

help yourself

MOVE OUT OF DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY

ACER
PRESS

helga a.h.rowe

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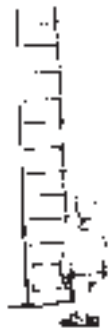
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introduction

In twelve simple steps this program will help you become the person you would like to be. It will lead you to greater enjoyment of life. You will feel better about yourself and the world around you because the program teaches you to be in control of how you think and feel.

The program will work for you because:

SUCCESS

with this program requires that you

COMMIT YOURSELF

TO FOLLOW IT DAILY

This Introduction explains why you should try the program and how to commit yourself to following it daily. The Contents gives an overview of the program structure by showing what is involved in each step.

Note that each step is important in its own right, and each is designed to move you further in a natural progression towards your goal. Combining all the steps, and applying them consistently, will achieve the final result of lifting you from and keeping you clear of anxiety and depression.

Please take the steps in the order in which they are presented, and keep a record of your progress for your own information. It is easy to monitor how you are going if you use the weekly record sheets in the Appendix.



You are going to be a success

You can rid yourself of your depression and feelings of anxiety, and function as a much happier person.

Don't only *hope* to succeed: be *utterly convinced* that you are going to be on top again.

Think of it this way: 'Only a short time and some effort (that is, some work on myself) separate me from a state of well-being'. Start today by feeding this positive message to your mind and do the same every day.

You can be the person you would like to be

Start thinking positively. That means think well, not sick. The way we think about ourselves controls what we are: if you have attractive thoughts about yourself, you will be an attractive person to yourself and others; if you like yourself, others will like you. The messages about yourself that you feed to your mind make you what you are. They also strongly influence how others see you.

When you are depressed or in a state of anxiety (remember that we all are sometimes depressed or anxious) see yourself as in that state only temporarily, and remember that you are already on your way out of it. Feelings of depression and anxiety are tunnels that are part of our lives. Remember, as soon as you have entered the tunnel, you are on your way out of it. There is light at the other end.

Think positively:

*Having decided to follow this program, I have already
taken the first step towards my complete recovery.
I am on the way.*

Commit yourself today

To motivate yourself more strongly, make a contract with yourself. Write on a piece of paper (or in the front of your diary, if you use your diary daily):



I will follow this program from today.

Under that sentence write today's date and sign your name. Then keep the paper on the inside of your wardrobe door, on your mirror or another place where you see it every morning. You need to remind yourself of what you have promised yourself. Stick to your commitment daily, whether or not you feel like it—this is the only way you are going to get the results you want.

Rely on your willpower, not on your feelings

Why follow a program?

Many people have tried to help themselves without a program, and have found that it does not work nearly as well, fast or effectively. Most people prefer to follow a program because it means they do not have to plan and make decisions for their progress. Often people don't have the time, motivation or energy to work out what they should do, and in which order they should do it. At the beginning there seem to be so many things to change and do. Which things should come first? Which ones are the more important? People often find it difficult to know when to move on to the next task.

Your aim is to reduce stress (depression or anxiety). Following the program in this book reduces stress and produces faster and more effective results than trying to plan yourself what to do next.

The program follows a step-by-step procedure. You will get used to the procedures by using the program on a daily basis and over time. Some steps must come before others, which is why the program is graded and the steps are presented in a certain sequence. Most people take one new step per week. Step 1 is practised in the first week, and you will get used to making that step part of your life. Step 2 is added and practised in the second week, Step 3 in the third week, and so on.



You progress by adding steps, not by dropping them. If you are finding it difficult trying to add a new step every week, go more slowly. Although your aim should be to take on one new step each week, that does not mean that you should not allow yourself two weeks to practise certain steps if you are finding them difficult to master. Two weeks should be the limit, though! You will prove to yourself that the program works. Work consistently—that is, daily—and be gentle and relaxed with yourself.

You will find that only a few minutes are actually required each day. Following the program makes you think differently about yourself and the world around you. It produces a change of attitude and requires no more than that you feed positive messages about yourself to your mind a few times a day. That does not require a great investment of time.

*You are making an investment in your future
You are building a better quality of life for yourself
You and I know that you can do it!*

Sensible diet, exercise and relaxation

A sensible diet, exercise and periods of relaxation are a prerequisite for the health of both body and mind—in a way they are prerequisites for achieving any other goals in life. They are the scaffolding on which to build so that you can progress towards becoming the person you want to be. Make a decision now to adopt these prerequisites, even before you embark on Step 1 of the program.

Eating wisely and aiming for a balanced diet looks after mind and body. We are what we eat. By eating foods that suit your physical requirements and taste, you give yourself a chance of feeling better in the shortest possible time. Feeling better physically will give you the energy to use more willpower and to motivate yourself.

Combine regular, if possible daily, exercise with a healthy and balanced diet. Exercise for twenty minutes a day. If you are not fit,



you may have to start off exercising for two minutes per day and gradually increase it to twenty minutes. Half an hour per day is a very good goal. Exercise is a major key to your mental and physical well-being, as you will realise.

Relaxation of mind and body is an essential part of the scaffolding and is vital to the success of the program. Relaxation enables you to be in touch with yourself. It allows you to direct your thoughts and feelings. Relaxation as an exercise should be practised daily.



