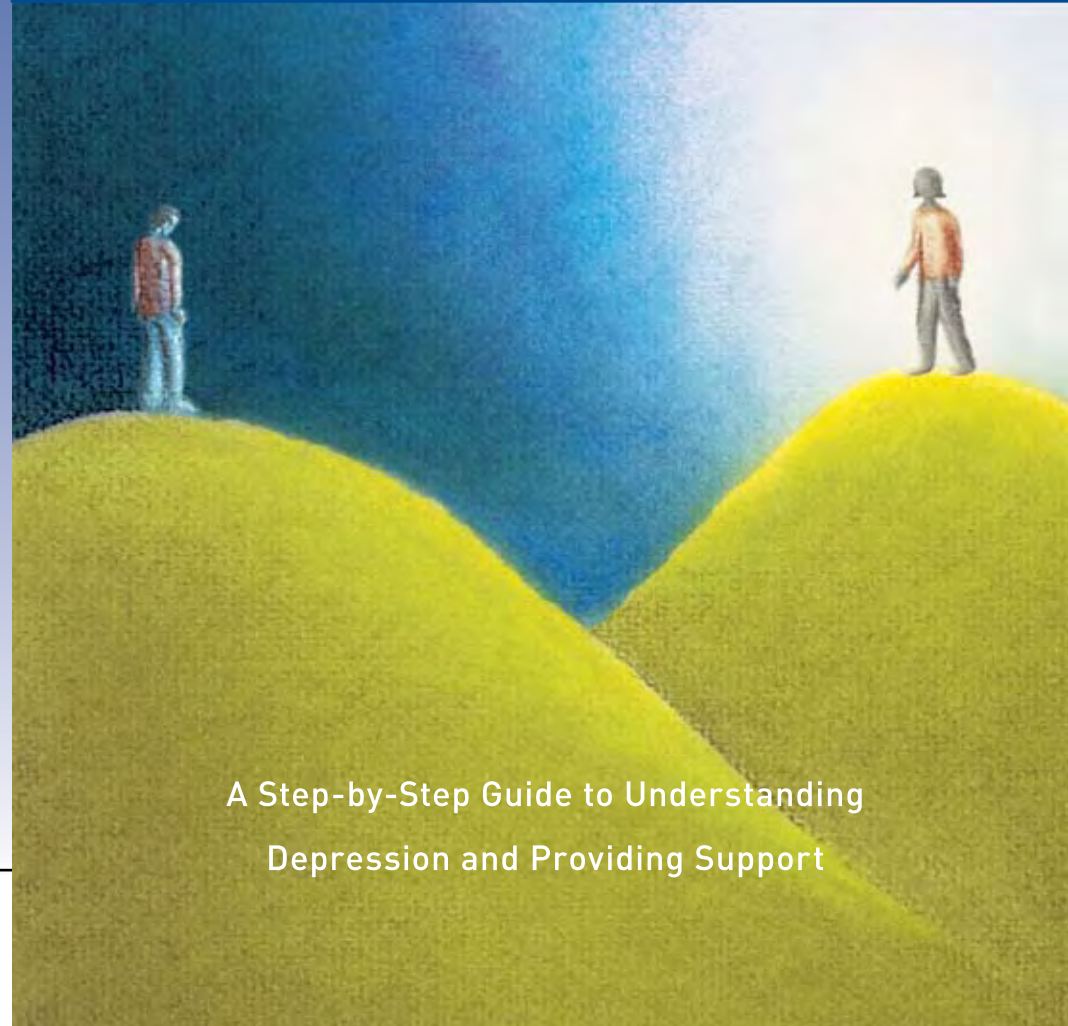




Being a Support Partner



A Step-by-Step Guide to Understanding
Depression and Providing Support



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Introduction to Support Partners

