

UNDERSTANDING DEPRESSION

Challenging Depressive Thinking

STUDENT WELLNESS CENTRE

- Knowing Yourself
- Positive and Negative Self-Talk
- Identifying What's Going Well
- Gratitude and Acts of Kindness
- When Depression is No Longer a Problem

Knowing Yourself

How you understand and think about yourself and your life has a significant impact on how you feel. Here are some ideas that have helped others to reduce their feelings of depression.

Knowing and Validating Yourself

Being true to yourself and encouraging yourself can contribute to satisfying life experiences. People who experience depressed mood often feel lost and separate from themselves. They may also have trouble noticing positive experiences and aspects of who they are.

Identifying, Accepting, and Expressing Your Feelings

An important part of preventing and overcoming feelings of depression involves understanding and accepting your own feelings and being able to communicate these in effective ways. For example, if you believe that your friend has overlooked you, it may be valuable to spend some time figuring out how you feel about this. Allowing yourself to feel whatever emotions you may have, including so-called "negative" feelings (e.g., anger, resentment, guilt, jealousy) is an important step toward expressing these in respectful ways and making affirming decisions.

Goal Setting

Sometimes people who feel depressed can lose sight of the direction they would like their lives to take. The feelings of hopelessness that accompany depression can often make it more difficult for people to set and work toward goals. Having direction in your life enhances your sense of purpose and meaning which, in turn, results in hope for the future.

Leahy, R. and Holland, J. (2000). *Treatment Plans and Interventions for Depression and Anxiety Disorders*. New York: Guilford Press.

Monitoring how you treat yourself and taking opportunities to learn about and affirm yourself will help improve mood.

Identifying, accepting and expressing feelings helps to alleviate depression.

Striving for and fulfilling goals results in a sense of accomplishment, increases feelings of self-worth and enhances mood.

WHO AM I?

Having a clear understanding who you are (including such things as your preferences, values, beliefs and goals) will put you in a strengthened position to cope with life's stressors and overcome depression.

Think about who you are as you finish these sentences.

I like _____

I plan on _____

I am happy when _____

I can't wait until _____

My favorite food is _____

I'm really excited about _____

My favorite season is _____

My friends think I'm _____

My favorite sport is _____

My best quality is _____

My favorite hobby is _____

My biggest limitation is _____

My favorite class is _____

Success means _____

My best friend is _____

I'm strongest when _____

I believe _____

I love it when _____

When I'm happy I _____

I love _____

When I'm sad I _____

I'm most ashamed of _____

My family _____

I felt most hurt when _____

The best part of the day is _____

I wish I could _____

I'm most relaxed when _____

I wish I didn't _____

I'm most stressed when _____

My biggest dream is to _____

I'm hopeful about _____

I'm good at _____

I'm worried about _____

My pet peeve is _____

I can't stand it when _____

My worst habit is _____

I'm most proud of _____

I like myself when _____

WHAT DO I VALUE?

Part of defining yourself is being clear about what you value most. Check off the values that are most important to you and then see if you can narrow that list by choosing your top 5-10 values.

independence	acceptance	thrill-seeking	spontaneity	comfort	frugality
tolerance	peace	feminism	practicality	science	country
family	being outgoing	religion	intimacy	nature	health
certainty	change	loyalty	promptness	music	self-control
individualism	understanding	excitement	formality	integrity	mercy
freedom	respect	exploring	compassion	work	happiness
differences	flexibility	introversion	rules	property	confidence
friends	faith	being active	uniqueness	possessions	peace
fitting in	stability	knowledge	trustworthiness	education	modesty
politics	winning	history	affection	patience	grace
equality	marriage	imagination	commitment	forgiveness	_____
similarities	children	creativity	nonviolence	humour	_____
being alone	the aged	logic	responsibility	courage	_____
being different	wisdom	kindness	truthfulness	openness	_____
growth	wealth	generosity	justice	pride	_____
power	challenge	plans	predictability	tenacity	_____

- Do you live according to your values?
- Do your values help you live the life you want?
- Are there some things you could be doing (or stop doing) that would better uphold your values?
- Do your values help you to feel more or less depressed?

HAVING A PURPOSE AND GOALS FOR THE FUTURE

Goals can get you going, helping you to endure beyond immediate difficulties.

Goals can be:

- **Short term** e.g., hourly, daily, weekly, monthly goals.
- **Intermediate** e.g., yearly goals.
- **Long term** e.g. a five-year vision, a career path, or a lifetime goal.

