

## COPING SKILLS

### **Behavioral Activation:**

Depression saps a person's energy to do just about anything—even activities they enjoy. As a result, people with depression tend to become less active, which causes the depression to worsen. However, even a little bit of activity can help stop this cycle.

#### **1. Choose activities you are likely to complete.**

- Exercise: walk, go for a bike ride, weightlift, follow an exercise video, swim, practice yoga
- Socialize: call or text a friend, organize a group dinner, visit family, join a club / group
- Responsibilities: cleaning / housework, pay bills, professional development, homework
- Hobbies: sports, gardening, drawing, playing music, hiking, playing with a pet, cooking
- Personal care: dress up, get a haircut, prepare a healthy meal, tend to spiritual needs

#### **2. Practice your chosen activities. Use the following tips to improve consistency**

- Start small: If needed, break activities into smaller pieces. Some activity is better than none.
- Make a plan: Set an alarm as a reminder, or tie an activity to something you already do. For example, practice a hobby immediately after dinner every day.

### **Social Support**

Social isolation is a common symptom of depression. Related issues—such as fatigue, lowered self-esteem, and anxiety—exacerbate this problem. Resisting social isolation, and instead leaning on social support, can improve resilience to stress and depression.

- Lean on your existing relationships. Make it a priority to socialize with friends or family every day. If this is proving difficult, or if no one is nearby, plan times to interact remotely. Try cooking together on a video call, playing a game together, or sharing a coffee over the phone.
- Say “yes” to socializing. Depression makes it tempting to stay home, isolated from friends and family. Make a habit of saying “yes” to social opportunities, even when you're tempted to stay in.
- Join a support group. Support groups let you connect with others who are dealing with issues similar to yours. You'll benefit from sharing and receiving advice and support.

### **Three Good Things**

Negative thinking is a defining feature of depression. Positive experiences are minimized, while negative experiences are magnified. Gratitude helps combat this tendency by shifting focus toward *positive* experiences, rather than negative ones.

1. Write about three positive experiences from your day. These experiences can be small (“The weather was perfect when I walked to work”) or big (“I got a promotion at work”).
2. Choose one of the following questions to answer about each of the three good things:
  - a. Why did this happen?

- b. Why was this good thing meaningful?
  - c. How can I experience more of this good thing?
3. Repeat this exercise every day for 1 week.

### **Mindfulness**

Mindfulness means paying attention to the present moment. It means taking a step back and noticing the world, and one's thoughts and feelings, without judgment. The goal of mindfulness is to simply *observe*. Mindfulness helps reduce the rumination and worry that often accompany depression.

One way to practice mindfulness is through meditation. During mindfulness meditation, you will simply sit and focus your attention on the sensation of breathing. By focusing on your breathing, you will put yourself in the here-and-now.

### **Time and Place**

Find a quiet, comfortable place where you can practice mindfulness for 15 to 30 minutes every day. Frequent and consistent practice leads to the best results, but some practice is better than none.

### **Posture**

Sit in a chair or lie down in a comfortable position. Close your eyes or let your gaze soften. Let your head, shoulders, arms, and legs relax. Adjust your posture whenever you feel uncomfortable.

### **Awareness of Breath**

Focus on your breathing. Notice the sensation of the air as it travels in through your nose and out through your mouth. Notice the gentle rise and fall of your belly.

### **Wandering Mind**

During meditation, it's normal for the mind to wander. When this happens, gently turn your attention back to your breathing. You may need to do this frequently throughout your practice.