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step 1: replace negative thoughts with positive thinking

Negative thinking and depression

Depressed and highly anxious people tend to think negatively. The question is whether they think negatively because they are depressed and anxious, or whether they are anxious or depressed because they think negatively. I do not believe that negative thinking is the whole cause of depression and anxiety, but it is a major factor in contributing and keeping us anxious and depressed. Consistent negative thinking has a devastating effect on how we feel and on how we appear to other people.

In almost any situation we can choose to work for or against ourselves. You are what you think yourself to be, and others tend to see you as they perceive you to be seeing yourself. That is why it is so important to think positively. Be what you want to be. Know your strengths, accept and compensate for your weaknesses, and practise being confident.

The problem is that many of us, when we are anxious and depressed, do not realise that our thinking is negative. Only when we are starting to lift ourselves out of anxiety or depression, and see things in better perspective, can we recognise how negatively we have been thinking. During depression we drift along, barely aware of ourselves as people. The solution is to pick ourselves up and take charge.

Positive and negative thinking

Make a conscious effort to feed positive messages to your mind. Just as your body responds positively to correct feeding, so your



mind responds to being fed constructively. Everyone knows the long-term results of overindulging in a diet without nutritional value, yet many people feed themselves a diet of negative, self-defeating thoughts for years then wonder why they tend to feel anxious, depressed, inadequate or unsuccessful. It makes sense that we can only be what we think we are.

What makes it possible for us to take charge of our thinking is that although human beings can think only one thought at a time, we are able to switch thoughts so rapidly that it seems as though we are thinking many things at once. Every thought is accompanied by an emotion—at any given moment we can have either a positive or a negative thought in mind, but we cannot have both together.

How the habit of negative thinking builds up

We are creatures of habit. This is why we quickly get used to a certain way of doing things, a particular way of acting or thinking. We establish habits of thought according to how we are thinking, on a thought-by-thought basis. A habit can be established surprisingly quickly, often within a few weeks.

We tend to think about ourselves and our lives in a certain way—our thoughts following a familiar path. If we are in the habit of thinking negatively about ourselves, we must expect to feel chronic depression and a lack of motivation to get out of those well-worn ways of thinking. The feelings of lethargy and apathy that usually accompany this state of mind can be devastating. The real tragedy is that once the habit of negative thinking is established, it determines the way in which we act and react in most situations.

The cumulative effect of many little negative thoughts, each seemingly insignificant, is what does the damage. A daily dose of this kind of thinking is enough to drag anybody down:

*I won't go—I wouldn't enjoy it—I won't like it—
I wonder why they are being nice to me—If I try this,*

*I'll mess it up—I can't do it—I'm so unattractive—
I wonder why she invited me?*

If we indulge in this type of thinking day after day and week after week, it is no wonder that we feel less than happy and confident. We are feeding our anxieties with our negative thoughts, which is why we can end up quite depressed. Each seemingly unimportant thought has an effect and contributes to our overall habit of thinking about ourself and our environment.

We are usually totally unaware of the fact that our thoughts are so negative. Thought by thought, we build up a destructive pattern of thinking. Negative thoughts are like an insidious and slow-growing cancer, creeping up on us without our knowledge or awareness.

Decide to adopt the habit of positive thinking

We must guard against the one-at-a-time negative thoughts that seem to pop into mind. They may seem small and unimportant, but they are a trap because they tend to build up and ruin our whole way of thinking. It is the little thoughts that you have to deal with if you want to move out of your present state of anxiety and depression.

When we have established a habit of thinking positively, the result is a general feeling of optimism, well-being and heightened self-confidence. Other consequences are personal growth, increased motivation, energy and enjoyment of life, and a general feeling of being on top of things.

When you adopt the habit of thinking positively, certain things begin to happen. You will feel more confident and you will find that you start to handle stressful situations better. You will develop a more optimistic outlook on life and begin to enjoy it more. You will become more cheerful and find it easier to motivate yourself. Things you previously thought were beyond you will seem more within your reach. You will begin to want to try new and unfamiliar things because you believe that you can succeed. You will



find it easier to make new friends, probably because your tolerance of other people has increased due to the fact that you are feeling happier in yourself.

How to change your thinking

The first thing you must do is believe that you can change the way you are thinking and, through that, the way you are feeling.

You are largely in control of what you think. You alone have the power to decide what you will or will not accept and feed into your mind. You are far more in control than you probably realise, as working through the steps of this program will prove. In the meantime (if you are in doubt), what can you lose by trying something that, if it works (and it will if you want it to), can only benefit you?

The way to change your habit of thinking from negative to positive is so simple and basic that you will be amazed that you have not stayed with it long enough in the past to get results. Like most methods that prove effective, it works when it is applied consistently.

To replace negative thoughts by positive thinking you must deal with two aspects of the situation:

- 1 monitor your thinking
- 2 kill negative thoughts as they arise by replacing them by positive thoughts as quickly as you can.

The following paragraphs show you how to go about this.

Aspect 1: Monitor your thinking

Become aware of the way you react to situations, people, requests, the weather, and so on. Each time you catch yourself feeding a negative thought, pause and realise what you are doing. Take a hard look at that particular thought. Ask yourself:

Why did I think that way?

