

Understanding and Coping with Depression



This booklet and the accompanying video have been made by Gill Welsh, Professor Paul Stallard, Isobel Greenhalgh, Jessica Tingley and young people from the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services provided by BaNES, Swindon and Wiltshire.

Part 1. Understanding Depression

We all have periods of feeling down, sad or unhappy. This is a **normal** part of everyday life and often there is a reason why we feel like this. We may have:

- Fallen out with a friend
- Been criticised or bullied
- Be unable to do something that we enjoy

Usually these feelings **don't last** very long and within a week or two our mood lifts. There are other times when **feelings of sadness, hopelessness and emptiness** seem to take over. Those feelings don't go away: they become **very strong** and start to affect every part of our lives. When this happens, you may:

- Find it hard to **motivate** yourself to do things
- **Stop** doing things, you used to enjoy
- Prefer to stay at home and **not want to go out**
- Avoid being around other people and **spend more time on your own**
- **Feel very tired** and lethargic and sit around doing nothing even though you have things to do

Common Symptoms

There are a number of signs of depression that you, or others around you, might notice. These include:

- Feeling irritable and easily upset or hurt
- Becoming tearful much more often than usual
- Eating more or less than usual
- Finding it difficult to concentrate on schoolwork or completing it
- Sleeping more or less than usual
- Finding it difficult to make decisions
- Not wanting to do things that you previously enjoyed
- Feeling that life is not worth living
- Thinking about death or having suicidal thoughts
- Self-harming or wanting to self-harm
- Being very self-critical

Some facts about depression

- Around the world depression is the most common mental health problem
- Depression tends to develop during adolescence
- It affects both males and females but is more common in girls
- Rates of depression in children and young people range from 3-8%

- In the UK, around 80,000 children and young people are estimated to suffer with depression at any one time

What causes depression?

We don't really know what causes depression, and often there is no single reason. Some of the possible reasons might be:

- Genetics: Although researchers haven't found a depression gene yet, it does seem to run in families. Depression is more common in those young people who have a close family member with depression.
- Trauma: Traumatic experiences e.g. bullying, abuse, bereavement, family conflict can increase the risk of developing depression.
- Chemical imbalances: Researchers have found that some of the chemicals that send messages from our brains don't seem to work as well in people who are depressed.
- Hormones: Because depression usually develops during adolescence some researchers have wondered whether changes in the body's balance of hormones may be involved.
- Learned patterns of negative thinking: People who become depressed become trapped in negative ways of thinking. They learn these patterns over time and often feel hopeless about their future and unable to find solutions to everyday challenges.

How depression affects us

There are three main ways that depression affects us. It has an impact on:

1. **How we think**. We end up stuck in negative and critical ways of thinking where we often expect to fail or things to go wrong. Everyone gets stuck in these ways of thinking from time to time but when we become depressed this way of thinking takes over.
2. **How we feel**. When we are depressed, we will notice a number of symptoms that might affect our concentration, appetite and sleep
3. **What we do**: People often feel tired, find it hard to do things and spend more time on their own.

1. How we think

When people feel low and depressed, they are **more likely to think negatively**. They are more likely to:

- **Blame themselves** if things go wrong. For example, a young person who was struggling to understand some new schoolwork found themselves thinking "I can't understand this

I must be stupid". They blamed themselves for not understanding the work even though the rest of the class were also finding it hard.

- Young people who are depressed tend to **generalise problems** or difficulties in one area to all parts of their life. For example, a young person who did not do very well in a maths test found themselves thinking "I'm going to fail all my exams". They were thinking that they were a complete failure and were overlooking how well they were doing with their other schoolwork.
- Believe that **things cannot change** or be different. For example, a young person who had an argument with a friend may find themselves thinking "I never get on with people and will never have any friends". They have overlooked how they have other friends.

Young people who are depressed tend to think in negative and critical ways. So, when they are depressed, they are more likely to:

- Dwell on the **negative things** that happen
- **Blame themselves** for the things that go wrong
- Have more **negative expectations** about themselves, what they do and the future
- **Dwell on the things that go wrong** or aren't quite right
- Take one thing that goes wrong and **apply it to all aspects of their life**

2. How we feel

As we have already seen, low mood and depression are associated with some changes in how we feel. We might:

Think about or harm ourselves

Feel tired

Be tearful

Go off food

Find it hard to
concentrate



Have problems sleeping

Comfort eat

Find it hard to make
decisions

Feel irritable

3. What we do

Low mood and depression also have a significant impact on our behaviour. We may:

- **Stop doing things**, even those things we used to enjoy
- We may **not want to be with people** and spend more time on our own
- We may **stop going out** and spend more time at home
- Find it **hard to do everyday things** like getting up or dressed

