

More information is available through our website:  
**[www. quakeragingresources.org](http://www.quakeragingresources.org)**

**National Suicide Prevention Lifeline 1-800-273-TALK (8255)**

National Alliance on Mental Illness: <http://www.nami.org/>

[www.mentalhealthamerica.net](http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net)

1-800-969-6642

[http://www.helpguide.org/mental/depression\\_elderly.htm](http://www.helpguide.org/mental/depression_elderly.htm)

Grounded in God: Care and Nurture in Friends Meetings, Edited by Patricia McBee, Quaker Press of FGC, Philadelphia.

Deborah Morris Coryell, Good Grief - Healing Through the Shadow of Loss, 2007, Healing Arts Press, Rochester, Vermont

Rosalynn Carter, Helping Someone With Mental Illness, 1999, Three Rivers Press, New York, NY.

Brian P. Quinn, C.S.W, Ph.D. The Depression Sourcebook, 2000, Lowell House, Los Angeles, CA

**Friends Counseling Service- for Friends in Philadelphia Yearly Meeting Region-** Deborah Cooper, the Counseling Service Consultant, at 215-248-0489, or the PYM Office 215 241 -7068

## *Depression in Older Adults*



*Q: How does our meeting support Friends who are overwhelmed by emotional challenges?*

*Q: Am I a listening, caring presence for others when they are experiencing troubling times?*



Aging Resources Consultation Help



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Quaker Aging Resources is a collaborative project of New York and Philadelphia Yearly Meeting Quakers and is funded by the Thomas Scattergood Foundation and Friends Foundation for the Aging.

**A Time of Loss and Change:** Depression is not a “normal part of aging.” Older adulthood is often a time where a person is at higher risk of Depression. Loss of loved ones, roles, home or community ties, or physical changes can increase risk for Depression. Men especially are more at risk for Depression as they age, and suicide rates increase dramatically for men over 65, even more so for those with a history of Depression.

### **Signs of Depression include:**

**Sadness**—Grief as a natural response to loss is different from Depression. Unexplained, unrelenting sadness or grief that never lets up is a sign of depression.

**Expressions of Feelings of Loss of Self-Worth**—a person may feel they are a burden, life has lost meaning, they cannot do things they were once able to do.

**Withdrawal and Isolation**—a person may avoid visits with friends, or avoid coming to Meeting.

**Avoidance of Activities that were once loved**—a person stops doing things that were once important to them.

**Changes in Sleep Patterns**—Extreme fatigue, insomnia.

**Changes in Appetite**—usually weight loss, but some people may eat more to try to replace lost energy.

**Fixation on Death, Suicidal Thoughts**—Consult a professional if a person expresses thoughts of suicide.

*“The remarkable discovery we can make is that love has not deserted us, and that it is available to us now in a new way.”* Margaret Torrie, 1975, PYM Faith and Practice

In older adults and others, Depression may also manifest itself as hopelessness, helplessness, increased irritability, anxiety, forgetfulness, or unexplained physical complaints. Symptoms such as confusion, forgetfulness, or paranoia may be similar to signs of dementia or other illness. A professional evaluation will help discern the root cause of the symptoms so that appropriate treatment can be determined.

**How can I help?** A person with Depression needs professional care. Friends can help by encouraging one to seek help and by being a caring presence. Overwhelmed by symptoms of hopelessness and confusion, compounded by the stigma placed on Mental Illness, often a person who is depressed does not recognize their symptoms and cannot take action to get help. They may also feel ashamed or embarrassed. Let the person know they are accepted and supported, and learn about your local resources and refer to professionals.

**Validate Feelings**—Respect and validate the person’s feelings. When a person’s feelings are validated, they feel valued. This contributes to healing and opens the doors for communication. See the Quaker Aging Resources brochure on Validation.

**Walk Beside the Person**—Even if they say “I don’t want to,” let them know that you want to spend time together. If you are rejected, suggest another activity—visit pets, children, a garden, or just sit together. Walking and other exercise can help alleviate symptoms of Depression. Mental health research shows that spiritual support, helping a person to find meaning and purpose, assists in recovery. Just listening goes a long way.

**Don’t give up**—continue to let the person know you care. Let go of expectations and understand it is the illness that is keeping the person from calling you back or taking you up on that potluck supper. Enlist the help of others and continue to encourage your Friend to accept professional help. Call your Yearly Meeting office for assistance, especially if reluctance to seek care or accept medication is a concern.

***Seek help immediately if thoughts of suicide are expressed or suspected:***

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