

PLANNING TO FEEL BETTER: A GUIDE FOR
DEPRESSED ADOLESCENTS



Produced for research purposes by:
The Departments of Pediatrics and Psychiatry, University of
Washington, Seattle Washington.

Authors:
Wayne Katon, MD
Laura Richardson, MD, MPH
Lori Higa, RN

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What is Depression?

Depression is a serious but common illness. You may be experiencing some of the following symptoms:

- Depression, sadness, or irritability
- Pain
- Sleeping or eating problems
- Fatigue or decreased energy
- Difficulty concentrating or remembering
- Loss of interest in activities that used to bring pleasure
- Nervousness or tension
- Anxiety attacks

The coping skills described in this booklet can help you feel better and improve the quality of your life.

The Depression Cycle

People become depressed for many different reasons. For most people, depression is related to stress, life changes or a loss, such as loss of a loved one, divorce, loss of a friendship, or problems at school. Depression may also be related to physical problems such as chronic pain or medical illnesses. Occasionally, depression may come on suddenly for no obvious reason.

My personal date for making my plan and putting it into action is.....

_____/_____/_____
day month year

4. Can you identify relatives, friends or professionals who could help you make your plan, put it into action and stick with it over the coming weeks and months?

People who can help: _____

5. Circle the first things you are going to do in making your plan and putting it into action.

- Read/get more information
- Answer the questions in this booklet
- Evaluate my plan and decide how to make it work better after one week
- Discuss my plan with a trusted friend
- Ask a trusted friend to help me try something new

6. Reconsider your plan later this week. You may want to make adjustments. People sometimes start with one coping skill area (for example, positive activities), and then switch to another (for example, balancing thinking).

Getting Started

Having more information helps you start to make a plan to help yourself. This pamphlet is a beginning. To help yourself decide how to best use this pamphlet right now, try answering the following questions:

1. Which of any of the ideas for overcoming depression described in this booklet, if any, do you think would work best for you?

	Not Much	Unsure	May Help	Would Help	Most Helpful
Enjoyable activities	1	2	3	4	5
Personal accomplishments	1	2	3	4	5
Social activities	1	2	3	4	5
Relaxation activities	1	2	3	4	5
Turning problems into a goal	1	2	3	4	5
Balancing your thinking	1	2	3	4	5

2. How ready are you to start trying out the ideas you think have the best chance of working for you?

	Not Ready	Unsure	Maybe Ready	Ready	Very Ready
My level of readiness is:	1	2	3	4	5

3. If you are ready, or if you're unsure but are willing to try, set a definite date for making a plan and for starting to put it into action. Experience shows that today or tomorrow are the best choices.

We think of depression as occurring in three ways:

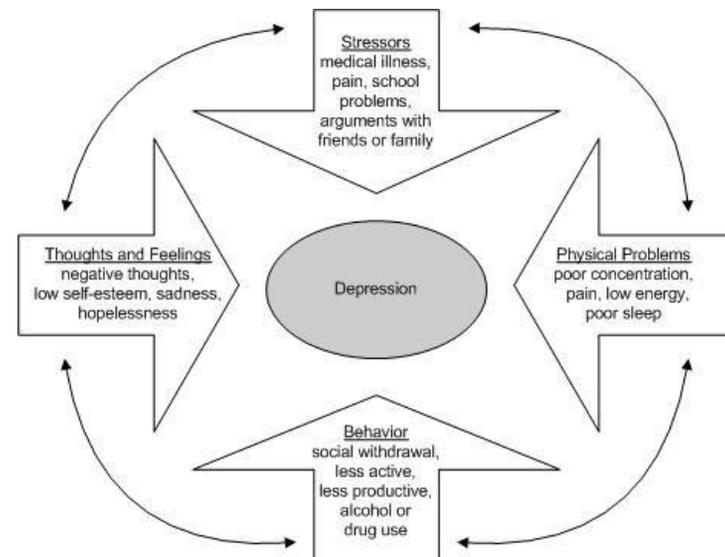
Your **BODY** – you sleep poorly, feel more tired and have more aches and pains.

Your **BEHAVIOR** – you talk less, socialize less.

Your **THINKING** – you have more negative thoughts than positive thoughts.

Your **BODY, BEHAVIOR, and THINKING** interact in ways that can lead you to **FEEL** more and more depressed. The good news is that the downward cycle can be reversed with medications and coping skills, so you begin to sleep better, feel more energetic, socialize more, think more realistically about yourself and **FEEL BETTER**.

