

GUIDED  
SELF-MANAGEMENT  
TOOLS  
**FOR DEPRESSION**

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Teens 13-17



# COGNITIVE BEHAVIORAL THERAPY

# FOR DEPRESSION



## INTRODUCTION

Everyone feels sad sometimes. School, friends, and family concerns can cause teens to feel down. Disappointments and challenges in life can also have an impact on mood. For some teens, sad feelings can become difficult to manage. This can cause problems at home, school, and/or with friends. If this is happening for you, you may be depressed. Working with your primary care team and your parents can help you manage symptoms of depression.

Behavioral health specialists have worked hard to figure out ways to help manage depression. One of the most effective interventions is a type of therapy called Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, or CBT. This type of therapy helps people with depression learn how to change their thoughts and behaviors in order to feel less sad and to cope when sad feelings do occur. The worksheets in this guide will help you and your family try CBT strategies at home. There are tips and activities for you and advice for your parents. We find that the skills are most effective when used in order. All of the skills included in our guide are *evidence-based*, meaning they are strategies that have been tested and proven to be effective through rigorous scientific research. Many families have found these strategies to be beneficial; we hope they will work for you, too.

## SKILLS & EXERCISES

Each of the skill handouts includes an explanation of the skill, a description of how it will help you and your family, and instructions for how to use the strategy at home. We've also included a list of common questions and concerns people usually have about each skill, along with our answers. Work through the guide along with your parents and try out each new skill for about two weeks to see which fit you best. See what's working and what's still challenging, then adjust as needed. Once you've found a set of skills that works for you, keep at it until the routine becomes second nature. It may be challenging at first, but the more you practice, the easier it will be to make these exercises and techniques a part of your daily life. Let us know how things are going and be in touch if you need any additional support for depression management. Good luck!



Skill 1

### Mood Tracking

These worksheets will help you pay attention to your feelings, see how different situations impact your mood, and practice sharing your feelings with others.



Skill 2

### Making Time for Fun

These worksheets will help you plan time in your day for activities you enjoy and learn additional positive coping skills for improving mood.



Skill 3

### Relaxation Skills

These worksheets teach simple skills and exercises that help increase feelings of calm and well-being. Make these skills a consistent part of your daily life to reduce stress.



Skill 4

### Thinking Traps

These worksheets teach new ways to look at situations and suggest questions to ask in order to reduce negative thoughts and increase positive thinking.



Skill 5

### Problem Solving

These worksheets help you gain confidence and improve your mood by teaching strategies that help you to 1) solve problems independently and 2) seek help when needed.



## What is Mood Tracking?

- ▶ In order for you to better understand how you feel, you will need to practice feelings identification and feelings expression.
- ▶ **Feelings identification** is a term for being able to name your feelings with detail and accuracy. Feelings identification goes beyond saying you feel “good” or “bad” and instead involves developing a richer feelings vocabulary. **Feelings expression** is a term for sharing emotions in safe and productive ways.
- ▶ The use of **mood tracking** to identify and record feelings is a helpful way to increase feelings identification and expression. A **Mood Tracker** is a simple system that can help you label and record your feelings.
- ▶ As you improve your feelings identification and expression through mood tracking, you may notice patterns in your moods. Paying attention to these patterns is an important first step to figuring out ways to improve mood. Having a better understanding of your emotions will help you use other helpful skills, such as the Relaxation Skills (Depression Skill 3) and Problems Solving worksheets (Depression Skill 5) in this guide.

## Here's How to Begin Mood Tracking at Home

**Your parent can read the introduction and script in quotes below to you or you can just read it yourself. There are things for you to do at each step.**

- 1 Make a master list of emotions .**  
You may want to track the following feelings: **Happy, Sad, Depressed, Angry, Frustrated, Stressed, Worried, and Neutral.** You can add more based on your vocabulary, understanding, and needs.
- 2 Expand your feelings vocabulary.**  
You will need a timer, two pieces of paper, and two pens. Set the timer for one minute. Read along with your parent or just read to yourself: **“We are going to come up with as many different feelings words as we can. Words like happy, sad, and any more you can think of. When I say go, start your list. I’ll do mine at the same time. We will put our lists together at the end.”** When time is up, compare your list with your parent’s and create a “master list” that contains the feeling words you and they think are most necessary for tracking their moods. Use tips 1 and 2 above to make sure you are including key feelings.
- 3 Introduce mood tracking.**  
“We named a lot of different feelings during the naming feelings game. Feelings can also be called emotions or moods. Happy, sad, depressed (which means really down and hopeless), angry, frustrated, stressed, worried and neutral (that means no feeling) are important ones that you and I are going to make sure we include in our vocabularies. Many people find it helpful to track their moods in order to get more practice identifying how they feel, notice any patterns in moods throughout the day, and then use the information to figure out ways to improve mood. This worksheet is one good way to try this. You can record your feelings and the situation that caused those feelings for morning, afternoon, and evening. Some people like to do this in the moment and other people like to do this at the end of the day. What would you like to do?”

