



action

a Making positive changes

- Goal Setting 3
- Learning How to Solve Problems 13
 - STEP ONE Make a list of specific problems.
 - STEP TWO Review your list and pick a problem to work on.
 - STEP THREE Write down possible solutions to the problem.
 - STEP FOUR Do a pros and cons list for the solutions that seem most promising.
 - STEP FIVE Choose your solution and make a plan to make it happen.
 - STEP SIX Putting your solution into action and checking up on your progress.

b Challenging depressive thinking

- Why is it important to identify and challenge depressive thoughts? 24
- What is depressive thinking during pregnancy and following the birth of your baby? 26
- Thinking Traps 27
- What is Healthy Thinking? 31
 - STEP ONE “Catch” your depressive thoughts and get them down on paper.
 - STEP TWO Identify any “thinking traps” in your recorded thoughts.
 - STEP THREE Challenge the depressive thinking and replace it with more healthy thinking.
 - STEP FOUR Make healthy thinking a habit.



Coping with depression during pregnancy and following the birth:
A Cognitive-Behaviour Therapy-based self-management guide for women

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a Making positive changes

The purpose of this guide is to help you to better understand depression during pregnancy and following the birth of your baby and to help you to learn and practice skills from cognitive behavioural therapy that will make you feel better.

Remember that the different areas of your life – your situation, thoughts, actions, physical responses and mood – affect each other. Because of this, making positive changes in one area will create positive changes in the other areas as well.

One great place to start is by making positive changes in what we do – our actions or behaviours. Making small, planned changes to our behaviours can have a tremendous positive impact on our feelings, thoughts and physical well-being.

This section will help you to learn and practice:

1. Goal setting skills to help you to make improvements in your self-care
2. Problem-solving skills to help you to begin to work on situations that are adding to your depression

Don't worry if the idea of making positive changes feels a bit overwhelming. This is very common for people who are depressed. The key to success in making positive changes is to **START SMALL**. The skills that are taught in this section work in part by helping you to break down big tasks and problems into smaller, manageable pieces. Tackling these small pieces in a step-by-step way is the best way to make progress towards feeling better.

As you have been reading through this guide, you may have had a few ideas about changes that you think would be helpful in your own life. This section will help you to make realistic plans to make positive changes to feel better.

The next few pages of this section will help you to set realistic goals to improve your self-care. Later on in this section, we review the steps to successful problem-solving.

Some of the ideas from this section are adapted from the free Antidepressant Skills Workbook by Dan Bilsker & Randy J. Paterson, Centre for Applied Research in Mental Health and Addiction (CARMHA), Simon Fraser University, 2005.]

Set small goals to make positive changes in your life

module 4



Goal Setting

GETTING STARTED Usually it is a good idea to work on goal setting first. Most women find that setting goals to make small changes in self-care is one of the first and most important steps that they can take to begin feeling better. As you begin to feel better, you will have more energy and be able to think more clearly and creatively about situations in your life that you may want to problem solve.

In the Self-Care section, we reviewed some of the important areas of self-care that tend to be neglected during pregnancy and after the birth of the baby, especially when a woman is also depressed. These included: Nutrition, Exercise, Sleep and Rest, Time for Yourself and Support.

Now that you have a better understanding of some of the important areas of self-care, you can begin to think about which areas may need improvement in your own life and how to begin to make some positive changes in these areas.

During pregnancy and following the birth, the many demands of caring for yourself and your baby can make it especially challenging to make the changes you that you would like to. What can be done?

Start with learning how to set small goals, to make positive changes in your life. In the next few pages, you will find a series of steps that will help you to make plans for positive changes, beginning with your self-care. Once your self-care has improved, you will be more prepared to learn skills to help you solve problems in other areas of your life.

TIP

You may wish to look at your responses to the 5 questions that you answered in each of the NEST-S areas to help you decide where to begin. The NEST-S section also has a lot of ideas for things that you can do to get started on making improvements to your self-care.

Some of the ideas from this section are adapted from the free Antidepressant Skills Workbook by Dan Bilsker & Randy J. Paterson, Centre for Applied Research in Mental Health and Addiction (CARMHA), Simon Fraser University, 2005.]



Choose the area you would like to make a positive change and write down your idea

STEP ONE: Review the NEST-5 program and choose an Area that you would like to work on and an Idea for what you could do to make positive changes in that area.

For every area, you could potentially have a lot of different ideas for positive changes, however, for now, choose just one idea to work on. For example, if you are working on Nutrition, you could try to eat more vegetables or drink more water during the day. For exercise, you could go for more walks, take a bike ride, go to an aerobics class, or use an exercise DVD from the library.

Remember, you are just going to pick one idea to work on for now.

Area	Idea for Positive Change
Exercise	Get out for more walks

Many women report that one idea can actually cover several areas of NESTS. For example, getting out for more walks may also provide time away from the baby (if you can arrange childcare) and could increase social support (if you can make arrangements to walk with a friend).

You can write your area and idea below.

Area	Idea for Positive Change

STEP TWO: Set a SMART goal and make a plan

Now take your idea for positive change and make it into a goal with a specific plan for how to accomplish it. One good way to make sure that the goal you are setting is a good one is to use the “SMART” formula.



S	M	A	R	T
specific	measurable	attainable	relevant	timebound

SMART goals and plans are:

S **SPECIFIC** A good goal is a specific goal. You want to know exactly what you are going to do, when you are going to do it, and where you are going to do it. It is also helpful to ask yourself how you are going to do it, so that you can make sure that you have everything you need to be successful.

