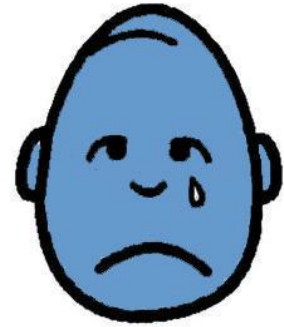




Stepping Forward

A Self-help Guide for Low Mood in later Life



Everyone feels sad or down sometimes. If these feelings have not passed after a few days, you may be experiencing the signs of low mood or depression.

Depression is common in older people and is **not** a normal part of aging. As we grow older we face significant life changes that can put us more at risk of depression and low mood.

- **Health problems** – long term illness or disability, severe or chronic pain.
- **Loneliness and isolation** – Living alone – (perhaps a loved one has moved to a care home), reduced social circle, reduced mobility or the loss of driving privileges.
- **A reduced sense of purpose** - a loss of identity or purpose due to retirement or limits on activity because of physical health issues.
- **Fears** – worry about the future, health or financial issues.
- **Recent bereavement** – the death of spouse or partner, family members, friends or pets.

Examples of how people may think when they are depressed.....

“I feel so alone, I never see my family now. I suppose they are busy with their own lives and don't have time for me. I'm probably just a burden to them. I don't see the point in trying....I'm always going to be lonely”

“I just get so upset all the time. I'm so tired and I struggle to do the things I used to. My aches and pains really get me down. I just feel so useless these days”

What is this booklet about?

It can often seem like nothing will help to make you feel better. But there are things you can do that will make a positive difference.

When a person is depressed, they start to think about themselves in a different way. There can also be changes in what they do. For example, they may lack the motivation to do what they used to enjoy.

This booklet aims to help you improve how you feel and start to get better. It uses a method called 'Cognitive Behavioural Therapy' and this has been proven to help depression. It involves making changes to how we think and what we do.

Some parts of the booklet have been left for you to fill-in with a pen – this will help you to begin to learn about, and manage, your depression.



About Depression

Everyone has some difficult times in their life. Difficulties like coping with retirement, money worries, bereavement, or health problems can mean that older people are more likely to become depressed.

Signs and symptoms that you may notice about yourself if you are depressed:

(Tick any you have noticed)

Feelings –

- Losing enjoyment or interest in things
- Feeling down, sad, upset or hopeless
- Crying more easily or more often
- Feeling irritable or frustrated about small things
- Feeling alone even when there are people around you

Thoughts -

- Poor concentration or memory
- Thinking that the worst will happen
- Losing your self-confidence
- Thinking that everything is hopeless
- Negative or sad thoughts

Physical Signs –

- Feeling tired
- Sleep problems
- Changes in eating patterns
- Headaches or digestive problems
- Being restless

Behaviours -

- Not doing what you used to enjoy
- No motivation to do the everyday tasks
- Difficulty making decisions
- Avoiding people, places or problems

If you have ticked a lot of these boxes then you may be experiencing depression or low mood. People with depression often have negative thoughts about themselves, other people or about the world around them. They can also feel hopeless about the future.

❖ ***REMINDER: Negative or Gloomy thoughts play an important role in depression. Depression can change how someone thinks, what they feel, how their body reacts and how they behave.***

What do these feelings mean?

Thought  Feeling  Behaviour

How you think about things affects how you feel, which affects how you behave. When you have negative thoughts over and over again, it can make the feelings of depression worse. Then when you feel this way, you may change what you do or how you behave.

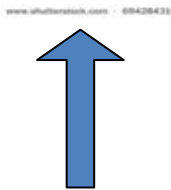
For example:

You are outside your house and you wave to your neighbour across the road but he seems to ignore you. Usually, you might think that your neighbour was preoccupied with something else or that he didn't see you.

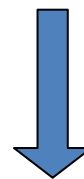
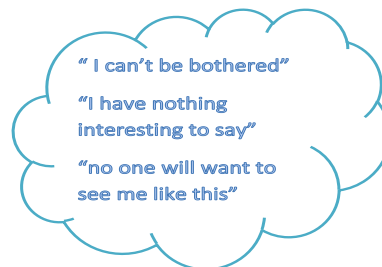
If you're depressed, you may start to think that he was ignoring you on purpose, that you had upset him in some way or that he did not like you for some reason. These negative thoughts will make you feel more sad and you may decide not to go out for the rest of the day. You could also notice some physical changes as a result. For instance, you may not feel like eating that day or your sleep might be interrupted.