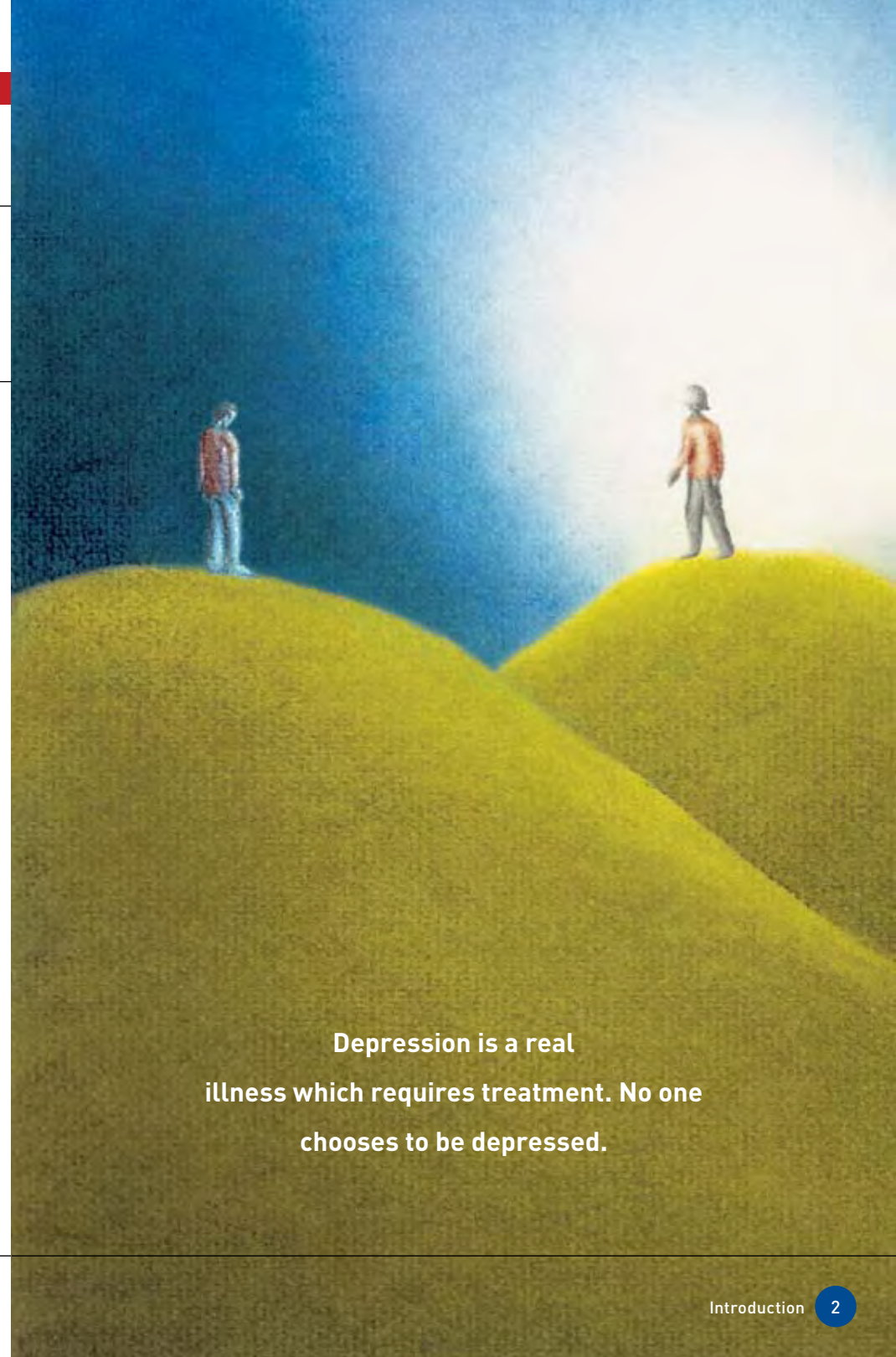
Support Partners is a program dedicated to helping the nearly 19 million American adults with depression, and people like you who care about them.



Throughout this guidebook, the term “friend or loved one” means the person with depression you are supporting.

How can Support Help People with Depression?

Depression can make people feel alone. It can cause them to back away from family, friends and loved ones. They may also feel hopeless at times. They may suddenly find it hard to do the things they once enjoyed. Since depression can be difficult to



Depression is a real illness which requires treatment. No one chooses to be depressed.

Having support can make a difference in someone's life.

talk about, having support can make a difference in someone's life.

Remember, it is important for a person with depression to get help from a doctor. A doctor can work with you to find a care plan that is best for you.

What is a Support Partner?

A Support Partner is someone who is devoted to helping a friend or loved one with depression. This person can be someone to cheer them on or listen to them when they need a friend. A Support Partner can encourage their friend or loved one and help them see that they can get better.

