Fighting Back Depression

There are times when everyone feels down, fed-up or unhappy. Most of the time these feelings come and go, but sometimes they last and take over. You can’t seem to shift them and end up feeling depressed. You might notice that you:

- are often tearful
- cry for no clear reason or over small things
- wake up early in the morning
- have difficulty falling asleep at night
- feel constantly tired and lacking in energy
- comfort eat or have lost your appetite
- have problems concentrating
- stopped doing the things you used to enjoy
- go out less often and just want to be on your own.

These are some of the many signals that depression has taken over and that it is **time to fight back!**

Getting started is hard work

When you feel down it is very hard to get yourself going again. It feels like you are trying to push an elephant up a hill. Everything seems impossible or feels really hard work and you may feel that you can’t be bothered to even try.

This is part of the depression and one of the hardest jobs is to take the first step. Two things might help you to get going.

- Tell other people that you are going to start fighting your depression. They can help, support and encourage you.
- The other thing to remember is that **you** can make a difference to how you feel. It is hard work but there are things you can do to make yourself feel better.
Check what you do and how you feel

When people feel down they stop doing things. They don’t go out so much and may sit around or stay in bed all day. A useful first step is to check what you are doing and to see if there are any times during the day that you feel worse than others.

Each hour, write down on a piece of paper what you did and choose a number from 10 (feel really good) to 1 (feel really low) to rate your mood. Lisa’s diary looked like this:

- 10.00 – In bed. Mood 3
- 11.00 – In bed. Mood 2
- 12.00 – Sitting in my room, thinking. Mood 1
- 1.00 – Downstairs, had lunch with Mum. Mood 6
- 2.00 – In my bedroom listening to music. Mood 6
- 3.00 – In my bedroom. Sitting around. Mood 2

This helped Lisa to see that the times she felt worse were when she was sitting in her room not doing anything. When she was downstairs with others or listening to music she felt better.

Find the fun things

When you feel down you stop doing things, even those things that you used to like doing! Hobbies, interests, activities or visiting places you used to like going (e.g. cinema) happen less often.

One of the first things to do is to start having fun again. Try making a list of all the fun things you used to do and enjoy. Mike’s list looked like this:

- Stopped playing my guitar.
- Don’t listen to music as much.
- Don’t phone friends any more – wait for them to phone me.
- Can’t seem to read anything.
- Not been to town on Saturday afternoon for a few months.
Mike was feeling very down and so even just trying to do something he used to enjoy felt impossible. Because this first step can be so hard it is important that it is small.

Mike chose to start by playing his guitar for five minutes each day. Mike felt this was possible and by setting a very small target there was more chance that he would be successful. As soon as he started playing, Mike realised how much fun he used to have and was soon playing his guitar more often and for much longer.

Mike then moved on to his next target. This was to telephone one friend each week. Mike found that the more he did, the more he enjoyed himself and the more he wanted to do.

You may find that you start doing things again but that these things don’t seem as much fun as they used to. Don’t worry, the fun may take a little longer to return. Keep reminding yourself that you are doing well and remember that being busy gives you less time to listen to your negative thoughts.

Find your negative thoughts

People who feel down and depressed have negative thoughts. They are more likely to:

- Look for and find the negative or bad things that happen.
- Ignore the good things.
- Be very critical of themselves and what they do.
- Think that the things that go wrong are due to them.
- Apply things that go wrong in one area (e.g. not winning a race) to other parts of their life (e.g. ‘I am a loser’).

This is the Negative Trap

- The more you hear these thoughts
- The more you believe them
- The less you do and
- The worse you feel.
You need to become aware of your negative thoughts and to discover whether you are caught in a thinking trap. The four common traps are:

**Negative glasses** – these only let you see the negative things that happen!

Jo didn’t think people liked her. She noticed that Gemma turned away and carried on talking with Sam when she said ‘Hello’. Her negative glasses didn’t let her see that Sue, Claire and Becky all smiled and said ‘Hello’ back.

**Positive doesn’t count** – any positive things that happen are thought of as unimportant or lucky.

Tom’s mum told him that he did well in his maths test but Tom replied, ‘Everybody did well and anyway these tests don’t matter.’

**Blowing things up** – small negative things become bigger than they really are.

Julie forgot to telephone her friend Mary after school. When Julie remembered she thought to herself, ‘I always let my friends down so no one will ever want to be friends with me’.

**Predict** that bad things will happen. This happens in two main ways:

The ‘**Mind-reader**’ thinks they know what everyone else is thinking – ‘I don’t think Scott likes me’.

The ‘**Fortune-teller**’ thinks they know what is going to happen – ‘I know that I will say something stupid and that everyone will laugh at me’.

**Challenge your negative thoughts**

Once you find your negative thoughts and know the negative trap you have fallen into, you can learn to **fight back**.

- If you have negative glasses, you need to learn to stop, look again and find any positives that you have overlooked.
- If you think that positive doesn’t count, you need to learn to accept and celebrate your successes.
- If you blow things up, you need to learn to stop things getting on top of you and to stop them growing too big.
- If you predict bad things will happen, you need to stop gazing into your crystal ball and check out what really happens!
Learn to cope with any problems

People who feel depressed sometimes feel that they don’t know how to deal with their problems. Difficulties with friends, family or teachers can feel so big that you just don’t know how to cope with them.

Think about ALL the possible solutions

Think about your problem and write down all the possible solutions. It is sometime useful to keep asking yourself I could do this OR, ...

Sade wanted to go to the cinema but she didn’t want to go on her own. She kept putting it off, thinking that no one would be interested in the film. She tried the ‘OR’ question to look for solutions:

- I could ask my friend Mandy OR
- I could see if Sally wanted to go OR
- I could ask Gemma OR
- I could see if Mum or Dad wanted to go OR
- I could ask my sister Lucy OR
- I could invite my cousin Jade

This helped Sade realise that there were quite a few people she could go to the cinema with, so there was no need to put it off any longer.

Practise being successful

When faced with a challenge or new situation it is easy to expect to fail or think that things will go wrong. This is one of the negative traps where we predict bad things will happen. A useful way forward is to imagine a picture of yourself being successful.

Imagine a picture of your challenge and talk yourself through what will happen. Think about the steps involved but this time imagine yourself coping and being successful. Make your picture as real as possible and describe your scene in lots of detail.

Practising this a few times will help you to see that, while it might be difficult, you can be successful.
Watch what other people do

Another helpful way of solving problems is to watch someone who is successful and learn what they do.

Susheela was always getting teased at school and she often ended up getting upset or angry and storming off. The more she reacted, the more the other children teased her.

Susheela decided to watch how her friend Nina coped with the teasing. Nina had been badly teased at the start of school and although she was still called names she didn’t get teased so much. Susheela watched what happened. When the other children started to call Nina names she just smiled and agreed with them. She did not argue back or over-react. After a minute the children got bored and moved off to find someone else to tease.

Positive self-talk

A useful way of helping yourself through a difficult or worrying situation is by using self-talk. Positive self-talk helps you to feel more relaxed and confident by keeping doubts and worries under control. You do this by saying positive things to yourself when you feel worried or unsure if you will be successful.

- I am going to go back to that place again.
- I have managed to get to the door and now I am going in.

Repeat your positive message and praise yourself as you face your challenge.

Praise yourself for having a go

When you are feeling down it can be hard to praise yourself and say ‘well done’.

There always seems to be so many things that you would like to do or that could be done better that it becomes difficult to notice what you have achieved.

You may not always be successful but that doesn’t matter. What is important is that you have tried and that you have started to fight back. So don’t overlook it, praise yourself for having a go.