

# what is depression?

Many people experiencing the symptoms of depression might begin to wonder if there is something really 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.

Depression can affect any kind of person at any stage of their life. You may be an introvert or an extrovert, socially active or shy, youthful or elderly, male or female, wealthy or poor. Whatever your distinction, you can become depressed. That means that any person you know is fair game. So remember, you are not alone.

**Depression** is a word used in everyday language to describe a number of feelings, including sadness, frustration, disappointment and sometimes lethargy. However, in clinical practice, the term "Depression" or "Major Depression" differs from these everyday 'down' periods in three main ways:



- Major Depression is more intense
- Major Depression lasts longer (two weeks or more)
- Major Depression significantly interferes with effective day-to-day functioning

In this handout, the word **depression** is referring to Major Depression or a clinical depression.

## Depression as a Syndrome

A syndrome is a collection of events, behaviours, or feelings that often go together. The depression syndrome is a collection of feelings and behaviours that have been found to characterise depressed people as a group. You may find that you experience all or some of these feelings and behaviours. There are many individual differences to the number of symptoms and the extent to which different symptoms are experienced. These symptoms are described in this next section.

## 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 not 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. This is called 'diurnal variation,' which often accompanies a more severe type of depression.



In addition to sadness, another mood common to depression is anxiety.

## Thinking

Individuals who are depressed think in certain ways, and this thinking is an essential feature of depression. It is as much a key symptom of depression as mood or physical symptoms. Those who are depressed tend to see themselves in a negative light. They dwell on how bad they feel, how the world is full of difficulties, how hopeless the future seems and how things might never get better. People who are depressed often have a sense of guilt, blaming themselves for everything, including the fact they think negatively. Often their self-esteem and self-confidence become very low.

## Physical

Some people experience physical symptoms of depression.

- Sleep patterns could change. Some people have difficulty falling asleep, or have interrupted sleep, others sleep more and have difficulty staying awake
- Appetite may decline and weight loss occurs, while others eat more than usual and thus gain weight
- Sexual interest may decline
- Energy levels may fall, as does motivation to carry out everyday activities. Depressed individuals may stop doing the things they used to enjoy because they feel unmotivated or lethargic

## Interacting 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 opportunities for doing so.

# what causes depression?

It is important to understand that depression is not caused by one thing, but probably by a combination of factors interacting with one another. These factors can be grouped into two broad categories – *biology* and *psychology*. Many biological and psychological factors interact in depression, although precisely which specific factors interact may differ from person to person.

## Biological Factors

The biological factors that might have some effect on depression include: genes, hormones, and brain chemicals.

### *Genetic Factors*

Depression often runs in families, which suggests that individuals may inherit genes that make them vulnerable to developing depression. However, one may inherit an increased vulnerability to the illness, but not necessarily the illness itself. Although many people may inherit the vulnerability, a great many of them may never suffer a depressive illness.

### *Hormones*

Research has found that there are some hormonal changes that occur in depression. The brain goes through some changes before and during a depressive episode, and certain parts of the brain are affected. This might result in an over- or under-production of some hormones, which may account for some of the symptoms of depression. Medication treatment can be effective in treating these conditions.

### *Brain Chemicals (Neurotransmitters)*



Nerve cells in the brain communicate to each other by specific chemical substances called neurotransmitters. It is believed that during depression, there is reduced activity of one or more of these neurotransmitter systems, and this disturbs certain areas of the brain that regulate functions such as sleep, appetite, sexual drive, and perhaps mood. The reduced level of neurotransmitters results in reduced communication between the nerve cells and accounts for the typical symptoms of depression. Many antidepressant drugs increase the neurotransmitters in the brain.

## Psychological Factors

### *Thinking*

Many thinking patterns are associated with depression. These thinking patterns include:

- overstressing the negative
- taking the responsibility for bad events but not for good events
- having inflexible rules about how one should behave
- thinking that you know what others are thinking and that they are thinking badly of you

### *Loss*

Sometimes people experience events where loss occurs, and this can bring on depression. The experience of loss may include the loss of a loved one through bereavement or separation, loss of a job, loss of a friendship, loss of a promotion, loss of face, loss of support, etc.



### *Sense of Failure*

Some people may stake their happiness on achieving particular goals, such as getting 'As' on their exams, getting a particular job, earning a certain amount of profit from a business venture, or finding a life partner. If for some reason they are not able to achieve those goals, they might believe that they have failed somehow, and it is this sense of failure that can sometimes bring on, or increase, depression.