Was there a reason for thinking that way?

No!

Be very honest when you answer these questions. In most cases the answer will be ‘no’—you will not be able to find a valid reason for your negative thought because there was no factual basis for it.

Aspect 2: Kill negative thoughts quickly

Any time you catch yourself thinking negatively, firmly dismiss the negative thought and replace it quickly with a positive one. Stamp out the negative thought and replace it with a counterbalancing positive thought. In the following examples negative thoughts are presented in italics and counterbalancing thoughts are in ordinary print.

I can't do it.

Why can't I?

There is no factual reason why I can't, so I will do it.

I probably won't like it.

Why wouldn't I like it?

How will I know I don't like it until I try?

I'll give it a go and see how I feel.

I don't think they like me.

How do I know they don't like me?

What are the factual reasons behind my feeling that they don't like me?

I can't think of any factual reasons—it's just a feeling.

I'll start thinking they do like me until it's proved otherwise.

I don't think I'll go.

I have no reason for not going.

I'd probably quite enjoy it once I got there.

My feelings are based not on fact but on vague negative fears.

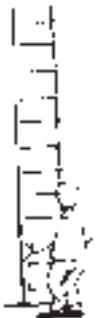
I won't continue to allow these negative feelings to set limits for me.

I am going and I will enjoy myself.

It's not for me, I can't be bothered.

On what am I basing that decision?

My vague feelings of no-confidence again?



It could very well be just my thing.
I am going to try it and see.
If it turns out to be boring I won't go again.
At least I'll have a real reason for my decision then.

Are you beginning to understand what this method is about? Have you noted the increase in positiveness of thought in some examples? The method involves you looking quickly at the negative thought when it arises, and deciding whether it is based on fact or on your negative feelings. If you are in the habit of thinking negatively, you will usually find that the negative thought is based on feelings not on facts. You are reacting negatively almost without being aware of doing so, because you have got into that habit.

Having decided whether your negative reaction is justified (whether it is based on fact, or on vague negative feelings or anxiety) you can then deal with it. If your reaction is not based on fact, you must replace the negativity with positive and constructive thoughts. This way you will learn to think positively.

Do this exercise many times each day, trying not to miss any opportunity to put it into practice. The more consistently you replace negative thoughts with positive ones, the quicker the results will be.

Beware of the wrong approach

Some people who try to replace negative thoughts with positive ones do so in a self-defeating way. They follow only the first half of the method. They monitor their thinking, as advised, but then they dwell on the negative thought by trying to find reasons for their negative thinking. They ask themselves, 'Why has this negative thought come into my mind again?'

The longer you focus on a negative thought the stronger it becomes. The question 'Why am I thinking this?' is not a fruitful

one. It makes you introverted, concentrating on yourself and your unhappiness. Try not to think of yourself so much—instead, concentrate on the content of the negative thought. Question its validity, as shown in the examples above.

Above all, do not blame or get annoyed with yourself for having negative thoughts. Blaming and feeling annoyed with yourself does not help to replace negative thoughts with positive ones. It makes you dwell on the negative thoughts and helps to make you feel bad. At the very least, it leads to self-pity.

Soon your positive thinking will be automatic

The first week will be hard work. You will have to watch the way you think all the time. But gradually, it will become automatic for you to reject unfounded negative thoughts. As your subconscious absorbs and responds to the new message it is receiving continuously, you will react and respond in more positive ways. After one week, you will certainly have stopped your habit of responding negatively to every situation.

If you practise Step 1 continuously, you will change drastically your habit of thinking. Those living with you will observe a dramatic change for the better. You yourself will notice the difference less, because much of what has happened occurred at a subconscious level—unless you actively monitor your thinking, you are not aware of it. That is why you fell into the trap of establishing a negative pattern of thinking in the first place.

Once a positive pattern has been established, it will become as automatic as the habit of negative thinking was. You will feel a growing awareness that *good* is happening to you at a very deep level. This feeling—and the way those around you react to you—will increase your confidence and feelings of acceptance, inner release, hope, happiness, general well-being and peace.



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step 2: cope with panic and feelings of fear

Panic and severe anxiety attacks

Some people experience feelings of panic or extreme anxiety occasionally; for other people such feelings occur daily. However, even one bout of panic is too much. There is no more frightening and exhausting experience than an attack of this nature.

Let me reassure you of two things.

- 1 You are not going mad because you experience bouts of panic. Attacks of panic can be so traumatic that you may think you are losing your mind, but you are not. You are in the temporary grip of a severe nervous reaction due to your current state of mental, and possibly physical, exhaustion and oversensitiveness. Your nervous system is temporarily playing up or out of gear. Because of your anxiety about this you are reacting with panic.
- 2 You can and will come out of this phase of your life. Eventually, you will be able to deal quite effectively with feelings of panic and fear. You will get on top of them and they will give you no more trouble. Many of my former clients are now leading panic-free lives as a result of successfully applying the methods explained in this step. Previously they experienced frequent and debilitating attacks of panic and severe anxiety, which terrified them and limited their ability to live life to the full.