M **MEASURABLE** If you have set a specific goal using the tips above, then your goal is probably measurable. You want to be able to answer the question “How will I know when I have achieved my goal?”. Your goal should be measurable so that:

(1) you can tell whether your plan for positive change has been successful (and if not, you can revise it) and (2) you can take credit for accomplishing your goal if your plan worked. During depression it is especially important to be able to recognize and give yourself credit for taking small steps towards feeling better. You may measure your goal in terms of time spent (e.g., 10 minutes once a week), how many (two friends or 3 blocks) or how much (half a glass of orange juice).

A **ATTAINABLE** One of the biggest mistakes that mothers with depression make when they are goal setting is to set their goals too high. Often this is because they set goals based on what they used to be able to do before they became depressed or before they became parents, or what they feel that they should be able to do. When this happens, there is a good chance that the mother will not reach her goal, feel that she has “failed” and become more discouraged and depressed.

A much better idea is to set a goal that is attainable given your mood, energy levels and other responsibilities (e.g., caring for an infant). One way to do this is to ask yourself ‘How much have I done this activity in the last few weeks?’ Then set a small goal, based on your answer that you can attain.



For example, if you would like to start swimming again for exercise, ask yourself how many times you have gone swimming in the past month or so. If the answer is one time, then it is probably not realistic to set a goal of swimming twice a week. Instead, consider setting a goal of one time in the next two weeks. You are much more likely to be able to attain this goal.

You may want to rate your level of confidence in achieving this goal from 0 = not at all confident to 100 = 100% confident that I can achieve this goal. If you are less than 80% confident, consider scaling back your goal to something more attainable.

Remember that you are just getting started with this goal setting process. Starting small and having successes will help you to get moving again and build your motivation to set new goals.

After you have completed your initial goal, you can set new ones that are slightly more challenging or are the next step towards attaining a larger goal.

R **RELEVANT** The goal that you set for yourself should be relevant to your well-being. In other words, your goal should be part of a series of steps that will help you to move towards feeling better. It can be useful to ask yourself why you are choosing to set this goal so that you can make sure that what you are picking is important to you and should help you to feel better. Choosing a goal based on the NEST-S program makes good sense because each of these areas is shown to be important to mental health.

T **TIMEBOUND** This means knowing when you are going to carry out your goal. This may be scheduling the time and day of the week you plan to do your activity (e.g., walk on Thursday morning) or setting a deadline to complete a goal (e.g., walk once this week).

TIP

Write it down! Most people find it very helpful to write out their plan for positive change (for example, their SMART goal). Consider writing out your plan using the worksheet below. You may also want to use a reminder system like writing into your schedule, putting up a reminder note for yourself or programming it into your electronic device.



Here is an example of a SMART Goal related to exercise.

Area	Idea for Positive Change	SMART GOAL/PLAN
Exercise	Get out for more walks	Walk around my neighborhood with baby in a stroller for 20 minutes two times a week on Monday and Wednesday mornings.

Sometimes, you may need to break down a goal into even smaller steps so that you have the information or supplies that you need to get started. For example, if you would like to start walking more, your first goal might be to find comfortable shoes and a suitable stroller or baby carrier.

Once you have taken these first steps, it will then be easier to set a SMART goal to carry out the activity. For example,

Area	Idea for Positive Change	SMART Goal/Plan
Exercise	Get out for more walks	Walk around my neighborhood with baby in a stroller for 20 minutes 2 times/week on Monday and Wednesday • To do this, I need to: - Get raincover for stroller now that it is winter - Call the store where I purchased the stroller - Call on Friday morning when baby is napping to see if they have any available - Ask my sister to pick it up and bring it over when she comes for dinner next Monday

Have a clear plan for how you are going to accomplish your goal

module 4



Here are some other examples of SMART goals based on the NEST-S program.

Area	Idea for positive change	SMART GOAL/PLAN
Taking time for yourself	Having alone time	After I put the baby down for her afternoon nap each day, make myself a cup of tea, read for 10 minutes in my living room before starting on any chores or go for a nap.
Support	Spend more time with other mothers	Email the two mothers that I really liked from my prenatal class to ask if they would like to get together. I can send the emails off tonight after my partner comes home from work.
Sleep and rest	Get to bed earlier	After I have watched my nightly tv program, turn off the tv right away, rather than flipping through channels. Get ready for bed and then read quietly in the living room until I feel sleepy, then get up and go to bed.
Nutrition	Eat more fruits	Buy some bananas when I go to the market on Sunday. Put them beside the kettle so that I will remember to eat one each morning when I have a cup of tea.

Ask a support person if you need help

module 4



Set your SMART goal/plan here:

Area	Idea for Positive Change	SMART Goal/ Plan	Done?

Do a Quick Check:

Is my goal/plan:

- Specific?
- Measurable?
- Attainable?
- Relevant?
- Timebound?

If not, what can I do to make my goal/plan more SMART?

Make sure that you have a clear plan for how you are going to accomplish your goal. It can also be useful to think about whether there are any obstacles that you can foresee that might get in the way of your plan. If you can see any likely obstacles, consider how you might be able to work around these. Ask a support person if you need help.



STEP THREE: Follow through with your plan.

Carry out your plan to reach your goal. As you complete each goal, check it off on your worksheet. Praise yourself for taking this important step. Each goal that you set and reach improves your wellbeing, even if it may not feel that way at first. Each small step leads you closer to feeling better.

STEP FOUR: Review your progress.

An important part of making positive changes is to review how things are going with your goal after you have been using your plan for a little while – depending on your plan, one to two weeks later is often a good time for a review.

Were you able to accomplish your goal?