A vicious cycle can start

FEELING LOW



NEGATIVE THOUGHTS



FEEL UNWELL IN BODY



DOING LESS



If a similar cycle has happened to you then write it in

.....
.....
.....
.....

Can I notice these gloomy thoughts?

When you feel low, it can be difficult to notice these thoughts. Sometimes because they happen so often, you may just believe they are fact.

Negative thoughts can be about yourself....

“I am useless”
“I can’t do anything
any more”
“I am a burden”
“I just can’t get with on
with people”



If you have any of these types of thoughts, write them down:

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

Negative thoughts can also be about other things, like the world around you or the future.....

“My family don’t care”
“The world is a terrible place”
“Nothing is going to improve,
it’s hopeless”
“Everything goes wrong”



If you have any of these types of thoughts, write them down:

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

❖ REMINDER: *You may still get these types of thoughts occasionally when you are not depressed. Usually, at these times, you would just put them out of your mind.*

Things to know about negative thoughts:

- Negative thoughts are usually automatic and seem to just pop into your head.
- These thoughts are often unrealistic and unhelpful. They usually just make you feel bad and the more you believe these thoughts, the worse you are likely to feel. Eventually you start to view everything in a negative way.
- Even if these thoughts are unreasonable, they may seem realistic and correct to you at the time. Later when you consider these thoughts, you may realize that you have assumed the wrong thing.
For example, Your family have not visited recently – this may lead you to think that ‘they don’t care’ or ‘that you are a burden’. But is this really true ?

Thinking Traps

When people are thinking negatively, they may make errors in the way they think. These are called 'Thinking Traps' and you may notice that you do some of these.....

1. Over-generalising



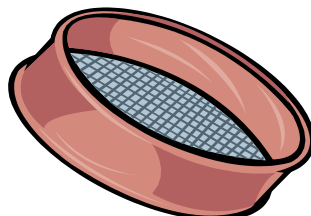
Over-generalising is when you may take an example of one thing that's happened and apply it to all situations.

For example, you may drop a cup at home and think "This always happens to me" or if you didn't finish all your chores, you may think "I haven't achieved anything today".

Write in your examples:

.....
.....
.....
.....

2. Mental Filter



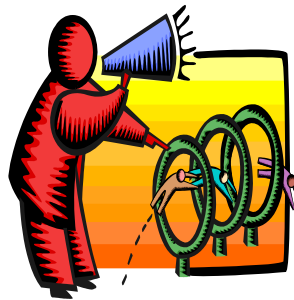
When people feel depressed, they tend to ignore the positive things and focus on only the negative or bad situations that have happened; they filter out all the positive

situations. For example, you may think about the one person that you don't get on with but forget that you have lots of other good friendships.

Write in your examples:

.....
.....
.....
.....

3. Critical Self



People may often put themselves down or blame themselves for things that go wrong, even when it is not our fault. For example, the postman arrives to deliver a parcel and you don't get to the door in time before he rushes off. You may think "I should have been quicker" or "What's wrong with me? I'm hopeless".

Write in your examples:

.....
.....
.....
.....

4. Prediction



No one really knows what will happen in the future but when people feel depressed, they may tend to predict the future more. For example “I’m not going to enjoy that day trip” or “The bus will be full again and I won’t get a seat” or “I’m never going to feel any better”.

Write in your examples:

.....
.....
.....
.....

❖ ***REMINDER: When people feel low they can have more negative thoughts. They may fall into ‘Thinking Traps’ which means they make errors in the way they think. It helps to start recognizing when you do this.***

The next section will look at helpful ways in which you can tackle depressive thoughts and feelings.



1. Planning your day

When people feel depressed, they can find it hard to decide what to do each day and may not feel like doing anything at all. This often means they end up doing very little.

- Start to overcome this by making a list of things you want to do then begin with the easiest things.
- It's important not aim to high.
- Make an action plan (see over the page) and work through your list.
- Cross off what you have done - you'll see what you've achieved that day.

List some activities:

(This could include things you enjoy, gentle exercise, mixing with friends and family or tasks you need to do)

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

You can use this plan or make your own

	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri
9.00am- 11.00 am					
11.00am- 1.00pm					
1.00pm- 3.00pm					
3.00pm- 5.00pm					
5.00pm- 7.00pm					

2. Achieving and Enjoying

When people feel depressed, they may forget what they enjoy or what they have achieved. On the action plan, write down all the events of the day and put an **A** by what you have done well and an **E** by what you have enjoyed.

- Don't be too modest !

