

OVERCOMING DEPRESSION – PART 9

PATTERNS AND ASSUMPTIONS – 4

FOCUS ON LOSSES

Focus on loss often takes form of “if only” thinking. Loss is at best disheartening but over-focussing on our losses adds salt to our wounds. When grieving you might sorely miss the person who is no longer there but does that mean that you should isolate yourself from those who remain? You won’t be able to replace the person who is gone but at least you remain engaged with people who can help you cope.

“If only” thinking often results in an assumption that might be used as an explanation for our inability to take necessary action. The “if only” belief is an assumption that two events are somehow tied together or that one event depends on another. This is relevant to depression as many depressed persons believe that their depression is an unescapable product of their life experiences. For instance, a victim of an assault might believe that they would be significantly happier if they were never assaulted (true) and that consequently having been assaulted precludes their chances at happiness (false). A piano prodigy might believe that music defines them (true) and that is impossible to find meaning in life other than through being a concert pianist (false) and consequently finds it hard to recover psychologically from an accident that damaged his hands.

Try to identify your assumptions related to your past by completing the sentences below.

If only I did not have that accident
this did not happen, today I would be I would be happy and doing things I like
feeling and doing this

If only I was not abused
this did not happen, today I would be I would be happy
feeling and doing this

If only _____,
this did not happen, today I would be _____
feeling and doing this

If only _____,
this did not happen, today I would be _____
feeling and doing this

If only _____,
this did not happen, today I would be _____
feeling and doing this

If only _____,
this did not happen, today I would be _____
feeling and doing this

If only _____,
this did not happen, today I would be _____
feeling and doing this

Circle the “if only” statement that you tend to use the most often when you feel stuck and unable to manage. The “if only” statements often imply that our happiness or success are **solely and fully** dependent on absence of adverse or traumatic events in our lives. Granted, life is better without such bad luck but current wellbeing depends on what is

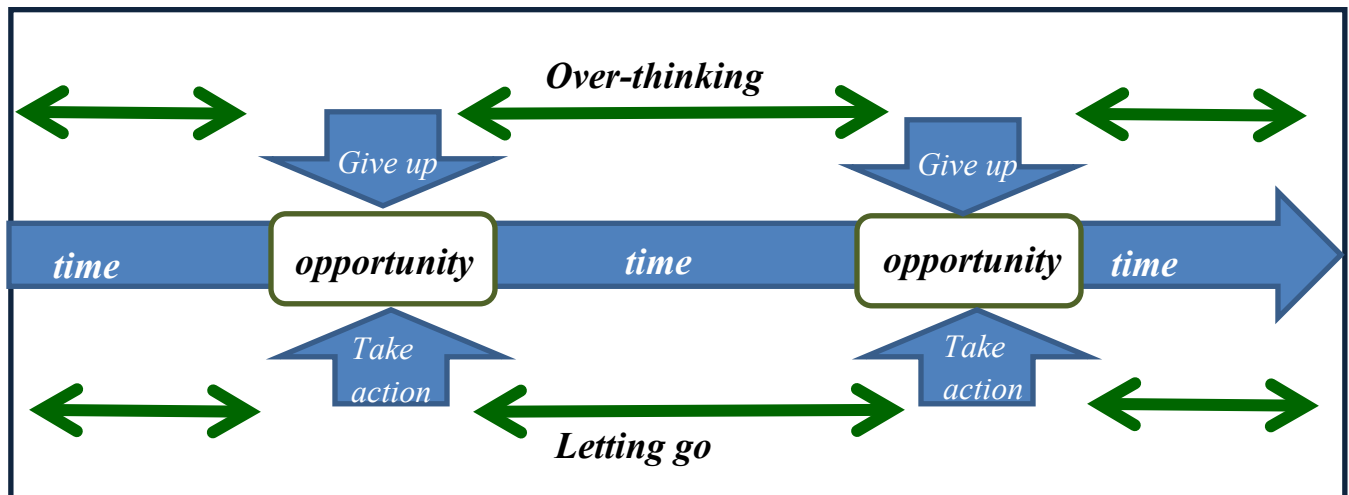
happening in our lives right now. Let's define "happiness" as a combination of relationships we have, goods/status, what we are able to do on everyday basis if we are in such states and what need to do on daily basis to preserve the success and happiness that you want.

HAPPINESS: What does it mean to you?			
What relationships would you have and how these relationships would be like if you were happy?	What things would you have or do and be proud off if you were happy?	What would you be doing with your time if you were happy?	What would you have to do on daily basis in order to preserve your happiness?
Is any of that available or possible right now?	Is any of that available or possible right now?	Is any of that available or possible right now?	Are you doing any of this in order to gain your happiness?