### *Stress*

An accumulation of stressful life events may also bring on depression. Stressful events include situations such as unemployment, financial worries, serious difficulties with spouses, parents or children, physical illness, and major changes in life circumstances.

## Conclusion

While we cannot do much about the genes we have inherited, there are a number of things we can do to overcome depression, or to prevent us from becoming depressed. Your doctor may have suggested medication, especially in a severe depression. While taking medication can be of assistance in overcoming depression, psychological treatments are also available. Ask your doctor or mental health practitioner for more details.

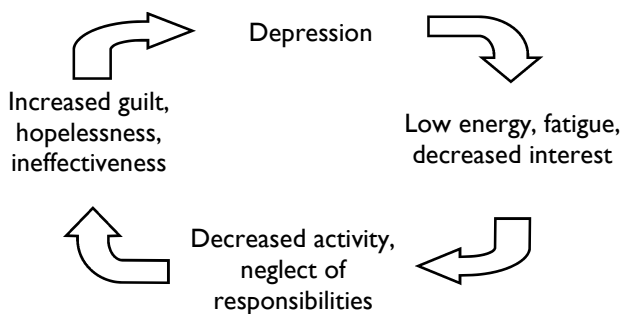
# the vicious cycle of depression

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 decision-making to others. Have you noticed these changes in yourself when you are depressed?

You may find that you have become less and less active, don't go out much anymore, avoid hanging out with friends, and stopped engaging in your favourite activity. When this happens, you have become locked in the vicious cycle of depression, which might look like this:

## The Vicious Cycle of Depression



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.

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

## Reversing the Vicious Cycle of Depression

One of the ways of breaking the vicious cycle of is through the use of medication. Medication such as antidepressants can help change your energy level and improve sleep. Another way is to simply increase your activity level, especially in pleasurable activities 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.

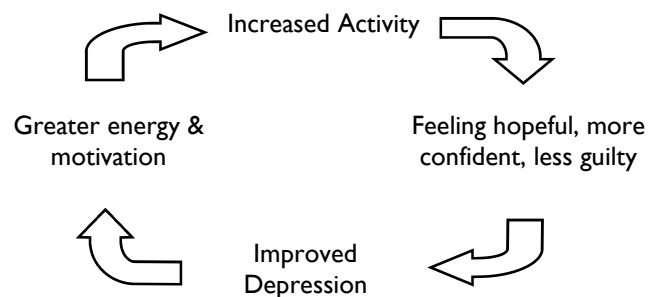
Becoming more active has a number of advantages:

- Activity helps you to feel better
- Activity helps you to feel less tired
- Activity can help you think more clearly



When the depression cycle is broken, it will look like this:

## Reversing The Vicious Cycle of Depression



Here's a list of possible fun things to do. You can add your own to this list.

1. Soaking in the bathtub
2. Collecting things (coins, shells, etc.)
3. Going for a day trip
4. Going to see a comedy at the movies
5. Going to the beach
6. Playing squash/tennis/badminton
7. Having a barbecue at the park
8. Going for a walk, jog, or hike
9. Listening to uplifting music
10. Gardening

Try some of them out and evaluate how you feel before and after the activity. Chances are, you'll find that you'll feel a little better. The important thing is to persist – keeping your activity levels up is the first step to breaking out of that vicious cycle!

The second step is to look at how *thinking patterns* contribute to the vicious cycle of depression. The "Improving how you feel" information sheet starts to look more closely at this.

# grief and bereavement

## Uncomplicated Grief

Grief and loss are part of life and is experienced by most of us at some point in life. People deal with grief in many different ways, and not necessarily going through a predictable group of 'stages,' although some do.

How people grieve can depend on the circumstances of the loss (e.g., sudden death, long illness, death of a young person) as well as past experiences of loss. There is no time limit on grief - some people get back to their usual routine fairly quickly, others take longer. Some people prefer time alone to grieve, others crave the support and company of others.

Below are just some of the range of experiences which can be part of uncomplicated grief:

- Symptoms of depression or anxiety, such as poor sleep, lowered appetite, low mood, feeling of anxiety - for some people the anxiety will be more obvious, for others the depression.
- A sense of the loss not quite being 'real' at first, or refusal to believe it has occurred
- Feeling disconnected from others, sense of numbness
- Guilt about not initially feeling pain about the loss
- Worries about not grieving 'normally' or 'correctly'
- Mood swings and tearfulness
- Guilt about interactions with the person who has died (e.g. *I should have spent more time with her or I wish we didn't have that argument*)
- Waves of sadness or anger which can be overwhelming and sometimes suddenly triggered by reminders
- Seeking reminders of the person who has died, e.g. being in their home or with their belongings, or perhaps at times even feeling you see or hear the deceased person
- Guilt about gradually getting back to 'normal' life and at times not 'remembering' to feel sad

## Coping with Uncomplicated Grief

Most people going through the pain described above will eventually adjust to the loss and return to normal life, although of course carrying some sadness about the loss. Most people do not require medication or counselling to manage uncomplicated grief, and should simply be



supported to go through their individual grief process. It is important to maintain a healthy diet and some physical activity during this time. Some people may find it helpful to engage in counselling or to attend groups with others who have suffered a recent loss.

