

I love my children and husband dearly and they are a great help, but I want to keep the worst of my ups and downs from them.

I don't want them to see me like this. I don't want to influence them with any learned behaviour of my depression and transfer my worries on to them.

In the worst of the depths - my depression seems to appear on a three-monthly cycle - I spirit myself away. Billy is my constant companion and we tramp the woods of the New Forest together while I rage at the world.

I don't know what I'd do without him. He keeps me together. He makes it possible for me to face the world and carry on.

Hes just a little round ball of white fur with a merry face, but he seems to understand me on a profound level.

My depression began about 18 years ago when I was pregnant with Katherine. I started to have these black moods, feeling overwhelmed. There's no history of depression in my family.

I had an emergency caesarean, so it was a traumatic birth, and I plunged back into work far too soon - I was running my own company and people relied on me.

In many ways, I created the perfect storm. I didn't know I had

post-natal depression but all the signs were there. I couldn't bear to be left alone with my baby. But it took a long time to be diagnosed.

I became suicidal and had to seek help. The depression deepened from there and I've also been diagnosed with bipolar.

It's so hard to explain what being severely depressed is like. It's like being drowned in a vat of trawle you cannot escape from.

I take 200mg of citalopram-hydrochloride daily, and I have counselling once a week.

But I don't think I'd still be

here were it not for my family and my dogs. As well as Billy there is Ruby, a Jack Russell poodle cross; Fifi, a Jack Russell and a mongrel called Elvis.

They are all important to me, but Billy is special. He seems to understand me best.

It's the look in their eyes, the way they respond to your body language and the way they seem to want to make you happy.

Billy picks up on all of my moods and he knows when he needs to stick by me.

The physical warmth of a dog is important, it is so comforting,

and there are none of the complications of human relationships. I walk a lot to counter my depression and dogs are vital for that - to have a companion who enjoys the experience. It stops you looking inwards, you have to care for a dog's needs.

I am a functioning depressive. I have found ways of living with my depression. My dogs are a major part of this coping strategy.

When I feel depression coming on Billy will jump up on my knee and gaze into my eyes, as if to say, "I am here for you".

It is such a beautiful feeling - and one I am grateful for.

## SNAKE MASSAGE

DISTRIBUTOR Sharon Kelly-Kenyon, 49, lives in Tamworth, Staffs. The mum-of-one says:

I suffer from fibromyalgia, which causes muscular and skeletal pain.

Three months ago, I found the Critterish Allsorts Facebook page and read that snakes can give massages.

It sounded mad but I went along - and having the snake lay across my shoulders was so soothing, for the first time in years I wasn't in any pain. It was amazing.

I now go back every week.



## PET THERAPIST

ANIMAL therapist Dale Preece-Kelly, 48, runs Critterish Allsorts in Kidderminster, Worcestershire. Dale says:

I suffered a heart attack in March 2010 and since then, my marriage broke up and I have suffered from depression and anxiety.

Strosh, my skunk, makes all the difference - she's by my side. Being with her calms me down, lowers my blood pressure and slows my heart rate.

I was working as a salesman before I had my heart attack, but now I am dedicating my life to animals and helping other people, too.



## CALMING CAT

NINE-YEAR-OLD Alice Whone is autistic. She lives in Chelmsford, Essex, with mum Patricia, 36, brother Filip, two, and father Sebastian, 36, a factory manager. The family are originally from Poland. Sebastian says:

Until Alice met Orion the cat, she had not said an English word. But after therapy at the Almandine Centre in Basildon, Essex, she said, "cat".

We were amazed. It was as if Orion had released something inside her and made her instantly calm.

The pair have a real bond.



## HORSE POWER

GRACE QUANTOCK, 28, lives with husband Linus, 30, in Newport, Wales. She suffers from a range of auto-immune diseases and is mostly confined to a wheelchair. She says:

I became quite suddenly when I was 18, with extreme fatigue and pain in my joints. Eventually I was told there was no cure and to go home and get used to living with it.

Two years ago I started equine therapy - mental and physical. Just being close to a horse, I found I could talk about my fears and feelings.

I also ride which helps me feel stronger, more mobile and gives me much a feeling of independence.



as guardian to the dog you rescued can be a lifeline.

### Dogs do not

understand our verbal conversation, they read us at a much more fundamental level of energy and emotional state. You cannot lie to them. They know when you are projecting negative energy as you are down or upset and will respond.

### Dogs behave best when

exposed to positive, calm, assertive energy. To be a successful, calm, assertive pack leader, you first need to be aware of your own emotions and state of mind and how this affects your dog.

Dogs get you out of the house - fresh air, physical exercise and a change of scene help boost people's mood and ease depression symptoms.

Caring for a dog forms a daily routine that can help keep you going, one foot after the other. No matter how depressed you are, your dog still needs feeding and walking.

Find our more online at [dogsfordepression.org.uk](http://dogsfordepression.org.uk).