If you were, congratulations! This is a great first step towards using these effective CBT-based skills to help you to make positive changes and work towards feeling better.

If you weren't able to accomplish your goal, don't worry. This is not unusual when people are practicing goal setting for the first time. This is the time to review what happened. Did you cover all the parts of SMART? Was the goal small enough? Maybe you need to break down this goal into even smaller pieces. Was your plan specific enough? Perhaps you need to include support from someone who can help you to reach your goal. Or maybe you need to make sure it is something you really want to do. Once you have figured out what would be SMART, you can rewrite your goal.

Making one play date, taking one nap, or eating a healthy breakfast are all SMART goals. Remember, you are dealing not just with depression but the challenges of developing healthy new routines now that you are a mother. These small steps are the beginning of your return to a sense of health and well-being. Allow yourself to experience success as you transition into your new life by setting small but important goals.

What would you like to do next?



STEP FIVE: Reset your goals.

Based on what you have learned from your first plan, what would you like to do next?

- Do you want to reset the same goal as before? In many cases, new moms may need to make some changes to their plan to achieve their goal. If you have already been successful with your plan for change, setting the same goal again can help you to make a positive change a new habit in your life.
- Are you ready to increase your goal a little bit? If you were successful with your first plan, maybe you want to increase your goal a little bit. For example, if you have been doing well with 10 minute walks, maybe you will plan to have a 15 minute walk this week. Be careful not to set your goal too high. Remember that you want to set realistic goals that you will be able to accomplish so that you can build up your motivation and make progress towards positive change.
- Are you ready to set a goal for another area of self-care? If you have been making good progress in Exercise, maybe now is the time to consider making positive changes in another area, such as Nutrition, Sleep and Rest, Time for Yourself or Support.

Write your new SMART goal below:

Area	Idea for Positive Change	SMART Goal/Plan



Now that you have learned these effective goal-setting steps, carry on using them to continue to make positive changes to your self-care. You can use these goal-setting steps in other areas of your life as well. These can include other rewarding activities besides self-care, such as, (re)connecting with family and friends, or taking care of household or other tasks. These other goals will help you continue to build on the positive changes that you have begun with building your NEST-S.

Once you begin setting and achieving goals related to self-care, you will probably find that other areas of your life are also beginning to improve.

You may be sleeping better, have more energy and be able to concentrate for longer periods of time. You might also be starting to feel more positive about continuing to make positive changes and be ready to learn how to solve some of the problems that you have in your life.

The next few pages will teach you important skills that you can apply to problem situations in your life.

Goal Setting Worksheet

Area	Idea for Positive Change	SMART Goal/Plan	Done

Some of the ideas from this section are adapted from: (1) The free Antidepressant Skills Workbook by Dan Bilsker & Randy J. Paterson, Centre for Applied Research in Mental Health and Addiction (CARMHA), Simon Fraser University, 2005. (2) BCP Here to Help: Problem Solving & Healthy Thinking Wellness Modules. BC Partners for Mental Health Addictions Information, Vancouver BC, 2004-2005. Available on-line at <http://www.heretohelp.bc.ca/skills/managing-well-being>.

New motherhood brings with it a variety of new problems and challenges

module 4



Learning to solve your problems

When a woman is depressed during pregnancy or following the birth of her baby, she may feel like she is surrounded by a lot of problems. Sometimes women become depressed in part because problems have piled up and they do not know how to solve them. At other times, depression begins for other reasons, but once a woman is depressed, the symptoms of depression such as low motivation and energy, concentration and decision-making problems can make it very difficult to solve problems, so that more and more problems pile up.

Added to this is the fact that new motherhood brings with it a variety of new problems and challenges, which often require some time and creativity to work through. The end result is that a woman with depression in pregnancy and following the birth of her baby may feel that she has a lot on her plate that she needs to problem-solve, but feel confused and pessimistic about her chances of taking positive steps to resolve these problem situations.

The purpose of the next few pages is to teach you some effective problem-solving skills that you can apply to problem situations in your own life. The steps of problem-solving are relatively straightforward, but most of us aren't taught how to do this.

TIP

It is important to check whether there is a problem that needs to be solved. Sometimes when people are depressed they see their life situations in such negative terms that they may think that there is a problem when really it is just their way of looking at the situation.

For example, a woman who is depressed may think that her marriage is falling apart if her depression causes her to only focus on the times that she and her husband disagree, without considering the times that they have a good time together. If this is the case, the skills taught in the Challenging Depressive Thinking section may be helpful.



STEP ONE: Make a list of specific problems.

An excellent place to start is by making a list of problems that you need to work on. Here are some tips for making your list.

Pay attention to your feelings. Negative feelings such as anger, frustration, anxiety or sadness can help you to identify problem situations that may need your attention. For example, if you are angry whenever you talk to your partner, this may be a sign that there may be a problem between the two of you that needs to be addressed.

Be specific about the problem. It is difficult to solve a problem effectively unless you are very clear about what is going on. “I don’t have enough money” is not very specific. It would be more helpful to define the problem in more specific terms, for example, “I don’t have enough money to cover my rent this month”.

Try to break large problems down into smaller ones. For example, “The house is a mess” could be broken down further into more specific problems like:

- The laundry needs to be done.
- There are so many papers on the kitchen counter that I don’t have enough room to cook.
- The living room needs to be vacuumed.

Being very specific about the problem and breaking large problems down into smaller ones makes it much easier for you to come up with strategies that might help you to solve your problem.

Start small. By tackling a smaller problem first, you will more likely be successful



STEP TWO: Review your list and pick a problem to work on.

