

Activity Scheduling:

One of the first aspects we notice when our mood lowers is that we don't seem to have the energy or the inclination to do things. Our social life suffers, dietary intake may lessen, sleep patterns suffer and we tend to either cease or drastically reduce activities, which we enjoyed or found to be fulfilling.

This reduction in behavioural activity serves to further lower our mood and we find ourselves getting sucked into a vicious cycle of events.

When treating a person who is depressed a cognitive behavioural therapist will first need to work with the person to identify current behaviour and identify any behavioural deficits (e.g. staying in bed all of the day, avoidance of social situations etc.).

For this an activity diary is used. Once the person has become used to completing these the therapist will then request that the activities are rated for either a sense of pleasure and/or achievement. This is to determine whether there is a natural fluctuation in mood at a regular time each day, so that when activity planning begins the activities can be timetabled at the time of day the mood is at its' highest- therefore increasing the likelihood of success at the task.

NB. Maximum rewards for minimum effort!

It has been shown that increasing behavioural activities reduces the severity of depressed mood.

Graded Task Assignment:

Sometimes the things we enjoyed before we were depressed are complicated, such as baking a cake, building a model aeroplane and such like. There are a number of things we have to do before we can 'get on' with the task (such as choosing the model to build/ recipe to follow, buying the ingredients/materials, assembling the ingredients/ tools, measuring quantities, etc.)

If this is the case then the depressed person may put off doing these, due to a number of reasons, including difficulty concentrating, procrastination, motivational problems, tiredness or 'just not having the time'.

However, if the tasks are broken down (or Graded) into manageable chunks it is more likely that these will be completed and a sense of pleasure/achievement will be experienced, again lessening the effects of depressed mood.

Once Graded the task may then be spread out over several days, reducing the perception of 'too much to do' and allowing completion of the activity.

An essential aspect to remember is that how much is achieved or the completion of the task isn't important what is important, however, is that the task is attempted.

EG Baking a cake:

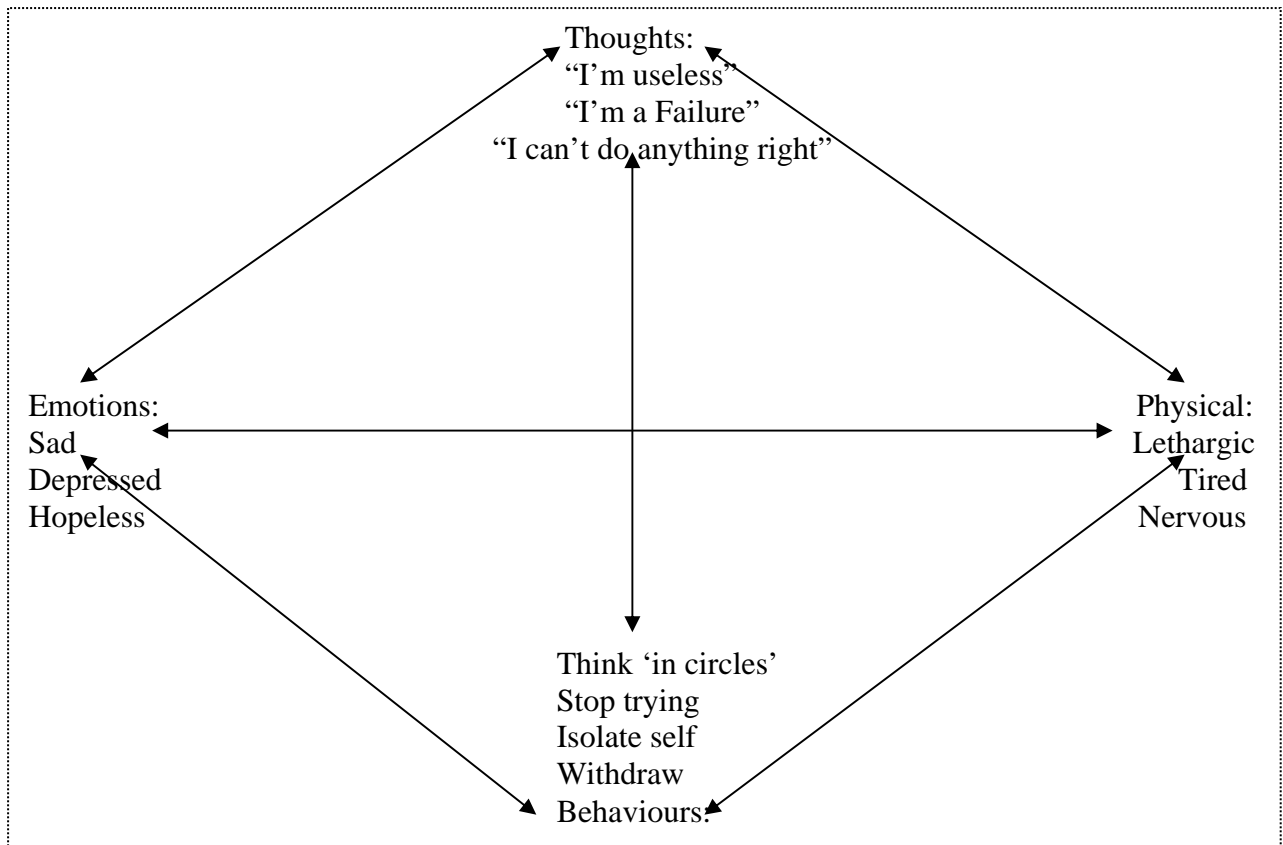
1. Choose Recipe and List Ingredients
2. Shop for ingredients
3. Assemble utensils
4. Measure quantities
5. Mix ingredients and bake cake
6. Prepare filling/icing (if used)
7. Fill/ice cake (if necessary)
8. Eat cake!

