

## Dealing with Sadness and Depression

1. **Examine and chart thinking errors.** (See *Changing Negative Thinking Patterns* handout.) Divide a sheet of paper in half by drawing a vertical line in the middle. At the top, put the day and date. On the left hand side, list any irrational thoughts or thinking errors you experience throughout the day. On the right hand side, rewrite these as healthy thoughts.
2. **Line up a group of emotional cheerleaders.** Surround yourself with people who will affirm you and act as personal cheerleaders during tough times. Limit your contact with anyone who is not supportive or makes you feel incapable.
3. **Identify and discover who you really are.** Using paper and pencil can help you clarify your identity and focus on your “real” self. Write a paragraph describing the real you. Write a second paragraph describing yourself as you believe others see you. Examine the difference between the two descriptions. Are you feeling torn between being true to yourself and being the person others perceive you to be? This conflict can be a trigger for depression.
4. **Give yourself permission to feel.** Avoid stuffing or repressing feelings because you’re afraid of the reaction of others. Don’t let anyone talk you out of your feelings or minimize them.
5. **Stay in touch with your feelings.** Take the time to do emotional checks several times each day so you can label and articulate your emotions. If you have difficulty identifying your feelings, see the *Feeling Menu* handout. Ask yourself these questions frequently, especially when you feel sad or overwhelmed.
  - a. How am I feeling right now?
  - b. What is the name of the feeling?
  - c. How do I know that I have this feeling?
  - d. How is my body reacting?
  - e. Where in my body do I feel this emotion most intensely?
  - f. Why am I feeling this way?
  - g. Am I expressing my feelings or am I keeping them to myself?
6. **Deal with any unresolved anger.** It is OK to feel anger. However, suppressed unresolved anger requires considerable emotional energy and can be a major trigger for depression. Identify and address sources of anger so that they don’t interfere with your ability to experience joy. Once identified, make a plan for unpacking and resolving the anger so you can let it go. If you are unsure how to accomplish this, a counselor may be able to help.
7. **Journal your feelings each day.** Write each day about events and the feelings they elicit. This can be a page, a paragraph or just a few sentences. Periodically read over your journal and look for patterns that indicate triggers for anxiety, sadness or depression.
8. **Make decisions based on what is healthy for you rather than what others think.** You are the one that has to live with your decisions. Educate yourself about healthy attitudes and relationships, trust your instincts and avoid second guessing yourself. If you find yourself making unhealthy decisions because you are overly concerned about the opinion of others, do some self-examination to determine why this is the case.

9. **Avoid taking responsibility for the behavior and feelings of others.** The only person you can control is you. Take responsibility only for your part of any situation. If the other person assigns you blame or responsibility that is not yours, don't automatically assume that he or she is right. Avoid taking on issues that are not of your making. Some people can be very convincing when it comes to projecting blame on others.
10. **Look at your childhood family and examine the messages you received about yourself.** Childhood scripts, especially those in the first six years of life often play over and over and become embedded in our self-talk. These messages may have been spoken or unspoken. The actions and unspoken messages from your childhood family about you, relationships, and conflict may be more powerful than words.
11. **Nurture yourself.** Do something extra nice for yourself at least once a week. This may be as simple as taking a long warm bath or spending a half hour listening to your favorite music. It's difficult to maintain emotional energy when you don't take care of yourself.
12. **Do something physical.** Physical activity can increase endorphin levels which can elevate mood. Plan do something physical everyday, even if only for a few minutes.
13. **Set small daily goals for yourself and take one day at a time.** Set a goal every morning no matter how small. Depending on your situation, your daily goal may be getting to work on time, fixing a meal or taking a shower. Consider each step necessary to accomplish this goal. Take one day at a time. If you are unable to complete your daily goal, make it again for the next day or establish a smaller goal.
14. **If you have a history of suicidal thoughts or attempts, establish a contact person who knows what to do.** Give him or her the phone number of the nearest emergency room or other facility providing immediate care, your therapist, an immediate family member. Keep your contact person's phone number on your cell phone as an emergency contact in case you need to call.