

A TEEN'S GUIDE TO OVERCOMING DEPRESSION

Finding



Hope

Finding Hope: A Teen's Guide to Overcoming Depression

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Being depressed sucks. But if you have been given this workbook, you already know that.

You probably feel sad a lot of the time. Maybe you feel sad all the time.

You may not want to be with other people, even people you love.

You may not feel like eating or you may eat a lot of sweets and carbs to feel better.

You may have difficulty sleeping, or you may feel like you never want to get out of bed.

Things you used to enjoy may now seem stupid or not worth doing.

I can't think of one good thing about being depressed. Depression really does suck.

But I do know you don't have to stay depressed.

People get depressed at any age, but teens are more likely to get depressed than anyone else. Why is this true? As a teen your hormones are changing, and this can cause big mood swings. And I don't have to tell you that being a teenager can be very stressful. Teens are more likely to be affected by peer pressure, academic pressure, and family problems.

The good news is we know how to help you with your depression and when you get the help you need, you can usually feel better in a pretty short period of time. Using this workbook is a great way to start feeling better and regaining the hope that you will feel better soon.

This workbook will teach you some new ways to think and get over your depression, but nothing can replace talking to other people about how you feel and what you need. The most important way to get over your depression is by talking to a trusted friend or family member, a teacher or other supportive adult, as much as possible. You should talk about how you feel and what you are doing to feel better every day if you can. And of course, you should talk to a mental health professional if you have been feeling depressed for a while. Your counselor or therapist will not only give you the support you need, but they can show you new things you can do to feel better and enjoy every day again.

I hope this book helps you get over your depression soon.

Lawrence E. Shapiro, Ph.D.

Please note:

Depression takes many forms and sometimes it can make you feel completely helpless, and that life is not worth living. If you ever feel like hurting yourself, call 988 (the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline) right away for immediate help. If you feel there is immediate danger, call 911. There are many people who can help you. Please reach out if you need them.

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Why Am I So Sad?

What to Know

It's normal to feel sad sometimes. Lots of things can make you feel sad, like feeling left out, being called names, losing a game, or missing someone. Changes can make you feel sad, too. Sad feelings—like all emotions—are just a natural part of life. But it doesn't feel good to stay sad for a long time. Keep in mind that:

- you can cope when sad things happen.
- you can do things to ease your sadness and feel better.

Here are some ways to deal with sad feelings:

1. Notice how you feel and why. Don't ignore that you're sad or pretend you don't feel it. Just observe what feelings are inside you. Then, name them. Think of the words for how you feel and why. Tell yourself (or someone else) that you feel sad. Figure out why you feel that way, but don't dwell on the feeling or create drama around it. Remind yourself that your sadness will pass.

2. Accept. It's OK to feel how you feel. Don't be mad at yourself. You might think, "When I wasn't invited to the party, it hurt my feelings. No wonder I feel this way!" Show yourself understanding—there is probably a good reason you feel sad. Remember, sometimes you can't change things that happen, and you might have to accept things for how they are right now.

3. Think positive. Even if you're sad, think of one or two good things about yourself or your life. Imagine what you can do and how things can get better.

4. Problem-solve. Coming up with ways to cope with a situation can help you feel strong, confident, and good about yourself. If you need help finding solutions, ask.

5. Get support. The people in your life who believe in you and care (like parents, siblings, friends, or teachers) can comfort you. Sometimes, you just need someone to listen. Maybe they can help you problem-solve or think of things to help you feel better.

7. Feel better. Let go of your sad mood by doing things that make you feel better. You don't have to be 100% happy, just happier. What can help you get there?

- think about a time you had fun
- watch a funny video
- play music

- ride your bike
- hang out with friends
- take a walk or go for a run
- play a sport
- dance
- play with your pet
- make art or do a craft

What if you're not ready to feel better? Maybe something has you feeling incredibly sad, and you just can't find a way to feel better. Sometimes that happens. Maybe you need some time or figure out another way to cope with your sadness. You can:

- find a way to let the sadness out, like have a good cry.
- express your sadness through drawing, painting, or writing a poem or song.
- talk about your feelings with someone who cares about you. They don't have to cheer you up or offer advice—they can just listen.

If you have trouble feeling better, tell an adult. Ask them to help you.

What to Do

Write down why you are sad.

How long have you been feeling this way? _____

What are some other feelings you are feeling? For example, you might feel sad and mad.

How does your body feel? Where in your body do you feel sad? Be specific.

Has anything (so far) helped you feel better? Why or why not?

What do you need right now?

Who can you talk to? _____

Think about some times in the past you felt sad. What did you do to make yourself feel better?

On the next page is your "sadness bag." Decorate the page with stickers, drawings, colored pencils, or markers. Write down or draw all the things you can do to help yourself feel better. Put this sheet in a place where you can refer to it when you're sad. You might share it with an adult who cares about you.

Be sure to ask for help if you are having a hard time bouncing back.



Writing Your Depression Story

What to Know

Depression involves sadness, discouragement, despair, or hopelessness that lasts for weeks, months, or longer, and it affects more than your mood. It can change how you think and your ability to notice or enjoy good or positive things. Depression drains the energy, motivation, and concentration you need for daily activities - like completing homework, exercising, having fun with your friends, or sometimes even getting out of bed.

