The Partner's Guide

LOW MOOD

Loving someone through low mood

A warm, practical guide for the husband, wife or partner of someone going through low mood: how to stay in their corner without losing yourself, step out of the cheer-up-and-withdraw loop, and reach for help together.

Who this is for: the wife, husband or partner of someone going through low mood.

Cited: NICE, WHO, and peer-reviewed research.

Languages: English, Hindi, Marathi, and Kannada.

Read it free at weave.clinic/family

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IS THIS US

The person you know feels far away

IN SHORT

You have started noticing a pattern. Your partner seems flat, tired, pulled away, or short with you in a way that is not like them, and it has gone on for weeks, not days. Naming a pattern is not the same as putting a label on them. This guide is for you, so you can stay in their corner without slowly disappearing yourself.

It crept in slowly. The person who used to laugh at your jokes now stares at the wall. The one who planned your weekends cannot decide what to eat. They are tired all the time, or snappy over small things, or just somewhere else behind their eyes. You keep waiting for them to bounce back, and the weeks keep passing.

You have started to see a shape in it. Naming a pattern is not the same as putting a label on your partner. Only a doctor can say what is really going on, and this booklet names nothing on them. What it will do is help you understand what you are living with, and how to be steady inside it.

Low mood is common, and it is not weakness or a character flaw. Health bodies describe it as a common condition that responds to treatment. That is worth holding on to on the hard days: this is something real, and something that gets better.

A common condition

that responds to treatment

Low mood is one of the most common health conditions in the world, and most people who get the right help improve.

You might feel relief that there could be a name for this. You might also feel guilty for feeling relieved, as if wanting to understand somehow means you are giving up on them. Both of those feelings are normal. You are allowed to want to understand what is happening in your own home.

BEFORE WE GO ON

This guide is written for you, the partner. Not because your partner matters less, but because nobody hands the partner a manual. You are carrying something too, and you deserve to be looked after while you look after them.

2

WHAT IT IS, AND WHAT IT IS NOT

The illness, and the person you love

IN SHORT

The heaviness, the loss of interest, the pulling away, the short temper: these are symptoms of the condition, not a verdict on your marriage or your love. Separating the person from the illness lets you be angry at the illness and gentle with the person at the same time.

Here is the shift that changes everything. When your partner cannot get off the sofa, or stops enjoying the things they used to love, that is the illness pulling them inward, not them rejecting you. The flatness is a symptom, like a fever is a symptom. It is not a message about how they feel about you, and it is not a comment on your marriage.

This matters because of what it protects you from. When the withdrawal reads as "they do not love me anymore", every quiet evening feels like a wound, and you start to pull away too. When it reads as "the illness is pulling them in", you can stay close to the person while being angry at the thing that took them.

The day I understood the silence was the illness and not a verdict on us, I stopped taking every flat evening as proof he had stopped loving me.

A partner, remembering the turn

It is treatable, and this is not a small thing. Talking treatments help, medicine helps some people, and many people get well. Effective treatment exists, and most people improve. Your partner is not broken beyond repair. They are unwell, and unwell has a path out of it.

And here is the hard, freeing truth you may need to hear twice. You did not cause this, and you cannot simply fix it by loving them harder. Low mood is not a mood they are choosing to sit in, and it is not something your patience alone can lift. Loving them well matters enormously, but it is not a cure, and it was never your job to be one.

More, if you want it

Separating the illness from the person does not mean excusing everything or pretending nothing hurts. The short temper still stings. The withdrawal still leaves you lonely. It means you stop fighting a person you invented, the one who "does not care", and start facing an illness you can actually push back against, together. "This illness is heavy, and I am here, and we are going to get you help" is a sentence you can both stand next to. "You have given up on us" is not.