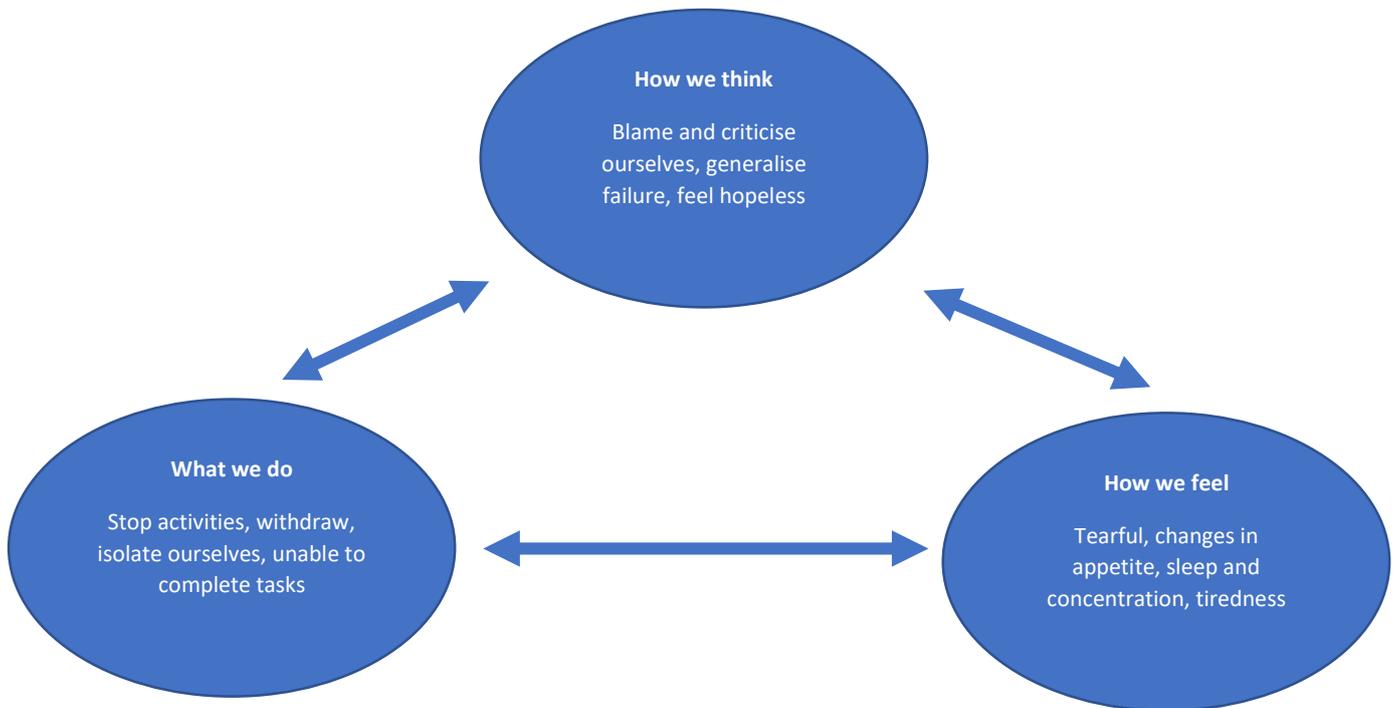
- Fall **behind with schoolwork**

The comic strip in the attached resources shows what it feels like to be depressed.



Putting it together

The diagram below shows how the way we think, how we feel and what we do are connected.



The wider effects of depression

Depression can be very difficult to cope with and can have a big impact on your life. Here are some examples of how it may affect you:

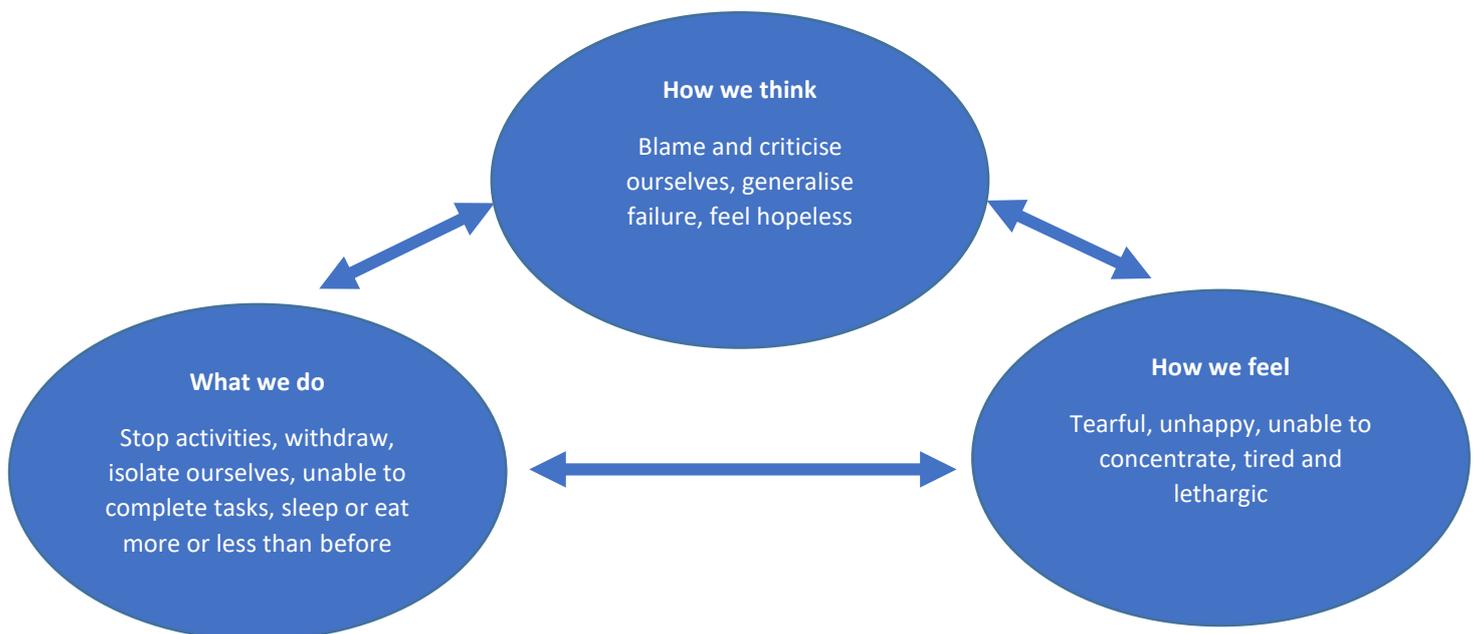
- **School/College:** Difficulties concentrating, tiredness, and thoughts of failure and hopelessness can affect school attendance and schoolwork. Attendance may suffer and grades may drop.
- **Family relationships:** It can be hard for families to recognise that you are depressed and are not being a “difficult adolescent”. You might have more arguments with your family, particularly around everyday tasks such as getting up, keeping the bedroom tidy and helping around the house. You might withdraw from your family and spend more time on your own. You may find it very difficult to talk about how you’re feeling.
- **Friendships/Relationships:** When you feel down you may feel irritable and find it hard to go out and to socialise with your friends. They may not understand how you feel, and relationships may become strained.

Part 2. Manage Your Emotions and Check How You Think

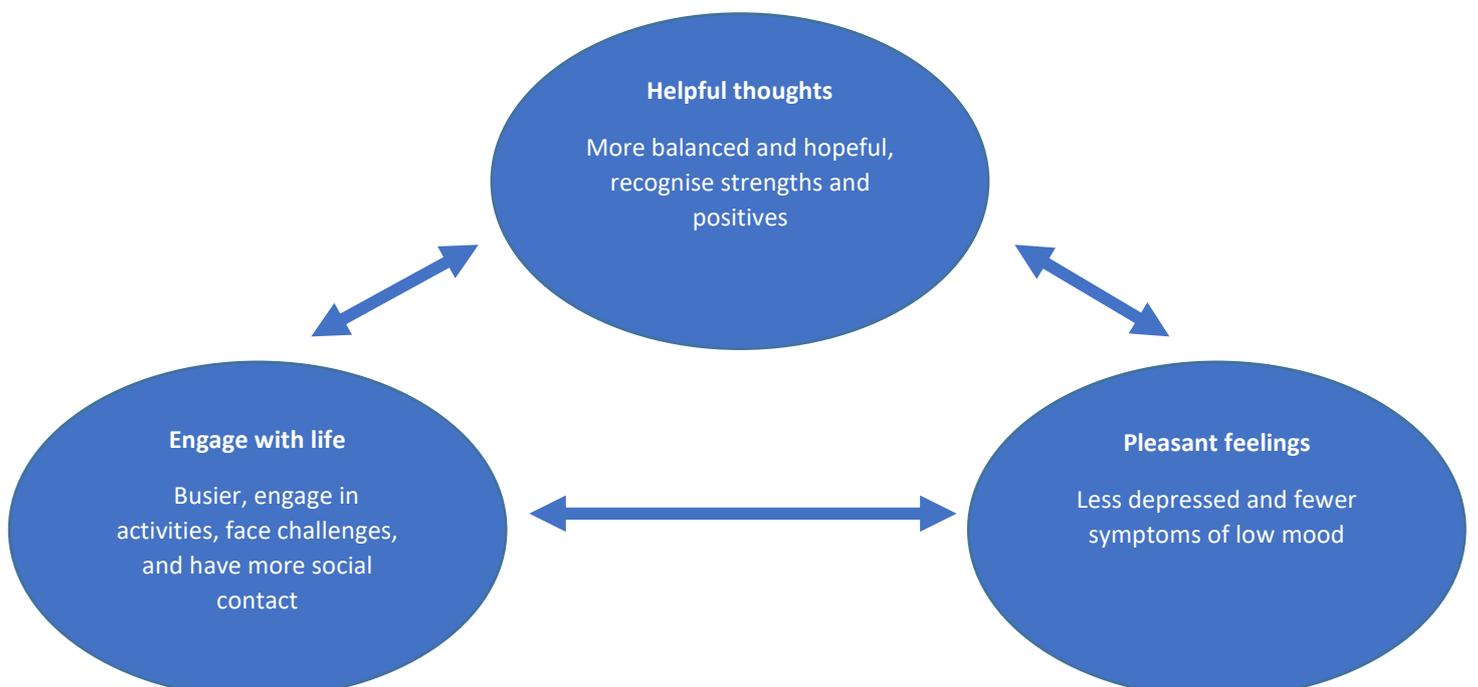
One of the recommended treatments for depression is **Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT)**. CBT explores the three parts of depression we talked about earlier:

- **The way we think:** It helps us to question the way we think about events and situations.
- **How we feel:** It helps us to understand, manage and overcome or cope with symptoms of depression and strong and persistent feelings of sadness and hopelessness.
- **What we do:** It helps us to change what we do, to engage with life once again.

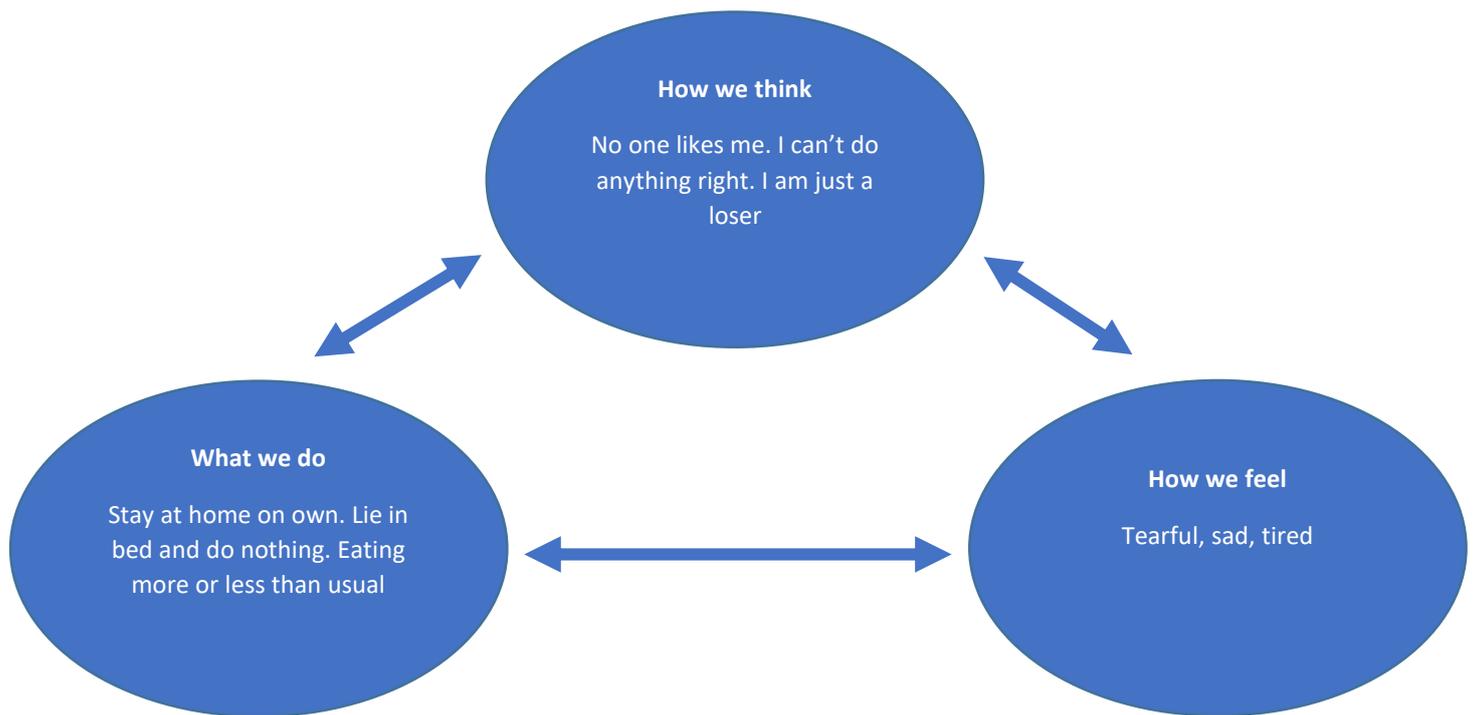
The aim is to move from feeling depressed:



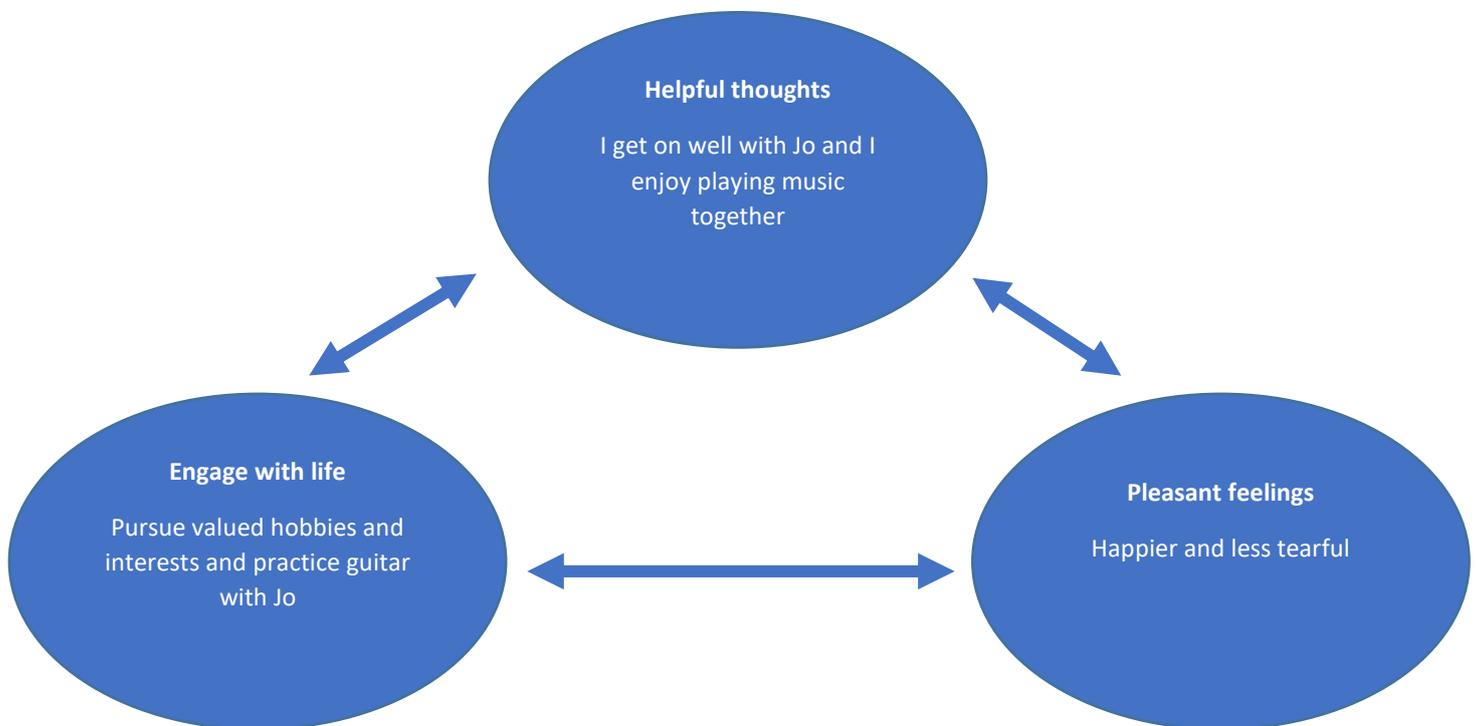
To thinking in more balanced ways which makes us feel better:



For example, CBT helps you move from this:



To more balanced thinking which recognises our strengths and the positive things that happen:



The goal is to learn to **cope with depression** not to eliminate general feelings of sadness. Everybody will feel sad and this is normal. Depression is different. This is when feelings of sadness become overwhelming, persist, and have an impact on your life. The aim is to help you manage the feelings that are part of your depression so that they **don't interfere with life and stop you from doing what you want to do.**

Support

You can do this on your own but sometimes it can be really helpful to have someone to talk this through with. For example – you may feel you can talk to a parent/carer or trusted adult and they can help you without interfering. Or you may have a partner or close friend who understands how hard you are finding things and would be willing to listen.

Their job is to listen and help you think, NOT to solve it for you.

Worksheets

This booklet will take you through 6 steps that will help you learn to cope with feelings of depression.

1. **Monitor your mood and what you do**
2. **Feel better and manage your emotions**
3. **Get busy**
4. **Identify and challenge the way you think**
5. **Learn to solve problems**
6. **Look after yourself**

There are also some worksheets that you can download to help you try out these ideas.



Step 1: Monitor Your Mood and What You Do

When people feel down, they stop doing things. They may not go out so much and may spend more time on their own. A useful first step is to check what you are doing to see if there are any times during the day that you feel worse than others.

A helpful way of doing this is to keep a diary. For each hour of the day write down what you did and how you felt. Choose a number from 1 (very weak) to 100 (very strong) to rate the strength of your feeling.

Day	What were you doing, where, who with	How did you feel	How strong was the feeling?
6 -7 pm	Preparing and eating tea with mum	OK	50
7 - 8 pm	Watching TV with sister	Bit sad	60
8 – 9 pm	In my bedroom doing homework	Sad	90
9 – 10 pm	In my bedroom chatting with friends	Sad	90

A worksheet, *what you do – how you feel*, is included for you to use. If this feels hard, talk to your supporter and see how they might be able to encourage and help you.



Try and complete the diary for two or three days and then make some quiet time to review it. You could do this with your support person. You are looking for any patterns that will help you understand your low mood.

