

# Depression: when to get help

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Uncommon Sense

**Question:** What is the difference between feeling sad and having depression? My husband often acts aloof, withdrawn and uninterested in joining in with our family. He has also been avoiding his friends. If he is depressed, can he get help without having to get on antidepressants?

**Answer:** Depression is something almost everyone wonders about at one time or another in their lives. People used to think that the blues were always just sadness and never even considered the possibility that it might be depression. People were told to get over it or just change their attitude and outlook to being positive. There was no broad public understanding of what depression was and people who went to psychiatrists or psychologists were viewed as crazy. These days there are more ads on TV for depression than almost anything else related to health and these ads try to educate the public about the signs and symptoms of depression. So how can we tell the difference?

Sadness is a natural human emotion that happens when people suffer a loss or disappointment. Losing a job, the breakup of a relationship, the death of a friend or failing a class are all situations that can evoke sadness. Usually sadness is a temporary emotion that passes fairly quickly and most of the time people who are sad can usually keep up with their daily responsibilities and still find some things they can enjoy in spite of the loss.

Grief is a more intense reaction to loss that usually happens in response to death of a loved one, the diagnosis of a

serious illness in you or a family member, a disabling accident or similar tragedies. Grief includes sadness but lasts longer and is more intense. Grief is more likely to disrupt your relationships and life activities for a period of time. Sometimes there are physical and medical problems that occur along with grief and grief can also be emotionally and physically exhausting. Sometimes a person can get stuck in grief and it can turn into depression.

Depression may look similar to sadness and grief but there is a lot more to it. Depression is an illness that can be triggered by situational stressors or biological changes in brain functioning. The main symptoms can include chronic feelings of sadness, a decrease or absence of interest and pleasure in activities a person usually enjoys, isolation, loss of motivation, problems with concentration and memory, and sleep difficulties. Other symptoms include overeating or under eating, unexplained feelings of fatigue and exhaustion and sometimes physical symptoms like anxiety, heart palpitations or general achiness. Symptoms vary from person to person and not everyone has all of the symptoms of depression.

Depression often has a genetic component, but this is not always the case. Treatments include counseling and/or medication. Some depression is triggered by hormone imbalances, thyroid imbalances or other medical conditions. If you suspect medical issues, these conditions should be evaluated by a medical physician to rule out medical problems as a reason for the depression. Substance abuse can also trigger depres-

sion. Substance abuse related depression will not get better by counseling or medicine unless the addiction is also treated. The good news is that there are many effective treatments for depression. If you are unsure whether what your husband is experiencing is sadness, grief or depression, consult a mental health professional and/or your physician to get more information and an accurate diagnosis.

**Question:** Why do some people feel the need to lie? I recently started dating a woman in her 20s and just found out that she had lied about her profession. She also made up a bunch of smaller lies tied to her big lie. She seems like a great person otherwise, so I'm just wondering why she, or anyone, would be compelled to lie even if it meant it would sabotage them later. She says she lied because she was embarrassed by her job. Should I back away from the relationship, or give her another chance to earn my trust?

**Answer:** People lie for a variety of reasons. The most common reasons people lie are to make things easier or to avoid conflict in a relationship. In this case, it sounds like the woman you are dating is lying in order to avoid the anticipated embarrassment of having you judge her as less than or possibly reject her because she is not proud

of her job. At least that is what she is telling you, which may or may not be true, right?

The problem is that when someone is caught lying, it is hard to know where the boundary of honesty ends and their lying begins. Kids often lie at least now and then in order to avoid getting in trouble for doing something they were told by their parent not to do. Most people mature out of this occasional lying in childhood. Some do not. Frequent lying without remorse, except if you get caught, is a serious psychological problem and is not easily fixed.

At a minimum, the woman you are dating is not OK with who she is and what she is doing in the world. She is choosing not to tell the truth at the start of a new relationship, which is usually an easier time to tell the truth because there is less to lose at the start of the relationship. More red flags appear when you learn that she has also told other smaller lies to support her big lie. Sometimes nice people lie. Lying doesn't mean the person is not nice, it means the person tells lies.

People who make a habit of lying and building lies on top of lies have strong internal reasons for doing this and chances are very low that they will change. The question you need to ask yourself is, "Am I willing to accept dating a person who lies?" If the answer is yes, keep dating. If the answer is no, run the other direction and don't look back.



## UNCOMMON SENSE WITH BETH FIRESTEIN

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