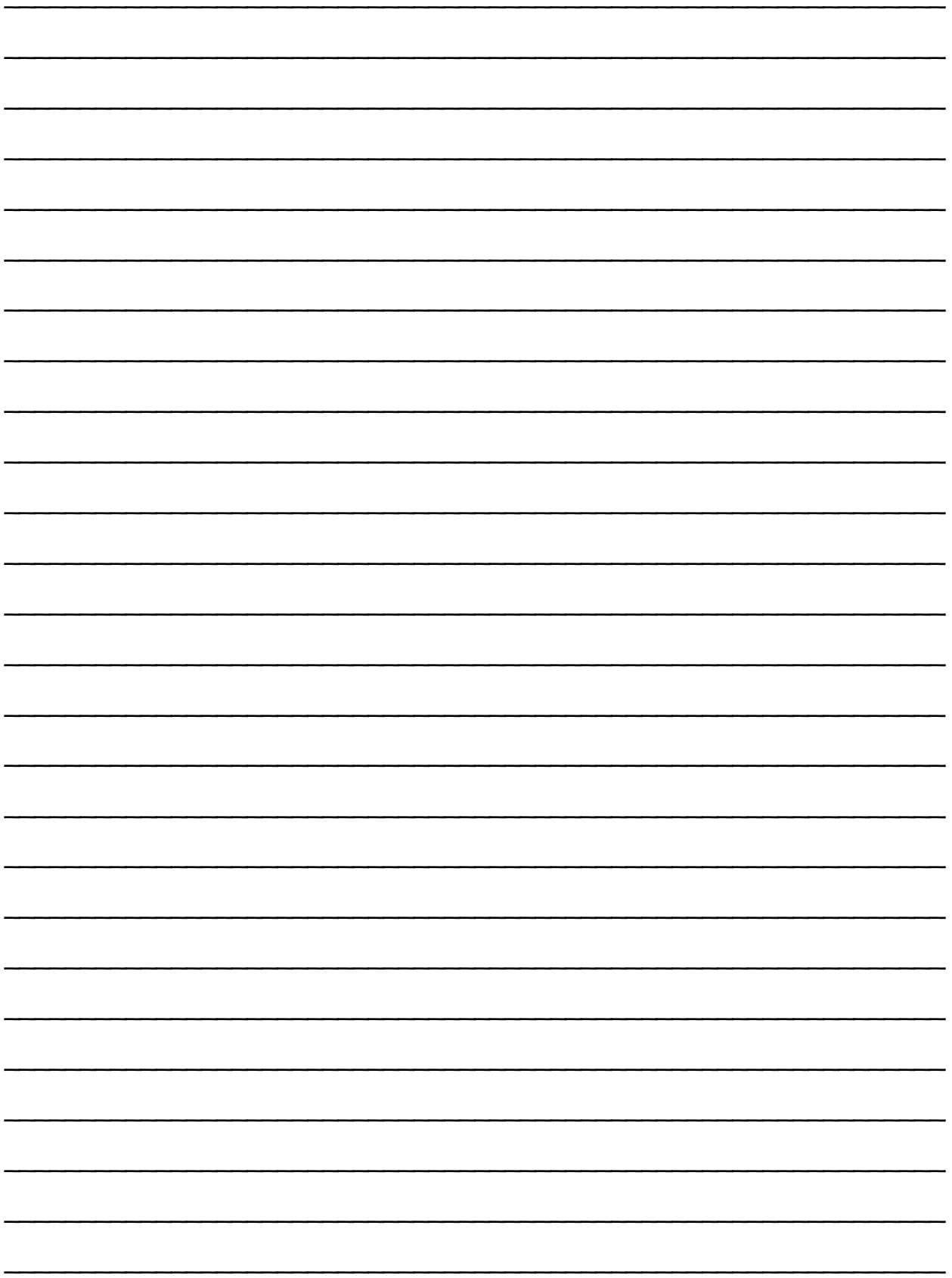
Depression can get better, but if it's not treated, things can stay bad or get worse. So, it's important for you to tell your parents or another adult how you're feeling so you can get help. Don't wait and hope it will go away on its own.

You might not know how to talk about how you're feeling. This worksheet will help you write your "depression story" and a script you can use to share how you're feeling with your parents, caregivers, other family members, friends, or your school counselor.

Writing your depression story, even if you decide not to share it, can be a powerful way to make sense of when you started feeling depressed, where you are now, and what you'd like your future to look like. Writing your story can help you sort out how you can talk about how you're feeling with others.

What to Do

On the lines below or in your journal, write the "long" version of your depression story. You might include when your symptoms began, events that might have contributed to you feeling down, when you realized you needed help, and anything that is helping you now. You might include what you want to say to others. Also describe what you think you need right now.



I have depression and I'm learning how to deal with it. Sometimes it's really hard.

Depression feels like:

The symptoms that are hardest for me to deal with are:

Sometimes depression makes me:

The things that help me include:

When I talk to you about it I hope you can:

Now, put it all together. Looking at what you've written above, write a script so if you decide to talk about how you're feeling you'll know what to say.

