

GUIDED
SELF-MANAGEMENT
TOOLS
FOR DEPRESSION

Parents of Teens 13-17



COGNITIVE BEHAVIORAL THERAPY

FOR DEPRESSION



INTRODUCTION

Everyone feels sad sometimes. School, friends, and family concerns can cause teens to feel down. Disappointments and challenges in life can also have an impact on mood. For some teens, sad feelings can become difficult to manage. This can cause problems at home, school, and/or with friends. If this is happening for your teen, they may be depressed. Working with your teen's primary care team can help you assist your teen in managing symptoms of depression.

Behavioral health specialists have worked hard to figure out ways to help manage depression. One of the most effective interventions is a type of therapy called Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, or CBT. This type of therapy helps people with depression learn how to change their thoughts and behaviors in order to feel less sad and to cope when sad feelings do occur. The worksheets in this guide will help your teen and your family try CBT strategies at home. There are tips for parents and activities for your teen, which can be used with teens across a wide age range. All of the skills included in our guide are *evidence-based*, meaning they are strategies that have been tested and proven to be effective through rigorous scientific research. Many families have found these strategies to be beneficial; we hope they will work for you, too.

SKILLS & EXERCISES

Each of the skill handouts includes an explanation of the skill, a description of how it will help your family, and instructions for how to use the strategy at home. We've also included a list of common questions and concerns parents have about each skill, along with our answers. Work through the guide with your teen and try out each new skill for about two weeks to see which fit your family best. See what's working and what's still challenging, then adjust as needed. Once you've found a set of skills that works for you, keep at it until the routine becomes second nature. It may be challenging at first, but the more you practice, the easier it will be to make these exercises and techniques a part of your daily life. Let us know how things are going and be in touch if you and your teen need any additional support for depression management. Good luck!



Skill 1

Mood Tracking

These worksheets will help your teen pay attention to their feelings, see how different situations impact their mood, and practice sharing their feelings with others.



Skill 2

Making Time for Fun

These worksheets will help you and your teen plan time in their day for activities they enjoy and learn additional positive coping skills for improving mood.



Skill 3

Relaxation Skills

These worksheets teach simple skills and exercises that help increase feelings of calm and well-being. Make these skills a consistent part of your family's daily life to reduce stress for everyone.



Skill 4

Thinking Traps

These worksheets teach your teen new ways to look at situations and suggest questions to ask in order to reduce negative thoughts and increase positive thinking.



Skill 5

Problem Solving

These worksheets help your teen gain confidence and improve their mood by teaching strategies that help to 1) solve problems independently and 2) seek help when needed.

PARENT HANDOUT: MOOD TRACKING



What is Mood Tracking?

- ▶ In order for you and your teen to better understand how your teen feels, they will need to practice feelings identification and feelings expression.
- ▶ **Feelings identification** is a term for being able to name your feelings with detail and accuracy. Feelings identification goes beyond saying you feel “good” or “bad” and instead involves developing a richer feelings vocabulary. **Feelings expression** is a term for sharing emotions in safe and productive ways.
- ▶ The use of **mood tracking** to identify and record feelings is a helpful way to increase feelings identification and expression. A **Mood Tracker** is a simple system that can help your teen label and record their feelings.
- ▶ As your teen improves their feelings identification and expression through mood tracking, you and your teen may notice patterns in their moods. Paying attention to these patterns is an important first step to figuring out ways to improve mood. Having a better understanding of their emotions will help your teen use other helpful skills in this guide, such as Relaxation Skills (Depression Skill 3) and Problem Solving (Depression Skill 5).

Here's How to Begin Mood Tracking at Home

- 1 Make a master list of emotions .**
You may want to track the following feelings: **Happy, Sad, Depressed, Angry, Frustrated, Stressed, Worried,** and **Neutral**. You can add more based on your teens vocabulary, understanding, and needs.
- 2 Expand your feelings vocabulary.**
You will need a timer, two pieces of paper, and two pens. Set the timer for one minute. Read along with your parent or just read to yourself: **“We are going to come up with as many different feelings words as we can. Words like happy, sad, and any more you can think of. When I say go, start your list. I’ll do mine at the same time. We will put our lists together at the end.”** When time is up, compare your lists and create a “master list” that contains the feeling words you and your teen think are most necessary for tracking their moods. Use steps 1 and 2 above to make sure you are including key feelings.
- 3 Introduce mood tracking.**
Say to your teen, **“We named a lot of different feelings during the naming feelings game. Feelings can also be called emotions or moods. Happy, sad, depressed (which means really down and hopeless), angry, frustrated, stressed, worried, and neutral (that means no feeling) are important ones that you and I are going to make sure we include in our vocabularies. Many people find it helpful to track their moods in order to get more practice identifying how they feel, notice any patterns in their moods throughout the day, and then use the information to figure out ways to improve mood. This worksheet is one good way to try this. You can record your feelings and the situation that caused those feelings for morning, afternoon, and evening. Some people like to do this in the moment and other people like to do this at the end of the day. What would you like to do?”**

