



Philadelphia Coordinated Health Care
a core program of PMHCC, Inc.

Empowerment through
education, **support** and advocacy

Tips for Supporting Individuals Experiencing Depressive Disorders

- Assess for suicidal behavior or thoughts. Suicidal ideation and behavior may not be as widely recognized as it is in the general population. Increases in self-injurious behavior or the sudden onset of self-injurious behaviors should be communicated to all prescribing physicians. Look for themes centering around death and dying. This can be found in not just what people say, but also what they do and what they watch.
- Altering the environment very subtly can help alleviate some depressive symptomology. For example, increase the natural light in the home gradually by opening window blinds, shades and curtains. Attempt to keep the environment peaceful with music they enjoy at a moderate to low volume. Add bright colors such as bright pictures or flowers (if they are not allergic and flowers are not a behavioral trigger).
- Relax demands. Those experiencing depression may report physical health complaints. The person may truly physically feel unwell. Try to be more supportive and helpful with daily chores and demands. Consider giving them the opportunity to take a break from their routine and programs. If the person becomes agitated, stop pressing the issue and attempt to alter the environment and try again a bit later.
- Engage the person in something the person may still find motivating. This can be any activity or interest can help build motivation to complete other activities, tasks or chores. Motivation is like a snowball rolling downhill. It starts slow and needs to pick up momentum. Motivating a person experiencing depression starts the same way: It may be a slow start but, with patience and compassion, you can help the person pick up momentum.
- Make future plans with the person related to things they enjoy or enjoyed in the past. Developing events and situations to look forward to can help reduce feelings of hopelessness and increase motivation and mood
- Speak calmly and quietly. People experiencing depression can be hypersensitive to the moods and communication of others. Keep your tone relaxed, calm, quiet and supportive.
- Focus on one topic in a simplified way. People experiencing depressive symptoms may be feeling completely overwhelmed mentally and emotionally. Take time and care when communicating with them and do not “pepper” them with questions.
- Be patient. People experiencing depressive symptoms may need increased time to respond to you as their mind and body may be working more slowly than it previously has due to their depression.
- Encourage movement. This can include exercise, walking around the house, swimming, biking...anything to get the person physically moving. Movement and exercise can help reduce the intensity of depressive symptoms.

****This information does not take the place of medical advice. Please seek a psychiatrist or medical professional if you support a person experiencing a mental health challenge.****