Practice your script a few times in front of the mirror.

Are you going to share your depression story? Why or why not?

If you decide to share your story, who will you share it with? _____

Reflections on This Exercise

Did this exercise help you sort out how you can share your feelings with others?
Why or why not?

What did you find most challenging about this exercise?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What else can you do to cope with depression?

Becoming Aware of Your Upsetting Thoughts and Feelings

What to Know

Many teens deal with their problems by trying to avoid painful thoughts, feelings, sensations, and memories. They think if they just distract themselves, they will be fine. However, while avoiding these unpleasant inner experiences may help temporarily, these strategies usually only work for a short period of time.

There is also a significant personal cost to avoidance. Some teens spend hours each day avoiding the things that could upset them instead of using this time to enjoy life.

This exercise is designed to help you examine how you are avoiding the things that cause you to be anxious and upset, and how this keeps you from having a happier and more fulfilling life.

What to Do

Begin by listing the feelings you are trying to avoid. List three feelings that upset you.

List three thoughts that upset you.

List three sensations that upset you.

List three memories that upset you.

Write any additional upsetting thoughts, feelings, sensations, or memories here.

What do you do to avoid these unpleasant inner experiences?

List activities or events you avoid to keep from having painful inner experiences.

List the places you avoid to keep from having painful inner experiences.

List the people you avoid to keep from having painful inner experiences.

List substances—including alcohol, cigarettes, drugs, and food—you use to try to avoid unpleasant inner experiences.

Is there anything else you do to avoid unpleasant or painful inner experiences?

Now go back to what you have written and circle the three things you do most often to avoid unpleasant inner experiences. In the space below, write down how your life might be different if you could accept these unpleasant inner experiences rather than work so hard to avoid them.

Reflections on This Exercise

Did this exercise help you become more aware of your upsetting thoughts and feelings? Why or why not?

What did you find most challenging about this exercise?

How helpful was this exercise? _____

(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What else can you do to increase your awareness?

Stop Putting Yourself Down!

What to Know

Sometimes it's easy to be hard on yourself - to focus on things you do poorly, mistakes you make, or the things you're not any good at. You might even forget about the things you do well and your accomplishments if you frequently put yourself down.

The things you say to yourself play a big part in how you feel about yourself. Putting yourself down damages your self-esteem, confidence, and self-worth. Negative thoughts and words you say out loud can be believable and they distort your perception of yourself. When you talk negatively about yourself to others, you may make it easier for them to put you down.

Putting anyone down, including yourself, is bullying. You probably think bullying is bad, so why would you bully yourself? Do you treat others better than you treat yourself? It's not okay to put *anyone* down - including yourself.

Sometimes, the voice in your head uses harsh words others have said to you. Or, you have had some bad experiences that have affected how you feel about yourself. You can't control what others say about you, but you can control what you say about yourself!

The good news is self-esteem is a pattern of thinking, and you can change the pattern and build your self-esteem. You can change the voice in your head and learn to think better of yourself. Here are some suggestions to stop putting yourself down. Each tip focuses on a behavior - something you can DO. The goal is to do things differently to change the pattern of how you think and feel about yourself. You don't have to think or feel differently to get started - that will change over time.

1. Instead of putting yourself down, turn it around. You might say, "I didn't do well on the test, but next time I'll study harder and do better," or "If I join a club at school, I'm sure to make some friends!" Make your internal voice more hopeful to help you feel better. Use positive affirmations. Write them down on sticky notes or put them on your phone screen.

2. Pay attention to your negative talk. Catch negativity early because awareness is important for you to make changes. Immediately stop your negative thoughts or words and correct them quickly. This may be hard at first. Change takes effort

and habits usually don't change overnight. Keep practicing and you'll see improvements.

3. Make a list of positives. You may think you have many negative traits or believe you've failed a lot, but the truth is you have many positive qualities. Identify them to begin to lift yourself up.

4. Keep an accomplishment journal. Every day, take note of three things you accomplished. You might even create an accomplishment jar or box where your family members add accomplishments they notice about you and each other.

5. Practice what you enjoy or what you do well. Spend time doing activities you're good at and enjoy every day. You'll build your skills and feel good about yourself. Be sure to add these activities to your accomplishment list each day.

6. Do something kind. Acts of kindness make others feel good, but it also makes you feel great. Volunteer in your community or pick up litter in a nearby park.

7. Try something new. You might be afraid of trying new things because you might not be good at it, or you might make a mistake. Mistakes help you learn and grow. Focus on putting forth your best effort and learning something new - not on getting it right the first time.

8. Exercise and stay active. Exercising regularly is good for your self-esteem. Anything that gets you moving is exercise, so think creatively about fun ways to get active.

9. Spend time with people who treat you well. Some people tear you down, while others lift you up by what they say and do. Choose friends who help you feel good about yourself. Find people you can be yourself with and be that type of friend for others.

10. Accept imperfection. It's always good to try your best, but when you think you need to be perfect, it's hard to feel good about anything less than perfect. Accept your best and allow yourself to feel good. Ask for help if you can't let go of perfection.