## Complicated Grief

Complicated grief is a general term for describing when people adjust poorly to a loss. **This is very difficult to define, as there is no standard which limits what is normal or healthy grief.**



Below are some warning signs which *may* suggest that a person is not coping well with grief and may be at a greater risk of the grieving process taking longer to resolve or being more difficult:

- Pushing away painful feelings or avoiding the grieving process entirely
- Excessive avoidance of talking about or reminders of the person who has died
- Refusal to attend the funeral
- Using distracting tasks to avoid experiencing grief, including tasks associated with planning the funeral
- Abuse of alcohol or other drugs (including prescription)
- Increased physical complaints or illness
- Intense mood swings or isolation which do not resolve within 1-2 months of the loss
- Ongoing neglect of self-care and responsibilities

Again, it is important to emphasise that there are no 'rules for grieving' and that many of the items above may occur as part of uncomplicated grief. However, people who are coping very poorly one month after a loss may continue to cope poorly 1-2 years later, so if these warning signs are present then it is often worthwhile seeking some help early on, to increase the chances of adjusting in the long term.

## Coping with Complicated Grief

Psychological therapy can support people to safely explore feelings of grief and connect with painful feelings and memories, paving the way for resolution. Therapy may also support people to use strategies such as relaxation, engaging in positive activities, and challenging negative thoughts, in order to combat the associated symptoms of anxiety and depression.

Antidepressant medication may also be used to alleviate depression associated with grief, and this can be useful in conjunction with psychological strategies. Tranquilizing medications can interfere with the natural grieving process.

Although early help is recommended, health professionals are able to support people to work through complicated grief even years after the loss.



# psychotherapy for depression



Depression can be treated with medical treatments such as antidepressant medication or electroconvulsive therapy, and psychotherapy. Please see your medical doctor or psychiatrist for more information about medical treatments as this will not be discussed in this handout.

We're now going to talk briefly about two psychological therapies that have been proven to be effective most of the time. You might have come across words such as "best practice" "evidence-based practice," "evidence-based treatment" or "evidence-supported therapy." These words refer to a particular type of treatment or therapy that has been evaluated and has proven to be effective. For the treatment of depression, the evidence-supported therapies include cognitive therapy and behaviour therapy.

## Cognitive Therapy

The aim of cognitive therapy is to help individuals realise that they can influence their mood by identifying and changing their thoughts and beliefs. When people are depressed, they often think very negative thoughts about themselves, their lives, and their future. This further worsens their mood. Cognitive therapy focuses on discovering and challenging unhelpful assumptions and beliefs, and developing helpful and balanced thoughts. Cognitive therapy is also structured, time-limited, and focused on the 'here-and-now.' This form of treatment for depression has been proven to be effective when individuals are able to acquire the skills that are being taught in therapy.



## Behaviour Therapy

Depressed people tend to feel lethargic and unmotivated. They often stay at home and avoid going out and interacting with people. As such, they may miss out on opportunities that help lift their mood. Behaviour therapy aims to identify and change aspects of behaviour that may perpetuate or worsen the depression. Some behavioural strategies include: goal setting, activity scheduling, social skills training, and structured problem solving.



## In Summary

These two therapies have been shown to be effective most of the time. Often, a combination of these therapies are offered for people who experience depression. This information package focuses on providing information on the cognitive and behavioural aspects of depression, which includes suggested strategies for how you could better manage your mood.

# what are 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 in situations involving her flatmates and friends. 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 from 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 yet again 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 just totally and absolutely accepted. It is not surprising, then, that these types of beliefs are the hardest to 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. You may become aware of one or two common themes found in the things you say about yourself, others, and the world.

## 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. Use questions such as: "If that's true, what does that mean?" "What's bad about that?" "What does that say about me?"