TEEN WORKSHEET: MOOD TRACKER FOR TEENS



Depression
Skill 1

- 1 Make copies of this worksheet so you can continue this practice beyond the first week.
- 2 Keep the master list of emotions you made with your mood tracking worksheets for easy reference. If you have electronic devices, you may want to keep the list on a device.
- 3 If you can't think of a feeling word when it's time to fill in their worksheet, use examples from the master list.
- 4 If you can't think of something for the What Happened? section, ask yourself, *"Where were you when you noticed your feeling? What was the situation? What were you doing?"*
- 5 Once you have completed a week of Mood Tracking, start to look for patterns. You can do this together with your parent or a support person. Read all of the emotions and situations from the week's Mood Tracker. Ask yourself, *"What do you notice? Are certain events connected to certain feelings a lot?"* Also notice if certain times of day are connected: *"Do you notice anything interesting about how you feel at certain times of the day?"*
- 6 Once you notice and identify patterns, think about which other skills in this guide could help. Many teens find that the Relaxation Skills (Depression Skill 3) and Problem Solving worksheets (Depression Skill 5) in this guide are useful.

		Sun	Mon	Tues	Weds	Thurs	Fri	Sat
Morning	Mood							
	What Happened?							
Afternoon	Mood							
	What Happened?							
Evening	Mood							
	What Happened?							

TEEN WORKSHEET: MOOD TRACKER FOR TEENS



Depression
Skill 1

Week: _____

	Sun	Mon	Tues	Weds	Thurs	Fri	Sat
Morning	Mood						
	What Happened?						
Afternoon	Mood						
	What Happened?						
Evening	Mood						
	What Happened?						

Week: _____

	Sun	Mon	Tues	Weds	Thurs	Fri	Sat
Morning	Mood						
	What Happened?						
Afternoon	Mood						
	What Happened?						
Evening	Mood						
	What Happened?						

PARENT HANDOUT: MOOD TRACKING TIPS



Depression Skill 1

How Can Mood Tracking Help My Family?

- ▶ Teens who are having a hard time with sad or depressed mood sometimes struggle to both explain how they feel and show how they feel in appropriate ways. Mood Tracking can help your teen become more skilled at feelings identification and feelings expression.
- ▶ Improving these skills can help your teen feel more in control when a low mood occurs. This can in turn reduce certain behaviors that may be connected to difficulty expressing emotions (e.g., yelling outbursts, acting out, or withdrawing from friends and family).
- ▶ Mood Tracking can help you and your teen notice patterns in their moods that can give you valuable insight into your teen's triggers and challenges (e.g. they notice that they tend to feel worse when they're left out at school).
- ▶ You can use this information to work together to find coping skills that can improve specific moods and solve problems that may be causing stress.

Common Parent Concerns

When I ask my teen how they feel, they say they don't know!

Sometimes Mood Tracking can feel overwhelming or confusing. Use your master list of feelings to give your teen ideas. You can also ask them questions about how they felt in specific situations (e.g., "How did you feel in math class? At lunch? After school?"). You can first ask them to use "good" or "positive" and "bad" or "negative" to identify if they were feeling a positive or negative emotion. Then focus together on narrowing that range of emotions down to be more specific, using the list we provide for suggestions.

My teen refuses to track their moods.

Empathize with your teen. It can feel hard to begin expressing emotions if you've kept them bottled up inside, or if you're not comfortable talking about them. Your teen could be feeling overwhelmed, or too down to be motivated. Mood Tracking should not be another chore but something short and simple that you can work into your daily routine (e.g., can they fill out the worksheet after dinner, or use their phone to keep track?). Together, set a specific goal for regular mood tracking (e.g., three times a week to start) and think of a small but fun reward your teen can earn for reaching it.

I'm not sure how to use the Mood Tracker to plan or problem solve.

Think of the Mood Tracker as data: important information about your teen's day-to-day experience. Look for patterns, such as certain moods that happen over and over on the same day, at the same time, or in the same situation. Use this information to brainstorm ways to improve those situations together. Are they always sad on Mondays? Maybe Mondays would feel more positive if there were occasionally a fun activity or special dinner to look forward to. See the Making Time for Fun worksheets (Depression Skill 2) for more ideas like this. Are evenings stressful? Perhaps this could be improved by starting homework earlier or thinking of a calming bedtime routine. Read the Relaxation Skills (Depression Skill 3) and Problem Solving (Depression Skill 5) worksheets for more ideas like these. Once you have more information about the specific circumstances around certain moods, you can plan ahead.

Our Mood Trackers show that my teen is almost always in a low mood, no matter what.

Help your teen figure out ways to add more fun and relaxing activities to their daily life (see Making Time for Fun and Relaxation Skills, Depression Skills 2 and 3). Notice if this results in any changes. Also discuss with your teen whether negative thinking may be impacting their report of their mood. Are they reporting the facts? Would using a skill from Thinking Traps help (Depression Skill 4)? If your teen's low mood continues, talk to your primary care provider. They can connect you to a behavioral health specialist who can help. If your teen's mood causes you concern for their safety, seek emergency help.



What is Making Time for Fun?