If we are in a general state of anxiety (as distinct from occasionally feeling anxious about something in particular, which is a normal part of human experience) or suffering from depression, even mild depression, we are particularly prone to panic. We will



also be oversensitive and prone to overreact. Panic attacks occur when we are low on nervous (and often physical) energy and in a state of tension. Add to this any emotional bruises from early childhood or adolescent stresses, and the combination of factors can create the climate in which panic is most likely to occur.

Panic attacks are unpredictable

Attacks of panic and anxiety are unpredictable. Not only do they occur when we least expect them, but they often occur some time after the stressful situation or event. In that case, our nervous system is still reacting to the past stress.

Attacks can take different forms. Some of us shake, some feel very hot or cold, some feel faint, have trouble breathing, experience a sudden severe headache, feel ill or vomit. The many and varied physical manifestations of panic attacks are always accompanied by awful feelings of fear and excessive anxiety. Some of us experience panic only on the emotional level—we may feel terrible, but we don't have any physical symptoms. As many of my clients have said: 'I don't know what I am frightened of, but when I have a panic attack I feel absolutely terrified'.

Panic has no set pattern. It can occur daily or occasionally. It can be mild or so severe that it causes us to be in a state of absolute terror and leaves us unable to function normally. It can come when we are in a specific situation—crowds, open spaces, lifts or any situation that stresses us.

The source of the panic and the form it takes have little influence on the ways of treating it, as the principles of treatment don't change.

Whether we experience panic or not is probably related to various factors including our tolerance of stress, the sensitivity of our nervous system, the development of our coping mechanisms, and biochemical variables that are not yet completely understood.

The likelihood of panic attacks is increased by stress, which we

may have experienced in the past and which can date from childhood. That stress can be reinforced or reactivated when we experience similar feelings of stress in adulthood. The memories of early feelings are locked inside us, even though the events that caused the feelings are long forgotten.

Fear of anxiety and panic

Either present stress or a reaction to past stress causes a panic attack, and the fear of how we are going to cope when it hits feeds panic. This fear is separate from the anxiety or panic itself, and occurs before either sets in. If we dread the coming of panic, we add to the stress we are already exposed to.

A client once said that she was frightened of the dark and of being alone in the house at night. Her husband had a new job that required him to work nightshifts. The client was very afraid of how she was going to feel when alone at night—she even worried about it during the day and at night when her husband was at home, not working.

Anyone who has ever feared a panic attack will identify with this story. The way to add to and prolong a feeling of panic is to feed it with fear.

Once we lose our fear of panic or anxiety attacks, the attacks seem to occur less frequently, and eventually not at all. If we have a weapon to deal with our fear of panic, we eventually reach the stage of having an ‘I don’t care whether it happens’ attitude. Then panic either disappears entirely or ceases to be a problem.

A young nurse who had been suffering badly from daily panic attacks said about this program: ‘It’s like having an anti-panic weapon in my head. It’s there at all times for me to use when and if I need it. Knowing this gives me the confidence not to care whether I am going to have an attack, because I know that I can handle it’.



How to handle panic and excessive anxiety

The trick is to **accept, relax and let it pass**. This trick is the anti-panic weapon you can carry in your mind. It will be available to you wherever and whenever you need it.

Accept

The first step in coping with panic is to accept its existence. If you get upset at the thought of panic, get anxious about it, pretend it is not happening or try to fight it with rigid self-control, you will worsen and prolong the attack.

For example, by having thoughts such as ‘If only I am strong and controlled enough, I can beat it’ or ‘It is my own fault that these attacks occur. I must develop more self-control’ you actually make matters worse for yourself.

It is quite natural to react like this. However, it is not the way to overcome panic. Reacting this way feeds panic and keeps it going, often making it more intense. Being anxious about anxiety adds stress to stress. It becomes a vicious circle. Also, as happens when we dwell on negative thoughts (see Step 1), being anxious about anxiety relates and ties the anxiety to us rather than allowing us to stand back from it and look at our fears objectively.

Instead of fearing panic attacks, we must distance ourselves from them. You can do this by realising that a combination of tension (mental and physical) and nervous exhaustion create the climate for these attacks. Our nervous system can work in a strange way and its operation can result in extremely strong symptoms—it is certainly not just ‘all in the mind’, as some people might say. The symptoms that your nervous system is producing are having a strong effect on you. However, there are two very important facts about these symptoms.

- 1 These feelings of anxiety and panic cannot harm you.
- 2 These feelings will not last.

These facts comfort people who feel that they are going to die or go mad, or at least be physically or mentally harmed by panic

attacks. These things will not happen, no matter how bad you feel during an attack. Your attack is like a toothless tiger—it seems ferocious but it has no power. Try to see your attacks in this light. An elderly client told me that the thought of a toothless tiger makes her laugh, and laughing immediately reduces the intensity of the panic attack.

When you regard your panic only as a nuisance, and so lose your fear of it, you will begin to get on top of it. Attacks will lessen in intensity and frequency. A young client told me that he has got into the habit of saying to himself aloud, when he feels an attack approaching, ‘Here we go again, what a bore’. He then takes some deep breaths and sits quietly waiting for it to pass. Since adopting this attitude his panic attacks have been reduced to a third of their previous scale.

