

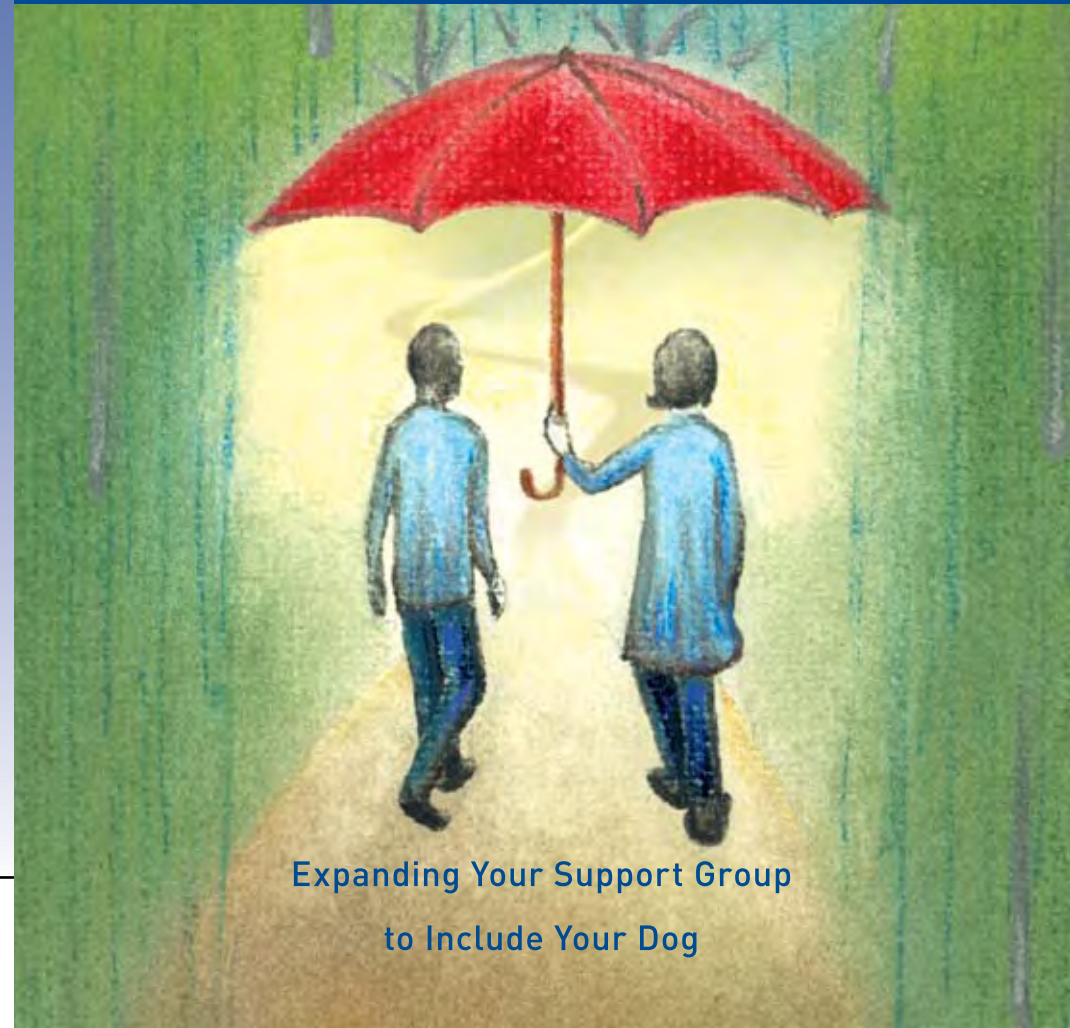


# Support Partners: Canine Companions



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*Lilly*



Expanding Your Support Group  
to Include Your Dog



## Introduction to Support Partners

**T**he Support Partners program shows you how to get help and support when you have depression.



Your friends, family and doctor will likely make up your support group – or Support Partners. Help can also come from surprising places, like your dog. *Canine Companions* will show you some benefits of having a dog when you have depression. Also, it will offer tips on how to include your dog in your support group.

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### 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

## 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

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.

Talk to a doctor if both of the following occur:

- Sadness or loss of interest close to every day for at least two weeks
- At least four other signs from the list above during the same two weeks



## Where to Begin

*I think I might be depressed; what should I do?*



If you think you might be depressed, the first step is to talk to your doctor. You and your doctor can talk about ways you can get better. Your doctor may suggest therapy with a psychiatrist or therapist. Treatment options may include medicines (anti-depressants) and talk therapy.

It is important to get help from a doctor and from your family and friends. Having a Support Partner can make a difference in someone's life. A Support Partner can be anyone who is dedicated to helping you get well.

The *Support Partners* program includes three guidebooks:

- One for the person with depression
- One for the person who wants to help
- One for both people to share

The guidebooks will help you and your Support Partner work to make a strong support group. They give tips on the signs of the illness and ways to start talking about it. The guidebooks also include a list of places where you can learn more about ways to get well.

