



OVERCOMING DEPRESSION – 7

PATTERNS AND ASSUMPTIONS – 2

RELATIONSHIPS AND HOW WE TALK TO EACH OTHER

In section 6, we worked to uncover some hidden assumptions that might have an unwanted impact on our lives. We are especially prone to forming such assumptions when dealing with our relationships, whether these relationships involve friends, family or romantic partners.

In this section, we will:

- Take stock of our relationships;
- Review values and principles that guide our relationships;
- Challenge assumptions that make us repeat same mistakes over and over again; and
- Learn to recognize and avoid traps within emotionally charged interactions.

TAKING STOCK OF RELATIONSHIPS

UNDERSTANDING MY RELATIONSHIPS			
Person you have the relationship with – this might be friendship, romantic relationship or professional relationship.	What predictions are you making about this relationship? What expectations do you have about interactions with this person?	What assumptions guide your behaviour? (Think of the “if – then” statements you make in your head when dealing with person.)	What would you like to see happen in this relationship?

VALUES AND PRINCIPLES THAT GUIDE YOUR RELATIONSHIPS

Most people agree that our relationships should be rooted in the values listed below:

- Mutual respect (friendships, family, romantic and professional relationships)
- Reliability (friendships, family, romantic and professional relationships)
- Supporting each other (friendships, family, romantic and professional relationships)
- Showing affection and kindness (friendships, family and romantic relationships)
- Honesty (friendships, family, romantic and professional relationships)
- Loyalty (friendships, family, romantic and professional relationships)
- Mutual attraction (romantic relationships)

Despite that agreement, we might have different definitions of what each of these ingredients mean. Furthermore, we are likely to express these values through different behaviours. For instance, if Tanya believes that being cared for means that Tom listens to her talk about her day, while Tom believes that his caring should be taken for granted as he works long hours to support Tanya and their son, this couple is likely to have problems despite their best intentions. Similarly if Mary believes that being reliable means that she should take on all the work given to her by her manager while her manager believes that reliability includes knowing and communicating when the plate is full, the two are likely to become at odds. First, think a bit how you would define each type of a relationship (friendship, family, romantic and professional) and identify people in your life that you have this type of relationship with. Think a bit about what are your expectations of such a relationship. Then use the table on the next page to see how you can define the desired characteristics (mutual respect, reciprocity etc.) in context of each type of relationship and how these characteristics can be translated into everyday actions.

There is no escaping it: our assumptions and rules color our relationships, inform what we pay attention to and what we discard as irrelevant. Most importantly, even when we have quite reasonable rules and assumptions, we often think that others share exactly the same assumptions. The next worksheet will help you bring your own assumptions to your awareness.

Do you know how people in your life define mutual respect, reciprocity, reliability, being supportive, being affectionate, kindness, honesty and loyalty? Chances are that these people believe that they treat you according to all of these values except that your definitions are somewhat different and the manner in which these values are expressed through their actions does not match your expectations. Share these sheets with your significant others. It might turn out to be a very interesting conversation as people tend to take on a lot of unnecessary silent sacrifices that instead of strengthening their relationships, end up by creating resentment. Just imagine eating food that you hate just because you are under the false assumption that your partner likes it or expressing your support in a manner that is irritating to them.

CHALLENGE THE ASSUMPTIONS THAT DO NOT WORK

There are many assumptions about relationships that can derail the best of intentions. The most damaging ones include:

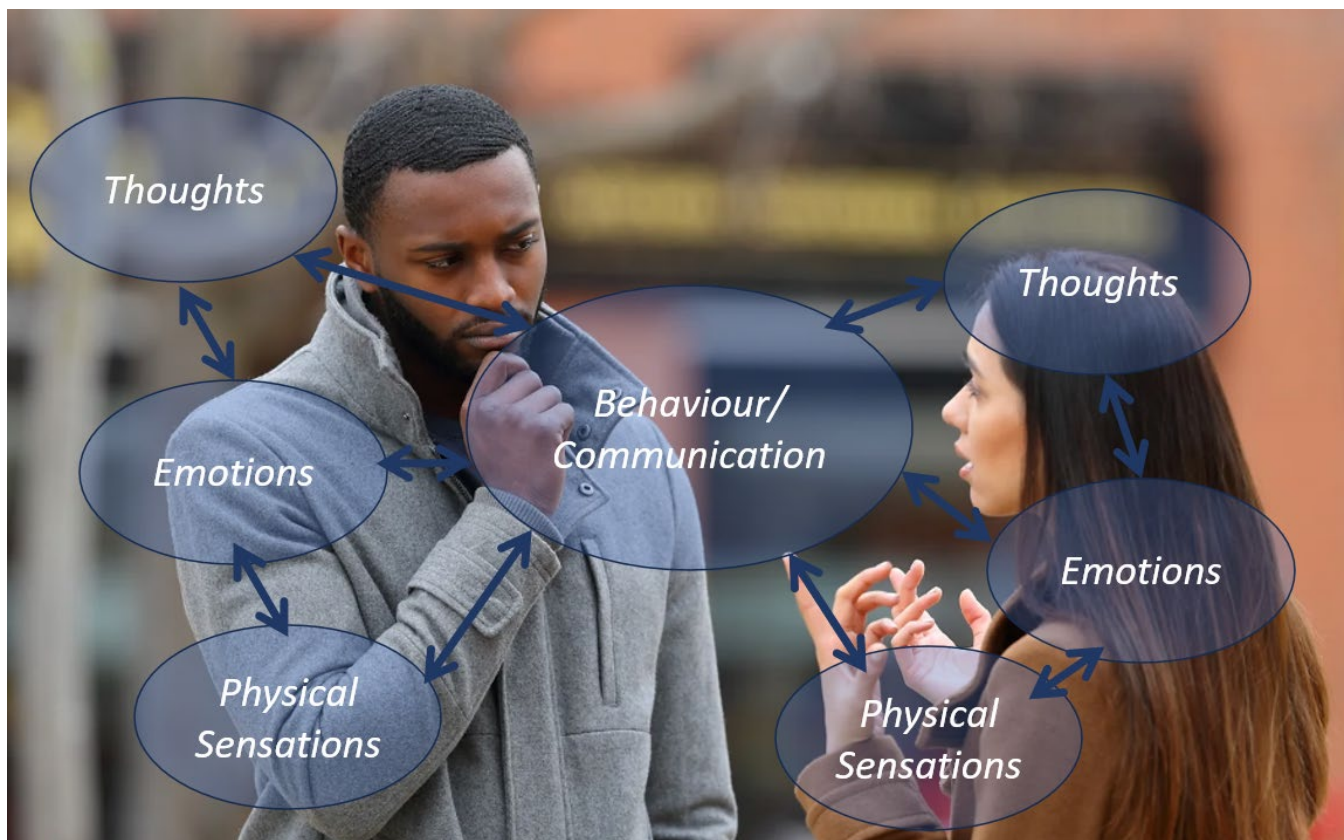
- If “x” cared for me, then “x” would know what I am feeling.
- If “x” cared for me, then “x” should know what I want.
- If “x” is unable to meet me, that means that I am not important.
- People who care for us are always able to soothe us.

The reality is often different. People who care for us, are not always able to guess our feelings correctly. We often do not fully know what we want but we expect the other people to figure it out and give it to us. We owe it to ourselves to figure this out and communicate our preferences openly. You might be very important to someone and yet they might not be able to meet you. Our emotions unfold within us and it might be impossible for someone else to relieve you of your pain. Just think of having received bad news – the person next to you can offer sympathy but cannot eliminate the pain associated with the news you have received. Others cannot save us from our own emotions. You can help the situation by giving someone you care about an “instruction manual” to yourself (page 4).

UNDERSTANDING ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT RELATIONSHIPS

DESIRED CHARACTERISTIC (what do you value in your relationships?)	RELATIONSHIP TYPE			
	ROMANTIC	FAMILY	FRIENDSHIP	PROFESSIONAL
How do you define this?				
What can you do to maintain this value?				
How do you define this?				
What can you do to maintain this value?				
How do you define this?				
What can you do to maintain this value?				

RECOGNIZING TRAPS OF EMOTIONALLY CHARGED INTERACTIONS



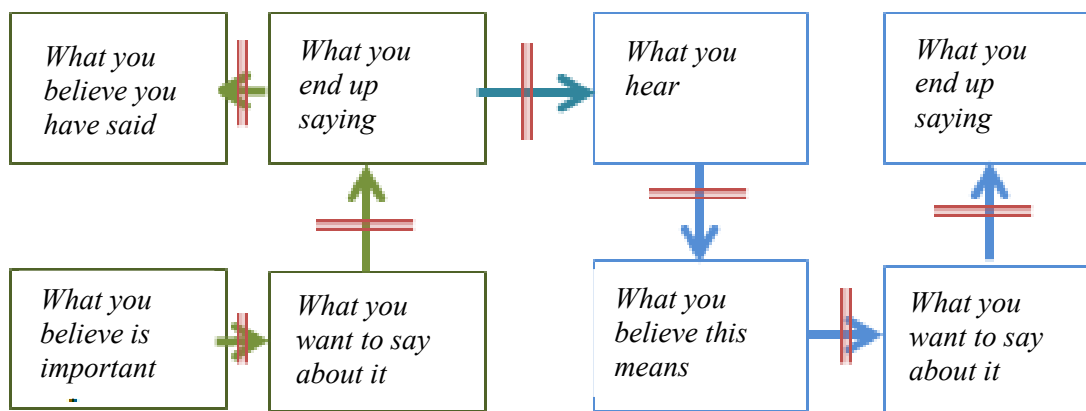
The only thing that our conversation partner is responding to is our behaviour (i.e., how and what we communicate). Everything else is pretty much hidden from the view. Even the best intentions can be ruined by our inability to communicate clearly.

