



## There are two approaches to making treatment work

- 1 **Work with experts** who know how to help you and where shared responsibility is established.
- 2 **Be informed by experts and work together with your teenager** where you are responsible for his/her mood and there is an agreement on how to manage a variety of behaviours.

### 1 Working with experts

There are a number of treatments available, most commonly outpatient, although day patient and in patient treatment may be offered depending on severity. These treatment settings may usually include a mix of psychological and medical treatments at an individual, family and/or group level.

This document focuses on:

### 2 Working with your teenager.

Here is how **you** can be directly involved in collaborating with your teenager in implementing change.

- STEP 1:** Establish a baseline
- STEP 2:** List your aims
- STEP 3:** Recognise change
- STEP 4:** Evaluate change

## STEP 1: Establish a baseline

- a Make sure your teenager is physically not at risk by consulting your GP.
- b Get a psychiatric/psychological evaluation of your teenager and discuss with the professional involved what you plan to do and how this is in line with what the professional may identify as your teenager's needs.
- c Get shared backing from your partner/spouse and the rest of the family
- d Explain what you intend to do with your teenager and get them involved in the steps ahead
- e Devise some specific targets for change
- f Be available and prepared to invest in making the programme work. This may mean significant change to your and the whole family's schedules.
- g Know when to begin to back off
- h **Take care of yourself.**

## STEP 2: List your aims

Firstly, establish the length of time you are going to allocate to implement the programme

For example:

We will allocate the next thirty days to implement the following steps.

We will aim for a short term strategy to help manage some of the worrying symptoms and a long term strategy for finding out and changing what may be contributing to the depression.

**Aims: Short term** – Dealing with depressive episodes. There are three areas that need focus:

- 1 Your teenager's activities
- 2 Your teenager's thoughts
- 3 Your teenager's support systems

All these areas will need help with focus.

Take **small** steps that lead in the right direction. The aim is to feel better **now**.

### 1 YOUR TEENAGER'S ACTIVITIES

- a Work out** some simple daily tasks for your teenager to do. These should include: an agreed getting out of bed time; dressing up time; small tasks such as writing something; making a telephone call; sorting something; etc. Be realistic. They have to be achievable goals.
- b Agree beforehand** what your involvement with this will be. eg, you will remind him/her three times.
- c Agree on distractions** and eliminate them – for example, if long hours are spent watching TV, on the computer, or listening to music, then agree that this will be done in agreed 'rest breaks' or at the end of the day rather than at the beginning.
- d Draw up** a timetable of these activities (see box on the right) Implementing this will need practice.

**Remember!** You are aiming for consistency.

Once this is done, items can be changed as appropriate.

**Remember!** The items on the timetable have got to be:

**1** achievable, **2** small, **3** what your teenage feels they can do

**Remember!**

- Your teenager is in a different place to where they've been before their mood changed,
- Low mood takes away pleasure so its difficult to see the positive of doing anything
- Low mood creates tiredness which makes it difficult to activate yourself
- Low mood creates a loss of direction, so its easier to become disorganised – having a routine helps

#### Example of Daily Activity Diary

time	activity
8-9 am	wake up
9-9.30 am	brush teeth and get dressed
10 am	have breakfas
11-12 am	catch up on email / Facebook / Flick'r, read / make some phone calls
12-1 pm	go for a walk
1-2 pm	lunch
2-2.30 pm	rest
3-4 pm	do some college work
5 pm	free time
10 pm	have a regular bed time

**Troubleshoot!** Increase the proportion of positive or pleasurable activities to start with followed by trying to balance harder activities that require application and mastery.

**Troubleshoot!** Schedule small tasks to start with, eg. having a bath, getting dressed more often. Then balance out with bigger tasks for example, taking the dog out for a work.

**Troubleshoot!** Start with low energy tasks, such as catching up with email and build onto higher energy tasks, eg. going out for a brisk walk

## 2 YOUR TEENAGER'S THOUGHTS

Sam had been unhappy since he broke up with his girl friend. He moped around the house all day and listened to gloomy music. He stopped bothering to get dressed and when his father lost his cool over this, shrugged his shoulders and said 'What's the point?' His room was an even bigger tip than usual and when his mother went in and tidied it, he said 'what difference does it make anyway?' When his brother forced him to come downstairs to play on the Wii he got angry with himself, every time he lost saying 'this is how it always is, I'm such a loser.' He told his brother 'Why are you bothering? Remember the last time we played I was rubbish too.' When a friend called to say he would join and then he cancelled, Sam said 'well, I didn't expect any different really, that's how it usually is for me, people let me down.' When his mother bought back some films for him to watch he said 'these are boring, I don't think they make good movies any more.'

As you can see from Sam's story, depression affects what we remember.