- ▶ If your teen is struggling with sadness or depression, they may stop doing things that they used to enjoy. They may engage in more passive activities (e.g., screen time) reduce the amount of active choices (e.g. sports, hobbies) they engage in, or spend less time with others. Or you may find that they aren't doing many fun activities at all, or report that activities they usually enjoy are less fun than they used to be. These changes in activity and motivation are common symptoms of depression.
- ▶ **Behavioral activation** is a method for increasing the amount of enjoyable activities that are a part of your teen's day. It is a great tool for helping your teen improve their mood and increase their active coping skills. Since your teen may feel unmotivated right now, activities are scheduled ahead of time in order to help with consistency and planning.
- ▶ Your teen may not be in a good mood at the start of an activity, but they may notice a significant improvement in mood once they get going! Keeping track of their moods before and after the activity will help them notice which activities make a big positive difference in their mood. In the future, they can return to these activities to cope with low mood.

Here's How to Use Behavioral Activation at Home

You can use the following script with your teen:

- 1 Introduce behavioral activation.** "I've noticed that you've been feeling sad and down lately. When people feel down, they often stop doing things they used to love. That sometimes happens because they feel tired or uninterested in their hobbies and activities. This causes them to have less fun and feel even more down! Do you think this is happening to you?" Wait for an answer and provide encouragement in a way that feels comfortable to you. "Together, we are going to make an effort to plan for more fun in your daily life. Scheduling fun in your day to help you feel happier is called behavioral activation."
- 2 Introduce the Making Time for Fun worksheet.** "We are going to use the Making Time for Fun worksheet to organize your behavioral activation. Your job is to make a list of fun activities you'd like to do and then choose one activity for each day. We will try to put mostly everyday things on the worksheet that you can do daily (even on school nights!). However, we can also include the occasional bigger, special activity. We will also rate your mood before and after to see if the activity makes you feel better." We can use a scale from 1-10 where 1 means very down, and 10 means very happy. See Mood Tracking worksheets in Depression Skill 1 for additional support on feelings identification and expression.
- 3 Brainstorm and choose activities.** "Do you have any ideas about things you want to do? We will add them to the Fun Activities List." Wait for your teen to name activities; if they need help you can make suggestions based on activities you know they once enjoyed and/or the suggestions on the worksheet. Record the activities on the Fun Activities List as you go.
- 4 Make the schedule.** "Great job! Now I'll read the list to you. Why don't you pick which day of the week you would like to do some of these things?" Write the activities down in the schedule according to your teen's choices. Review the chart together once it's filled in.

TEEN WORKSHEET: MAKING TIME FOR FUN



My Fun Activities List

1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
6	
7	
8	
9	
10	

Fun Activities Suggestions

- Play outside
- Journal
- Listen to music
- Go for a walk
- Exercise or practice a sport
- Draw or paint
- Play with a pet
- Watch a funny movie
- Talk to a friend
- Read a book or listen to an audiobook

Behavioral Activation Schedule

Day of the Week	Fun Activity	Mood Before	Mood After
Sunday			
Monday			
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			
Saturday			

PARENT HANDOUT: MAKING TIME FOR FUN TIPS



Depression Skill 2

How Can Making Time for Fun Help My Family?

- ▶ When teens are struggling with sadness or depression, they often stop doing activities they once loved because they feel tired, think once enjoyable activities are boring, feel frustrated or irritable, or start withdrawing from friends. Unfortunately, the more your teen reduces their pleasurable activities, the more their sadness may increase.
- ▶ Using the Making Time for Fun worksheet can help you organize and motivate your teen to increase their positive activities through behavioral activation. It can reduce the need to nag your teen to choose something to do when they seem sad or bored. The whole family can benefit from mood-boosting activities if you do them together. For example, physical activity as a family can make a big difference. In addition, spending time in nature can have positive and soothing effects on everyone's mood.
- ▶ Another benefit of the Making Time for Fun skill is that it helps your teen increase their active coping skills. They will be able to keep track of which activities improve their mood the most. These activities, along with relaxation skills (see Relaxation Skills worksheets in Depression Skill 3), will be powerful tools that you can turn to for improving mood in a variety of circumstances.

Common Parent Concerns

My teen only wants to include video games on their chart.

Many teens prefer screen time over other activities and it's okay to include a few of these activities in their plan. However, too much screen time can be passive and isolating, leading to more negative effects than positive ones. Try to help your teen balance their Fun Activities List so that there is a mix of high and low energy activities and not too many activities with screen time. Explain to your teen that physical activities can make a huge difference in their mood and that low key activities like reading or art projects can also help them feel relaxed and in a better mood. Praise your teen for including activities with no screen time on the list.

My teen has too many expensive activities on their list.

Help your teen pick some simple and free activities and explain to them that these activities are beneficial and necessary because they are easier to access and can happen several times a week. Based on your family's practices and budget, decide if and when you would like to include some activities that have a cost and calmly but firmly explain this to your teen. Decide together when to occasionally fit these activities in. You may even want to choose a special activity as a reward for their use of coping skills!

My teen doesn't want to do their activities when I suggest them.

Ask specific questions to find out what could make doing behavioral activation more appealing. Have they decided that they want to change the order of activities, or do completely new ones? Edit your Making Time for Fun worksheets as needed. Encourage them to keep trying new things until they find something that is enjoyable and comfortable, make sure to give them little reminders of how they felt when they had fun in the past. Remind them that it's hardest to do fun things when they feel down, but that this is when doing fun things is actually most important!

