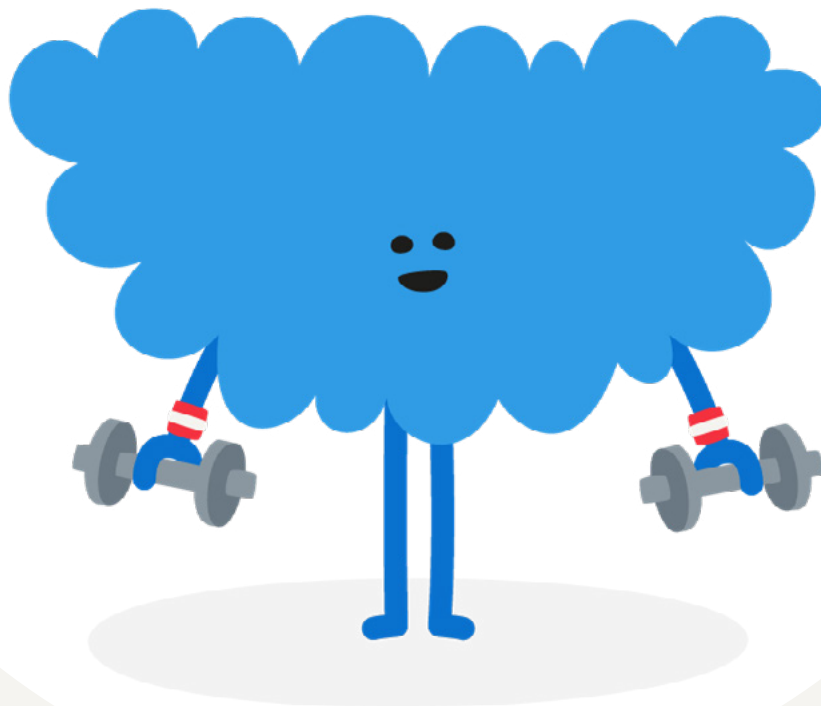


Dealing with Low Mood and Depression During Covid-19 Using the Move Mood App

A booklet for young people from stem4



MOVE MOOD



By Dr Nihara Krause, Consultant Clinical Psychologist

About

This booklet accompanies a video outlining how you can use the Move Mood app to manage COVID-19 triggered and maintained low mood or depression.

stem4 is a London based teenage mental health charity creating a portfolio of mental health apps for young people and mental health literacy in secondary schools and colleges

Dr Nihara Krause is a Consultant Clinical Psychologist with many years of clinical practice and the clinical creator of the stem4 digital portfolio.

stem4 thanks Comic Relief and the Paul Hamlyn Foundation for a Tech for Good grant that has enabled the development of the Move Mood app as well as the creation of the video and booklet.

Introduction

The outbreak of Coronavirus (COVID-19) has been difficult in terms of the restrictions it has posed as well as its effect on creating an uncertain and anxious time for us all.

Many young people - particularly those who had problems before the outbreak - are worried about how the situation might impact their mental health.

The most important thing to remember is that - if you find yourself sad or depressed - you are not alone.

This booklet, which supports the Move Mood app, will help you and your loved ones get through this period and protect your mental health as best you can.

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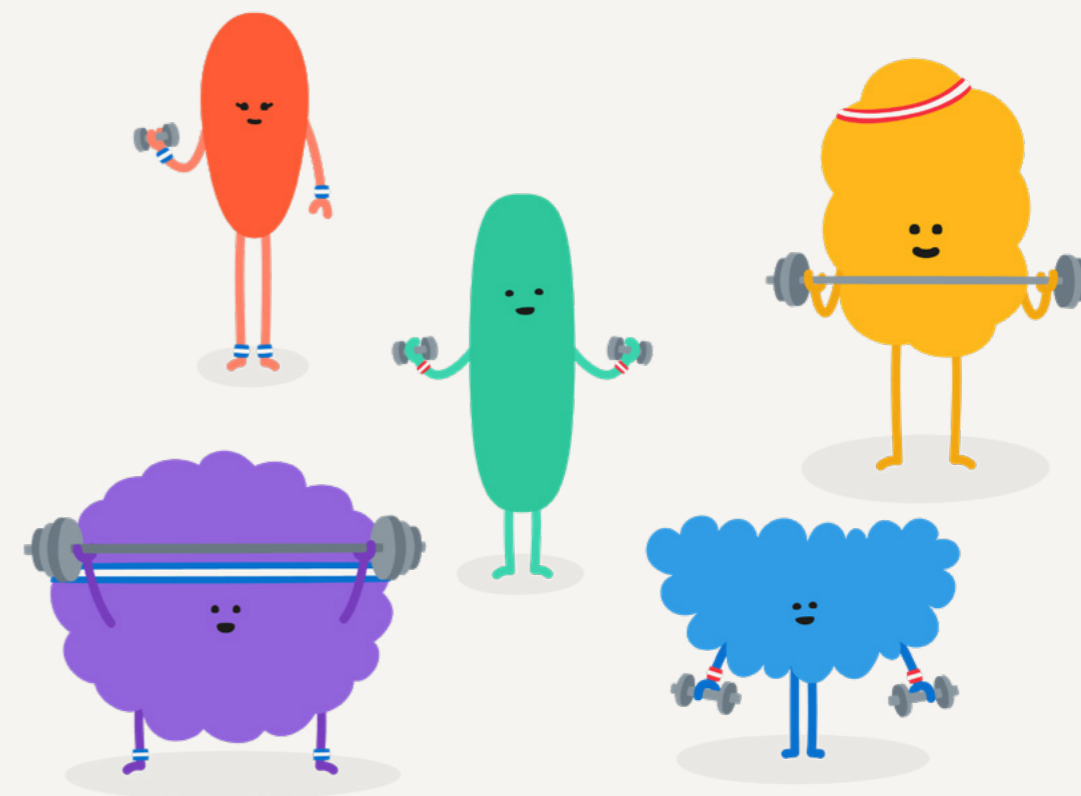
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Chapter 1

About Low Mood and Depression

Most people, including children and adults, feel low occasionally. This is a normal reaction to events that are stressful or upsetting. It is even more common for teenagers to be affected by a range of moods, particularly feeling 'blue'.

However, sometimes these feelings continue, become severe and turn into clinical depression. Depression can affect children as young as eleven although it is less common in the younger age group. Clinical depression, requiring appropriate treatment, is thought to affect around every 5 out of 100 teenagers.

Depression can affect us in a number of different ways. Some people might have just some of the symptoms whilst others might have quite a few. It's important to get a professional to make the diagnosis.

Symptoms fall into several categories which include emotional, physical, thought-based and impacting on behaviours.

Emotionally, people can:

- Feel sad
- Feel irritable and angry
- Feel numb
- Feel hopeless
- Feel guilty or worthless
- Feel overwhelmed



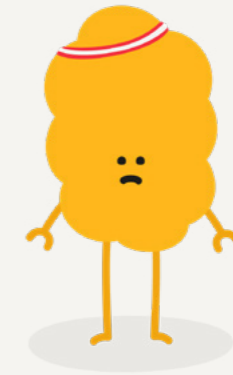
On the physical side, a person may:

- Experience sleep changes
- Experience appetite changes
- Experience lethargy or extreme tiredness
- Sometimes even feel increased pain

Inevitably, these symptoms will affect a person's thoughts and behaviours, just as much as changes to thoughts and behaviours further affect emotions and behaviours.

Changes to thoughts include:

- Constant negative thoughts
- Concentration problems
- A loss of interest
- Not enjoying anything much
- Slowed down thinking
- Becoming indecisive
- Losing confidence



Changes to behaviours include:

- Not engaging with others
- Losing motivation to do things
- Feeling tense
- Becoming withdrawn
- Self-neglect, such as for example not eating properly, not looking after their appearance
- Procrastination
- Avoidance
- Harmful behaviours which may include self-harm, substance overuse or misuse



Depression can affect anyone. Contrary to popular belief, clinical depression is not about being weak or unable to cope, it is an illness and taking steps to get help will make it better. The first step is to talk to someone you trust, for example, a family member, a teacher or relative. Talking to your GP can help to get a diagnosis and they may refer you to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS), or a mental health professional for help.

There are many treatments that are effective at managing depression including Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) which helps a person identify depression-related thoughts and behaviours and encourages step by step change. There is also Behavioural Activation Therapy (BAT) which focusses on breaking the vicious cycle between depressed behaviours and further impact on mood.

Occasionally a psychiatrist may also prescribe medication alongside psychological treatment. For some people exercise in combination with the above therapies helps. It's important to keep in mind that there is always 'light at the end of the tunnel' and something to look forward to.

Chapter 2

Depression and COVID-19

There is no doubt that the COVID-19 pandemic has been stressful and difficult for everyone.

The problem is that many of the safety guidelines, together with the impact of the virus are specifically difficult on mood and for people who have a diagnosis of depression. Listed below are some examples of how they interact.

Changing news:

- The daily, ever-changing bad news has a negative effect on mood and with an extended lockdown and uncertainty of when things will change, it is easy to also feel overwhelmed by hopelessness and despair. If you already have a history of low mood, it is also easy for this hopelessness and despair to be cumulative, intensifying depression.

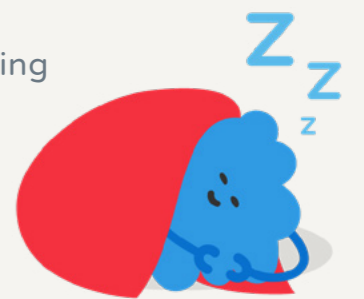
Safety measures:

- Social withdrawal and distancing can be a behavioural consequence of depression, so recommended social isolation measures to keep safe from the virus may have further added this.
- The social withdrawal caused by depression affects relationships and friendships. The current focus on encouraging social distance and being careful of human contact can become a further contributor to the lack of motivation someone with depression might feel. Lack of ease in making and maintaining social connections may also lead to loneliness, which is a known contributor to depression.



Interaction on symptoms:

- Since some of the symptoms of depression also include difficulty in concentrating and a negative focus, trying to process all the different pieces of information about the pandemic may be hard and what is interpreted may add to further despair.
- The lack of energy felt as a result of the condition may also be affected by quarantine guidelines and may further add to a person becoming increasingly housebound.
- Depression can make life seem hopeless, whilst the worry about family finances, jobs and health as well as losses as a result of the virus may either trigger depression in some or make existing depression worse.
- COVID-19 makes future planning difficult. Whilst there may be school and exams at planned times, these could be changed. Going on holiday, which is often something to look forward to, seems tentative due to changing statistics on when the virus peaks in different countries, the costs of cancelled trips and accommodation. One defining feature of depression is a negative outlook of the future. With restrictions on things to look forward to this can become worse.
- The pandemic has also increased feelings of anxiety – of the virus, impact on loved ones, school changes, loss of focus, relationship difficulties and worries about the future. For some people, there may be multiple numbers of these worries leading to the possibility of a major mood disorder or interacting with a mood disorder.
- There may be things that help improve mood such a specific hobby or sport, for example, that can't be carried out due to the virus.
- Sleep patterns may have changed with later night sleeping since the days have been less tiring. Sleep patterns change with depression often with trouble sleeping at night and to sleeping in the day instead. The sleep pattern changes as a result of COVID-19 impact may contribute to a worsening pattern.
- The structure provided by school or college provides people with depression beneficial direction. This will no longer be available so that the effort that someone with depression puts in to get up at a certain time, get dressed, travel, meet others, focus, do homework, take on tasks of responsibility, focus on the future etc will all change, leading to further mood deterioration.



Impact on relationships:

- Some people may be in difficult relationships or in families where there is discord. Spending months in lockdown in troubled relationships can be harmful to mood.
- Distance from friends or the lack of continuity of seeing them can cause worries about whether the closeness of a friendship can be preserved or feel overwhelming when thinking of return back to school or college.
- Close, intimate relationships, depending on where they may be in their development may or may not last lockdown.
- However good family relationships might be, the extended lockdown period may have placed a strain on them and boredom may contribute to further low mood.

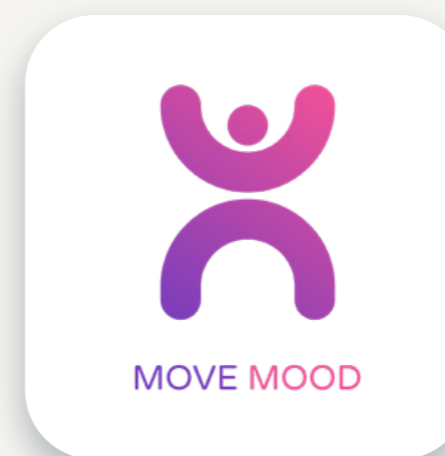


- The friendships that you have through hobbies or interests, for example, those you meet at football or running, or people you meet for leisure such as in a club may come to an end since they can't be pursued easily.
- Relationships with parents might change – parents working from home, parents teaching you, for example, may be a positive but may also place strains on relationships, which if mood is low can be further upsetting.
- Parents may be under pressure due to work changes, particularly if they have lost a job and this may change family interaction or there may be a mood disorder that develops or intensifies in a parent.
- It becomes much harder to date and this can feel lonely and sad.
- You may not be able to visit people you love such as a grandparent or a separated parent who lives far away. This may add to worries and sadness.
- You may get enjoyment from things you offer to the community, for example volunteering at your local charity or reading to someone in an old people's home. Depression narrows perspective, especially about yourself so that you can think badly of yourself. If these activities are no longer available it may take away the one good feeling you have about yourself. Feeling guilty is a common feature of depression. Being limited from what you can do due to the virus may make this feel worse.

- Online communication isn't easy for many people, but it can be particularly difficult for people who are depressed. Seeing themselves on screen, finding it difficult to join in, feeling left out can all leave a person further unhappy.
- Many people have experienced the loss of loved ones as a result of COVID-19. With loss comes sadness and grief. These may intensify existing depression or, if opportunities to grieve have been held back, for example, not being able to attend a funeral or be with them at their last hours, then this grief may last much longer and turn into depression.

Negative consequences of COVID-19 coping strategies:

- People have resorted to many different ways of keeping themselves active during the lockdown period of COVID-19. One such way is to bake or cook elaborate meals. If body image is a problem or a contributory factor to depression, then the impact of weight gain can further lead to a sense of hopelessness and depression. Lockdown has been particularly difficult for young people with anorexia nervosa since their routines have changed considerably, which may add to existing mood problems.
- Alcohol consumption has also increased over this time. Some people who are depressed will drink to cope, 'lift' their mood or 'forget their worries', leading to further depression. This can lead to overuse or misuse.
- People with depression often feel the need to distract from difficult thoughts or find online, 'virtual' interaction easier. Having unstructured time may have led to an imbalance between the time spent online and 'real' time. Sometimes, this can lead to a digital or gaming addiction which creates its own problems.



Given that COVID-19 continues to need management, getting support to deal with how it may impact on and interact with depression is essential. Whilst there are many traditional treatment approaches, the Move Mood app is a tool that can be used regularly to practice changing some of these circular patterns.

Chapter 3

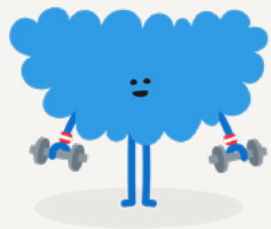
About the Move Mood App and How It Can Be Used for Covid-19 Triggers and Maintaining Factors

About Move Mood

Move Mood is a free app to help young people manage the behaviours associated with low mood or depression. Created for stem4, teenage mental health charity, this clinically-led app has been co-designed with input from young people. It follows a type of treatment called Behavioural Activation Therapy (BAT) and uses powerful, in-built analytics to measure effectiveness. The app is completely anonymous and doesn't collect any identifiable data.

Behavioural Activation Therapy encourages people with depression to approach activities they may be avoiding. This is done by defining goals and activity schedules. It is a highly personalised intervention that targets the behaviours that feed into depression. When you are depressed you tend to avoid particular situations or activities.

The app uses a weight lifting analogy:



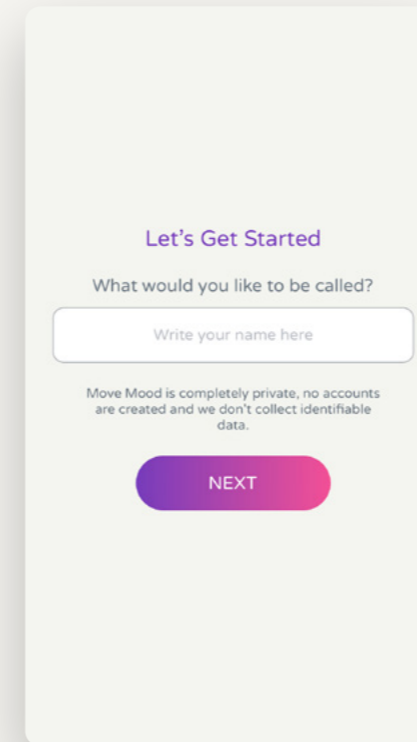
**Low mood and depression weigh you down.
Instead, engage, initiate and activate.
Move your mood and lift this weight.**

The Move Mood app is suitable for mild/moderate depression. If severely depressed it should only be used alongside treatment.

Using an app such as Move Mood is helpful as it can be available wherever you need it. It is a helpful self-management tool since it helps with choosing a behaviour you would like to change, and, together with a companion set goals to practice, earn rewards for completing them, learn to encourage yourself to keep motivation to change going even with the presence of low mood, self-monitor progress and keep things in check. Whilst Move Mood does not substitute for a treatment plan with a mental health professional, at a time when services are stretched, having a self-management tool to help prompt change and make change can be helpful.

Here are some guidelines on how use the Mood Move app to help with COVID-19 triggered or maintained low mood or depression.

Getting started



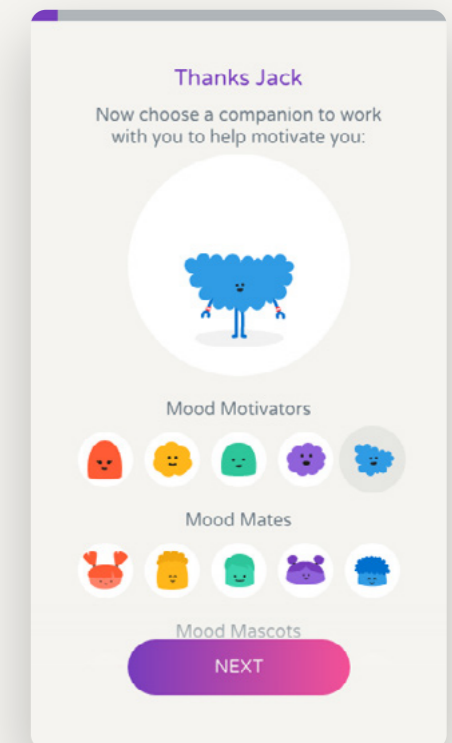
Here are some guidelines on how use the Mood Move app to help with COVID-19 triggered or maintained low mood or depression.

When you start the app you will be asked to enter a name you would like to be called. This is because the app likes to send you personalised, encouraging messages, often needed when your mood is low.

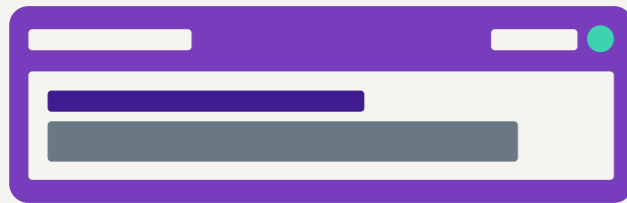
Now comes the fun bit – you get to choose from a range of Mood Motivators, Mood Mates or Mood Mascots. They will remind you of your promise to make a change and be with you on your journey to getting better.

You have completed the first bit of registering on the app and you are ready to get started with choosing the goals you would like to change.

The next bit will take about five minutes to set up. When mood and motivation is low spending time on anything might seem hard, but please do persist since this next bit will only need to be set up once. After this, it's just a matter of choosing a new task whenever you want to.



The next bit, is about choosing one task from each of the three categories below:



A routine task

Routine tasks are daily activities that get disrupted when a person is low in mood. For example, it might be that brushing your hair has become tedious or even brushing your teeth!



A necessary task

You can decide what you think might be necessary, but an example might be making sure you hand in that piece of homework in time so that you don't get into trouble or it might be making sure you eat regularly because appetite can change when you are low.



An enjoyable task

These are the best tasks to do, but it might be that depression has made everything seem flat and unenjoyable. It's also helpful to remember that some of the enjoyable things you liked to do, for example, going to the cinema, are harder to do or in fact can't be done due to COVID-19 restrictions. The app provides a range of other choices you might be able to make instead.

In order to help with choice, Move Mood provides you with 6 main categories. These categories are generally based on things that matter to people, things that people value. The reason that value categories work is that given everything is hard when you are depressed, you are more likely to want to do something that has meaning. In addition, these are the categories that are all affected by depression and even more so by COVID-19.

The six value categories are:

- Physical Wellbeing
- Family Friends and Relationships
- Community
- Mental/Emotional Health
- Education
- Hobbies



Remember, you will be looking to do something which has meaning and this will vary from person to person.

Once you choose a value category, for example, physical wellbeing, you will be given a list of different things that you might like to choose from. You can also create your own task but do please make it achievable, safe and COVID-19 friendly.

Once you choose your tasks, you can think of how you might do these by writing small steps to achievement.

For example, if I wanted to set a task of 'going to bed early and reading a book', my steps could be:

1. Choose a book and have it ready
2. Decide on what time I want to go to bed
3. Have a shower and get ready for bed half an hour before my set time
4. Read my book
5. Turn the lights off and go to bed

Once you have written your steps, the app will ask you to rate how difficult you think this task will be on a sliding scale. It will also ask you to rate your mood at the start of the task.

You can now schedule your task in terms of frequency, date when it finishes (remember to learn something new you need to practice it a few times - generally 30 days) and what time of the day you would like to carry it out and set your calendar.

Great, your first task out of three is complete.

Note: You can swipe back if you want to change something.

Now do the same for the other two categories. Please keep up your motivation to complete this even if it seems a long process. It will help you to get better once you've set it up. You can also earn the 'Setup Star' award.



One of the difficulties with depression is keeping your promises to yourself. Lack of motivation, difficulty remembering and tiredness all get in the way. So, help yourself and make a commitment to your companion to complete the tasks you've set. Once you have set all three tasks, you will achieve two awards - Setup Star and Commitment Champion. Well done!

The first time you set up, you will also be asked to provide optional information about your age, gender, geographical location, and whether you are in treatment. This data is completely anonymous and helps stem4 to adapt the app to suit users even more accurately. You can choose whether you would like to receive push notifications for motivational messages or task reminders. These reminders can be turned off at any time.

From the Settings menu, you can personalise the app by choosing a day or night mode, change your companions and also set up a passcode to access the app if you like.

The app will then remind you of what you have set out to do. Put your tasks into action, note how they affect your mood and track your programme. Your companion will, every time you achieve your task post a motivational message and you will be able to work towards a variety of awards depending on how many of your tasks you can complete. You can set a pace that works for you or you can turbocharge what you want to do - either way you will be able to feel the satisfaction of completing a task.

The app also signposts to several resources for extra help.

Resources

About Move Mood

Sometimes mood is hard to shift, even with the best of efforts.

If you are finding breaking the tasks into smaller steps difficult or just can't do the tasks, it might be that speaking to someone will help. The stem4 'Asking for Help' leaflet provides some tips on how to approach and talk to the people recommended below.

In the first instance:

Talk to a trusted adult - it might be a parent, a teacher or a relative.

You can also talk to a doctor - in the UK this is your GP.

Often young people might talk to a friend to start with - see if they can help you talk to an adult.

You might also like to contact a charity, a text help organisation or the NHS counselling service. Some useful (UK) links are listed below:

Anxiety UK
www.anxietyuk.org.uk

Bipolar UK
www.bipolaruk.org

CALM
www.thecalmzone.net

Childline
www.childline.org.uk

Cruse Bereavement Care
www.cruse.org.uk

Headspace
www.headspace.com

Hopelineuk
www.papyrus-uk.org/hopelineuk

Kooth
www.kooth.com

Mind
www.mind.org.uk

Together All
Togetherall.com



www.stem4.org.uk

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