**SELF HELP**

**MANAGING LOW MOOD.**



Many people experiencing symptoms of depression might begin to wonder if there is something wrong with them. One typical fear is that they might be going crazy. Unfortunately, the reactions and comments from other people such as, “Just get yourself together!” are not very helpful.

Although you might feel alone in your struggle against depressive moods, the reality is that many people experience these moods from time to time, or even regularly. In fact, it is estimated that 1 in every 4 people experience significantly depressed mood at some time in their life.

**MOOD.**

Depression is considered to be a disorder of mood. Individuals who are depressed, describe low mood that has persisted for longer than two weeks. In mild forms of depression, individuals may feel bad all day but still describe a dismal outlook and a sense of gloom. Their mood may lift with a positive experience, but fall again with even a minor disappointment. In severe depression, a low mood could persist throughout the day, failing to lift even when pleasant things occur. The low mood may fluctuate during the day – it may be worse in the morning and relatively better in the afternoon. In addition to sadness, other moods common to depression are:

* **Anxiety**
* **Guilt**
* **Worthlessness and inadequacy.**

**THINKING**

Individuals who are depressed think in certain ways. They tend to see themselves in a negative light. Often their self-esteem and self-confidence become very low. They dwell on how bad they feel, how the world is terrible, and on how hopeless everything is.

**PHYSICAL**

Some people experience physical symptoms of depression.

* Change in sleep patterns
* Change in appetite
* Lack of energy/motivation

**INTERACTION WITH OTHER PEOPLE.**

Many depressed people express concern about their personal relationships. They may become unhappy and dissatisfied with their family, and other close relationships. They may feel shy and anxious when they are with other people, especially in a group. They may feel lonely and isolated, yet at the same time, are unwilling or unable to reach out to others, even when they have the opportunity for doing so.

**WHAT ABOUT YOU?**

What symptoms of depression do you experience?

Write them down on the **Depression Symptoms** worksheet on the next page. To help you identify your symptoms of depression, ask yourself:

**“How does my life change when I’m depressed?”**

**“What have I noticed about what I do or don’t when I’m depressed?”**

**“How does my view of myself, others, and the future change when I’m depressed?”**

**“What do other people notice about me when I’m depressed?”**

Use the space below to brainstorm your ideas before completing the worksheet.

**DEPRESSIVE SYMPTOMS WORKSHEET.**

Depressive symptoms can be grouped into 3 possible categories. Some symptoms are of the physiological type, which are those that have something to do with physical sensations of your physical body, for example; insomnia, poor appetite, or low energy levels. Some symptoms are of the cognitive (thoughts) and affective (emotions) type, such as: thoughts of suicide, hopelessness, feeling sad, and crying. The third category of symptoms is to do with how you act and behave, for example: staying in bed, not going out, avoiding people.

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| **SOMATIC/PHYSIOLOGICAL** | **COGNITIVE/AFFECTIVE** | **BEHAVIOURAL** |
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**BEHAVIOURAL ACTIVATION: FUN AND ACHIEVEMENT.**

The symptoms of depression can bring about some drastic changes in a depressed person’s life, daily routines, and their behaviour. Often it is these changes that makes the depression worse and prevents the depressed person from getting better.

For example, a lack of motivation or a lack of energy can result in a depressed person cutting back on their activities, neglecting their daily tasks and responsibilities, and leaving the decision making to others. **Have you noticed these changes in yourself when you are depressed?**



When your activity level decreases, you may become even less motivated and more lethargic. When you stop doing the things you used to love, you miss out on experiencing pleasant feelings and positive experiences. Your depression could get worse and this becomes a vicious cycle.

Similarly, when one begins neglecting a few tasks and responsibilities at school or at home, the list may begin to pile up. This can lead to a depressed person becoming overwhelmed by the list of things they have put off doing. This may result in them feeling guilty or thinking they are ineffective, or even a failure. This will also worsen the depression.

**INCREASING YOUR ACTIVITY LEVEL**

On way to combat depression is to simply increase your activity level, especially in pleasurable activities – having fun – and tackling your list of tasks and responsibilities, but doing it in a realistic and achievable way, so that you set yourself up to succeed. Becoming more active has a number of advantages:

* **Activity helps you to feel better** – at the very least, when you start engaging in some kind of activity; it gives your mind something else to think about – a different focus. Doing things even a little at a time, can help give you a sense that you are moving forward, taking control of your life again, and doing something – experiencing a sense of **ACHIEVEMENT**. You may even find **PLEASURE** and enjoyment in the activities you do.
* **Activity helps you to feel less tired** – Usually, when you are physically tired, you need rest. However, when you are depressed, the opposite is true. Sleeping more and sitting around doing nothing will only cause you to feel more lethargic and tired. Also, doing nothing leaves room for you mind to ruminate on depressive thoughts, which will make you feel even more depressed.
* **Activity can help you think more clearly** **-** Once you get started, you may find that you take a different perspective on particular problems in your life. Also, because your mind takes a different focus as a result of the activity, your thoughts may become clearer.