Think About These Questions As You Consider Your Own Goals:

- What have you already done that you feel proud of/are glad you did?
- What have others done that interests/inspires you?
- Is there something you feel you need to experience in your life?
- What is important enough to justify your time and energy?
- Is there something you want to accomplish this month/year/in your lifetime?
- Are there some things you could be trying instead of simply considering?
- What are the goals of those around you? Do their goals fit for you or would you like something different?
- What do you want for your future?
- When you are older and look back on your life, what do you want to see yourself having done?

Yapko, M.D. (1997). Breaking the Patterns of Depression. New York: Doubleday.

Having a sense of purpose can provide the motivation, interest and energy to help people overcome depression.

USING SELF-AWARENESS TO BUILD RESILIENCY

Since those who experience depressed mood can be vulnerable to recurring mood problems, it is helpful to prepare for the possibility of future episodes. You can build your resiliency in order to help protect yourself against future episodes of depression. This involves being aware of factors that contributed to the development of your depression, signs of depression and your own typical coping strategies. It also involves strengthening your overall ability to cope with life's challenges. .

WHAT IS RESILIENCY?

Resiliency is the ability to recover rapidly from illness, change, or misfortune. How well you weather the storms of life, including the experience of depression, depends on your resiliency. For each of us, life tests our resiliency in our daily experiences and we demonstrate our level of resiliency in how we respond. Over time, we can lose or build resiliency. Each time we choose a healthy response to a particular stressor, our resiliency improves. Poor coping choices, along with chronic stressors, have the potential to diminish resiliency.

HOW IS RESILIENCY IMPROVED?

There are a number of ways to strengthen your resiliency. These include making changes to and improving the following:

■ Self-care skills

- Physical self-care – encompasses such areas as nutritious eating, adequate exercise, healthy body image, regular sleep patterns, responsible alcohol use, and relaxation.
- Emotional self-care – involves having a good awareness and acceptance of feelings, expression of a wide range of feelings, self-confidence and optimism.
- Mental self-care – involves attending to school/work performance, using effective problem-solving strategies, learning new things, being curious and creative, and staying open-minded. Choose to be optimistic. Develop positive beliefs about your abilities.
- Spiritual self-care – encompasses such things as one's philosophy or theology of life, self-discovery, finding meaning in life, establishing and living by values, and taking comfort in one's own beliefs.

■ Problem-solving skills

- Be proactive and ask yourself, "What can I do to solve this problem?" Take active steps to move toward solutions and goals.
- Accept and embrace change
- Keep things in perspective
- Learn from your past
- Seek help when you need it

■ Relationship and communication skills

- Help others (e.g., do volunteer work) gives you purpose and an opportunity to connect with others
- Learn to connect and develop healthy ways of resolving differences

Here are some questions to think about as you explore your own resiliency and work to prevent future episodes of depression:

- What are the kinds of things that happen in my life that tend to lead to depression?
- Do particular kinds of experiences or events leave me more vulnerable to depression?
- What are my early warning signs of depression?
- What helps me get a handle on my depression?
- When do I most need to use the coping strategies I've learned?
- Who supports me to take action when I need to?
- Do I take care of myself on an ongoing basis (e.g., look after my physical, emotional, mental and spiritual self)?
- Do I engage in effective problem solving?
- Do I choose and maintain healthy relationships?

APA (2012). Building your resilience. Retrieved from: <https://www.apa.org/topics/resilience>.

Cherry, K. (2020, January 24). 10 Ways to Build Your Resilience. Retrieved from: <https://www.verywellmind.com/Ways-to-become-more-resilient-2795063>

Positive and Negative Self-Talk

We all have a running monologue that goes on in our mind everyday. We talk to ourselves about immediate, past and future situations, about others and about ourselves. This self-talk, or what we say to ourselves, is a key determinant in how we feel. Our thoughts form the basis for our moods.

Two people thinking about the same situation in different ways can experience different emotional reactions. For example, if person A thinks that a class being canceled is an inconvenience, feelings of frustration or anger may arise. If person B thinks that the cancellation is a good opportunity to relax or catch up on some reading, feelings of happiness or relief may result. In short, it is how we interpret situations, along with the context of our lives, which determine our emotional response.

Individuals who experience difficulties with low mood tend to engage in negative self-talk about themselves, others and the future.

Negative self-statements such as “I can’t cope,” “Other people don’t understand how bad I feel,” and “I’ll never feel better,” promote feelings of depression and lower self-confidence.

Negative self-talk tends to:

- happen automatically (many people aren’t even aware it’s happening)
- be brief (e.g. “No one cares.”)
- sound like it could be true (“She thinks I’m boring.”)

