

# Living with Depression

By Heather Pearman, LMFT

## How Do You Live with Someone Who is Chronically Depressed?

She has more good days than bad, always sad and mostly mad. She comes home from work and whisks into her bedroom like a ghost. If I try to engage her, I may get some grunt of acknowledgement on her way by. If I block her path and throw open my arms - I may get a hug. (Now that's a lucky day.) I try to be available to talk to her, to try to comfort her and make her feel better. However, what happens is a downward spiral of a conversation that leads to anger and how her misery is my fault. This eventually leads to self-loathing, resulting in her feeling worse than she did before I encouraged her. I have come to realize that in order to live with a depressed loved one there are things that you have to understand.

## Chronic Depression is a Mental Illness

They call it an illness because your loved one is not feeling well. She feels sick, just ask her. A depressed person looks and acts sick. That's why it is labeled an illness. The mental part of the title means that everything that is going wrong with your loved one is taking place between the ears. It is an electro-chemical imbalance in the brain. You can't see it with your eyes, but like a cancer eats away the organism, the depression eats away at your loved one's ability to reason with others and image of self. This results in your loved one not knowing where she fits into her own life or the lives of those surrounding her. It will often take a variety of interventions to alleviate the symptoms. This includes- but is not limited to - psychotherapy, medication, Neurofeedback or even a hyperbaric chamber. Your loved one may end up taking sleeping pills, anti-anxiolytics and other self-medicating drugs such as cigarettes or marijuana.

## Time May Not Heal

When living with someone who is depressed you, the caregiver, must come to the realization that your loved one will struggle with depression for the rest of their life. Depression may go into remission but may never fully go away. Just as someone with diabetes has to constantly watch their diet a, person struggling with depression must be vigilant about recognizing the return of the negative thought patterns.

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## **Depression is Anger Turned Inward**

Learn strategies to not respond to the anger that your loved one expresses. It is not your fault and there is little you can do to alleviate their suffering. Angry words from you or a defensive stance will only aggravate the depression. As you watch the progression - the anger will turn to self-loathing. The anger lashes out at you then in toward self. Learn to watch the cycle.

## **Anxiety is the Other Side of the Coin**

I have never met an anxious person who wasn't depressed or a depressed person who is not also anxious. You will notice times when your depressed loved one seems very anxious. Expect this and be available for a loving hug and a word of reassurance.

## **God has Called You to Love - Not to Fix It**

Remember that depression is an illness and your loved one has got to take responsibility for their own management of their condition. I find it works well to make a decorative copy of

*I Corinthians 13:4-7 "Love is patient; love is kind; love does not envy; it does not parade itself; it is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil; does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. (8) Love never fails."*

Place this where you and your family members can see it often. This is the type of love you can provide for your depressed love one. This Biblical guideline for love will keep you from slipping into a trap of enabling behaviors that come with trying to "fix" your loved one's depression. You have got to remember that this depression is out of your control and must be the responsibility of the one who is suffering from it.

## **Take Care of Yourself**

It is difficult to constantly be the object of someone's consternation. You as the caregiver must have your support system. Meet friends for coffee. Surround yourself with those who encourage you and can support you. You can join a support group. It would also be a good idea to meet with a therapist. A mental health professional can help you discern between the parts of the relationship that you have control over and those you don't.

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## **Seek Help and Healing for Yourself**

It is important to understand that your loved one's depression affects everyone in the house. You as the parent, spouse or caregiver must understand that you need healing too. It is easy to be caught up in the enabling cycle of trying to fix the depression. This will lead to enabling or co-dependent behaviors that will harm you and the other ones in your home. Managing a house that is being affected by someone's depression is a task in itself. Mental illness can affect the dynamics of a family in a similar way that alcoholism does. Seeking professional help from a therapist will help you navigate through this harmful dynamic, which will help to bring peace to you and your home.

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