TIP

Don't be alarmed if your list seems long. That is true for many people. The important thing is to pick one problem that you would like to tackle and to get started. As you become more familiar with these problem-solving steps, you will be able to take on additional problems and solve them effectively. Solving problems as they come up will also make a big difference.

Here is an example of a problem list for a new mother.

- "My partner and I are fighting all the time"
- "The dog needs another walk today"
- "Since the baby was born I haven't been able to take very much time for myself, even just to take a bath".
- "We are having money problems because I am not earning any money right now."

You will notice that some problems are bigger than others. Picking a problem to solve is similar in many ways to setting goals. As with making any positive change, you want to **START SMALL** by picking a smaller, more short-term problem to solve. This is not the time to take on a problem situation that you have been struggling with for years. By tackling a smaller problem first, you will be more likely to use all of the problem-solving steps and more likely to be successful. This can help motivate you to take on other problems and apply these same effective skills.

Some examples of typical smaller problems that a new mother might add to her list include:

- The laundry needs to be done
- I haven't seen my friends since the baby was first born.
- We need to get groceries
- I need to return some phone calls



It is also a good idea to have a specific goal that you would like to reach that would let you know that your problem has been solved. For example, “The papers are filed in my filing cabinet and my counter is clear” or “I am able to pay my rent each month”. You can use the SMART formula to help you to set your goal.

For example, if the problem is that the laundry is piling up week after week, a SMART goal might be “The laundry needs to be washed, folded and put away by Saturday each week”.

STEP THREE: Write down possible solutions to the problem.

The next step is to brainstorm possible solutions to your problem that will help you to meet your goal. Your task is to come up with as many different kinds of solutions as you can. Do not judge yet whether your solutions are good, bad or silly. You are more likely to think of new solutions if you also include some wild ones. Consider asking others for help. Friends, family, or health professionals may be able to help you to think of some possible solutions that you haven’t thought of yet.

Here’s an example of brainstorming:

The Problem	My Goal	Possible Actions
There are several loads of laundry that need to be done and we are running out of clean clothes for the baby.	The laundry is washed, folded and put away by Saturday each week.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skip my nap when the baby naps so that I can do some laundry. • Get my partner to do the laundry. • Google for information on a super robot that does laundry • Change my standards: Do the baby’s laundry and anything else I urgently need and leave the rest for later • Keep buying new clothes and give away dirty laundry. • Hire some help so that I have time to do the laundry.



Write down some possible things that you can do to solve your problem.

The Problem	My Goal	Possible Actions



STEP FOUR: Do a pros and cons list for the solutions that seem most promising.

The next step is to consider the solutions that you have brainstormed and to think about the pros and cons of each solution. For pregnant and new moms, it is important to remember to consider things like how much time and effort are involved in a particular solution.

I could...	Pros	Cons
1. Skip my nap when the baby naps so that I can do some laundry.	The laundry gets done.	I'm already exhausted and it will be harder to cope if I don't nap.
2. Get my partner to do the laundry.	The laundry gets done. My partner is sharing some of the daily tasks.	My partner might not want to do the laundry because I usually do it. I am a bit nervous about asking.
3. Change my standards: Do the baby's laundry and what else I need and leave the rest for later.	The baby will have clean clothes.	I will need to do more laundry soon because I will run out of clean clothes.
4. Hire some help so that I have time to do the laundry.	Other household chores get done, the laundry gets done.	Don't have the money right now.



My pros and cons list:

I could...	Pros	Cons
1.		
2.		
3.		



STEP FIVE: Choose your solution and make a plan to make it happen.

Now it's time to review your pros and cons list and choose the solution that seems to have the most pros and the fewest cons. Remember that no solution will be perfect. Every solution will have some drawbacks. Your aim is to pick a solution that you think might help to improve the problem situation, even if it does not take care of everything. Even if you are not sure about the best solution, it is important to pick one and move forward.

Once you have chosen your solution, you need to plan out how to carry out this solution. One good idea is to use the SMART formula (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, timebound) to help you to make your plan.

Example: Tonight after the baby is asleep, I will discuss the laundry problem with my partner. I will tell him about my ideas based on the problem-solving that I have done. I will ask him to do a couple of loads of our laundry each week before the weekend comes. I will tell him about my idea that we can do the folding and putting away on Friday night while we are watching TV together so that we can have clean clothes folded and put away by Saturday.

My solution is:

The steps for carrying out my solution are:

Some problems require us to go through the problem solving steps a few times before we find the solution



STEP SIX: Putting your solution into action & checking up on your progress

Problem solving only works if you put your plan into action! Follow the steps that you have written out as part of your plan. Then, after a little while, check up on your progress.

Were you able to carry out your plan and solve (or at least improve) your problem?

If you were, congratulations! This is a great first step towards using these effective CBT-based skills to help you to make positive changes and work towards feeling better.

If you weren't able to fully resolve your problem, don't worry. This is not unusual, especially when people are practicing problem solving for the first time or when you are dealing with a more difficult problem. Some problems require us to go through the problem solving steps a few times before we find the solution or combination of solutions that takes care of the problem. This is the time to review what happened.

Here are a few questions that you can ask yourself to help you to decide what to do next:

- Did I define my problem correctly? Did I break it into small enough pieces? Sometimes after working on a solution for a while, we can see that there is a different way of defining the problem that is more specific or helpful.
- Do I need to give my solution more time to work? Sometimes we can be on the right track, but our solution takes a bit more time to work than expected.
- Was my goal unrealistic?
- Did I carry out the solution properly?
- Is there a better solution?