11. Set goals and work toward them. Make a goal and a plan for how to achieve it. Stick with your plan, track your progress, and be proud of what you do. You might say, "I've been following my plan to _____ for ___ days, and I feel so good about myself! I know I can keep it up." Remember to let go of perfection here, too! What if you don't achieve the goal on time or in the way you expected? Focus on the fact you're working toward something and give yourself credit for any steps

you make toward the goal (no matter how small). Add theses to your accomplishment journal.

12. Focus on what goes well. It can be easy to focus on what's wrong. But unless you balance the good with the bad, you'll just end up feeling bad. Next time, stop yourself when you complain or focus on what went wrong. Identify what went well instead.

13. Have a helpful attitude. Giving is one the best ways to build self-esteem. Help at home or at school. Make it a habit to be kind, helpful, respectful, and fair. When you do things that make a difference your self-esteem will expand.

What to Do

What negative things do you say out loud or to yourself inside your head? Keep track of what you say over the next few days. Write them down. Are these things you'd say to a good friend? Why or why not?

How can you turn these statements around? Rewrite them in a way that's kind, true, and fair. Write down some examples of what you can say to yourself. Read the new phrases often until it's more of a habit to think that way.

What are you good at? What do you enjoy doing? What do you know a lot about?
What are your special talents or skills?

Ask other people what they would say are your most positive qualities. What did they say? Write down their responses.

Every day, write down three things you accomplished. They can be big or small. Use the chart to keep track for two weeks.

Date	Accomplishments	How did you feel?

Date	Accomplishments	How did you feel?

What kind acts you can do? When will you do them?

Do you spend time with people who treat you well? Why or why not?

Set a goal. What will you do? _____

What steps do you need to take to accomplish your goal?

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What else can you do to stop putting yourself down?

Untying Negativity Knots

What to Know

If you are feeling depressed, you might get tangled up in negative thinking. Those thoughts can lead to more negative thoughts, causing you to feel like you're totally tied up in knots of sadness, hopelessness, or worry. If you can untie those knots by picking apart the negative thoughts one by one, you'll learn to shut down negative thinking, replacing what's keeping you tied up in knots with helpful, realistic, positive thoughts.

The first thing you'll want to do is catch your thoughts before they tie you into knots! If your mind is swirling with thoughts that bring you down, don't get overwhelmed - just work on one thought at a time. Once you identify the thoughts that tie you into knots, you can identify where the thoughts came from and come up with ways to untangle yourself.

This worksheet will help you untie your knots so you can take charge of negative thoughts and replace them with alternative, realistic, positive thoughts. You can untie your knots!

What to Do

First look at the example, and then you will identify your own knots.

Knot: *I can't keep up with my homework; I'm going to fail!*



What keeps me in knots?

1. *Good grades seem to come easy for my friends.*
2. *My parents put a lot of pressure on me to get good grades.*
3. *I get email notifications constantly reminding me I have missing assignments.*

Thoughts to untie this knot:

1. *I'm working really hard to catch up, and my teachers are all offering to help me.*

2. *My parents care about me no matter what grades I get, and I know they just want me to be successful.*

3. *I'm not going to fail; I am in touch with my guidance counselor, and she is going to help me find a tutor.*

Now, on each line above the knot, write down a thought that's keeping you tied up in knots. Think about the thoughts that are keeping you in knots. Then come up with positive, realistic, helpful thoughts to untie the negative knot.

Knot: _____



What keeps me in knots?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

Thoughts to untie this knot:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

Knot: _____



What keeps me in knots?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

Thoughts to untie this knot:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Knot: _____



What keeps me in knots?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

4. _____

Thoughts to untie this knot:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Knot: _____



What keeps me in knots?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

4. _____

Thoughts to untie this knot:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Did this worksheet help you untie your knots, replacing them with alternative, realistic, positive thoughts? Why or why not?

What was the one thing that helped you the most as you untied your negativity knots?

What was the most challenging part of this activity?

What was the easiest part?

Coping with Feeling Excluded

What to Know

It doesn't feel good to be left out or excluded from things. Maybe you hear a classmate is having a party, and you weren't invited. Maybe they forgot, but you might wonder if they left you out on purpose. Focusing on this possibility can lead to lots of uncomfortable feelings, from sadness to anger to confusion.

Everyone experiences social rejection or exclusion at some point, and the following tips can help.

Accept how you feel. It's normal to feel upset when others exclude you, even if they didn't do it on purpose. All your emotions are valid, so don't deny them or hold them back. You may experience a mix of emotions, including hurt, disappointment, sadness, or anger. Take time to explore these feelings to process them and decide what to do next. Try:

- journaling
- grounding exercises (get centered and calm)
- exercising, playing a game, or doing an athletic activity
- deep breathing exercises
- going for a walk

Example: Miguel wasn't invited to a classmate's party. He found out about it because some of his friends were talking about the day after. Miguel felt angry and hurt. He decided to take some deep breaths to calm down and invited some other friends to play basketball later that day.

Avoid jumping to conclusions. Jumping to worst-case scenarios isn't unhelpful because it can increase your anxiety and make it hard to consider reasonable explanations. Stick to logical thinking by looking at the evidence. Maybe you were left out of a group text by mistake.