Remember do not give yourself too much to do at once, if a task took 10 minutes before you were depressed allow at least 20 minutes to do the same task.

Identifying Negative Automatic Thoughts (N.A.T.s)

Negative Automatic Thoughts are thoughts we have which directly affect our mood, they are generally self depreciating (I'm useless, I'm hopeless, etc) and are generated by what we believe is right (e.g. I should be a better person). The depressed person may then have thoughts of being a failure, being a bad person, being unworthy etc. these thoughts will affect our emotions, how we behave and our physical feelings, which tends to lead to a vicious cycle between thoughts, emotions, behaviours and physical feelings.

The model overleaf may illustrate the interactions between these:



As may be noticed Emotions affect thinking- if you are sad you are more likely to think sad thoughts. Behaviour affects thinking- if you are isolating yourself and withdrawing you are giving yourself time and the opportunity to increase your sad thinking and of course if you are tired or lethargic you may not want to do anything, therefore, you may be more likely to think in terms of failing or being useless etc.

This is however a two way street, if you are thinking sad thoughts you are more likely to withdraw, feel sad and tired or lethargic which make sad thoughts even more likely and so on and so on and so on and on and on and on (have you got the picture?).

This is where we start to learn how to think about what we are thinking in order to later challenge our thoughts. The most simple is to practice noticing when your mood starts to lower, write down what is going through your mind at that moment and what you are doing at the time. For this we use the “Daily Thought Record”. Once we have become skilled in recognising our Negative Automatic Thoughts we can then begin to challenge our NATs.

Generally we may use a “Daily Thought Record” as before but with a couple of extra columns, but instead of just identifying what you were feeling, doing and thinking

you are encouraged to rate how much you believe the NATs, Question the validity of these NATs and to formulate a more helpful way of thinking. We do this by asking ourselves a number of questions:

1. *Is this an example of a thinking error?*
2. *Would I be thinking this way if I wasn't depressed?*
3. *Would I apply this to others?*
4. *Would I advise my friend to think this way?*
5. *Is this the only way to look at the problem?*
6. *Am I confusing thought with fact?*
7. *Is this way of thinking helpful?*

Once we have asked and answered these questions we then look at what a more rational response would be and re-rate our belief in either the NATs (earlier) then rational response (as we get more practiced and effective at challenging NATs.)

E.g.:

Emotion %	Situation	Negative Automatic Thoughts	Belief %	Rational response:	Belief %
Sad 80%	Putting up a shelf	I've ruined it	90%	Okay, maybe it isn't the best bit of D.I.Y. in the world but it does the job intended and doesn't look that bad.	40%
Anxious 50%		It's not worth doing if not perfect	100%		50%
		I can't do anything right.	80%		35%
		I'm a failure	90%		20%
		My partner will go mad	65%		10%

I hope that this will prove useful as a reminder of what has been discussed over the last few weeks.