Accept what is happening. Don’t get upset about it. In asking you to accept your attacks, I am not asking you to like them. There are many things in our lives which we do not like, but we accept them and live through them. Be very low-key and relaxed in your acceptance, not tense. Do not challenge yourself to see how well you can accept. Don’t strain yourself at all. Acceptance is a passive thing. Just let the anxious moment pass.

It is important to apply this method at the first sign of an attack (there is usually a warning of a few seconds). It is far easier to forestall and thus prevent anxiety or a panic attack with your own anti-panic weapon, than to have to go through an attack. If you wait until you are really into an attack, it is a little more difficult to deal with—although you can certainly deal with it effectively. We can all handle something that is going to last only a short time.

I have known people who, once they learned about the method of accept–relax–let it pass, never had another attack. The only way I can explain this is by assuming that once they knew that they were equipped to deal with an attack, they could overcome their fear of an attack.



Relax

This is the second step in coping with panic and anxiety. The better you have mastered the skill of relaxation, the more effectively it will work for you. If you practise relaxation daily, you will have it at your fingertips.

Once you have accepted the attack, very quickly apply instant relaxation. Take a deep breath—let go—feel yourself relaxing both mentally and physically. It is easier to do this sitting down (you can feel yourself slumping in your chair), but you can also do it standing up if you have to. Leaning against something will encourage the relaxation process.

Applying instant relaxation at the mental and physical levels is just as important as the first step: acceptance. Each step on its own is important but incomplete. Together, the three steps form a powerful weapon, which works to overcome your attacks when properly used. The quicker you apply your instant relaxation after the first step—acceptance—the better. It should all happen in a fast process, a natural and smooth progression from one step to the next with no breaks. The more proficient you become in instant relaxation (some people practise it four to six times a day to start with), the easier it will be to flow smoothly and quickly from the first step to the second.

Let it pass

This is the third and final component of your anti-panic weapon. By ‘let it pass’ I mean let it blow over. As soon as you feel that you have relaxed mentally and physically, take this final step. Once more, it is a smooth and speedy flowing from acceptance to relaxation to letting it pass. When you have practised this method for a reasonable time, you will find that there are no discernible starts and stops between steps. It will seem as though you are applying them simultaneously. Letting it pass simply means that you remain utterly accepting and relaxed while the next couple of minutes (or seconds) pass.

If you have difficulty passively accepting this third step, then very slowly and calmly feed in words and phrases like the following examples.

*I am calmly floating through and beyond this panic—
I am gently drifting out of it—I am in a flow of gentle
waters that carry me out and beyond it.*

*I am moving through this tunnel and the light on the
other end is close—I will soon have passed out of
this—I am peaceful, calm, tranquil, at rest, utterly
relaxed—I am accepting and relaxed—I can peacefully
wait for a few minutes until my fears leave me.*

If you are alone and can say these phrases aloud, so much the better. The sound of your own voice telling you what to do in a calm and confident manner will really put you in control. If you are with other people, don't worry—just soundlessly send the same messages to yourself.

It is normal not to be successful every time

Even after you have mastered the techniques described in Step 2, you may find that occasionally they don't work for you. There can be a number of reasons for this, including overtiredness or the fact that you are so tense that you cannot relax. The main thing is not to worry about it. It is perfectly normal not to succeed all the time. The next time the method will probably work as well as ever.

If you experience problems for a number of days, try to identify which part of your anti-panic weapon is ineffective. Are you really accepting your feelings? Are you relaxed? Are you really letting it pass? Has there been a blockage in the fast and natural flow from one step to another? Have you missed the first warning signs and delayed using your weapon?



What is important is that you regard accept–relax–let it pass as your personal weapon against panic and severe bouts of anxiety. Use this weapon with confidence. It has worked for many people, some of whom felt worse than you do, and there is no reason why it should not work well for you.

step 3: confront your feelings

Step 3 is designed to help you learn better ways of handling your feelings.

Unaccepted and unexpressed feelings

Many highly anxious and depressed people constantly carry a load comprising a backlog of negative feelings, which they have not been able to either accept or express. Powerful emotions such as anxiety, jealousy, frustration, bitterness, hate or resentment are often felt for a long, long time. The reason is that when they began, the individual suppressed them, buried them deep inside and became withdrawn.

Time and time again counsellors witness the fact that, when withdrawn individuals start to talk about their feelings and to release some of their suppressed emotions, their depression or intense anxiety starts to lift quite suddenly. They can show some positive emotions to themselves and those around them. The following story of 'Jean' is an example.

The case of Jean

Jean was in a state of deep depression when I first met her. She was a severe, rather stiff middle-aged woman, whose defensiveness and depression were causing intense marital problems. She was withdrawn and expressed no emotions. After some counselling, she began to release the feelings she had been suppressing: anger, which had been stored up for twenty years, began to surface.



The first step in her recovery was for Jean to recognise that she was angry, the next step was to begin to deal with the anger in a healthy way. Jean had to recognise and accept how and when the anger arose, then find a way of releasing it and thus finishing with it.

It was no longer appropriate for Jean to express her anger to the people involved in the situation which caused the anger twenty years ago. Nor was it appropriate to express the anger in her relationship with her husband. Jean dealt with the anger in her therapy sessions. As she started to express her anger and release her feelings in a healthy way, her depression began to lift.