3

THE CYCLE YOU KEEP REPEATING

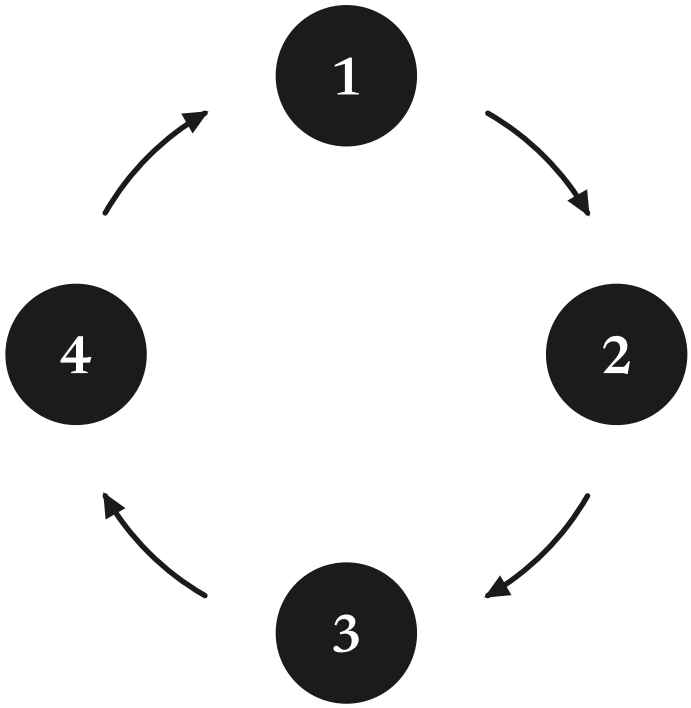
The loop that pulls you both down

IN SHORT

A common loop looks like this: they withdraw, you try to cheer them up or push them to snap out of it, they feel more like a burden, and they withdraw further. It is a loop between two people, not the fault of either one. Once you can see it, you can step out of it together.

Watch how it usually builds. Your partner goes quiet and pulls in. You cannot bear to see them like that, so you try to cheer them up, or gently push them to get moving, to snap out of it. But instead of lifting them, it lands as pressure. They feel like they are letting you down, like a burden, so they pull in further. And the further they go, the harder you push. Round it goes.

Nobody chose this loop. You are trying to help, and they are trying to cope, and the two efforts keep colliding. You can name it out loud together, gently, when things are calm.



The loop that pulls you both down. Nobody chose it, and either of you can interrupt it, usually with warmth instead of pressure.

1. Your partner withdraws and pulls inward.
2. You try to cheer them up or push them to snap out of it.
3. They feel more like a burden and a disappointment.
4. They withdraw further, and the pressure builds again, until it starts over.

Two things feed this loop, and both are worth knowing. The first is a tense, critical home. When the air at home turns critical or high-strung, low mood tends to lift more slowly, while warmth and steadiness help recovery. This is not about blame. It is simply why presence beats pressure, every time.

The second trap is the opposite of criticism, and it looks like love. It is over-functioning: you quietly take over everything, the cooking, the bills, the calls, the chores, until your partner feels useless and you burn out. It feels like help, but it feeds the same cycle. Doing everything for them can leave them feeling like they can do nothing.

REMEMBER

Stepping out of the loop usually starts with one small change from you, and it is almost never "try harder to cheer them up". It is warmth and presence instead of pressure and fixing. You do not have to solve them. You have to stay near them.

4

WHAT ACTUALLY HELPS, WHAT BACKFIRES

Presence over advice

IN SHORT

Presence beats advice. Sitting with them, a short walk together, a warm meal, feels smaller than a pep talk but usually lands better. Small invitations, not pressure. And getting them to a doctor is one of the most useful things you can do.

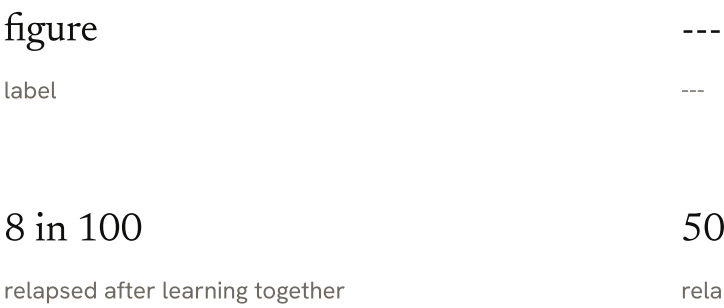
The instinct is to find the right words that will fix it. But presence beats advice, almost every time. Sitting beside them without needing them to talk. A short walk together. A warm meal put in front of them. These feel far too small to matter, and they matter more than any pep talk. What lifts someone in low mood is rarely a clever sentence. It is the steady sense that they are not alone in it.

A warm meal, made without being asked, that says you are not alone in this.

On the worst weeks, Meera stopped trying to talk her husband out of how he felt. Instead she started small. She would cook the dal he liked and put it in front of him without a word about mood. She would sit next to him on the sofa with her own book, not asking him to talk, just there. It felt like doing nothing. But slowly, the quiet company did what the pep talks never had. He started to surface, a little, because he was not surfacing alone.

Offer small invitations, not pressure. Instead of "you need to get out more", try "would you like to come for ten minutes, we can leave whenever you want". The escape hatch is the kind part. It lets them say yes without signing up for something that feels impossible from inside the low.

Learning about low mood together helps the whole couple, and this is not just a nice idea. In one trial, a short course of family psychoeducation for low mood cut the relapse rate sharply, to 8 in 100 compared with 50 in 100 for usual care alone. Understanding it together is itself part of the treatment.



