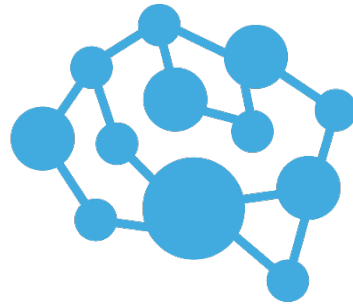




AcuityTherapy

Psychology & Behaviour Support

Resource series:

Depression: *Understanding vicious cycles*

One theory of depression that exists is the vicious flower of depression (Moorey, 2010). This theory suggests there are six connecting vicious cycles that keep people stuck in a depressive state. The following pages will discuss this theory and its components in detail and explain the effect they have on people and depression.

On the outside is the environment you are surrounded by. This include where you live, who you live with, your friends and family, social network, work, and other factors. All of which have either a direct or indirect on your emotions, behaviour and thinking. For example, if a person is having difficulties with the people they live at home as well as working in a job they dislike they are more than likely going to be unhappier than a person who lives in a stable and supporting environment who also loves the job they do.

Question to ask yourself?

What effect do you think your current environment such as living, social or work has on your depression?

ENVIRONMENT



In the middle of the diagram is what is referred to as the “depression mode”. This is where people who are depressed may have a negative view of themselves, the world, and their future. An example could be a person who thinks themselves as being “unlovable” or “not good enough”, that the world “is out to get them”, and that they have no future.

Surrounding the core depressive state are the six petals or “vicious cycles” that together form the vicious flower. These six vicious cycles include:

1. Negative automatic thinking
2. Rumination and self-attacking
3. Negative mood states
4. Withdrawal and avoidance
5. Unhelpful behaviours
6. Motivational and physical problems

Throughout this resource you will want to have a look at each of the individual cycles and think about how they relate to you and identify the ones that are most relevant to you.

Negative automatic thinking

Negative automatic thoughts or NATs for short are the ones that easily accessible and which we have thousands of a day. They are easily accessible and if we can take moment to listen to ourselves, we can work out what we tell ourselves in any given situation. For example, a person who is depressed might turn up to a party and think that nobody likes them so what is the point of going to future things which can then lead to withdrawal and social isolation.

Useful metaphors to assist with explaining depression and negative thoughts is going to a comedy show but not finding any joy in it or always thinking the glass is “half full”. This constant negative feedback that we give ourselves leads to low mood and helps reinforce the state of depression.

Questions to ask yourself?

What negative thoughts do you have in different scenarios and situations?

Ruminations and self-attacking

Ruminating is a style of thinking where a person continually thinks about something negative about themselves (usually from the past). This rumination can become so ingrained within a person that it creates repetitive neural pathways that become constantly activated. It can involve thinking about something we regret not doing in the past, focusing on problem for the future, and thinking negatively about their present situation. The content/theme of ruminative thoughts is highly varied for each person. These thoughts can often be intrusive and come to the front of our mind when we are trying to complete day-to-day activities. Some examples of rumination could include:

- Thinking and having thoughts of regret about a relationship from many years ago.
- After a conversation repetitively thinking “I can’t believe I said or did that”.
- Thinking you must do better or you’re not good enough.
- Thinking that everyone else is doing better than you.
- Thinking that you never stand up for yourself and never will.
- Thinking there is no hope for the future.

One of the biggest signs that you are ruminating is being able to catch yourself having these constant negative thoughts. However, quite often people don’t even know they are having these thoughts or even what they are thinking about so it’s important to know about other signs you may be experiencing ruminating thoughts. Some of these signs could include:

- Mood swing
- Talking about uncomfortable memories to people
- Always talking about the bad things that are going on in your life and leaving out some of the good stuff.
- Having a low self-esteem
- Linking everyday things that happen to the recurrent negative thoughts.

Rumination and worry are similar but also differ in some ways. Usually, people who worry often think about negative, recurrent uncontrollable thoughts about the future whilst ruminative thoughts often concern people obsessing over actions, events, and situations that have already occurred. It is possible that person may be experiencing both worry and rumination at the same time.

Questions to ask yourself.

When you ruminate or worry what effect does it have on your mood and on your concentration?

What ways do you think you engage in self-critical talk?

