

UNDERSTANDING DEPRESSION

Making Behaviour Changes



Student Counselling Services

- Engaging in Rewarding Activities
- Problem Solving and Decision Making
- Healthy Coping
- Effective Support Systems
- Healthy Relationships

Using An Activity Schedule

Individuals who experience depressed mood often find themselves engaging in monotonous and/or unrewarding behaviors. These activities offer little pleasure and reinforce feelings of hopelessness and depression.

Increasing the time you spend in rewarding activities is an important way to improve mood.

An activity schedule is a helpful way to examine more closely how you spend your time. For each hour of each day of the week, record what you actually do. Next, on a scale of 0 – 10, record how much you actually enjoyed the activity. Here's an example:

0 10
no enjoymentmost enjoyment

HOUR	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
7 pm	Talked to Chris on the phone	Napped	Studied	Watched movie with friends	Cleaned apartment	Went Rollerblading	Watched T.V.
Enjoyment level	4	3	2	7	1	6	3
8 pm							
Enjoyment level							
9 pm							
Enjoyment level							

What did you find out by completing an activity schedule?

Do you spend more or less time in activities that you enjoy?

Would you benefit from choosing to spend your time differently?

More About Activity Schedules

There may be times when you doubt whether choosing to engage in a particular activity will actually help to improve your mood. If this is the case, try to calculate the cost-benefit ratio of sitting at home ruminating/napping/watching a boring T.V. program/etc. versus going to a movie/calling a friend/exercising/etc. Sometimes, this “choice calculation” helps people to see that negative predictions are determining their choices, or that they may actually gain more from making positive choices.

Remember, there will be times when acting against negative predications (e.g. going out with friends even if you believe you won’t have fun) pays off. Often times, “doing it anyway” helps to reduce depression.

The next step in using an activity schedule involves recording, for each hour of each day of the week, what you plan to do. Next, on a scale of 0 – 10, record how much pleasure you think you will experience. Finally, engage in the planned activity and then record how much you actually enjoyed the activity. Here’s an example:

0 10
no enjoymentmost enjoyment

HOUR	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
7 pm	Clean Apartment	Shop	Walk Dog	Go to movie	Nap	Call Jen	Coffee with Dave
Predicted Enjoyment level	2	9	4	5	8	4	5
Actual Enjoyment level	4	7	7	9	3	6	8
8 pm							
Predicted Enjoyment level							
Actual Enjoyment level							

How do your numbers stack up?

Did planning and engaging in enjoyable activity make a difference?

Do you actually enjoy experiences more than you initially thought you would?

Are there activities that you anticipate will be more pleasurable than they actually are?

Are there activities that you gave up when you began feeling depressed? Can you go back to them?

Leahy, R. and Holland, J. (2000). Treatment Plans and Interventions for Depression and Anxiety Disorders. New York: Guilford Press.

Activity Schedule

0 10
 no enjoymentmost enjoyment

HOUR	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
7 am							
Predicted Enjoyment level							
Actual Enjoyment level							
8 am							
Predicted Enjoyment level							
Actual Enjoyment level							
9 am							
Predicted Enjoyment level							
Actual Enjoyment level							
10 am							
Predicted Enjoyment level							
Actual Enjoyment level							
11 am							
Predicted Enjoyment level							
Actual Enjoyment level							
12 pm							
Predicted Enjoyment level							
Actual Enjoyment level							
1 pm							
Predicted Enjoyment level							
Actual Enjoyment level							
2 pm							
Predicted Enjoyment level							
Actual Enjoyment level							
3 pm							
Predicted Enjoyment level							
Actual Enjoyment level							

4 pm							
Predicted Enjoyment level							
Actual Enjoyment level							
5 pm							
Predicted Enjoyment level							
Actual Enjoyment level							
6 pm							
Predicted Enjoyment level							
Actual Enjoyment level							
7 pm							
Predicted Enjoyment level							
Actual Enjoyment level							
8 pm							
Predicted Enjoyment level							
Actual Enjoyment level							
9 pm							
Predicted Enjoyment level							
Actual Enjoyment level							
10 pm							
Predicted Enjoyment level							
Actual Enjoyment level							
11 pm							
Predicted Enjoyment level							
Actual Enjoyment level							
12 am							
Predicted Enjoyment level							
Actual Enjoyment level							
1 am							
Predicted Enjoyment level							
Actual Enjoyment level							

Leahy, R. and Holland, J. (2000). *Treatment Plans and Interventions for Depression and Anxiety Disorders*. New York: Guilford Press.

Activities People Enjoy

An important strategy for reducing feelings of depression is to actively seek enjoyable and fulfilling activities.

Below is a list of ways people can spend time. Which of these do you already enjoy? Which would you like to try? What else would you add to this list?