This process is like sifting through the layers of self-talk to get at what is at the bottom layer. Now, you are ready to challenge your core beliefs. Even though these beliefs are strongly held, it is important that they are challenged, just like any unhelpful thoughts. Once you have fully identified what you are telling yourself, you can begin to see if your core beliefs hold up against all that you have experienced. This process of challenging your core beliefs may not be an easy one. If you find the process too difficult or distressing, do consider seeing a mental health professional and discussing this with them.

## 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?" 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 helpful core belief? Write this down.

## 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 the 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. Once you've 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. 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.

# thinking & feeling

People often believe that the feelings and emotions they experience are determined by external events, situations, and the behaviour of others. For example, we may hear ourselves say, "My boss made me so nervous," "My partner made me so angry," "This trip down south made me feel so relaxed," or "I'm depressed because I didn't get the job I wanted." What is the assumption underlying these statements? That someone or something other than ourselves was directly determining the feelings we experienced.

We come to these conclusions automatically without asking ourselves if this assumption is true. However, if we stop to analyse the process that links an external situation to our emotional responses, we will find that there is a step in between.

## How Our Thoughts Influence Our Feelings

What really makes us feel and respond the way we do, is often not the situation or the words and actions of another person, but how we perceive that 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 significantly influences our emotions and actions.

Here's an example. Suppose you went to a party and your host 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. How would you feel if you thought, "Boy, this guy is so rude! He won't even look at me while I'm talking with him! How nasty!" What if you thought, "Mike must think that I'm really unattractive and uninteresting. I must be a really boring person. Nobody wants to talk to me!" What about if you were to think, "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.

### Words That Describe Feelings

Tense	Enraged	Frightened	Cheerful
Annoyed	Happy	Panicky	Euphoric
Unhappy	Exhilarated	Frustrated	Mad
Exuberant	Keyed-up	Scared	Uneasy
Anxious	Irritated	Flat	Sad
Depressed	Joyful	Tired	Discouraged
Angry	Excited	Nervous	Jealous

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 drive a car, we are often not aware of our thinking. Some of our thinking is so habitual that it is automatic, and just like driving, 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 well-being.

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 *feel* anxious. More commonly, you might hear someone saying something like "I *feel* that my partner doesn't appreciate the gift I bought for him," when they are actually *thinking* "My partner doesn't appreciate the gift I bought for him," and *feel* hurt.

Being aware of your feelings and your thoughts is the first step towards feeling better. If thinking influences feelings, then it makes sense that if you want to change the way you feel, you need to change the way you think. Look out for the information flyer entitled "Changing the Way You Think" for more details on how to do this.

# analysing your thinking

We've talked about the way our thoughts affect how we feel. If we are feeling happy and excited, chances are, we have been thinking positive thoughts and about positive things. On the other hand, if we are feeling anxious, depressed, and upset, it is likely that we have been thinking negative thoughts. We call these unhelpful thoughts (simply because they lead to unpleasant feelings or unhelpful actions!). All of us, at times, think things that make us feel sad or anxious, and that is a normal part of life. However, if you often feel distressed or anxious, you might need to examine your thinking to improve how you feel.

If unhelpful thoughts lead to distressing emotions, then it might be quite reasonable to say that the most effective thing to do is to change those unhelpful thoughts to helpful ones!



So, how can you do that? To start influencing the way you feel, you need to learn to be aware of, and "capture," those unhelpful thoughts and beliefs, with the ultimate aim of changing them. To do that, let's start with doing an ABC analysis.

The ABC analysis begins with identifying the '**A**' which stands for '**Activating Event**.' Simply write down an event or a situation in which you experienced a strong negative emotion, such as, depression. Record the situation the same way a video camera might record it – just the facts. This means that you do not include your thoughts about why the situation occurred, who was responsible, and how you felt about it. Just describe the event simple, without any 'frills.'

The next step is to identify the '**C**' which stands for '**Consequences**,' and this includes both your feelings and your actions/behaviour. Write down the words that best describe your feelings. When you have written down these words, rate the intensity of the emotion from 0 to 100. The higher the number, the more intense the emotion. Have a look at all those feelings and then choose the feeling that best represents the emotion you actually felt at the time and underline it. You might also want to note any actions that you carried out, for example, drawing all the curtains, putting on the answering machine, and going to bed.

Now, bearing in mind the situation and the feelings you experienced, identify the '**B**,' which represents your '**Beliefs**' or thoughts, expectations, perceptions, and attitudes. Ask yourself "What was I thinking of when the event occurred?" "What was going through my mind at the time?" Write down all of these thoughts in a list. When you have completed this task, read through each statement and then underline the thought that is most associated with the primary emotion you felt during the '**A**'. We'll now call it your hot thought. Now rate how much you believe this thought on a scale from 0 to 100.