### Its circular!

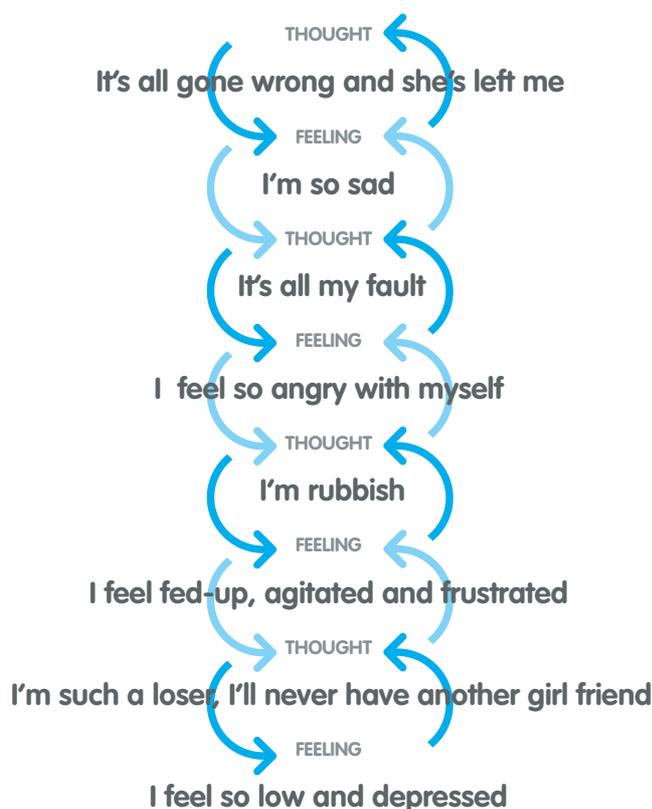
When we are depressed we remember bad or negative things and the more we remember these things the more depressed we get.



### It's also a downward spiral!

This circular thought process pulls you down a spiral of **thoughts** and **feelings**.

As you can see not only is a downward spiral of depression created by the interaction of thoughts and feelings but each of these will lead back on themselves in a circular way keeping you trapped in a negative mindset.



## Breaking the pattern of negative thoughts

These are all different ways you can challenge the thoughts, you could try one, a few or all!

- 1 If the thoughts go over and over and over in your head – you need some time out from them.**  
**Be firm! When you start to think these over and over . . .**
  - a distract yourself** – do something that stops the thoughts from re-occurring.
  - b stop them at the beginning** – as they start, say ‘stop’ really loudly at the first thought. Make yourself start to think something else and resist the temptation of going down the same route over and over.
  - c take the significance away from the thoughts** – as the thought enters your head, just work on letting it go. Make it insignificant – it’s not real.
  - d challenge the thoughts** – this is the opposite of c. where you don’t give the thought any importance. Here you take your negative thought and explore how true it really is.

So, for example, Sam thinks **“It’s all my fault”** . . . check . . .

- 1 Is this correct?** How do I know it’s all my fault? Give some examples.
- 2 Could it also be due to any other reasons?** Give some reasons.
- 3 Based on 1 and 2 can I modify my original thought?**

Since depressed thoughts are biased, you will find that there usually is a good alternative that balances out the constant negative – give it a try!

**Do it on paper**, it’s easier to write things out and seeing them usually helps.

There’s lots of help on how to change negative thoughts – check out Cognitive Therapy or book a consultation to have yourself assessed – it helps!

## 3 YOUR TEENAGER’S SUPPORT SYSTEMS

**Teenage depression responds well to having support from friends or someone important. Having someone to confide in, talk to and break the pattern of isolation and withdrawal created by depression is part of treatment.** The problem is:

Teenagers who are socially lacking in confidence or have fewer friends are more likely to become depressed, and depression needs more social support - another circle!

Building up supportive relationships takes time - encourage your teenager to

- a re-make contact with friends** they have even if its very few.
- b meet new people** - in a variety of contexts other than just school. You may need to create the opportunities for this to happen, it is unlikely that a shy and/or depressed teenager will initiate new contacts on their own accord. Offer a varied choice of place to meet people in (clubs, church, interests, neighbours, sport) and a varied choice of person (they may be older for example).
- c See your role as a coach** in encouraging the building of friendships with help and encouragement to build friendships and keep them in good working order.
- d keep talking to your teenager**

## STEP 3: Recognise change

- Rewarding change is an invaluable tool in reinforcing new behaviour
- Set up a regular system of monitoring your goals together and of finding ways of rewarding your teenager for their achievements and continuing to devise incentives for continuing with and maintaining change
- Rewards can also be accumulated – example One clear week of sticking to the timetable
- Rewards can get more challenging to earn as new behaviour becomes easier
- Do not work on too many target behaviours at the same time.

### EXAMPLE: My Reward Chart

target	achievement		my reward
To stick to my timetable tasks	Mon	Y/N	15 extra minutes on Facebook
	Tues	Y/N	Got to see my friends in the park
	Wed	Y/N	Went out with Mum
	Thurs	Y/N	15 extra minutes on Facebook
	Fri	Y/N	Bought a new album of my favourite artist

## STEP 4: Evaluate change

- Evaluating change and working out what works and changing what doesn't should be an ongoing focus.
- When to introduce the next change should also be assessed.
- Maintaining change needs regular monitoring
- Relapse should be seen as part of recovery and the challenge is to get back on track as quickly as possible.

## References / further reading

- Navigating teenage depression, a guide for parents and professionals, Parker & Evers, Routledge
- Depression, the way out of your prison, Dorothy Rowe, Routledge
- Workbooks:  
Think Good, Feel Good, by Paul Stallard, Wiley (for younger teenagers)  
Mind over Mood, Greenberg and Padesky, Guildford Press (for older teenagers)
- [www.themindgym.com](http://www.themindgym.com)