Exercise	Go skiing
Play soccer	Go to a concert
Play hockey	Do photography
Play volleyball	Take lessons
Play basketball	Sing in a choir
Play badminton	Meditate
Go swimming	Paint
Take a long walk	Have a massage
Do yoga	Have a picnic
Dance	Sew
Read	Watch sports
Listen to music	Start a collection
Take long, hot baths	Help someone else
Go for long drives	Go out for a meal
Play pool	Go to a museum
Do crafts	Visit a friend
Do woodworking	Plan a party
Draw	Go running
Write in a journal	Try a new food
Write a letter	Read the comics
Go boating	Buy some flowers
Go horseback riding	Get a hair cut
Go hunting	Daydream
Go fishing	Rent a movie
Go window shopping	Write poetry
Take a day trip	Go for coffee
Play an instrument	Support a local cause
Spend time with children	Spend time with a pet
Clean	Recall good times
Go to a movie	Spend time outdoors
Watch T.V.	Pray
Buying something you've wanted	Garden
Volunteer	Browse in the library
Talk with a friend	Talk on the phone
Go to a play	Play frisbee

Copeland, M. (1992). *The Depression Workbook: A Guide for Living with Depression and Manic Depression*. Oakland, New Harbinger Publications.

Effective Problem-Solving

Problem-solving refers to a particular set of skills that can be used to define a problem, generate possible solutions to that problem, and help you to achieve a positive outcome.

Effective problem-solving can help you to avoid additional stress and depression.

For example, if someone who is doing poorly at school takes action to improve academic performance, the stress of being on academic probation is averted. Or, if someone who has received negative feedback about his or her job performance is able to correct the problem and obtain a better job evaluation, the prospect of getting fired may be avoided.

Steps to Problem-Solve

1. Define the problem. The problem needs to be assessed and understood. Ask yourself the following questions:

- In what area is the problem (e.g., school, work, relationships, finances, etc.)?
- Who are the people involved in the problem?
- How did this problem come about?
- What would I like to change?
- What is realistic to expect in this situation?

2. Brainstorm solutions. Come up with as many possible solutions as possible. Be open-minded, creative and allow anything to be considered a possible solution.

3. Evaluate the options. Review each possible solution to determine if it is possible, and potentially useful. Ask yourself the following questions about each option:

- Is this feasible?
- What are the advantages of this option?
- What are the disadvantages of this option?

4. Choose a possible solution. Decide on a possible solution and determine the specific steps in which you need to engage in order to carry it out.

5. Enact the potential solution. Do the things you decided to do to try to solve the problem.

6. Evaluate the outcome. Decide if your actions were sufficient, or if you need to return to considering other possible solutions. Ask yourself the following questions:

- How did I do?
- What worked?
- What didn't work?
- What else could I try?

Beiling, P. & Antony, M. (2003). *Ending the Depression Cycle: A step by step guide for preventing relapse*. Oakland: New Harbinger Publications.

PROBLEM-SOLVING TIPS

- If you have multiple stressors (e.g., increased responsibilities at work, upcoming exams), prioritize your time. Focus on the most important issues first.
- Time management is a positive way to reduce stress and anxiety. In addition, it will ensure you have the time you need to work on resolving problems (instead of simply meeting your basic needs and important deadlines).
- Break large demands into small, manageable parts. Work through one task at a time.
- Be clear about your goals and what you need to do to work toward them.
- Take action when stress first arises. Don't wait for the situation to worsen.
- When a problem arises, identify your needs and articulate them to people who can help.
- Acknowledge your thoughts and feelings concerning the stressors in your life.
- Develop a support network to rely on in times of need.
- Don't dwell on "shoulds." Instead, remain focused on what you think you need to do to solve your problem.
- Be willing to take an honest look at your coping style and the effectiveness of the strategies you are trying.
- Be flexible. If something isn't working, it's time to try something new.
- Remember to be kind to yourself.

Making Good Decisions

Making good decisions help to avert problems, leaves people feeling better about themselves and sets the path for more satisfying life experiences.

At some time or other, we are all faced with complicated situations that leave us unsure of how to respond. Here are some tips to consider next time you find yourself searching for a good decision.

- Avoid the temptation to make an impulsive decision in order to get out of the work of decision-making. While there is a time and place for quick decisions, generally good decisions have been given some thought.
- Take the time you need to think things over, but don't use this as an excuse to avoid. Not making a decision is, in and of itself, a decision.
- Over-focusing on making the "right" decision can leave you stuck. And sometimes, there isn't a "right" decision. Remember, you are looking for a good decision. And you can always continue to decision-make in response to your initial decision.
- Use your head. If you make a particular decision, can you explain it to others? Is it reasonable? Does it make sense?
- Listen to yourself. Your gut reaction/intuition is important. If a particular course of action doesn't feel right, don't pursue it.
- Take some time to consider what you think will happen if you choose one decision over another. Where will the different decisions take you? Where do you want to go?
- Consider how each of your possible decisions might impact the people involved. Will a particular decision harm you or someone else?
- Pay attention to how you will you feel about yourself if you make one decision instead of another. Will you be proud of yourself? Can you live with yourself?
- Ask yourself if your decision is ethical.
- Talk it out. Reviewing your options with a trusted friend can help you sort out what to do.
- Make it your own. Resist the temptation to allow others to make difficult decisions for you. This only serves to reduce your confidence and ability to set your own course.
- Learn from your experience. Pay attention to what you have done to make good decisions and poor decisions. When situations and problems repeat themselves, take the opportunity to improve your decision-making.
- Give yourself a break. We all have times when we make decisions we later wish we hadn't. Forgive yourself and move on.