Example: Chris believes her friends no longer care about her because they didn't invite her to go shopping with them. She started to cry, then remembered she didn't have any proof to support that thought. She grabbed her journal and wrote down all the ways her friends and family do care. She decided they really do care about her, and there's most likely another explanation why she wasn't invited.

What signals are you sending out? When you notice that people exclude you, think about whether your actions play a role. If you want to be included, communicate that through your words, body language, and behavior. Maybe you cross your arms during conversations, or you get absorbed in activities and lose track of what is happening around you.

Example: Melissa is sitting with friends at lunch, and she's so focused on watching TikTok that she doesn't notice they are making plans for a party. She didn't respond or offer anything to the conversation, so they assumed she wasn't interested.

Ask yourself:

- Am I shy?
- Do I try to make conversation and include others?
- Do I have a short temper when others make mistakes?
- Do I use rude language or interrupt when others are talking?

It can be hard to know how you come across, so if you're unsure, ask a family member, friend, or teacher that can offer some guidance.

Communicate your feelings. When you feel left out, talking about it can help you understand what happened. Instead of worrying about what others might think or feel, explain why you felt left out using "I" statements. Focus on your experience and mention specific instances.

Example: Instead of, "You always leave me out! No one ever invites me to anything!" you might say, "The movie nights I keep hearing about sound really fun. I feel left out because I haven't been invited. Is there some reason why? I'd like to join next time."

Look at your strengths. If you feel like you don't fit in at school, and friends forget to invite you to events and activities, you might wonder why no one wants to spend time with you. If you believe you don't belong, it can impact your confidence and self-esteem. Affirmations and positive self-talk can help. Here are some examples:

- "My friends always say how caring and kind I am. They wouldn't exclude me for no reason."
- "I'm smart and I have a great sense of humor."
- "I have fun with my friends, and I'm sure they have fun with me, too."

Feeling confident can help you to connect with others instead of waiting for an invitation.

Do something fun. You might not always understand why you were excluded. Sometimes, you must accept that others *did* exclude you, perhaps intentionally. And that's on them - it doesn't mean you did anything wrong. You may feel hurt and angry, but don't let that ruin your day. Next time you're not invited to do something, do something fun, like:

- watch a favorite movie
- hang out with loved ones or call a friend
- play with a pet
- bake cookies

Make the first move. If you often say no to invitations, people may assume you aren't interested and stop inviting you. They may leave you out of events they think you won't enjoy. If you don't like large groups, friends who know this probably won't invite you.

Example: Nathan gets nervous at large group events, and because he has skipped the last few parties, his friends stopped inviting him. Instead of getting upset, he set up a movie night with just three of his close friends.

Talk it out. When you feel rejected or excluded, talking to someone can help. They may not have solutions but talking things through can be helpful. They can also help you sort out possible explanations you might not have considered.

Who can you talk to? _____

Make some new friends. People change, and new interests and friendships sometimes go with these changes. This can be upsetting, but you can't do much other than letting your friends know you're available. You can avoid loneliness by making new friends who share your interests.

Example: Celine was friends with a group of girls since elementary school. Recently, many of the girls joined the band. Celine didn't, and she felt left out because the "band friends" attended many activities together. Celine decided to sign up for an art class, where she made a few new friends.

You want to feel like you belong, and it can feel awful when you feel ignored or excluded. But remember, they are missing out on your friendship. You can choose to spend time with people who show interest in you, instead of waiting around and feeling bad.

What to Do

Describe a time you felt left out or excluded. What happened? How did you feel? What did you do?

Do you jump to conclusions or make assumptions when you're excluded? What happens when you do?

Are you sending out signals to others that you're interested in hanging out with them? Come up with one way you can show others you're interested.

Are you communicating your feelings when you feel excluded? Why or why not?

Write down your strengths, and 2-3 affirmations you can say to yourself when you feel left out.

What are some fun activities you can do on your own?

What can you do to "make the first move?" Who will you invite? When will you do it?

What are some ways you can make some new friends?

What are some other ways you can cope with feeling excluded? Be specific.

Reflections on This Exercise

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Treat Yourself Like a Good Friend

What to Know

What is the first thing you do when someone you care for tells you they feel bad about themselves? For example, suppose they failed a test or they weren't invited to a party. You would probably feel compassion for that person. The first thing you would probably do is comfort them. The second thing would be to assure them they're a good person.

Can you honestly say you treat yourself with the same consideration and compassion you give to the people you care about? Probably not. To change this, you can learn and practice self-compassion. Self-compassion means that you stop avoiding or escaping your emotional pain and instead acknowledge how difficult your situation is while thinking about how you can care for and comfort yourself. You can commit to show yourself the same empathy, love, and care that you feel and show toward others. You can practice loving yourself, caring for yourself, and forgiving yourself.

What to Do

First, compare and contrast how you hear yourself speaking and responding to the pain of others with how you usually respond to yourself.

Visualize yourself helping a friend who needs your support.

What feelings does seeing your friend trigger in you? (For example, immediate concern? Feelings of warmth? Disgust?)

What do you say? (Something comforting? Friendly? Angry?)

