

FROM LISA

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Dear You,

Thank you for opening this letter. You probably won't be reading much at the moment. So I need to grab your attention.

I want to tell you something. I have been where you are, or my own version of it. Depression (or whatever you prefer to call how you are feeling at the moment) is different for each of us. And there are different sorts. But that really doesn't matter. What makes you and me similar is the utter awfulness of our experience. The weariness, even exhaustion, and yet inability to sleep. Lying awake for hour after endless hour, either alone or next to a partner who you can't talk to about the darkness of your thoughts. How pointless everything seems, especially in the mornings. How things you used to look forward to feel trivial and too much effort. How worried you are about stuff you used not to worry about, and even more worried over things that were worrying

you already. And how loathsome and undeserving you feel, in every possible way.

Let me tell you a secret. When I was last ill, not all that long ago, I wanted to be dead. I even felt jealous of people with terminal illnesses like cancer because they had a reason for staying in bed and dying and people wouldn't think badly of them for it. And yet at the same time, I didn't actually believe I was ill. I went along with my psychiatrist and GP because I thought I must, and I didn't have the energy to argue with them. But inside, I knew I was a lazy, work-shy, cowardly, incompetent, self-obsessed waste of space.

Now let's talk about you. You are a wonderful person, with many fabulous and interesting things that make you who you are. It is just that you have lost sight of these for a little while. I've been visited by depression many times, each different in its own vile way. From my experience, and that of many others who have generously shared theirs, the special things that make you who you are will come back. It is just that the strength, patience and hope you need to wait for them to return is exactly what depression takes away. So right now, everything feels impossible. I truly know that feeling.

Depression is an illness. It can actually be seen in the brain. It may get better on its own. But depending on how severe it is, that can take ages. However bad things seem right now, if you don't seek help, they could get worse. You may have already found that it helps to talk

to a friend, or call a helpline. If not, however hard it feels, please think hard about giving this a try.

Your doctor can help you. He/she can support you to decide if you need medication and/or a talking therapy, or a referral to more specialist services. If you are prescribed them, the new antidepressant medications work with your body to help you heal. Yes, they do have side-effects. But so do antibiotics and you would probably take those if you had a serious infection. People and websites that tell you that taking antidepressants is a sign of weakness honestly don't know what they are talking about. Please don't take advice from anyone who isn't a qualified doctor. If you are prescribed medication, I hope you will consider taking it, including waiting for it to start working, which can take a few weeks, and avoiding the things you should avoid while you are on it. And if you are referred for a talking therapy, or a group, please give yourself a chance, however anxious or low you are, and give serious consideration to going along.

Some of us find sharing what we perceive as our 'weaknesses' very hard. I know I do. But bottling things up is not a good idea. My biggest breakthrough has been learning to share how I feel with those close to me. I have to keep practising. And so will you. It is very hard, but worth the effort.

I could write pages and pages about how you WILL get better. But your concentration is probably not great right now. And there are other lovely letters here that I hope you will also read.

I just want to end with this. You will have good days and bad days. In time, you will gradually notice that there are more good ones than bad ones. You will rejoice again in small things, like a walk in the rain, or the smile of a stranger. You will find things to do that give you a sense of achievement. I did jigsaw puzzles and very bad knitting. You can choose your own. Just make the tasks small and achievable. And celebrate what you have done. Because you are amazing to have found the strength to do them.

Learning to be kind to yourself can be a lifelong project. But if you aren't kind to yourself, it is much harder to be kind to other people. So for that reason, it is a generous and thoughtful thing to do, rather than an indulgence, as you may once have thought it.

Thank you for reading this. And well done. It was a huge step.

I wish you luck on the rest of your journey. And please know this: you are not alone.

With my loving kindness for your gradual recovery.

Lisa