Healthy And Unhealthy Coping

Coping refers to the way in which a person tries to handle, defuse, or deal with a threat, stress or crisis.

How people choose to cope when experiencing depression is a key part of recovery.

Examples of Healthy Coping	Benefits of Healthy Coping
Exercise	Increased self-awareness
Balancing work and play	Increased self-esteem
Time management	Strong family and work relationships
Owning your feelings	Increased energy
Journal writing	Increased productivity
Talking to friends or family	Increased concentration and focus
Playing with a pet	Increased physical health
Focusing on positives	Increased mental health
Problem solving	Increased sense of purpose/direction in life

Examples of Unhealthy Coping	Costs of Unhealthy Coping
Alcohol or drug use to cope	Depression
Avoidance of an event	Anxiety
Procrastination	Eating disorders
Negative self-talk, catastrophizing	Addictions (e.g., alcohol, drugs, gambling)
Over/under-eating	Poor physical health
Blaming others	Unhealthy or abusive relationships
Unsafe sex	Lack of purpose or direction in life
Self-harm behavior	Unfulfilled goals
Criminal activities	Death

How I Cope

There are a variety of ways people can help themselves cope during the stress of depression. Consider how frequently you use these coping activities.

POSITIVE COPING ACTIVITIES

- _____ listen to music
- _____ shop with a friend
- _____ watch TV or go to a movie
- _____ attend an athletic event
- _____ go to a play
- _____ exercise
- _____ take a nap
- _____ use a relaxation technique
- _____ write in a journal
- _____ go for a walk
- _____ enjoy nature
- _____ go to church/pray
- _____ talk to a friend
- _____ **TOTAL NUMBER OF POSITIVE ACTIVITIES**

NEGATIVE COPING ACTIVITIES

- _____ use negative self-talk, catastrophize
- _____ get drunk or high
- _____ swear
- _____ argue/become aggressive
- _____ avoid others
- _____ chew fingernails
- _____ over/under eat
- _____ drink too much coffee
- _____ cut, burn or hit self
- _____ break something
- _____ blame others
- _____ gossip
- _____ do something dangerous
- _____ be impulsive
- _____ **TOTAL NUMBER OF NEGATIVE ACTIVITIES**

Ways Of Coping

While there are many ways to respond in times of stress, coping strategies are often categorized into the following types:

Emotion-Oriented Coping

Emotion-oriented coping involves strategies aimed at gaining clarity about a problem by talking, thinking, and expressing feelings about it.

- Having a good cry about the problem
- Sharing with someone the way the problem makes you feel
- Exploring the basis for your feelings about the problem

Escape/Avoidance Coping

Escape/avoidance coping involves strategies aimed at ignoring the problem/stressor and doing something else to change your thoughts and feelings. Distraction-avoidance coping reduces feelings of distress.

- Going to a movie or watching TV
- Eating a meal or snack
- Sleeping or napping
- Having a drink
- Playing a video game or surfing the Internet
- Talking about everything except the stressor
- Going to a party and trying to have fun
- Leaving town to visit another place

TASK OR ACTION-ORIENTED COPING

Action-oriented coping involves strategies aimed at directly solving the problem. Action-oriented coping tends to involve more behavior, logic, and information gathering compared to the other kinds of coping.

- Getting more information about the problem
- Coming up with alternate ways to fix the problem
- Trying out a specific way to solve the problem

Choosing The Best Way To Cope

- Using a variety of strategies is usually most effective for healthy coping.
- Each of the different coping strategies (i.e., emotion-oriented, escape/avoidance and task-oriented) has a function and a place.
- Different problems require a different balance of coping strategies. Relying on only one coping strategy may result in less effective functioning and harmful consequences.
- Emotion-oriented strategies are typically viewed as effective, regardless of the problem. It is usually a good thing to talk about problems and how you feel. However, this is best done in moderation. Devoting too much emotional energy to a problem sparks more negative thinking and fuels painful emotions.
- Escape/avoidance coping can provide needed emotional relief and a break from a crisis. This strategy, however, will not actually solve a problem. Too much escape/avoidance coping will perpetuate existing problems and create new ones.
- Action-oriented coping helps people find solutions to problems (when there is a clear problem that can be solved). For some problems, solutions are beyond our control and action-oriented coping centers on helping ourselves cope with the things we cannot change (e.g., gathering information about a medical problem for which there is no cure).