- Take credit for your achievements even if they are small things
- Try to build-in some things you enjoy every day as this will help you, even if they are small treats.

3. ABC - Changing your feelings

When people are depressed they can think that they have every right to feel sad because their lives are so terrible. Actually, our feelings come from what we think about and how we understand what has happened to us.

Think of a recent event that upset or depressed you. You should be able to split it into three parts:

A The event

B Your thoughts about it

C Your feelings about it

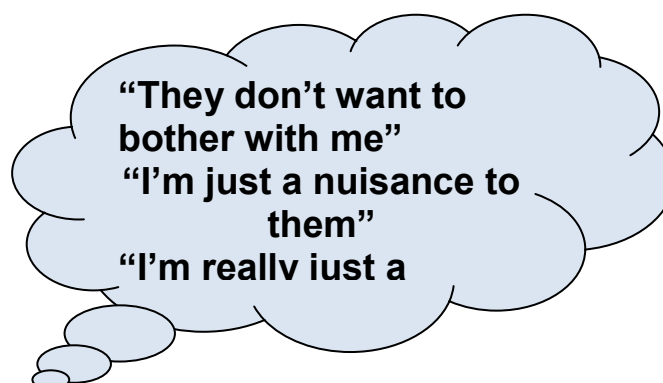
Often people are only aware of **The event** and **their feelings**

For example :

A. The Event - You're family were going to visit tomorrow but they telephone you to cancel it.

C. Feelings - You feel upset, disappointed and sad

B. Thoughts ? - *You may need to concentrate on what you were thinking.....*



No wonder you feel bad if you are thinking these thoughts !

It is important to become aware of these three stages and to know that by changing what we think about an event can change how we feel about it.

4. Balancing



This is a useful technique that helps with negative or critical thoughts.

When you have a negative thought, try balancing it out with a more positive statement,

For example: the negative thought is..." I'm hopeless, I can't do anything anymore".

This could be balanced with " I can't do as much as I used to but I've managed to do the polishing today."

- Another way of balancing thoughts is to write them in a column

Negative Automatic thought	Balanced thoughts
My son hasn't phoned today, he doesn't care.	My son called most days last week . He's busy at work this week and will phone when he can.

5. Remembering Details

Research says that when people are depressed, they tend to forget details and remember events through general statements, like “I can’t do anything anymore”.

It is important to remember details of good experiences and happy times so that they are easy to recall. A diary can help with this and it is important to record the details.

For example –

I’m good at gardening,
My grand daughter visited at the week end,
I helped my neighbour on Wednesday

Sometimes keeping a thought / feeling diary like the one below, can be helpful.

Event	Feeling	Thoughts in your mind	Balanced thoughts
<i>Example</i> The shop assistant didn't look at me	Sad and low	She thinks I'm a pest and I take too long at the check out	It was really busy there today but sometimes she does have a quick chat when she has time
<i>Your Example</i>			

❖ **REMINDER :** *Use a daily plan, keep a diary of automatic thoughts and more balanced thoughts and remember your achievements – these tools can help you to deal with depression.*

6. Solving Problems

We can often feel overwhelmed by our problems or things we need to do. Writing down the steps you need to take to solve a problem, then tackling each step at a time, can help you to deal with these situations. Writing down all the possible solutions – even if they seem silly – then choose the best solution.

Solving problems can seem more difficult when you feel low. Thinking back to times when you have successfully dealt with similar problems can help. Speaking to friends or relatives about their opinion can also be helpful.

You can use the steps below –

What is the problem? (write it down) :

List possible solutions

Choose the best solution (write it down):

Steps to tackle it:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

7. Long term beliefs

Sometimes, people have long-term beliefs about themselves that are very negative, for example, “I’m not a lovable person” or “I am a failure”. These types of beliefs may come from our past experiences and may not relate to the present situation.

Try to challenge these negative beliefs, stop putting yourself down and write down the evidence that disproves these beliefs. For example, what would you say to a friend if they held that belief about themselves ?

8. Stressful times

At times, People may experience difficulties in their life because of situations that they cannot change. For example, retirement, long-term illness, bereavement, financial problems or isolation. If more than one difficult situation arises then depression can result. Sometimes it can be difficult to cope without help.

9. Further help

Using some of the exercises in this booklet should help you to start to overcome your depression and to begin to get some control over your thoughts and your difficulties.

If you feel that you need further help then you should contact your GP who will discuss this with you.

This booklet was written by Julie Davies with contributions from
Bobbie Petford, Kira Bradbeer, Lin Bradshaw and Laura
Hallmark

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