She improved slowly but steadily and, as she did, she lost a lot of her bodily stiffness. Her whole personality seemed to brighten. She spoke more freely of her husband and family, and said that she now felt physically relaxed and much younger and more energetic than she had in years.

The danger of suppressed emotions

If powerful negative emotions such as anger, jealousy and resentment are not dealt with and released in healthy ways, they can turn inward and eventually ruin our emotional life. As negative emotions begin to clog up our emotional system, our subconscious begins to deal with them. When the subconscious takes over dealing with negative emotions, one or both of two things can happen:

- 1 Our pent-up emotions emerge in a destructive form (overreactions, violence, aggression or devious behaviours).
- 2 We become depressed.

One of the strongest sources of internal stress is suppressed negative emotion. The two most common reasons why we suppress emotions are that we are frightened of them (and frightened of expressing them to ourself and others), and that we don't know how to express them.

Being frightened of emotions

Often we are afraid to accept our anger and other negative emotions, and even more afraid of expressing them. We fear that if we start to acknowledge our strong negative feelings, we will lose control of them. As Jean put it in an early therapy session: 'If I start expressing my feelings, will I lose control? Will I be unable to stop myself? Will I go too far and say too much? I may never be able to be the same again after having expressed these feelings'.

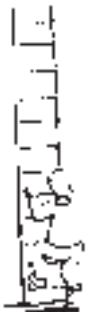
Would Jean really want to remain the same? Does she want to be anxious and depressed all her life? After dealing with her negative feelings, Jean will feel a great deal better because she has expressed her feelings.

Overreactions and other emotional reactions, such as losing our temper, actually prevent us from damaging ourselves emotionally. Feelings that we can let go are safe. Feelings that we lock up inside us are potentially damaging. Once we have expressed our feelings they are in the open—they have been made concrete, put into words. They can now be understood by ourself and others, worked through and dealt with.

You may wonder whether it is fair to express your negative feelings to others. You may fear damaging those people. But those around you are more likely to be damaged by your not expressing what is going on inside you, than by hearing about it. Obviously, you must be aware of the feelings and rights of those to whom you are expressing your angry feelings. It is not acceptable to simply verbally attack a person, but it is legitimate to share with another person what is going on inside you, to confide what you are feeling.

Expressing stored-up negative feelings

When you try to express your stored-up feelings to another person, you should explain exactly what you are feeling and why you think you are so upset. Raise the issue that was the cause of your injury and attack the issue, but never attack the person to whom you are



speaking. Name-calling, swearing, being sarcastic and putting down the other person is unfair. We all have a responsibility not to damage or hurt another person through aggression. You can express feelings to another person without being aggressive. You can discuss the issue forcefully by making certain points about it and discussing its rights and wrongs in an assertive way. There is a big difference between assertiveness and aggression. Aggression is destructive, assertiveness is not.

When expressing your feelings assertively, it is essential to be prepared to listen to what the other party has to say about the issue. Being assertive involves more than merely saying your piece and walking off. You owe it to the other person to give them the opportunity to express their feelings too. Only when both sides have expressed their feelings about an issue can they begin to negotiate or find a compromise. The other party may not have realised that there was a problem, they may wish to explain or apologise, or the situation may result from a misunderstanding. In fairness, there must be full opportunity for discussion.

Ideally, each party should reach out to the other and make it easier. An honest discussion, which might well include an outpouring of feelings, can lead to better understanding and improved relationships. It removes barriers that people have built between them. But this cannot happen unless people are prepared to communicate positively by expressing, listening, negotiating, apologising and forgiving. Once feelings have been worked through like this, frustrations and resentments tend to disappear and the way is cleared for a better relationship.

Get into the habit of expressing how you feel

The sooner you say what you are feeling, the less you are going to have to say. Often it is sufficient to say 'I don't agree with you', 'I don't accept that' or 'I don't think you are fair to me'. A simple and short statement expressed at the time an issue arises is all that

is required. In this way everyone knows exactly where they stand with everyone else, and tension does not stockpile inside.

When we get into the habit of expressing feelings in this way, two things happen: negative feelings arise less frequently, and if they do occur they are let go more quickly. In other words, quick and assertive action prevents negative feelings from building up.

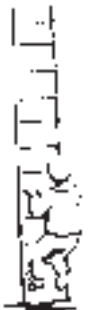
Because we have less tension and stress from suppressed feelings, we become more at peace with ourselves. We cope better with ourselves, become more tolerant of others and are slower to anger. Little things that might previously have upset us no longer do so. You too will find that you let go of your anger as soon as you have expressed it, and that you will become much slower to anger.

From today, try to react more openly and honestly to other people's behaviour towards you. Whenever appropriate, express your feelings as they arise and express them in a way that is appropriate. This includes positive feelings—we owe it to ourselves and to other people to express positive sentiments as well as negative ones. Your partner, family, friends and others deserve your affirmation, acceptance and appreciation. They need to know when you are pleased and happy. Their self-esteem needs nurturing too, and you may be able to provide some of that nourishment.

If you have been depressed or have not been in the habit of expressing your feelings, you may have a backlog of unexpressed negative emotions to be worked through and let go. These feelings may be clogging you up and preventing you from progressing as well as you should. Pulling the stopper out and releasing the emotional backlog clears the way for better and happier functioning in life. Following the guidelines in this step will allow you to rid yourself of potentially damaging emotions.

