

Self-Care Work Sheet #6: Handle Problems Step-by-Step

How can you deal with problems? Even when you're depressed, your life continues. You can put off some problems and decisions, but others you can't. It's hard to deal with problems and make decisions when you feel sad, have little energy, and your thinking is negative.

Having a system to follow will help. Use the steps below as a way to address a problem or decision you have.

PART I: MAKE A PROBLEM LIST

1. Write down all the problems or decisions you face right now.
2. Number the problems or decisions (1, 2, 3, etc.) in order of priority, based on what you must take care of now. Now go back and mark "E" for those that are fairly easy and "D" for the more difficult.

EXAMPLE

Here's how one woman with depression listed the problems and decisions she faced, and ranked them by priority. She then marked each as fairly easy ("E") or as more difficult ("D").

| PROBLEM LIST EXAMPLE | PRIORITY | DIFFICULTY |
|--|----------|------------|
| Find child care to give me some time without kids to see one of my good friends. | 3 | E |
| Find a new job. | 5 | D |
| Get the laundry done. | 4 | E |
| Talk to my husband about how bad I have been feeling. | 1 | D |
| Pay the overdue bills | 1 | E |

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YOUR TURN

Now list your own problems and rank them by difficulty and priority like the example above. Which are most important? Which are most difficult?

Sometimes you feel worse when you write down your problems. Seeing all of your problems at once can be overwhelming. Writing them down and then choosing which ones are most important and easiest to tackle is a very big step toward feeling better.

Tip: Do this exercise with someone you trust and who supports you.

MY PLAN

PRIORITY

DIFFICULTY

PART II: TAKE ACTION ON ONE PROBLEM

After listing problems and decisions, the next step is to select one problem or decision, and come up with a plan of action.

1. Pick one problem. Select an easy problem before taking on a harder but higher priority one. As you practice, those difficult problems will get easier.
2. Brainstorm as many solutions as you can for that one problem. Ask someone to help you come up with options.
3. Choose a solution, and turn it into a goal.
4. Pick one small, first step that will help you meet your goal.
5. Plan when you will take that step. What might get in the way? What will you do if something gets in the way?
6. Do it. Even if you don't feel like it. Congratulate yourself for following through.
7. Assess the results. How did you do? Watch out for negative thoughts. Adjust your goals or tactics, and try again. Remember, nothing is as easy to do when you feel depressed compared to when you feel OK.

EXAMPLE

Here's an example of how a woman handled one problem on her list:

The problem: A 35-year-old woman with major depression has trouble facing the usual, many demands placed on her by her kids and husband. She has trouble getting up in the morning to get the kids ready for school. Fixing breakfast, dinner, and cleaning feel as if they take more energy than she has. To her, it seems that her family is making bigger messes since she has been depressed.

Options: Not doing anything will leave her trapped in a downward spiral. When she gets angry at her husband and kids, they just get angry back. She has to have help.

Solution/goal: Ask for help from her children and husband.

First step: Explain how desperate she feels. Ask husband to help by starting work later and getting their kids ready for school. Even two or three mornings a week would help.

Results: Husband agrees to help two mornings a week.

What next? Ask husband to help get the children to pick up after themselves.

DEPRESSION WORK SHEET



YOUR TURN

Now try to address one of your problems step-by-step. Pick a problem that has been bothering you. Remember, start with an easy one.

MY PLAN

The problem:

Options:

Solution/goal:

First step:

Results:

What next?