My teen still has a low mood, even after doing their fun activities.

Brainstorm with your teen to see if trying different activities could be more impactful. Adjust the planned activities on the worksheet as needed. Discuss with your teen whether negative thinking may be impacting their report of their mood. Are they reporting the facts? Would using a skill from Thinking Traps help (Depression Skill 4)? If your teen's low mood continues, talk to your primary care provider. They can connect you to a behavioral health specialist who can help. If your child's mood causes you concern for their safety, seek emergency help.

PARENT HANDOUT: DEEP BREATHING



What is Deep Breathing?

- ▶ Relaxation skills are ways to help relax our bodies and minds and increase feelings of calm and well-being.
- ▶ Our guide includes three different types of relaxation skills that can help your teen and family. This handout provides an introduction to a skill called **deep breathing**.
- ▶ Deep breathing involves taking slow, deep breaths in which you fill your belly with air on the inhales (i.e., the breathe *in* part) and release the air on the exhales (i.e., when you breathe *out*).
- ▶ Try some of our strategies below and see if they help your teen feel calmer, more relaxed, and more in control.

Deep Breathing Practice

Deep Breathing Script: "Sit in a comfortable position and close your eyes. We are going to focus on our breathing. Start by taking some nice deep breaths, the same way you normally would. Notice how your stomach rises and falls as you breathe. You can put your hand on your stomach to help you feel the air going in and out. Now we are going to try to breathe in a way that will help us feel even more relaxed. Breathe in through your nose. This is the inhale. When you do this, make your stomach fill with air like a balloon. Now breathe out slowly through your mouth. This is the exhale and it makes you empty the air out of your belly balloon. Good. You can make a 'whoosh' sound on the exhale if that helps you. Now do that again, breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth. Try to take in as much air as you can, slowly and calmly. Take your time and focus on the rhythm of your breathing. Try to make your belly balloon fill with air on the inhale and empty on the exhale. Great job. If other thoughts pop into your mind, that's okay. Just try to stay calm and start thinking about your breathing again. Now take three more slow, deep breaths in through your nose and out through your mouth, making your stomach rise and fall three times. One. Two. Three. You can do this any time you need to relax. Great job! When you're ready, you can open your eyes."

Here's How to Use Deep Breathing at Home

- ▶ Making relaxation a family activity can help your teen feel more comfortable and use their relaxation skills more consistently. Go over the skills with your teen, then let them lead the way. Pick a time when family members can practice together (e.g., before saying goodnight and getting ready for bed).
- ▶ To set an example, you can point out to your teen times when you can use deep breathing in your own life (e.g., "I feel stressed when the grocery store is this busy, so I'm going to take a few deep breaths before we go in."). If you notice your teen looking anxious before or during an activity, you can also suggest they try deep breathing to see if it makes them feel better.



Check Your Form!

To make sure your teen is doing deep breathing properly for maximum anxiety relief, encourage them to check their form by placing their hand on their belly. When they breathe in, their hand should move up slightly as air flows in. When they breathe out, their hand should sink slightly as air flows out.



Number Breathing

Once your teen understands how to breathe more deeply, try variations such as 3-1-3. This involves breathing in for a count of three, holding it for one, and breathing out for a count of three. You can try other numbers and combinations and use whatever your child likes and finds comfortable.



Bubbles

Break out some bubbles and spend a few moments relaxing like a little kid! Notice that when you blow out slowly and calmly you can make bigger bubbles. Now try out some fast, anxious-style breathing: it doesn't work as well.



Pizza Imagery

A fun image that can help you or your teen practice this skill anytime, anywhere: Imagine you are breathing in the smell of a slice of hot, delicious pizza and then blowing out to cool the slice down. Or think of another hot food you love!

PARENT HANDOUT: PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION



Depression Skill 3

What is Progressive Muscle Relaxation?

- ▶ Relaxation skills are ways to help relax our bodies and minds and increase feelings of calm and well-being.
- ▶ Our guide includes three different types of relaxation skills that can help your teen and family. This handout provides an introduction to a skill called **progressive muscle relaxation**.
- ▶ Progressive muscle relaxation involves tensing different muscle groups one at a time and then releasing them. An example is flexing your arm muscle, then relaxing it.
- ▶ Try some of our strategies below and see if they help your teen feel calmer, more relaxed, and more in control.

Here's How to Use Progressive Muscle Relaxation at Home

- ▶ Making relaxation a family activity can help your teen feel more comfortable and use their relaxation skills more consistently. Go over the skills you're your teen, then let them lead the way. Pick a time when family members can practice together (e.g., before saying goodnight and getting ready for bed).
- ▶ To set an example, when you can point out to your teen times when you can use progressive muscle relaxation in your own life (e.g., "I've been clenching the steering wheel the whole way home. I'm going to try to relax my muscles now to feel calmer."). If you notice your teen looking anxious before or during an activity, you can also suggest they try progressive muscle relaxation to see if it makes them feel better.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation Practice

Progressive Muscle Relaxation Script

You can read this to your teen. Or they can record it on their phone or tablet and play the recording!