This is one of the ways of turning the vicious cycle of depression around, by using behavioural strategies – engaging in pleasurable activities and tackling small tasks.

**FUN AND ACHIEVEMENT**

It makes good sense to do fun and pleasurable things to make you feel better, but these are not the only sorts of activities that will help generate positive feelings. Being depressed isn’t just about feeling sad – there are a lot of other feelings involved as well, such as hopelessness, guilt and despair. So, it also makes sense to do things that result in other positive feelings, such as achievement and a sense of purpose. When you are planning things to do for yourself, it is important to remember to include a mixture of activities, adding those that have the potential to give you other positive feelings. Doing tasks that give you a sense of achievement or mastery will help you feel like you are starting to get back on top of things again.

**START SIMPLE.**

Even though there a number of advantages in increasing your activity level, it may not be easy to get started. Often, this is because when you are depressed, you think negative thoughts such as “I won’t enjoy doing this”, or “It’s too hard,” or “I’ll probably fail at this too.” These thoughts may stop you from getting started. Often the big mistake people make is trying to do too much too soon.

When you are depressed, things that you usually don’t even have to think about doing (when you are not depressed) can seem to require a huge amount of effort. The idea is to start with small easy steps and begin with things that you can do. Sometimes it’s easier to do a task for a short period of time rather than trying to achieve a set amount. Read a book for 5 minutes rather than reading the whole chapter. Spend 10 minutes sorting your room rather than doing the whole room. In this way it will be easier for you to achieve your goal. In the beginning, the important thing is not what you do or how much you do, but simply the fact that you are **DOING**. Remember the action is the first step, not motivation, and you’ll soon find yourself feeling better. Below is a list of some fun activities. Choose two or three (or use your own) from the list in the coming week. Remember to include one or two achievement type tasks to your schedule as well. Use the worksheet on the next page to plan ahead which activity you will do, when you will do it and then rate your depression, pleasant feelings, and sense of achievement **before** and **after** the activity. Take this as an experiment to evaluate your mood before and after an activity. See if this helps lifting your mood. Also you can use the Weekly Activity Schedule to plan your schedule for a week.

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| --- | --- | --- |
| Painting my nailsGoing out with friendsBaking something to shareGoing out for teaBuying giftsCleaning my roomWatching TVOrganising my wardrobePlaying musical instrumentsLighting a scented candleExercisingGoing on a picnicHaving a warm drinkMassaging cream into my handsLaughingPlaying sportsGoing to the gymJogging/walkingGoing to the beachVolunteering for a good causeSmelling a flowerDoing jigsaw puzzlesBlowing bubbles | Lying in the sunDoing arts and craftsRe watching a favourite movieListening to musicGoing for a bike ridePlaying with a petSoaking in a nice bubble bathDoing a favour for someoneHelping my mum around the houseCompleting all my outstanding workGoing to a partyLooking at old photographsPlaying footballBuying clothesSnuggling up with a soft blanketListening to an audio bookMindfulnessGoing to the picturesWearing an outfit that ,makes me feel goodGoing window shopping | Spending time with familySinging around the houseWashing my hairMaking my bed with fresh sheetsDoing 5 minutes of deep calm breathingRelaxingTurning off electrical devices for a hourPlanning a nice surprise for someoneDancing Having a BBQHaving lunch with a friendColouringHaving an indoor picnic with friendsCalling a friendReadingGoing to a public place and people watchingMake a to do list of tasksPlaying board games |

**BEHAVIOURAL ACTIVATION WORKSHEET**

**FUN AND ACHIEVEMENT**

One way of combating depression is to prescribe some fun for yourself. By engaging in some simple, pleasant activities, you can improve your mood and your energy level. However, because you’re feeling depressed right now, you might not experience the same level of leisure doing an activity as when you were not depressed. But don’t stop at one or two activities. Keep going and you’ll find that your mood will begin to lift. Try it and see!

You may also want to engage in some simple tasks or responsibilities that you have neglected for some time. Often, accomplishing tasks can improve your motivation and give you a sense of achievement. Start with tasks that are simple and achievable. BUT remember that it is important to **BALANCE** both responsibilities and pleasurable activities. Try not to go overboard on one and leave out the other.

Use the following rating scale to rate your depression, pleasant feelings, and sense of achievement **BEFORE** and **AFTER** the activity.

