



OVERCOMING DEPRESSION - 1

UNDERSTANDING DEPRESSION

WHAT IS DEPRESSION?

Depression can become an overwhelming and serious disorder. Depression seldom has one clearly identifiable cause. It tends to develop from a combination of biological, psychological, and environmental factors.

From a psychological perspective, persons with depression might have a tendency to:

- over-think as they rehearse past events to try to discern a correct course of action without daring to take any action steps (e.g., someone stuck in a loveless relationship who is unable to leave because of guilt).
- follow rules that might have been necessary at one point to allow them to function in a difficult environment but are no longer necessary and might stifle personal growth (e.g., a victim of childhood abuse continues to stop himself from expressing his opinions or a perfectionist who is seldom satisfied with the outcome of her efforts).
- assume excessive responsibility and consequently end up by getting overwhelmed or feeling guilty about situations that are beyond their control.
- chronically compare themselves to others or attempt to motivate themselves by criticism; and
- have a general negative view of the world (e.g., a failed job interview would mean that the person is permanently unemployable)

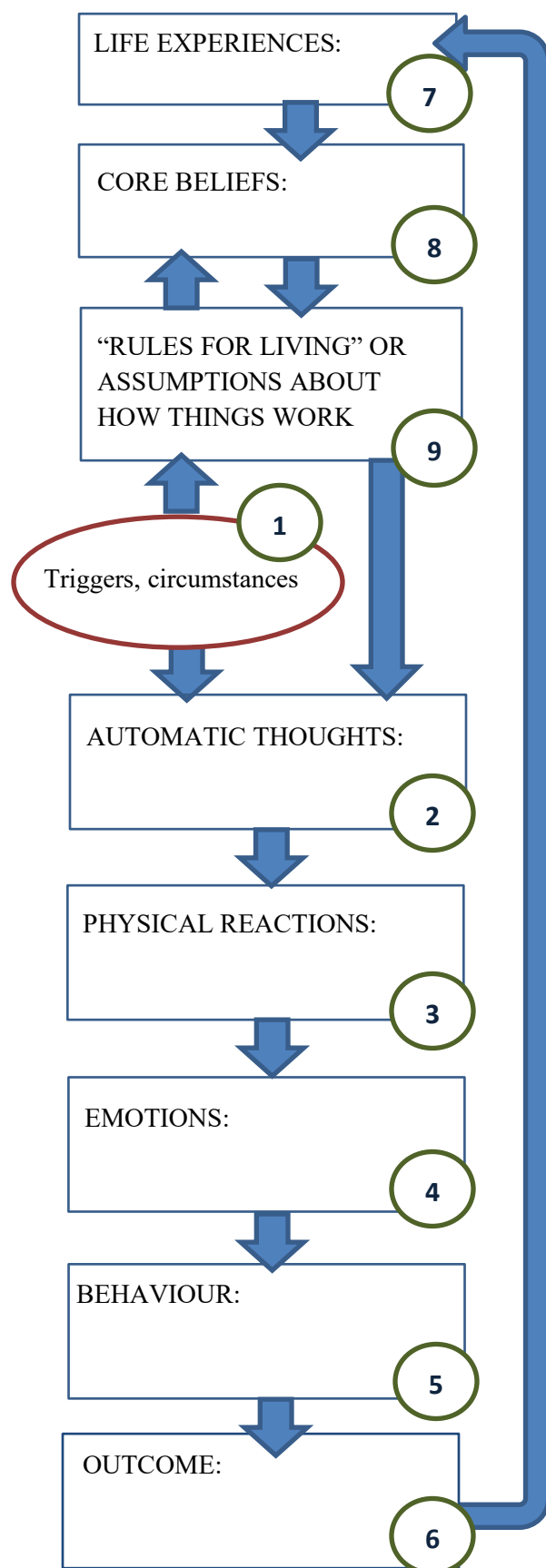
Environmental variables that can produce depression include loss (bereavement, loss of social status, traumatic experiences), isolation, conflict, high pressure to perform or fulfill difficult obligations, and physical illness.