- Is this what you expected or are you feeling slightly better than you thought?
- When are your feelings of sadness strongest e.g. in bedroom when on own?
- When are your unpleasant feelings weakest, e.g. when busy and helping mum?

If there are any times when feelings of sadness are particularly strong it may be possible to explore whether things **could be done differently**.

- If you feel worse when you are in your bedroom on your own could time spent in your bedroom be reduced? For example, could you do your homework downstairs?
- If you feel particularly sad in the morning when you wake up could you try a different routine? Could you get up straight away instead of lying in bed listening to your sad thoughts or perhaps try to listen to some music instead?
- If you feel particularly sad returning home to an empty house after school is there something else, you could do? Could you meet up with a friend after school, join an afterschool club or perhaps visit a relative?

Experiment and see if changing things can help you to feel better.

Step 2: Feel Better and Manage Your Emotions

Feeling depressed is horrible. However, we tend to accept and live with these unpleasant feelings rather than looking after ourselves and doing something to make ourselves feel better. There are many ways that we can help ourselves so experiment and find out what helps you. Develop a toolbox of feel good ideas so that if one doesn't work you can try another.

You may already have some ideas that work for you. The *feeling better* handout also provides several different ideas so try them and find out which help you. Remember, the more you practice the more these ideas will help.



Step 3: Get Busy

When people feel down, they often feel tired and stop doing things, even those things they used to like doing. Hobbies, interests, activities or visiting places happen less often. The third step is **to get busy** and to start doing things again.

You can start by making a list of the things:

- You used to enjoy but have now stopped,
- You don't do very often but would like to do more
- You haven't done but would like to try

A worksheet, *have more fun*, is included in the resources which accompany this booklet.



Depression can feel overwhelming so that becoming busier may feel hard. If it feels difficult talk with your supporter and see if they can help you. Remember, **whatever you are able to do**, no matter how small, **will be helpful**. You could also try to set yourself **different levels** for your goals:

- If you were going to try to play a musical instrument you could set a less demanding (pick up and hold the instrument), medium (pick up and play for a couple of minutes) or more demanding goal (pick up and try to learn a new piece of music for 10 minutes).
- If you were going to contact a friend you could set a less demanding (send one short message), medium (start a message discussion) or more demanding goal (arrange to talk with someone online for a few minutes).

When planning activities some of the most helpful are those that:

- **Involve people.** Activities could be shopping with your sister, meeting a friend in a café or going to the park. These activities help you to reconnect with others.
- **Give a sense of achievement.** Activities that give you a sense of pride or accomplishment such as fixing your bike, playing an instrument or baking some biscuits
- **Are important and meaningful.** There is no point simply doing something if it is not important for you. If you are trying to go out don't just go to the supermarket. If you like reading or playing a guitar arrange a trip to the local book or music shop.

Once you have identified some activities **build them into your week**. Choose one or two and agree when you will do them. A worksheet, *plan more fun*, is included in the resources.



As you become busier you may find that things don't seem as much fun as they used to be. Don't worry, the fun may take a little longer to return. Keep reminding yourself that you are doing well and that being busy gives you less time to listen to your negative thoughts.

Step 4: Identify and Challenge the Way You Think

The fourth step is to find out more about the way you think. We all have negative and critical thoughts at times. This is normal. The problem when people become depressed is that they think like this all the time. They never seem to recognise the good things that happen or their successes.

They become trapped in these negative, critical and unhelpful ways of thinking.

If you feel depressed, you are more likely to:

- Think about the things that have gone wrong – “if only I hadn't sent that message”
- Blame yourself for the things that go wrong – “as soon as I arrive people start arguing”
- Generalise failure from one area to all parts of their life - ““I did really badly in that exam I'm going to leave school without any qualifications”
- Feel hopeless that things can ever be different - “I will never have any friends”
- Believe you are a burden to others – “I just make people unhappy”
-

Thoughts like these are unhelpful.

- They make you feel down and unhappy
- They are demotivating and don't encourage you to try things
- They make you give up and stop doing things

Balanced Thinking

To get out of this way of thinking you need to develop more balanced ways of thinking.

You may have noticed that your thoughts tumble around in your head like they are in a washing machine. You can spend hours listening to them and end up feeling very sad. This is called ruminating. When you are ruminating you look for and listen to all the evidence that you are unsuccessful and can't cope.

What you need to do is actively search for those times you have been successful and coped. Instead of simply listening to all the unhelpful thoughts that go around inside your head you need to check them out and see if they are seeing the whole picture.

A positivity log

To counter your tendency to focus on your unhelpful thoughts (not coping or being unsuccessful) you can keep a log of all the positive and good things you have done or been part of. The aim is not to eradicate any negative thoughts but to put them in perspective.

Each day identify two or three positive things that have happened. These could be examples of things you:

- Enjoyed
- Achieved
- Made you feel good
- Nice things people said about you

Because you are so used to looking for evidence that you are a failure you may find this difficult. This is where you could call on your support person. They can help you think about your day and can help you find the things that have gone well. You can ask more than one person too.

