

8 Things People With Depression Are Tired of Hearing

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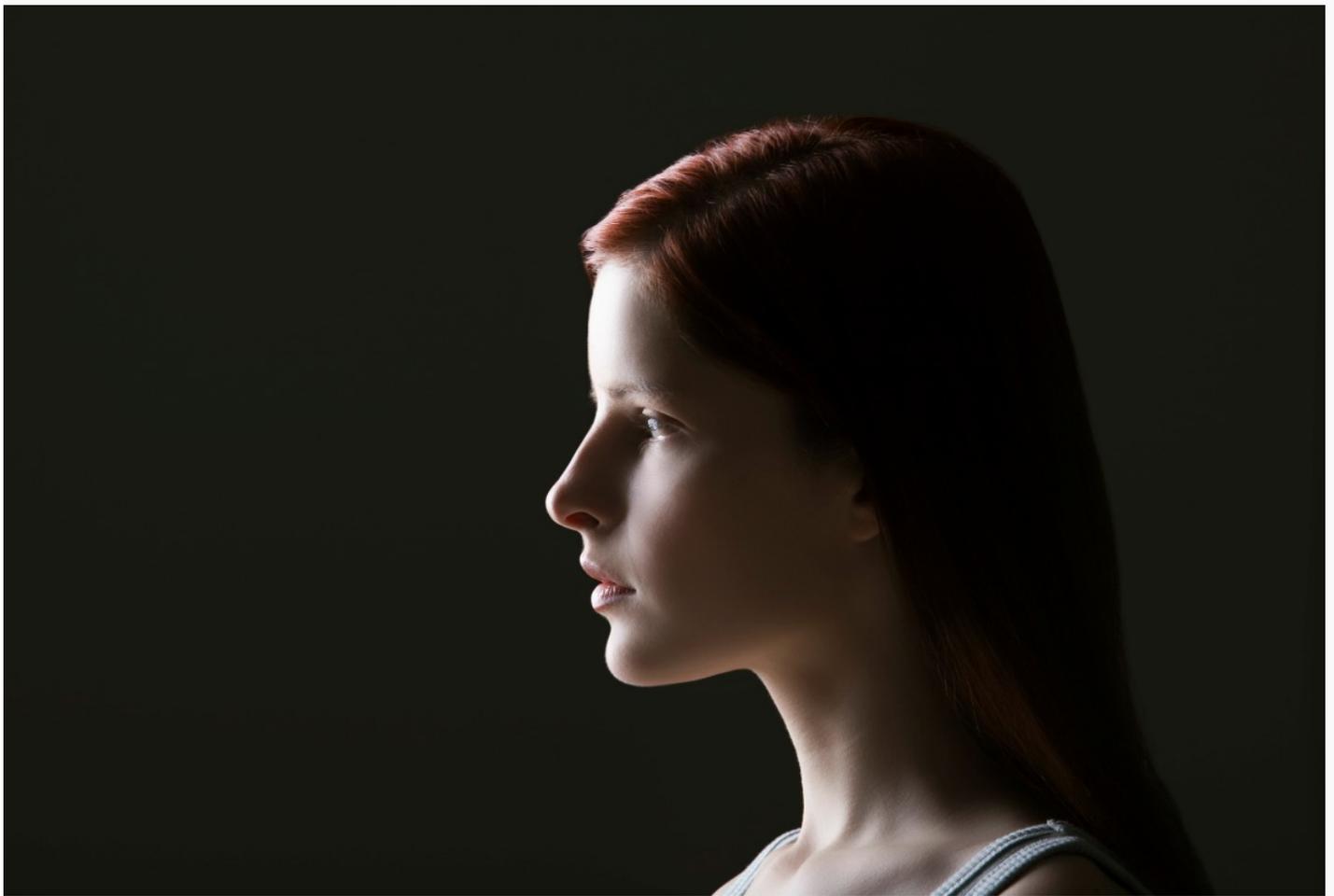


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For the last 16 years, I have struggled with depression. That means I have had 16 years of highs and lows. Sixteen years of ups and of downs. And 16 years of therapy — for 16 years I have been chasing a cure. It also means I have had 16 years to “hear things,” i.e. to be the recipient of well-meaning, but misinformed, comments. To hear good-intentioned, but unsolicited, advice. To receive encouraging yet completely misguided remarks. Remarks about my “problem.” Remarks about the state, and severity, of my illness. Remarks about why I cannot have depression, because I do not look depressed. Because I have too much to be thankful for. Because I am too strong.