The worksheet on pages 6-7 helps you identify your goals and your own apprehensions about conversations that you might need to have. Completing such a sheet before having difficult interactions might not eliminate all the difficult emotions but at least it will ensure that you will stay your course and be clear about what you want, **one interaction at a time**. Remember, you are likely to be derailed by your apprehensions. You will feel some strong emotions. Your body might be sending out alarms and might put you in a state of fight or flight. Yet, at risk of being overly repetitive: *The only thing that your conversation partner can react to is your behaviour*. Intentions are not easy to understand. Even worse, we might have multiple contradicting goals in mind and consequently achieve nothing. For example, the goal of preserving a relationship is not quite compatible with revenge for your wounded feelings.

For our communication efforts to be successful, we need to:

- offer the greatest degree of detail about the least amount of change that is necessary.
- acknowledge when the other person is trying to provide us with what we want.
- not view things that they still need to correct as major disappointments.
- be prepared to negotiate.
- be patient – behaviour change takes about 6 months to become a new norm; and
- dare to have engaging conversation despite feeling powerful emotions.

These principles above apply to relationships with people that we feel safe with. If your partner or friend does things that impact your safety or are against your moral code, you really have to re-evaluate the nature of your relationship. In the meantime, keep the diagram below in mind as our communication is prone to many breakdowns.



PLANNING FOR DIFFICULT INTERACTIONS

A. PREPARING

What is the interaction you are facing?		
Who is involved?	What is at stake?	
What is the best case scenario?	What is the worst case scenario?	What is the most likely outcome?

List difficulties that you anticipate:

With respect to yourself (e.g., resentment, anxiety, knee jerk reactions etc.):	With respect to the other people involved (e.g., personality, need to save face etc.):	With respect to the circumstances (e.g., outside pressures, time limit etc.):
What can you do about it?	What can you do about it?	What can you do about it?

B: KNOWING WHAT YOU WANT

List your goals (be honest with yourself!):

		How important is this goal for you? (1-10)	How likely can you accomplish this goal? (1-10)
A			
B			
C			
D			
E			

C: CHOOSING ACTIONS THAT MAKE SENSE

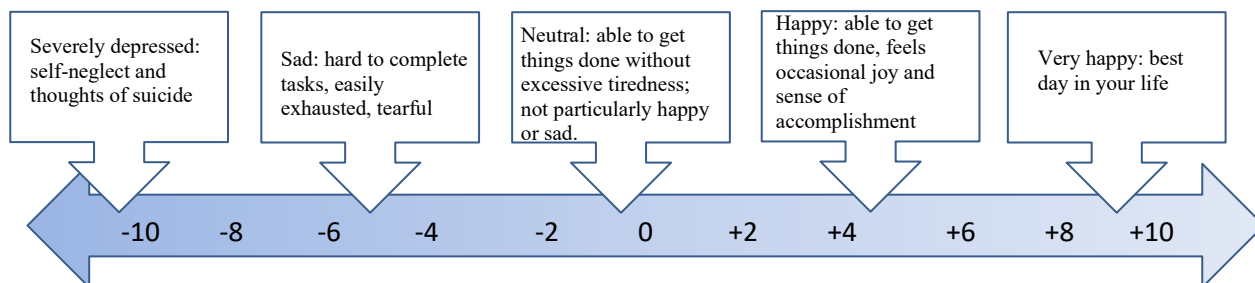
The letters to the right correspond to the goals you have identified previously. Mark “+” if your plan helps you reach a given goal. Mark “-“ if the action you think about taking may take you away from your goal. Mark “?” if you are uncertain. Brain storm and list anything you feel compelled to do. Often we need to do more than one thing to reach our goals and need back-up plans. This exercise also helps us identify which of our actions can move us away from some of our objectives while moving us closer to other objectives.

No.	Possible course of action	A	B	C	D	E
1.						
2.						
3.						
4.						
5.						

D: IF NECESSARY, SCRIPT IT AHEAD:

O	Be clear about your objectives and describe them to the other person.	
P	Present the other person with a plan of how these objectives can be achieved.	
E	Explain your reasons for choosing your objectives and plan.	
N	Be prepared to negotiate .	

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"/> Planned for difficult interaction	<input type="checkbox"/> Engage in meaningful activity <input type="checkbox"/> Thought Record <input type="checkbox"/> Challenge Assumptions <input type="checkbox"/> Planned for difficult interaction	<input type="checkbox"/> Engage in meaningful activity <input type="checkbox"/> Thought Record <input type="checkbox"/> Challenge Assumptions <input type="checkbox"/> Planned for difficult interaction	<input type="checkbox"/> Engage in meaningful activity <input type="checkbox"/> Thought Record <input type="checkbox"/> Challenge Assumptions <input type="checkbox"/> Planned for difficult interaction	<input type="checkbox"/> Engage in meaningful activity <input type="checkbox"/> Thought Record <input type="checkbox"/> Challenge Assumptions <input type="checkbox"/> Planned for difficult interaction	<input type="checkbox"/> Engage in meaningful activity <input type="checkbox"/> Thought Record <input type="checkbox"/> Challenge Assumptions <input type="checkbox"/> Planned for difficult interaction	<input type="checkbox"/> Engage in meaningful activity <input type="checkbox"/> Thought Record <input type="checkbox"/> Challenge Assumptions <input type="checkbox"/> Planned for difficult interaction
What other things were you able to accomplish?							