Usually, one or more of these questions will give you some ideas about where to go next. If you are stuck, consider asking a friend, family member or health professional for help.



Finally, even if your problem is not fully resolved, remember to give yourself credit for taking steps to work on improving the situation. By learning and applying these problem-solving skills, you are making progress towards taking charge of your situation and improving your mental health.

The next section of this guide, Challenging Depressive Thinking will teach you how to identify and challenge negative thinking patterns that can keep you feeling trapped in depression.



b Challenging depressive thinking

This section is designed to help you to learn how to:

1. identify and challenge common types of depressive thoughts during pregnancy and following the birth and
2. replace these depressive thoughts with more accurate and helpful thinking patterns.

These healthy thinking skills will help you to better manage your symptoms of depression. As depressing thoughts and anxious thoughts often occur together, the skills covered in this section may also be helpful for managing anxious thoughts.

Some of the ideas from this section are adapted from: (1) The free Antidepressant Skills Workbook by Dan Bilsker & Randy J. Paterson, Centre for Applied Research in Mental Health and Addiction (CARMHA), Simon Fraser University, 2005. (2) BCP Here to Help: Problem Solving & Healthy Thinking Wellness Modules. BC Partners for Mental Health Addictions Information, Vancouver BC, 2004-2005. Available on-line at <http://www.heretohelp.bc.ca/skills/managing-well-being>. (3) Anxiety Disorders Tool Kit. BC Partners for Mental Health Addictions Information, Vancouver BC, 2003. Available on-line at <http://www.heretohelp.bc.ca/publications/toolkits>

Changing your thinking patterns can make a huge difference

module 4



Why is it important to identify and challenge depressive thoughts?

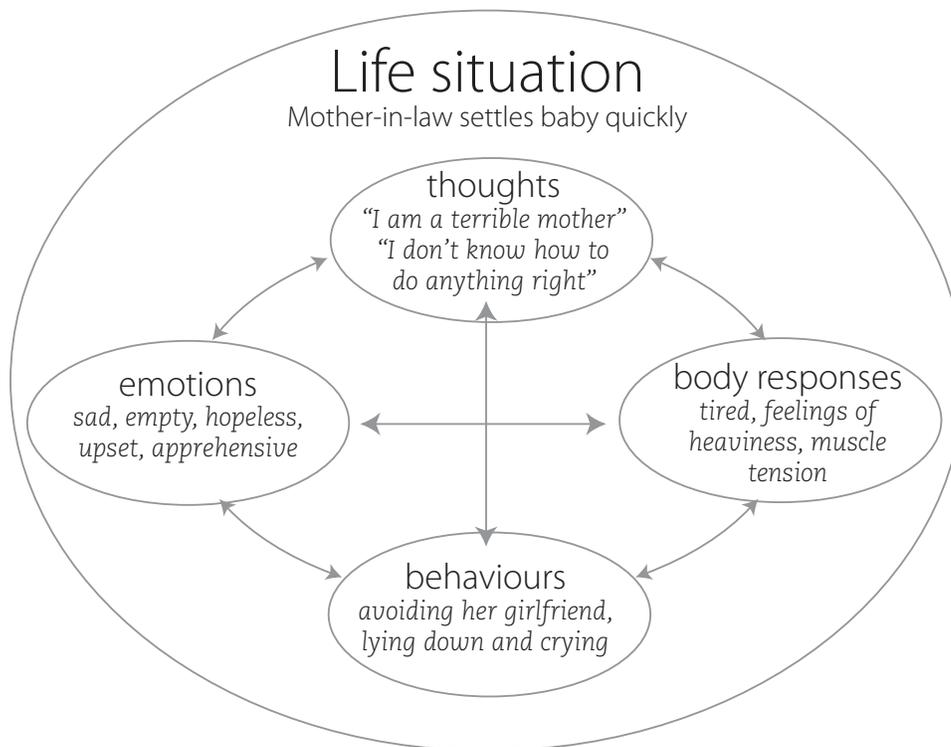
The way that you think about your life situation and your experiences influences how you feel and what you do.

For example, consider Sarah's story.

Sarah had her first baby, a daughter named Mia, three months ago. Sarah's mother-in-law is visiting from overseas. Sarah has just finished breastfeeding Mia and her mother-in-law offers to burp the baby and settle her down for a nap while Sarah has a bite to eat. Sarah is expecting a girlfriend to call before she comes over so they can go for a walk together.

As Sarah is handing over the baby, she warns her mother-in-law that Mia usually takes 30 minutes or so to settle down after feeding. Sarah's mother-in-law takes Mia and she settles down within five minutes. Sarah automatically thinks "Why can't I settle her down that fast? I should know how to do that – she's my baby. I can't satisfy my baby properly. I'm a terrible mother. I don't know how to do anything right".

These thoughts make her feel embarrassed and sad. She notices that she is feeling tense and she suddenly feels very tired. She isn't hungry anymore. She tells her mother-in-law that she has a headache and asks her to pass along the message that she is not feeling well and won't be able to go for a walk today. Sarah goes to her bedroom to lie down and cry.



As you can see, the way that Sarah thought about this situation (her “self-talk”) had a huge impact on how she felt emotionally and physically and on how she coped with her situation.

It is important to remember that everyone has negative thoughts from time to time. People are most likely to think negatively during stressful times (such as during a pregnancy or following the birth of a child), or when they are depressed, anxious, stressed, or not taking care of themselves properly. At these times, negative thoughts can become more frequent and more difficult to let go of. Our thoughts can become unfair and unrealistic, they are not based on the facts even though it feels like they are true.