This process of “unlearning” negative self-talk involves learning to identify negative self-talk and replacing it with more encouraging, positive self-statements. In general, it will be useful to:

- Think about your thinking - notice when you are engaging in negative self-talk.
- Challenge your thinking - in the beginning it may be useful to use a thought record.
- Choose self-statements that will promote improved mood.

Each of us is responsible for choosing self-talk that will facilitate emotional adjustment.

Negative self-talk aggravates and perpetuates depression.

Because negative self-talk is learned (you aren’t born with depressive self-talk), it can be unlearned.

Bourne, E. (2020). *The Anxiety and Phobia Workbook* (7th ed.). Oakland: New Harbinger Publications.

Greenberger, D. & Padesky, C. (2016). *Mind Over Mood: Change how you feel by changing the way you think* (2nd ed.). New York: Guilford Press.

TYPES OF DISTORTED SELF-TALK

MIND READING

You assume that you know what people think without having sufficient evidence for their thoughts.

- “He thinks I’m a loser.”

FORTUNETELLING

You predict the future negatively.

- “She won’t ever want to go out with me.”

CATASTROPHIZING

You believe that what has happened/will happen will be awful.

- “I’ll die of embarrassment if he sees me without makeup.”

LABELING

You assign global negative traits to yourself and others.

- “I’m ugly.” or “He’s a jerk.”

DISCOUNTING POSITIVES

You claim that the positive things you or others do are trivial.

- “I only passed that test because it was easy.”

NEGATIVE FILTERING

You focus almost exclusively on the negatives and seldom notice the positives.

- “Everyone hates me.”

OVERGENERALIZING

You perceive a global pattern of negatives on the basis of a single incident.

- “This happens to me all the time. I’m a failure.”

ALL-OR-NOTHING THINKING

You view events or people in all-or-nothing terms.

- “It was a complete waste of time.”

SHOULD

You interpret events in terms of how things should be, rather than focusing on what is.

- “I shouldn’t tell her I feel angry at her because that would be mean.”

PERSONALIZING

You attribute a disproportionate amount of the blame to yourself.

- “We broke up because I’m a loser.”

BLAMING

You focus on the other person as the source of your negative feelings.

- “She made me feel bad.”

UNFAIR COMPARISONS

You interpret events in terms of standards that are unrealistic.

- “He likes her because she’s perfect and I’m not.”

REGRET ORIENTATION

You focus on the idea that you could have done better in the past.

- “Why did I ask him out. That was so stupid.”

WHAT IF?

You keep asking “What if” and can’t be satisfied with any of the answers.

- “Yeah, but what if I get nervous?”

EMOTIONAL REASONING

You let your feelings guide your interpretation of reality.

- “I feel lousy. Life sucks.”

Leahy, R., Holland, S. and McGinn, L. (2012). Treatment Plans and Interventions for Depression and Anxiety Disorders (2nd ed.). New York: Guilford Press.

NEGATIVE VS POSITIVE SELF-TALK

Negative self-talk	Positive self-talk
Happens automatically	Happens automatically if practiced
Is brief	Is brief
Sounds like it could be true	Is consistent with the evidence
Usually in the present tense	Is in the present tense
Typically begins with "I"	Typically begins with "I"
Characterized by "What if" worrying	Assumes something could happen, but not necessarily something bad
Self-critical	Characterized by positive and affirming self-statements
Focuses on helplessness	Focuses on capabilities
Expects perfectionism	Gives permission to make mistakes and be less than perfect

CREATING A POSITIVE INTERPRETATION

Here is a method to help you to begin noticing and challenging your negative thinking.

Consider the events listed in the first column. Fill in the blank spots with your interpretations.

Event	Negative Interpretation	Positive Interpretation
Mom refused to lend me money.	She doesn't care about me.	She wants me to learn to be more responsible with my money.
My prof asked me to come to her office after class.	She's probably going to tell me I should change my major	
He didn't call back.	He hates me.	
I wasn't invited.	They are trying to ditch me.	
I didn't make the team.	I suck.	
I didn't get the job.		
I have two exams the scheduled for the same day.		
My friend is moving to another city.		
Our team lost.		

- Remain aware that, for some life events (e.g., tragic death of a family member), there may not be a positive interpretation.
- You can, however, choose positive self-statements that focus on your ability to cope.

NEGATIVE SELF-TALK WORKSHEET

In the space below, record some of the distorted, negative self-talk that you would like to change.