# TEEN WORKSHEET: MOOD TRACKER FOR TEENS



Depression  
Skill 1

- 1 Make copies of this worksheet so you can continue this practice beyond the first week.
- 2 Keep the master list of emotions you made with your mood tracking worksheets for easy reference. If you have electronic devices, you may want to keep the list on a device.
- 3 If you can't think of a feeling word when it's time to fill in their worksheet, use examples from the master list.
- 4 If you can't think of something for the What Happened? section, ask yourself, *"Where were you when you noticed your feeling? What was the situation? What were you doing?"*
- 5 Once you have completed a week of Mood Tracking, start to look for patterns. You can do this together with your parent or a support person. Read all of the emotions and situations from the week's Mood Tracker. Ask yourself, *"What do you notice? Are certain events connected to certain feelings a lot?"* Also notice if certain times of day are connected: *"Do you notice anything interesting about how you feel at certain times of the day?"*
- 6 Once you notice and identify patterns, think about which other skills in this guide could help. Many teens find that the Relaxation Skills (Depression Skill 3) and Problem Solving worksheets (Depression Skill 5) in this guide are useful.

		Sun	Mon	Tues	Weds	Thurs	Fri	Sat
Morning	Mood							
	What Happened?							
Afternoon	Mood							
	What Happened?							
Evening	Mood							
	What Happened?							

# TEEN WORKSHEET: MOOD TRACKER FOR TEENS



Depression  
Skill 1

Week: \_\_\_\_\_

	Sun	Mon	Tues	Weds	Thurs	Fri	Sat
Morning	Mood						
	What Happened?						
Afternoon	Mood						
	What Happened?						
Evening	Mood						
	What Happened?						

Week: \_\_\_\_\_

	Sun	Mon	Tues	Weds	Thurs	Fri	Sat
Morning	Mood						
	What Happened?						
Afternoon	Mood						
	What Happened?						
Evening	Mood						
	What Happened?						

# TEEN HANDOUT: MOOD TRACKING TIPS



Depression Skill 1

## How Can Mood Tracking Help Me?

- ▶ Teens who are having a hard time with sad or depressed mood sometimes struggle to both explain how they feel and show how they feel in appropriate ways. Mood Tracking can help you become more skilled at feelings identification and feelings expression.
- ▶ Improving these skills can help you feel more in control when a low mood occurs. This can in turn reduce certain behaviors that may be connected to difficulty expressing emotions (e.g., yelling outbursts, acting out, or withdrawing from friends and family).
- ▶ Mood Tracking can help you notice patterns in your moods that can give you valuable insight into your triggers and challenges (e.g. you notice that you tend to feel worse when you're left out at school).
- ▶ You can use this information to find coping skills that can improve specific moods and solve problems that may be causing stress.

## Common Teen Concerns

### **When I sit down to mood track, I don't know how I feel!**

Sometimes Mood Tracking can feel overwhelming or confusing. Use your master list of feelings to get ideas. You can also ask yourself questions about how you felt in specific situations (e.g., "How did you feel in math class? At lunch? After school?"). You can first use words such as "good" or "positive" and "bad" or "negative" to identify if you were feeling a positive or negative emotion. Then focus on narrowing that range of emotions down to be more specific, using the list we provide for suggestions. Ask your parents or a support person for help if you need it.

### **I don't want to mood track.**

We empathize! It can feel hard to begin expressing emotions if you've kept them bottled up inside. You could be feeling overwhelmed, or too down to be motivated. Mood Tracking should not be another chore but something short and simple that you can work into your daily routine (e.g., can you fill out the worksheet after dinner, or use your phone to keep track?). With your parent, set a specific goal for regular mood tracking (e.g., three times a week to start) and think of a small but fun reward you can earn for reaching it.

### **I'm not sure how to use the Mood Tracker to plan or problem solve.**

Think of the Mood Tracker as data: important information about your day-to-day experience. Look for patterns, such as certain moods that happen over and over on the same day, at the same time, or in the same situation. Use this information to brainstorm ways to improve those situations, together with your parent or support person if you need it. Are you always sad on Mondays? Maybe Mondays would feel more positive if there were occasionally a fun activity or special dinner to look forward to. See the Making Time for Fun worksheets (Depression Skill 2) for more ideas like this. Are evenings stressful? Perhaps this could be improved by starting homework earlier or thinking of a calming bedtime routine. Read the Relaxation Skills (Depression Skill 3) and Problem Solving (Depression Skill 5) worksheets for more ideas like these. Once you have more information about the specific circumstances around certain moods, you can plan ahead.