Make no mistake: I know these words come from a good place. A supportive place. An empathetic place. In fact, their intention is why I have never written about them before. However, these “helpful” remarks can hurt. These well-intentioned words can be harmful, and some of these comments are actually dangerous, especially when someone is deep in the throes of a depressive episode. And for that reason — and that reason alone — I feel compelled to share a few of the things I believe you should never, ever say to someone struggling with a mental illness. To someone struggling with depression.

1. “It’s OK; everyone gets depressed.”

The truth is this: Not everyone “gets depressed.” Sure, people may experience grief or hurt or waves of extreme sadness; in fact, people can even “feel depressed. But sadness is a feeling and [depression is an illness](#), and these

two things are different. Very different. How so? Because depression — the disease — is chronic while sadness, sorrow, and/or “depressed feelings” are temporary. They almost always have a cause, and they are almost always the byproduct of an outside event (such as death, divorce, or the loss of a job). Make no mistake, the symptoms of depression can be intensified by external factors; however, these events do not cause depression. Because depression is a disease: a disease caused by chemical, biological, environment, and genetic factors.

2. “Just smile. You’ll feel better.”

Would you tell someone with cancer to treat their illness with a smile? Would you tell someone with a broken leg to wrap it up with joy, or tend to it with love? No. Because these ideas are absurd, and everyone understands why they are absurd — i.e. illnesses and injuries need to be treated medically. Because wounds will not heal with will alone. The problem is since depression is a mental illness, many assume depression it is “all in your head.” Many assume it is a matter of choice, or of strength. Many assume you can shake it off. But depression doesn’t work like that, the harder you fight it — the harder you fight your feelings or fight to keep a smile on your face — the worse you feel.

Trust me. If it were that easy, I’d be smiling ALL THE TIME.

3. “Why are you so sad?” (Or “Why are you depressed?”)

Honestly, I have no idea. I mean, I wish I could tell you why I “got depressed” but I cannot. Why? Because it is an illness, and like any disease, it just happened. Sure, I could ask “why me” but I don’t because that won’t help me. It won’t fix me, and it certainly won’t cure me or make me less “sad.”

4. “Things could be worse.”

Of course they could be. Whether you suffer from depression or not, things can always “be worse,” but the severity of my disease is not determined by external factors. What’s more, the knowledge that someone is worse off than I may make me feel grateful, but it will not make my problem — and my illness — disappear.

5. “Have you tried exercise, meditation, prayer, or changing your diet? Have you tried chamomile tea?”

Let me start by saying this: I am in no way against alternative treatments and alternative medicine. In fact, these things can help those struggling with depression to better manage their symptoms, just as they can help anyone who is trying to cope with a chronic illness. However, I still have depression — despite being a distance runner, and despite being a relatively healthy young woman — because my depression is biological. Because my depression is caused by a chemical imbalance, and because my depression is an illness — an illness which needs to be treated medically. Just like diabetes. Just like cancer. And just like heart disease.

6. “But you have so much to be thankful for (or happy about)!”

Much like the aforementioned idea that “things could be worse,” you’re right: I do have a lot — and I mean A LOT — to be thankful for. I have a beautiful daughter, an adoring husband, and a job I love, but thankfulness cannot cure my disease. Gratitude will not make me better. (Unfortunately.)

7. “You don’t look depressed.”

What do you do when you take a picture of yourself? Do you find the right angle and smile, or you play with props and slap on a silly face? Do you then put your best pics — and only your best pics — on social media? You do. Great. Now tell me why? Why do you only share the best shots, the ones with perfect lighting, perfect skin, and a perfect smile? Because that is how you want to be seen. That is how you want to be perceived, and the same is true

for someone struggling with depression. Besides, there are very few depressed individuals who look like a TV commercial. Trust me.

8. “It’s all in your head.”

Of all the things on this list, this is the one I feel most strongly about. Not only is it wrong — completely and totally wrong — it is inaccurate, it is ignorant, and it is dangerous. How so? Because a statement like this implies the person suffering from depression has control (or should have control) over their illness. It implies that if they cannot control their illness it isn’t because they are sick, it is because they are weak or because they do not want to. And this type of thinking is dangerous: Why can’t I snap out of it? I’m weak. I’m pathetic. I’m must be going crazy. I am crazy. I can’t handle living like this anymore. God, I can’t handle life anymore.

And while this may seem extreme, it is one of the ways the mind works when dealing with depression. Everything is all-or-nothing. Everything is black or white.

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