 **DEPRESSION PLEASURE ACHIEVEMENT**

Before \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_­­\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

After \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

 **DEPRESSION PLEASURE ACHIEVEMENT**

Before \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_­­\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

After \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

 **DEPRESSION PLEASURE ACHIEVEMENT**

Before \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_­­\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

After \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**ACTIVITY AND DATE**

**ACTIVITY AND DATE**

**ACTIVITY AND DATE**

 **DEPRESSION PLEASURE ACHIEVEMENT**

Before \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_­­\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

After \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**ACTIVITY AND DATE**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 0Absolutely none | 1minimal | 2Slight | 3Mild | 4Moderate | 5Much | 6Higher | 7Very High | 8Extreme |

**What did you notice about yourself?**

**WEEKLY ACTIVITY SCHEDULE.**

Use the schedule below to plan your activities for the coming week. Make sure you balance fun and pleasurable activities with your daily responsibilities and duties.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **MON** | **TUES** | **WED** | **THURS** | **FRI** | **SAT** | **SUN** |
| **8am – 9am** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **9am -10am** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **10am-11am** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **11am-12am** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **12pm-1pm** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **1pm-2pm** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **2pm-3pm** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **3pm-4pm** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **4pm-5pm** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **5pm-6pm** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **6pm-7pm** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **7pm-8pm** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **8pm-9pm** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **9pm-10pm** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

**7**

**THE THINKING-FEELING CONNECTION**

What really makes us feel and respond the way we do, is often not the situation or the words and actions of others, but how we perceive the situation or that person’s actions. It is how we see something or someone and what we think about it or them that really influences how we feel. It is our thoughts and beliefs about an event that influences our emotions and actions.

**EXAMPLE – Suppose you went to a party and your friend introduces you to Mike. As you talk to him, you notice that he does not look directly at you but often looks around the room.**

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| --- | --- | --- |
|  | **THOUGHT**  | **FEELING** |
| **EXAMPLE 1** | “This boy is so rude! He won’t even look at me while I’m talking with him! How nasty! |  |
| **EXAMPLE 2** | “Mike must think that I am really unattractive and uninteresting. I must be a really boring person. Nobody wants to talk to me!” |  |
| **EXAMPLE 3** | “Mike’s probably waiting for a friend to come. Maybe he’s getting a bit anxious” |  |

You probably realised that you felt three different emotions as a result of those three different thoughts. Often, we are not aware of our thoughts and beliefs because they are so automatic and happen quickly. But they are there, and they affect the way we feel.

**WHAT AM I FEELING?**

It is often difficult to know exactly what we are feeling, and sometimes it can also be difficult to put it into words. The list below contains words that describe feelings, and this might be a useful starting point in you being able to understand the connection between your thinking and your feelings.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| TenseAnnoyedUnhappyCalmAnxiousDepressedAngry | EnragedHappy ExhilaratedKeyed upIrritatedJoyfulExcited | FrightenedPanickyFrustratedScaredFlatNervousTired | CheerfulEuphoricMadUneasySad DiscouragedJealous |

This is only a limited list but it should give you an idea of the kinds of words we could use to describe our feelings.

**AUTOMATIC THOUGHTS**

Just as we are not always conscious of the way we walk or how we ride a bike, we are often not aware of our thinking. Some of our thinking is so habitual that it is automatic, and just like riding a bike, when things are automatic we might not be conscious of them. All of the time, our brains are turning over thoughts and ideas. However, we are not consciously aware of most of them because it happens relatively fast and we are not accustomed to slowing them down. Our automatic thoughts, however, play an important role in our emotional wellbeing.

There are three kinds of automatic thoughts:

**Neutral thoughts**, e.g., “I think I will buy some bread today.”

**Positive thoughts**, e.g. “This is something I can do really well”

**Negative thoughts**, e.g. “I often find it hard to concentrate – I must be really stupid”

Automatic thoughts often reflect worries and concerns, however they can be about anything at all, anything we have ever seen, heard or learned. In addition, it can be anything we know about from any source at all. Obviously, though, negative automatic thoughts are the ones that can cause us emotional distress. People who are depressed tend to think negative thoughts about themselves, the world about them, and their future, and it is these thoughts that can be changed to lift your depression.

**FEELINGS ARE NOT THOUGHTS.**

When we first try to distinguish thoughts from feelings, it can be easy to confuse them. We might be used to talking about thoughts and feelings as being part of the same experience, but it is more helpful to separate them and remember that feelings are not thoughts. For example, you might hear a person saying “I think I’m anxious,” but they’re probably *thinking* “Everyone will laugh at me” and I *feel* anxious. More commonly, you might hear someone saying something like “I feel my friend doesn’t like the present I bought for her”, when they are actually *thinking* “My friend doesn’t appreciate the present I bought for her”, and I *feel* hurt.