### **My Mood Trackers show that I'm almost always in a low mood, no matter what.**

Figure out ways to add more fun and relaxing activities to your daily life (see Making Time for Fun and Relaxation Skills, Depression Skills 2 and 3). Notice if this results in any changes. Also ask yourself whether negative thinking may be impacting your report of your mood. Are you reporting the facts? Would using a skill from Thinking Traps help (Depression Skill 4)? If your low mood continues, talk to your primary care provider. They can connect you to a behavioral health specialist who can help. If your mood causes you concern for your safety, talk to a parent or other supportive adult and seek emergency help.



## What is Making Time for Fun?

- ▶ If you are struggling with sadness or depression, you may stop doing things that you used to enjoy. You may engage in more passive activities (e.g., screen time) reduce the amount of active choices (e.g. sports, hobbies) you engage in, or spend less time with others. Or you may find that you aren't doing many fun activities at all, or feel that activities you usually enjoy are less fun than they used to be. These changes in activity and motivation are common symptoms of depression.
- ▶ **Behavioral activation** is a method for increasing the amount of enjoyable activities that are a part of your day. It is a great tool for helping you improve your mood and increase your active coping skills. Since you may feel unmotivated right now, activities are scheduled ahead of time in order to help you with consistency and planning.
- ▶ You may not be in a good mood at the start of an activity, but you may notice a significant improvement in mood once you get going! Keeping track of your moods before and after an activity will help you notice which activities make a big positive difference in your mood. In the future, you can return to these activities to cope with low mood.

## Here's How to Use Behavioral Activation at Home

**Your parent or support person can read the introduction and scripts in quotes below to you or you can just read it yourself. There are things for you to do in each step:**

- 1 Introduce behavioral activation.** "You've been feeling sad and down lately. When people feel down, they often stop doing things they used to love. That sometimes happens because they feel tired or uninterested in their hobbies and activities. This causes them to have less fun and feel even more down! Do you think this is happening to you? Together, we are going to make an effort to plan for more fun in your daily life. Scheduling fun in your day to help you feel happier is called *behavioral activation*."
- 2 Introduce the Making Time for Fun worksheet.** "We are going to use the Making Time for Fun worksheet to organize your behavioral activation. Your job is to make a list of fun activities you'd like to do and then choose one activity for each day. We will try to put mostly everyday things on the worksheet that you can do daily (even on school nights!). However, we can also include the occasional bigger, special activity. We will also rate your mood before and after to see if the activity makes you feel better." We can use a scale from 1-10 where 1 means very down, and 10 means very happy. See the Mood Tracking worksheets in Depression Skill 1 for additional support on feelings identification and expression.
- 3 Brainstorm and choose activities.** "Do you have any ideas about things you want to do? We will add them to the Fun Activities List." Record the activities on the Fun Activities List as you go.
- 4 Make the schedule.** "Great job! Now look over your list. Why don't you pick which day of the week you would like to do some of these things?" You or your parent can write the activities down in a schedule according to your choices. Review the chart once it's filled in.

# TEEN WORKSHEET: MAKING TIME FOR FUN



## My Fun Activities List

1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
6	
7	
8	
9	
10	

**Fun Activities Suggestions**

- Play outside
- Journal
- Listen to music
- Go for a walk
- Exercise or practice a sport
- Draw or paint
- Play with a pet
- Watch a funny movie
- Talk to a friend
- Read a book or listen to an audiobook

## Behavioral Activation Schedule

Day of the Week	Fun Activity	Mood Before	Mood After
Sunday			
Monday			
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			
Saturday			



# TEEN HANDOUT: MAKING TIME FOR FUN TIPS



Depression Skill 2

## How Can Making Time for Fun Help Me?

- ▶ When teens are struggling with sadness or depression, they often stop doing activities they once loved because they feel tired, think once enjoyable activities are boring, feel frustrated or irritable, or start withdrawing from friends. Unfortunately, the more you reduce your pleasurable activities, the more your sadness may increase.
- ▶ Using the Making Time for Fun worksheet can help you organize and motivate yourself to increase your positive activities through behavioral activation. It can reduce how often your parents nag you to choose something to do when you seem sad or bored. You can be a leader in your family by helping everyone benefit from mood-boosting activities if you do them together. For example, physical activity as a family can make a big difference. In addition, spending time in nature can have positive and soothing effects on everyone's mood.
- ▶ Another benefit of the Making Time for Fun skill is that it helps you increase your active coping skills. You will be able to keep track of which activities improve your mood the most. These activities, along with relaxation skills (see Relaxation Skills worksheets in Depression Skill 3), will be powerful tools that you can turn to for improving mood in a variety of circumstances.

## Common Teen Concerns

### I really only want to include video games on my chart.

Many teens prefer screen time over other activities and it's okay to include a few of these activities in your plan. However, too much screen time can be passive and isolating, leading to more negative effects than positive ones, even if they feel good in the short term. Try to balance your Fun Activities List so that there is a mix of high and low energy activities and not too many activities with screen time. Physical activities, especially outside in nature, can make a huge difference in mood, and low-key activities like reading or art projects can also help you feel really relaxed and put you in a better mood.

