Depression – A Guide for Relatives and Friends

1. In-Depth Knowledge
Knowledge about depression, its causes and symptoms, represents an essential part in its treatment and it makes sense that you, as a friend or family member, have this knowledge as well. Among other sources, you can benefit from the counseling and information services of the Stiftung Deutsche Depressionshilfe.

2. Seek Medical Advice
Many people suffering from depression are ashamed of their condition or blame themselves. Hopelessness is also among the typical symptoms of depression. That is why those affected often do not dare to visit a doctor's office or think that they cannot be helped. Sometimes they also lack the strength to make an appointment on their own, let alone go there. This is where your support is especially important. Make an appointment (a general medical practice may be contacted first) and accompany the affected person there.

3. No Well-Intentioned Advice
Advice such as "It'll be okay!” usually puts sufferers under pressure and can increase feelings of guilt. Do not encourage victims to be more positive or convince them that they have no reasons to feel guilty in any way. However, if those suffering from depression show initiative, support them where you can!

4. Be There
It sounds almost mundane, but showing sympathy and understanding as well as offering support and a sympathetic ear can have a very relieving effect on those affected. Of course, this is not always easy, especially because people suffering from depression often find it difficult to show their feelings or feel empty inside. Sometimes it also helps to ask the person if there is anything they would like.

5. Patience
Even though it is not always easy, be patient. Always remind yourself and the affected individual that depression is a medical condition that is easily treatable and usually subsides after some time.
6. Own Boundaries and Self-Care
Watch your boundaries and don't lose sight of your own needs. Small time-outs and rest breaks reduce the risk of falling ill yourself. Firmly schedule times for yourself, do something good for yourself, pursue your hobbies and keep up social contacts. If you need more support, perhaps involve other people in your social network. Talk about your concerns and worries. It is also possible for you to make an appointment for counseling at a psychological counseling center or to participate in a self-help group for relatives and friends of depressive patients. Please note: Don’t get help only when you yourself have already gone beyond your own limits!

8. Dealing with Suicidal Thoughts and Behaviors
For people suffering from strong depression, their current situation can often seem hopeless and suicidal thoughts and/or impulses may occur. If you are worried that the person concerned might be suffering from suicidal thoughts or if they already making announcements of suicide or statements such as "There's no point in it all anymore!", bring up the subject. Do not be afraid! Talking about suicidal thoughts and impulses does not reinforce them, but rather leads those affected to experience relief from it. Be there for the affected person and, if necessary, take responsibility in the crisis situation. Escort them to the doctor's office or even to a clinic or emergency room. If affected persons are not willing to seek help together with you or can no longer be reached by talking, call an emergency physician. Do not leave affected individual alone in the situation. Suicidality is often only a temporary condition, so the first step is to buy time. In any case, you should take any hints or announcements seriously and always involve professional help.