The Cycle of Depression



Coping with Depression

Experience shows that most people can reverse the CYCLE OF DEPRESSION. This pamphlet introduces you to three COPING SKILLS that have been used successfully by many, many people in the past decade:

IDENTIFYING AND PLANNING POSITIVE ACTIVITIES

TURNING PROBLEMS INTO GOALS BALANCING

YOUR THINKING

While these skills are not difficult to learn, they can be difficult to start to use when you are depressed. You may need to ask a friend or a relative to help you develop a plan for using one or more of these coping skills. Using one of these skills may be your key to feeling better, starting now.

Balancing Your Thinking

Who helps me balance my thinking on different issues?

Thoughts I want to keep in mind now:

Balancing Your Thinking

Favorite sayings and thoughts that inspire courage or optimism:

Ideas about shifting my perspective from negative to more positive: _____

Identifying and Planning Positive Activities

There are four types of daily activities that can increase your sense of well-being. These are:

Pleasant activities

Social activities Personal

accomplishments Relaxing

events

None of these activities needs to take much time or energy. In fact, you may be doing these things now but perhaps you are doing them less often. When your life is going well, you may do these things often and quite naturally.

When life becomes difficult, you may stop doing activities in one or more of these critical areas. You can increase your sense of well-being right away by starting to do more of these activities.

Pleasant Activities

These are the things in your life that you do just for fun. They are simple and quite personal. They help your body recover from both large and small stresses. Examples include listening to music, going for a walk, going to a movie, or reading something you enjoy.

If you are interested in planning pleasant activities, follow these steps and use the work sheet on the facing page:

Identify what you did for pleasure when you were less depressed.

Ask yourself, what might you enjoy doing tomorrow?

Identify and plan to do one pleasant activity each day this week. Start with something that is simple for you.

Identify what or who can help you do these activities.

A Personal Example

Ashley – coping with parent’s divorce

“I went through a serious depression when I was 15 when my parent’s decided to get a divorce. My parents had been fighting for a long time and my father moved out of the house. I visited him every other weekend

The changes at home and the fighting between my parents were very hard. I avoided my friends so that I wouldn’t have to listen to their problems. I was not as hopeful as usual, and my friends told me I just wasn’t myself. I felt like my friends didn’t want to be around me anymore.

I started hanging around the house and watching a lot of TV. I didn’t care about getting my homework done and started failing some of my classes. My teachers called my parents because they were worried about me.

My parents suggested that I read a book about feeling better. I was tired of my life feeling out of control and liked the idea that I could change my thoughts and feel less guilty and angry. I worked at this for a while and began to feel better.

Two years later, I broke up with a boyfriend who had been a very good friend, and I started to cycle into depression again. I started feeling bad about myself again. Because of my previous work in balancing my thinking, I was able to help myself sooner – before becoming seriously depressed again.”

Balancing Your Thinking

When life is going well, we tend to have two positive thoughts to every negative thought. When we become depressed, the balance changes to two negative thoughts to every positive thought. “Realistic” thinking probably lies somewhere in between.

Shifting the balance in the direction of more positive thoughts is difficult to do, especially without someone to help you. Friends or parents can help when you decide to give them the opportunity by asking their opinion on something. Knowing how to change the balance of your thoughts is important because it can help you catch yourself when you start to become more depressed.

When you are ready to try to balance your thoughts, use steps below and the work sheet on pages 19 and 20.

- Identify a favorite saying or thought that inspires courage or optimism for you in difficult times.
- Try changing your perspective on something of little importance to you from an exaggerated negative perspective to a realistic or slightly positive point of view.
- Remember someone who tends to be positive or realistic who can help you balance your thoughts.

Past pleasurable activities:

What enjoyable thing could I do tomorrow?

What would be enjoyable right now?

Who can help with these activities?

Social Activities

This critical area includes all of the pleasant things you do with one or more other people that you enjoy. This is the single most powerful activity for increasing your sense of well-being. These positive social activities include calling a friend, going to a movie, going to the mall, playing a game with a friend, or joining a club or team at school.

When you are ready to plan social activities, follow these four steps. You may use the work sheet on the facing page:

Identify the kinds of social activities that you enjoy. Make a list.

Make a definite plan to do several social activities that you find easy to arrange.

Ask yourself, is there someone who makes you feel good about yourself?

Identify who you could call for a "phone visit" today or tomorrow.

Remember, more activities in this critical area may improve your mood dramatically. Try to make one call today and plan to get together with a friend for a little while tomorrow or some time this week. Keep trying. That's taking charge.

Turning a Problem into a Goal

The solution I choose to try is: _____

My goal is (remember to be specific): _____

The small steps I will follow to reach my goal are: _____

I will review my progress on _____ / _____ / _____
day month year

Turning a Problem into a Goal

The problem is: _____

Possible solutions to the problem that involve something I do are: _____

Possible solutions to the problem that involve learning something new are: _____

Social activities I enjoy:

My plan for social activities:

People who can make me feel good about myself:

“Phone visit” possibilities:

Personal Accomplishments

These activities boost your self-confidence and give you feelings of pride. They tell you that you can take on challenges and succeed. Some challenges involve using special skills, like playing the piano, baking something or working a puzzle. Other challenges involve staying with a boring or unpleasant task that needs to be completed. Accomplishments in this area might include washing dishes, cleaning your room, or doing the laundry.

