

How Depression Damages Your Relationship & What You Can Do

By Margarita Tartakovsky, M.S.

Associate Editor



Depression is a difficult illness that darkens your thoughts and feelings. It saps your self-esteem, energy, motivation and interest in anything. It's also tough on romantic relationships.

According to psychologist Shannon Kolakowski, PsyD, in her book *When Depression Hurts Your Relationship: How to Regain Intimacy and Reconnect with Your Partner When You're Depressed*, depression diminishes your ability to connect with your partner and creates doubts about your union. Symptoms such as anger and irritability can create tension between partners.

Depression is a master manipulator. "The primary feature of depression is distortion, meaning your perception of life — including your relationship — is easily warped and represented in a more negative way," writes Kolakowski. You might have more negative thoughts about your partner and your relationship, she says.

However, by recognizing these effects and learning helpful techniques, you can cultivate a healthy relationship. (It's also vital to receive proper treatment for your depression.)

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In [*When Depression Hurts Your Relationship*](#), Kolakowski shares valuable and practical tools and techniques to help readers rebuild their bond and create a loving relationship. Here are three common ways depression damages relationships and effective suggestions from her book.

Self-Doubt

Depression breeds self-doubt, which can color how you view your partner and how you think they view you. According to [Kolakowski](#), “Someone with lower-self-esteem and depression may have a bad time with their partner and think, *she doesn’t really care about me. I knew it wouldn’t last*, whereas someone with a healthier sense of self-worth may think, *Right now, we’re going through a tough time, but I know our relationship can withstand this. We’ll work it out.*”

The best way to feel secure in your relationship, she writes, is to feel secure within yourself. Kolakowski suggests cultivating self-compassion.

Self-doubt says *you’re defective, worthless and filled with flaws*. According to Kolakowski, self-compassion says, *“its okay to have failures, setbacks, and to be disappointed. It’s part of the human condition. Everyone feels this way sometimes.”*

Because self-doubt can be paralyzing, Kolakowski suggests looking for evidence of moments you felt empowered or overcame adversity. “Look for small ways to affirm that you are capable of affecting your path in life.”

Also, take action. Pick one small thing you can do right now to feel better, “and do it.” This might be anything from taking a walk to cleaning your car, she says.

Criticism

Depression minimizes the positives in your life and magnifies the negative. So when your partner leaves their clothes out or doesn’t wash the dishes, you automatically think they’re inconsiderate and clearly don’t care about you.

When depression manifests as criticism, according to Kolakowski, your partner might feel like they’re walking on eggshells and worry about being condemned.

What helps to counter criticism is noticing your partner’s positive traits and realizing that their less-than-stellar qualities don’t cancel out their positive attributes.

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Kolakowski shares this example: “He sometimes leaves clutter around the house, which bugs me way more than it bothers him. He also is caring and considerate most of the time, like when he offers to help my mother go to the store and buy groceries or when we decide to go to the movies and he’s happy to see whatever film I pick.”

She suggests this exercise: List five to seven of your partner’s positive traits (for instance, they have a great sense of humor). Next list how you can show your appreciation for their strengths (for instance, you can thank them for making you laugh or smile). Add to your list weekly.

Appreciation begets appreciation. When you show your appreciation to your partner, and they feel appreciated, they’re more likely to do the same in return, creating a stronger bond.

Unrealistic Expectations

According to Kolakowski, you may have an internal script that dictates the right things your partner should say and how they should support you. The problem with that, she says, is your partner hasn’t read your script.

“When the other person inevitably deviates from your script, the depressed part of you may react with dissatisfaction, disenchantment, or feelings of failure.”

Remember that your partner isn’t a mind reader. Communicate clearly and directly with them about how you’d like to be supported. Kolakowski includes this exercise for increasing your flexibility when it comes to your script:

- Identify your inner script. “What are some instances when you’ve had an internal script and things turned out differently from your expectations? In your script, what were you hoping would happen? What led you to form this expectation?”
- Look for alternative scenarios. For instance, what are some things your partner might’ve been thinking? If you’re not sure, ask them.
- “What happens if things don’t go according to how you envisioned? Without judging yourself, explore how you feel and what made the event so important to you.”

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- Consider how you'd like to navigate similar situations in the future. For instance, recognize that relationships involve two human beings who may have very different needs. "There's no right way to act, feel, think or be in any given situation." Work on accepting your partner's behavior and how they do things. Ask them for a certain behavior beforehand, and explain why it's important to you. Try to recognize when your script is rigid, and be open to other possibilities.

Depression can take a toll on relationships. But there are many things you can do to rebuild your intimacy and connection.

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