

HOW TO HELP A SUICIDAL PERSON - PRACTICAL TIPS

I have heard it said a person with depression is “motivationally challenged.” Quite often a depressed person will resist many of the strategies that can be helpful because “I don’t feel like it.” They may need a lot of support and encouragement to do the things that can help them to feel better. You can offer to set up and take them to appointments as one way of supporting them.

Exercise: Any form of exercise releases endorphins, feel good chemicals that help lift a person’s mood. Gary Small writes: “Exercise not only increases blood flow to the [brain](#), it releases endorphins, the body's very own natural antidepressant. It also releases other neurotransmitters, like serotonin, which lift mood.”ⁱ

Sleep: We need a healthy balance of sleep, rest and relaxation. “Sleep research shows that normal adults should get at least eight and a half to nine hours of sleep a night. But teens need more - up to two hours more - for their brains to function normally.”ⁱⁱ

Computer or internet interventions: Websites with information on depression, or computerised Cognitive Behaviour Therapy. This is said to work best when the help of a professional is involved.

Support groups: These can help the person to feel less isolated. As others share experiences they will feel less alone. They can receive a lot of encouragement from group members who have managed to overcome depression and moved into a healthier place. They can provide hope, an important key to recovery.

Light therapy: Originally used to treat Seasonal Affective Disorder and has been found to be very effective for this. Studies show it is not as effective for other types of depression. Getting out in the sunshine, particularly during early morning, has been shown to improve mood.

Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT): Works on the basis that changing the way you think about a problem changes the way you feel. I would advocate that the Bible is the best book on CBT available, filled with the wisdom of God to help in every kind of situation.

Behaviour Therapy/Behavioural Activation: “BT tries to help people who are depressed by teaching them to become more active. This often involves doing activities that are rewarding, either because they are pleasant (e.g. spending time with good friends or engaged in hobbies) or give a sense of satisfaction. These are activities such as exercising, performing a difficult work task or dealing with a long standing problem that, while not fun, gives one a feeling of a ‘job well done.’ This helps to reverse patterns of avoidance, withdrawal and inactivity that make depression worse, replacing them with rewarding experiences that reduce depression.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Interpersonal Therapy: This helps the person to recognise patterns in their relationships with others that may make the person more vulnerable to depression. It may include looking at different expectations within relationships, improving skills for dealing with other people, and giving up old roles (such as ‘victim’) to take on healthier ones.

Marital Therapy: Has been shown to be effective when a couple is having relationship problems. Both attend a series of psychological therapy sessions. This aims to reduce

negative interactions (such as arguments, abuse, criticism), and increase supportive interactions (such as praise, empathy, problem solving and forgiveness).

Problem Solving Therapy (PST): The person is helped to clearly identify their problems and then come up with different solutions for each problem. Depression often makes a person feel their problems are too difficult and cannot be solved. PST helps the person to discover new and effective ways of dealing with their problems.

Medical interventions - Just as someone with a physical illness may need medication for the body to function as it should, a person with mental illness may need medication for a chemical imbalance. This should be done in consultation with suitably qualified health professionals.

Further information can be found in the free downloadable booklet “A Guide to What Works for Depression” from beyond blue (www.beyondblue.org.au). This is a very helpful booklet that looks at many different forms of treatment, the research and findings, and any potential risks.

You will hear about many treatments for depression from different sources. A good question to ask is, has this been researched? If yes, who has done the research? A company that conducts research on its’ own product may only use certain questions that will support their claim, so I tend to be skeptical about research done by a company that profits from the product.

ⁱ<http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/brain-bootcamp/201009/can-exercise-cure-depression>

ⁱⁱ Dr. Arch Hart and Dr. Catherine Hart Weber. *Is Your Teen Stressed or Depressed?* ©2005 by Archibald D. Hart and Catherine Hart Weber. Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, Tennessee, USA

ⁱⁱⁱJorm, Anthony; Allen, Nick; Morgan, Amy; Purcell, Rosemary, *A guide to What Works for Depression* ©2009 Beyond Blue (available for free to download at: www.beyondblue.org.au)