"Sit in a comfortable position and close your eyes. We are going to practice relaxing our muscles by squeezing them tight and then releasing them. Let's start with our legs. Stretch your legs out in front of you and point your toes. Hold your position and count to 5. Now relax your legs. Good job! Do that again. Stretch, hold for 5, and relax. Now make two fists like you are squeezing a lemon in each hand. Squeeze your lemons as tightly as you can to get the juice out for a count of 5. Now drop your lemons. Great job! Now repeat. Squeeze for 5 and drop. Let's next focus on our arms. Hold them out in front of you, stiff and straight for 5. Good. Now drop your arms to your sides like they are cooked, limp spaghetti. Now repeat. Stiff for 5 and then loose. Okay, now we're going to squeeze our stomach muscles as if we are trying to squeeze through a door. Hold them tight and count to 5! Now release. Great job. Repeat. Squeeze for 5 and release. Now we are going to scrunch up our faces like we are trying to get flies off our noses. Keep your face scrunched up for 5! Good. Release. Again, scrunch for 5 and release. For our last step we are going to hold our whole body as tight and scrunched up as we can. Tense all the parts and count to 5! Great job. Now release. Do that one last time. Tense for 5, now relax. Notice how good it feels to relax all your muscles. You can open your eyes."

Progressive Muscle Relaxation on Your Own

Time to get creative and have fun! Encourage your teen to come up with their own script or do an internet search for additional progressive muscle relaxation scripts. You don't have to stop there; they can create their own or search for other examples of all the relaxation skills in this guide! Find a bunch that suit your teen's personality and lifestyle.

PARENT HANDOUT: GUIDED IMAGERY



Depression Skill 3

What is Guided Imagery?

- ▶ Relaxation skills are ways to help relax our bodies and minds and increase feelings of calm and well-being.
- ▶ Our guide includes three different types of relaxation skills that can help your teen and family. This handout provides an introduction to a skill called **guided imagery**.
- ▶ Guided imagery involves imagining a calm image or scene using all 5 senses (i.e., sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell), sometimes with the help of a script or recording.
- ▶ Try some of our strategies below and see if they help your teen feel calmer, more relaxed, and more in control.

Here's How to Use Guided Imagery at Home

- ▶ Making relaxation a family activity can help your teen feel more comfortable and use their relaxation skills more consistently. Go over the skills with your teen, then let them lead the way. Pick a time when family members can practice together (e.g., before saying goodnight and getting ready for bed).
- ▶ To set an example, you can point out to your teen times when you can use guided imagery in your own life to feel better (e.g., "What a busy day! I need to take a mini vacation to my relaxing place!").
- ▶ If you notice your teen looking down or stressed, you can also suggest they try guided imagery to see if it makes them feel better.

Guided Imagery Practice

Guided Imagery Script:

You can read this to your teen, or they can record it on their phone or tablet and play the recording!

"Sit in a comfortable position and close your eyes. I want you to use your imagination to go on a vacation in your mind. Think of a calm and peaceful place. It can be some place you have been before or some place you would like to go. The place doesn't even have to be real; it can be imaginary. Spend a few moments picturing your peaceful place. Now think about the things you **see** in your special place. Notice the colors, shapes, and patterns. Think about how peaceful it is to see the details of your special place. Now think about the things you **hear** in your peaceful place. Do you hear music, animal sounds, or ocean waves? Or maybe you hear something different. Now think about the things you **feel** in your calm place. Warm sunshine on your face, grass under your feet, or something else? Notice how these feelings help you relax. Now think about what you **smell** in your relaxing place. The salty ocean, cookies baking, or something else? Take a deep breath of the amazing smells. Now think about what you **taste** in your calm place. A popsicle? Or a fresh cookie? Or something else? Think about how good it tastes. You can always take a trip back to your relaxing place if you need to feel calm. This is a tool you can always use to feel better. When you are ready, you can open your eyes."

Mini Vacation

Once you have practiced with the script above, encourage your teen to close their eyes briefly and go on a mini vacation to their calm place when they feel sad or down.

5-4-3-2-1 Relaxation

Help your teen relax at any time by prompting them to notice 5 things they see, 4 things they feel, 3 things they hear, 2 things they smell, and 1 thing they taste. This technique is a **grounding exercise** and can help your teen feel better in challenging moments. Here's an example of using this in the kitchen: "I see my plate, the table, my sister sitting across from me, the clock, and the wall. I feel the chair, the floor, the table, and the warmth from the heater. I hear water running in the sink, water boiling on the stove, and my sister's voice. I smell cookies in the oven and the pasta I am eating. I taste the pasta."

PARENT HANDOUT: RELAXATION SKILLS TIPS



Depression Skill 3

How Can Relaxation Skills Help My Family?

- ▶ Relaxation techniques can be very important coping skills for teens having problems with sad feelings and low mood. These strategies can reduce stress by helping teens calm their bodies, take their mind off of their sad feelings, and focus more on positive thinking and feelings. Reducing stress also makes it easier to problem solve and use other coping skills.
- ▶ This is because the mind and the body are connected. When teens who are sad or feeling some other negative emotion learn to practice relaxation, they can change their moods, improve their sleep, and experience many other benefits.
- ▶ Your teen needs to practice relaxing regularly when they are in a good mood so that they are better able to use the skills when they are in a bad mood and need them. You can't use a skill well in "the game" if you don't practice!
- ▶ Relaxation skills are "portable." Your teen can do them at home, school, or in public. Most skills can be done without anyone noticing.