Let's look at an example. Imagine walking into a party and feeling anxious. To do an ABC analysis, you might ask yourself, "How am I making myself anxious? What am I thinking?" You might identify a thought such as, "I don't want to be here." If you only had this thought, you'd probably not experience a strong emotion but only feel mildly anxious. If you do experience a strong emotional response to this thought, it probably indicates that there are other thoughts underlying this thought. Therefore, the thought, "I don't want to be here" is only an initial thought, and you would need to discover what other unhelpful thoughts were present to invoke such a strong emotional response.

## How to Uncover Your Unhelpful Thoughts

By asking yourself a number of questions, you can uncover any other unhelpful thoughts underlying an initial thought. Let's use the example of being at the party to identify the unhelpful thoughts underlying the initial thought "I don't want to be here." The following is a description of the thoughts that might be going through your head as you uncover other unhelpful thoughts. The questions in bold are your unhelpful thought discovery questions.



"I don't want to be here".

**"I don't want to be here because...?"**

"...people will look at me and know that I am depressed"

**"...and that is bad because...?"**

"Well, they will think something is wrong with me"

**"...and what is bad about that..?"**

"....They will think I'm crazy!"

**"...and what does that say about me?"**

".....that I must be crazy."



Your task is to become an expert at identifying your unhelpful thoughts. Sometimes, one or two thoughts might not represent the other unhelpful ones you might have had. As such, to get to those other thoughts, you might need to ask some of the following questions, called Thought Discovery Questions:

"What is bad about that?"

"What is it that I see happening in this situation?"

"What am I concluding about myself or others in this situation?"

"... and that is bad because ..."

"... and what does this say about me ...?"

It is best to be as specific as you can, even if some of your unhelpful thoughts sound stupid or embarrassing when you think about them. Discovering your unhelpful thoughts, no matter how silly they sound, is important in learning how to better manage your mood.

After you have done this, the next step is to do some 'Detective Work' and 'Disputation.' At this point, it is important that you understand how to identify your feelings and thoughts surrounding a particular situation, especially one in which you experienced unhelpful, negative emotions. When a person experiences unhelpful emotions, they might get a stronger physical reaction in their body, such as a tightness in the chest when anxious, an increase in blood pressure when angry, or a sense of heaviness when depressed. Emotions such as depression, guilt, fear, rage, and anxiety might also lead to avoidance and unhelpful behaviours towards yourself and others, get in the way of effective problem solving, and contribute to long term difficulties such as hypertension, heart disease, interpersonal problems, and psychological problems. Doing the ABC analysis is taking the first step toward learning to better manage your mood and helping yourself feel better.



# changing your thinking

In the handout 'Thinking & Feeling,' 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 our unhelpful thoughts and beliefs. This begins with you taking a good hard look at them. Imagine that you are a detective and a lawyer, and your unhelpful thoughts and beliefs are to be 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. This is the fourth step (or **D**) that follows on from the ABC Analysis.

## Detective Work

“**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:

- Where is the evidence (or proof) that my thoughts/beliefs are true?
- Are there any evidence that disproves my thoughts/beliefs?
- How do I 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?



## Disputation

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

- What other ways are there of 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?

Detective work and disputation is about trying to be objective about our thoughts. It is about analysing them, assessing, and evaluating them to see if they are indeed valid and true, as opposed to accepting these thoughts and believing them without question.

## The End Result

We've spent some time examining the link between thinking and feelings, and discussed how to identify your unhelpful thoughts and thinking styles. We've also talked about looking for evidence that might prove or disprove your unhelpful beliefs as well as considering other alternative ways of viewing the situation. Now let's look at how you can change the way you are thinking in order to improve how you are feeling.

By this time, you would have learned how to describe an **A**ctivating Event, identify your automatic and unhelpful **B**eliefs and thoughts (including the Hot Thought) that have contributed to your experiencing distressing emotions (**C**onsequences), and recognise a few unhelpful thinking styles you might have used. You would have also used the **D**etective Work and **D**isputation section to challenge your hot thought. Now, take a good look at the evidence you have listed and the answers to the other challenging questions. Is there enough evidence to believe that your hot thought is true all of the time? Are there other alternative explanations?

At this point, ask yourself, “How can I revise my hot thought to take into account all the evidence I have listed?” Then, write out an alternative explanation. This becomes your new, balanced thought. A balanced and helpful thought or belief is one that takes into consideration all the evidence, objective information, and alternative viewpoints. This is the fifth step of the ABC analysis – the **E**nd Result, where you replace your original, unhelpful thought with this new, balanced, and helpful belief.