Example 1 - Job loss

Large problems such as job loss usually require all three types of coping strategies in different doses. Emotion-focused coping is used to clarify feelings and grieve the loss. Distraction provides some emotional relief from the stress and prevents one from becoming preoccupied with the job loss. In this situation, however, action-oriented coping is critical because it is used to consider one's abilities and desires and to actually pursue new job options.

Example 2 – Waiting for a necessary medical procedure

Undergoing a somewhat uncomfortable, though safe, medical procedure also requires the use of different coping strategies. Action-oriented coping helps one to obtain information about the medical procedure and potential results. Emotion-focused coping helps one recognize and accept uncomfortable feelings (e.g., fear). In this situation, distraction is particularly useful as it helps one tolerate the wait for the procedure.

Example 3 – End of a relationship

In this situation, emotion-focused coping is key. It is probably best to take some time to come to grips with feelings about the loss. Distraction can provide needed breaks from the emotional pain. Taking action to find a new partner too quickly (without adequately processing emotions related to the loss) impedes necessary learning and leaves people vulnerable to repeating poor choices or being hurt. Once emotion-focused coping has resulted in sufficient resolution of emotional pain, action is the next step.

Coping Worksheet

Step 1

Describe the problem (be as specific as possible).

Step 2.

What emotion-focused coping strategies might be helpful in this situation?

What am I trying to accomplish in using the emotion-focused coping strategies?

What aspects of this problem cannot be handled or dealt with by emotion-focused coping?

Step 3

What action-oriented coping strategies will be helpful in this situation?

What am I trying to accomplish in using the action-oriented coping strategies?

What aspects of this problem cannot be handled or dealt with by action-oriented coping?

Coping In A Crisis

DISTRACTION

At some time or another we all experience emotional crises (e.g., the break-up of an important relationship, discovering that you have been required to discontinue from your college). In these moments, you may feel intense distress and an immediate response won't be sufficient to solve the problem at hand. Using distraction and self-soothing skills, however, will help you to weather the immediate storm of distress until you can focus more energy on problem-solving.

The following distraction skills can help you to temporarily take your mind off your problem and the intense feelings associated with it.

- **Activities** – focus on hobbies, cleaning, reading, exercising, visiting with friends, baking...
- **Contributing** – volunteer or surprise a friend with a treat.
- **Comparisons** – remind yourself of people in more difficult situations or other times that you've survived.
- **Emotion** – intentionally engage pleasant emotions (e.g., if you are feeling really sad, look for a way to laugh) through listening to music, watching movies, or reading.
- **Pushing away/containing** – create mental distance from the problem by visualizing yourself putting the problem on a shelf. Write out your problem and put in a jar to “contain it” so you can re-focus.
- **Thoughts** – Fill your mind with thoughts of other things.
- **Sensations** – Use physical sensations (e.g., hot bath, cold shower, squeezing a rubber ball) to shift your focus from the distressing thoughts.

SELF-SOOTHING

Self-soothing involves taking deliberate steps to calm yourself while facing a stressful situation. The goal is to comfort yourself emotionally by doing things that are pleasant and, most especially, not harmful. Here are some ideas.

- Buy a beautiful flower
- Make a space in your room beautiful or calming
- Light a candle and watch the flame
- Go to a museum
- Look at nature around you
- Go out in the middle of the night and watch the stars
- Walk in a scenic part of town
- Look at beautiful pictures in a book
- Go to a ballet or other dance performance
- Watch TV or listen to music
- Pay attention to the sounds of nature (birds, leaves rustling) or listen to tapes of nature sounds
- Sing your favorite songs
- Bake
- Have a good meal (what are your favorite comfort foods?)
- Have a favorite soothing drink such as herbal tea or hot chocolate (avoid alcohol)
- Treat yourself to a dessert
- Sample flavors in an ice cream store
- Suck on a piece of peppermint candy (or other flavors that you like)
- Take a bubble bath
- Put clean sheets on the bed
- Pet your dog or cat
- Have a massage or soak your feet
- Put a cold compress on your forehead. Or wrap your face in a very warm, damp facecloth
- Call a friend
- Hug someone

Self-soothing strategies are one part of managing in a crisis. Ideally, self-soothing occurs along with being honest and realistic about your situation and with problem solving. **Self-soothing without problem-solving leads to avoidance** (e.g., emotionally-driven eating, substance abuse). Conversely, confronting yourself about problems without being able to self-soothe can lead to reduced self-esteem, increased depression and heightened anxiety. Consider whether you self-soothe too much (thereby creating crises by avoiding problem-solving), or if you rarely self-soothe (because you feel guilty and believe you don't deserve it).