Common Parent Concerns

My teen thinks this is too hard.

Relaxation skills may feel uncomfortable or challenging at first. Practicing regularly helps make the skills feel easier and more comfortable. Figuring out which skills (and methods of practicing the skills) your teen prefers will also be helpful. Try out the different strategies we suggest, and see which ones work best for your family.

My teen doesn't want to practice regularly.

Relaxation practice should not be another chore but something short and simple that your teen can work into their daily routine. For example, can they practice for a few minutes on the way home from school or use an app on their phone before getting ready for bed? Together, set a specific goal for regular practice (e.g., three times a week to start) and think of a small but fun reward your teen can earn for reaching it. Remind your teen that this skill gets easier the more they do it, and that this is one way they can be in control of their mood.

My teen thinks relaxation practice is boring or strange.

Ask specific questions to find out what could make it more appealing. Do they prefer a certain skill over others? Do they want to use technology in their practice (e.g., relaxation phone apps, guided imagery videos, etc.)? Would they be more interested in an active practice like yoga? Encourage them to keep trying new things until they find something that is enjoyable and comfortable.

My teen can never use the skills in the moment to manage their mood.

If you are in a situation with your teen where they could use a relaxation skill but are not doing so, give a gentle reminder to encourage them and then model the skill yourself. Talk with your teen about times when relaxation skills can be helpful (e.g., academic stress is making them sad, so suggest progressive muscle relaxation before they start their homework) and set a goal with them regarding trying to use that skill in that specific situation for a reasonable amount of times for the next week.



PARENT HANDOUT: THINKING TRAPS FOR TEENS



What Are Thinking Traps?

- ▶ **Thinking Traps** are ways of thinking that increase sadness, anger, and stress. They often involve jumping to conclusions, guessing that things will go badly in the future, and making connections that might not really make sense.
- ▶ Here are **4 Common Thinking Traps** that are often connected to sadness and depression. Discuss these with your teen and see if you can come up with more examples that apply to them.

How to Decrease Thinking Traps

Ask your teen these questions to help them think in more positive ways:

- 1 **What are the facts?** What is the likelihood that what you're worrying about will happen? Often there is very little evidence that the things we are stressed about will actually happen! Working with your teen to look at the facts will help them think more realistically and often empower them to notice that they are capable of facing their fears.
- 2 **What would you tell a friend in this situation?** Focusing on helping a peer may help your teen with perspective taking and problem solving. This strategy can help them feel calmer and more positive about their worry.
- 3 **What can you do to solve your problem or take your mind off it?** If possible, help your teen take concrete steps to solve their problem. If that's not possible, encourage them to use relaxation or other coping skills (Depression Skill 3) to reduce stress and take their mind off things.



FORTUNE TELLING

Predicting that bad things will happen in the future.

People who struggle with negative thinking often spend a lot of time imagining bad things happening in the future. People dealing with depression sometimes predict their sadness will continue.

Fortune Telling Example: "I've felt really sad for the past few weeks. I'm probably going to be sad forever."



CATASTROPHIZING

Making little problems or disappointments seem like big problems.

When we catastrophize, we make a big deal out of situations, even when they might not be that serious or bad.

Catastrophizing Example: "My best friend didn't text me at all today. I bet she hates me now and is going to ditch me."



OVERGENERALIZATION

Assuming that because we had a hard time in one situation, our same problem will happen again in a new one.

When we overgeneralize, we are ignoring the unique facts about a situation.

Overgeneralization Example: "I had a hard time with the essay questions on our English exam. I'm going to mess up the essay questions in History, too!"



ALL-OR-NOTHING THINKING

Seeing things as "all good" or "all bad."

When we use all-or-nothing thinking, we ignore the fact that many situations are in the middle and have both positive *and* negative aspects.

All-or-Nothing Thinking Example: "Three of my friends said they like my sneakers, but Tim didn't say anything. I look stupid. I should have gotten a different pair."

TEEN WORKSHEET: THINKING TRAP PRACTICE



Here's an example of how to use your new skills to deal with a **Fortune Telling** Thinking Trap:

"I've felt really depressed for the past few weeks. I'm going to be depressed forever."



What are the Facts?	"I'm learning things that might help me start to feel better. I already feel happy sometimes after I do the stuff in Making Time for Fun. I've felt sad in the past, and it didn't last forever."
What Would I Say to a Friend?	"It's going to get better! You are working hard at being more positive."
What can I do to take my mind off things?	"I'm going to go for a run and try to forget about this thought for a little while."

CATASTROPHIZING

"My best friend didn't text me at all today. I bet she hates me now and is going to ditch me."

What are the facts?

What would I say to a friend?

What can I do to take my mind off things?

OVERGENERALIZATION

"I had a hard time with the essay questions on our English exam. I'm going to mess up the essay questions in History, too!"

What are the facts?

What would I say to a friend?

What can I do to take my mind off things?

ALL-OR-NOTHING THINKING

"Three of my friends said they like my sneakers, but Tim didn't say anything. I look stupid. I should have gotten a different pair."

What are the facts?