What tone do you use? (Harsh? Soft? Gentle?)

How do you talk about their past? (Draw on their strengths? Point out past mistakes?)

What would you predict might happen in the future? (Learn from mistakes? Make the same mistakes again?)

Now visualize yourself going through a difficult time. What feelings does thinking of yourself going through your difficult time trigger in you?

What do you say to yourself?

What tone do you imagine yourself using?

How might you think about your past?

What would you predict might happen in your future?

What would it look like if you spoke to yourself the way you spoke to someone else who was in a crisis?

What has this activity taught you about the relationship between self-compassion, weakness, and strength?

How might your life change or remain the same if you acted with self-compassion toward yourself on a regular basis?

Increasing Your Self-Esteem

What to Know

There are lots of reasons why people might have low self-esteem, but most of the time the roots go back to childhood and the view that you might have internalized as a result of criticism or negative messages you heard and, perhaps, believed (and still believe). Maybe you feel that you are not attractive enough, not smart enough, or that you haven't accomplished as much as other people. Sometimes people dwell on their faults as adults or measure themselves against an unrealistic ideal of the way that think they "should be."

Does this sound familiar? Do you have a running narrative in your mind about how you are just "not good enough"? What would it be like to embrace yourself fully, "warts and all"? Wouldn't your day be a little easier, a little more pleasant?

This worksheet is designed to help you develop a better self-image through various strategies—some involve inner reflection; some involve outward action. Don't give up—keep trying and experimenting until you are able to bust through some of the old, negative messages and experience a newfound view of yourself.

What to Do

Here are 11 ways that you can learn to improve your self-image. Review the items below and commit yourself to working on at least four or five of them in the coming week or so. Keep this list handy to work on the others over the coming weeks and months.

1. **Challenge your negative thoughts.** Listen closely to what your inner critic says. Ask yourself, is that actually true? Challenge those ingrained beliefs that bring down your self-esteem. Write some statements to counter them here. Example: Instead of "I am not good enough," try, "I am a worthy and capable human being with strengths and weaknesses." Repeat as needed. Write down some positive affirmations below.

2. **Develop a kind inner voice.** When you hear your inner critical voice rear its familiar head, imagine that you're listening to someone you care about. What would you want to say to them to help them feel better about themselves? Use those words and that kind tone with yourself too, and keep practicing making that shift for as long as you need.

3. **Celebrate your accomplishments and strengths.** People with a poor self-image often focus too much on what they haven't done or accomplished versus what they have. Write below all the accomplishments you can think of, even from when you were little. They can be big or small, public ones or private ones. Then write down words that describe your strengths, such as reliable, caring, curious, strong, etc. Use extra paper if you need to. Go for it!

4. **Avoid “compare despair.”** It’s easy to feel down about yourself if you’re always comparing yourself to others. This happens a lot on social media, where other people always *seem* to have everything that you want—whether it’s relationships or vacations or “perfect” children or professional success. Remember, those posts are just a selected reality, not real life itself. Refocus on your own strengths and work on not measuring yourself against others. Does this happen to you? Explain.

5. **Notice what’s in your control and what isn’t.** If your poor self-image is related to things you can’t control (“If only I were taller, I’d be happier,” “If only I looked like Beyoncé, I’d be sexy,” etc.), then you are setting yourself up for continued misery. Focus your energy on identifying things in your life that you can do something about and begin to act on those. Write them here.

6. **Do something you love to do!** Are you passionate about cooking? Reading? Singing? Sports? Computers? Animals? What are you currently doing or not doing to invest time and energy into your passions? What would you like to do more of? Note any excuses or rationalizations you might think of that keep you from pursuing these activities.

7. **Be grateful.** Current research shows the establishing a "gratitude practice" every day can help boost your mood and your self-esteem. List here some things you are grateful for—it can be small, like the pleasure of chewing a tasty piece of cheese, or big, like your health or your family or having a warm bed at night.

8. **Give Back/Pay It Forward.** If you suffer from low self-esteem, it's often hard to think about anything but your flaws and limitations. You might have trouble seeing other people's needs sometimes. Consider volunteering some time or money to a cause that has meaning for you, such as the Food Bank or an animal shelter. You might also consider what skills and talents you have that you could pass along to someone else—look into being a mentor or volunteer who helps others to discover their own strengths. What goes around comes around, as they say. Studies show that the happiest people are the ones who are involved in serving others.

9. **Find Positive People in Your Life.** Maybe you feel down a lot and avoid hanging out with others whose lives might seem "better" than yours. Identify the people in your life whom you feel comfortable with, who bolster your self-esteem, who see your wonderful qualities and accept your flaws and mistakes. Make an effort to

spend more time with them and less time with people who bring you down. What would you like to do toward meeting that goal?

10. Exercise! Sure, you've probably heard this a million times but it's true. Exercise has been proven to be a true, natural anti-depressant and can help people with a poor self-image to feel better about themselves. Set small, realistic goals (e.g., walking for a few minutes a day) and build up to more if you wish. Releasing positive hormones such as endorphins can be a great side effect of increased movement. As they say, just do it!