**UNHELPFUL THINKING STYLES.**

When a person experiences an unhelpful emotion (e.g. depression or anxiety), it is usually followed by a number of unhelpful self-statements and thoughts. Often there is a pattern to such thoughts and we call these **“unhelpful thinking styles”.** One of the things we have noticed is that people use unhelpful thinking styles as an automatic habit. It is something that happens out of our awareness, however, when a person consistently and constantly uses some of these styles of thinking, they can often cause themselves a great deal of emotional distress. Can you identify any thinking patterns and styles that you often use?:

**Mental Filter.**

This thinking style involves a “filtering in” and “filtering out” process – a sort of “tunnel vision”, focusing on only one part of a situation and ignoring the rest. Usually, this means looking at the negative parts of a situation and forgetting the positive parts, and the whole picture is coloured by what may be a single negative detail.

**Jumping to Conclusions.**

We jump to conclusions when we assume that we know what someone else is thinking **(mind reading)** and when we make predictions about what 8is going to happen in the future **(predictive thinking)**



**Personalisation.**

This involves blaming yourself for everything that goes wrong or could go wrong, even when you may only be partly responsible or not responsible at all. You might be taking 100% responsibility for the occurrence of external events.



**Catastrophizing.**

Catastrophizing occurs when we “blow things out of proportion”, and we view the situation as terrible, awful, dreadful, and horrible, even though the reality is that the problem itself is quite small.



**Black and White Thinking**

This thinking style involves seeing only one extreme or the other. You are either wrong or right, good or bad and so on. There is no in-betweens or shades of grey.



**Shoulding and Musting.**

Sometimes by saying “I should….” Or “I must…” you can put reasonable demands or pressure on yourself and others. Although these statements are not always unhelpful. (e.g. “I should not get drunk and walk home”) they can sometimes create unrealistic expectations.

**Overgeneralisation.**

When we overgeneralise, we take one instance in the past or present, and impose it on all current or future situations. If we say “You always….” or “Everyone…” or “I never...” then we are probably overgeneralising.

**Labelling**

 We label ourselves and others when we make global statements based on behaviour in specific situations. We might use this label even though there are many more examples that aren’t consistent with that label.

**Emotional Reasoning**

This thinking style involves basing your view of situations or yourself on the way you are feeling. For example, the only evidence that something is bad is going to happen is that you feel something bad is going to happen.

**Magnification and Minimisation**

In this thinking style, you magnify the positive attributes of other people and minimise your own positive attributes, it’s as though you’re explaining away your own positive characteristics or achievements as though they are not important.

**UNHELPFUL THINKING STYLES: MORE DETAILS**



1. **Mental Filter.** – *(focusing on one part of the situation and ignoring the rest)*

**Example:**

Maybe you are out with your Boyfriend/Girlfriend and at the end of the night you argue about when you will see each other next. Perhaps you think about this as you walk home in silence together. What do you think the effect of having this thinking style will have on the way you feel?

Notice in the example above you are dwelling on one single detail out of the many details that occurred during the entire night. Notice that the detail you are dwelling on happens to be a negative. You have excluded other details of the whole picture, which means that you are not remembering all the other positive experiences of the night. If you focus on the negative bit, then it is likely that you’ll keep experiencing the negative feelings that go along with it.

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| **Can you think of a situation where you used this thinking style?** | **What were the thoughts that went through your mind?** | **What feelings did you experience consequent to your thinking?** |
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**2.Jumping to Conclusions*.*** *(making a conclusion without really knowing if there is any evidence to support it*)

Although we might like to think that if we “have a hunch” about something it is usually right, there are times when it is not right. There are times that we keep jumping to the wrong conclusion, or the conclusions are usually negative. When we do this consistently then we can cause ourselves quite a bit of distress. There are two ways in which we often jump to conclusions – mind reading and predictive thinking.

**Mind Reading** – *as the name suggests, this is where we jump to conclusions because we assume we know what someone else is thinking, or we know the rationale behind someone else’s behaviours. This happens to be a very common style of thinking.*

**Example** – Have you ever had this experience? You are talking to someone, and during the conversation they look at their watch? Perhaps you thought, “*They must think I am really boring*”, or “*they don’t want to be here with me*”

Often these conclusions are a reflection of how we think about ourselves, e.g. “I think I am boring”. Often we jump to the conclusion that because we think poorly of ourselves, then others must too.

**Predictive Thinking**- *(making predictions about what is going to happen on some future occasion)*

This is a very common way to increase anxiety and stress. These are often predictions where you overestimate the negative emotions or experiences you are going to encounter.

