

Depression and Low Mood

These are the thoughts of two people who are depressed:-

- ❖ *“I feel so alone, I never see my friends now, I guess they have dropped me. They probably don’t like me – who would? There is no point in making any effort. It doesn’t pay off ... I just hate myself.”*
- ❖ *“I feel like crying all the time, I am so tired and can’t get interested in anything. In fact I don’t even get started with jobs I should be doing, I can’t even do basic things that seem so easy to other people ...”*

You may have similar thoughts yourself. Depression is a very common problem and many people feel low or down in the dumps at times. This is often due to life stresses such as bereavement, money or housing problems or difficulties in relationships. For some people it becomes much worse and gets in the way of normal life.

It may seem that nothing can be done to help you feel better. But there are things that you can do to make a difference. There is also further help you can get if the depression does not seem to be getting any better.

This leaflet aims to help you cope with depression and begin to get better. The approach is Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT). Cognitive Behaviour Therapy uses methods that have been tried and tested and found to be effective. It involves looking at the way you think about things.

What does research tell us about depression?

Life is sometimes difficult and we know that factors such as low income, divorce or relationship problems and loss of work can make people more likely to become depressed. New research has helped us to understand depression more clearly. We now realise that thoughts can also play an important role in depression. Changes in feeling may occur gradually but the way a person thinks about themselves when they are depressed is very different from how they thought before.

Perhaps you can think about some examples of depressed thinking in yourself or in someone you know who has depression.

For example:-

- ❖ The business man who believes he is on the brink of bankruptcy.
- ❖ The caring mother who thinks she has lost interest in her children.
- ❖ The clever student who thinks he can’t concentrate.
- ❖ The ordinary man who thinks that he is useless because he has lost his job.

People who are depressed typically have these thoughts and at the time they believe them to be true. When someone’s thoughts change like this, they also begin to experience other changes.

These are some typical signs or symptoms that you may experience if you are depressed:-

Emotions or feelings

- ❖ Feeling sad, guilty, upset, numb or despairing.
- ❖ Crying a lot or unable to cry when a truly sad event occurs.
- ❖ Feeling angry and irritable about the slightest things.
- ❖ Losing interest or enjoyment in things.
- ❖ Feeling alone even if you are in the company of other people.

Physical or bodily signs

- ❖ Tiredness.
- ❖ Restless.
- ❖ Sleep problems.
- ❖ Changes in weight, appetite and eating.
- ❖ Feeling worse at a particular time of day – usually mornings.

Thoughts

- ❖ Losing confidence in yourself.
- ❖ Thinking that everything seems hopeless.
- ❖ Thinking you *hate* yourself.
- ❖ Poor memory or concentration.
- ❖ Expecting the worse and having negative or gloomy thoughts.

Behaviour

- ❖ Having difficulty in making decisions.
- ❖ Can't be bothered to do everyday tasks.
- ❖ Putting things off.
- ❖ Not doing the things that you enjoy.

If you are experiencing many of the above signs and symptoms that you may be experiencing low mood or depression. When you are depressed you may believe that you are helpless and alone in the world. You often blame yourself for all the shortcomings that you think you have.

At the bottom of all of this you feel negative about yourself, about the world and about the future. You tend to lose interest in what is going on around you and you don't get any satisfaction out of the things you used to enjoy. It can become hard to make decisions or to carry out little tasks that you once did with no problem at all.

Research now tells us that gloomy thoughts play an important role in depression. When someone is depressed there are usually changes in the way they feel – their emotions, how their body reacts, what they think and how they behave.

How can I understand these feelings?

