

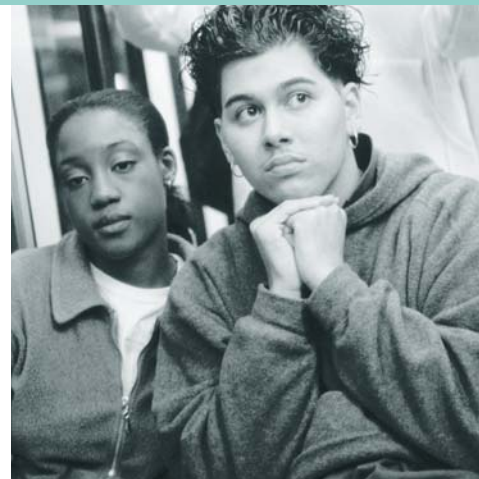
What Helps and What Hurts

When someone you care about has depression or bipolar disorder

People living with depression or bipolar disorder (manic depression) often cope with symptoms like feelings of hopelessness, emptiness or worthlessness. You probably want to say something to help the person feel better. But what can you say? Why does it seem like many well-meant comments hurt more than they help?

Here is a basic list to use as guidelines when you talk to someone who has symptoms of depression or bipolar disorder. Put the statements into your own words. What's most important is that the person you care about understands your support. You didn't cause your loved one's illness and you can't control the person's feelings. You can only do your best to offer help.

If the person is actively threatening suicide, don't try to handle the situation on your own. Call a mental health professional or take your friend to the nearest emergency room for treatment.



What helps

I know you have a real illness and that's what causes these thoughts and feelings.

I may not be able to understand exactly how you feel but I care about you and want to help.

You are important to me. Your life is important to me.

Tell me what I can do now to help you.

You might not believe it now, but the way you're feeling will change.

You are not alone in this. I'm here for you.

Talk to me. I'm listening.

What hurts

It's all in your head.

We all go through times like this.

You have so much to live for – why do you want to die?

What do you want me to do?
I can't change your situation.

Just snap out of it.
Look on the bright side.

You'll be fine. Stop worrying.

Here's my advice...

When you have depression or bipolar disorder

What can I do to help others understand what helps and what hurts?

- Set aside some time to sit down with family members or friends and talk about something important. Choose a time that is relatively calm and free of distractions.
- Begin your statements with yourself: "I feel," or "I need." Avoid "you" statements like "You always criticize me," which may be more likely to lead to arguments.
- Tell them what they *can* say or do that will help you. This includes practical things like helping with housework or taking you somewhere.
- Ask for help when you need it. If you feel better, thank the people who helped you.
- Look for more than one person to support you. Different people offer different perspectives.