

Managing Sadness or Depression for Care Providers

16%

A 2017 CDC report indicated that 16% of Americans over the age of 75 have been diagnosed with a depressive disorder (CDC, 2017)¹.



What is depression:

Depression is a mental health condition that can make people feel sad and act differently than they usually do. This condition can be present in addition to other medical conditions. It can sometimes be hard to tell the difference between “depression” – the illness – and “normal sadness.”

Who depression can affect:

- Anyone!
- People who live with illness or a disabling condition may feel sad or depressed.
- People who have chronic illness, are hospitalized, and residents of long term care facilities have higher rates of depression.

Symptoms of depression:

Feeling sad or lonely, especially while sick and not able to participate in activities with family and friends.

Important takeaways:

- As a care provider, you are not a therapist or a doctor. It is not your job to diagnose people. It is your job to support the people you serve.
- Open communication and listening skills are important when working with someone living with depression.

Left untreated, depression may result in:

- Decreased physical, mental, and social functioning
- Increased suicide rate
- Decreased quality of life
- Higher use of primary health care services

It's helpful to:

- Offer a safe and nonjudgmental space for people to share their thoughts and feelings.
- Listen nonjudgmentally, and alert the individual's care team to the changes in the person's behaviors and symptoms.

¹Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System Survey Data. Atlanta, Georgia: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2007.

Managing Anxiety in Individuals with Chronic Illness or Disabling Conditions

>30%

Over 30% of U.S. adults experience any anxiety disorder at some time in their lives, and approximately 19% of individuals in the U.S. have had an anxiety disorder in the past year. Anxiety disorders are more common in women than in men (NIMH, 2017)¹.

What is anxiety:

Anxiety is defined as a feeling of worry, nervousness, or unease – usually about something with an uncertain outcome.

Left untreated, anxiety may result in:

- Decreased physical, mental, and social functioning
- Increased suicide rate
- Decreased quality of life

Symptoms of anxiety:

- Feeling restless, wound-up, or on-edge
- Being easily fatigued
- Difficulty concentrating
- Irritable
- Having muscle tension
- Difficulty controlling feelings of worry
- Having sleep problems, such as difficulty falling or staying asleep, restlessness, or unsatisfying sleep.

Who anxiety can affect:

- Anyone!
- Many people who struggle with chronic illnesses or disabling conditions also struggle with feelings of anxiety, nervousness, or stress. These feelings can be related to worries about how their illness will affect them over time, how they will be able to afford their care, or how their condition will impact their family.

Important takeaways:

- As a care provider, it is not your job to determine whether someone has an anxiety illness, or anxiety related to having an illness. Your job is to support someone who feels anxious.
- You can support individuals with anxiety by reminding them that people exist to help them sort through their concerns.
- Relaxation exercises like counting breaths or gentle yoga can help individuals relieve their tension.
- Encourage the individuals you serve to talk about their concerns. Allowing them this opportunity can potentially help decrease distress. Decreasing emotional distress in a healthy way is a part of providing person-centered care, and a part of being a care provider.
- Listen nonjudgmentally, and alert the individual's care team to the changes in the person's behaviors and symptoms.

¹Harvard Medical School, 2007. National Comorbidity Survey (NCS). (2017, August 21). Retrieved from <https://www.hcp.med.harvard.edu/ncs/index.php>. Data Table 1: Lifetime prevalence DSM-IV/WMH-CIDI disorders by sex and cohort.

Feel Good Strategies for Depression & Anxiety

The following tips have been adopted from <https://www.webmd.com/depression/guide/chronic-illnesses-depression#1>, and are helpful for many people with a wide range of medical issues who you think may be feeling anxious, sad, or depressed:

1. Encourage them to reach out to their family, friends, and local support groups.
2. If they are ready, help them learn as much about their condition as they can. This will help them feel empowered and give them a sense of control.
3. Urge them to consult their doctor and treatment team about their feelings, questions, or concerns – as they may be related to their medical condition.
4. Persuade them to continue doing the activities they enjoy doing – as much as possible. This will boost their sense of self-confidence and reduce their worrying about issues.
5. Support participation in volunteer opportunities (if they are able). Studies have shown that helping others contributes to feelings of happiness.
6. Encourage regular participation in physical/exercise activities – as allowed by the person's physician. Encourage the person you care for to transition extra energy towards physical activity, rather than worrying. If the person you care for is physically able and the environment is safe, suggest taking a walk. Participating in yoga or stretching exercises can also be relaxing.
7. Encourage them to use relaxation techniques. Relaxation techniques are techniques people can use to help them relax.
 - Breathe deeply - Breathing deeply can help people physically relax. Take 5 minutes and have the person you care for focus on their breathing – nothing else. Have them sit up straight if possible, close their eyes, and breathe in slowly through their nose. Have them imagine that the air they are inhaling is filling their entire body, starting in their stomach and going all the way to the top of their head and tips of their fingers/toes. Then have them exhale slowly through their mouth.
 - Savor the Moment - Focusing on the present can help distract people from worrying about the future. Have the person focus on one sensation at a time, spending one minute focusing on each of their senses. Have them describe in detail what they are smelling, seeing, and hearing.
 - Laugh It Up - Laughing can help ease anxiety and tension. Find something funny for you both to watch or listen to.
 - Tune Out Your Troubles - Help to create a playlist of music that they enjoy. This may help them to feel more relaxed and positive, and in turn, to worry less.