After you have written down your new, balanced thought or belief, ask yourself, “How do I feel now?” Look at the most intense emotion you identified in section **C**, and re-rate how intense that emotion feels for you now. Often, you will find that it is not as extreme and distressing.

Finally, read through the Detective Work and Disputation section again, and re-rate how much you believe the hot thought now.

This final step of replacing your unhelpful (hot) thoughts with balanced thoughts is very important. Challenging your beliefs and evidence testing is the process of change, but the final step is where you **MAKE** the change. You'll probably find that this process becomes easier after some practice. So keep it up. Keep practising and remember that you can be your own expert at managing your moods!

# unhelpful thinking styles

When a person experiences an unhelpful emotion (eg, depression or anxiety), it is usually preceded 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. This information sheet describes a number of "unhelpful thinking styles". As you read through them, you might notice some thinking patterns and styles that you use consistently. Some of these styles might sound similar to one another. They are not meant to be distinct categories but to help you see if there is a kind of pattern to your thoughts.

## **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 is 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.

## **Catastrophising:**

Catastrophising 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 & 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 are no in-betweens or shades of gray.

## **Shoulding and Musting:**

Sometimes by saying "I should..." or "I must..." you can put unreasonable demands or pressure on yourself and others. Although these statements are not always unhelpful (eg "I should not get drunk and drive 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 bad is going to happen is that you feel like 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

# problem solving

Sometimes, it is not enough to just cope with the problems – they need to be solved. Most people engage in problem solving every day. It occurs automatically for many of the small decisions that need to be made on a daily basis. For example when making a decision about whether to get up now or sleep in for an extra 10 minutes, the possible choices and the relative risks and benefits of obeying the alarm clock or sleeping later come automatically to mind. Larger problems are addressed in a similar way. For example “I have tasks that need to be done by the end of the week. How am I going to get them all done on time?” After considering the possible



strategies, one is chosen and implemented. If it proves to be ineffective, a different strategy is tried. People who can define problems, consider options, make choices, and implement a plan have all the basic skills

required for effective problem solving. Sometimes following a step-by-step procedure for defining problems, generating solutions, and implementing solutions can make the process of problem solving seem less overwhelming.

The following are step-by-step procedures for helping people to solve problems.

## 1. Problem Identification and Definition

- State the problem as clearly as possible (e.g., I don't have enough money to pay the bills)
- Be specific about the behaviour, situation, timing, and circumstances that make it a problem (eg, I need to pay the phone and gas bills, and I don't have enough money to cover both this month)

## 2. Generate Possible Solutions

- List all the possible solutions, don't worry about the quality of the solutions at this stage
- Try to list at least 15 solutions, be creative and forget about the quality of the solution. If you allow yourself to be creative you may come up with some solutions that you would not otherwise have thought about

## 3. Evaluate alternatives

- The next step is to go through and eliminate less desirable or unreasonable solutions
- Order the remaining solutions in order of preference
- Evaluate the remaining solutions in terms of their advantages and disadvantages

## 4. Decide on a Solution

- Specify who will take action
- Specify how the solution will be implemented
- Specify when the solution will be implemented (e.g., tomorrow morning: phone the gas company and negotiate to pay the gas bill next month)



## 5. Implement the Solution

- Implement the solution as planned

## 6. Evaluate the Outcome

- Evaluate how effective the solution was
- Decide whether the existing plan needs to be revised, or whether a new plan is needed to better address the problem
- If you are not pleased with the outcome, return to step 2 to select a new solution or revise the existing solution, and repeat the remaining steps

Problem solving is something we do everyday. Some problems are small or are easily solved. Some problems are more complicated and can seem overwhelming. One way of tackling problems is to use a specific and systematic problem solving procedure. If you've tried to solve certain problems without much success, try these steps out and see if they help. Learning to solve problems effectively will help you to minimise the level of stress in your life and improve your overall sense of well-being. Try it out and see! Remember, you can always talk to your doctor or mental health practitioner and ask for help.

# staying healthy

Whatever form of treatment you have been receiving for your difficulties – medication or psychotherapy – it's important that you maintain whatever gains you have made. If you have been seeing a mental health practitioner, keep practising the strategies you might have learned in therapy. This means continuing to apply all the useful skills and insights about yourself you might have gained and they will soon be integrated into your lifestyle.