Symptoms of depression have been listed in the table below. As you can see, we can classify these symptoms into four categories (emotional, physical, cognitive, and behavioural) outlined in the table below.

SYMPTOMS OF DEPRESSION			
Emotional Symptoms (Emotions)	Physical Symptoms (Physical Reactions)	Cognitive Symptoms (Thoughts)	Behavioural Symptoms (Behaviours)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sadness - Apathy - Guilt - Shame - Anger / Irritability - Anxiety - Numbness - Disappointment - Desperation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tearfulness - Tiredness - Increased pain - Tension - Sluggishness - Loss of appetite - Poor sleep - Agitation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Jumping to conclusions (e.g., <i>"Things will never get better."</i>) - All or nothing thinking (e.g., <i>"This is a total failure"</i>.) - Harsh criticism and labeling (e.g., "I am a total idiot", "I am ugly") - Thinking imperatives (e.g., "This should not be happening") 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Withdrawal - Avoidance - Self-neglect - Giving up or argumentativeness - Comparing self to others - Perfectionism - Suicide attempts

DIFFERENT EXPERIENCES, SAME BUILDING BLOCKS

EXPERIENCES, SAME PROCESS



Our life experiences are vastly different and yet the way in which depression develops is quite similar for most people. We experience negative automatic thoughts in response to triggers or difficult circumstances (items 1 and 2 in the diagram to the left). Keep in mind that anything can be a trigger – from being rejected by a romantic partner to having to deal with a less than polite neighbor to watching a movie in your living that causes you to compare yourself to the main character. Triggers are not avoidable, but we can make them less triggering. Our thoughts in response to triggers happen very fast and sometimes might be hard to notice. We call these thoughts automatic thoughts as they happen almost immediately whenever a “trigger-button” is pressed.

Our automatic thoughts influence our emotions (4), including associated physical reactions (5). Before we even know it, we end up by reacting in predictable ways. Our behaviours (5) lead to outcomes (6) that might be deeply disappointing but nevertheless feel familiar. We could have drawn arrows going in every direction here as thoughts influence behaviour and emotions while emotions influence physical reactions etc. The bottom line: our thoughts, emotions, physical reactions, and behaviours are synchronized. It is impossible to have a negative view of the world while bursting with positive energy.

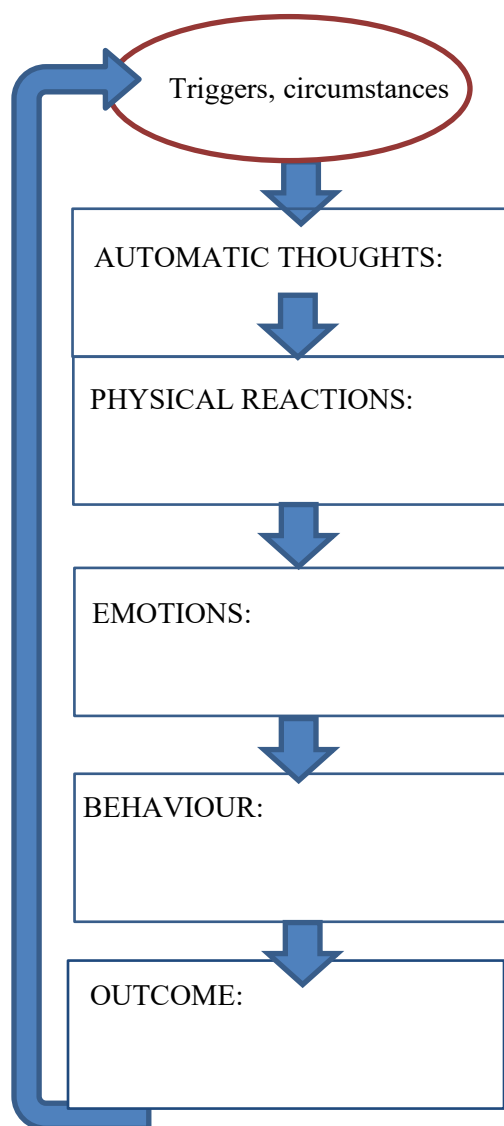
Often the story of depression goes much deeper. A depressed person might have had some terrible life experiences (7) that led them to develop a host of very rigid core beliefs about themselves, other people and the future or life in general (8). These core beliefs are held much more strongly than our automatic thoughts. In response to these beliefs and life circumstances, we develop a series of rules and assumptions (9) that we might not even be fully aware of. At the time, these assumptions protected us from harm. They feel very real and are very hard to let go even if our life circumstances become vastly different. Exercises that help you let go of these assumptions can initially produce quite a bit of anxiety.