Remember, you may not feel better until you've found resolution to the crisis or problem with which you are dealing. One sign of success, however, is managing in a crisis by using distraction and self-soothing skills until you are in a better position to work on a solution.

Evaluating Your Support System

Everyone needs emotional support. People you care about and trust, whether family members or friends, play an important part in strengthening and maintaining your emotional health.

Choosing relationships with people who are supportive will help you to better manage depression.

In general, supportive relationships involve the following:

- Making efforts to understand each other (“I can really see that this is a hard time for you.”)
- Having the freedom to be yourselves
- Having fun together
- Listening without being judgmental
- Helping each other out
- Encouraging each other’s efforts
- Respecting each other’s choices, even when there is disagreement
- Having room for other interests and relationships
- Expressing yourselves in ways that are respectful

What kinds of things are important to you in a support system?

- | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| _____ mutual support | _____ time together having fun |
| _____ someone to talk to | _____ trustworthiness |
| _____ acceptance | _____ listening |
| _____ companionship | _____ encouragement |
| _____ sharing | _____ respect |
| _____ caring | _____ honesty |
| _____ commitment | _____ common and different interests |
| _____ _____ | _____ _____ |

Are you choosing people in your life who are supportive?

There are a variety of reasons why people can struggle to build and/or maintain a strong support system. Do any of these apply to you?

- | | |
|---|---|
| ■ Frequent self-criticism | ■ Difficulties with anxiety |
| ■ Language or cultural differences | ■ Not knowing how to initiate friendships |
| ■ Unreliable, unpredictable or inappropriate behavior | ■ Over dependence on one/two people |

Assertive Communication

What Is Assertive Communication?

Assertive communication is characterized by an ability to listen to the perspective of others and express oneself honestly and respectfully. It involves stating requests or ideas clearly and with confidence, without feeling guilty or apologizing. Assertive communicators are self-aware (i.e. know their own feelings, goals, etc.), responsible (for their own thoughts, behavior, etc.) and honest (i.e. provide consistent verbal and non-verbal messages).

What Does Learning To Be More Assertive Involve?

The following may suggest a need for more assertiveness: feeling disrespected, difficulty in taking action to achieve your goals, attempting to get what you want by trying to make others feel guilty, and feelings of resentment and helplessness.

Learning to communicate more effectively often involves better identifying and accepting your own feelings and needs, recognizing your rights, developing verbal and nonverbal assertiveness skills and practicing (on paper, with a friend, "for real") assertive communication.

How Do I Communicate?

	PASSIVE	ASSERTIVE	AGGRESSIVE
Characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allow other to choose Emotionally dishonest Indirect Self-denying 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Choose for self Tactfully honest Direct Self-respecting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Choose for others Tactlessly honest "Too direct" Self-enhancing
Goal of Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To avoid conflict 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To express needs and feelings without guilt 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To dominate
Body Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Avoid eye contact Hunched shoulders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain eye contact Relaxed posture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staring Finger pointing
Voice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Overly soft 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Firm 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Loud
Feelings During	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Anxious 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confident 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Righteous
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ignored Angry at self 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Goal-oriented Self-respecting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Controlling Guilty
Others' Feelings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guilty 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Respected 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Humiliated
During Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Superior Frustrated with you 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Heard 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Angry Distrustful
Others' View of You	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of respect Distrustful 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Respectful Trusting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Angry Distrustful
Potential Outcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Your rights are violated Others achieve their goals You do not achieve your goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Your rights are respected Others rights are respected Outcome negotiated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Others rights are violated Others don't achieve their goals You achieve your goals
Underlying Beliefs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> People should not be displeased with me 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I'm responsible for my needs I respect others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> I have to dominate to protect myself

Copeland, M. (1992). *The Depression Workbook: A Guide for Living with Depression and Manic Depression*. Oakland, New Harbinger Publications

Assertive Communication

How Should I Prepare For Assertive Communication?

- Determine the problem (e.g. “I need help cleaning the apartment”)
- Determine how you feel about the problem (e.g. tired, annoyed more help hasn’t been given)
- Determine your rights (e.g. right to have roommate help clean the apartment)
- Determine what you want (e.g. roommate to do her own dishes, clean bathroom every second week, dust weekly)
- Designate a time to assert yourself (e.g. “I’ll talk to my roommate tonight at supper”)
- Practice asserting yourself (e.g. “I’m feeling tired of housework and would like more help. Can you,?”)
- Assert yourself by stating the problem, your feelings, what you want and the consequences (e.g. “I’m feeling tired of housework and would appreciate more help. I’d really like to see us work something out. It would work for me if you could do your own dishes, clean the bathroom every second week and dust the apartment weekly. I’ll do my dishes, clean the bathroom every other week and vacuum...What do you think?...It’s too hard to live here and focus on studying if I have to do all the housework. I’ll have to find another apartment if we can’t work something out.”)