Getting them to a doctor is one of the most useful things you can do, and going with them to the first visit can make it far easier. You are not being pushy by helping them reach care. You are doing the single most helpful thing on this list. Offer to book it, to come along, to sit in the waiting room. The hardest step for someone in low mood is often the first one, and you can carry them over it.

LINES TO DROP

Some lines add shame to an already heavy load, even when they come from love. Let these go: "snap out of it", "others have it worse", "just be positive", "you are being lazy". They do not lift the low. They tell your partner that on top of everything, they are failing at feeling better too.

More, if you want it

If you are not sure what to say, you do not have to fill the silence with advice. "I am here" and "I am not going anywhere" and "we will get through this together" carry more than any fix. And if a conversation goes wrong, which it will sometimes, you can repair it later. "I pushed too hard earlier, I am sorry, I just want you to feel better" is a sentence that rebuilds. Getting it perfect is not the job. Staying is the job.

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WITHOUT LOSING YOURSELF

Your own oxygen mask

IN SHORT

You cannot pour from an empty cup. Looking after your own sleep, food, friendships, and breaks is not selfish. It keeps you able to help. You are their partner, not their therapist, and loving someone does not mean becoming their whole treatment plan.

You have heard it on every flight, and it is true here too. You cannot pour from an empty cup. Looking after your own sleep, your own food, your own friendships and breaks, is not selfish. It is what keeps you standing, and a partner who is still standing is the most useful thing your partner has.

This is not a soft worry. Partners of people with low mood carry a real load, and over time a partner's own mood and health can start to suffer too. Your feelings count. Your exhaustion is not a distraction from their illness. Protecting your own health is part of the plan, not a break from it.

Hold on to this line as well: you are their partner, not their therapist. Loving someone does not mean becoming their entire treatment plan. You can be endlessly kind and still not be the doctor, the counsellor, and the medicine all at once. That was never the deal, and it is not a load one person can carry.

Boundaries are allowed, and they are not unkind. You can be steady and warm and still say, "I cannot do this part, we need to bring in help". Keep one or two threads of your own life alive too, a hobby, a friend, a routine that is just yours, so the relationship is not only ever about the illness. In a joint family the load can multiply, with relatives adding advice and expectations. You do not have to win every conversation. "We are handling this together, in our own way" is a full and complete answer.

TRY THIS

This week, choose one thing that is only for you, half an hour with a friend, a walk without your phone, one small routine you protect. Take it without guilt. Notice that the house does not fall apart, and that you come back with a little more patience than you left with.

6

WHEN TO STEP IN, AND CRISIS

When to act, and where to turn

IN SHORT

Some warning signs need action now. Ask directly and calmly. Asking someone if they are thinking of ending their life does not plant the idea, it opens a door. If they may not be safe, do not leave them alone, and get help. Tele-MANAS is on 14416, free, any time.

Most of this guide is about the long, slow days. This section is about the sharp ones. Some warning signs need action now, not next week. Watch for talk of being a burden or better off gone, giving away belongings, a sudden calm after a dark stretch, or any mention of not wanting to be alive. Take these seriously, every time.

If you are worried, ask directly and calmly. This is the part people fear most, and here is the truth that should free you: asking someone if they are thinking of ending their life does not plant the idea. It opens a door, and it can bring relief. You can say it plainly: "Are you thinking about ending your life?" The question does not push them toward it. It tells them they can finally say the thing out loud.

If they may not be safe, do not leave them alone. Reduce access to anything they could use to harm themselves, and stay with them while you get help. You do not have to know exactly what to do next. You only have to not be alone in it, and neither do they.

Reach for help early, and reach for it out loud. Call Tele-MANAS on **14416**, India's free national mental health helpline, available in many languages, any time of day or night. It is there for you as much as for your partner, and you are allowed to call it to ask what to do.

For immediate danger, go to the nearest hospital or call emergency services. Getting help is a sign of love, not failure, and you do not have to hold this alone. You have been steady for a long time. Reaching for help is not the moment you gave up. It is the moment you brought in reinforcements, which is exactly what steady people do.

IN YOUR CORNER

If the strain ever tips into "I cannot keep doing this", that feeling is common and reachable, not a verdict on your marriage or on you. The crisis card linked below has people you can talk to, any time, for either of you.

WHERE THIS COMES FROM

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World Health Organization. Depressive disorder (depression) fact sheet. 2023. who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/depression

Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India. Tele-MANAS: National Tele Mental Health Programme (helpline 14416). 2022. telemanas.mohfw.gov.in

FURTHER READING

- WHO: Depressive disorder (depression) fact sheet

This guide helps you recognise and understand. It is not a diagnosis. For that, see a professional.

Feeling like it is all too much? **Read the crisis card.** Help is one page away.