

Book Review: When Someone You Know Has Depression

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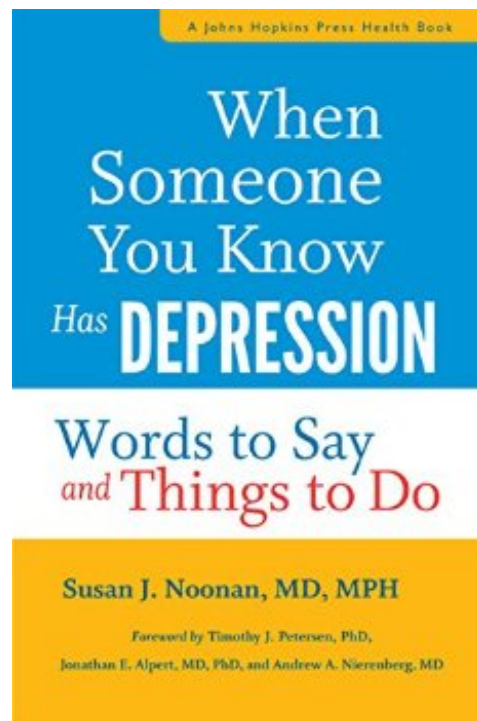
We all want to help and support the people we care about in our lives — whether they're friends, family members, or significant others. After all, they do the same for us. When one of those people is dealing with a mood disorder, however, it's easy to feel like you're out of your depth. You might be afraid of saying or doing the wrong thing. You may worry about making the situation worse. In her book, *When Someone You Know Has Depression: Words to Say and Things to Do*, Susan Noonan offers concrete suggestions for caregivers attempting to support loved ones dealing with depression and [bipolar](#) disorder.

Above all, Noonan seeks to create a practical guide. Consisting of just nine short chapters, this probably won't be the only book you read about dealing with mood disorders. But it is a reasonable place to begin. Including such topics as "Signs of Depression to Look for" and "Finding Professional Help," *When Someone You Know Has Depression* broadly covers the basic topics you'll need to support a friend or family member dealing with depression or bipolar disorder. It is a quick, accessible read with easy-to-revisit passages, useful checklists and charts, and a helpful glossary and resource list for further reading. Notably, this is not a text intended for professionals or students in the field of psychology, nor does it seek to advise readers with mood disorders. This is not to say such readers would not find the book interesting, but its practical approach does not have them in mind.

Noonan begins with statistics, definitions, and symptoms. 350 million people deal with depression worldwide, she notes, but not everyone experiences or deals with depression in the same way. In particular, there is a marked difference between the ways men and [women](#) confront mood disorders. Moreover, she emphasizes that major depression is a relapsing and remitting illness, so an individual may have to deal with repeated [depressive](#) episodes. This poses its own challenges for caregivers, who may have to manage their own disappointment as well as their loved ones' in the event of a relapse. These early chapters are a blend of technical information, such as relating the theory of depression in the brain, to entirely practical exercises, including the inclusion of a mood chart for tracking depression and bipolar episodes and a checklist of [depression symptoms](#).

The subsequent chapters of the book give caregivers tips for creating a supportive environment and engaging in healthy communication. Chapter 3, "Support and Communication Strategies," emphasizes the importance of listening without judging and responding with empathy. There is a temptation, Noonan writes, to want to offer advice or relate your friend's experiences back to your own. However, it is best to resist these impulses and instead focus on what your loved one tells you about her mental state. Likewise, we should expect anger and frustration as well as sadness and hopelessness.

In "Helpful Approaches," Noonan not only discusses ways to provide hope and support, she also explains the basics of mental health: treating physical illnesses, getting sufficient [sleep](#), exercising and eating right, and maintaining routines. These, she notes, are important not only for those of us dealing with depression, but also for caregivers. She devotes a later chapter, "Caring for Caregivers," to this topic and discusses the need to establish boundaries, which may be a particularly difficult process for some.



When Someone You Know Has Depression is not an exhaustive text on the subject of depression. Rather, it seeks to be a practical guide for those who want to help. You may not find it easy to have the conversations outlined in this book, particularly if you're trying to convince a loved one to get professional help or if the possibility of suicide seems to be an immediate threat, but Noonan offers the tools you need to begin those difficult conversations. She also anticipates the need to prepare for recovery and the necessity of developing the proper skills to establish [resilience](#). Her list of dos and don'ts may not account for every situation you and your friend face, but it will give you a sense of how to approach your interactions.

When Someone You Know Has Depression is the kind of book you might first read cover-to-cover in an afternoon as you think about how to help someone in your life with depression. Perhaps more importantly, though, you can revisit it quickly and easily throughout the process of supporting that person, whether on their worst or best day. Noonan seeks not only to explain best approaches or lift the [stigma](#) of mental illness, but she also writes to empower us to give the best possible care we can — and to care for ourselves as well.

When Someone You Know Has Depression: Words to Say and Things to Do
John Hopkins University Press, April 2016
160 pages, Paperback
\$16.95

Psych Central's Recommendation:

Your Recommendation: (if you've read this book)

☆☆☆☆☆ (No Ratings Yet)

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