

PREGNANT CHICK USER GUIDE #4:

The Big D

Dear Significant Other,

If the pregnant lady in your life comes down with depression, you may feel any or all of the following sensations:

- pretty bloody helpless
- pretty bloody terrified
- pretty bloody embarrassed
- pretty bloody guilty, or maybe even
- pretty bloody pissed off (well thousands of other chicks manage to get through pregnancy without cracking up, don't they?)

As a significant other, you cop a double whammy when trying to wrangle a Depressed Breeder (hereafter known as a DB). You're already under pressure to be strong and supportive even though you, too, are freaking out about what life's going to be like on the other side of D-day. If you're the breadwinner, there's the added burden of bringing home the bacon (or, in the case of vegetarian households, the Fakin').

'Holy [insert your expletive of choice],' you may be secretly thinking. 'If she's struggling now, how on earth is she going to cope once the baby arrives?' While this is a hard topic to raise in polite conversation, ignoring depression in the hope that it will go away isn't recommended, particularly during pregnancy when a tiny human's wellbeing is at stake, too.

Here are some tips to help you cope:

- If your DB tells you she's depressed, it may feel like an unwanted burden. But owning up to having a brain



problem is a big step — and a big vote of confidence in you.

- Don't worry if you have some peculiar or selfish responses to the news that you're sharing a relationship with a DB. These are normal reactions and do not mean you're a terrible person or that you won't become very supportive very soon.
- Learn as much as you can about your DB's condition. Read books but also ask her lots of questions. Don't assume she'll have a textbook experience.
- Try not to write your DB off as a crazy lady. Her symptoms are those of an illness. Try to respond the way you would if she had a more socially acceptable condition such as viral meningitis or tadpole pupil.
- Avoid pointing out all the things your DB should be feeling good about. Depression isn't logical, and rational arguments may make her feel worse. Here are the thoughts of an Australian television celebrity hospitalised with clinical depression:

Nothing prompted it. If anything, things were going unusually well. But I just sank lower and lower. My husband tried pointing out all the things that were going right in my life but depression is like wearing a pair of shit-coloured glasses. Everything looks like crap. I'd come home saying: 'I just got promoted. What's the point of going on?'

- Try to be patient. Depression refuses to be rushed. Your DB may also have good days and bad days. She may look like she's getting better, then suddenly look like she's getting a whole lot worse. If you find yourself

getting impatient or pissed off, find a private place to let off steam.

- Never, ever say stuff like ‘snap out of it’, ‘you’ll just have to cope’ or ‘what am I supposed to do about it?’
- Encourage your DB to do things that make her feel better, but don’t force her into anything she doesn’t feel like doing.
- Ask for suggestions about what you can do or say when she’s feeling really shocking. This conversation is best saved for one of the aforementioned good days.
- Don’t panic about how her state of mind will affect the baby now or in the future. Your DB is highly susceptible to guilt trips and, at the moment, her health takes priority.
- Take as much pressure off your DB as you can. Depressed people often feel like the smallest things are too hard. For her, getting out of the top half of her pyjamas and getting into a T-shirt may be a mighty achievement.
- Think about what you can do to support your DB if she goes on to experience postnatal depression. You might like to establish some emergency contact numbers and organise extra help from family, friends or paid professionals.
- Don’t give yourself a hard time for not being able to fix everything. Much of life is outside your control and the best intentions in the world won’t give you the power to make things right.

