

Antidepressant Skills

You will learn three skills that can stop your mood from sliding down, can make you feel less depressed and can prevent depression from happening again.

The skills are:

Realistic Thinking 🗨️ Problem Solving 🗨️ Goal Setting

We will explain how each of these skills helps fight depression and show you in a step-by-step way how to use the skill. It's best to think about these skills the way you would if you were learning a new sport: *practice* is very important. Lots of people find it helpful to share this book with a trusted friend, counsellor or family member – this person can help you to keep practicing even when you feel low energy or unmotivated. She or he would be like a coach to keep you on target. If there's no one like that, then be your own coach and keep yourself practicing the antidepressant skills. As you work through the skills, it will gradually get easier and the result is totally worth it.

Here's something to remember. Just as the 5 parts of your life (situation, thoughts, feelings, physical state and actions) can affect each other in negative ways, they can also affect each other in *positive* ways:

- 🌀 Think more realistically and your emotions will become less negative;
- 🌀 Solve problems more effectively and your situation will gradually improve and this will help your mood;
- 🌀 Become more active, your mood will improve and it will become easier to think about yourself in a fair way.

So by working with more than one skill at the same time, you can make change in several areas of your life, with each area having a positive impact on the others.

**If you never change your mind,
why have one?**

Edward de Bono

Realistic Thinking

In this section

you will learn to:

- 🗨️ Spot depressive thoughts that lead to depressed mood
- 🗨️ Challenge these depressive thoughts
- 🗨️ Come up with realistic thoughts
- 🗨️ Practice realistic thinking

We've talked about the kind of negatively distorted thinking that feeds into depression. Depressive thinking is *unrealistic* and *unfair*:

- 🌀 unrealistic negative thoughts about your situation
- 🌀 unfair negative thoughts about yourself
- 🌀 unrealistic negative thoughts about your future

Your plan is to replace depressive thinking with realistic thinking.

Realistic thinking is:

- 🌀 accurate about your situation, seeing things clearly as they are;
- 🌀 fair about yourself, looking in a balanced way at the positive and negatives in your life;
- 🌀 accurate about your future, not exaggerating bad outcomes.



**So, how do you change depressive thinking?
See the following page for the steps . . .**

Spot depressive thoughts

Here are the most common types of depressive thinking:

all or nothing

You see situations as totally one way or the other. If you don't get an A on the exam, that means you basically failed it. If you're having trouble with Math, that means you're never going to understand it. If your friend just says hi quickly in passing, that means she doesn't want to spend time with you ever again. One version of this is perfectionism, where you think that you have to be the best in the situation or it means that you failed. But the fact is that very few situations are completely one way or the other. Most situations fall somewhere in between. It's more realistic to think about situations in shades of gray, not black and white. Having difficulty with Math is a problem that will require getting assistance, not a total disaster. Your friend may be unhappy with you over something, so you'll need to talk it over with her, but that doesn't mean she never wants to see you again. As for perfectionism, since nobody can reach the top-level performance all the time (and be the smartest Science student, the most creative Art student, the most popular person in the school), set your expectations at a level that is challenging but not superhuman. Remember, if you set your standard for yourself at the top level, you may be setting yourself up for depression.

overgeneralizing

Based on one negative event, you expect that things will continue to go wrong; or based on one negative fact, you assume that everything else in the situation is negative. You do poorly on one exam, so you expect to do poorly on all the exams coming up. You hear that one student is mad at you, so you assume that all the students in your class are mad at you. But it's more realistic to look for extra information to decide how things are rather than rely on one little fact. Doing poorly on one exam doesn't mean you can't do well on later exams in that subject if you study more, or on exams in other subjects. Instead of assuming that all the students are mad at you, check it out.

labeling

You talk to yourself in a harsh way, calling yourself names like "loser", or whatever the worst insults are for you. You talk to yourself in a way that you would never talk to a friend or almost anyone. But this kind of self-labeling is unfair. All it really accomplishes is to make you feel discouraged and overwhelmed. Stop putting bad labels on yourself and instead encourage yourself to try things and praise yourself for what you achieve. You'll feel better and accomplish more.

Realistic Thinking

exaggerating

You exaggerate risk and expect the worst possible thing to happen. If you're going to a party, you expect that everybody will ignore you and you'll have a horrible time. Or an exam is coming up and you're convinced that you'll fail, no matter how much you study or how well you've done before. Or you don't sign up for any activities like music or sports because you're convinced that you'll be useless at it and you'll be humiliated. But this kind of thinking exaggerates the likelihood of something horrible happening. It makes you feel much more discouraged than you need to be and it often will stop you from trying new things you might enjoy.

mind-reading

You imagine that other people are criticizing or rejecting you, even when you don't have any real reason to think that. When you do this, you're acting as though you could read someone else's mind. If you're introduced to a new girl who doesn't say much, you immediately assume she doesn't like you or want to talk to you. But it's more realistic to check it out, to spend some time finding out what the other person really thinks. She probably doesn't feel about you as negatively as you imagine, maybe even feels positively about you. You don't really know until you check it out, and what you imagine is usually worse than the reality.