### My parent says I have too many expensive activities on my list.

Try to pick some simple and free activities too. These activities are beneficial and necessary because they are easier to access and can happen several times a week. Based on your family's practices and budget, work together with your parent to decide when to include some activities that have a cost at reasonable intervals. You can also use your own money (from chores, gifts, a job, etc.) to pay for some of the activities if your parents are okay with them.

### I don't want to do activities when my parent suggests them.

Ask yourself what could make doing behavioral activation more appealing. Have you decided that you want to change the order of activities, or do completely new ones? Edit your Making Time for Fun worksheets as needed. Keep trying new things until you find something that feels enjoyable and comfortable. It's hardest to do fun things when you feel down, but that this is when doing fun things is actually most important!

### I still have a low mood, even after doing their fun activities.

Brainstorm with your parent or support person to see if trying different activities could be more impactful. Adjust the planned activities on the worksheet as needed. Consider whether practicing some relaxation strategies (Depression Skill 3) could help you feel more relaxed and peaceful. Think about whether negative thinking may be impacting your report of your mood. Are you reporting the facts? Would using a skill from Thinking Traps help (Depression Skill 4)? If your low mood continues, talk to your primary care provider. They can connect you to a behavioral health specialist who can help. If your mood causes you concern for your safety, talk to a parent or other supportive adult and seek emergency help.

# TEEN HANDOUT: DEEP BREATHING



## What is Deep Breathing?

- ▶ Relaxation skills are ways to help relax our bodies and minds and increase feelings of calm and well-being.
- ▶ Our guide includes three different types of relaxation skills that can help you with anxiety. This handout provides an introduction to a skill called **deep breathing**.
- ▶ Deep breathing involves taking slow, deep breaths in which you fill your belly with air on the inhaled (i.e., the breathe *in* part) and release the air on the exhaled (i.e., when you breathe *out*).
- ▶ Try some of our strategies below and see if they help you feel calmer, more relaxed, and more in control.

## Deep Breathing Practice

**Deep Breathing Script:** "Sit in a comfortable position and close your eyes. We are going to focus on our breathing. Start by taking some nice deep breaths, the same way you normally would. Notice how your stomach rises and falls as you breathe. You can put your hand on your stomach to help you feel the air going in and out. Now we are going to try to breathe in a way that will help us feel even more relaxed. Breathe in through your nose. This is the inhale. When you do this, make your stomach fill with air like a balloon. Now breathe out slowly through your mouth. This is the exhale and it makes you empty the air out of your belly balloon. Good. You can make a 'whoosh' sound on the exhale if that helps you. Now do that again, breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth. Try to take in as much air as you can, slowly and calmly. Take your time and focus on the rhythm of your breathing. Try to make your belly balloon fill with air on the inhale and empty on the exhale. Great job. If other thoughts pop into your mind, that's okay. Just try to stay calm and start thinking about your breathing again. Now take three more slow, deep breaths in through your nose and out through your mouth, making your stomach rise and fall three times. One. Two. Three. You can do this any time you need to relax. Great job! When you're ready, you can open your eyes."

## Here's How to Use Deep Breathing at Home

- ▶ Making relaxation an activity that you teach your family could help you practice your relaxation skills more consistently. Pick a time when you could begin giving one person, or your whole family, "relaxation lessons" (e.g., before saying goodnight and getting ready for bed).
- ▶ Encourage everyone to point out times when they used their new deep breathing skills. If you notice a family member looking sad or stressed, you can also suggest they try deep breathing to see if it makes them feel better.



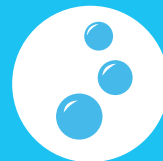
### Check Your Form!

To make sure you are doing deep breathing properly for maximum anxiety relief, place your hand on your belly. When you breathe in, your hand should move up slightly as air flows in. When you breathe out, your hand should sink slightly as air flows out.



### Number Breathing

Once you understand how to breathe more deeply, try variations such as 3-1-3. This involves breathing in for a count of three, holding it for one, and breathing out for a count of three. You can try other numbers and combinations and use whatever you like and find comfortable.



### Bubbles

Break out some bubbles and spend a few moments relaxing like a little kid! Notice that when you blow out slowly and calmly you can make bigger bubbles. Now try out some fast, anxious-style breathing: it doesn't work as well.



### Pizza Imagery

A fun image that can help you practice this skill anytime, anywhere: Imagine you are breathing in the smell of a slice of hot, delicious pizza and then blowing out to cool the slice down. Or think of another hot food you love!

# TEEN HANDOUT: PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION



## What is Progressive Muscle Relaxation?

- ▶ Relaxation skills are ways to help relax our bodies and minds and increase feelings of calm and well-being.
- ▶ There are three different types of relaxation skills that can help your child and family. This handout is an introduction to a skill called **progressive muscle relaxation**.
- ▶ Progressive muscle relaxation involves tensing different groups of muscles one at a time and then releasing them. An example is flexing your arm muscle, then relaxing it.
- ▶ Try some of our strategies below and see if they help your child feel calmer, more relaxed, and more in control.