Support can be given in many different ways. You can choose how you want to support friend or loved one based on your available time and their needs. Some people with depression may need a Support Partner to give them a safe place for talking about how they are feeling. Other people might need help with daily chores. Anyone can be a Support Partner — family, friends, co-workers, neighbors, spiritual leaders or other people who care.

How do I use this Guidebook?

The *Being a Support Partner* guidebook gives step-by-step instructions on how to support someone with depression. A successful partnership can help your friend or loved one take charge of their illness. To be a good Support Partner, know the signs and symptoms of the illness. It can be very important for you to help your friend or loved one see the support you can give and help track their healing progress.



STEP 1: Recognizing Depression

What is Depression?

Depression is a real illness and requires treatment. No one chooses to be depressed. One thought is that it is caused by not having enough of certain chemicals in the brain. Depression can make people feel and act differently.



Everyone has a different experience with depression. It can start because of a single event or stress. It may also run in the family or it may have no outside cause at all. Also, when signs, or symptoms, don't all go away it is more likely to come back — but getting well is possible. Nobody should settle for feeling only a little better. Most

**When discussing depression,
it is important to show your concern
and compassion — without
passing judgment.**

Depression has many signs, or symptoms:

COMMON SYMPTOMS

Emotional

- Sadness throughout the day, nearly every day
- Loss of interest in, or enjoyment of, your favorite activities
- Feelings of worthlessness
- Excessive or inappropriate feelings of guilt
- Thoughts of death or suicide
- Trouble making decisions

Physical

- Fatigue or lack of energy
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Change in appetite or weight
- Trouble concentrating
- Restlessness
- Feeling slowed down

people with the illness get better with the right care.

Talk to a doctor if both of the following occur:

- Sadness close to every day for at least two weeks
- At least four other signs from the list above

The Goal of Treatment

The goal of any care plan is to help people with depression get back to feeling and acting like themselves. That way, they can move forward with their lives. Symptoms that don't go away completely can hurt a person's chances of staying well. It may also increase the risk of symptoms coming back. Nobody should settle for feeling only a little better. Finding a doctor and sticking with treatment can help keep a person with depression on the road to wellness. On top of that, getting support can also help.



STEP 2: Making a Commitment

It is not easy to see someone you care about struggle with depression. Your first thought may be to rush in and fix it. This is understandable, but it is not the most helpful way to start. Getting better takes time and can involve some setbacks. You first need to think about how much time you can give to being a Support Partner. This can be useful to help set limits and expectations with your friend or loved one. It will also make a strong base for success. It is okay if you feel you do not have a lot of time for them. It is okay if your life or work stops you from being as involved as you would like. Sometimes just being there to talk to once in awhile is plenty. Remember, any amount of support is welcome.



**No matter what the task is —
big or small — your support can
help provide hope,
so that getting better can
feel within reach.**

Understand the amount of time you can give

Before offering your friend or loved one your support, you may want to think about:

1. How much time do you have after family, work or other duties?
2. How much time will your friend or loved one need?
3. Can you keep up this relationship over time?
4. What kind of support can you give?
5. Think about your reasons for being a Support Partner to make sure that this will be a good thing in your life.

All in the Family

If you are living with a friend or loved one with depression, you need to think about how you can help. It is important to understand depression and how it is affecting your friend or loved one. This will help you see the areas where they may need the most support. Understanding your strengths and weaknesses will help you decide if support from others is also needed. Working together is the goal.

Pinpoint Your Strengths

Providing support to a friend or loved one should not take over your life. Some people might need help

tackling daily chores, while others may need a friend to lean on emotionally. No matter what the task is — big or small — your support can help provide hope, so that getting better can feel within reach.

Before you can help, you need to understand your strengths and weaknesses. For example, if you have a strong take-charge personality, not being able to “fix” each thing may frustrate you. If that’s the case, you may need to focus on helping in different ways. Use your take-charge personality to help your friend or loved one with everyday chores like grocery shopping or picking the kids up from school. If you’re a problem solver, you may be good at helping your friend or loved one fill out medical forms. Or maybe you’re a good listener. You may be a wonderful source of emotional support for your friend or loved one.