The goal is to help you notice that positive things that happen too. Watching the list grow will help you to recognise that although things are hard, good things do happen and you can be successful. A positive diary is included in the accompanying resources.



Check the Way You Think

Because we hear our negative and unhelpful thoughts so often, we simply believe them and don't stop to check them out. We need to train ourselves to check out what we are thinking and to discover whether there may be a more balanced and helpful way of thinking.

This can be done by using the Catch it, Check it, Challenge it, Change it technique. There is a worksheet in the accompanying resources to help.



1. The first step is to **Catch** the unhelpful thoughts that are making you feel depressed.
2. The next step is to **Check** out whether you are making things out to be worse than they really are.
3. The third step is to **Challenge** it and to look for any evidence that supports and challenges this way of thinking. Is there something positive and helpful that you might have overlooked?
4. The final step is to **Change** it. On the basis of the above, is there a more balanced and helpful way of thinking about this?

So how does this work?

A young person was feeling very low after getting a D grade for their maths assignment and caught the following thought going around in their head.

CATCH IT	CHECK IT	CHALLENGE IT	CHANGE IT
I never get good marks for my schoolwork. I'm just stupid	Is it really the case that you have " <u>never</u> " had any good marks for " <u>any</u> " of your schoolwork?	I am in the bottom classes for maths, English and science but I do like history and do alright with drama and art.	I find academic lessons hard, but I am creative and get good marks for drama and art

This process helps to put things in perspective:

- It acknowledges that you find some of your schoolwork difficult
- It challenges how you think about yourself. You are not "stupid". You are more creative and do better in these than more academic lessons.
- It stops you generalising your poor marks mark to all your schoolwork.
- It helps you to remember your strengths and recognise that you are good at drama and art.

This way of thinking is more balanced and challenges your thoughts of failure.

What Would My Best Friend Say?

Another way we can check our thinking is to ask ourselves what someone we respect, or value, would say if they heard our negative thoughts. Many of our thoughts stay in our heads and we don't say them out aloud or question them.

Use the *what would my best friend say* worksheet in the resource pack.



Write down your sad and unhappy thoughts. Now ask yourself to imagine what your best friend or support person would say if they heard you thinking this way. You can also ask yourself what you would say to your best friend or support person if they were thinking this.

Part 3. Solving Problems and Looking After Yourself

Step 5: Learn to Solve Problems

When people feel low, they often feel overwhelmed by their problems and unable to make decisions. They may put decisions off and hope that their problems will go away. Unfortunately, they don't and often ignoring them only makes things worse.

The fifth step to coping with depression is to problem solve. This is a simple way of working out what you can do to overcome a problem. This asks a series of questions to help you identify the problem and then think about the different ways you could deal with it. There is a *problem-solving* sheet in the resources



The steps to problem solving are:

- **Define your problem.** Choose a problem to work on that can be solved. Be specific and try to clearly define your problem.
- Now **explore your options.** Try to find as many solutions as possible. Remember that some problems may take longer to solve than others.
- The third step is to **explore the consequences** of each option. Think about the short- and long-term consequences and the consequences for you and for others
- Now **make a decision.** On balance what seems to be the best option?
- **Try it** and see what happens.
- **Would you do this again?** What did you think about this solution and would you use it again?

So how does this work?

A young person found it difficult to stand up for themselves, worrying that they would be seen as selfish or that others would be angry or criticise them. They felt sad, thinking that no one listened to them or was interested in what they had to say. They were also worried that if they spoke up that they would lose their friends. They had felt like this for a long time and decided that they needed to do something to make themselves feel better.

1. **Define the problem.** This didn't feel very easy, so the young person talked with their supporter. After talking, they defined their problem as: "I feel uncomfortable around other people and find it difficult to be myself". They set their goal as

"I want to feel better around my friends, and to be able to be honest and open".

2. Once this was clear the next step was to **explore possible options** about what they could do. The young person talked with their supporter and came up with the following options:
 - They could try and say exactly what they wanted and not hold back
 - They could do nothing and just learn to live with it
 - They could make a fresh start and find a new group of friends and then try to be themselves
3. They then worked through the **consequences** or possible outcomes of each option:

Option	Positives	Negatives
To speak up	I would feel better Hopefully people will accept and like the 'honest' me	Hard to do May upset people
Live with it	None	Continue to feel bad
New group of friends	Can be myself I can make a fresh start	Hard to do No one around who I really want to hang out with My old friends maybe angry

As with many problems, there was no easy or simple solution. It was clear that continuing with the current situation was the worse option. Changing the friendship group was a big challenge and wasn't really possible.

The young person **decided that the best option** was to try and speak up although she was worried that she would upset her friends if she did.

4. She talked with her supporter to work out a small way she could **test this out**. The young person usually walked home with two friends after school. Her friends walked slowly and kept stopping to talk and it took a long time to get home. She wanted to get home quicker and decided to see what would happen if she spoke up.