## Here's How to Use Progressive Muscle Relaxation at Home

- ▶ Making relaxation an activity that you teach your family could help you practice your relaxation skills more consistently. Pick a time when you could begin giving one person, or your whole family, "relaxation lessons" (e.g., before saying goodnight and getting ready for bed).
- ▶ Encourage everyone to point out times when they used their new progressive muscle relaxation skills. If you notice a family member looking sad or stressed, you can also suggest they try deep breathing to see if it makes them feel better.

## Progressive Muscle Relaxation Practice

### Progressive Muscle Relaxation Script

You can ask your parent or support person to read this to you, or record it on your phone or tablet and play the recording!

"Sit in a comfortable position and close your eyes. We are going to practice relaxing our muscles by squeezing them tight and then releasing them. Let's start with our legs. Stretch your legs out in front of you and point your toes. Hold your position and count to 5. Now relax your legs. Good job! Do that again. Stretch, hold for 5, and relax. Now make two fists like you are squeezing a lemon in each hand. Squeeze your lemons as tightly as you can to get the juice out for a count of 5. Now drop your lemons. Great job! Now repeat. Squeeze for 5 and drop. Let's next focus on our arms. Hold them out in front of you, stiff and straight for 5. Good. Now drop your arms to your sides like they are cooked, limp spaghetti. Now repeat. Stiff for 5 and then loose. Okay, now we're going to squeeze our stomach muscles as if we are trying to squeeze through a door. Hold them tight and count to 5! Now release. Great job. Repeat. Squeeze for 5 and release. Now we are going to scrunch up our faces like we are trying to get flies off our noses. Keep your face scrunched up for 5! Good. Release. Again, scrunch for 5 and release. For our last step we are going to hold our whole body as tight and scrunched up as we can. Tense all the parts and count to 5! Great job. Now release. Do that one last time. Tense for 5, now relax. Notice how good it feels to relax all your muscles. You can open your eyes."

### Progressive Muscle Relaxation on Your Own

Time to get creative and have fun! If you like this skill, try to come up with your own script or do an internet search for additional progressive muscle relaxation scripts. You don't have to stop there; you can create your own or search for other examples of all the relaxation skills in this guide! Find a bunch that suit your personality and lifestyle.

# TEEN HANDOUT: GUIDED IMAGERY



## What is Guided Imagery?

- ▶ Relaxation skills are ways to help relax our bodies and minds and increase feelings of calm and well-being.
- ▶ Our guide includes three different types of relaxation skills that can help you with anxiety. This handout provides an introduction to a skill called **guided imagery**.
- ▶ Guided imagery involves imagining a calm image or scene using all 5 senses (i.e., sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell), sometimes with the help of a script or recording.
- ▶ Try some of our strategies below and see if they help you feel calmer, more relaxed, and more in control.

## Here's How to Use Guided Imagery at Home

- ▶ Making relaxation an activity that you teach your family could help you practice your relaxation skills more consistently. Pick a time when you could begin giving one person, or your whole family, "relaxation lessons" (e.g., before saying goodnight and getting ready for bed).
- ▶ Encourage everyone to point out times when they used their new guided imagery skills. If you notice a family member sad or stressed, you can suggest they try guided imagery to see if it makes them feel better.

## Guided Imagery Practice

### Guided Imagery Script:

You can ask your parent or support person to read this to you, or record it on your phone or tablet and play the recording!

"Sit in a comfortable position and close your eyes. I want you to use your imagination to go on a vacation in your mind. Think of a calm and peaceful place. It can be some place you have been before or some place you would like to go. The place doesn't even have to be real; it can be imaginary. Spend a few moments picturing your peaceful place. Now think about the things you **see** in your special place. Notice the colors, shapes, and patterns. Think about how peaceful it is to see the details of your special place. Now think about the things you **hear** in your peaceful place. Do you hear music, animal sounds, or ocean waves? Or maybe you hear something different. Now think about the things you **feel** in your calm place. Warm sunshine on your face, grass under your feet, or something else? Notice how these feelings help you relax. Now think about what you **smell** in your relaxing place. The salty ocean, cookies baking, or something else? Take a deep breath of the amazing smells. Now think about what you **taste** in your calm place. A popsicle? Or a fresh cookie? Or something else? Think about how good it tastes. You can always take a trip back to your relaxing place if you need to feel calm. This is a tool you can always use to feel better. When you are ready, you can open your eyes."

### Mini Vacation

Once you have practiced with the script above, encourage your teen to close their eyes briefly and go on a mini vacation to their calm place when they feel sad or down.