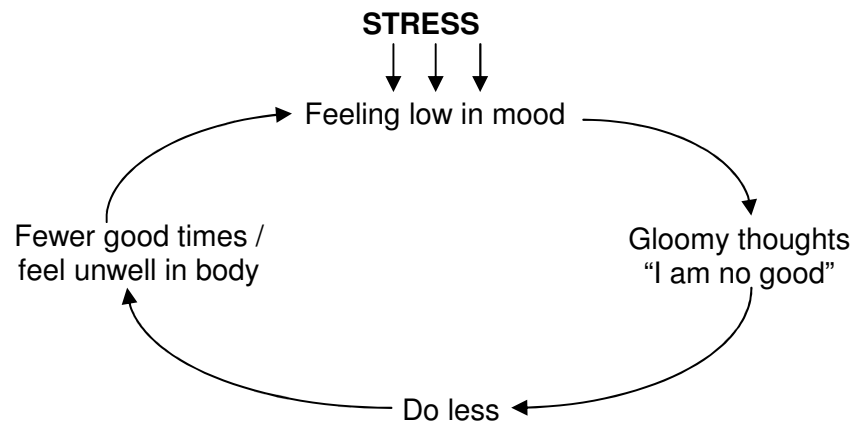
The way you think about things affects the way you feel, which affects the way you behave. It is difficult to change the way you feel, but you can change the way you think.

When you are feeling depressed you might have negative thoughts a lot of the time. With each negative thought the feelings of depression are likely to increase.

Sometimes negative thoughts can stop you from doing things that you would normally do. As a result, you may get critical thoughts about being lazy, or irresponsible which can make you feel even worse. In other words, you can get caught up in a vicious circle. Below is an example:-

Suppose you are walking down the street and you see a friend who appears to ignore you completely. You might wonder why your friend has turned against you and you feel a little sad. Later on, you mention the incident to your friend and they tell you that they were preoccupied at the time and didn't even see you. Normally you would feel better and put what happened out of your mind. But if you are depressed you probably believe your friend has rejected you. You might not even ask them about the incident and then the mistake goes uncorrected. If you are feeling depressed you are more likely to make mistakes like this over and over again.

The vicious cycle can be like this:-



Can I recognise these gloomy thoughts?

When you are feeling low the gloomy thoughts may be so familiar and happen so often that you just accept them as fact. Gloomy thoughts are often about yourself. "I am no good", "People don't like me", "I am a bad mixer", and "I look ugly". If you have gloomy thoughts about yourself jot down your thoughts. These are sometimes about other things such as the world around you or the future.

What more should I know about these gloomy negative thoughts?

We have given examples of negative thoughts that people have when they are depressed. It is important to remember that you might still occasionally have some of these thoughts when you are not depressed. The difference is that you would generally dismiss them from your mind. When you are depressed, however, these thoughts are around all the time.

- ❖ Negative thoughts tend to be automatic. They are not actually arrived at on the basis of reason and logic, they just seem to happen.
- ❖ Often the thoughts are unreasonable and unrealistic. They serve no purpose. All they do is make you feel bad and they get in the way of what you really want out of life. If you think about them carefully you will probably find that you have jumped to a conclusion which is not necessarily correct. For example somebody doesn't like you because they haven't phoned you recently.
- ❖ Even though these thoughts are unreasonable they probably seem reasonable and correct to you at the time.
- ❖ The more you believe and accept negative thoughts they worse you are likely to feel. If you allow yourself to get into the grip of these thoughts, you find you are viewing everything in a negative way.

When people become depressed their thinking often changes. They may make some of the following errors when they are thinking negatively:-

❖ Exaggerating the negative

This means you think things are much worse than they really are. For example you make a small mistake at work and fear that you may be dismissed because of it. In other words you jump to a gloomy conclusion and believe that it is likely to happen. You may spend a long time worrying that you have upset a friend only to find later she didn't even remember the comment.

❖ *Overgeneralising*

For example, if one person doesn't get on with you, you may think "No one likes me". If one of your many daily tasks hasn't been finished you think "I have achieved nothing, nothing has been done". In other words, from one thing that has happened to you, you draw a negative conclusion which is much bigger and covers all sorts of things.

❖ *Ignoring the positive*

People who are depressed tend to focus their thinking on negative or bad events and ignore positive or good events. You might have had a game of football and missed the goal once, but played well in general. So after the game you may think about the one missed shot and not the rest of the game played well. You may have many good friends who you have known for years but you concentrate and worry about the one that has fallen out with you rather than remembering all the other good friendships.

❖ *Taking things personally*

Often if our mood is low we blame ourselves for anything which goes wrong, even if things have nothing to do with us in reality. For example, you go into a local shop and the assistant who knows you is off-hand and your automatic thought is "He/she doesn't like me ... have I done something wrong?" Most likely the reason is that he or she is tired or is having a bad day. In this example you have taken the blame personally.

