

Pastoral care for carers

Carers may feel:

- Loss of 'warmth' in their life.
- Deprived of enjoyment in the relationship, loneliness (dangers of filling the void in inappropriate ways) and becoming socially 'single'.
- They are giving much but receiving little.
- Helpless to 'fix' the person's illness.
- Frustration or anger.
- Reluctant to ask for, or accept help.
- Remote from God.
- Guilt at taking time out for themselves.

Exercising a Pastoral Ministry to Carers

- Acknowledge and make time for the carer during visits.
- Consider a separate meeting with them.
- Create opportunities to give them 'time out'.
- Be a listener; slow to speak and quick to listen.
- Bring encouragement and hope that this will not last forever.
- Prayer considerations:
 - » Seek the Holy Spirit to bring physical, emotional, mental and spiritual strength.
 - » Ask the Holy Spirit for gifts of patience, discernment and wisdom.
 - » Help the carer pray for the person.



References and signposting

Lifeline - the Northern Ireland crisis response helpline service for people who are experiencing distress or despair.

Telephone – **0808 808 8000**
or website – <http://www.lifelinehelpline.info/>

SAMARITANS

Telephone – **116 123 (UK)** or **116 123 (ROI)**

AWARE

Voluntary organisation which specialises in depression and has self help groups throughout NI and also information on website
<http://www.aware-ni.org/>

PCI social issues leaflet – 'Help to overcome depression'. Available on
<https://www.presbyterianireland.org/Resources/Congregational-Resources/Social-Issues/Help-to-overcome-depression>

Well.com. 9 Antrim Road, Belfast.
www.carlislecircuswell.com
077 1749 6686
info@carlislecircuswell.com

SPIRITUAL CARE
IN DEPRESSION

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Guidance for Ministers, Church
Visitors and Family



 **The Methodist Church
In Ireland**
Ministry of Healing

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Introduction

This leaflet is aimed at providing some information, pastoral guidance and spiritual helps for church visitors, ministers, family and close friends who are drawing alongside those with depression.

We all know someone who has experienced depression; it is a reality of modern living which affects 1 in 5 people during their life. The condition is personal and difficult for the sufferer but it can be just as difficult for those who are trying to love and support them.

What is depression?

We all feel down, sad or fed up at times during our lives; these feelings usually don't last long and are a normal response to life's challenges and difficulties. However, depression is a disorder which can occur in people of all ages and from all backgrounds. It may be accompanied by anxiety or physical health symptoms.

Signs of Depression

Depression is an individual experience and the severity of the symptoms and signs will vary as will the impact on each individual. The following are some of the symptoms that the person with depression may experience.

- Continuous feelings of sadness, guilt or apprehension.
- Crying, extreme emotions, forgetfulness and inability to concentrate.
- Difficulty getting over to sleep, disturbed sleep pattern or waking very early.
- Tiredness, fatigue, changes in appetite leading to weight loss or gain.

- Non-specific aches and pains such as headache and joint pains.
- Feeling life is not worth living and they would not be missed if they were not around.
- Loss of interest or enjoyment of activities previously enjoyed.

Ministering to the person with depression

Depression may develop as a result of traumatic life events, hereditary factors, physical conditions or spiritual distress; in some situations there does not appear to be any clear or identifiable reason for the depression. It may have taken a lot for the person to share how they are feeling so the following are important considerations:

- Listen actively to what the person is saying and avoid interrupting.
- Avoid offering analysis of cause and solutions.
- Avoid offering over-wrought spiritual clichés which might further alienate.
- Be non-judgmental in approach and response.
- Show sympathy and concern for the person.
- Be generous with your time. A walk or help with a task might be more appropriate than talking.
- Give practical advice and support regarding sleep, exercise, diet and excessive inactivity.
- Acknowledge and give encouragement at any signs of progress.
- Encourage talking openly with their GP and other professionals involved in their care.
- Encourage compliance with treatment.
- When you respond, let your words be gentle and kind; sensitively discuss negative thinking about themselves or God.
- Take any suicidal remarks or actions seriously.

- Pray and tell them you are praying for them.
- Don't give up or make promises you can't keep, "a friend loves at all times" Proverbs 17v17.

Christians with depression

Christians are not immune to suffering from depression and may experience unique challenges such as irrational guilt, doubt and perhaps a sense of being abandoned by God. Depressed believers may not be experiencing any joy in Christ and may feel spiritually dry. Walking alongside the depressed believer requires particular sensitivity and awareness of their specific spiritual needs:

Fellowship

God provides us with family to share one another's burdens; it is also important for depressed Christians to continue to have fellowship with Christian friends, who love, encourage and pray. If it is difficult to attend public worship, meeting in a small group may be preferred.

Prayer

In depression, God can seem remote, concentration is likely to be poor and prayer may be difficult. Encourage honest prayers, crying out to God for help; even angry prayers are better than no prayer at all. The Psalmist offers many examples of such prayer. Articulating thanks for God's goodness helps to replace feelings with biblical truth; Paul's command to rejoice always points to a conscious decision and not an emotional response.

Scripture

Reading scripture is important as it helps to reinforce biblical truths and bring comfort. Read short familiar passages, and make them personal; using

them as a prayer can be helpful. God can speak through His word into the darkest situations.

Ministry of presence

As family, friends and carers we can feel incredibly helpless at times; we are at a loss to find something to say or do to make things better. Sometimes though, we do not need words, our presence is enough. Neil Holm defines the ministry of presence as "a faith presence that accompanies each person on the journey through life." This presence in each of us reflects God's presence, love, and peace through listening, being with, and affirming.

When Jesus heard of Lazarus' death, his first caring act for Lazarus' family was to be with them. He went to them, he wept with them, he comforted them and then he acted. (John 11)

We see a similar example in Job, Job's friends spent most of their time being with him, they sat with him and they suffered with him. Even though they sometimes said the wrong things, being there and offering comfort were the best support they could provide him.