How Can I Communicate More Effectively?

- Use “I” statements (e.g. I think/feel/need/would like/want/would appreciate...). Be specific about exactly what you want. Requests, not demands, work better.
- Use “you” statements to express empathy (e.g. “You seem tired.”), not to blame or judge (“You’re lazy.”).
- Stay on topic. Letting the conversation get sidetracked delays resolution.
- State problems in terms of their impact on you (e.g. “I felt sad when you forgot my birthday.”). “You” statements (e.g. “You forgot my birthday.”) can often result in a defensive response.
- “We” responses suggest a willingness to negotiate and be involved in creating a solution (e.g. “We could brainstorm about this issue.”).
- When someone responds to an assertive request with very intense emotion, it is sometimes helpful to delay further discussion (e.g. “I can see that you’re very upset. Let’s talk about this after supper.”).
- Facilitate further discussion by acknowledging the other person’s point of view, even if you don’t agree with it (e.g. “I can see how you might think that I’m being stubborn.”).
- Be aware of your body language. Look people in the eye and assume an “open posture.”
- Avoid apologizing for your request; it waters down your message.

What Is A Healthy Relationship?

For most people, fostering satisfying personal relationships is an important part of life. A close relationship with a friend, family member or an intimate partner can bring a sense of security, enjoyment and fulfillment. At the same time, no relationship is perfect. Everyone experiences conflict and feelings of frustration and dissatisfaction at some time or another.

There are some common features of healthy relationships. These include:

- having the freedom to be your own person
- having room for your own interests and other relationships
- being able to make your own choices without pressure or coercion
- being able to express yourself in a way that is respectful of you and the other person
- trying to understand and accept the other person’s feelings and opinions, even when they are upsetting to you or you disagree with them

We all have particular ideas about what a healthy relationship involves. Many people see the following as important:

- respect
- emotional closeness
- trust
- spending time apart
- appreciating the other’s qualities
- common, as well as different, interests
- talking and listening
- nonviolence
- affection
- willingness to work on problems together
- honesty
- enjoying time together
- taking responsibility for how you might contribute to relationship problems
- commitment
- similar basic values
- belief that the other person is responsible for his/her own life

Choosing healthy relationships helps people manage, overcome and prevent depression.

Fighting Fair

We all have disagreements. There are times when we argue with friends, roommates, professors and partners. The challenge is to manage conflict in a way that is respectful and productive. Here are some tips to help you maintain healthy relationships by improving the quality and outcome of your arguments.

Be Calm

Take time to settle down. Clarify what you are angry about and what you hope to get out of the discussion (e.g., negotiate a different way to share groceries; have a professor explain why you received a lower mark than you expected). If possible, have the discussion when you and the other person have privacy and time to talk.

Avoid “Losing It”

Although the saying goes, “sticks and stones will break my bones...”, some words can actually be very damaging. Try and avoid saying things that are hurtful or that you might feel in the moment, but not in the long run (e.g., “I hate you!”, “I can’t stand living with you”).

Accept Responsibility

Take responsibility for your part in the conflict (e.g., yelling back).

Don’t Wait Too Long

Talking about what is bothering you. In intimate relationships, grievances can build and fester, making the situation worse.

Stick To The Point And Stay In The Present

Avoid using the argument as an opportunity to raise issues from the past.

Respect Feelings

Avoid the temptation to tell the other person that what they feel or think doesn’t make sense or isn’t justified. We all have the right to feel the way we do.

Listen

As difficult as it is, often the most helpful thing you can do in a disagreement is work to really listen to what the other person has to say. Communicating that you understand (without necessarily agreeing) often diffuses anger and helps people work toward a shared resolution.

Agree To Disagree

In many circumstances, it is reasonable to express an opinion without needing the other person to agree or change their position.

Recognize That There Might Not Have To Be A Winner Or A Loser

The outcome could be a compromise, or it could involve both parties admitting some fault. If you get your way, don’t gloat or rub it in. Respect the strength it took for the other person to concede.

Allow The Discussion To End

When the discussion is finished, resist the temptation to add comments or have the last word. Know when to put it to rest.

Saying You Are Sorry

At some time or another, we all do things that hurt others. Showing up late, making an insensitive comment or accidentally damaging something can put a rift in a relationship. It's the act of apologizing that often re-establishes goodwill. An insincere, poorly delivered apology, however, does more harm than good. Learning to apologize well goes a long way toward maintaining satisfying relationships.

When to apologize

The very best time to apologize is as soon as you realize you've done wrong. It can be tempting to try to relieve guilt by letting time pass, making an excuse, blaming others or even lying. However, your impulse to wait or avoid is a strong signal to you that it's time to act honorably. While it's often uncomfortable, or even difficult, it's worth doing.