STEPS TO CHALLENGE NEGATIVE SELF-TALK

1. Identify the specific situation in which the negative self-talk occurred.

Ask yourself:	Where was I?	What was I doing ?
	Who was I with ?	When did it happen?

2. Identify the moods associated with that situation using one word descriptors.

Ask yourself: What did I feel?

Sad	Insecure	Hurt	Proud	Relieved	Enraged
Cheerful	Disappointed	Disgusted	Ashamed	Frustrated	Frightened
Anxious	Guilty	Nervous	Happy	Glad	Content
Depressed	Resentful	Irritated	Overwhelmed	Angry	Peaceful
Excited	Embarrassed	Confused	Humiliated	Overjoyed	Regretful

3. Rate the intensity of each mood on a scale from 0 to 10.

Ask yourself: On a scale from 0 – 10, how much did I feel_____ (each mood)?

No Feeling 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Extreme Feeling

4. Identify the negative self talk and circle the “hot thought” (the thought that carries the most emotional charge).

Ask yourself:

- What was going through my mind just before I started to feel _____?
- Which thought is most connected to the moods?
- Which thought has the most emotional charge?

5. Identify the evidence that supports the “hot thought” (the thought that carries the most emotional charge).

Ask yourself: When is this true?
What tells me this thought is accurate?

6. Identify the evidence that does not support the “hot thought”.

Ask yourself:

- Is it always true?
- What are the odds of this really happening?
- Am I looking at the whole picture?
- Am I being totally objective?
- Could there be another possibility?

7. Create an alternative thought that is consistent with the evidence. This thought should:

Ask yourself:

- Is this statement positive and affirming?
- Is this statement in the present tense?
- Is this statement believable to me

8. Re-rate the intensity of the moods (and any new moods) on the rating scale.

SAMPLE THOUGHT RECORD

1. Situation	2. Moods	3. Automatic Thoughts	4. Evidence FOR The HOT thought	5. Evidence Against The HOT thought	Alternative Thought	New Thought and Moods
Monday 8:40 am History Class						
Received 51% on exam	- Ashamed—7 - Frustrate—6 - Depressed—8	"I'm such a loser." "I'm stupid." "I knew I couldn't do well in this class" "I probably received the lowest mark" "My parents are going to kill me."	- Received 51% - I failed an exam last year - I didn't get the scholarship I applied for	- I didn't study - I pass the majority of exams - I was accepted into university - I won an academic award in high school	There are times when school is challenging for me, but I generally do well."	- Ashamed—6 - Frustrated—5 - Depressed—6.5

No Feeling 0 _____ 1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____ 6 _____ 7 _____ 8 _____ 9 _____ 10 Extreme Feeling

1. Situation	2. Moods	3. Automatic Thoughts	4. Evidence FOR The HOT thought	5. Evidence Against The HOT thought	Alternative Thought	New Thought and Moods
Tuesday 9 pm My House						
One week after breaking up with boyfriend	- Depressed—8 - Lonely—7	"I'll always be alone." "Nobody cares" - I'm not desirable." "I'm a loser." "It's my fault."	- The relationship is over - I've had other break ups - Only a few people asked me to dance last night.	- I've dated several people - I have friends that like me - Bob and Doug say I'm interesting. - Eventually I will date after a break up.	- Break ups happen and they hurt. - Chances are I will date again sometime - I'm desirable to some people.	- Depressed—6.5 - Lonely—6

No Feeling 0 _____ 1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____ 6 _____ 7 _____ 8 _____ 9 _____ 10 Extreme Feeling

1. Situation	2. Moods	3. Automatic Thoughts	4. Evidence FOR The HOT thought	5. Evidence Against The HOT thought	Alternative Thought	New Thought and Moods

No Feeling 0 _____ 1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____ 6 _____ 7 _____ 8 _____ 9 _____ 10 Extreme Feeling

BLANK THOUGHT RECORD

1. Identify the specific situation in which the negative self-talk occurred.

Ask yourself: Where was I? What was I doing ?
 Who was I with ? When did it happen?

2. Identify the moods associated with that situation using one word descriptors.

Ask yourself: What did I feel?

Sad	Insecure	Hurt	Proud	Relieved	Enraged
Cheerful	Disappointed	Disgusted	Ashamed	Frustrated	Frightened
Anxious	Guilty	Nervous	Happy	Glad	Content
Depressed	Resentful	Irritated	Overwhelmed	Angry	Peaceful
Excited	Embarrassed	Confused	Humiliated	Overjoyed	Regretful

3. Rate the intensity of each mood on a scale from 0 to 10.

Ask yourself: On a scale from 0 – 10, how much did I feel _____ (each mood)?