When you are ready to start planning personal accomplishments, follow these four steps and use the work sheet on the next page:

Identify what you could do today that would be an accomplishment for you.

Ask yourself, is there a way that you could recognize yourself more for activities that you have already done today, like reading this pamphlet or just getting out of bed?

Plan to start small and stay small in this critical area. For a few days this week, you might try listing your accomplishments at the end of each day.

Identify who or what can help you get started on increasing these activities.

and was irritable with my friends. I began to worry more about school and my friends, especially at night when I was trying to fall asleep. I talked to my mother who took me to the doctor. We talked about the things that I was feeling and decided that I was becoming depressed.

I decided to focus on my problems with sleeping because I thought that it would help me feel better. I thought of many possible solutions: (1) do more of the things that might make it easier for me to sleep like taking a hot bath or taking a light snack with milk; (2) making sure to exercise during the day; (3) stop drinking drinks with caffeine; and (4) read a good book.

I liked all of these possible solutions and decided to make goals for each of them (step C above).

1. <i>Week one: listen to a book on tape when I can't sleep.</i>
2. <i>Go for a long walk after school.</i>
3. <i>Have juice drink instead of cola.</i>
4. <i>Get a good book and read a chapter each night before bed.</i>

Katie's work under step D (writing out a plan) included scheduling a trip to the library and setting a special time to read; using a personal calendar to keep track of whether she listened to the taped book at night and exercised after school each day. Finally, she decided to re-evaluate her problem-solving plan every Sunday before watching TV in the evening. She made a plan that fit her weekly schedule. She was able to sleep more, concentrate better at school, and begin the upward cycle.

Turn the page and try out the work sheets provided.

TURNING A PROBLEM INTO A GOAL

You may have difficulties getting yourself started in solving daily problems when you are depressed. Solving problems successfully involves using several specific skills to change a problem into a small, concrete goal.

These are the steps to follow to improve your ability to solve the troubles you are currently facing:

- A. Define the problem
- B. Identify a number of solutions to the problem. Make sure that the solutions involve increasing something you do or trying something new.
- C. Choose a solution and state the solution in terms of a very specific goal
- D. Write out your plan for achieving the goal. Be sure to include a day and time when you will review your progress.

A PERSONAL EXAMPLE: Jason

“ When I got on the high school basketball team I was really pleased, but didn’t have as much time to get my homework done. My mom got sick and I had to help out more with my younger sister and at home. I didn’t want to quit basketball so I was staying up late to try to get my homework done after helping with my sister. I was exhausted and falling behind. I began worrying more and more about my homework after helping my sister get ready for bed. Over time, I became more tired at school. I was having difficulties concentrating

Accomplishment Plan for today:

I could recognize myself for: Things

I’ve accomplished today: Who can

help me accomplish more?

What could help me accomplish more?

RELAXING ACTIVITIES

In your efforts to cope with problems of living, you may sometimes give up your relaxing activities. For example, a health problem, such as back pain, might interfere with the relaxing activity of walking or playing soccer with friends. A busy and demanding school and home schedule may leave little or no time to develop or pursue activities that could give you more “peace of mind.”

When you’re ready to plan relaxing activities, follow these two steps and use the work space below:

1. Identify when you last felt really “at ease”
2. Ask yourself how can you give yourself a similar experience of “calm” today.

1. _____

2. _____

A PERSONAL EXAMPLE: Brian – a neck injury

“My neck was injured in a car accident. Prior to the injury, I was very active, skateboarding with my friends every day after school. After the injury, I stopped skateboarding and didn’t see my friends very much anymore. They told me nothing was wrong with my neck. I was frustrated and started feeling like I was never going to get better. I stopped doing some of the other activities I enjoyed and was sleeping all day. I couldn’t concentrate at school and my grades started to fall. With the help of my doctor, I recognized that I was becoming more and more depressed. I decided to help my self by identifying and planning activities that would work to build up my sense of well-being.”

1. Begin to take short walks.
2. Go to the movies with my family.
3. Invite a friend over to play video games after school.
4. Start an exercise program to strengthen my back and neck so that I can start to skateboard again.

Brian started doing more things with his friends and family. While the neck pain continued, Brian began to feel more in charge of his life and more optimistic about the future. With focused, step-by-step changes, he was beginning to reverse the DEPRESSION CYCLE.