You can use these examples to help you make a list of your own skills. This list may also help you figure out how your skills can help your friend or loved one. By seeing your strengths now, you can have a useful talk with him or her about how you can help later on.

STEP 3: Breaking Down Barriers to Support

Finding the words to offer your help can be hard to do. Starting a talk doesn't have to be embarrassing. If a person you care about has been diagnosed with depression, or you just suspect that they may have it, ask about it.

You may be surprised to see that they may be happy to finally share his or her feelings.

Setting the Stage

We all understand the power of a good place to talk. It is easier to talk about a tricky topic when we are relaxed and cozy. It is much harder when we are feeling stressed or pressured. Don't be afraid to offer your support. Just choose the right time, such as:



- A weekend or evening visit
- At lunch, away from work
- Over coffee
- During a walk together

Ready, Set . . . Start Talking!

When talking about depression, it is important to show that you are concerned and that you care — without judging your friend or loved one. Try not to point to their past mistakes to start the talk. He or she may become defensive. Avoid negative language and asking “why.” For example, instead of saying, “Why can't you just snap out of it?” you could say, “What do you think has been making you depressed?”

Your friend or loved one may not be ready to talk about their illness. They may feel embarrassed. For some people, it can take a few tries before you have a meaningful talk.

Be aware that your friend or loved one may not be ready to talk about depression. They may feel embarrassed. For some people, it can take a few tries before you have a meaningful talk. In the meantime, talking shows that you are concerned and that you care.

Breaking the Ice

Some things you could say if a friend or loved one has already told you about his or her depression diagnosis:

- “If you decide you’d like some help with your depression, I am here for you.”
- “Has your doctor recommended that you set some goals? If so, can I work with you to build a plan that will help you get back to feeling like yourself again?”
- “It is great that your doctor has given you a medicine for your depression; are there other things that are still stressing you out? I’m here if you need anything.”
- “If your depression makes doing things seem out of reach, I’m here to help you.”

Some things you can say if you suspect depression:

- “I’ve noticed you haven’t seemed like yourself lately. Have you thought about going to see a doctor? I can go with you, if you’re feeling nervous.”
- “Do you think a doctor might be a good person to talk to? Will you let me help you find one?”
- “It seems like you’ve been having a hard time with things lately. Have you thought about seeking professional help? You don’t have to go through this on your own.”

If at First You don’t Succeed

Many people find it hard to accept help. Your offer may be refused for a number of reasons. Don’t worry if this happens. The time might not be right for your friend or loved one to accept your support. Don’t push it. Instead, keep gently offering your support over time. In this situation, it is important to encourage your friend or loved one to seek help from, or keep on seeing, a doctor. Remember, even though it takes time to get better, with the right help, real improvement is possible.

It’s important to encourage your friend or loved one to seek help from, or keep on seeing, a doctor.