The guidebooks look at many kinds of support that may help you. For example, you might need a Support Partner who can offer emotional support, like a shoulder to cry on. You might also want practical support, like someone to help you run errands.

If you are new to Support Partners, the best place for you to start is by downloading the Support Partners guidebooks. You can get them at [www.SupportPartnersProgram.com](http://www.SupportPartnersProgram.com).



## Making Your Group Bigger

You may see why it is good to have support in your life once your main

group is formed. There are many kinds of support. It is important for you to think of ways you can get more support from more places.

Pets, for example dogs, can be a nice addition to the help you are already getting from your main Support Partners. Just like family and friends, pets can really help someone who is feeling depressed.



## Why Dogs

Dogs can offer a great source of love, devotion, and fondness. Studies have shown that human-pet “interactions” may help feelings of loneliness.

Your dog can help you be more active, exercise more and be more social. Check with your doctor before starting an exercise program. Including exercise into your everyday to-do list and spending time with friends and family can be keys to getting better. Dogs may also help improve your emotional well being. Research has shown that petting your dog may help lower your blood pressure.

Things you can do with your dog that may help your overall health and well being include:

- Taking a walk
- Making new friends at the dog park
- Cuddling petting your dog

## Different Levels of Support from Dogs

Now you know some of the ways your dog can help you feel better. Just thinking about your pet this way may help you see the support your dog can give. Or, maybe you would rather specially train your dog to give you support. Either way, it is good to know your choices.

### Terms to know:

#### Psychiatrist:

Cares for people with mental health problems. This doctor can give medicine.

#### Therapist:

Helps people understand their feelings and actions. This person cannot give medicine.

## Below are a few types of support dogs that can help someone with depression:

### **Pet**

A pet, such as a dog, can give emotional and physical support, and can also provide social benefits and help you to be more active.

### **Emotional Support Animal (ESA) –**

An ESA is a dog that is owned by a person with a physical or mental impairment. These pets do not have to be specially trained. Sometimes a doctor such as a psychiatrist or psychologist may suggest that you get a dog. Under a law called

the “Fair Housing Act,” people with disabilities can keep an ESA wherever they live. This law also includes people with mental health disabilities.

### **Therapy Dog (TD) –**

A TD is a pet that is trained, tested, and certified. A TD may be used to help with grief and stress. TDs visit patients in hospitals, nursing homes and other places where people need cheering up. TDs spend time with patients and their loved ones.



### **Psychiatric Service Dog (PSD)**

A PSD is the title for a professionally-trained dog. A PSD is trained to help people who have a mental illness. Only people with a physical

or mental impairment, as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), can get a service dog. PSDs count as professional animals and may be able to go many public places that pets are not usually allowed. PSDs are like guide dogs and hearing dogs. PSDs are trained to give emotional support by doing work or performing tasks to help its owner.

