

The Little Book of Big Conversations

Helping you to start talking about depression

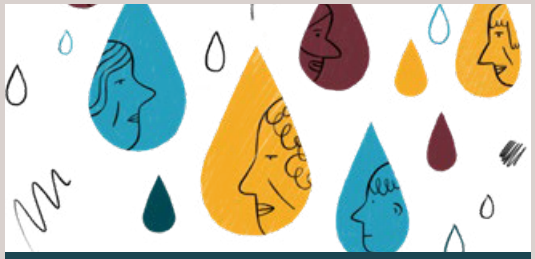
BREAKING DEPRESSION

CP-586602; July 2026

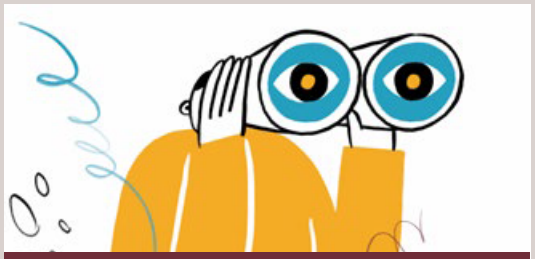
Click on a chapter to start reading



INTRODUCTION
Making big conversations a little bit easier



CHAPTER ONE
Understanding that you're not alone



CHAPTER TWO
Deciding when, where and how to talk



CHAPTER THREE
Taking it step by step



CHAPTER FOUR
Getting the right support



FURTHER SUPPORT
Resources

This book has been developed by Johnson & Johnson in partnership with GAMIAN-Europe (Global Alliance of Mental Illness Advocacy Networks-Europe) and EUFAMI (European Federation of Associations of Families of People with Mental Illness).

A virtual roundtable meeting brought together patient and carer representatives from both advocacy group partners to discuss individual experiences of starting conversations around depression. The contents of this book reflect the conversations that took place during the meeting.



Making big conversations a little bit easier

Starting a conversation about depression can be a big, daunting challenge. Many people do not have the confidence to speak up, but staying silent means they don't get the right support.

Open and honest conversations are an important step towards getting people the professional support they need to start the healing process. Talking openly also helps loved ones understand the impact of depression and what they can do to help.



The Little Book of Big Conversations is full of small pieces of practical advice to help everyone feel confident about discussing depression.

It offers guidance for anyone who is living with depression, as well as friends or family members who want to offer support. Some of the information is tailored for a particular group, but we recommend that you read the full book as it may help you understand the emotions others might be experiencing.



Understanding that you're not alone

Depression is an invisible illness and from the outside it can be difficult to see the impact it is having. If you are living with depression you may feel isolated and find it hard to speak up. It's common to worry that others won't understand you or will look at you differently if you do disclose your feelings.

If you are a friend or family member of someone with depression, it can come as a complete surprise that someone so close to you is struggling, and this surprise may make it harder to know how best to help.

The following pages contain some important advice to help you understand that you are not alone in what you are experiencing.

If you're struggling with depression, it can seem like you are the only person who is feeling this way.

However, depression is much more common than you may think.

Depressive disorders are devastating diseases, affecting over 21 million people across EU countries[1]

One in ten people have taken time off work for depression[2]

According to the World Health Organization, depression is a leading cause of disability worldwide[3]



References

1. OECD/EU. Health at a Glance: Europe 2018: State of Health in the EU Cycle, OECD Publishing, Paris. Available at: https://www.oecd.org/content/dam/oecd/en/publications/reports/2018/11/health-at-a-glance-europe-2018_g1g91fe4/health_glance_eur-2018-en.pdf. Date accessed: July 2026
2. Target. Depression in the Workplace in Europe: A report featuring new insights from business leaders. Available at: https://www.readkong.com/page/1-concentration-depression-in-the-workplace-decisions-2600135. Date accessed: July 2026
3. WHO. "Depression: let's talk" says WHO, as depression tops list of causes of ill health. Available at: https://www.who.int/news/item/30-03-2017--depression-let-s-talk-says-who-as-depression-tops-list-of-causes-of-ill-health. Last accessed: July 2026

Depression is a serious and complex condition[1] and your feelings are not your fault.

Depression can happen to anyone, no matter what you have going on in your life – it is nothing to be ashamed of

Depression is not a choice and cannot be easily overcome just by 'trying hard enough'

Depression can have a serious impact on every aspect of a person's life and therefore requires the right treatment and care[2]



References

1. American Psychiatric Association. What is depression? Available at: https://psychiatry.org/patients-families/depression/what-is-depression. Last updated: July, 2026
2. Lepine JP and Briley M. The increasing burden of depression. Neuropsychiatric Dis Treat 2011;7(suppl 1):3–7

Starting a conversation is the first step to getting the right support.

By sharing your feelings with someone, you not only give yourself the best chance of getting the right support, but you may also help others feel more comfortable talking about their own experiences in the future.

You may feel guilty or embarrassed about asking for help, but there's no need to. There are people around you who can and want to help you

Speaking about your feelings would not make them worse. Many people find that talking to someone is a turning point in their recovery

Remember you are not asking for much, only that someone listens and is there with you



Deciding when, where and how to talk

Sometimes it's hard to know when to start talking about depression and what to say. The right time and place to talk are whenever and wherever you feel comfortable, and these are likely to be different for everyone. Many people worry about upsetting their loved ones, but don't let a desire for the situation to be 'perfect' get in the way of the conversation.



Choosing a time and a place to talk

There is no right time or place to start a conversation, but you may find the following suggestions helpful:

Having the conversation in a setting that makes you feel safe and relaxed

Choosing to speak to someone who you feel comfortable and safe with

Talking while doing something else with your loved one, for example, going for a walk or a drive

Asking a healthcare professional to join the conversation – or help you prepare for it – to provide guidance and a neutral point of view

Having several short conversations instead of trying to explain everything in one go



Finding ways to start talking

Whilst every individual's experience with depression is personal to them, it is not intrusive to check in with them. Ways to do this without forcing the conversation can include:

- Asking them 'how are you today?'
- Mentioning something that is concerning you, for example, 'I've noticed you haven't been sleeping as much lately, is there something on your mind?'
- Letting them know you're there if they want to talk
- Doing everyday activities together



Feeling nervous is normal

It's normal to feel nervous, guilty or scared about the first conversation you have with someone about depression. You might find it helpful to:

Speak to someone outside your family first, for example, a friend, co-worker or healthcare professional

Prepare a simple explanation of what depression is, perhaps with the support of a healthcare professional

Write down what you want to say beforehand so it's clear in your mind

Let the person know ahead of time that you want to talk, for example, 'I haven't been feeling myself lately and could use someone to talk to. When might be a good time to chat?'



Remember it's not personal

While you may feel guilty if you were unaware of your loved one's feelings, it is not your fault. Try to remember:

During initial conversations people living with depression may not use the word 'depression' to describe what is happening, and they may not even know that it is what they are experiencing. Instead, they may focus on their experiences or physical symptoms such as complaints of aches and pains or of feeling tired all the time, so it is okay if you were not aware of the nature or extent of their feelings

With depression, there are often no signs that someone is struggling unless they tell you about it

A loved one experiencing depression may become withdrawn, shy, sullen or even angry. These changes in mood can be challenging to experience and it is okay to feel confused or even scared. Try to understand that it isn't personal and isn't because of anything you have, or haven't done

Be as honest as possible about how you feel

You might feel pressure to say that you are 'fine' when people ask you how you are, but **it's important to be as honest as possible about how you feel**. It might be helpful to:

Use metaphors and analogies to help you describe your symptoms to others, for example, 'it's like having a knot in my stomach' or 'it feels like a heavy weight on my chest'

Ask not to be interrupted until you've finished talking

Let people know if you're having a particularly difficult day or a better day – it is normal for your experiences of depression to ebb and flow in severity, with some days feeling better or worse than others



Try to listen with compassion

Although it can be hard, remember that you don't always need to give advice. Being a compassionate listener is often even more important than providing answers, and many people with depression see giving answers as a role for healthcare professionals. Here's what you can do instead:

DO

Recognise that their feelings are valid

Listen carefully, without interrupting

Avoid judgement or blame

Only offer solutions if you're asked

Suggest seeking professional support together if the context allows for it

TRY NOT TO

Minimise the person's feelings by trying to cheer them up

Suggest they have no reason to feel sad or try to rationalise your loved one's experience; depression is a biological condition that can affect anyone

Downplay how serious depression is to show the person that they can overcome it easily

Express feelings of anger, disappointment or guilt when your loved one does open up to you for the first time



Taking it step by step

The first conversation is a big step, but **you don't have to talk about everything in one go**. There is no instant solution to someone's journey with depression; it takes time, patience, and ongoing conversations to start the healing process and help someone find the support they need. It is important to be gentle yet persistent and avoid putting too much pressure on one conversation.

Try not to put too much pressure on one conversation

It may help to remember the following:

It's up to you to decide what you share with whom and when

After one conversation you may feel like a weight has been lifted, but don't panic if you don't feel better after talking to the person – it's normal to experience ups and downs

You can be as direct and open as you want, for example, 'I'm having a tough time, I think I may have depression' or 'I've been feeling stressed and I could use some help.'

Don't be afraid of saying that you need the conversation to slow down

It's okay to take a step back from conversations if you feel overwhelmed

Set boundaries that acknowledge the conversation is confidential and the discussion will not be taken out of context

Patience and perseverance are important

Whilst it is difficult, it is important to:

Be patient – understand that your loved one will share things with you as and when they are ready. Whilst the first conversation is a great first step, experiences are still theirs to share and probing or pushing too far can be detrimental to building a relationship of trust

Acknowledge that the conversation is an important and difficult first step

Persevere – progress can go forwards but also backwards. It's important that your loved one knows you're in it for the long run

Keep checking in with them and encouraging them to share their feelings, it is important to keep the conversation going

Avoid pushing the person to talk more than they want to

Set boundaries acknowledging the conversation is confidential and that it will not be taken out of context



Getting the right support

It is important to acknowledge that talking to a loved one about your/their experiences of depression isn't going to fix everything. Whilst opening up to someone for the first time is a crucial and brave first step, recovery is a process and **it is important to seek professional help** when you or your loved one feel ready.





It's important not to cope with depression alone. Having the right medical and/or therapeutic help in place will help your chances of depression recovery. If you are living with depression and feel ready to speak to a professional about your feelings, you may find the following links a useful place to start:

Global Alliance of Mental Illness Advocacy Networks-Europe

VISIT WEBSITE

Mental Health Europe – Helplines for young people

VISIT WEBSITE

World Health Organization

VISIT WEBSITE

Mental Health Foundation

VISIT WEBSITE

Encourage your loved one to speak to a professional

Your role is not to be a psychotherapist, and while you can't control someone else's recovery from depression, you can encourage them to speak to a professional and direct them to potential resources that they can read, or you can explore together.

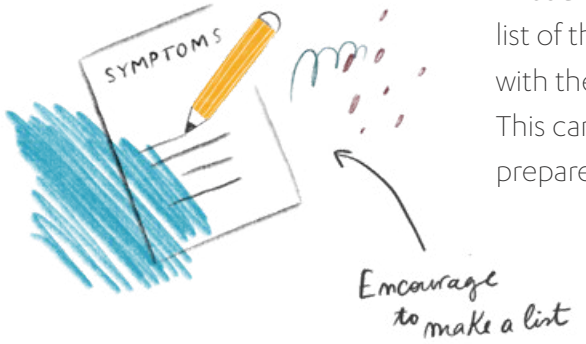
If seeking professional help seems daunting to your loved one, some ways that you can offer support include:



Suggesting a general check-up with a physician – your loved one may be less anxious about seeing a family doctor than a mental health professional. This can be a helpful option as the doctor can make a referral to a specialist if depression is diagnosed



Offering to help find a doctor or therapist and go with them to the first visit



Encouraging them to make a list of their symptoms to discuss with the healthcare professional. This can help them feel more prepared for the first visit

Everyone's mental health matters

To take good care of your loved one, you must also take good care of yourself. Being there for them isn't always easy, so it's important to:



Set boundaries around what you can help with and what is the role of a trained professional



Take time for yourself – conversations can be difficult and bring up a lot of emotions so don't feel guilty if you need to take a break



Make sure that you also have a support network and talk to others. There are networks available, such as **EUFAMI.org**

Do not feel that it is your sole responsibility to help them get better. Remind yourself that you're not a trained professional and just listening and being present for them is a huge help

Learning more about depression may help

Taking the time to learn more about the condition, people's experiences with it, and how best to talk about it, may help you feel more prepared to support your loved one. You could join a local support group, talk to a healthcare professional, or find resources online. For example:

European Federation of Associations of Families of People with Mental Illness — VISIT WEBSITE

World Health Organization — VISIT WEBSITE

Mental Health Foundation — VISIT WEBSITE

Reading about what depression can feel like, as well as the myths, misconceptions, and stigma around mental illness, can help you understand your loved one's experience more clearly.



Resources

If you are worried about your own mental health, or someone else's, please visit GAMIAN-Europe's website for information.

VISIT WEBSITE

If you are caring for someone living with a mental health disorder and would like additional support, you can find more resources on the EUFAMI website.

VISIT WEBSITE

In an emergency situation, get help immediately by calling the emergency services or your local mental health helpline.



About Breaking Depression

Breaking Depression is a health awareness campaign developed by Johnson & Johnson in partnership with GAMIAN-Europe (the Global Alliance of Mental Illness Advocacy Networks Europe) and EUFAMI (European Federation of Associations of Families of People with Mental Illness).