**Example** – You are supposed to be doing an English talk in front of your class. You might think, “I’m going to forget what I am supposed to say, stumble over my words, and completely mess up, and this will be terrible”. How might you feel if you believe this?

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| **Can you think of a situation where you used this thinking style?** | **What were the thoughts that went through your mind?** | **What feelings did you experience consequent to your thinking?** |
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1. **Personalisation** *(Blaming yourself for something that has happened.)*

Can you think of some occasions when something hasn’t gone quite as you wanted, or the way you expected, and you’ve blamed yourself totally for what’s happened? The toast burns a breakfast, and you blame yourself not the toaster. Without realising it, you relate external negative events to something you have or have not done.

When you personalise something, you take total responsibility for external events occurring, and ignoring other important factors. As a consequence, you end up blaming yourself for everything that goes wrong or that could go wrong – even when you may only be partly responsible or not responsible at all. If you consistently say to yourself, “This is my fault”, “I’m to blame” – how do you think you’d start to feel? Carrying 100% of the responsibility is a rather large burden to bear, and one that’s likely to leave you feeling discouraged or overwhelmed.

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| **Can you think of a situation where you used this thinking style?** | **What were the thoughts that went through your mind?** | **What feelings did you experience consequent to your thinking?** |
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1. **Catastrophizing** – (*Blowing things out of proportion*.)

When someone says “You’re blowing things out of proportion”, or “you’re making a mountain out of a molehill”, chances are a person is catastrophizing. This style of automatic thinking often begins with the following phrases;

“**What if**!!!” or “**Oh no**…”

**Let’s try some examples**

“*Oh my God I have a chest pain…..I might be having a heart attack”*

*“I felt depressed this morning. “What if I stay depressed?”*

*“What if a disagree with my friend on this………..I will lose an important relationship”*

All of these examples get the essence of this unhelpful thinking style – that the person views the situation as terrible, awful, dreadful and horrible. Notice the appearance of other unhelpful thinking styles – a bit of predictive thinking and a bit of jumping to conclusions.

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| Can you think of a situation when you used this thinking style? | What were thoughts that went through your mind? | What feelings did you experience consequent to your thinking? |
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**4.Black and White Thinking**

When it comes to sports, you might have heard some people say “There are no second places, there is only one winner and the rest are losers” as if being the second best in the world is nothing to be proud of. Perhaps you have said something similar to yourself.

**Example:**

“If I am not the best at what I do, then I’m worthless”

“If my friend and I don’t always agree, then we have a bad friendship”.

We call this all or nothing thinking, or black and white thinking because you tend to see only one extreme or the other. With this thinking, you are right or wrong, you are good or bad – there are no in between, no shades of grey, and no middle ground.

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| **Can you think of a situation where you used this thinking style?** | **What were the thoughts that went through your mind?** | **What feelings did you experience consequent to your thinking?** |
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1.  ‘**Shoulding’ and ‘Musting’**

It is quite common in everyday language to hear people use “I should”, and “I must” statements. It is not necessarily unhelpful to think, “I should get my work in on time”, it only becomes unhelpful when you use “should” and “must” statements to put unreasonable demands or pressure on yourself.

We might say “I should always get things right”, or “I must never get upset with my friend”, or “I should always get my homework right”, How do you think someone would feel after asking these kinds of statements over and over again? Chances are, they’ll feel guilty or disappointed in themselves.

We may also uses these types of statements when we are talking about other people “She should know better than that”. “People should always keep their promises”, “people shouldn’t get angry at others”. You might have guessed that these kinds of statements leave us feeling frustrated or angry and disappointed in others.

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| **Can you think of a situation where you used this thinking style?** | **What were the thoughts that went through your mind?** | **What feelings did you experience consequent to your thinking?** |
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1. **Overgeneralisation** *(to take one instance in the past or present, and to impose on all current or future situations)*

Perhaps you’ve said to yourself in the past “This is just so typical” telling yourself that this is “how things always are”, “Everyone’s like that”, or “things never turn out well for me”, when in fact, there are only a few examples to go by. Making conclusions on very little evidence can leave us thinking that things are really uncontrollable, inevitable and out of our hands. A sense of hopelessness often accompanies such overgeneralisations.

These unhelpful thinking styles often include words like “all”, “never”, “always “and “every”, when in most cases, the “always” and “never” are not as solid as we might think they are. How do you think people would feel if they used this thinking style? They may feel frustrated, discouraged, depressed, or annoyed, amongst other things.