Realistic Thinking

filtering

You only pay close attention to events that are disappointing or to critical comments from others. Negative events are given a lot of importance. When something positive happens, you ignore it. When someone praises you, it makes you feel uncomfortable and you treat it as unimportant ["he was just trying to make me feel better"]. But it's more realistic to pay attention to both kinds of events; in fact, positive events or positive feedback are often more important, because they tell you what you're doing right. Building on what you do right is a great strategy for making life better.

Notice what you are thinking, what you're telling yourself. Do you use one of these kinds of depressive thinking? If so, write a Depressive Thought you have.

Based on the list above, what type of depressive thinking is it?



A large, empty rectangular box with rounded corners and a thick grey border, intended for writing a response to the prompt above.

Realistic Thinking

1 Notice how depressive thoughts change your mood

Most of the time, you're not aware of the negative things you're telling yourself. Thoughts change quickly, so you need to pay close attention to spot depressive thoughts. Think about the last time you felt really down, irritable, or noticed that

your mood dropped — what was going through your mind just then? Maybe you got home from school, sat down in your room to listen to a CD and suddenly just felt hopeless — what were you thinking about?

Write down any depressive thoughts that go along with your negative moods:

Realistic Thinking

Writing it down is really helpful when you're trying to understand how you got depressed. Seeing your thoughts on paper makes it easier to look at them clearly. A depressive thought that seems to make sense in your head ["my friend didn't show up for lunch, she must hate me now"] is much less certain when you see it written down.

Keep on writing your depressive thoughts and noticing how these thoughts change your mood. You'll probably find the same sorts of depressive thoughts again and again. Most depressed

people have a few kinds of depressive thoughts repeating in different situations. After a while, you'll begin to recognize the patterns and start to catch depressive thoughts while you're in the situation. Remind yourself that it's just a depressive thought, not reality!

Also – don't criticize yourself for having depressive thoughts. Either your past experience taught you to think like this or being depressed made you think like this – either way, *it's not your fault*.



Realistic Thinking

3 Challenge these depressive thoughts and replace them with realistic ones

Challenging depressive thoughts means *rethinking* the situation where you felt so lousy. We use a special worksheet with three columns: the first is named Situation,

the second is named Depressive Thoughts and the third is named Realistic Thoughts. Here's an example of a Realistic Thinking worksheet:

Situation	Depressive Thoughts	Realistic Thoughts
While I was talking to a couple of friends in the cafeteria yesterday, I found out they had gone out for coffee the day before without inviting me	I figured they were letting me know they don't want to hang out with me anymore [Overgeneralizing]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ☀ I've been friends with these two for a couple of years, they still act friendly ☀ we're planning to go out together on the weekend ☀ maybe they were out talking about the school project they're doing together ☀ it looks like they still are my friends

To do this worksheet you start by briefly describing a situation where you felt your mood drop (during the situation or afterwards). Then, you write down the thoughts that went along with your low mood. Using the list of kinds of depressive thinking from Step 1, you decide what kind of depressive

thinking you were using and write this down in the Depressive Thoughts column. (For example, "Overgeneralizing".) Finally, you try to come up with more realistic ways of thinking about the situation and write these in the last column.

Realistic Thinking

But when you're down or depressed, it's not easy to come up with realistic thoughts. Pick a depressive thought

} you've had and try coming up with realistic thoughts to replace it. Here are some questions that will help you.

Depressive Thought:



What proof do I have? Would most people agree with this thought?
If not, what would be a more realistic thought?

Can I get more proof, like asking someone about the situation?

What would I say to a friend in a similar situation?

What is a less extreme way of looking at the situation?

What will happen if I think this way? Is there another way of thinking that is more encouraging or useful?

Realistic Thinking

Now try using these questions to come up with more realistic ways of thinking about a situation that upset you.

Notice that it usually feels better to think realistic thoughts than depressive thoughts.

Situation	Depressive Thoughts	Realistic Thoughts

It won't be enough to come up with realistic thoughts just once. There are different kinds of situations where depressive thoughts make you feel

miserable. Try using this worksheet for other situations as well. We've included a blank copy of this worksheet at the back of the guide.



Each time you try coming up with realistic thoughts, it becomes easier.

Realistic Thinking

4 Practice realistic thinking

 Certain kinds of situations can really start up (trigger) depressive thinking. Common triggers for teens may include

 going to a party, finding out about a scheduled exam, or family arguments. *Write down some of your trigger situations.*



If you find yourself in trigger situations, practice your realistic thinking. Talk back to the depressive thoughts! Don't allow depressive thinking to happen without fighting it: every time you talk back, you make the depressive thinking weaker and realistic thinking stronger. But it will take time before realistic thinking is stronger than depressive thinking.

 At first, realistic thinking might seem fake. It will seem as though you are just kidding yourself. But that's only because you've had so much practice with depressive thinking. Remember the first time you tried a new sport, took a new subject or got a new videogame – it felt a bit awkward at first but got easier as you kept at it.


As you keep practicing the skill of realistic thinking, you'll find that it begins to feel right for you. Eventually you'll be able to accept realistic thoughts.