If we believe these thoughts, we are more likely to feel depressed and to cope in ways that are not helpful and may actually make us feel worse. For example, we may stop taking care of ourselves properly, avoid seeing other people or use unhelpful ways of coping like using drugs or alcohol to change how we feel. That is why it is so important to recognize depressive thinking and to practice more healthy thinking. Changing your thinking patterns can make a huge difference in how you feel and make it easier for you to use ways of coping that are helpful.



What is depressive thinking during pregnancy or following the birth of your baby?

Depressive thinking is a pattern of negative thoughts that triggers your depressed mood or keeps it going. Depressive thoughts are often distorted, meaning that they are not accurate or helpful.

When people are depressed, they often think in very negative ways about themselves, their situation and their futures.

NEGATIVE THOUGHTS ABOUT THE SELF. Many women who are depressed during pregnancy or following the birth of the baby will be very critical of themselves and say unfair and negative things to themselves about their ability to care for the baby, their appearance, and what they are able to accomplish in a day or other things.

NEGATIVE THOUGHTS ABOUT THE SITUATION. Women who are depressed during pregnancy or following the birth of the baby may question their relationship with their partner, think their baby prefers others to themselves, that others are critical of their ability to care for the baby, or that there is nothing they can do to improve some of the difficulties they are experiencing, even if this is not true. They will often have a difficult time seeing any positive aspects to their situation or experience.

NEGATIVE THOUGHTS ABOUT THE FUTURE. Women who are depressed during pregnancy and following the birth often feel unhappy with their current situation and don't feel like things are going to get better. For example, women who are depressed following the birth of a child will often feel overwhelmed by the demands of caring for an infant, may despair that their relationship will survive the new stressors, or that they will ever feel 'like themselves' again.



Are you experiencing thoughts about harming yourself or someone else?

Sometime when women are feeling very depressed and hopeless, they have thoughts about harming themselves or others. They think that their partner or child would be better off without them.

If this is happening to you, it is very important that you tell someone you trust about these thoughts and make an urgent appointment to see your family physician to discuss these thoughts.

If you are worried that you may be unsafe, please call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room.

Thinking Traps

Some types of depressive thinking are so common that they have been recognized and given specific names. In this guide, we call them “thinking traps”. These depressive thinking styles are “traps” because they are not accurate or useful and they keep a person “trapped” in depression.

It is not unusual for people to find that they are more likely to ‘fall into’ some thinking traps than other ones. One step that you can take to start feeling better is to identify which of these thinking traps you tend to fall into. This can help you to recognize more quickly when you are having depressive thoughts. Also, once you know which trap you’re in, you can plan a way out into healthy thinking.

In the table below you will find a list of some of the most common thinking traps for women who are depressed during pregnancy or following the birth. You may want to read through the list and check off all of those that apply to you.



THINKING TRAP	DEFINITION	FOR EXAMPLE...
<p>Negative Mental Filter</p>	<p>In this thinking trap, you focus on the negative parts of a situation, and ignore the positive parts of a situation. You may only pay attention to the things that go wrong, or that you didn't get done, and don't give yourself credit for your accomplishments.</p>	<p>You go to a mother-baby group for the first time. During the hour you are there, you have short conversations with a number of the other mothers, but there is one mother who talks to a lot of people but not to you. You think "There must be something wrong with me because people weren't interested in meeting me". You forget that a number of the other mothers did make time to chat with you.</p>
<p>Overgeneralization</p>	<p>In this kind of thinking trap, you make up a "rule" about how things are or will be based upon one experience or event.</p> <p>Hint: When people are overgeneralizing, they often use words like always, never, all, every, none, nobody, and everybody. For example, "The baby never falls asleep for my partner".</p>	<p>If one friend spends less time with you after the baby comes, you think "Now none of my friends want to hang out with me".</p>
<p>All or Nothing Thinking (also known as "black and white thinking")</p>	<p>Seeing things or people as either right or wrong, good or bad, perfect or terrible. Everything is black or white, there are no shades of grey. People who think in all or nothing terms see a small mistake as a total failure.</p>	<p>One morning when the baby naps for longer than usual, you manage to tidy up the living room and sweep the kitchen floor. But even after doing all this, you say to yourself "The house is a complete mess!"</p>



THINKING TRAP	DEFINITION	FOR EXAMPLE...
Catastrophizing (also known as “blowing things out of proportion” or “making a mountain out of a molehill”)	Telling yourself that a minor negative event is/would be a complete disaster. Often people who are catastrophizing also fear that they would be unable to cope with the situation that they are imagining.	Your partner does not make eye contact with you during dinner and you think “He doesn’t love me anymore and he is going to leave me. I’ll be a single mother and I can’t deal with that”.
“Should” statements	Telling yourself how you “should” or “must” act or feel.	I should always be happy, cheerful and patient, even when my child is very fussy.
Labeling	Saying something very negative (and often unfair) about yourself or other people.	I am a lazy and pathetic because I haven’t exercised since the baby was born.
Mind-reading	You think you know what others are thinking, without any evidence.	If your baby cries while you are waiting in a line-up you say to yourself “Other shoppers must think I’m a horrible mother”.
Jumping to Conclusions	Making predictions about what is going to happen, with little or no evidence. People who are depressed predict that a lot of negative things are going to happen, even when the evidence suggests that this is not very likely at all.	“I have been trying for a week and I am not going to be able to potty train my daughter”.
Perfectionism	Thinking that things (or people) are only right or worthwhile if they are perfect.	You are concerned that your baby has a skin rash and won’t be perceived as lovable or cared for by others.