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| **Can you think of a situation where you used this thinking style?** | **What were the thoughts that went through your mind?** | **What feelings did you experience consequent to your thinking?** |
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1. **Labelling.**

You can probably think of times when you’ve bumped something off the table, or dropped a glass whilst washing the dishes and perhaps thought to yourself, “I’m such an idiot!” Or perhaps a friend doesn’t call you to say they can’t make it to your party and you think, “They are so inconsiderate”. It’s a little like overgeneralising about people. When we make global statements about ourselves or other people, which are based on behaviour in specific situations, then we are labelling. The problem is, that by defining a person by one specific behaviour – and- usually one that we consider negative, we ignore the other positive characteristics and actions. When you step back from a situation, and take a closer look, you might realise that breaking a glass doesn’t mean that you’re an “idiot”. Similarly, your friend may have acted kind and considerate at other times, but something may have prevented them from calling.

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| **Can you think of a situation where you used this thinking style?** | **What were the thoughts that went through your mind?** | **What feelings did you experience consequent to your thinking?** |
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1. **Emotional Reasoning**

This is a style of unhelpful thinking where you base your view of situations, yourself and others on the way you are feeling. Have you ever felt anxious about something and thought to yourself “I know this isn’t going to work out well” and everything turned out just fine? If you have, it’s likely that you were using emotional reasoning. In this case, we tend to take our emotions as being evidence for the truth. For example, you might be walking down the street and think “I feel anxious, I know something dangerous is going to happen”, or “I feel so depressed, this must be the worst place to work in”. It’s like we are saying to ourselves “I feel, therefore it is” – rather than looking at what real evidence there may be. There might be no other evidence to suggest that something dangerous might happen, or that it is a worst place to work in. the only real evidence you have is how you feel.

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| **Can you think of a situation where you used this thinking style?** | **What were the thoughts that went through your mind?** | **What feelings did you experience consequent to your thinking?** |
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1. **Magnification and Minimisation**

This is a binocular effect on thinking. Often it means that you enlarge the positive attributes of other people and shrink your own attributes, just like looking at the world through either end of the same pair of binoculars. Think of the times in your own life where you might have said or heard others say, “Oh that doesn’t count, I was just lucky”, or “They don’t really mean it, they were just being polite”. In this way you might water down positive experiences, and even transform them into negative ones. It’s as though you’re being so humble you’re putting yourself down.

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| **Can you think of a situation where you used this thinking style?** | **What were the thoughts that went through your mind?** | **What feelings did you experience consequent to your thinking?** |
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**DETECTIVE WORK AND DISPUTATION.**

**MOVING ONTO D: CHALLENGING OUR UNHELPFUL THOUGHTS**

Previously, we established that it is our thoughts that influence our feelings, emotions and behaviours – the thoughts and feelings connection. We also discussed and identified some unhelpful thinking patterns and styles that we frequently use. Often, a depressed person will think negative thoughts that are characterised by these unhelpful thinking patterns, which lead them to feel depressed, miserable and distressed. This, in turn, maintains and perpetuates the depression.

The key to changing the way we feel is found in challenging and changing unhelpful thoughts and beliefs. This begins with you taking a good hard look at them. Imaging that you are a detective or lawyer and your unhelpful thoughts and beliefs are investigated or on trial.

To assess whether or not your thoughts and beliefs are valid, you need to gather and examine evidence. As such, we liken this process to that of being a detective. Therefore, “D” stands for “Detective Work” where you look for evidence that does or does not support your thoughts and beliefs. Like all good detectives, we need to find out the facts, and gather the evidence. Here are some helpful questions:

* **What is the evidence (or proof) that my thoughts/beliefs are true?**
* **Is there any evidence that disproves my thoughts/beliefs?**
* **How do you know that my thoughts/beliefs are true?**
* **Are there facts that I’m ignoring or I’ve overlooked?**
* **What other explanations could there possibly be?**
* **How realistic are my thoughts, beliefs and expectations?**

D also stands for **“Disputation.”** Remember, you are also like a lawyer, asking questions that challenge thoughts, beliefs and expectations, ultimately testing and challenging whether or not they are true, and whether or not they help or hinder you. Here are some helpful questions to ask yourself:

* **What other ways are there or viewing the situation?**
* **How might someone else view the situation?**
* **If I were not depressed, how might I view the situation differently?**
* **Realistically, what is the likelihood of that happening?**
* **Is it helpful for me to think this way?**

**Finally….F for Following Through**

Often, many people say they can understand the new helpful thought or belief in their minds, but find it difficult to “feel” it or believe it. They understand that the new belief is balanced and helpful, but at the same time are not all that convinced. This is probably because the balanced thought or belief may have been ‘newly’ activated into the knowledge system, but has yet to be integrated into the person’s belief system.