There are also some other things you can do in order to make the most of what you have learned to stay well or gain that extra improvement. Here are some suggestions:

## 1. Keep to a balanced routine & lifestyle

A chaotic lifestyle can be stressful in itself. Try to keep to a reasonably structured routine and a balanced lifestyle. This means making sure you maintain good eating, sleeping, and exercising habits, and engage in social activities that can be both fun and challenging.

## 2. Develop a good social support network

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 ventilate 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.

## 3. Develop a good professional support network

Professional help is an important resource. Find a doctor or mental health practitioner with whom you can have a good professional relationship based on mutual trust and respect. Talk to them about your needs and concerns. Learn as much as possible about your illness and take an active role in making decisions about treatment and after-care.

## 4. 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 – its 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.

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

Use the spaces below to jot down a few things you could do to remain healthy.

Thinking		
Social Activities	Healthy 	Pleasant Activities
Exercise		Relaxation
Professional Support		Social Support

# behavioural activation fun & achievement

The symptoms of depression such as tiredness, lethargy, loss of interest, loss of motivation, loss of pleasure, and indecisiveness can lead to inactivity, and this often keeps the depression going or even make it worse.

Also, because of the lack of motivation, a depressed person might begin to neglect everyday tasks and responsibilities at work or at home, and the list begins to pile up. As such, when a depressed person thinks about the things they have to do, they might feel overwhelmed by the pile of things they have put off doing. This might result in them feeling guilty or thinking that they are ineffective or even, a failure. This will also worsen the depression.



## Increasing Your Activity Level

One of the ways of overcoming depression is to increase your level of activity. There is a lot of evidence that shows that the more people do, and the more pleasant activities they get involved in, the better they feel. 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 achieving something – experiencing a sense of MASTERY. 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 your 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.

## Fun & Achievement

It makes good sense to do fun and pleasurable things to make yourself 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. An example of this is paying off money on your credit card, or doing the ironing. Doing these things can help you feel more in control of your life (e.g., paying off your debts) and give you satisfaction that

you have started doing something (e.g., catching up on household chores). 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. Some activities may combine the two. For example, making your bed may give you a sense of pleasure at having a neat, tidy bed, but it may also give you a sense of achievement at having done something to improve your home environment. This sense of achievement is just as important as getting pleasure out of something, and may indeed prompt you to do more.

## Start Simple

Even though there are 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 you can do. Think of it in terms of training for a sports event.

If you hadn't been doing any running for 6 months, would you try and run a marathon without doing any training? Of course not! You would go on a training programme that slowly builds up your fitness and endurance. Similarly, when you are depressed, it is unreasonable to expect yourself to be able to jump out of bed and clean the house before going out to meet a friend for a late lunch. If you set your goals too high, you might end up not doing them, become disappointed in yourself, and feel worse than ever. Instead, plan to do things that are achievable at your current level of functioning. Start with small steps and slowly build yourself up to the large tasks that seem unmanageable right now. For example, aim to get out of bed for 10 minutes, then slowly build up the amount of time you are out of bed for. Don't try to clean the whole kitchen – just aim to do the dishes. If this is too much, just stack all the dirty dishes in a pile. Aim to get one bench top clean, or just wash 5 plates. Any task can be broken down into smaller and smaller steps until you find something achievable.

Sometimes it is easier to aim to do a task for a set period of time rather than trying to achieve a set amount. Read a book for 5 minutes rather than reading a whole chapter. Say you will spend 10 minutes weeding the garden rather than aiming to weed a certain area. 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 that action is the first step, not motivation, and you'll soon find yourself feeling better!



# Fun Activities Catalogue

The following is a list of activities that might be fun and pleasurable for you. Feel free to add your own fun activities to the list.