11. Step Out of Your Bubble. Are you stuck in a routine? Do you feel like a stick-in-the-mud as a result? Make a plan to do something different—whether it's driving a different route to work or visiting a place you've never been or reconnecting with an old friend or going to an event where you are likely to meet new people. It can feel challenging at first, but moving out of your comfort zone can give you a boost of energy and a new perspective on the possibilities for your life.

Reflections on This Exercise

How was it to reflect on the above suggestions? Which ones do you feel excited about? Which ones do you feel some resistance to?

For those you feel some resistance to, what encouraging words would you like to offer that part of yourself in order to boost your motivation?

Who can you identify in your life who loves you unconditionally? Try to connect with that person regularly to remind yourself of your worth and your positive qualities. Then remember to tell yourself the things they tell you.

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?

Using the “7C” Technique to Manage Stress

What to Know

It can be easy to get overwhelmed by stress—especially when your thoughts and emotions run away from you. Yet, you can learn to stay in control. You can ride the wave of life instead of being thrown around by it—or even drowning. Learn and practice the 7C coping method to manage the daily stresses of life.

- 1. Control.** You need to feel in control of your own life. As a teen, this can sometimes feel limited because your parents are strict, or your teachers have high expectations. But you need some space to think for yourself and make your own decisions.
- 2. Competence.** Feeling competent increases your confidence. You can push outside your comfort zone and be okay with that. By building talents and abilities you already have, you can develop new skills and strengths.
- 3. Confidence.** Confidence helps you take risks and identify new coping strategies. You start to believe that you'll be okay no matter what.
- 4. Connection.** Healthy relationships are essential. A sense of community and belonging is important when you're stressed. These connections can help you find resources to cope.
- 5. Character.** This is your moral compass—what you stand for and your values. Being clear about your values can help you overcome stressful situations.
- 6. Coping.** There's healthy coping and unhealthy coping, and it's important for you to develop healthy coping mechanisms, like self-care strategies or relaxation techniques.
- 7. Contribution.** If you help others, you're more likely to ask for help. It strengthens families and communities when members lean on and rely on each other.

So now you know the 7C technique, and you're probably aware that you can't just eliminate stress from your life. Considering one C (“coping”), here are some healthy examples.

- set boundaries
- accept yourself for all that you are
- balance your life with routine, responsibilities, and play

- let yourself fail and make mistakes
- find creative ways to express yourself
- recognize your triggers

What to Do

Answer the following questions.

What can you do to have more control in your life?

What skills can you build to increase your competence?

Do you have high or low confidence? Explain.

What can you do to increase your confidence?

Do you have strong connections with family, friends, and in your community? Why or why not?

What do you stand for? Write down some of your values.

How do you usually cope when you are stressed? Is it healthy or unhealthy? What are some new ways you can cope in a healthy way?

What can you do to contribute to others?

How can others contribute to you?

What is one thing you learned about how to manage stress after reviewing the 7 Cs?

Make a poster on the following page using all 7 Cs. For each C, write down how you can build or cultivate each one. Use crayons, colored pens and pencils, markers, stickers, and other craft supplies to decorate your poster. Share it with a loved one and post it somewhere you can see it.

Who can you share your poster with? _____

Reflections on This Exercise

Did you experience any challenges while completing this activity? What was hard? Easy? Explain.

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn during this exercise?

's 7 Cs

Developing a Coping Game Plan

What to Know

When you're overwhelmed or upset it can be hard to come up with a plan to manage your emotions the moment you need one. So, it can be helpful to have "go to" strategies ready and waiting. Take some time when you are feeling good to plan for times when you're upset or feeling sad. Here are some ideas:

1. Let go through visualization. Own your feelings and visualize a different ending can turn sadness into productive coping. Try this: Sit comfortably in a relaxing space and turn on calming music. Close your eyes and take two deep breaths to clear your mind. As you breathe, visualize your feelings of sadness surrounded by bubbles floating up into the sky. As your sad feelings float away, breathe in joyful thoughts that make you smile. Visualize places, people, or objects that bring you happiness.
2. Make a playlist of calming music, or music you like to dance to.
3. Develop a list of inspirational quotes, affirmations, or movies about inspirational people. Choose ones that will help you when you're feeling down.
4. Connect with a trusted loved one. Sharing your feelings of sadness with a trusted friend or adult can build empathy. Ask for help, and connect on a deeper level.
5. Collect comforting or inspiring images on your phone. Or, decorate index cards and write something positive about yourself on each card. Keep them in a special place and add to them regularly.
6. Get creative. You don't have to be a professional to tap into the power of creativity, allowing you to get your feelings out while processing what you're going through. Whether you play a musical instrument, write a short story, or paint, creative expression can help you externalize difficult thoughts and feelings.

What else can you do?

As you develop your coping game plan, identify what you can and can't change.
Spend time taking positive, healthy actions to better manage your emotions.

Write down your plan. Put it on your phone, or post it somewhere where you can see it.

Nurturing Hope with a Hope Box

Your sense of stability, structure, and sense of control might have been impacted by the recent pandemic. The prolonged uncertainty, combined with the social distancing and isolation, probably took a significant psychic toll.