What would I say to a friend?

What can I do to take my mind off things?

PARENT HANDOUT: THINKING TRAPS TIPS



Depression Skill 4

How Can Understanding Thinking Traps Help My Family?

- ▶ When people experience sadness or depression, they often think about the past, their present situation, and/or things that might happen in the future in negative ways. These negative thought patterns often make them feel worse and can lead to feelings of hopelessness or helplessness.
- ▶ By learning about thinking traps (i.e., ways of thinking that make us feel sad, stuck, or angry), your teen will learn to identify times they may be thinking in overly negative or unrealistic ways.
- ▶ Your family can also help each other pay attention to the ways you talk about feelings and problems. Once everyone has practiced noticing the thinking traps, you can help each other take those thinking trap statements and make them more positive and realistic.
- ▶ Learning how to discuss feelings and problems in realistic and self-esteem boosting ways can help your whole family feel more confident and capable when facing stressful situations.

Common Parent Concerns

Some of the thinking traps are hard for my teen to understand.

If a particular type of thinking trap is challenging for your teen, brainstorm additional examples that might make it clearer. Ask friends and family to help if needed. Examples that connect to your teen's interests (e.g., their favorite sport or movie) can be very useful. If your teen struggles to separate the thinking traps into different categories, just focus on noticing negative thoughts in general and changing them. For example, call them "sad thoughts," "negative thinking," or another name you come up with together. You can still improve thinking this way.

My teen says that thinking traps aren't a problem for them, but I know that they are.

It's hard for people of all ages to notice or acknowledge a harmful habit. Be a role model by pointing out thinking traps out in your own life (e.g., "I noticed the living room was messy and thought, 'This house is always a mess!', That made me feel sad and frustrated. Then I realized that was *all-or-nothing thinking* because the rest of the house is clean!"). Make similar connections in media you watch together (e.g., "Is that character using a thinking trap? Which one?"). Gently bring up times you notice your child using a thinking trap when the situation is calmer (e.g., "After you guys lost that tough game, you said that you wanted to quit basketball because it 'will always be this way'. I wonder if that was a thinking trap, maybe *overgeneralization*? Just because you lost that one game doesn't mean you will lose every game in the future and you've told me that you love playing basketball.").

Changing negative thinking is very hard for my teen.

Negative thoughts are often automatic, like a bad habit. Becoming a more positive thinker requires breaking this habit. It takes a lot of practice to make a change like this! Start with more fun and playful examples if jumping right into your teen's own thinking patterns feels overwhelming. Practice on a regular basis for a few minutes at a time (daily if you can manage it) to start forming a new habit of positive thinking. If your teen is still having a difficult time, talk to your teen's primary care provider. They can connect you to a behavioral health specialist who can help.



What is Problem Solving?

- ▶ Teens dealing with low mood and depression may be in particular need of targeted strategies to deal with daily challenges and concerns. Everyone can benefit from solving problems in their lives; these skills can help you and the rest of your family as well!
- ▶ Your teen may be frustrated that they are having a hard time dealing with problems. This can further increase their low mood and low motivation. You may be frustrated that they are not taking your advice or making good choices, creating conflict between the two of you.
- ▶ These worksheets teach a simple plan for solving problems. You will learn to:
 1. Name the problem
 2. Identify 3 possible solutions
 3. Name one good thing and one bad thing about each solution
 4. Pick one to try
 5. Evaluate how things went after you implement the solution



Here's How to Make a Problem Solving Plan at Home

You can introduce the plan by saying, "Everyone can use help solving problems. When people are sad, they sometimes need strategies that make it easier to deal with challenges. Here's the Problem Solving Plan we are going to start using." Introduce the 5 parts of the plan to your teen by going through them together and reading the explanations below:

- 1 **What's the problem?** "You may be feeling overwhelmed and not know exactly how to describe the issue you need to handle. Clearly stating the problem helps us both focus on what we need to do to solve it."
- 2 **What are 3 possible solutions?** "I want you to think of 3 possible solutions so you have some good options, but not so many that you are overwhelmed with choices. Let's not worry about how good or bad they are yet. We will evaluate them together in the next part."
- 3 **What's one good thing and one bad thing about each?** "This part means you will name one positive possibility and one negative possibility that could occur with each solution. This will help you consider the benefits and challenges of each choice."
- 4 **Pick one!** "This is your chance to take charge as you pick which solution you want to try out first."
- 5 **How did it go?** "After you follow through with a solution, we will evaluate it. This will help us both learn what the best options for different problems are and we can refer back to these tested solutions as needed. If the first solution isn't successful in solving the problem, we can try a different one or start a completely new solution brainstorming session."

The next section puts the **Problem Solving Plan** into a chart. Go over the example together and then have your teen try to solve the practice problems. Come up with solutions for our example problems and then try it for one of their own.

TEEN WORKSHEET: PROBLEM SOLVING



Example 1: "I am so sad and tired all time that I am not paying attention in math class. Now I don't understand today's homework."

