



WISDOM FOR THE CAREGIVER

When Caring for a Person with Depression

Considerations

- Listen! Do not offer advice or your own judgments unless asked...and even then avoid it if you can.
- Accept the other person *as he or she is*. You have to start there, and you need to communicate this acceptance and care.
- A good rule of thumb in determining the degree of the person's depression is to ask questions and actively listen during several meetings with the person. If the person's mood remains the same over a period of time, the likelihood of him or her being depressed rather than merely grieving is high. If the person is not receiving professional help, it's crucial that you recommend this. You may have to make the appointment yourself if he or she is too depressed to take the initiative. Do not attempt to diagnose the person. Your role is to be there for him or her. It's the job of the therapist to help bring him or her back to health.
- Communicate to the depressed person (and remember yourself) that depression is not a sign of weakness. It is a disorder that responds very well to various treatment programs. Seeking help is the first step toward recovery and feeling better.

Be aware of what depression feels like to the person who is depressed.

- *It feels like being hungry when you are well fed.*
- *It feels like fatigue, tired after a long day, after a long life.*
- *It feels like a little bit like shame and guilt, that feeling you had when you were a little kid and your hand was caught in the cookie jar.*
- *It feels a little bit like anger. Angry at who, angry at what? "I don't know, I'm just angry."*
- *It feels a bit like nothingness. Like a blank screen in an empty theater and you're all alone and it was supposed to be the story of your life.*
- *It feels something like all of those things.*