She decided that if they stopped, she would say, "Sorry, I need to get home tonight so I will carry on without you". If the friends put pressure on her to stay, she would remain calm, respect their views but repeat her position. "That's fine if you guys want to stop here but I do want to get home" and then walk on.

5. She then took the next step and **tried it**. She practised what she would say. Next day as she walked home her friends stopped as usual. This time she was prepared to speak up. Instead of stopping with them she said she wanted to get home. To her surprise her friends heard what she said. They weren't angry and carried on walking with her.

Afterwards she felt pleased with herself for speaking up. Her friends didn't get angry or criticise her. Although it is not always easy this showed that there may be times when she could speak up and was heard.

6. This increased her confidence to **do this again** and she started to speak up in other situations.

Step 6: Look After Yourself

When we are depressed, we often become very critical and unkind to ourselves. We tend to:

- **Beat ourselves up** and criticise what we do
- **Blame ourselves** for everything that goes wrong
- **Focus on our weaknesses** and failures
- **Do not respect** or value ourselves
- **Feel worthless** and think that we are never good enough

The more critical and unkind we are, the worse we feel, and we may end up not liking ourselves.

The sixth step is to try a different approach to life by learning to **look after yourself**. You may need your supporter to help challenge your “inner critic” so that you can begin to:

- **Respect yourself** for who you are
- **Value** what you do
- **Recognise your strengths** and your achievements
- **Feel worthy** of being happy and doing well

Treat Yourself Like a Friend

Our inner critic is often very harsh, and we say things to ourselves which we would never say to anyone else. One way you can be kinder to yourself is to treat yourself like a friend.

Imagine what you would say to a friend if you heard them being very self-critical.

- If your friend had just been dumped and said, “I am a horrible person no one will ever want to be with me”, you wouldn’t say “yes you are a horrible person”. You would be kind and might say something like, “you are a wonderful person. They don’t know what they are missing”.
- If your friend tried on some clothes and said, “I look fat and ugly in these jeans”, you wouldn’t say “yes you look really terrible”. You would be kind and say something like, “Why don’t you try something else. Those jeans just don’t suit you”.

So be kinder and treat yourself like a friend. When you notice your inner critic:

- **Write your thoughts down** exactly as you are saying them to yourself.
- Once you have done that, imagine instead that these thoughts are not yours but those of your friend who has shared them with you. Write down what you would say to your friend if you heard them saying this
- Now treat yourself the same way and **write a kinder message** to yourself and say it out loud.

A worksheet, *treat yourself like a friend*, is included in the accompanying resources. If you find this hard ask your support person to help you.



Don't Kick Yourself When You're Down

If you are feeling down don't make it worse by blaming yourself for feeling so bad. You wouldn't blame yourself if you caught a cold. You would look after yourself and do something to make yourself feel better. So, if you have had a bad day don't kick yourself when you are feeling down. Don't blame yourself for what has happened or how you feel, **look after yourself**.

Make a list of all the things you could do to make yourself feel better:

- A long bath or washing your hair
- Watching a movie or an episode of your favourite box set, going for walk
- Contacting a friend or challenge your mate to a game on your PS4
- An activity like baking biscuits, going for a run or drawing or practicing some freestyle football tricks

When you feel down try doing one of these things to feel better. You don't deserve to feel like this so look after yourself. A worksheet, *look after yourself*, is included in the resources.



Find Kindness

When people are down it often feels as if:

- Everyone is **picking on you**
- The world is **out to get you**
- That everyone is being **mean and unkind to you**

Because you are expecting people to be unkind, you are probably looking for evidence of this. The more you look, the more you will find.

Kind things do happen, but you just don't notice them. The final part of looking after yourself is to **look for kindness** and the times when someone:

- Makes time to listen and talk with you
- Says something nice like "your hair looks good" or "I know I can always trust you"
- Is caring and asks if you are alright or gives you a hug
- Shares something like their music or chocolate
- Sends a nice message or picture
- Makes someone smile
- Says thank you

Finding acts of kindness helps you to notice that kind things happen. Try to find at least one act of kindness each day. As the list grows you will find that acts of kindness do happen. If you find this hard then talk with support person.

Looking for kindness will help you to feel better about yourself. Because you now know how good it feels when people are kind to you make an extra effort to be kind to someone else. Give a compliment, smile, offer to help or make time to listen to what they have to say. Often it is the small things that make a difference.

There is a *finding kindness* worksheet in the accompanying resources.



Summary

We hope that these ideas will help you to manage your depression better.

- This will be hard work and progress may seem slow. Use your support worker to help and stick with it.
- One young person who also struggles with depression wanted you to know you are not alone.

“Fighting the thoughts that are making it hard can be very difficult and scary but making the first step is the hardest part and it gets easier from there. Sometimes it takes a while ... but once you find the balance, the thoughts will get less. Recognising changes in your mood can also be hard at first, but one day you will look back and realise how far you've come. Anything that might help is worth a try and I promise that you won't always be in this place forever. No matter what your head is telling you, you deserve to try something that will give you a shot at feeling better!”

Good luck!