

20 Sentences People with Depression Hate Hearing the Most

Why are people so unsympathetic when their friends or loved ones suffer from depression? The main reason is that depression is very difficult to fully understand. Another reason is that there is a stigma attached to being depressed. Even though we live in a society which seems to revolve around physical well-being and being upbeat, we don't want to be reminded of the other side. We want to forget depression exists. A person with cancer is likely to get a lot more support than a person suffering from depression.

It's even worse when friends and relatives give some advice which does not help at all. The sad fact is that these opinions reflect an appalling ignorance about this mental illness. No, depression was not invented for Big Pharma, like some sort of conspiracy. This illness affects 350 million people worldwide. It causes enormous suffering and is a contributory factor in death by suicide. The alarming fact is that less than 50% of patients will seek treatment, mainly because of ignorance and apathy.

Here are 20 pieces of advice which are pretty useless when you are trying to help a loved one suffering from depression. Do not use these phrases if you're trying to be sympathetic. They may have the opposite effect than desired.

1. You should snap out of it

If you suffer from depression, I bet you envy how simple *snapping out of it* would be! This is not just a temporary blip on your sadness/happiness scale. It is debilitating, to the point where you cannot even get out of bed in the morning. You find it difficult to summon up enough energy. Motivation is beyond your capabilities.

If you note these symptoms in a friend, make sure that she or he gets diagnosed and treated. Especially if these feelings last more than two weeks. Symptoms will vary enormously. You may notice hopelessness, appetite and sleep problems. The important thing is to get a diagnosis.

2. Other people are far worse off, you know

This is not going to help a person solve their problems! The depressed person just needs a person to be there and give support. You do not have to say anything if that embarrasses you. However, you can also tell the person that they can get better and that you will be there to support them.

3. Life is tough

This will probably reinforce how bad the depressed person is feeling, rather than help them. You could help them more by saying that you feel empathy for them and are willing to help them get through it. Treatment may take the form of medication and/or psychotherapy.

4. You have to get on with it

This sends the wrong message. It reinforces the sense of isolation that a depressed person feels. The best way to help them is by sending texts or just phoning them to let them know there is someone who cares. Susan Serani's book, *Living with Depression* provides excellent examples of practical ways to help.

5. You are too introspective

The implication here is that depression really is a minor problem. You'll come across as being judgmental and critical. The best way to show affection and love is to avoid statements like these which isolate the individual even more.

6. You are far too sensitive

This belittles the depressed person because they will think that their illness is being regarded as a character flaw and nothing else. A much better approach would be to take the person out for a walk. You can try and encourage them to get out and do something every day.

7. Life goes on

“Living with depression is like living with a 40-ton weight on your chest — you want to get up and move, but you just feel like you can’t.” – from an anonymous individual suffering from depression.

Telling a depressed patient that life goes on anyway will appear like brushing the whole thing under the carpet. It will appear that you are not really concerned at all.

8. Just go out and enjoy yourself

Suggesting fun times does not help at all, unless you are prepared to accompany your depressed friend and encourage them to try to take baby steps every day. Lending support means being there, or at least phoning to remind them that they have to do “X” today and “Y” tomorrow.

9. Aches and pains are just normal

A strange thing about depression is how often the condition is diagnosed by patients experiencing physical aches and pains, rather than mood and motivation problems. Encourage them to get a diagnosis and offer your help.

10. You have got so many things to be grateful for

The depressed patient does not want to hear about gratitude. Their main worry is that the sheer exhaustion and loss of interest will become permanent. It is always a good idea to remind the suffering individual that treatment can be effective. Depression need not last forever.

11. Cheer up

My uncle used to tell my depressed aunt to, “Cheer up”. The effect was just the opposite. It actually made her cry even more. His total misunderstanding of her condition was not helpful at all.

12. You’re strong, you will be fine

Yes, some people are strong and may have even coped with despondency or despair. If you are depressed, you may feel that your life means nothing to anyone else out there. Again, just listening can be reassuring for the person with depression.

13. You should stop feeling sorry for yourself

This suggests that the depressed person has a rather weak personality and is flawed in some way. A much more helpful response would be to actually sitting down and listening to the depressed person’s problems and feelings.

14. You should take vitamins for your stress

An offer of an over-the-counter cure will not help at all, as you are not really qualified. It is much better to urge the sufferer to get treatment and to offer to accompany them, or help them seek a specialist.

15. You should phone me

If you are a real friend, you should be the person who reaches out to the sufferer and show him or her that you really do care.

16. You should buy nicer clothes

Your friend's wardrobe may look a mess, but this will not cure their depression. Going on a shopping trip together would be a much better idea.

17. You know that everyone has problems

When you say this, the implication is that the depressed person has actually made a choice to be miserable and unhappy. Comparisons with the vast majority of the population are not at all helpful. It would be much better to say that you are trying to understand their problems. Encourage them to seek help and advice online.

18. You should try harder

Harsh and critical comments like this will not help one little bit. The attitude of family members and close friends are often crucial in whether a person will recover from depression.

19. You should be better by now

Impatience is a sign to the depressed person that nobody really understands what they are going through. A more compassionate approach without deadlines would be much more helpful.

20. You will have to learn to live with it

Learning to live with depression with no way out is like entering a dark tunnel. Pep talks, platitudes and the so-called encouraging remarks only make matters worse. It is much better to follow the steps I have outlined below if you really want to help.

What we can do to help depressed persons

- Most experts agree that just being there and being supportive can be very helpful.
- We can learn about depression, its causes and symptoms
- We can encourage the depressed person to get diagnosed and treatment. We can help them with day-to-day tasks and objectives. We can also stop by and remind them of a task later that day. Or we can simply give them a call, and have a short chat while we're at it.
- We can encourage them to join online forums which cater to depressed persons. This is a great place to get support although it will never be as effective as a real live presence.
- We should never give the impression that it is the patient's fault or criticize them in any way.
- We should encourage and supervise their daily routines such as regular eating, exercise and sleep.
- We should be able to talk to them about suicide, should they mention it. The important thing is to go over the thoughts but suggest a different solution.

Robert Locke MBE