No Feeling 0 _____ 1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____ 6 _____ 7 _____ 8 _____ 9 _____ 10 Extreme Feeling

4. Identify the negative self talk and circle the “hot thought”.

Ask yourself: What was going through my mind just before I started to feel _____?
 Which thought is most connected to the moods?
 Which thought has the most emotional charge?

5. Identify the evidence that supports the “hot thought”.

Ask yourself: When is this true?
 What tells me this thought is accurate?

6. Identify the evidence that does not support the “hot thought”.

Ask yourself: Is it always true?
 What are the odds of this really happening?
 Am I looking at the whole picture?
 Am I being totally objective?
 Could there be another possibility?

7. Create an alternative thought that is consistent with the evidence. This thought should:

Ask yourself: Is this statement positive and affirming?
 Is this statement in the present tense?
 Is this statement believable to me

8. Re-rate the intensity of the moods (and any new moods) on the rating scale.

Greenberger, D. & Padesky, C. (2016). *Mind Over Mood: Change how you feel by changing the way you think* (2nd ed.). New York: Guildford Press.

SUPPORTIVE SELF-TALK

Consider how the following statements discourage depression. Prepare a list of supportive self-statements that you can have ready when you need them.

- It's ok to feel my feelings.
- This is difficult and I can deal with it.
- Even though this feels overwhelming, I can ask for help.
- I'm really scared people will think I'm weak, but I can focus on my own opinion of myself.
- I can feel low and still function.
- I make mistakes and that's normal.

Identifying What's Going Well

For many people experiencing low mood, it can be challenging to remain focused on those aspects of life that are going well. Being clear about those aspects of life that are “going right” will help you to feel more hopeful. Spend some time thinking about your situation and, in the space below, record some of the things that you believe are “going right” for you.

Example:

- I have friends
- I attend university
- I'm healthy
- I like playing volleyball

Gratitude

Gratitude is that act of identifying and appreciating experiences, ourselves, others and the world.

Recent research demonstrates that gratitude can result in improved happiness. It seems to be a universal value found across cultures and has been considered important throughout time. When we identify the things we appreciate, we are more likely to strengthen positive beliefs and tap into the best parts of ourselves.

Focusing on gratitude means a shift in perspective from the negative to the positive. While it does not mean ignoring difficulties, it encourages one to actively look beyond them to appreciate the positive dimensions of the experience.

Gratitude has added value when we share it with others. Taking the time to express appreciation to others results more positive conversations, strengthened relationships and improved mood.

Gratitude about the World

Gratitude about Others

Gratitude about Myself

EXPRESSING GRATITUDE

Who I expressed gratitude to:

What I said/wrote:

What happened:

Greenberger, D. & Padesky, C. (2016). *Mind Over Mood: Change how you feel by changing the way you think* (2nd ed.). New York: Guildford Press.

Acts of Kindness

Another way to respond to depression and activate more positivity in your life is to extend kindness to others. When you engage in kind acts, you feel better about yourself and others, boost your mood and increase your sense of happiness. In one study, individuals who extended kind acts toward others every day for four weeks experienced improved mood.

Examples of acts of kindness:

- Hold the door for someone
- Let someone go ahead of you in line
- Smile and say “thank you” to the store clerk
- Buy a coffee for a friend
- Give a compliment
- Help a friend with homework
- Give someone your seat on the bus

My acts of kindness:

Greenberger, D. & Padesky, C. (2016). *Mind Over Mood: Change how you feel by changing the way you think* (2nd ed.). New York: Guilford Press.

When Depression Is No Longer A Problem

Many mental health professionals would agree that there have been advances in the treatment of depressed mood. We now know that there are effective strategies that individuals can master in order to decrease or eliminate depression. There are many accounts of people who were successful in overcoming low mood, and continue to reap the benefits of their hard work. These individuals are working to meet their potential, and are living more satisfying, enjoyable and stimulating lives.

**Think about the future.
What will your life
be like when you are
feeling better?**

When I better manage my depression my relationships will _____

When I'm feeling better I will _____

When depression is no longer a problem I will be _____

When I meet my goal it will be _____

Less depression will free me to _____

Just wait until I _____

When I overcome this depressed mood _____

Feeling more hopeful will mean _____

When I feel better my social life will _____

The most exciting thing about feeling better will be _____

It will be such a relief when _____

When I feel better about myself _____

Successfully managing depression will show me that _____