### 5-4-3-2-1 Relaxation

You can relax at any time by noticing 5 things you see, 4 things you feel, 3 things you hear, 2 things you smell, and 1 thing you taste. This technique is a **grounding exercise** and can help you feel better in challenging moments. Here's an example of using this in the kitchen: "I see my plate, the table, my sister sitting across from me, the clock, and the wall. I feel the chair, the floor, the table, and the warmth from the heater. I hear water running in the sink, water boiling on the stove, and my sister's voice. I smell cookies in the oven and the pasta I am eating. I taste the pasta."



## How Can Relaxation Skills Help Me?

- ▶ Relaxation techniques can be very important coping skills for teens having problems with sad feelings and low mood. These strategies can reduce stress by helping you calm your body, take your mind off of your sad feelings, and focus more on positive thinking and feelings. Reducing stress also makes it easier to problem solve and use other coping skills.
- ▶ This is because the mind and the body are connected: calmer body, calmer mind. Learning to practice relaxation when you have a sad feeling or other negative emotion can help you better control your moods, improve sleep, and experience many other benefits.
- ▶ Practice relaxation skills regularly when you're in a good mood so that you are better able to use the skills when you need them during times when you feel low. You can't use a skill well in "the game" if you don't practice!
- ▶ Relaxation skills are "portable." You can do them at home, school, or in public. Most relaxation skills can be done quickly and without anyone noticing.

## Common Teen Concerns

### The relaxation skills are too hard.

Relaxation skills may feel uncomfortable or challenging at first. Practicing regularly helps make the skills feel easier and more comfortable. Taking the time to figure out which skills (and methods of practicing the skills) you prefer will also be helpful. Ask a parent or support person for help if you need it.

### I can't get into the habit of practicing regularly.

Relaxation practice should not be another chore but something short and simple that you can work into the daily routine. For example, can you practice for a few minutes on the way home from school or use an app on your phone before getting ready for bed? Set a specific goal for regular practice (e.g., three times a week to start) and think of a small but fun reward you can earn for reaching it. These skills get easier the more you do them. Remember that this is one way you can gain control over your mood.

### Relaxation practice is boring and/or strange.

What could make it more appealing? Do you prefer a certain skill over others? Do you want to use technology in your practice (e.g., relaxation phone apps, guided imagery videos, etc.)? Would you be more interested in an active practice like yoga? Keep trying new things until you find something that is enjoyable and comfortable.



# TEEN HANDOUT: THINKING TRAPS FOR TEENS



## What Are Thinking Traps?

▶ **Thinking Traps** are ways of thinking that increase sadness, anger, and stress. They often involve jumping to conclusions, guessing that things will go badly in the future, and making connections that might not really make sense.

▶ Here are **4 Common Thinking Traps** that are often connected to sadness and depression. Read this guide and see if you can come up with more examples of thinking traps that apply to your life.

## How to Decrease Thinking Traps

Here are some questions to help you think in more positive ways:

- 1 **What are the facts? What is the likelihood that what you're worrying about will happen?** Often there is very little evidence that the things we are stressed about will actually happen! Try to look at the facts in order to think more realistically and feel empowered that you are capable of dealing with stress.
- 2 **What would you tell a friend in this situation?** Focusing on helping a peer may help you with perspective taking and problem solving. This strategy can help you feel calmer and more positive about the stressor.
- 3 **What can you do to solve your problem or take your mind off it?** If possible, take concrete steps to solve the problem. If that's not possible, use relaxation or other coping skills (Depression Skill 3) to reduce stress and take your mind off things.



### FORTUNE TELLING

#### **Predicting that bad things will happen in the future.**

People who struggle with negative thinking often spend a lot of time imagining bad things happening in the future. People dealing with depression sometimes predict their sadness will continue.

**Fortune Telling Example:** "I've felt really sad for the past few weeks. I'm probably going to be sad forever."



### CATASTROPHIZING

#### **Making little problems or disappointments seem like big problems.**

When we catastrophize, we make a big deal out of situations, even when they might not be that serious or bad.

**Catastrophizing Example:** "My best friend didn't text me at all today. I bet she hates me now and is going to ditch me."



### OVERGENERALIZATION

#### **Assuming that because we had a hard time in one situation, our same problem will happen again in a new one.**

When we overgeneralize, we ignore the unique facts about a situation.

**Overgeneralization Example:** "I had a hard time with the essay questions on our English exam. I'm going to mess up the essay questions in History, too!"



### ALL-OR-NOTHING THINKING

#### **Seeing things as "all good" or "all bad."**

When we use all-or-nothing thinking, we ignore the fact that many situations are in the middle and have both positive *and* negative aspects.

**All-or-Nothing Thinking Example:** "Three of my friends said they like my sneakers, but Tim didn't say anything. I look stupid. I should have gotten a different pair."

# TEEN WORKSHEET: THINKING TRAP PRACTICE

Here's an example of how to use your new skills to deal with a **Fortune Telling** Thinking Trap:



"I've felt really depressed for the past few weeks. I'm going to be depressed forever."

