

IDEAS TO ASSIST IN MANAGING DEPRESSED MOOD

Managing self in relationships

- Rather than put all the focus on lifting mood it may be helpful to focus on maintaining the best functioning possible. Examples of functioning or self-management are organising adequate bedtime, eating healthily, exercising and relaxing, being responsible for appointments and medical care, fulfilling role responsibilities at work and in the household.
- Take care of allowing others to do any aspects of your life functioning for you. This may contribute to an increased sense of helplessness. Ask for help when you need it but if others are stepping in to manage areas of your responsibility, it may require you to ask them to step back from this. When a depressed mood feels like it has drained all motivation and energy it is helpful to take responsibility for communicating to others what you are going through and to nominate what you will stay responsible for even when it may be limited.
- The reverse of the above is the trap of feeling responsible for other people's wellbeing. You can care without needing to make everything right for another. A good check is to ask: "Am I thinking, feeling or behaving on behalf of another rather than on behalf of myself?"
- Take care of intuiting or mind reading the thoughts and feelings of others and taking these perceptions personally. Equally comparing yourself to others takes energy away from a focus on your own life course.
- Focusing on understanding the relationship challenges that your family has had to adapt to over the generations can be a useful way of moving from blame to awareness. A focus on unchangeable hurts from the past may contribute to people getting stuck in a victim role. Blaming others can drain a person's ability to manage themselves.
- Stay as connected as possible to significant others.

Tune into what is going on inside your mind and body

- Experiment with ways to calm and sooth yourself. (E.g. Positive meditation; cheerful music; walking in a favourite place; reflecting on principles of personal integrity.) Take care to turn to external things such as alcohol (or people) to do this for you.
- Keep time as structured as possible, including leisure and relaxation time. Routines can help with a sense of stability. Take care to have a balanced emotional diet. Eg: beware of over-emphasizing intense thinking (deep and meaningful). Is there a balance with developing your lighthearted side? (This applies to choice of books and movies as well as thought processes.)
- Notice whether your thinking is fueling your sense of helplessness and pessimism. Stay aware of your inner critic. You decide whether to pay attention to negative feedback. What we think about is in our control in a way that feelings are not. A helpful saying: "Have your feelings but don't allow them to have you."
- Stay alert to "all or nothing thinking", where one negative occurrence defines the bigger picture. Notice whether your reaction to one event is exaggerated beyond the facts of the single incident. Beware of perfectionism! -for self and others. Check whether you have realistic expectations of self, family, friends and others.

The role of medication

While medication may provide some supportive relief, it cannot provide prevention. Antidepressants may sometimes be useful in giving some relief from symptoms so that a person is better able to address the issues that have lowered their functioning.