



Supporting a loved one

through depression and anxiety



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The author of this book does not dispense medical advice or prescribe the use of any technique as a form of treatment for physical, emotional or medical problems without the advice of a physician. The intent of the author is only to share her story and provide resources and links that are current at time of publishing to help you in your quest for your emotional wellbeing. The service of a qualified and competent mental health professional is strongly encouraged.

SimpLee Serene
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Statistics

Statistics are human beings with the tears wiped off

In Canada the equivalent of one jumbo jet full of people would have to crash to the ground once a month for a year to equal the lives lost to suicide. If we had airplanes falling out of the sky monthly – there'd be a national outrage – commissions and investigations.

- 1 in 5 Canadians – **6 million people** are impacted by mental illness.
- Women are **two times more likely** to experience depression than men.
- Age with the **highest rate** of depression symptoms: **Under 20 years of age**.
- **90% of people** who are depressed never seek treatment.
- **15% or 1.2 million Canadian children and youth** are affected by mental illness at any given time.
- 15 – 20 % of women will develop postpartum depression.
- Over **4000 people die by suicide** in Canada each year.
- **Men account for 78%** of suicides
- **95% of those who die by suicide** have either a mental illness or substance abuse, **only 15 – 20% are receiving help** in the mental health, substance abuse treatment system.

Statistics from Mood Disorders Society of Canada www.mooddorderscanada.ca



The Warning Signs

Being aware of the symptoms of depression and anxiety

Depression:

According to the Canadian Mental Health Association, *depression becomes an illness, or clinical depression, when the feelings and signs are severe, last for several weeks, and begin to interfere with one's work and social life. Depressive illness can change the way a person thinks and behaves, and how his/her body functions.*

Sleep:

- Sleeping more or less than usual
- Interrupted sleep – waking constantly throughout the night

Feelings and Emotions:

- Feeling worthless, helpless or hopeless
- Crying for no apparent reason
- No feelings – lack of emotion toward others and yourself
- Overwhelming sadness
- Mood swings – one minute high, the next minute low
- Difficulty concentrating and making decisions
- Feeling isolated, alone and rejected
- Thoughts of suicide or death

Behaviors:

- Withdrawing from family, friends or regular activities
- Self-harm: cutting, scratching, pulling out hair

Physical:

- Change in eating habits – sudden weight gain or loss; loss of appetite
- Lack of energy, fatigue
- Decreased sex drive
- Lack of interest in physical appearance

One of the most useful tools I have found for finding the warning signs of depression is online at Depression Hurts www.depressionhurts.ca. It is a free *Symptoms Checklist* that you may complete and provide to your doctor.



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Anxiety:

According to Mood Disorders Society of Canada, while everyone feels anxious in response to specific events, individuals with anxiety disorder have excessive and unrealistic feelings that interfere with their lives, their relationships, their school and work performance, their social activities and recreation.

The essential feature of the panic attack is a discrete period of intense fear or discomfort that is accompanied by at least four of thirteen physical symptoms, such as:

- Palpitations, increased heart rate or pounding heart;
- Sweating;
- Trembling or shaking;
- Sensations of shortness of breath or smothering;
- Feeling of choking;
- Chest pain or discomfort;
- Nausea or abdominal distress;
- Dizziness, unsteadiness, light-headedness or fainting;
- De-realization or de-personalization;
- Fear of losing control or of going crazy;
- Fear of dying;
- Paresthesias; and
- Chills or hot flashes



It's Not About You

Recognize your loved one's illness is not about you.

The first thing you must realize in supporting your loved one is that it is not about you. You must not take personally any actions or lack of actions on the part of your loved one. Always approach your loved one with kindness, love and compassion; accept where your loved one is in the present moment.

There are several deeply hurting and damaging things one may say to someone with depression. They follow here and I urge you to avoid saying them:

- Just snap out of it.
- Don't be so dramatic.
- Why don't you just get over it, already?
- You have so much going for you, so wake up...
- Can't you just be happy?
- It can't be all that bad.

Be aware that your unhealthy reactions result from your own fears. Possibly you feel there is nothing you can do to help, no matter what you try. You may be frustrated because you cannot understand why your loved one is depressed. Perhaps you feel angry as you observe the impact your loved one's illness is having on others. Do your best to step past your own fears. Recognize that this illness is not about you and that your loved one needs your support, your acceptance and, most of all, your unconditional love.

Meet your loved one where he or she is right now; do not try to change or to fix him or her. Depression is an insidious disease that carries far too much stigma and judgment already. You can alleviate that stigma and judgment for your loved one by educating yourself about depression and by being fully present to and accepting of your loved one.



ASK Questions

Don't assume - ASK!