However, there is hope! This worksheet can help you nurture it. Hope is always important in our lives, but now it is more critical than ever. Hope can help you fight off depression. Hope can motivate you to achieve your goals. Hope can help you be more resilient.

What to Do

Take a shoe box or any similar-sized box and write the words Hope Box somewhere on the top. Every day find something to put in your Hope Box. Put in objects that are associated with positive feelings and memories. Put in words that inspire you and make you think of a brighter future. Here are some suggestions of things to put in your Hope Box. Check off the ones that you think might be most useful.

_____ A special letter, card, or printed email from someone you care about.

_____ Special pictures that bring up happy memories (family, friends, vacations, etc.).

_____ Success documents (report card, diploma, certificates, awards, etc.).

_____ Special quotes that are important to you.

_____ Art you have created or that someone has made for you.

_____ Objects from your life that are associated with good memories.

_____ Letters or printed emails that mean a lot to you.

_____ Photos of special times you have had - or of special times you hope to have, such as photos of an activity you enjoy doing.

_____ Souvenirs from past trips or vacations.

_____ Meaningful clippings from magazines or newspapers.

Write down other things you might put in your Hope Box:

This technique will only be helpful if you do it every day and spend some time thinking about hope. The essence of hope is that you *believe* you will be able to have a better future. The strength of that belief is largely based on your ability to create that future by solving the problems that are currently weighing you down.

While some teens seem to be better problem solvers than others, the truth is that everyone solves big and small problems every day. Answer the following questions to think about how you can solve the problems that are affecting you.

Describe the one problem that when solved will make the biggest difference in your life.

Problems are best solved one small step at a time. Write down six or more steps you can take to find a solution for this problem.

It is important to make a plan, or a roadmap, to solve your problem. However, every plan has some obstacles. List some obstacles you might encounter as you solve your problem.

Sometimes you might have a mental block in seeing the best steps to take in solving a problem. In this case, other viewpoints can help. Name three people who can give you other viewpoints in solving this problem.

How do you know when you have solved your problem? What will be different in your life?

A Virtual Hope Box (VHB) is available from the Apple App store, developed by the National Center for Telehealth and Technology. People can use the VHB to store a variety of rich multimedia content they find personally supportive in times of need. For example, you can include photos, videos, recorded messages from loved ones, inspirational quotes, soothing music, and more. The VHB provides people with positive activity planning, distraction tools, and interactive relaxation exercises including guided imagery, controlled breathing, and muscle relaxation.

Who I am?

What to Know

Self-awareness is the ability to focus on yourself and how your actions, thoughts, or emotions line up with your standards and values. This self-awareness worksheet focuses on discovering your talents, qualities, values, and perceptions. Self-awareness can happen through self-reflection. Self-awareness is about knowing and understanding:

- your beliefs, values, and principles
- what's important to you
- what motivates you
- your emotions
- your thinking patterns
- how you react to situations
- what you want out of life

What to Do

Spend some time answering the following questions.

What are your greatest talents or skills?

Which talent or skill gives you the greatest sense of pride or satisfaction?

What talents or skills do you admire most in others?

What talent or skill do you want to develop?

What are your 5 greatest strengths?

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

What do you think are your 2 biggest weaknesses?

1.

2.

What are your best qualities or characteristics?

What qualities do you wish you had?

What qualities or traits do you most admire in others?

What behaviors, traits, or qualities do you want other people to admire in you?

What are 10 things that are really important to you?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

What is the *most* important thing to you? Why?

Do you spend time on the things that are important to you? Why or why not?

How is the "public you" different from the "private you"? Explain.

Is it hard to be yourself with others? Why or why not?

Are you trying to please others with the way you live your life? Why or why not?

What do you want people to think and say about you?

How do your behaviors and actions support what they think or say?

Is it more important to be liked by others or to be yourself? Why? Explain.

Who are the people who let you be fully yourself?

What places or activities allow you to be fully yourself?

How do you want people to remember you when you are gone?

What 3 things are you most proud of?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

What do you hope to achieve in life?

If you were to receive an award, what would you want that award to represent?
Why?

If you could accomplish only 1 thing during the rest of your life, what would it be?
Be specific.

What do you believe you are here to accomplish or contribute to the world?

Describe yourself using 3 words.

What are 3 things you are *not*?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

What is something that represents you? It might be a song, an animal, a book...be
creative! Explain why.

What do you like best about yourself?

What do you like least about yourself?

What 2 things would you like to change about yourself?

1. _____
2. _____

Who are 2 people you most admire?

1. _____
2. _____

What do you admire about them? Why?

What are 4 things you love to do?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

What matters most in your life?

What makes you happy?

What are 3 things you need to have a great life?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Why are those things important to you?

What do you stand for (your principles)?

How do you want to impact the lives of others?

Finish the following sentences.

I do my best when...

I struggle when...

I'm comfortable when...

I'm stressed when...

I'm courageous when...

One of the most important things I've learned was...

One of my favorite memories is...

Being myself is hard because...

I can be myself when...

I wish I was more...

I wish I could...

I wish I had...

I wish I knew...

I wish I felt...

I wish I saw...

I wish I thought...

Life should be about...

I'm going to make my life about...

Did you enjoy this activity? Why or why not?
