I GOT YOUR BACK, BOO

KNOW SOMEONE WITH DEPRESSION, BUT NOT SURE HOW TO HELP? FIND OUT WHY SUPPORT MATTERS AND WHAT YOU CAN DO TO ASSIST
Depression is a mental illness that negatively affects a person’s life and emotions. Statistics released by the South African Depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG) show that 1 in 4 teens struggle with feelings of hopelessness and sadness, and 17.6% of teens have considered attempting suicide. With stats like this, we should all learn more about recognising potential signs of depression and how to deal with them appropriately.

**WHAT YOU CAN DO**

If your friend confides in you that they are depressed, the best thing you can do in this scenario is to listen. Social support from friends and family can really aid in the management of their illness. Theresa Woolley, 25, remembers being diagnosed with depression at 12 years old. ‘A few years later, I noticed the symptoms recurring. I felt sad, tired and anxious all the time. I recognised it as depression and told my parents I needed medical help. They dismissed the symptoms as trivial. This just added to the shame and guilt I already felt. Their reaction hugely impacted how I felt about my diagnosis. It made me think it was a big, ugly secret; something that I should not talk about. This prevented me from getting support. It prevented me from seeing that I wasn’t alone.’ Theresa wishes more people would be empathic and curious about the condition.

**IF YOUR FRIEND STARTS EXHIBITING SELF-DESTRUCTIVE BEHAVIOUR**

Perhaps you’ve noticed your friend has started drinking or taking drugs. Maybe they have developed an eating disorder or started self-harming. These kinds of self-destructive behaviours often go hand in hand with depression. While it can be very difficult to have these conversations, educational psychologist Dr Thandiwe Nhlapo suggests the following: ‘You need to reassure your friend that you love and care for them.’ You need to remind them that they’re not alone. ‘Mention other available networks of support, such as parents, siblings and teachers.’ And if things seem really serious? ‘If your friend is at risk, you cannot promise to keep their destructive behaviours a secret. Try to negotiate with them to involve other caring adults. If that doesn’t work, tell them that you’re going to seek help from a trusted adult.’

**SAY SOMETHING**

They say: ‘I’m all alone’.
You say: ‘I know that you’re feeling alone right now. Is there anything I can do to help? I’m just glad to be with you – together we’ll get through this difficult time.’

They say: ‘Why bother? Life isn’t worth living. There’s no point in going on.’
You say: ‘I know it feels that way to you right now, but I want you to know that you matter to me and you matter to others who love you. We’ll get through this together.’

**CONTACT DETAILS**

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