How to rid yourself of long-suppressed emotions

There is a difference between spontaneously expressing feelings as and when they arise in the present, and expressing stored up feelings



from the past. There are two ways to start expressing stored-up feelings: one is to talk them out, and the other is to write them down.

Talking out feelings

Talk out your suppressed feelings with someone you can trust and respect, with a view to working through and letting them go—forgetting all about them forever.

You need to choose a person who will listen and keep what you say to themselves. You should explain that you do not expect advice or reaction; what you want is a sounding-board. All you require is a trustworthy person, either a professional or a friend, who has the ability to listen and is willing to allow you to get it all out of your system.

Often it is neither appropriate nor possible to deal with the person who was involved in the creation of your anger or resentment. It may have happened such a long time ago that the person concerned is no longer around, or the person may now not be able to cope with you offloading your negative feelings.

One of my clients was very angry over his mother's dishonesty towards him thirty years earlier, when she had let him down badly in an important business deal. His resentment and anger had been highly destructive ever since. He had not been able to forgive her or let go of his deep hurt. His mother was in her mid-eighties and would be unable to cope with a confrontation with her son's anger—she might be shattered completely by such a confrontation. So he expressed his emotions to me, his psychologist, experiencing rage and great agony as he did so. But finally he was able to forgive his mother and let go of his negative feelings. Following this, my client experienced great relief and a marked improvement in general well-being. A couple of weeks later he visited his mother, something he had not done for years.

When expressing deep-seated resentment and anger, we have a

responsibility to ensure that the person who caused the feelings can stand up to our offloading them.

Writing down feelings

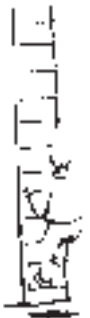
Another way of dealing with deep-seated feelings is to write them down. This has a strong healing effect. Writing down feelings is an answer for those of us who simply do not have anyone to whom we can talk about them. I have sometimes suggested this method to clients who initially found it impossible to talk about their emotions. After writing some of them down, they were able to also express them verbally. Writing can provide tremendous release and, like talking to someone, enables us to work through and let go of feelings we have been carrying for a long time.

The following plan might help you start to express your feelings. Get away by yourself for a day or a weekend. Allow plenty of time. Start writing about how you feel, what is happening to you now, what your life is like, how you feel about it. Do not worry about style, grammar or spelling, or whether your writing makes sense to others. The purpose of this task is to offload your emotions, regardless of how they come out or whether they make sense. Do not judge your writing or your emotions, just pour them out onto paper.

Start writing about the present. Write how you feel at this moment. Then allow your mind to take you into the past. Write down all you feel and want to express about the past—past hurts, angers, frustrations and so on. Write until you feel drained and you think there is nothing more to come.

Having emptied yourself in this way, do not read what you have written. You must not reinforce it! The purpose of the exercise is to rid yourself of all the negative emotions that might be preventing you from coming out of your anxiety and depression.

At the end of your writing, put:



*Having got all this out of my system, I now let it go.
I mean that.*

Then either burn the paper or shred it, taking pleasure in doing so. This act symbolises letting go of all the things that have been causing you disquiet. Having done this, try never to dwell on the thoughts and events of which you have rid yourself.

If you find the things that you thought you had got rid of come back into your mind from time to time, or that new negative thoughts and memories are surfacing, repeat the writing exercise. Sometimes one attempt is sufficient. Sometimes you may have to repeat the exercise of entrusting all your hurts and resentments to paper several times to really clear the backlog.

While you are writing, you may feel very upset. You might cry with anger and hurt as you recall painful memories. Don't let this upset you. It is perfectly normal. An emotion that is expressed is safe, one that is suppressed is not safe. Upsetting emotions need to come out. They are always better out than locked inside you. Writing is an effective way of releasing them.

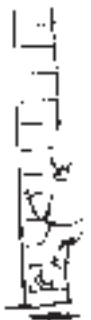
Nature has provided an inbuilt braking system that will protect you from going too far. You will come to the end of expressing your emotions when you are ready to finish. So do not be fearful, but let your feelings out.

When used properly, either of these methods described will have good results. Whichever method you choose, start to do something now about the long-stored negative emotions inside you. Release them, and resolve that you will never again suppress your feelings—you will express them as situations require.

Encourage those around you to express their feelings

Once you have cleared the backlog and got into the habit of expressing your positive and negative feelings, you should never again suffer the damaging consequences of suppression and

withdrawal. It is a good idea to discuss this step of the program with your partner, parent or other family members. Together, make the decision that all family members will try to handle feelings in the way suggested here. The result will be a happier relationship and a vastly improved climate in the relationship, family and home.



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step 4: make your imagination work for you

One talent that all human beings have is the talent of being able to imagine. Sometimes imagination appears to be something undesirable. People say ‘You are imagining that’ or ‘That is a figment of your imagination’. These types of comments might contribute to the fact that so many of us tend to overlook or ignore our talent of imagination.