STEP 4: Building a Network of Support

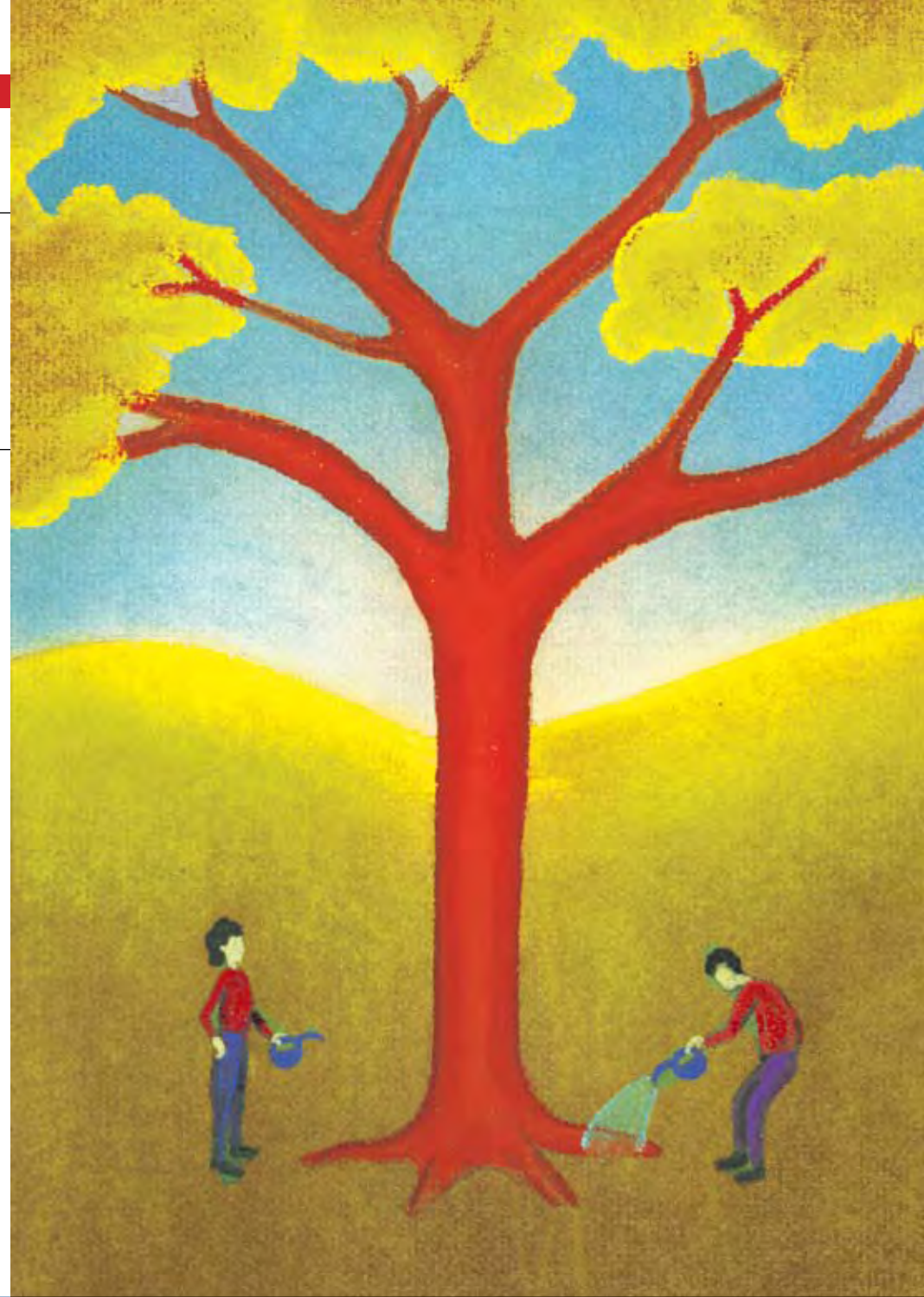
Depression can make any task seem overwhelming. Unfortunately, asking for help is often seen as a sign of failure. It can become a barrier to feeling better. As a Support Partner, you can help to change this.



There are many ways for you and your friend or loved one to learn about depression. For more information, go to www.SupportPartnersProgram.com or see the *Shared Guidebook* for more resources.

Encourage seeking Professional Help

One of the things a Support Partner can do is to encourage their friend or loved one to seek out medical help.



Offering Support

These are some examples of emotional and practical support to consider. Use the extra space to note their specific needs.

Emotional Support

- Call them every evening to check in
- Meet them once a week
- Help them identify their depression signs and the things that set them off
- Encourage them to stick with the care plan
- Help them see their progress
- Help set real short-term goals, if it is okay with their doctor
- Encourage them to be active
- _____
- _____
- _____

Practical Support

- Help them make an appointment with a healthcare professional
- Help pick their kids up from school
- Help them with medical paperwork
- Help cook dinner for them on occasion
- Drive them to doctor's visits
- Run errands for or with them
- Arrange a time to walk or go to the gym with them
- Make a date to go to the movies with them
- _____
- _____
- _____

If they are already getting help from a doctor, you can encourage him or her to stay with it. Help them be open with their doctor about how they are feeling, their progress and any setbacks. If they aren't seeing a doctor, remind your friend or loved one that with the right help, it can be possible to get better. For tips on how to find a doctor in your area and what questions to ask, check the *Shared Guidebook*.

Map Out a Game Plan

In "Step 2: Making a Commitment," you decided on the amount of time you can give and determined your personal skills. Now you can help make a care plan.

Ask your friend or loved one about the type of help they may need. At first, they may not know or may not be ready to tell you. Don't give up. Instead, offer specific examples of how you can offer emotional or practical support. To figure out the type of support they may need, look at the chart on the opposite page with your friend or loved one. You also may want to use the extra space for any specific needs he or she may have.

