

Group's

EMERGENCY RESPONSE

Handbooklet:

DEPRESSION



Loveland, Colorado
www.group.com

Group's Emergency Response Handbooklet: Depression

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Introduction

It's not easy suffering with depression. But it doesn't have to be lonely.

Christians should never have to face trials on their own. Those around them—their Christian brothers and sisters—should rise up and support them.

"Share each other's burdens, and in this way obey the law of Christ" (Galatians 6:2).

Although it isn't easy to go through depression, it's also tough being on the outside and trying to help.

You don't know what to do. You're worried about hurting their feelings or stepping on their toes or saying the exact *wrong* thing.

Of course you care—you love them! It isn't that you don't want to help—it's just that you don't know how.

Group's Emergency Response Handbooklet: Depression will help you come alongside your friends and those in your small group who are facing tough times. From care and counseling tips, to practical ideas for your small group, to what to say and what not to say, this booklet offers insight after insight into how to care for those who are struggling with depression.

Of course, it'd be great if you never had to pick up this booklet! But the reality is that many people deal with depression—including your friends and the people in your small group. And they need your help.

So when someone you love is struggling with depression, it's time to pick up this guide. Use the table of contents to find the specific section that gives you what you need to be successful in helping them.

In this handbooklet there is a **real life narrative**—a story from someone who's been there. You'll find a section on **care and counseling tips** that will give you practical ideas for reaching out in love. The practical ideas in the **group tips** section will help your entire small group support your hurting friends during their trial. An invaluable section on **what to say and what not to say** to your friend. This section will help you avoid the hurtful comments and use the helpful ones.

You'll also find useful boxes that offer Scripture help, guidelines for referring your friends to a professional counselor, and additional resources, such as books and Web sites, that you can use as you support your hurting friends.

Our prayer for this booklet is that it will help you help your friends during a difficult time.

Depression

Supporting Your Friend in the Darkness

with counseling insights from

REBEKAH KNIGHT-BAUGHMAN, PH.D.

+ ministry tips from AMY WEAVER

I've always had a personality susceptible to depression. Depression isn't a sign of personal weakness or a condition that can be willed or wished away, despite what many people think. People like me who struggle with depression can't simply "pull themselves" together and get better.

The first time I experienced a deep depression, I felt lost. I was dealing with issues I'd never dealt with before. I'd essentially lost my dad through a divorce, and the feelings surrounding that experience created the depression that plagued me. Those feelings of being lost and alone were compounded when I lost the support of my mother and sister—I moved across the country to go to college, and I became a Christian—two things they really didn't like. I felt abandoned when I needed support the most.

It was during that first year of college when I realized I had a serious problem. That was when I started failing...for the first time in my life. I'd always been successful in everything I did—I was an A student in school, a star on the track team, the editor of my school yearbook. But I just couldn't make myself do any of it anymore, and it wasn't long before I was on academic probation. Sure, I was discouraged about school, but it wasn't

enough to get me out of the slump I'd sunk into. Eventually, I just stopped going to classes. Everything seemed like too much work.

My sophomore year of college, I promised myself I'd do better in school. But before the semester even began, I felt those familiar thoughts creeping in. I was overwhelmed before I even started. I felt unworthy of another chance, unworthy of love. I felt sorry for myself, like things were unfair and like nobody around me understood how I felt. I needed to know I was loved, so I tried to draw attention to myself. I tried to be funny, spiritual, encouraging—anything to get people to acknowledge me. It didn't last long—the effort was too much. So in the end, I just started avoiding people.

During this time, I didn't sleep or eat for days. And then at other times, I slept or ate way too much. I was a case of extremes. I cried a lot and then felt numb. I didn't want to bathe or get out of bed for days on end. I wrote in my journal that I wanted to be alone because no one understood me or knew what I needed. People felt fake. I wanted it all to go away. I felt helpless and hopeless.

For the most part, people in my small group didn't have a clue about what I was going through, and that hurt. Some people tried to fix me. When I didn't get better immediately they either got frustrated with me or gave up on me. They told me I wasn't seeking God or I needed to try harder to get over my depression—as if all it would take was a simple “attitude adjustment.”

But that wasn't everyone. There were those who were there for me. They listened to what I had to say. They sincerely cared about understanding what I was going through. They didn't simply offer quick fixes; instead they prayed for me and with me. They encouraged me by speaking truth into my life, writing notes, showing me how important I was to them. Those unexpected gestures were done out of love, and they meant the world to me.

They pursued me when I thought I wanted to be alone. Getting out of my room and out of my bed was a positive thing, even if only to help me focus on something besides myself. When I said “no” to going places, they gently insisted. They told me they wanted me with them and expressed that I was important to them with their words and actions. It was what I needed.

And, really, it was those little things that got me out of the depression: prayer, love, meaningful actions, simple activities, a gift for no reason, an offer to watch my favorite movie, a listening ear, a special dinner made for me by special friends. God's love offered to me through God's people. They reminded me that God still loved me even if I didn't see him.

God worked through the people in my small group, and I gradually began to come out of my depression. It took time and effort on the part of the people around me. I started to take part in all the daily activities that I'd been avoiding, and my mood improved little by little. Some days were harder than others. And though I'll most likely always be susceptible to depression, I know that I have friends who will help me through it.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

+ Books

Tan, Siang-Yang and Ortberg, John. *Coping with Depression*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2004.

Worthington, Everett, L., Jr. *When Someone Asks for Help: A Practical Guide for Counseling*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1982.

+ Online Resources

www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/friend.cfm

(National Institute of Mental Health)

www.healthyminds.org (American Psychiatric Association)

www.suicidology.org (American Association of Suicidology)

www.dbsalliance.org (Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance)



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