Remember, it's not about giving-up/giving in and punishing yourself for not being able to "pull yourself by your boot straps". The idea is to recognize the mental processes that make our lives worse when we are trying our best to make our lives better. It's all about a distinction between giving up (and accepting bad fate) and letting go (of reminiscing about bad events while taking action steps to change our live circumstances.)

GIVING UP / GIVING IN VS. LETTING GO	
Characteristics and examples of "giving up / giving in":	Characteristics and examples of "letting go":

Giving up and letting go can also be understood in terms of timing. People who give up do not take advantage of life opportunities and might still end up by overthinking. People who let go, take advantage of opportunities when such opportunities present themselves while at the same time they are able to disengage from over-thinking.



REDUCING FOCUS ON LOSSES**A: UNDERSTANDING IMPACT OF FOCUSING ON LOSSES**

1: Write the “if only” statement related to losses that you have experienced that you use the most often:

2: How did the event that you refer to impact your life?

3: What are the benefits of thinking like this?

4: What are the costs of thinking like this?

B: GETTING UNSTUCK

5. If you were not stuck in your thoughts, what would you be doing with your time?

6: What barriers are you facing presently that make it difficult for you to do what you desire?

7: What can you do about these barriers?

8. What thoughts block you from letting go?

9. How can you counter the thoughts that block you?

10: Given all of the above, what are your next steps?

In terms of things that you might do today to help your situation?

In terms of short-term goals that can be accomplished within a month?

In terms of things that you would like to see happen in your life in the long term?

C: LEARNING FROM ACTION STEPS

11: Take the first step and write down what happened:

12: Did things get worse, better or stayed the same as a result of your taking action steps? (Stick to facts)

Let's go back to the case of a pianist who lost their hand. Consider all options that are still open to this person. Figure 1 shows the impact of tunnel vision. Figure 2 shows the ability to adjust. It's not a perfect life but it can get better. Use Figure 3 to find out what is still available to you than to get stuck.

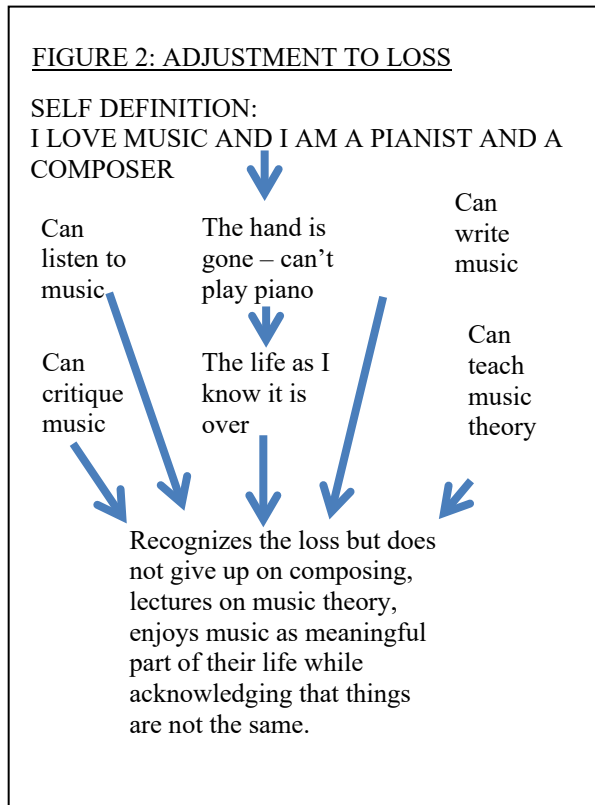
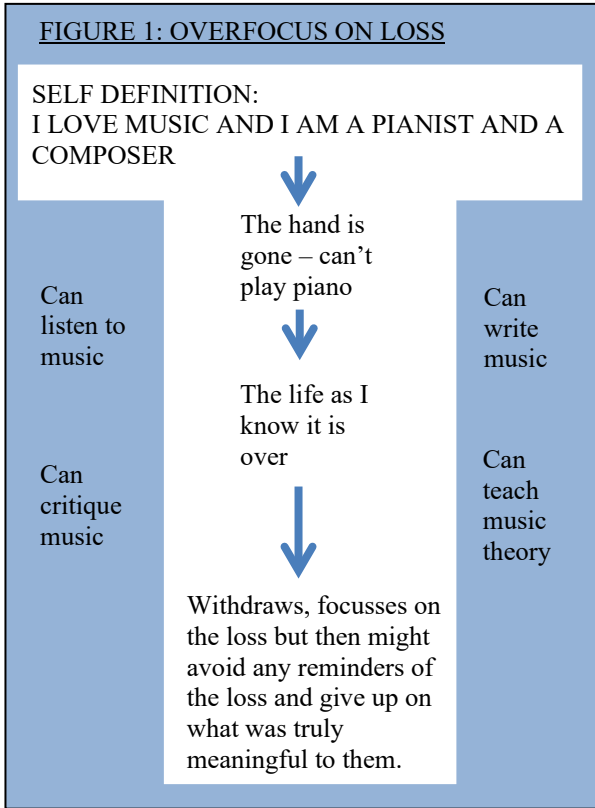