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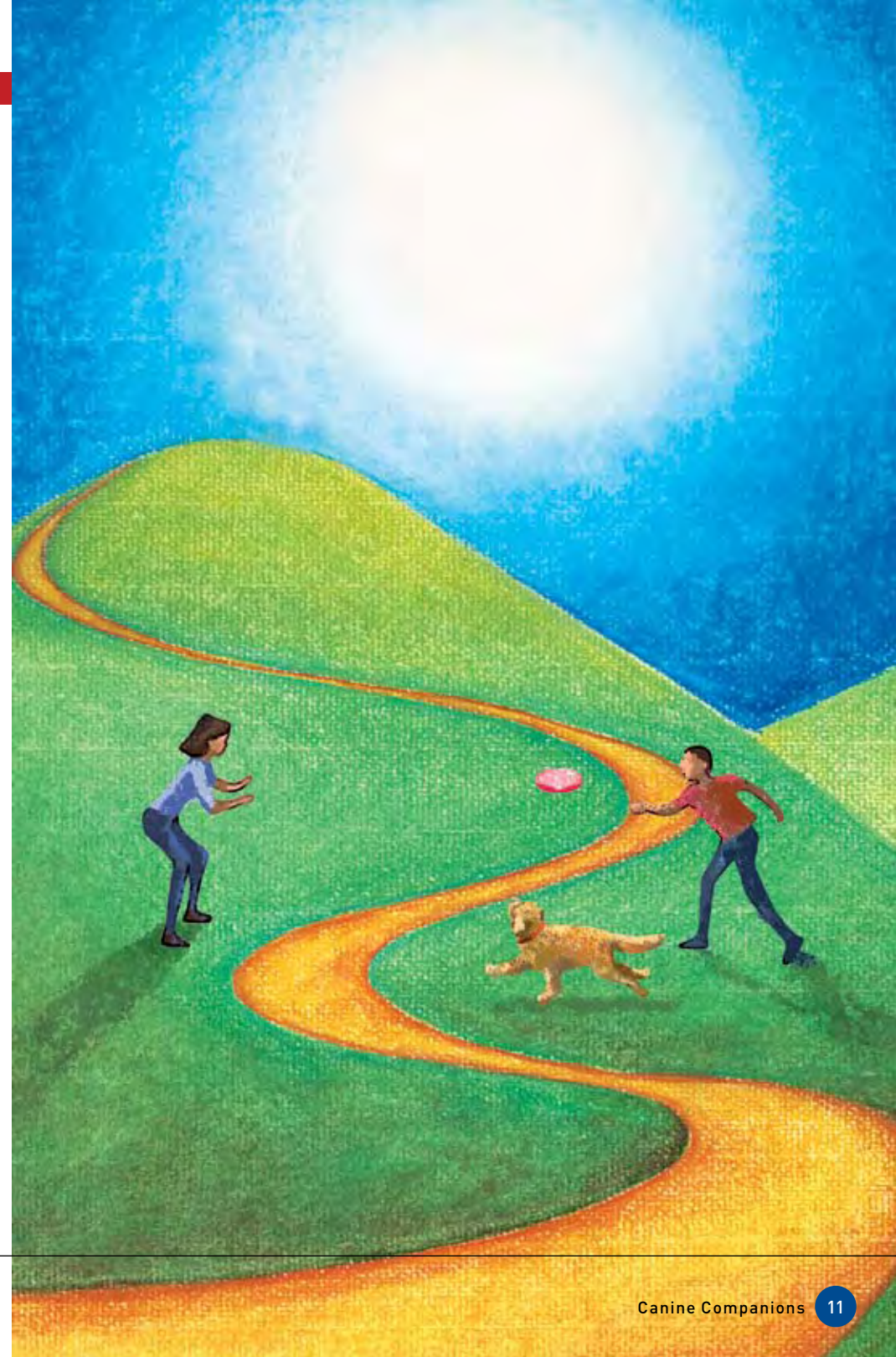
To learn about the rules for training a PSD, please visit the Psychiatric Service Dog Society (PSDS) at [www.psychdog.org](http://www.psychdog.org).

## Ways Your Dog can Help You Get Better from Depression

You can follow these easy and handy tips to include your dog in your recovery:



- 1. Be active!** Walking, running and playing with your dog are great ways to exercise every day. Remember to always talk with your doctor before starting a new training plan.
- 2. Pet your dog** Petting your dog may take your mind off of things that are bothering you and help you relax.
- 3. Teach your dog a new trick** Creating a goal and reaching it may help you feel more successful.
- 4. Take your dog to a dog park** Dog parks can be a great place for dogs and people to socialize. Talking with other people may take away some feelings of loneliness.
- 5. Sign up for a training class with your dog** It can help make the link between you and your dog stronger. Training classes also offer more chances to meet new people.
- 6. Talk to your dog** Sometimes we all need someone we can talk to. Dogs are great because they will give us their full attention. In addition to your friends, family and your doctor, a dog can offer a great ear when you're in need.
- 7. Make something for your dog** A project like baking treats, knitting clothing or building a doghouse can give a sense of motivation and completion.





## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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### THE DELTA SOCIETY

875 124th Ave NE, Suite 101

Bellevue, WA 98005

Phone: 425-679-5500

E-mail: [info@deltasociety.org](mailto:info@deltasociety.org)

[www.DeltaSociety.org](http://www.DeltaSociety.org)

An organization devoted to improving human health through service and therapy animals.

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### DORIS DAY ANIMAL LEAGUE

2100 L Street NW

Washington, DC 20037

Phone: 202-452-1100

[www.ddal.org](http://www.ddal.org)

A national, nonprofit citizen's lobbying organization working to improve the humane treatment of animals. Their publication, "Best Friends for Life," gives information on keeping an Emotional Support Animal.

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### PSYCHIATRIC SERVICE DOG SOCIETY (PSDS)

[www.psychdog.org](http://www.psychdog.org)

A nonprofit organization dedicated to educating mental health consumers, providers and the general public about Psychiatric Service Dogs.

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### THERAPY DOGS INTERNATIONAL, INC.

88 Bartley Road

Flanders, NJ 07836

Phone: 973-252-9800

E-mail: [tdi@gti.net](mailto:tdi@gti.net)

[www.tdi-dog.org](http://www.tdi-dog.org)

A volunteer group that manages qualified handlers and their Therapy Dogs for the purpose of visiting institutions, facilities, and any other places where Therapy Dogs are needed.

## For the Support Partners ...

If you are a Support Partner helping a friend or loved one with their depression, here are some ways you can work your dog into the support process

- Suggest that your friend take your dog on weekly walks to help them get fresh air and exercise.
- Invite your friend to go with you to the dog park.
- If you have normal visits with your friend, bring your dog along for extra friendship.