Remind your friend or loved one that with the right care plan, it will be possible to get better.

Take each chance to build on your friend or loved one's strengths by encouraging him or her to take action.

Now that you know your friend or loved one's needs, the next step is to make a schedule for yourself. For example, commit to calling every evening to talk or to helping them pick up the kids from soccer practice. By taking away the need for your friend or loved one to ask for help, you can help them focus on getting well.

Setting Future Goals

Having a Support Partner to help with everyday tasks can be a great help. If your friend or loved one says they need practical support, make sure your help does not delay their healing progress. Your friend or loved one will value your help, but doing too much for them will not be helpful in the long run. You and your friend or loved one should make a plan that will help them one day take over these tasks on their own. Working toward and achieving each goal can help them on the road to wellness.

Your job as a Support Partner is to encourage and support. Take each chance to build on your friend or loved one's strengths. Encourage them to take action. For example, if you promise them

you will help them cook dinner every Thursday, "cooking together" can be a long-term goal. Check in with your friend or loved one now and then about what they are able to do. Keep them motivated to reach their goals every step of the way.

Organize a Support Partner Team

If your friend or loved one is living with more severe depression, they might need more help than you can offer. You and your friend or loved one may want to talk about forming a Support Partner team. Talk it over with your friend or loved one to make sure they are okay with involving other people.

Once you agree to involve others, your friend or loved one will need to choose other possible Support Partners. Share this guidebook with the other Support Partners. Make sure they think about "Step 2: Making a Commitment." The support team may need to talk often about how you can all work together and share duties. First, make sure that's okay with the person you are supporting.

One of the best things you can do for your friend or loved one is to help him or her decide on and reach their goals.

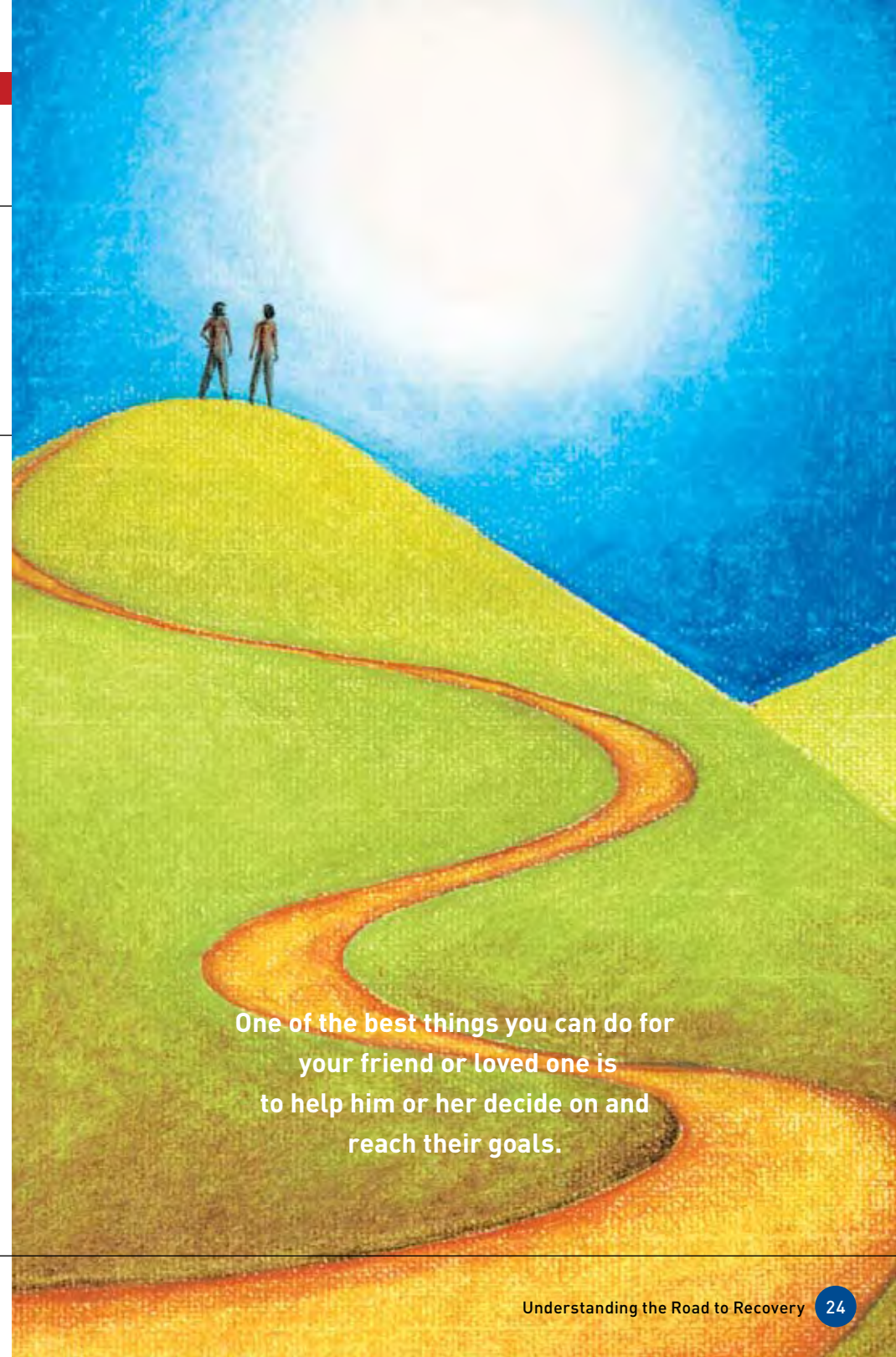
STEP 5: Understanding the Road to Recovery