These assumptions color what we think and what we do in triggering circumstances. They might also be a root of self-fulfilling prophecies in our lives as they guide us across a variety of situations, leading to outcomes that further reinforce our original predictions.

It is true that sometimes we face depression at very difficult times – someone might be undergoing chemotherapy or has experienced recent bereavement. It is also true that sometimes feelings of depression come as a surprise as nothing awful (aside from depression) is happening. These handouts will be useful to address both, but for now, let's learn the basics of CBT (cognitive behaviour therapy) and understand our patterns. To do so, we will start by focusing on a portion of our model – the everyday interactions between our thoughts, emotions, and behaviours.

WHAT IS INVOLVED IN TREATMENT?

1. Learning to identify your own patterns of thinking and acting
2. Understanding how our thoughts and behaviours are informed by our life experiences, what makes us stuck (the diagram on page 2) and what can we do change it.
3. Learning to recognize and modify automatic thoughts so that we no longer fall prey to skewed views of our circumstances. Action is only possible when we have an accurate understanding of what is at stake. We will tackle automatic thoughts in our 4th and 5th meetings, deal with our assumptions in meetings 6 to 9 and then challenge our core beliefs towards the end of the group.
4. Learning to act in a goal directed manner despite apprehensions. We will start by challenging our everyday behaviours by reintroducing pleasurable activities in group 2 and then we'll move to challenge procrastination in group 3.
5. Learning to gauge our emotional experiences and our progress. Next week we will spend some time developing your own scale for measuring these experiences.
6. Daily practice is very important in CBT. Start by writing your examples in the LEARNING OUR PATTERNS on page 4 and completing the SELF-MONITORING LOG on page 5. Self-Monitoring Log offers a glance on how you are spending your time and will be start point for our discussion next week.
7. Finally, you need to be clear what goals you are working towards (PERSONAL GOALS worksheet on page 6).



UNDERSTANDING OUR PATTERNS

Triggering Circumstances	Reaction				Outcome (Change in Circumstances)
	Thoughts	Physical Reactions	Emotions	Behaviours	
Learns about friend's promotion at work	"Life isn't fair. I will never succeed like he does."	Headache, tension	Envy, sadness, disappointment	Withdraws from work	Work performance plummets, might lose job
A friend walks by without saying hello	"I must have done something to upset her but then she is probably too stuck up to say hello to me."	Tearful, tense	Annoyance, sadness, disappointment	Avoids this person from now on	Friendship suffers

SELF-MONITORING LOG

Planned Actual

Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
7 am							
8 am							
9 am							
10 am							
11 am							
12 noon							
1 pm							
2 pm							
3 pm							
4 pm							
5 pm							
6 pm							
7 pm							
8 pm							
9 pm							
10 pm							
11 pm							
12 midnight							
1 am							
2 am							
3 am							
4 am							
5 am							
6 am							
Mood rating (-10 to +10)							

WHAT ARE YOUR PERSONAL GOALS FOR THIS GROUP?

What would you like to see happen in your life?	On a scale from 0 to 100, how important is this goal to you?	What blocks you from reaching your goals?	What can you practice to help you overcome your barriers?	How difficult will it be to practice these skills (0 to 100)?	How committed are you to practice these skills (0-100)?