



If you feel anxious or depressed, your problems may seem overwhelming. To cope better, it may be helpful to approach your problems in a different way and correct your negative thought patterns. You can do this by using a technique called 'Structured Problem Solving' (SPS). Approaching your problems with SPS helps to put them in perspective.

SPS may help with problems such as:

- Relationship problems with your spouse or partner
- Family troubles
- Problems with children
- Unemployment, problems and/or stress at work
- Financial problems
- Housing problems
- Medical issues
- Issues with sex or sexuality
- Feeling isolated from friends
- Drug and alcohol problems
- Problems studying.

WHAT IS STRUCTURED PROBLEM SOLVING? (SPS)

Structured Problem Solving is a method designed to work logically through your problems.

SPS helps you to:

- Recognise what's caused you to feel this way
- Become aware of the support you have, your personal strengths and how you coped with similar problems in the past
- Develop an approach to deal with current difficulties
- Feel in control of your problems
- Deal more effectively with problems in the future.

HOW DOES SPS WORK?

These are the steps to follow the SPS approach:

- Step 1:** List the problems that are worrying or distressing you and write them down.
- Step 2:** Identify the problem that's causing the most stress and write it down.
- Step 3:** Work out what options are available to deal with the problem and write them down.
- Step 4:** List the advantages and disadvantages of each option, taking into account the resources you have – such as friends, other people to talk to and finances. You might find the table below helpful for writing down your thoughts.
- Step 5:** Identify the best option(s) to deal with the problem.
- Step 6:** List the steps you need to carry out this option.
- Step 7:** Carry out the best option and then think about whether it's worked for you and whether you'd do this again.

Changing your thinking

FACT SHEET 10

STRUCTURED PROBLEM SOLVING TABLE

Problem	Options	Advantages	Disadvantages
1	1 2 3		
2	1 2 3		

MORE WAYS TO CHANGE YOUR THINKING

Another way of working through depression and anxiety is to change negative ways of thinking to more helpful ways of thinking. Thoughts such as 'I'm a failure', 'Nobody loves me', 'There is nothing good out there', 'Things will never improve' are unhelpful ways of thinking. These thoughts interfere with recovery and make you vulnerable to experiencing depression and anxiety in the future.

It's important to be able to recognise unhelpful thoughts and challenge them with more helpful ways of thinking. Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) is another structured psychological treatment based on the idea that the way we think affects how we feel.

Everyone experiences problems and stressful situations. CBT helps people to think more clearly about common life problems.

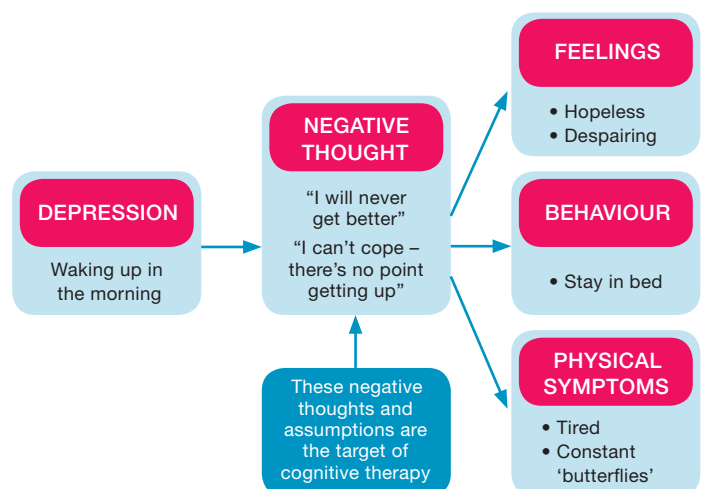
Have a think about your own way of thinking. Are you very critical of yourself? Are your thoughts helpful or unhelpful? If thoughts such as 'I'm hopeless', 'Everyone is better than me', or 'I can't do anything to change' tend to be the way you think about yourself, you may find CBT helpful in changing your thinking.

HOW DOES COGNITIVE BEHAVIOUR THERAPY (CBT) WORK?

Cognitive Behaviour Therapy works by monitoring your thoughts about yourself. Monitoring is the basis of 'cognitive' or 'thinking' therapy for depression.

People experience different degrees of unhelpful thinking. If some people have had negative thoughts all their lives, they will need to undergo more extensive cognitive treatment.

CBT is often used in association with medication or following the treatment of the acute episode of depression.





Use the chart below to help identify and change your own unhelpful thinking to more helpful thinking.

Situations	Thoughts	Feelings	Behaviours
Male example: Argument with my wife	'I'm no good at anything' 'I always mess it up'	Felt hopeless, inadequate, depressed	Drank some alcohol and went to bed
Female example: Argument with my husband	'It's all my fault' 'Nothing good ever happens to me'	Felt guilty, sad, frustrated	I used sedatives to calm down



SOME REASONS FOR CHANGING YOUR THINKING

Changing your thinking and seeking help for depression and anxiety can have positive, long-term effects for you and your relationships. It is important to be aware that people with depression can often be sensitive and sometimes more easily upset by people's comments.

What happens if you don't seek help?

- Your relationships with friends and family may suffer.
- You may feel you've been criticised when no criticism was intended.
- You may feel that others are against you.
- You may stop joining in normal social activities.

WHAT CAN YOUR FAMILY DO?

Although you may not find it easy to discuss problems, family and close friends need to know about your depression, sooner rather than later. Family and friends can play an important role in your recovery. They can offer you support, understanding and help you to find a solution. If your family and friends know about your depression, they can be a source of support by:

- Being more caring and less critical
- Relieving you of some of your daily responsibilities
- Helping to identify stressful situations at home or work
- Assisting you to find new ways of solving practical and emotional problems
- Being aware of changes in your symptoms.

More difficult family or relationship problems may require specific family or relationship counselling.

BEING ASSERTIVE

When you're feeling depressed and anxious, it can be difficult to stand up for yourself – to be assertive. This means that your rights and needs may be neglected. Standing up for yourself doesn't mean that you will necessarily deny others their rights. Everyone has the same rights as you.

Everyone has the right to:

- Express feelings, including anger
- Say 'No'
- Say 'Yes'
- Say 'I don't understand' or 'I will think about it'
- Make their own decisions
- Change their mind if they wish
- Hold their own opinions or beliefs.

Sometimes when you assert your rights, other people get upset. This doesn't mean you've done something wrong.

MORE INFORMATION

MoodGYM

moodgym.anu.edu.au

MoodGYM is an interactive web-based program designed to prevent depression and anxiety in young people. You can read about Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) on their website. MoodGYM was developed by The Centre for Mental Health Research at The Australian National University.

Learn about other treatments for depression and anxiety:

beyondblue Fact sheet 11: Antidepressant medication

beyondblue Fact sheet 14: What other treatments are available for depression and anxiety?