

A GUIDE TO CLINICAL AND PATIENT COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES ON DEPRESSION



Depression is one of the most common mental health problems in the United States. However, many patients may find it difficult to acknowledge and discuss their illness. As a health care provider, you have the opportunity to help patients address this issue and make positive changes in their lives.

This coaching guide offers ways to discuss depression with your patients. You, your patient, other members of the clinical community and programs that offer social services can work to treat and identify depression.

TIPS FOR DISCUSSING DEPRESSION WITH YOUR PATIENTS:


- 1. REDUCE STIGMA**
- 2. CONNECT PHYSICAL HEALTH AND MENTAL HEALTH**
- 3. COLLABORATE ON A TREATMENT PLAN AND ENGAGE PATIENTS BY SETTING GOALS**
- 4. CREATE A FOLLOW-UP PLAN**

1. REDUCE STIGMA

Share with patients that depression is common, can affect anyone and is nothing to be ashamed of.

Depression is common.

One in 12 adult New Yorkers has depression. Would you mind if I asked you a few questions about it? These are questions we ask everyone."



The image shows a Patient Health Questionnaire-9 (PHQ-9) form. It is a self-report questionnaire used to assess the presence and severity of major depressive disorder. The form includes a title 'PATIENT HEALTH QUESTIONNAIRE-9 PHQ-9' and a small green logo. Below the title, there is a section for 'Over the last 2 weeks, how often have you been bothered by any of the following problems?' followed by a table with 9 items and a scale from 0 to 4. The items are: 1. Little interest or pleasure in doing things, 2. Feeling tired or exhausted, 3. Trouble falling or staying asleep, or waking too early in the morning, 4. Feeling slowed down or having too much energy, 5. Trouble concentrating, 6. Thoughts of suicide or death, or thoughts of harming yourself, 7. Trouble thinking clearly, such as making decisions or remembering things, 8. Feeling hopeless, 9. Thinking or feeling that you are not the same as you once were, or that you are just like the other people in the world. Below the table, there is a section for 'For the rating ...' and a section for 'If you checked off any problems, how much have these problems made it for you in the past 2 weeks?' with a scale from 0 to 4. The form also includes a footer with the text '© 2002 Medical Outcomes Trust. All rights reserved.' and the NYC logo.

Maternal depression is common.

"Many women struggle with depression during pregnancy or after having a baby. By helping you identify these symptoms, we can improve not only your mood and health but also the well-being of your child."

Depression has many different causes.

"Having depression does not mean you did something wrong. Depression may be caused by chemical changes in the brain, hormones or certain chronic illnesses. Major life events, such as losing a loved one or experiencing financial troubles, can also lead to depression. Depression has many causes and challenges, but there are also many ways we can work together to get you feeling better and healthier."

2. CONNECT PHYSICAL HEALTH AND MENTAL HEALTH

Depression affects the mind and the body. Use the Depression Flip Chart to help convey this message to patients.



Depression is more than feeling sad.

"The mind and the body are connected. When you are depressed, you can feel so overwhelmed that you might struggle to take care of yourself, which affects your physical health. That's why it's important to seek help if you feel depressed. Can we talk about how you have been feeling both physically and mentally?"

Depression and chronic illnesses.

"Nearly one in three adults with a chronic illness, such as diabetes or high blood pressure, also struggle with depression. It can be very hard to manage a chronic condition and depression. You might want to eat healthier, be more active and take your medicine, but can't because your depression makes it difficult to do so. Let's work together so you can feel better."

3. COLLABORATE ON A TREATMENT PLAN AND ENGAGE PATIENTS ON SETTING GOALS

Stress the importance of shared decision-making when developing and implementing your patient's treatment plan. Educate patients on how clinical and community resources can enhance treatment outcomes. Work together to create goals with actionable steps.

Depression is treatable.

"Treating your depression can improve your overall health, as well as your social, personal and work life. Talk therapy, medication, lifestyle changes and developing new coping skills can help."

"Depression affects people differently – no single treatment is best for everyone. For some people, talking to a counselor or therapist is the best option. For others, it can be medication, lifestyle changes or a combination of all three. It might take time for us to find the right treatment plan for you and to start seeing results, but we will get there."

"Sometimes we may work with other people, like social workers and behavioral therapists, to develop a treatment plan. These clinicians will make sure you have the best possible care. Let's talk about how this will work."

"There are many community organizations that can also provide support. We are all here for you."

Lifestyle changes and self-care are important tools in treating depression. Work together to set small, achievable goals by using the My Self-Management Goal for Depression Tool.

“Let’s review this worksheet and come up with a plan to improve your mental and physical health. It takes time to feel better, so let’s start with small goals you can meet. This way, you will be able to give yourself credit for the improvements you see.”

Be physically active.

“Being physically active may seem like the last thing you want to do when you have depression. However, it can make you feel better and improve your overall health. Physical activity can also help you manage other chronic illnesses.”

“Exercise doesn’t mean you need to go to the gym, it can simply mean moving your body or going for a walk.”

“Being physically active boosts chemicals in your brain, and can give you energy to complete daily activities when coping with depression.”

“Do you think you can be physically active for _____ minutes each day?”



MY SELF-MANAGEMENT GOAL FOR DEPRESSION

Taking small steps can make a big difference in managing your depression. Start by choosing one of the goals below. Then work with your health care provider to create a plan to reach that goal.