THINKING TRAP	DEFINITION	FOR EXAMPLE...
Personalization and Self-Blame	You feel overly responsible for other people's behaviours and negative events, and do not consider other factors or people who may have influenced the situation.	Your partner's work hours are reduced and you blame yourself because you have been asking him to take on some of the night feedings.
Emotional reasoning	Thinking that bad feelings say something about how a situation actually is. You believe that your thoughts must be true or accurate because you "feel" strongly that they are, even if there is little or no evidence to support them.	"I feel sad, so my relationship must be in trouble" or "I feel scared, so something bad is going to happen".

TIP

Don't worry if you find that you are falling into more than one thinking trap. This is very common. Notice how your thinking traps make you feel. Chances are that being in a thinking trap keeps you feeling depressed or sad and make it harder for you to make positive changes.

When a woman is depressed during pregnancy or after the birth, it is often very difficult for her to recognize that her thoughts may not be true or helpful or that she has fallen into a thinking trap. When this happens, these depressive thoughts can keep her "stuck" in a depressed mood. Fortunately, there are ways that you can recognize and change these thinking patterns so that you can begin to feel better. The goal is to help you to practice more **healthy thinking**.

Healthy thinking means looking at life and the world in a balanced way

module 4



What is healthy thinking?

No one can look at things positively all the time. Sometimes bad things happen, like your baby getting sick, having an argument with a family member, or getting into a car accident. It's normal and healthy to feel upset and have negative thoughts when these things happen.

Healthy thinking means looking at the positive, the negative, and the neutral parts of a situation, and then making a conclusion about the situation. In other words, healthy thinking means looking at life and the world in a balanced way—and staying out of thinking traps!

How can I change my depressive thinking and think in healthier ways?

Even if you are having a lot of depressive thoughts, the good news is that with some practice, you can learn to identify your negative thinking habits and to replace these negative thoughts with healthy thoughts that are more accurate and helpful. In the next few pages, you will find a 4 step plan that will help you to develop more healthy thinking patterns.

What doesn't work

One thing that many people try when they recognize that they are having negative thoughts is to tell themselves “stop thinking that way” or “don't think such stupid things”. This rarely works. Our depressive thoughts are usually easier to let go of when we have considered the situation logically (looked at the evidence for and against the thought) and then come up with a more realistic or helpful thought to replace the depressive one.

We also know from research studies that when we try and push away upsetting thoughts, they are more likely to keep popping back into our minds. This way of coping with depressive thoughts may make you feel worse in the long run. Instead, try the simple steps on the following pages.



STEP ONE: “Catch” your depressive thoughts and get them down on paper.

The first step towards practicing healthier thinking involves catching and recording your depressive thoughts on paper. When you notice that your mood has dropped, take a moment to pay attention to the thoughts that have been going through your head. Write down the thoughts that were going through your head as well as the situation that you were reacting to on the “Thought Challenging Worksheet” on page 6 in module 6. This worksheet will help you to record (and challenge) your depressive thinking.

Here are some tips for using the Thought Challenging Worksheet

Under “Situation”, write down what happened. Only include the “facts” of the situation that everyone would agree on. Try to separate out your thoughts from the actual situation.

Under “Thoughts”, write down what you have been telling yourself – your “self-talk”.



STEP TWO: Identify Any “Thinking Traps” in Your Recorded Thoughts.

Take a look at the definitions and examples of “thinking traps” and see whether your thinking matches any of these. It is common to fall into more than one thinking trap. Don’t spend too much time on this, just make your “best guess” and then move on to the next step.

For example, these are the best guesses that Sarah might write down:

Thought	Thinking Trap
I’m a terrible mother.	Labelling
I should know how to do that – she’s my baby	“Should statements”
I can’t satisfy my baby properly. I don’t know how to do anything right.	Overgeneralizing

As you can see, Sarah fell into the thinking traps of “labeling”, “should statements” and overgeneralizing. These thinking traps made her feel down and physically unwell which caused her to cancel her plans with her friend and go lie down.

STEP THREE: Challenge the Depressive Thinking and Replace it with More Healthy Thinking.

When you are really depressed, it can be difficult to come up with a healthy thought to replace your depressive thought

There are several helpful questions that you can ask yourself to help you to come up with healthy thoughts.*

* These are adapted from the following excellent sources:

Greenberger, D. & Padesky, C.A. (1995). *Mind Over Mood: Change How You Feel by Changing the Way You Think*. New York: Guilford.

Burns, D. D. (1999). *Feeling Good: The New Mood Therapy*. New York: Plume.

Burns, D. D. (1999). *The Feeling Good Handbook*. New York: Plume.

Bilsker, D. & Paterson, R. (2005). *Antidepressant Skills Workbook*. Centre for Applied Research in Mental Health & Addiction, Simon Fraser University. www.carmha.ca/publications



Not every question will apply to every negative thought – but usually one or two of these will give you some ideas for coming up with more healthy thinking. Try a quick skim of the list to see which ones might apply to your situation.

- 1.** Ask yourself: **If someone I really care about was in this situation and had this thought, what would I tell them?**
- 2.** Ask yourself: **If someone I really care about knew I was thinking this thought, what would they say to me?** What would this person say to you to point out your thoughts are not entirely accurate?
- 3.** Ask yourself: **What’s a less extreme way (more fair way) of looking at the situation? Are there shades of gray in this situation that I am ignoring?**
- 4.** Ask yourself: **Is this thought helpful right now? Is there another way of thinking about the situation that would have better results?**
- 5.** Ask yourself: **When I have felt this way in the past, what did I think about or do that helped me feel better?**
- 6.** Ask yourself: **Five years from now, if I look back at this situation, will I look at it any differently?**
- 7.** Ask yourself: **Are there any strengths or positives in me or the situation that I am ignoring?**
- 8.** Ask yourself: **Am I blaming myself for something over which I do not have complete control?**
- 9.** Ask yourself: **Have I confused a thought or feeling with a fact?** It is important to distinguish between thoughts, feelings and facts. For example, just because we feel depressed or have negative thoughts in a particular situation does not mean that the situation is a bad or dangerous one. It is important to remind ourselves of the “facts” of the situation – what we have evidence for.