What's the Problem?		"I don't understand the homework."	
		One Good Thing	One Bad Thing
Solution 1	Don't do the homework.	I can play videogames tonight because I'll have less to do	I'll get a zero.
Soution 2	Text my friend for help.	She is good at math and can help me.	She might not respond.
Solution 3	Talk to my teacher tomorrow and ask for extra help.	My teacher will explain what I missed.	She might still give me a zero for today's homework.
My Choice	Text my friend for help.		
How'd it go?	My friend texted me back. She called and helped me. I understood and did the homework.		

Example 2: "I get mad really easily now. I have been mean to my little brother a lot. This morning I heard him crying and telling mom that he thinks I don't like him."

What's the Problem?			
		One Good Thing	One Bad Thing
Solution 1			
Soution 2			
Solution 3			
My Choice			
How'd it go?			

TEEN WORKSHEET: PROBLEM SOLVING



Example 3: "I've known that we had a history project due for a while but I just couldn't focus on it because of how I'm feeling. Now it's due tomorrow."

What's the Problem?		
	One Good Thing	One Bad Thing
Solution 1		
Solution 2		
Solution 3		
My Choice		
How'd it go?		

Example 4: "My friends have stopped inviting me places because I kept saying no. Now I'm ready to use my Making Time for Fun Skills and I want them to ask me to hang out again."

What's the Problem?		
	One Good Thing	One Bad Thing
Solution 1		
Solution 2		
Solution 3		
My Choice		
How'd it go?		

BLANK PROBLEM SOLVING PLANS

Here are a couple Blank Problem Solving Plans. Make copies and use it to help guide your decision making when problems arise.



Depression Skill 5

What's the Problem?		
	One Good Thing	One Bad Thing
Solution 1		
Soution 2		
Solution 3		
My Choice		
How'd it go?		

What's the Problem?		
	One Good Thing	One Bad Thing
Solution 1		
Soution 2		
Solution 3		
My Choice		
How'd it go?		

PARENT HANDOUT: PROBLEM SOLVING TIPS



Depression Skill 5

How Can Problem Solving Help My Family?

- ▶ Teens who are having a hard time with sadness or depression sometimes struggle to deal with challenges and solve everyday problems.
- ▶ These difficulties with problem solving can occur because they are more sad or irritable, more easily overwhelmed, not feeling motivated, and/or struggling with negative thinking due to depression. They may also try to solve a problem, but give up easily if they aren't successful right away.
- ▶ The problem solving skill described here can provide a concrete way to help your teen think through challenges, brainstorm options, notice what works and what doesn't, and keep trying if their first attempt doesn't work. Increasing positive outcomes through successful problem solving can help significantly improve your teen's mood and sense of control.
- ▶ In addition, making and following a problem solving plan can reduce frustration for both of you while increasing feelings of independence and mastery for your teen. You won't be telling your teen what to do, but instead supporting and guiding them in their plans to overcome challenges on their own.

Common Parent Concerns

My teen doesn't think they have problems that need solving.

It can be hard for teens to notice which challenges or frustrations in their lives can benefit from problem solving skills. You and your teen can identify potential problem solving opportunities by reviewing the situations they connected to their low mood and recorded on their How I Feel/Mood Tracker worksheets (review Mood Tracking, Depression Skill 1). Fill in the Problem Solving Plan for past situations that made your child feel sad, frustrated, stressed, or another negative emotion. In addition, if you notice a situation that is applicable to these skills in daily life, you can gently point this out to your child (e.g., "You told me you were sad because you didn't know who to sit with at lunch today. Do you think we can use the Problem Solving Plan to help plan for tomorrow?").

My teen can't think of any solutions.

Talk to your teen about what might be getting in the way. They may be feeling overwhelmed and stuck. Offer guidance without being demanding (e.g., "What if you tried [insert potential solution here]?"). Very often, once you give a teen one example, they are able to get creative with solutions of their own. Remind them that they don't need to think of the "perfect" solution because there is no such thing. They can make mistakes and you will help them. Review the practice examples we provide, both to remind your teen of potential options for common concerns as well as the fact that they came up with great solutions for the examples!

All the solutions my teen comes up with are bad choices.

If the solutions are not harmful or unsafe, try not to dismiss them right away. Working through the different choices together will improve your teen's positive problem solving and ability to distinguish between solutions. Encourage your teen to focus on the one good thing and one bad thing step of the plan (step 3). If there is no "good" aspect to a solution or the good thing your teen identifies is actually detrimental, gently point this out. Encourage them to pick a choice with a positive outcome at the "pick one" stage (step 4). If they don't have a choice like that, gently suggest that you go back to the brainstorming solutions stage (step 2). Let them know that it's okay to go back to this step to think of additional options, because the goal is to solve the problem in a safe and positive way.

When I ask my teen to use their problem solving plan, they get upset and sometimes even cry.

Sometimes teens experiencing depression can feel overwhelmed when trying to problem solve. Remind yourself and your teen that feeling upset is okay and that their emotions are giving you both a message that they are having a tough time and need support. Some teens will benefit from using a relaxation skill to lower their stress levels before trying problem solving. For tips, review Relaxation Skills (Depression Skill 3). In addition, negative thinking can make problems seem huge and unsolvable. Review strategies from Thinking Traps (Depression Skill 4) to help encourage more realistic thinking. If you and your teen are still having a hard time using problem solving skills and this is impacting their depression, talk to your primary care provider. They can connect you to a behavioral health specialist who can help.