FIGURE 3: LEARNING TO ADJUST

SELF DEFINITION:

LOSS THAT MAKES DIFFICULT FOR YOU TO LIVE ACCORDING TO WHAT YOU VALUE:

LIFE AS YOU KNEW HAS CHANGED. What can you still do to follow the value that defines you?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____

IF YOU WERE DOING THOSE THINGS, HOW WOULD YOUR LIFE LOOK LIKE?

SETTING CONDITIONS

Sometimes we remain stuck because we believe that some things have to happen first before we are able to move on. This might often be true. You need to pass a professional exam in order to work in your chosen field. You need to meet someone that you have feelings for and who cares for you in order to start a relationship. You might need to get better before being able to focus on some of your long term goals. However in order to pass a professional exam, you need to study and take the test. In order to meet someone, you need to get out of your house. In order to get better, you have to be careful not to follow the patterns that keep you stuck. In other words we often cannot just wait to become better, more knowledgeable or wait that relationships or opportunities present themselves through a draw of luck. Even more importantly, we have to be careful not to miss opportunities because we insist on waiting for certain conditions to be met.

NECESSARY VS. OPTIMAL CONDITIONS	
Characteristics and examples of necessary conditions:	Characteristics and examples of optimal conditions:

Complete the sentences below to help you identify your conditional thinking.

In order to have friends, I need to be interesting and feel better about myself
 write down what you would like to be doing or experiencing or what you would like to achieve
 write down what you insist must happen before you work on the concern identified in the first part of the sentence.

In order to _____, I need to _____.

In order to _____, I need to _____.

In order to _____, I need to _____.

Ultimately, we are talking about acceptance. Acceptance is an ability to have a good look at all aspects of the situation we face or our life in general and then deciding what we can change and what we need to leave the way it is. It is an ability to find focus in life without insisting that certain issues take care of themselves or disappear. It is the ability to do what we need and value when necessary conditions are present without insisting that the optimal conditions materialize. The process of acceptance can be helped by distinguishing between resistance, acceptance and endorsement. If you have a reaction to the word “acceptance” just think of it as being factual and realistic.

RESISTANCE	ACCEPTANCE	ENDORSEMENT

COUNTERING CONDITIONAL THINKING

A: IDENTIFYING CONDITIONAL THINKING AND ITS IMPACT

1: Write the conditional statement that keeps you stuck or hurts you:

2: Why is this condition necessary to enable you to do what you desire?

3: What are the benefits of focussing on this condition?

4: What are the costs of focussing on this condition?

B: WHAT CAN YOU DO EVEN IF THE CONDITIONS ARE NOT MET?

5: Are there any things that you could still be doing that would make your life better even if this condition was not met? If so, what are they?

6: What blocks you from doing things that you have identified in box 5?

7: What can you do to manage barriers that you have listed in box 6?

C: WHAT CAN YOU DO BRING ABOUT THE DESIRED CONDITIONS?

8: Are there any things that you could be doing to bring about the conditions that you desire?