TIP

If you recognized some of the thinking traps in step one, you can help to challenge them by using the tips on page 38.



Think about your answers to these thought challenging questions, then write them down and use them to help you to come up with a more accurate and helpful thought.

Here is an example of a completed Thought Challenging Worksheet.

Situation	Depressive thoughts	Thinking trap or questions to challenge this thought	Healthier thoughts
After I told her that Mia takes at least 30 minutes to settle down, my mother-in-law gets her to settle in about 5 minutes.	“Why can’t I settle her down that fast? I should know how to do that –she’s my baby.”	“Should” statement. I need to ask myself if there is a more helpful and encouraging way of looking at this situation.	Mia will take different amounts of time to settle on different days. Sometimes she settles very quickly for me.
	“I can’t satisfy my baby properly.”	Overgeneralizing. I need to ask myself: Does this one situation really tell me that much about myself or what is going to happen in the future? Can I think of other times when this “rule” has not been true?	It isn’t fair or helpful to call myself a terrible mother or say that I can’t satisfy her. Actually, it is a good thing that she will settle for other people, as that will make it easier for me to get some time to myself. I need to stop being so hard on myself.
	“I’m a terrible mother”	Labelling. I need to ask myself: What impact does calling myself names have on my mood, stress level and motivation?	I have learned a lot of things since my baby was born and I do a lot to care for her which takes effort and love.



Now try this out for yourself. Here is a blank **Thought Challenging Worksheet** for you to use. There are also other blank sheets that you can copy in module 6.

Situation	Depressive thoughts	Thinking trap or questions to challenge this thought	Healthier thoughts

The best thing to do to build your healthy thinking skills is to PRACTICE

module 4



STEP FOUR: Make healthy thinking a habit.

Learning to recognize and challenge depressive thoughts and replace them with healthier thoughts is an important skill. Like learning any new skill, it takes some time and practice before you will be comfortable and confident in your healthy thinking patterns.

The best thing to do to build your healthy thinking skills is to PRACTICE. Every time you catch yourself with a depressive thought and make the effort to replace that thought with a healthier thought, you are making progress towards feeling better/ reducing your depression.

TIP

One technique that many people find to be helpful is to make themselves “coping cards” to remind them to challenge their depressive thoughts, especially the ones that tend to come up over and over again. You may want to use a recipe card or other small piece of paper to make your own coping card.

On one side of the coping card write the depressive thought. On the other side, write the healthy thought that you want to use to replace that depressive thought. You can carry your coping cards around with you in your pocket or bag and pull them out when you find yourself having that depressive thought to remind yourself of healthy thinking.

With practice, you will find that it becomes easier and easier to recognize and “let go” of depressive thinking when it happens. Eventually, you may even find yourself thinking “That’s just my depression talking, I don’t need to pay attention to that” or you might find that your mind quickly replaces that negative thought with a more accurate and helpful thought. When this happens, you know that you are well on your way to making healthy thinking a habit.



TIPS FOR CHALLENGING THINKING TRAPS

If you know what your thinking traps are, the questions on this sheet can help you find a way out of your traps.

THINKING TRAP	QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF TO HELP CHALLENGE THIS THINKING TRAP
Negative Mental Filter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What positive aspects can I see in this situation? • What strengths do I have to deal with this situation?
Overgeneralization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does this one situation really tell me that much about myself or what is going to happen in the future? • Can I think of other times when this “rule” has not been true? • What evidence do I have that this situation is going to happen over again? • What other outcomes are possible? • Would other people agree that this situation is likely to happen over again?
All or Nothing Thinking (also known as “black and white thinking”)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is there a less extreme way of looking at this situation? • Are there “shades of grey” in this situation that I am ignoring?
Catastrophizing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Am I blowing this event/situation up to be worse than it actually is and imagining things that have not happened yet? • What is truly happening & how can I make a plan to cope with that? • Have I coped with difficult life circumstances before? What does this tell me about my ability to manage stressful times?



THINKING TRAP	QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF TO HELP CHALLENGE THIS THINKING TRAP
“Should” Statements & Labeling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would I say the same thing about others who did this or who found themselves in this situation? • Is this way of talking to myself/thinking about the situation helpful to me? Is there another way that might be more helpful to me?
Mind-reading	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What evidence do I have that this is what this person is thinking?
Jumping to Conclusions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What evidence do I have to suggest that this outcome is likely? • Do I have any evidence that suggests that this might not happen, or that another outcome is more likely? How many times have I had this thought before? How many times has this bad event actually happened? What does this tell me about the chances that it will happen this time?
Perfectionism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would others judge me as harshly as I am judging myself for not doing this perfectly? • What is the worst that could happen if something wasn't perfect? • Have I given myself credit for my accomplishments even if it is not perfect?
Personalization and Blame	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there other factors or people that have an influence on this situation that I am ignoring? • Do I have all the information needed to know who or what contributed to the situation?
Emotional Reasoning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is this a fact or a feeling? • Is there any evidence that my judgment may not be entirely accurate? • Do I need to calm myself down before thinking about this?