How Can I Help Myself?

In this section we will look at practical steps to overcome depressive feelings and thoughts.

❖ *Make a daily plan.*

When people are depressed they don't feel like doing anything Begin to tackle this by making a list of things you want to do and then plan out an action list, starting with the easiest task first, and try not to aim too high. Work through the action list and tick off what you have done. At the end of the day you will be able to look back and see what you have achieved. Physical exercise and activity can help to lift your mood so try and build a little in each day. Mixing with friends, family and neighbours can also help.

	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri
9am to 11am					
11am to 1pm					
1pm to 3pm					
3pm to 5pm					
5pm to 7pm					
7pm to 9pm					

❖ *Achievements and Pleasure*

When people are depressed they often forget what they have achieved. Most people have more things going on for them than what they are aware of. In your daily plan write down all the events of the day and put a **P** next to those which have given you pleasure and an **A** next to those activities where you felt you had achieved something and did well. Try not to be too modest, people who are depressed tend not to take credit for their achievements. Try and build in some pleasant events into each day and treat yourself, it will help you.

❖ *Changing Feelings*

Most people who are depressed think their lives are so awful that they have every right to feel sad. In fact our feelings come from what we think about and how we make sense of what has happened to us. Try and think about a recent event which had upset and depressed you. You should be able to sort it into three parts:-

- A. The event.
- B. Your thoughts about it.
- C. Your feelings about it.

Most people are normally only aware of A and C. Here is an example - someone at work criticises you for a piece of work you have done.

- A. The event – criticism. You may feel hurt and embarrassed.
- B. Your thoughts - “He / She thinks I am no good at my job and they are right I’m hopeless, I shouldn’t be in this job”.
- C. Your feelings – hurt and embarrassed. But what are you thinking about? You may need to concentrate to discover.

No wonder you feel bad! The important point about trying to become aware of these three stages A, B and C is that we can change what we think about an event and can therefore change how we feel about it.

❖ *Balancing*

A useful technique is called balancing. When you have a negative, critical thought, balance it out by making a more positive statement to yourself. For example if you thought: “I’m no good at my job”, that could be balanced with “My boss said how much he appreciated the piece of work I did yesterday”. Try writing down your negative thoughts in one column and then your balanced positive thoughts in the next column, like this:-

Negative Thoughts	Balancing Thoughts
Jack hasn’t called, he doesn’t love me.	He is very busy and thinks I am doing better than I was last week and so he doesn’t need to worry about me.

❖ *Try and remember details*

Research tells us that the person who is depressed doesn’t remember details of events but tends to think in general statements. Try and train yourself to remember details so that good times and experiences are easy to recall. Think of particular times and a diary might help you to do this. Try and keep a diary of events, feelings and thoughts. Use the approaches described to gain more balanced thoughts and look out for errors in your thinking.

❖ *Solving difficult problems*

Sometimes we feel overwhelmed by the very complicated and difficult things we have to do. One thing which helps with this sort of problem is to write down each of the steps which you have taken to complete the job, then tackle one step at a time. Problem solving seems more difficult when you are depressed. If you have a particularly difficult problem try and look back at the times when you had a similar problem and use the same approach. Be clear and write down all your possible solutions. Use brainstorming where even silly solutions are written down and considered. Use the best approach.

❖ *Long Terms Beliefs*

Sometimes people have long held views about themselves that are sometimes very critical. “I am not a very clever person” or “I am not a very lovable person”. These beliefs are often a product of our past experience and may hold no truth in present reality. Try to challenge this self criticism, stop knocking yourself down and look for evidence which disproves this belief.

❖ *Particularly Stressful Times*

Many people experience a difficult time in their lives that is linked with events that they cannot change. For example a bereavement, or several bereavements over a period of time, unemployment, longstanding illness or chronic financial problems. Sometimes several of these events can happen together and depression can result. In time, most people can bounce back but it may be hard to do without help.

You can learn more about the Lancashire Early Intervention Service by visiting our website:-

www.hope-health-recovery.org.uk

Email: info@hope-health-recovery.org.uk