When not to apologize

Some people find themselves constantly apologizing, even when they've done nothing wrong. If you find yourself apologizing for things beyond your control (e.g., someone's bad mood, the limits of your own time, your parents' decisions), then it's time to stop. This "false apologizing" distracts attention from real issues, waters down real apologies and sends you and others the (incorrect) message that you are responsible when you're not.

How to apologize

1. Acknowledge that you've done something wrong. Tell the person you have wronged the extent of the offense. Start by saying what you did, using accurate language. Accept responsibility.
2. Explain what you've done. Don't make excuses. When you explain why you did what you did, both you and the person you've wronged can have increased confidence that it won't happen again.
3. Express your regret. Apologies have little meaning when they are offered without an expression of sincere remorse. Telling someone you've wronged, "I'm sorry you feel hurt" removes blame from you and leaves the other person feeling even more offended. Say, "I'm really sorry for my hurtful actions. I shouldn't have done that and I won't do it again."
4. Make amends. Once you've apologized it's time to make reparations (e.g., start showing up on time, stop making hurtful comments, replace the item you damaged). Ask, "What else can I do?" When an injured party feels listened to and valued, you've gone a long way toward repairing relationship damage.

Once you've apologized

Offering a sincere apology should help you feel better about yourself because you have been brave, honest and committed to making a relationship work. You've also shown a willingness to accept your own imperfections and a desire to do better next time. Forgive yourself and move on. Remember, though, that no matter how real the apology, the person who has been wronged always retains the right to forgive or not.

Beck, M. (2004, September). Always Apologize, Always Explain. O: The Oprah Magazine, pp. 105-108.

What To Do When There Is Relationship Trouble

In all relationships there will be times when you feel closer to each other than at other times.

Help yourself manage depression by watching for and responding to the signs that a relationship is in trouble.

Signs of relationship trouble

- you stop talking and listening to each other
- substance abuse/problem gambling
- excessive jealousy
- cheating
- controlling behavior
- lying
- frequent criticisms
- emotional abuse
- non-mutual use of pornography
- physical abuse
- you stop seeing your family and friends
- sexual abuse
- not feeling understood
- not feeling supported
- not feeling appreciated

What to do when there is relationship trouble

- Trust your instincts.
- Live by your own values. It is important to be true to yourself.
- Talk to people you trust.
- Seek professional help if you have questions about whether couple counselling could be helpful.
- Let it be ok if your partner will be upset, angry, sad or lonely if you break-up. Relationship break-ups are difficult and stressful experiences. It makes sense for people to react when someone leaves. Trust that, as an adult, your partner can find a way to cope without you.
- Seek professional help right away if your partner threatens to hurt you or him/herself if you end the relationship.
- If you have questions about whether there may be abuse in your relationship, check it out with a counsellor.
- If you know you are in an abusive relationship, seek help to leave.
- Maintain your supportive relationships with others and accept their help.
- Check the library for books about relationships. Below are some suggestions.
 - *When Anger Hurts Your Relationship (2001)* by Kim Paleg & Matthew McKay
 - *When "I Love You" Turns Violent (1993)* by Scott A. Johnson
 - *Do I Have to Give Up Me to be Loved by You? (2002)* by Jordan Paul & Margaret Paul
 - *I Only Say This Because I Love You (2001)* by Deborah Tannen
 - *The Relationship Cure (2001)* by John Gottman
 - *The Dance of Connection (2001)* by Harriet Goldhor Lerner
 - *The Dance of Intimacy (1989)* by Harriet Goldhor Lerner
 - *The Dance of Anger (2001)* by Harriet Goldhor Lerner
 - *Dumped! (1998)* by Sally Warren
 - *How to Day No Without Feeling Guilty (1995)* by Patti Breitman & Connie Hatch

When A Relationship Ends

When an important relationship ends it is one of life's most stressful occurrences. Grief is the most common response to this type of loss. In fact, grieving the end of a close relationship is adaptive; it is neither a weakness nor a thing to be avoided.

The grief you feel after a break up may be complicated by prior experiences of loss, traumatic events surrounding the relationship (e.g. physical violence), a history of difficult relationships, or other social or personal factors (e.g. lack of social support). It can be especially helpful to seek assistance when a grieving process is complicated by other factors or events.

Some normal reactions to the end of a relationship include:

THOUGHTS	FEELINGS	BEHAVIOURS	PHYSICAL SENSATIONS
disbelief	anger	crying	dry mouth
confusion	guilt	social withdrawal	chest pain
preoccupation	relief	sleep disturbance	lack of energy
misgivings	anxiety	absent-mindedness	tightness in your throat
second thoughts	sadness	appetite disturbance	weakness in your muscles
"what ifs"	hopefulness	restless over-activity	hollowness in your stomach
	loneliness	dreams of the other	headaches
	resentment	avoiding going to classes	
	abandonment	treasuring reminders of the	
	emptiness	other	

Immediately following a breakup, many individuals report experiencing a period of numbness or shock. This may occur whether the loss was anticipated (as in the case of a mutual decision to separate after repeated discussions), or was unexpected (as in the case of one partner suddenly announcing the dissolution of the relationship).