This will take time and a bit of practice because you have probably established a habit of thinking in an unhelpful way, especially when you are depressed. Now is the time to uproot the old habits and establish a new pattern of balanced and helpful thinking. This process requires that you re-train yourself to think in a helpful way and continue to practice it until it becomes an unconscious skill. It’s all about repetition, repetition, repetition. One day, it will feel right and you might not even realise it. Remember how we learned to tie our shoelaces? We keep practicing until we are not even conscious of the way we bring the laces together and how we tie the bow. Learning to think in helpful ways goes through the same process.

**Thought Cards**

You might want to write out your healthy beliefs on small cards and carry them in your pockets or handbags so that you can refer to them regularly and in situations where you may become upset or distressed. Remember it takes a little time for a new habit to be established. Be persistent in practicing your new helpful beliefs so that they will be integrated into your belief system. Use the Though Diary whenever you feel upset or distressed, and work through the process of identifying, challenging, and changing your unhelpful beliefs. When you become familiar with this process, you can become better at managing your moods.

**Turning Your Thoughts Into Actions**

Another important way of integrating the helpful and balanced thoughts into your belief system is to **ACT ON THEM!** This means applying the balanced thoughts to your life and translating them into action. Ask yourself **“How can I change what I do to reinforce my balanced thoughts?”**

Following through is especially important if you often avoid doing certain things or avoid certain situations. Avoidance of actions or situations can maintain and perpetuate depression. Remember our discussion about behavioural activation? If you have been depressed, and have avoided social activities, you probably would miss out on experiencing pleasant feelings, and this in turn, perpetuates your depressed mood. So don’t avoid potentially pleasurable activities, go ahead and do them!



**CORE BELIEFS**

By now you are probably becoming used to the process of challenging your thinking in a range of situations. You know how to identify the thoughts that are causing you distress and how to challenge them and replace them with more balanced thoughts. However, you might notice that there are times when it is harder to believe the new balanced thought and the old unhelpful thoughts seem to be very powerful. You might notice that this happens in certain kinds of situations.

A possible explanation for this ‘difficulty in letting go’ of an unhelpful thought is that there may be a strong core belief at the root of that unhelpful thought. **Core beliefs** are the very essence of how we see ourselves, other people, the world, and the future. Sometimes, these core beliefs become ‘activated’ in certain situations. Here’s an example.

*Erica is able to challenge her thinking in most situations. However, she has noticed that she has trouble challenging her thinking when it comes to situations involving her flat mates and the people she volunteers with at the hospital. She is troubled by feelings of depression and despair, and even working through her thought diary she has a tendency to believe the negative statements and continue to feel bad. In these situations, she has recognised that her thinking is often about being unlikeable. In fact, when she really looks hard at her thinking, she can see that often the underlying self-statement is “I’m unlovable”.*

Core beliefs, such as the one form the above example, develop over time, usually from childhood and through the experience of significant life events or particular life circumstances. Core beliefs are strongly – held, rigid, and inflexible beliefs that are maintained by the tendency to focus on information that supports the belief and ignoring evidence that contradicts it. For example, Erica focuses on any feedback from her flatmates that isn’t positive and then uses this to confirm that she is unlikeable. Even neutral statements from her flatmates and friends are often interpreted as negative. Over the years, this narrow focus gives strength to the belief and Erica no longer thinks to question it. It is totally and absolutely accepted. It is not surprising then, that these types of beliefs are the hardest the shake.

**IDENTIFYING THEMES FROM THOUGHT DIARIES.**

So, how can you start identifying your core beliefs? The first step is to look over your Thought Diaries to see if your ‘hot’ thoughts have any common themes. You might notice that there are certain patterns to your thoughts – similar themes that occur in the B columns. Look closely at these to identify the patterns. Yu may become aware of one or two common themes found in the things you say about yourself, others, and the world. In the columns below, write down the themes you might have found from your ‘hot’ thoughts.

**IDENTIFYING A CORE BELIEF.**

The process of identifying a core belief is not a great deal different from what you have already been doing in your thought diaries. Essentially, the idea is to extend the hot thought further to reveal the bottom line or root of what you might be thinking. This is illustrated using the following example:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| I am……. | Others are……… | The world is …….. | The future is …… |
| E.g. “I am inadequate.” | E.g.: “People always reject me.” | E.g.: “The world is a dangerous place.” | E.g.: “The future is hopeless” |

**CHALLENGING YOUR CORE BELIEFS.**

To evaluate and challenge your core beliefs, ask yourself “What experiences do I have that show that this belief is not completely true all the time?” Use the space below to list as many experiences and be as specific, as possible. Remember to write down everything even when you’re not sure if they are relevant.

When you have considered all the experiences you have written down, develop an alternative balanced core belief. Remember that these experiences show that your unhelpful core belief is not completely true all the time. What would be an appropriate balanced and unhelpful core belief? Write this down.