For a person with depression, the road to recovery can be a long and hard one. Even with you and your friend or loved one's best efforts, depression can come back and setbacks may happen. You can play an important role in helping your friend or loved one stay motivated.



Mapping Out a Care Plan

One thing you can do for your friend or loved one is to help them decide on and reach their wellness goals. Your support and coaching can be really important to the success of this plan.



One of the best things you can do for your friend or loved one is to help him or her decide on and reach their goals.

A care plan can help to:

- Decide on goals (if goal-setting is approved by your friend or loved one's doctor)
- Figure out things or specific times that may cause depression to get worse
- Outline a care plan that can be used to move beyond the illness
- Make a list of early signs that may mean depression is coming back

To create a care plan, look at the *Shared Guidebook* for ways to get started and some specific examples.

In addition to seeing a doctor, it may be helpful for you and your friend or loved one to make a care plan together.

Keeping Track of Progress

For someone with depression, it can be hard to see the daily improvements that show their progress. Help your friend or loved one see their progress; check to see that their goals are being met and celebrate this success with them. Call

out each sign of improvement, no matter how large or small, by saying things like:

- "I haven't heard you laugh so much in a long time."
- "You seem a lot more relaxed lately."
- "You've started gardening again."
- "You seem to be more involved with projects at work."

Keep in mind that it can make your friend or loved one feel bad if they are not meeting goals right away. You may want to focus on small goals at first and wait to tackle larger ones until they are feeling better. Your friend or loved one may be disappointed, so watch out for any negative talk about him or herself. This can be a barrier to getting well, so help your friend or loved one try to avoid it.

As you go through the stages of depression with your friend or loved one, keep in mind that each person feels depression, and getting better, differently. Also, what they need may change over time. To keep in step with these changes, keep talking to him or her.

Your active support can be a key source of help for your friend or loved one to help them to get better.

The Link Between Depression and Suicide

As someone helping a person with depression, it is important that you understand the relationship between depression and suicide. Not all people with depression have these thoughts and not all thoughts lead to suicide. Try not to let the fear of facing this situation stop you from helping. **It is important that you help your friend seek medical help immediately.**

If you can't reach their doctor, go to the nearest emergency room or call 911. You can also call the National Suicide Prevention Hotline, 1-800-SUICIDE, where help is available day and night. You need to know that a person's depression can worsen. Thoughts of suicide can come up at any time, so watch for any unusual changes in their behavior. **Never wait to get in touch with their doctor if you are worried.**

Look at the *Shared Guidebook* to learn more about where to find help from support groups, as well as mental health agencies.

Take Care of Yourself

Supporting someone with a serious illness like depression can be very tough.

Even though there is a good chance your friend or loved one will start to feel better with treatment, you may find things slow-going at first. The ups and downs of living with depression can be very draining on you, as well as on your