What are the Facts?	"I'm learning things that might help me start to feel better. I already feel happy sometimes after I do the stuff in Making Time for Fun. I've felt sad in the past, and it didn't last forever."
What Would I Say to a Friend?	"It's going to get better! You are working hard at being more positive."
What can I do to take my mind off things?	"I'm going to go for a run and try to forget about this thought for a little while."

## CATASTROPHIZING

"My best friend didn't text me at all today. I bet she hates me now and is going to ditch me."

What are the facts?

What would I say to a friend?

What can I do to take my mind off things?

## OVERGENERALIZATION

"I had a hard time with the essay questions on our English exam. I'm going to mess up the essay questions in History, too!"

What are the facts?

What would I say to a friend?

What can I do to take my mind off things?

## ALL-OR-NOTHING THINKING

"Three of my friends said they like my sneakers, but Tim didn't say anything. I look stupid. I should have gotten a different pair."

What are the facts?

What would I say to a friend?

What can I do to take my mind off things?



## How Can Understanding Thinking Traps Help Me?

- ▶ When people experience sadness or depression, they often think about the past, their present situation, and/or things that might happen in the future in negative ways. These negative thought patterns often make them feel worse and can lead to feelings of hopelessness or helplessness.
- ▶ By learning about thinking traps (i.e., ways of thinking that make us feel sad, stuck, or angry), you will learn to identify times you may be thinking in overly negative or unrealistic ways.
- ▶ Once you have practice noticing thinking traps, you can take your thinking trap statements and make them more positive and realistic. Learning how to discuss feelings and problems in realistic and self-esteem boosting ways can help you feel more confident and capable when facing stressful situations.

## Common Teen Concerns

### **Some of the thinking traps are hard to understand.**

If a particular type of thinking trap is challenging for you, ask for help brainstorming additional examples that might make it clearer. Examples that connect to your interests (e.g., your favorite sport or movie) can be very useful. For example, if you notice yourself getting very down after school when doing your homework, you may be falling into thinking traps. Can you notice what thoughts come up, then see if you can gently challenge them? For example, instead of thinking, "This chemistry problem set is hard for me; I'm such an idiot," you could say something like this instead: "This new chapter we are on has been hard for everyone. Just because I'm having a hard time solving these problems doesn't mean I'm not smart." If you struggle to separate the thinking traps into different categories, just focus on noticing your negative thoughts in general and changing them. For example, call them "sad thoughts," "negative thinking," or some other name you come up with. You can still improve thinking this way.

### **Changing negative thinking is very hard for me.**

Negative thoughts are often automatic, like a habit. Becoming a more positive thinker requires breaking this habit. It takes a lot of practice to make a change like this! Start with more fun and playful examples if jumping right into your own particular style of negative thinking feels overwhelming. Here's a silly example about pizza that would be catastrophizing: "I asked for sausage and they gave me pepperoni! This is the worst pizza place ever!" Practice on a regular basis for a few minutes at a time (daily if you can manage it) to start forming a new habit of positive thinking. If you are still having a difficult time, talk to your primary care provider. They can connect you to a behavioral health specialist who can help.





## What is Problem Solving?

- ▶ Teens dealing with low mood and depression may be in particular need of targeted strategies to deal with daily challenges and concerns. Everyone can benefit from solving problems in their lives; these skills can help you and the rest of your family as well!
- ▶ You may feel frustrated that you are having a hard time dealing with problems. This can further increase your low mood and low motivation. You may be annoyed that your parents are always trying to give you advice or say that you are not making good choices, creating conflict and stress for you.
- ▶ These worksheets teach a simple plan for solving problems. You will learn to:
  1. Name the problem
  2. Identify 3 possible solutions
  3. Name one good thing and one bad thing about each solution
  4. Pick one to try
  5. Evaluate how things went after you implement the solution.



## Here's How to Make a Problem Solving Plan at Home

Walk through the steps below; your parent or support person can help you if you need it.

- 1 **What's the problem?** "You may be feeling overwhelmed and not know exactly how to describe the issue you need to handle. Clearly stating the problem helps us both focus on what we need to do to solve it."
- 2 **What are 3 possible solutions?** "I want you to think of 3 possible solutions so you have some good options, but not so many that you are overwhelmed with choices. Let's not worry about how good or bad they are yet. We will evaluate them together in the next part."
- 3 **What's one good thing and one bad thing about each?** "This part means you will name one positive possibility and one negative possibility that could occur with each solution. This will help you consider the benefits and challenges of each choice."
- 4 **Pick one!** "This is your chance to take charge as you pick which solution you want to try out first."
- 5 **How did it go?** "After you follow through with a solution, we will evaluate it. This will help us both learn what the best options for different problems are and we can refer back to these tested solutions as needed. If the first solution isn't successful in solving the problem, we can try a different one or start a completely new solution brainstorming session."

The next section puts the **Problem Solving Plan** into a chart. Go over the example and then try to solve the practice problems. Come up with solutions for our example problems and then try it for one of your own.