ASK

Your loved one may not be able to give you a straight answer about what is wrong, but by asking the questions you are showing that you care. If your loved one is experiencing depression, they are more than likely feeling alone, desperate, isolated, frustrated, overwhelmed and helpless. Your unconditional love and support will not cure the depression, but it will let him or her know that you are present and that you do care. Be aware that you may need to ask the questions more than once before you will get a response; there is a great deal of fear that arises when one admits that something is wrong and feels judged. Be patient and kind.

Sample scripts to use in asking:

"I have noticed you're not yourself lately. I am here to listen. How can I help you?"

"Is everything okay? I am worried about you, and want you to know I am here for you."



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SUPPORT

Seeking professional help

Unconditional love, acceptance and compassion

Practise Active listening

Praise

Overcoming being overwhelmed

Receive

Team

Seeking Professional Help

Going to a doctor or even calling a crisis line can be a daunting task for people dealing with depression. Having someone accompany them and support them may lessen their fears.

Sample scripts to use in approaching your loved one:

I'm so grateful that you are sharing this with me. Let's contact your doctor and set up an appointment. I will happily join you in discovering how we can get you the help you need.

As soon as we hang up, please contact your doctor and set up an appointment. I will call you back in an hour and check with you about when it will be. I'd be honored to drive you to the appointment. If you'd like, I will be present with you.

Unconditional Love, Acceptance and Compassion

Judgment is one of the major and most damaging aspects of the stigma surrounding mental illness. Most people who are dealing with mental illness will not be open about it for fear of being judged or ridiculed. The biggest gifts you can give your loved one are your unconditional love, acceptance of their current situation and the compassion they need and deserve.



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Practice Active Listening

Allow your loved one to share with you how they are feeling and to speak without being interrupted.

- Listen with full attention and with the intention to support him or her unconditionally. Remove distractions such as television, radio, phone and computer.
- Maintain open body language: face the person in a relaxed and casual posture. You may also “mirror” your loved one's body language — if he or she is bent over, face in hands you can do the same. It is a sympathetic stance and will encourage openness.
- Maintain gentle eye contact; look into his or her eyes and connect at a soul level.

Praise

Celebrate positive steps. What to you may seem like small praise may go a long way for your loved one. Feeling trapped in a stream of negative emotions is common with mental illness. Gently point out any and all positive steps or emotions you notice.

Overcoming Being Overwhelmed

The simplest of tasks will more than likely result in your loved one feeling overwhelmed. Even mundane tasks such as eating or taking a shower may seem daunting. Receiving too much information at one time or too much support may also be daunting and may cause withdrawal. Keep things short, sweet and simple. If you are in doubt, *ask them what works best for them.*



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Receive

As a caregiver you need support too. Be willing to ask for help and be receptive when others give you the support you need. Always honor your loved one's privacy; ask permission before sharing with anyone else what he or she is going through.

Team

You are one person. In reality it is impossible for you to be the sole provider of support for your loved one. Instead, encourage your loved one to create an emotional health plan and appoint a support team. (An example is at the end of the previous chapter. This team consists of trustworthy friends and/or family who have the best interests of the person in mind and heart; the most effective team will be a mix of personal and professional support.)



Resources

Help is at hand

24 Hour Crisis Resources

NORTH AMERICA: 1-800-SUICIDE (784.2433)

AUSTRALIA: 13 11 14

UK: 08457 90 90 90

Republic of Ireland dial 1850 60 90 90

**Crisis Line listings across the world:
www.befrienders.org**

Education and Resources

Canadian Mental Health Association
Centre for Suicide Prevention
Mood Disorders Society of Canada

www.cmha.calgary.ab.ca
www.suicideinfo.ca
www.mooddisorderscanada.ca

Calgary Counseling and Psychologists

Serenity Now Wellness Centre 403.454.7600

www.serenitynowwellness.ca

Gemma Stone 403.255.0898

www.gemmastone.org

Distress Centre 403.266.HELP (4357) *

www.distresscentre.com

* Call 403.266.HELP (4357) and ask for an intake to counseling.

ConnectTeen 403.264.TEEN

www.calgaryconnectteen.com



To many I am known as SimpLee Serene, my name is Lee Horbachewski and I am a quiet strong voice for mental illness awareness and suicide prevention.

SimpLee Serene is derived from the words **simplicity** and **serenity**, both of which I highly value and hopefully inspire you to find. One of the definitions of serenity is "shining bright & steady." I believe that no matter where you are at, or how you are feeling you can shine bright & steady, even in the face of depression and anxiety.

I know too well how you feel. In 2004, I spiraled down into the dark pit of both depression and anxiety, which led me to be hospitalized in a psychiatric ward and resulted in numerous attempts on my life. Thankfully, I am here today... alive and well, filled with gratitude that I chose life.

I serve you through blogging, speaking and my book "A Quiet Strong Voice – my journey through depression, anxiety and attempted suicide".



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