In the example of Erica, some of the experiences that go against her core belief (“I am unlovable”)might be:

1. When I was in school, I had 4 really good friends. We hung out together every day. Unfortunately, we didn’t keep in contact after we left school, but I did have friends who liked me.
2. I had a neighbour who became quite a good friend. She would tell me a lot about herself. She’s married and moved over east now, but we occasionally keep in touch.
3. At the hospital where I volunteer, there’s someone I sometimes have coffee with.

Her balanced core belief might be: “Not everyone will like me all the time, but I am likeable to some people.

**CORE BELIEF TO BE CHALLENGED:**

**Experiences that show that this belief is not COMPLETELTY true ALL the time:**

1. **\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**
2. **\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**
3. **\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**
4. **\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**
5. **\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**
6. **\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**
7. **\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**
8. **\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**
9. **\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**
10. **\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**BALANCED CORE BELIEF.**



**BEHAVIOURAL EXPERIMENTS**

You could also try doing a behavioural experiment to challenge those hard to budge unhelpful core beliefs. The purpose of doing an experiment is to find out how true your core beliefs are. Here’s how you could conduct an experiment.

1. Write down the core belief you want to test
2. Think of a few tasks you could do to test your core belief
3. Write down what you would expect would happen if your core belief were true.
4. Carry out tasks
5. Record what actually happened when you carried out the tasks
6. Compare the actual results with your prediction and write down what you might have learned from the experiment. Then, write down a new balanced belief that fits with your conclusion.

**FOLLOWING THROUGH**

You might find it useful to write your balanced core beliefs onto cards that you can carry around with you as a reminder when this type of thinking is triggered. Remember, unhelpful core beliefs are approached just the same as any other type of unhelpful thinking – they just take some extra work on your part. Once you’ve gathered evidence against your unhelpful core beliefs, conducted a behavioural experiment to test them, and have developed balanced core beliefs, follow through on them.

Balanced core beliefs require careful nurturing and ‘tender loving care’. Affirm yourself by using positive self-statements, remind yourself of all the evidence against the unhelpful core belief. Also, act against your unhelpful core belief. If you have previously avoided doing certain things because of your unhelpful core belief, now is the time to act against it, and stop avoiding those things. Ask yourself, “If I really believed my balanced belief, what are the things I would do?” then, go out and do them. The more you do these things, the more you will come to believe your balanced beliefs. Over time, these new core beliefs will be integrated into your belief system.

**MAINTAINING YOUR GAINS AND STAYING WELL**

Congratulations on making it to the end of this booklet. The most important thing for you now is to keep practising some of the strategies you have learnt. This means continuing to apply all of the useful skills and insights about yourself you might have gained. If you continue practising the concepts and skills you have learned, they will become like habits that have been integrated into your lifestyle.

There are some important things that you will need to do in order to make the most of what you have learned to stay well and gain that extra improvement. The easiest way to summarise this is by looking at the ‘Healthy Me’ worksheet on the next page. It shows the main areas of your life that you should give some attention to in order for you to continue maintaining your gains.

You will notice that on the ‘Healthy Me’ Worksheet, each heading has spaces left blank for you to write in what you will need to attend to. For example, under Self-Care you might write: “I will buy fruit and vegetables every week in order to stop me eating junk food.” You may want to update this worksheet on a regular basis when you need to extend your goals or modify them. We really encourage you to do this, as it will enable you to keep track of things.

There are some important things to remember about monitoring and managing yourself.

1. **Expect Slip-Ups and Down Days.**

Slip-ups in progress can happen at any time and are to be expected. Try not to fall into the trap of believing that you are ‘back to square one’ as this will only make you feel worse. Use your skills of challenging your thinking to help when this situation occurs. It might be useful to remind yourself that most people have ‘down days’ or days where life’s hassles are harder to deal with – it’s part of being human. Also, you can use setbacks as a way of learning something new about yourself to help avoid similar problems in the future.

1. **Social Support**

It is wise to find someone with whom you can sit down and have a good talk. This doesn’t mean a therapy session where you pour out your heart but rather just a chance to talk through what’s going on in your life, what your goals are, and generally just to talk with someone you trust.

Often, problems seem bigger than they really are when a person tries to deal with them on their own. Hearing yourself talk through something can help to put it into perspective. Socialising is also fun and will help you to keep on track with scheduling of pleasant events.

Remember – progress may be a bumpy road at times but it will be a rewarding journey on the whole.

**RELAXATION**

**GOALS**

**PLEASANT ACTIVITIES**

**BALANCED THOUGHTS**

**SOCIAL ACTIVITIES**



**EXERCISE**

**SELF-CARE**

**SOCIAL SUPPORT**