Mood and emotions

While feeling sad is a normal emotion, feeling sad, down or depressed constantly is where problems occur. When a person feels sad, they will still be able to feel moments of joy and happiness. Depression differs from sadness in that those feelings of sadness will influence all facets of the person's life. Making it almost impossible to feel enjoyment in things they used to enjoy.

Other feelings that often accompany depression include becoming irritable at even minor things, fatigue and tiredness, difficulties concentrating, frustration, feelings of worthlessness, guilt, and lack of enthusiasm. These feelings can often then lead to thoughts of suicidal ideation and behaviours such as self-harm.

Reflective questions

What feelings do you experience most days? What emotion or emotions do you feel the most?

Which emotions are the most troublesome?

What are the situations or events that cause these difficult emotions?

Withdrawal and avoidance

Quite often depressed people will withdraw and avoid doing things and isolate themselves. This may seem a good way to manage what they are feeling but it can lead to extremely unhealthy outcomes. Continual avoidance of people or social situations and once pleasurable activities means the person is getting no positive interactions with anything, which further exacerbates the problem.

For example, a depressed may stop talking to work colleagues to avoid unpleasant feelings and at the same time have stopped going to the gym because they think “what is the point, I don’t have the energy and I’m not getting the results I wanted anyway”. This leads to social isolation as they are not getting the meaningful social interactions people need and have avoided/stopped doing the things they used to enjoy. All of this reinforces and maintains a depressed mood and quite often a severely depressed person may withdraw from all things, which can then lead to rumination and unhelpful behaviours such as alcohol and drug use to make themselves feel better. They can then often stop looking after themselves such as not completing self-care routines or looking after their home living environment.

Questions to ask yourself?

What self-care routine practices are you struggling with?

What activities that you used to do have you stopped doing?

What social, work or study activities are you struggling with and why do you think you are?

What people have you withdrawn from?

Which social events or activities are you avoiding and why?

Unhelpful behaviours

When we feel bad it is not surprising that we act in ways that help take away the pain, if only in the short term. It is common for people to start to drink more alcohol than they used to, which can quickly become a habit. Because alcohol is a depressant it can make your mood worse and stay worse for longer. Sometimes people use recreational drugs to give them a taste of the feelings they used to be able to get from other activities, but again these in turn become unhelpful in the long run. Some people may even engage in self-harm behaviour or risky sexual behaviours.

Reflective question

What are you doing that's not really in your best interests?

Motivation and physical symptoms

Depression isn't just about feeling distant from others and the world; it's as if your mind decides to shut everything down. It can sap your motivation, impair your focus, disrupt your memory, and leave you feeling constantly exhausted.

People with depression often struggle with sleep issues—whether it's difficulty falling asleep, frequent awakenings during the night, waking up too early, or sleeping excessively. Eating habits can also be affected; some might lose their appetite and shed weight, which can lead to further fatigue, while others might overeat and gain weight, potentially leading to negative self-perceptions. Additionally, symptoms like persistent fatigue, a lack of interest in sex, restlessness, or moving slowly are common. These issues can make someone feel trapped in a relentless, challenging mood.

Reflective questions

What problems are you having with motivation, concentration, and memory and how do they affect you?

What physical problems are you having with sleep, appetite, fatigue, and sex drive and how do they affect you?

Each of the six detrimental patterns we've discussed can be tackled with various strategies and approaches. The chart on the next page outlines our goal of achieving overall wellness and the strategies we can guide you through to address these challenges.

Our objective is to help you develop a personalized plan that targets the issues most affecting you. After finishing the section on these harmful patterns, take a moment to reflect on which specific problems are currently causing you the most difficulty.

Reflective question

Please write what goals you have or what you would like to work on ?

1: _____

2: _____

3: _____

4: _____

ENVIRONMENT



Having identified the main areas, you would like to work on we will help you to:

- ! develop goals to work towards,
- ! choose which goal to work on first,
- ! break the goal down into manageable steps,
- ! identify tools to help you achieve each step of the goal,
- ! look out for things that may block your progress, and then.
- ! devise strategies to overcome those blocks; preparing for change.

We know that making any significant change can be daunting, even at the best of times. Because we are going to ask you to try out some activities between sessions, we need you to be honest with yourself about how willing or ready you are to try to change. Try answering the following questions:

Reflective questions

What is the main reason for you wanting to change

What are the barriers or potential obstacles stopping you ?

Who and what are your supports ?

What are your strengths?
