

Depression is Not Sadness.

Via Erica Leibbrandt

Depression is not sadness. It is emptiness.

Depression is not being unhappy, it is being numb.

It is not anger or desperation or fear or even loneliness (though it is also all of these things.)

Depression is not a feeling. It is nothingness. A void where nothing grows or changes, where time does not exist, where dark is the only color, where no one else lives.

Depression is not a state of mind, it is a place. It's a place we stumble into sometimes unwittingly, a black hole yawning widely on an otherwise normal day. Once there, as in a corn maze in an unlit night, we can wander endlessly, perhaps never finding the way out. The black hole becomes seductive, it seeps into our bones, and we learn that it is us and we are it, and it was the ordinary day that was the fiction.

"Snap out of it!" we say to depressed people, as if our wish that they feel okay, feel normal, really could be enough to fix the problem. "Why are you depressed? You have everything in the world going for you! You're young, you're beautiful, you're healthy, you have people that love you."

"True," comes the mumbled response, and for just a moment, guilt tries to pile in on the nothingness and make it somethingness, but then it recedes again, sucked back into the hole.

"How can I help you? What do you need?" we cry out, frustrated. On the other side of depression, action is always the cure. "Take a walk, call a friend, just get up and move!"

But depression doesn't release its victims so easily. It lays upon them like an enormous leaden x-ray apron, pressing down, slowing heart rates to a weak thump thump, turning thoughts to formless shadows that sit, as a stone sits at the bottom of a stagnant, muddy river.

Even if we understand depression, when we are not ourselves in it, the depressed are as astronauts untethered from their ship, floating and paralyzed in space, unreachable, lost. How do we cross that gaping void which reaches out in all directions without losing the way ourselves?

Things that help:

Be with a depressed person in silence. Lay down next to them. You can even read a book silently to yourself. Don't focus on them, just be there. Let them absorb your energy. Sometimes that is enough.

Don't tell a depressed person what to do. Just say you love them, even when they are in the dark place. Say it quietly and bravely. Don't get upset if they can't say it back.

Remember for the depressed person, even if they can't remember it themselves (and they probably can't,) that this will not last forever, though it seems as if it will. Do not tell them this, simply sit in knowing.

If the depressed person will allow it, tenderly brush back their hair. If your touch is rejected, try not to take it personally—it is simply too overwhelming in that moment. You'll get another chance.

Depression is a disease of isolation and paralysis—it's grip is strong, it's nature shy. Like a feral cat, it doesn't respond well to clumsy intervention. But like such a cat, a patient heart and a steady hand can sometimes be the magic spell that tames it, until the next time night falls.

“Try to understand the blackness, lethargy, hopelessness, and loneliness they're going through. Be there for them when they come through the other side. It's hard to be a friend to someone who's depressed, but it is one of the kindest, noblest, and best things you will ever do.” ~ Stephen Fry