# TEEN WORKSHEET: PROBLEM SOLVING



Depression Skill 5

**Example 1:** "I am so sad and tired all time that I am not paying attention in math class. Now I don't understand today's homework."

What's the Problem?	"I don't understand the homework."		
		One Good Thing	One Bad Thing
Solution 1	Don't do the homework.	I can play videogames tonight because I'll have less to do	I'll get a zero.
Soution 2	Text my friend for help.	She is good at math and can help me.	She might not respond.
Solution 3	Talk to my teacher tomorrow and ask for extra help.	My teacher will explain what I missed.	She might still give me a zero for today's homework.
My Choice	Text my friend for help.		
How'd it go?	My friend texted me back. She called and helped me. I understood and did the homework.		

**Example 2:** "I get mad really easily now. I have been mean to my little brother a lot. This morning I heard him crying and telling mom that he thinks I don't like him."

What's the Problem?			
		One Good Thing	One Bad Thing
Solution 1			
Soution 2			
Solution 3			
My Choice			
How'd it go?			

# TEEN WORKSHEET: PROBLEM SOLVING



Depression Skill 5

**Example 3:** "I've known that we had a history project due for a while but I just couldn't focus on it because of how I'm feeling. Now it's due tomorrow."

What's the Problem?			
		One Good Thing	One Bad Thing
Solution 1			
Solution 2			
Solution 3			
My Choice			
How'd it go?			

**Example 4:** "My friends have stopped inviting me places because I kept saying no. Now I'm ready to use my Making Time for Fun Skills and I want them to ask me to hang out again."

What's the Problem?			
		One Good Thing	One Bad Thing
Solution 1			
Solution 2			
Solution 3			
My Choice			
How'd it go?			

# BLANK PROBLEM SOLVING PLANS

Here are a couple Blank Problem Solving Plans. Make copies and use it to help guide your decision making when problems arise.



**Boston  
Children's  
Hospital**  
Until every child is well™



Depression Skill 5

What's the Problem?			
		One Good Thing	One Bad Thing
Solution 1			
Soution 2			
Solution 3			
My Choice			
How'd it go?			

What's the Problem?			
		One Good Thing	One Bad Thing
Solution 1			
Soution 2			
Solution 3			
My Choice			
How'd it go?			



## How Can Problem Solving Help Me?

- ▶ Children and adolescents who are having a hard time with sadness or depression sometimes struggle to deal with challenges and solve everyday problems.
- ▶ These difficulties with problem solving can occur because they are more sad or irritable, more easily overwhelmed, not feeling motivated, and/or struggling with negative thinking due to depression. They may also try to solve a problem, but give up easily if they aren't successful right away.
- ▶ The problem solving skill described here can provide a concrete way to help your child think through challenges, brainstorm options, notice what works and what doesn't, and keep trying if their first attempt doesn't work. Increasing positive outcomes through successful problem solving can help significantly improve your child's mood and sense of control.
- ▶ In addition, making and following a problem solving plan can reduce frustration for both of you while increasing feelings of independence and mastery for your child. You won't be telling your child what to do, but instead supporting and guiding them in their plans to overcome challenges on their own.

## Common Teen Concerns

### **I don't have problems that need solving.**

It can be hard to notice which challenges or frustrations in your life can benefit from problem solving skills. You can identify potential problem solving opportunities by reviewing the situations connected to low mood and recorded on your Mood Tracker worksheets (review Mood Tracking, Depression Skill 1). Fill in the Problem Solving Plan for past situations that made you feel sad, frustrated, stressed, or another negative emotion. In addition, you can ask your parents or support people to gently point things out to you if they notice a situation where you could use these skills in your daily life (e.g., "You told me you were sad because you didn't know who to sit with at lunch today. Do you think we can use the Problem Solving Plan to help plan for tomorrow?").

### **I can't think of any solutions.**

Think about what might be getting in the way. Ask a parent or support person for help as needed. You may be feeling overwhelmed and stuck. Very often once you get one example from a helpful person in your life, you will be able to get creative with solutions of your own. Remember, you don't need to think of the "perfect" solution because there is no such thing. You can make mistakes and get help if you need it. Review the practice examples we provide, both to remind yourself of potential options for common concerns as well as the fact that you came up with great solutions for the examples!

### **When I try to use my problem solving plan, I get really frustrated and upset.**

Sometimes people experiencing depression can feel overwhelmed when trying to problem solve. Remind yourself that feeling upset is okay and that your emotions are giving you a message that you are having a tough time and need support. You might benefit from using a relaxation skill to lower your stress levels before trying problem solving. For tips, review Relaxation Skills (Depression Skill 3). In addition, negative thinking can make problems seem huge and unsolvable. Review the strategies from Thinking Traps (Depression Skill 4) to help encourage yourself to use more realistic thinking. If you are still having a hard time using problem solving skills and this is impacting your depression, talk to your primary care provider. They can connect you to a behavioral health specialist who can help.