-  Be physically active
-  Eat a healthy diet
-  Take medication as prescribed
-  Spend time with supportive people
-  Limit illicit drugs and alcohol
-  Talk to a therapist
-  Practice breathing exercises and/or meditation
-  Make time for a hobby or activity
- Other (e.g., limit social media)

HOW WILL YOU DO THIS:

FOLLOW-UP PLAN:

If you have questions or are having trouble reaching your goal, speak to your health care provider about other self-care strategies.

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Eat a healthy diet. 🍴🥗

"A healthy diet is important for the body and mind. Foods and drinks like soda and sweets have little to no nutritional value. You might feel better when eating them, but they can make you feel worse in the long run."

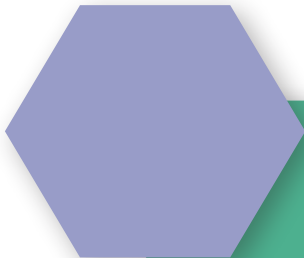
"What changes would you like to make to your diet before our next visit?"

Take medication as prescribed. 📦

"Taking your medication every day is an important part of self-care. Let's talk about your medications and their side effects."

"You can organize and keep track of all your medications by using pillboxes and medication logs."

"Can you commit to taking your medication every day until our next visit? If you have a problem with your medication, don't stop taking it. Let me know and we can work together to find a solution."



Spend time with supportive people.

“It can be hard for people with depression to stay connected with others, making them feel more alone and their depression worse. Try to stay connected with people who care about and support you. You can also join support groups, attend religious observances or volunteer. I can provide some resources to help you find this kind of support.”

“How about making a plan to connect with someone this week?”



Limit illicit drugs and alcohol.

"Alcohol and certain types of drugs have short- and long-term impacts on the brain and body. They can slow brain activity, worsen your depression and slow your recovery."

"Let's talk about how drugs and alcohol may play a role in how you feel."

Talk to a therapist.

"Talk therapy can help you learn how to cope with chronic health conditions and manage your depression. Make sure to attend scheduled therapy sessions if they're part of your treatment plan. Remember, therapy doesn't need to last forever."

"Talk therapy has been found to be equally, and sometimes more, effective for treating depression than medication. If individual talk therapy is not for you, there are hotlines and support groups that can also help."

"Let's talk about some of the benefits of talk therapy."

Practice breathing exercises and/or meditation.

"Deep, slow breathing can help you release anxiety and relax your whole body. Try to meditate daily or when you feel stressed."

"Meditating is a great way to relax wherever you are and something you can look forward to. There are lots of free online resources that can guide you through meditation techniques."

Make time for a hobby or activity.

“Depression can make you feel tired all the time. But working on something you enjoy, being creative or learning something new can help. Each day try to find the strength and motivation to participate in an activity.”

“What’s an activity you enjoy and can commit to doing before our next appointment?”

Limit social media.

“If you use social media, like Facebook, Twitter or Instagram, think about how it makes you feel. If it makes you feel connected and provides a positive social network, that’s great. However, if it makes you feel sad, isolated or angry, reduce your time on social media. These feelings can make your symptoms worse.”

Reduce stress.

“Being under constant stress can make your depression worse. Working with a counselor, therapist, social worker – or even joining a support group – can help you discover the sources of stress in your life and how to find ways to cope.”

“What are some sources of stress in your life? How can we work together to address them?”

4. MAKE A FOLLOW-UP PLAN

Establish a follow-up plan with patients to make sure their treatment is working.

“We have discussed a lot today, including your treatment plan and goals. How do you feel? Do you think this is manageable? We will continue to work together throughout your treatment. Following up on your treatment is very important; we can change something if it does not work for you. Let’s discuss the best ways to follow up.”

Getting better may take some time

“It might take time to find the right treatment plan for you. Even with the right treatment plan, it may take four to six weeks before you see improvement. You might even feel better then worse again for some time. Just like with losing weight, there can be a lot of highs and lows. This might feel frustrating, but it is normal, and in the long run, treatment will help you better manage your depression.”

LOCAL RESOURCES TO HELP MANAGE DEPRESSION:

Thrive Learning Center:

Download resources and self-directed training opportunities from the Thrive Learning Center.

nyc.gov/thrivelearningcenter

Postpartum Resource Center of New York:

Find resources that increase awareness and access to care for New York State families at risk for, or experiencing, prenatal mood and anxiety disorders.

postpartumny.org/resourcedirectory

Statewide help line:

855-631-0001

Health Information Tool for Empowerment (HiteSite):

An online resource directory for information on free and low-cost social services. Hite provides access to financial assistance, food assistance, housing and homeless services, immigrant support, social supports and services, and youth and families services.

hitesite.org

NYC Well:

A multilingual 24-7 call, text and chat line for patients and providers who are seeking suicide prevention and crisis counseling; peer support and short-term counseling via telephone, text and web; assistance scheduling appointments or accessing other mental health services; and follow-ups to check that you have connected with care and that it is working for you.

English: 1-888-NYC-WELL (1-888-692-9355), press 2

Español: 1-888-692-9355, press 3

中文: 1-888-692-9355, press 4

Call 711 (Relay Service for Deaf/Hard of Hearing)

nycwell.cityofnewyork.us