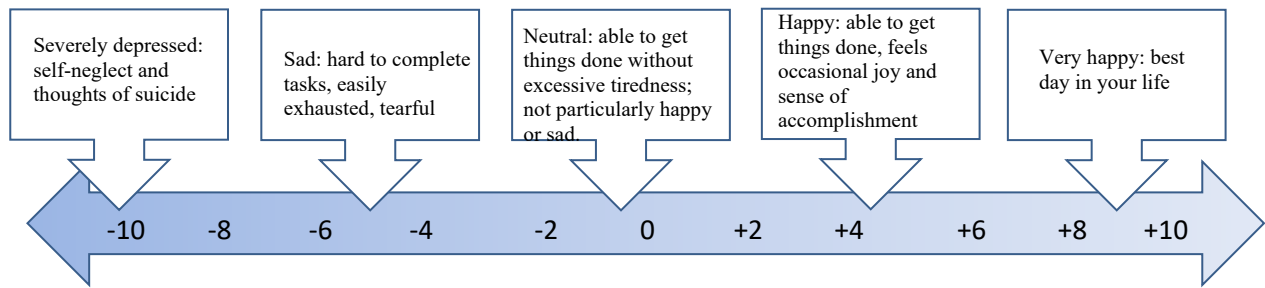
9: What blocks you from doing things that you have identified in box 8?

10: What can you do to manage barriers that you have listed in box 9?

DOING WHAT MAKES SENSE

<p>1: Think of a situation that you dread, might have avoided or that stayed on your mind for a long time after it already happened. Describe it.</p>	<p>2: As you look at this situation, what are the KEY OBJECTIVES that make sense?</p>	
<p>3: Complete following sentences:</p> <p>If I want to _____, then it makes sense for me to _____ <small>(state your goal)</small> <small>(write down the required action)</small></p> <p>If I want to _____, then it makes sense for me to _____ <small>(state your goal)</small> <small>(write down the required action)</small></p> <p>If I want to _____, then it makes sense for me to _____ <small>(state your goal)</small> <small>(write down the required action)</small></p> <p>If I want to _____, then it makes sense for me to _____ <small>(state your goal)</small> <small>(write down the required action)</small></p> <p>Circle the first action step that you are going to take</p>		
<p>4: Write down the thoughts that come to your mind that make you hesitant about taking that action step:</p>	<p>5: What facts / life experiences support these thoughts?</p>	<p>6: What facts / life experiences DO NOT support these thoughts?</p>
<p>7: What are the costs of doing what you plan on doing?</p>	<p>8: What are the benefits of doing what you are planning to do?</p>	
<p>9: What are the costs of not doing what you plan on doing?</p>	<p>10: What are the benefits of not doing what you are planning to do?</p>	
<p>11: Clarify what you are committing yourself to doing. What are you going to do and when? (Put it on your agenda)</p>		
<p>12:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> What happened when you did what you planned to do? You might not be able to achieve your objective at the first go. Were there any negative consequences to your actions? What is your next step? 		

KEEPING TRACK AND KEEPING HONEST



DATE:							
Rate your overall mood for the day using the scale above and mark it on the graph.	+10						
	+8						
	+6						
	+4						
	+2						
	0						
	-2						
	-4						
	-6						
	-8						
	-10						
What challenges / stresses were you faced with today?							
Did you engage in any meaningful activity? If so, what was it?							
What skill have you practiced?	<input type="checkbox"/> Engage in meaningful activity <input type="checkbox"/> Thought Record <input type="checkbox"/> Challenge Assumptions <input type="checkbox"/> Thinking Redirection <input type="checkbox"/> Doing what Makes Sense	<input type="checkbox"/> Engage in meaningful activity <input type="checkbox"/> Thought Record <input type="checkbox"/> Challenge Assumptions <input type="checkbox"/> Thinking Redirection <input type="checkbox"/> Doing what Makes Sense	<input type="checkbox"/> Engage in meaningful activity <input type="checkbox"/> Thought Record <input type="checkbox"/> Challenge Assumptions <input type="checkbox"/> Thinking Redirection <input type="checkbox"/> Doing what Makes Sense	<input type="checkbox"/> Engage in meaningful activity <input type="checkbox"/> Thought Record <input type="checkbox"/> Challenge Assumptions <input type="checkbox"/> Thinking Redirection <input type="checkbox"/> Doing what Makes Sense	<input type="checkbox"/> Engage in meaningful activity <input type="checkbox"/> Thought Record <input type="checkbox"/> Challenge Assumptions <input type="checkbox"/> Thinking Redirection <input type="checkbox"/> Doing what Makes Sense	<input type="checkbox"/> Engage in meaningful activity <input type="checkbox"/> Thought Record <input type="checkbox"/> Challenge Assumptions <input type="checkbox"/> Thinking Redirection <input type="checkbox"/> Doing what Makes Sense	<input type="checkbox"/> Engage in meaningful activity <input type="checkbox"/> Thought Record <input type="checkbox"/> Challenge Assumptions <input type="checkbox"/> Thinking Redirection <input type="checkbox"/> Doing what Makes Sense
What other things were you able to accomplish?							