**Stop, this is not how you care for a depressed person!**

Mental health advocacy is a rising trend among millennials on social media. If you are fairly active on social networks, you have likely come across a post or ten on the need to support whoever in your surrounding is in a battle against his inner universe.

Unfortunately, though, if you are not well-trained, supporting someone with a mental illness like depression isn’t as convenient as it sounds.

The problem is that we try to deal with someone’s depression like any other problem. Think about it; when someone comes to you with an issue, isn’t it an instinct for you to start blurting out the possible solutions that pop into your head?

That’s precisely what many of us do in the name of supporting someone with depression.

Since you don’t understand the nature of the illness, it makes sense that you would want to extend your wisdom or unsolicited advice in an attempt to pull someone out of depression. I understand that you are coming from a place of genuine intention. But what you fail to realize is that how *YOU* hear or interpret yourself might contradict sharply with how depression makes a person explicate your words.

So, you have decided to support a loved one who is fighting with depression. So far, so good. You’re going in the right direction. But if you are oblivious of the *HOW* of it, your support can just as easily end up doing more harm than good.

During my Master’s degree in Public Health, I had the opportunity to work with a few brave souls who defeated depression. Based on my experience, here are the top four statements that you must steer clear of when supporting a depressed person.

1. **Look On The Bright Side**

The next time you decide to help a loved one with depression, please avoid telling them to look on the bright side.

Let me ask you a simple question. If the person could see the bright side, why do you think he’d be depressed? Don’t you see it’s what depression is all about? It messes up with your head until you lose your very belief in a bright side.

It’s like telling a deaf person *“listen to this beautiful melody”*. For the love of God, he can’t hear.

You may have the purest of intentions, but it makes it a lot worse when you tell a depressed person to look on the bright side.

For him, your words are full of insinuation. What echo’s in his mind is that you are asking him to be more grateful. In a way, he gets a sense that you are calling him an ungrateful person who deliberately refuses to see the bright side while there evidently is one.

Do you see the problem with the unsolicited advice now?

1. **Be Patient**

Ah, the universal solution that we try to force onto everything. When nothing else is working, all explanations have failed, potential solutions have been rendered pointless, we go ahead and hide behind *“Be Patient”.*

I can’t stress it enough how dangerous it is to tell a depressed person to be patient.

Take suicide, for example. Try to think of the possible reasons why someone would want to end their life? Naturally, many of us will look for answers in personal and professional complications.

But isn’t it possible that it might have been because the person was suffering from a medical condition. And everyone kept telling him to just be patient instead of asking him to get treatment?

When a person is suffering from cancer, do you tell them to be patient? Or do you ask them to see a doctor? If a severe medical condition is left unattended in the arms of patience, isn’t it bound to take the patient’s life at some point?

The problem with the *“be patient”* theory can also be explained again in terms of insinuation. A person with depression is more than likely to hear another judgment in these words. A judgment that he’s impatient.

1. **Snap Out Of It**

Every time I’m dealing with excessive stress, work-wise or academically. Or perhaps when I have things going on in my personal life. There’s always someone who would jump on the opportunity to tell me to snap out of it.

Quick feedback, please. Is it too rude to want to punch them in the face for saying that?

If that’s how I feel when I’m merely dealing with the day to day stress, can you imagine the kind of impact it’ll have on someone who’s fighting with depression?

Point being, it’s crucial to understand that human lives don’t come with a pre-installed “Snap Out” button. It is rationally unfounded to expect a depressed person to snap out of it just like that.

*“Snap out of it.” “Oh okay, thanks Susan, you cured me, haha, I love life.”*

It doesn’t work that way.

You might have said it casually because the person is important to you and you want them to be happy. But again, the message they are receiving is that you are insensitive to their feelings. In a way, that you’re trying to minimize them.

1. **You’re Better Off Than A Lot Of People**

This statement is wrong for two reasons. First, you are dealing with someone who is surrounded by a hurricane of negativity. And all you are essentially doing is reminding them how it’s not even the extent of it. There’s worse out there. How does that work?

Secondly, you can’t expect anyone to forget about their troubles by merely shifting their focus to how other people have it worse. There are families in Yemen who have lost access to food. Is it tragic? You bet. Is it several folds broader than my problem? For sure.

But does it mean that ***I*** am not suffering at the moment? Absolutely not!

To be appropriately compassionate towards a depressed person, you need to develop a skill to see a problem in their perspective. Relativizing it to bigger and broader issues only pushes you back into an underlying insinuation. For them, it’s just another one of your judgments that they are not grateful enough.

Finding the right words which may have the desired impact on someone who is struggling with depression is not a convenient task. And yet, therapy is the first line of defense against a mental disorder.

The success rate of [psychotherapy is just as convincing](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2748674/) as that of antidepressants. And I understand that you haven’t received the training to deliver such an intervention.

But there’s one thing that you can adopt from a therapist and apply just as effectively to care for someone who is feeling depressed. *“Listen”*.

That’s it. A therapist has a better likelihood of being successful because he’s not obsessed with the idea of making his patients snap out of it. Remember that people with depression are often NOT looking for a viable solution from the caregiver. Sometimes, they are only seeking someone to listen. Someone who would listen and validate their feelings and emotions.

So, before you start pounding them with your unsolicited advice, listen to them. When in doubt, communicate. Instead of turning to the universal *“Be Patient”* solution, tell them that you are not sure what to say. Sometimes, listening can make a greater difference than your words.

If you are guilty of telling any of these things to a depressed person, it’s never too late to extend an apology. Feel free to explain that you didn’t understand and you’re sorry for your choice of words. Even if you haven’t been helpful in the past, your apology will make them feel better in the moment for sure.