Following this period of shock, people may experience a time of intense emotional upheaval, during which the full impact of the loss may be experienced. Here, your emotions may be overwhelming and temporarily interfere with your academic, social, or family life. The severity and duration of a grief reaction will vary from person to person.

For most people, the intense emotional pain of grief subsides. Eventually, energy is refocused on the future and new relationships.

If your grief response does not gradually lessen in intensity or, over time, continues to interfere with your academic, social or occupational functioning, then you may benefit from receiving assistance. Avoid letting difficulties resolving grief turn to depressed mood.

What To Do When A Relationship Ends

- If your relationship is over, it's normal for it to hurt. Give yourself some time to recover.
- Work to identify and accept all of your feelings. This is a difficult, yet vital, part of the grieving process.
- Give some form of expression to your feelings. Release jealousy, anger and sadness in ways that won't hurt you or others. Talking and crying about your experience can often help vent pain.
- Make a conscious decision to maintain a positive view of yourself. Another person's actions (e.g., decision to leave the relationship) are not a reflection of your worth. Loving and respecting yourself will help you to weather the storm of a breakup and make healthy choices in the future.
- Take action and make choices that are good for you. For example, you may feel better if you put away reminders of the relationship (e.g., photos, mementos) or decide not to listen to sad songs.
- For many people, it is difficult to leave a romantic relationship and become "just friends." Ask yourself whether it is realistic or in your best interests to pursue a friendship once the romantic commitment is gone.
- Reassure yourself that it is normal for feelings to take an "up and down" course. Some people describe experiencing their emotions in "waves" or "bursts" over time. Some days will be better than others.
- Stay focused on yourself. Over-focusing on your ex (e.g., ruminating about why she left, wondering if he is dating again) will drain you of the energy you need to help yourself feel better.
- Be careful of "rebounding". In the early stages of grief many people feel lonely and anxious about being alone; most, however, are not yet emotionally ready to make a meaningful and satisfying connection with someone new.
- Take care of your physical health. Try to eat nutritious meals, get enough rest, and exercise moderately.
- Seek and accept support. Some people believe they need to be "strong" and independent. This, however, is an unrealistic expectation. Allow those around you to provide comfort during this difficult time.
- Make a conscious decision to get through your grief.
- Give yourself permission to enjoy life, laugh and have fun. Continue to do the things you like to do. An important part of recovery involves experiencing all of your feelings, including hope and happiness.
- As you begin to feel better, take an honest look (without burdening yourself with excessive anger, guilt or blame) at yourself and the relationship. What did you learn? How did you really feel about yourself in your relationship? How do you want to be in your next relationship? What will you look for in a partner?
- Get professional help if you are finding it difficult to cope on a day-to-day basis, are using drugs or alcohol to deal with your pain, are being stalked by/are stalking your ex, if you fear hurting yourself or another, if there was violence in your relationship, or if you tend to sacrifice your identity for your partner.

Ready To Start Again?

After the break-up of an important relationship it is natural for it to take some time before you move forward with developing a new relationship. Once you feel ready to seek a new relationship, you may wish to consider the following questions:

1. Are you feeling good about yourself? Liking who you are is a crucial part of finding and maintaining a healthy relationship.
2. Do you like spending time with you?
3. Are you engaging in activities that offer opportunities to establish new friendships and acquaintances?
4. Do you assume that because someone is interested in you that s/he will be a good partner? Remember that you should be choosing, too.
5. Are you giving yourself a chance to really get to know a potential partner? True intimacy develops over time.
6. Do you use your instincts and listen to your own reactions about a person's suitability for you?
7. Do you believe a new relationship will heal past hurts?
8. Do you tend to over-focus on your partner's needs and ignore your own?
9. Can you move on quickly and gracefully when you determine a relationship is not right for you?

What I Will Look For In My Next Relationship

What qualities do you want in a partner or friend? Use your responses to this section to guide your choices.

_____ trust	_____ similar values	_____ _____
_____ fun	_____ freedom to be myself	_____ _____
_____ time together and apart	_____ listening	_____ _____
_____ respect	_____ emotional closeness	_____ _____
_____ commitment	_____ understanding/support	_____ _____
_____ willingness to work on problems together	_____ talking	_____ _____
_____ honesty	_____ no violence	_____ _____

When you begin a new relationship, refer back to this list.

- Are you being true to yourself?
- If you find yourself with someone who doesn't have the qualities you've outlined here, carefully examine what is happening for you.
- It's your right to leave a relationship that's not good for you.