1. Soaking in the bathtub
2. Planning my career
3. Collecting things (coins, shells, etc.)
4. Going for a holiday
5. Recycling old items
6. Relaxing
7. Going on a date
8. Going to a movie
9. Jogging, walking
10. Listening to music
11. Thinking I have done a full day's work
12. Recalling past parties
13. Buying household gadgets
14. Lying in the sun
15. Planning a career change
16. Laughing
17. Thinking about my past trips
18. Listening to others
19. Reading magazines or newspapers
20. Hobbies (stamp collecting, model building, etc.)
21. Spending an evening with good friends
22. Planning a day's activities
23. Meeting new people
24. Remembering beautiful scenery
25. Saving money
26. Card and board games
27. Going to the gym, doing aerobics
28. Eating
29. Thinking how it will be when I finish school
30. Getting out of debt/paying debts
31. Practising karate, judo, yoga
32. Thinking about retirement
33. Repairing things around the house
34. Working on my car (bicycle)
35. Remembering the words and deeds of loving people
36. Wearing sexy clothes
37. Having quiet evenings
38. Taking care of my plants
39. Buying, selling stocks and shares
40. Going swimming
41. Doodling
42. Exercising
43. Collecting old things
44. Going to a party
45. Thinking about buying things
46. Playing golf
47. Playing soccer
48. Flying kites
49. Having discussions with friends
50. Having family get-togethers
51. Riding a motorbike
52. Sex
53. Playing squash
54. Going camping
55. Singing around the house
56. Arranging flowers
57. Going to church, praying (practising religion)
58. Losing weight
59. Going to the beach
60. Thinking I'm an OK person
61. A day with nothing to do
62. Having class reunions
63. Going ice skating, roller skating/blading
64. Going sailing
65. Travelling abroad, interstate or within the state
66. Sketching, painting
67. Doing something spontaneously
68. Doing embroidery, cross stitching
69. Sleeping
70. Driving
71. Entertaining
72. Going to clubs (garden, sewing, etc.)
73. Thinking about getting married
74. Going birdwatching
75. Singing with groups
76. Flirting
77. Playing musical instruments
78. Doing arts and crafts
79. Making a gift for someone
80. Buying CDs, tapes, records
81. Watching boxing, wrestling
82. Planning parties
83. Cooking, baking
84. Going hiking, bush walking
85. Writing books (poems, articles)
86. Sewing
87. Buying clothes
88. Working
89. Going out to dinner
90. Discussing books
91. Sightseeing
92. Gardening
93. Going to the beauty salon
94. Early morning coffee and newspaper
95. Playing tennis
96. Kissing
97. Watching my children (play)
98. Going to plays and concerts
99. Daydreaming
100. Planning to go to school
101. Thinking about sex
102. Going for a drive
103. Listening to a stereo
104. Refurbishing furniture
105. Watching TV, videos
106. Making lists of tasks
107. Going bike riding
108. Walks on the riverfront/foreshore
109. Buying gifts
110. Travelling to national parks
111. Completing a task
112. Thinking about my achievements
113. Going to a footy game (or rugby, soccer,

- basketball, etc.)
- 114. Eating gooey, fattening foods
- 115. Exchanging emails, chatting on the internet
- 116. Photography
- 117. Going fishing
- 118. Thinking about pleasant events
- 119. Staying on a diet
- 120. Star gazing
- 121. Flying a plane
- 122. Reading fiction
- 123. Acting
- 124. Being alone
- 125. Writing diary/journal entries or letters
- 126. Cleaning
- 127. Reading non-fiction
- 128. Taking children places
- 129. Dancing
- 130. Going on a picnic
- 131. Thinking "I did that pretty well" after doing something
- 132. Meditating
- 133. Playing volleyball
- 134. Having lunch with a friend
- 135. Going to the hills
- 136. Thinking about having a family
- 137. Thoughts about happy moments in my childhood
- 138. Splurging
- 139. Playing cards
- 140. Solving riddles mentally
- 141. Having a political discussion
- 142. Playing cricket
- 143. Seeing and/or showing photos or slides
- 144. Knitting/crocheting/quilting
- 145. Doing crossword puzzles
- 146. Shooting pool/Playing billiards
- 147. Dressing up and looking nice
- 148. Reflecting on how I've improved
- 149. Buying things for myself
- 150. Talking on the phone
- 151. Going to museums, art galleries
- 152. Thinking religious thoughts
- 153. Surfing the internet
- 154. Lighting candles
- 155. Listening to the radio
- 156. Going crabbing
- 157. Having coffee at a cafe
- 158. Listening to the radio
- 159. Getting/giving a massage
- 160. Saying "I love you"
- 161. Thinking about my good qualities
- 162. Buying books
- 163. Taking a sauna or a steam bath
- 164. Going skiing
- 165. Going canoeing or white-water rafting
- 166. Going bowling
- 167. Doing woodworking
- 168. Fantasising about the future
- 169. Doing ballet, jazz/tap dancing
- 170. Debating
- 171. Playing computer games
- 172. Having an aquarium
- 173. Erotica (sex books, movies)

- 174. Going horseback riding
- 175. Going rock climbing
- 176. Thinking about becoming active in the community
- 177. Doing something new
- 178. Making jigsaw puzzles
- 179. Thinking I'm a person who can cope
- 180. Playing with my pets
- 181. Having a barbecue
- 182. Rearranging the furniture in my house
- 183. Buying new furniture
- 184. Going window shopping
- 185. Thinking I have a lot more going for me than most people

Others:

