

Project ECHO: Enhancing Care and Health Outcomes

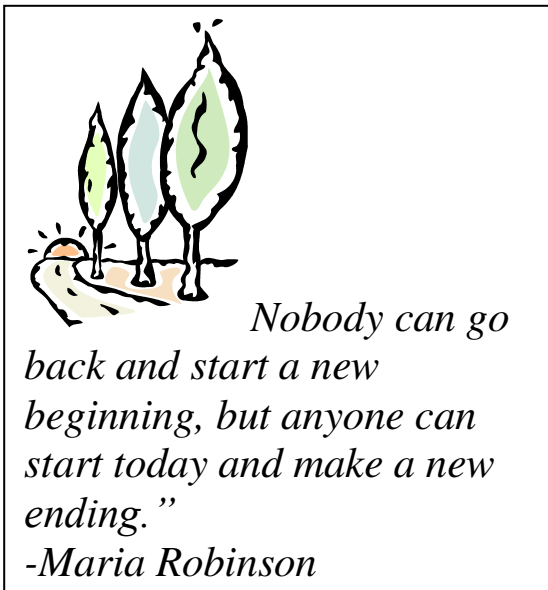
Section 1: Introduction

“It's just a lot to handle- feeling so stressed and trying to handle my emotions.”

Stress is a common part of most people's lives. Unfortunately, stress can sometimes be overlooked or minimized by family, friends, and others in our lives. This stress can often leave women feeling alone, helpless, exhausted, irritated and overwhelmed. If you are feeling this way, please know that you are not alone!

The Good News

Overwhelming stress and a down mood can make you feel like there is little hope and make you feel as though you are lost. But there is good news! Talk therapy has been proven to be very effective in helping lessen feelings of being down, lost, overwhelmed, frustrated, and other difficult emotions. By participating in this therapy you are making a good and healthy choice for yourself and your family. With time and support, you will be on your way to feeling better.



The good news is that you are making steps towards CHANGE, and you are seeking positive change, which is possible. The goal of these sessions is to build on your strengths to improve your mood and to help make stressful situations less overwhelming. The techniques that you will discuss with your therapist are techniques that you can use throughout your lifetime to help improve your mood.

Therapy

The most important part of this therapy is YOU. Therapy will focus on your needs and will try to be as convenient as possible. The best part about this therapy is that it is made *just for you*. Together, you and your therapist will determine what works for you and what does not. Every woman is different, and every woman experiences stress differently. That being said, it is extremely important that you take an active role in your therapy. Let your therapist know what is helpful and what is not; this will make the therapy more effective. You are in charge of your therapy, so do not hesitate to provide input and suggestions so the therapy works best for you.

The Workbook



This workbook will help you as you go through therapy. For some women, it may be useful to do all of the activities in this book and read every section. For other women, only certain sections may feel helpful, so they may skip some sections. The book is designed to help make your therapy fit your needs. As you progress in therapy, there may be diagrams, worksheets, and journals for you to fill out along the way. These tools can really help you determine how you are feeling, what is and is not working for you, and ways to improve your mood. They can also help you communicate with your therapist. We know it can be difficult to share personal thoughts and feelings, so we hope that using this workbook will make it a little bit easier for you. ***You can choose what pieces you want to use or not. There is no “wrong” way to use this workbook. Share only what you want to share with your therapist.***

The Big Picture

So how does this therapy work? What should I expect? The basic idea is that for all of us, our relationships, thoughts, actions, physical health, and circumstances play a role in how we feel. When we look at these different pieces of our lives, we can see how each of them (separately and together) affects our mood. ***By making changes, even seemingly small changes, in any one of these areas, we can affect our overall mood and stress levels.***

At its most basic, this therapy has two steps:

- 1.) Learning from your everyday life about what affects your mood and stress level; and
- 2.) Exploring different ways of thinking, acting, and reacting to find solutions that work best for you.

The main goal is to find out what works for you in terms of improving your mood. You and your therapist are allies in helping you feel better.

Motivation

“I don’t like how irritable I am right now. I want to work on my stress, get back to having more energy and patience, get back to my happier self.”

Every woman’s reasons for starting this therapy are different. What are yours? What do you hope will happen as a result of therapy?

Motivation

#1 _____

Motivation

#2 _____

Helpful Hints for Success

First, some ground rules:

- 1.) Be gentle with yourself as you work through this therapy. Self-care can sometimes be hard work! Be proud of yourself for your motivation, dedication, and hard work.
- 2.) Allow yourself to fill out the worksheets without thinking that you are doing it “wrong”. There are no wrong answers or stupid questions here.
- 3.) Recognize that this therapy can move at your pace. If you do not understand a section or something your therapist is saying, feel free to ask questions or change the direction of the session. Your input counts!

Second, we have a few general hints for the therapy meeting place:

Meeting at home:

1. Find a quiet place to meet with your therapist.
2. Try to limit distractions like television, music, excessive visitors, etc.
3. Schedule a specific time to meet—then you will be able to plan your day accordingly.
4. Be sure to communicate with your therapist about any scheduling conflicts you might have, or if your home is not working out to be a convenient or safe place for therapy.

Meeting at your doctor's office:

1. Try to schedule your meetings time when you already have an appointment.
2. If you are experiencing scheduling conflicts, call your therapist so you can maintain a meeting time once a week.



Over the telephone:

1. Discuss with your therapist how to handle call waiting and interruptions.
2. Try to find a quiet place with few distractions.

Always remember that you are in charge of your therapy. You and your therapist will work together to make appointments convenient and beneficial for you. We want to see you succeed as much as you hope to be successful in this process. Together, we can meet your goals.

Now you are ready to begin!



In the next section, we will start with the first step:
Learning about what is affecting your mood and stress level.

Section 2: Exploring what affects your mood and stress level

“Everything has been overwhelming. My job has me working too much, my doctor tells me to lessen my stress, I’m worried about my financial expenses, my car has been acting up, I’ve been fighting with my family, I stay up worrying about all this and then I feel tired all the time.”

“I feel like there is always so much to do, but nothing that I really want to do or feel like I can do. When I ask my spouse for help, I do not get help that really helps. Then, I have my mother pressuring me to do things differently. On top of all of this, family members have been laid off their jobs. It’s just so much.”

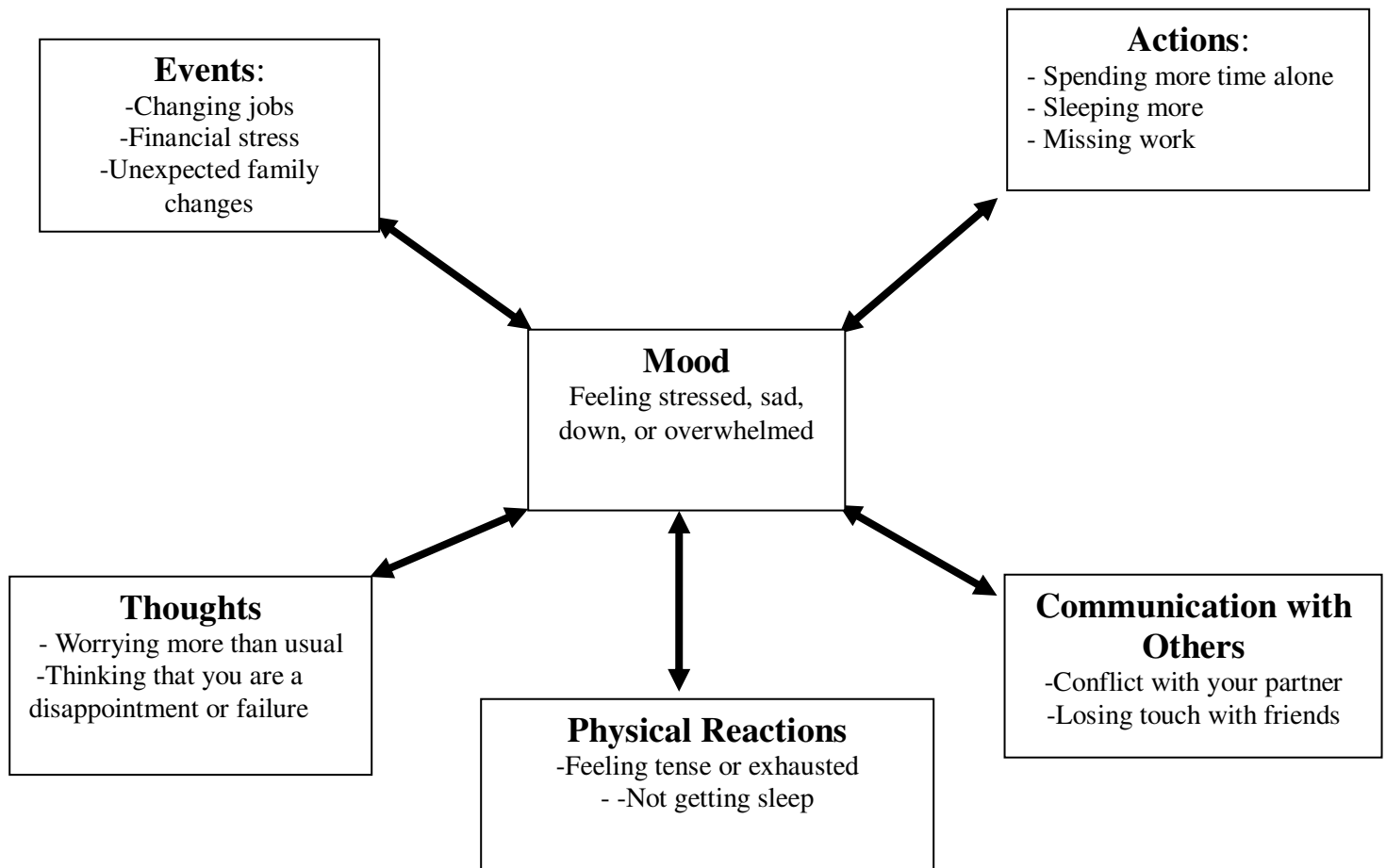
“I don’t really know what’s wrong—I just don’t feel like myself.”

Sometimes it is hard to pinpoint just one thing that is causing stress. More often, several things contribute to feeling down at any one time. These things may be related to each other in some way, and the good news is that focusing on making changes (even “small” changes) in any one area can have a “ripple effect,” improving your overall mood and stress levels. We will talk more about making changes in a little while.



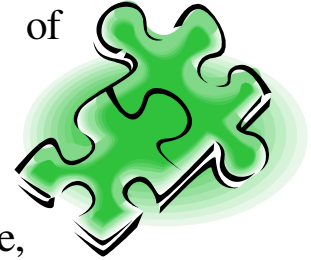
When we look at what is causing stress, we can start by looking at different types of stress in our life: stress from our physical health, recent events, our actions, our mood, the thoughts that come in our mind, and our relationships with others.

Here is an example of how these all fit together:



How this relates to therapy:

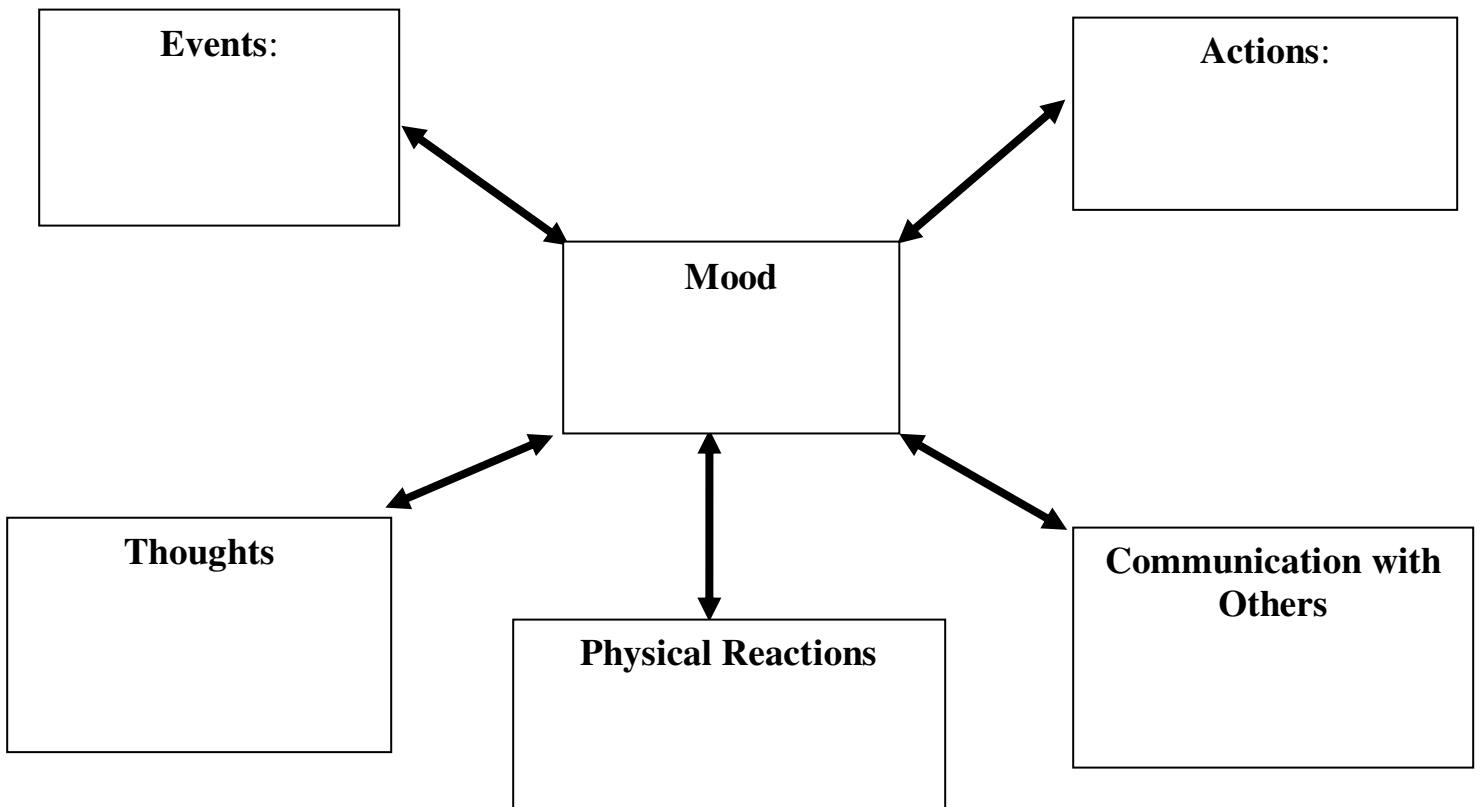
1. This model can help us “make sense” of our symptoms. Most of the time, there are connections between the way we feel, act, and think.
2. Each of these “pieces” can influence our mood. For example, spending less time with your friends can lead to feelings of loneliness.
3. Each piece is connected to each other. For example, thinking “my friends will think I’m boring” may impact how lonely you feel, but it also may decrease the likelihood of you calling your friends to go out.
4. Because they are all connected, we can make changes in any one place and feel the effects in other areas. When we change just one of these things, we can have an impact on all these pieces.
5. Like throwing a pebble in a still pond, small positive changes can create ripples that affect our mood, stress level, and other areas.



6. You are unique. This puzzle will look different for each person’s particular thoughts, life events, etc. Therefore, it is important to know the specific stresses that are most important for you right now.

What does this look like in my life?

You may go through this diagram with your therapist, or on your own. You may find it useful to write some notes in each box about what is going on in your life right now. You can also add “positives,” or things that are strengths in your life and have helped you cope with stress in the past.



Weekly Mood Log

Some women find that keeping a weekly log helps them to notice patterns in their moods. In fact, you may decide with your therapist that this is a useful tool for every week of your therapy.

Date	Mood 1—10 1 = extremely depressed/down 10 = no depression	Notes (these can be activities, conversations, or thoughts that seem to influence your mood the most).
Example: 6/5/08	4	Argued with family about finances. Went on a walk.
MON		
TUE		
WED		
THU		
FRI		
SAT		
SUN		

Next Steps: Attached are several different sections that you may or may not be use during therapy. Feel free to read ahead or to wait until after your sessions to read. **Some sections you may cover in therapy and some you may not. Read at your own pace and read what fits with your needs.**



Section 3: The Power of Action.....p.15

Section 4: Relationships and Communication...p.22

Section 5: Thinking Patterns.....p.29

Section 6: Moving On.....p.35

Section 3: The Power of Action

Beginning to talk about how you are feeling and your stress is taking action!

When you are down, you may feel:

- Irritable / angry
- Guilty
- Unmotivated
- Tired

When you are down, you may:

- Feel badly about yourself
- Not feel much pleasure
- Have a hard time with other people

You find it hard to put out energy and may not follow through on things you need to do, which may cause:

- More guilt and...
- Feeling worse about yourself...
- Isolation from those who you care about.

Solution? --> --> --> ACTION!!

All of these symptoms and problems can be dealt with by taking action. You have probably been taking a lot of action, but it may feel like it is not helping. We will work with you to make sure you are putting your energy into the things that will work best for you.

Daily Activities

When you are feeling sad, stressed, or down it is often difficult to feel like doing the things you used to enjoy.

Things I normally enjoy doing and / or feel good about:

Sometimes, not just enjoyable activities, but things that we find meaningful in life become hard to do when we are down. Activities like volunteering, making a meal for yourself or your family, or successfully finishing something at work can help add meaning to our lives.

Things I normally find meaningful or challenging:

How has your mood affected these activities? Do you find yourself doing them less often?

Are you doing other things more, like sleeping or watching television? These are common reactions to stress. However, those enjoyable and meaningful activities are just the things we need most when we are feeling down. That is why one focus of this therapy is on finding ways to get active.



But what if I don't feel like doing those things anymore?

When you feel tired and stressed, you may feel less like doing things you used to do.

For example, imagine you are feeling down and a friend asks you to go out for a walk (something you, at one point, really enjoyed doing). When people feel depressed and stressed they are very likely to turn down the offer because they “just don't feel like it” right now. This has probably happened to you and it is likely that you are wondering when you will feel like your old self again.

The good news is that you do not have to wait for the motivation to come first before you get moving! In fact, when we are feeling down, the best strategy is to act first, and know that motivation will follow. It may feel strange at first, but once you get moving, you will find more motivation, more enjoyment, and less stress.





Here are some ideas to get you started:

- ❖ Calling an old friend or family member
- ❖ Taking a walk
- ❖ Reading a magazine or book
- ❖ Listening to your favorite music
- ❖ Petting, walking, or grooming your pet
- ❖ Keeping a journal or diary
- ❖ Window shopping
- ❖ Going to a place of worship or spiritual importance
- ❖ Looking through old photographs or albums
- ❖ Being outside in nice weather
- ❖ Sending a card to someone who is sick or whom you miss
- ❖ Making food or crafts to keep or give to a friend
- ❖ Planting and potting flowers
- ❖ Planning or organizing something (a movie night, a trip around the block, a dinner together, cleaning)
- ❖ Having friends over for a visit
- ❖ Going on an outing to the park, museum, or event
- ❖ Doing a job well and giving yourself credit for the completion
- ❖ Learn something new
- ❖ Volunteer
- ❖ Watch a movie (rent a free movie from the library, exchange movies with friends or family)

These things alone may not solve everything, but may result in a little more energy or motivation. Taking action is an important step in the process.

Use the action schedule below to document your activities throughout this week. You may not fill every box, and that is okay. Just take the time that you can to keep track of the things you do throughout this week! You can also keep track of your mood so that you can notice patterns. To track mood, give it a rating from 1 (the most down or stressed you've felt) through 10 (good mood, not down at all).

	Example	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
9-10	Sleep							
10-11	Sleep							
11-12	Shower (3)							
12-1	Breakfast (4)							
1-2	TV (2)							
2-3	Walk (5)							
3-4	TV (3)							
4-5	TV (3)							
5-6	Dinner (5)							
6-7	Knitting (6)							
7-8	Sleep							
8-12	Sleep							

Tips for Turning “I don’t think so” into “I bet I will”

When you want to say “NO”...replace it with “I’ll try.”

- Try the activity for ten minutes. If at the end of ten minutes you are still feeling tired or unhappy doing it...stop if you would like.

Use variety...you don’t have to stick to any one activity

- Sit down and make a list of the things that you genuinely enjoy to do and try the easiest ones first. You can add others later.

Set realistic goals

- Remember to do only the things you can do safely.
For example: If you love to run, make sure it is a safe activity for you before you try it again.
- As you ease back into things you used to do, you may want to modify activities, such as walking around the neighborhood once instead of running around the neighborhood.

Schedule it!

- Scheduling the specific days and times you will get involved in an activity can help to knock down barriers that often cause you to say “forget about it.”
- Schedule the activity with a support person.



Most of all, remember that trying these things are important for YOU. This is designed to help uplift your mood and get you connected again. Take the time to do something good for yourself. You deserve it!

Section 4: Relationships and Communication

“If only I had more friends or supportive family, then this wouldn’t feel so overwhelming. Right now, I feel like I have no one. No one who understands, no one who listens, no one to help me. I don’t want to go through this alone.”

Our relationships with other people are directly connected to our moods...When we have positive or encouraging conversations, we feel good. When we experience conflict in our relationships, we often feel down. Relationships, our needs, and the way we communicate often change a lot.

A common stressor is figuring out how to deal with the changes that occur between you and those close to you. You may find yourself relying on people in new ways and for new reasons. This does not mean that you cannot take care of yourself, but that you are strong enough to ask for help when you need it. All people need other people.

In this section, we will look at your current relationships and support systems and how we can make the communication with those around you more effective.

Please remember that it is okay to have stresses, fears, and concerns. Those are emotions and thoughts that you may want to share with those you are close to and comfortable with.

Let’s take a moment to reflect on your current relationships.

When you think about the “important people” in your life, who comes to mind? (List them here.)

Thinking about the list above, who do you go to for support? This can be emotional support, favors, or help around the house, help with work, or with any type of caregiving.

What feels good about these relationships?

What would you like to be different in these relationships?

Communication and Mood Tracker

Below is a tool that you should feel free to use this week as you assess some of the relationships in your life. Use it to document some conversations you have with family, friends, and partners and take note of the verbal exchange (both their comments and yours) and how they made you feel, and how you think they went.

Date	Topic	What you said	What he or she said	How did this conversation influence your mood?	What would you like to change about this conversation if you could?
Monday	Housework	“The dishes are really piling up! It is so overwhelming to see those.”	“We’re going to run out of dishes soon. When do you plan on washing them?”	I felt really irritated, overwhelmed, and alone.	I would have gotten the reply of: “I’ll do the dishes right now so you don’t have to look at them and be overwhelmed.”

Planning a difficult conversation

Sometimes it is very helpful to write down what you would like to say to someone. Here is a brief worksheet that you may find helpful in starting a difficult conversation:

What is bothering me?

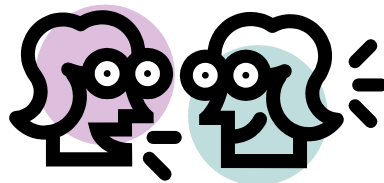
If the other person were here, what would he/she say about this? What is her point of view? Also, does s/he really know that this bothers me?

What do I want to change?

Knowing the person I am talking with, what approach would have the best chance of getting the result I want? (*Write down what you think you might say.*)

Here are a few ideas that may help improve communication:

- Consider looking for a good time to bring up a difficult issue. This may mean waiting until a calmer moment, after you and/or the other person have had a chance to cool down a little.
- Before you begin a conversation, try to think of what you are hoping to get across and what you want to get out of the conversation.
- Be sure to hear the other person's perspective when you are speaking about an important issue. When you feel strongly about a topic it can be easy to only think and reflect on the emotions you are feeling...but remember to be respectful of his/hers feelings as well.
- Just like medicine, sometimes complaints or requests can “go down” easier with a spoonful of sugar. Acknowledging a positive can help the other person be less defensive about the thing you want to change.



Section 5: Thinking patterns

Our thoughts play a role in how we feel. Everyone has thoughts, and it is important for us to examine helpful and unhelpful thoughts.

For example, if you have to finish a project by a specific deadline and you feel overwhelmed and unsure what to do, you may have certain thoughts about yourself. You may think, “I am so bad at projects! I am such a failure. I’ll never finish anything.” Then, you may feel down about yourself, frustrated, tired, and hopeless about the situation.

If instead you think, “This is really difficult, but I’m trying my best. I will get through this.” Then, you are giving yourself some credit for what you are doing and you may feel more hopeful that you will finish the project. You may still feel a degree of frustration, but you may also feel able to cope with the stressful situation.

Unhelpful thoughts (such as those in the first example) are thoughts that:

- Do not necessarily reflect the truth about our experiences and abilities.
- Usually cause us to feel even worse about ourselves and the situation (and sometimes the future). Unhelpful thoughts are those that bring us down even further.

Helpful thoughts are thoughts, like in the second example, that:

- Help us accomplish the tasks we need to complete
- State the truth about our abilities, experiences, and reality.
- Help us cope in a healthy manner that contributes to improving our mood.

Unhelpful thinking plays a big role in maintaining and worsening a down mood. Unhelpful thoughts can cause you to evaluate yourself harshly. For example, you may be able to recall every time you have been criticized or felt like a failure but you may forget all the positive experiences you have had and the times you have felt ready and prepared.

A low mood can also *cause* you to think in a self-defeating or negative way. Feelings of guilt, anxiety, and hopelessness that you feel help to maintain the cycle of unhelpful thinking. These thoughts can also extend into how you think about your future. This can cause a lot of anxiety and may cause you to be overwhelmed and feel like nothing will work out.

Identifying unhelpful thoughts is one of the first steps in creating more helpful thoughts that will aid in lowering your stress and improving your mood.



Here is an easy way to identify your thoughts and how they make you feel. Over the next week, keep track of significant events, and the thoughts you have during them. What did you feel as you were thinking that thought? Over time, you may be able to reflect on unhelpful thoughts that are particularly strong.

Event	Thoughts	Emotions
A family member said she would call you back, but she did not.	“No one wants to talk with me. I have to do everything on my own.”	Defeated, Down, Lonely, Isolated.

Your unhelpful thoughts may vary, but usually unhelpful thoughts revolve around some general themes and core beliefs.

Below is a chart comparing some unhelpful thoughts and the underlying beliefs.

Unhelpful Thought

Underlying Belief

“I am a failure.”

“I must be perfect.”

“I am unlovable.”

“I must be liked by everyone.”

“I am not good enough.”

“I must be outstanding in all that I do.”

“I am a bad person.”

“I must always do the right thing.”

“I am an outsider.”

“I must be popular and in the 'in crowd.'”

“I shouldn’t be without a partner.”

“I should always be with someone. I am incomplete without a partner.”

Some of the thoughts and beliefs listed above may apply to you, others may not. You may want to explore these beliefs with your therapist. It is also helpful for you and your therapist to figure out what triggers your unhelpful thoughts.

What thoughts and beliefs do you have?

When you think you might be struggling with unhelpful thoughts, ask yourself these questions to test whether they are just a quick thought or if they reflect beliefs that have become a deep part of who you are:

- Do my bad feelings come from thinking I need to prove I am good enough? Is it okay to be less than perfect sometimes?
- Do I really need to belong before I can feel worthwhile? Have there been times when I have felt worthwhile yet not belonged to every group?
- Am I taking the need to be special too strongly? Is it okay to be average sometimes?
- Is the belief, “I need to be strong all the time” working for me? Does it keep me from opening up to others and getting close to them?
- Do I feel that that I need to put everyone else's needs before my own at all times?

Take the time to track these thoughts and beliefs. Ask yourself these questions often. Make sure that you take time to pay attention to your thinking. When you find yourself thinking in unhelpful ways, work with yourself and with your therapist to figure out how to change your thoughts and improve your mood.

Section 6: Moving On.....

“I know there will be ups and downs, but I feel more equipped to deal with them, you know? I feel like I know how to cope better, and that makes me feel a lot more hopeful.”

“I’m a lot stronger than I thought I was. I have found ways to pull through no matter what.”



Congratulations!!!

You have worked hard over the past few weeks. You have worked on understanding yourself and your mood. You committed to therapy. More importantly, you committed to taking care of yourself and working to improve how you feel.



One of the goals of this therapy is to give you tools to use whenever you need to- both inside and outside of therapy. What you have learned can continue to be helpful and can help you keep learning. The worksheets, exercises, and reflections can be used whenever you wish to use them.

Take some time to reflect on how you have changed during therapy; has your mood improved? What have you learned? What has been most helpful?

What are the key helpful points you want to remember?

What have you learned about yourself?

What have you learned about what makes you feel down?

What are the “early warning signs” that you may be feeling stressed or depressed?

What helps you feel better?

Thinking about the future...

Many women find that it helps to think about what they might do if they feel down again. Thinking about and planning for feeling down does not mean that you will feel as down as you have in the past. It is one way that some people remember their strengths and ways to take care of themselves.

My Action Plan

When I start feeling down, I do these certain things: *(Ex. I start avoiding telephone calls from my friends and calling in sick to work.)*

If I start feeling down, I can try these things that have helped me feel better in the past: *(Ex. Keeping track of my activities to see when I am feeling down, which helps me keep track of how I am actually feeling)*

Some people find that it is helpful to get support from someone who can be an ally in working to improve how you feel.

Who in your life could be a good person to keep an eye out for these signs that you are feeling down?

If _____ sees me doing these things, then s/he can help me by:
(Ex. Telling me that s/he sees what I am doing, Working with me to find a therapist)

With 10 being very good and 1 being very down, when I feel like I am at a _____, then I will reach out for additional help by: *(Ex. When I feel like I am at a “2”, then I will go see my doctor and ask for a referral.*



Be proud of yourself for your work!

"Success seems to be connected with action. Successful people keep moving. They make mistakes, but they don't quit."

-- Conrad Hilton --