Imagination is a tool that can work for us in very positive ways. Creative people make excellent use of their imagination. It is the talent of imagination that makes it possible for scientists to invent, for writers to create stories, plays or poems, for composers to conceive of the music we so much enjoy, for artists to produce a painting or sculpture.

We can all profit by making use of our imagination. It helps us learn and can help us retrieve facts from our long-term memory. Above all, imaginative people are good problem-solvers.

Those of us who make good use of our power of imagination achieve better results, more quickly, than we who have not trained ourselves to use our imagination. We have not been given such a powerful talent for nothing—every talent should be made to work for our benefit. The advantages of using imagination are not restricted to the intellectual sphere.

Imagination can be used on a very private level in our personal lives. It can help us become the sort of person we would like to be, and can thus rid us of feelings of inadequacy, depression and anxiety. The potential of a correctly directed imagination as a force for



healing is tremendous, yet it is only recently that this has been recognised and used.

It is important that we direct our imagination correctly because, although it can have a powerful effect for our good, it can have an equally powerful effect when used for negative purposes.

Misdirected imagination

You can make imagination your worst enemy if you allow it to function in a misdirected way. Misused imagination can feed anxiety and depression. As with negative thinking (Step 1), the immediate result is feeling miserable. In the long term this can lead to loss of confidence, inability to cope, difficulty in relating to other people and inability to motivate yourself. If you use your imagination in the wrong way, you are conditioning yourself not to succeed.

When you continuously think of yourself as not coping with various situations you encounter in daily life, you are actively conditioning yourself not to be able to cope. If you constantly put yourself down in your imagination—seeing yourself as a failure, as inadequate, as not achieving, as an unworthy person—you are building a strong force against yourself that is going to hinder you in every aspect of life. Trying to overcome it is like running a race with one leg weighted with lead. Why would you want to go through life with such a handicap? How can you possibly feel good about yourself and set yourself to succeed, when you have progressively prepared yourself not to succeed and not to have good feelings about yourself?

Those of us who use our imagination to see ourselves in a bad light and as failures are ensuring that we will have difficulty in accepting and coming to terms with ourselves. We will be undermining our confidence by actively encouraging the growth of negative feelings about ourselves. How can we end up feeling anything other than depressed and a failure, when we treat ourselves to a daily dose of such medicine?

You may have been unaware until now of the dangers of indulging your imagination in a negative way. From now on, direct your imagination and make it work for you in a positive way. *Imagination can be your best friend.* It is a special talent, a special gift—treat it with respect and care. It is relatively easy to control your imagination if you act promptly, when you find yourself thinking in a negative way.

Correctly directed imagination

Correctly directing your imagination is a matter of mental discipline. You have to break the destructive habit of thinking negatively about yourself, then train yourself not to fall back into it. You can do this by consistently trying to stop yourself every time you start. If you do so, you will find that you are no longer using your imagination in a negative way—you will be using it to increase confidence in yourself.

If you use your imagination in a positive way every day, you will condition yourself to achieve what you want to achieve—the goals you have set. Of course, your goals must be realistic, based on common sense and an objective appraisal of what you are currently capable of. You have far more potential than you give yourself credit for.

Use your imagination to see yourself as a happy, positive and more outgoing person. See yourself as that person now. Not as yourself on the way to becoming, but as having become that person. Imagine yourself as the person you want to be. Keep your picture of that person firmly in mind.

In your imagination, practise doing all the things you wish you could do but feel that you currently can't. These include accepting yourself, being peaceful and happier within yourself, being at ease in a stressful situation, talking confidently to people, handling a difficult job or situation well and with confidence, and relating in a calm way to somebody with whom you don't feel at ease.



As you imagine a situation, try to ‘feel’ the scene. Imagine how you would like to feel in the situation—relaxed, coping, handling things confidently, perhaps enjoying yourself. Try to really experience these feelings, make them your own and live them. If you can feel and see yourself as you wish to be in specific situations, then you will become the person you want to be more quickly.

By endeavouring to act as if you have already become the person you see and feel in your imagination, you are giving yourself the best chance of achieving results. By doing this, plus your daily imagination exercise of seeing yourself as you wish to be, you are programming yourself to become that person. After a while you will find that you are automatically beginning to act in the way that the person you see and know through your imagination would act. As with positive thinking (Step 1), you will reach a stage where positive imagining will no longer be hard work, but automatic. Your subconscious will have received and accepted the new messages about yourself and will be working for you.

When we are using our imagination to work for us, we prepare a path to follow later. Briefly, the process works like this:

- 1 We feed into our subconscious the messages we want it to receive, assimilate and act upon.
- 2 At a certain point, the subconscious feeds the information back and we respond to the information and messages.

It is as if we had a computer inside, waiting to receive instructions. A computer responds according to the way in which it is programmed. The process is largely similar with human beings—our internal computer (our mind) can be programmed to work for or against us. However, there is one important difference between a real computer and the imaginary computer in our mind: programming a real computer requires a message or set of instructions to be fed in only once; programming our internal computer involves feeding in the same message every day for several weeks.

Practice details

We are most receptive to autosuggestion (suggestions we make to ourselves) when we are in a relaxed state. Good times are the end of your daily relaxation practice, just before drifting off to sleep, and first thing in the morning before you are completely awake. Being in a deeply relaxed or drifting state is a good time to send the messages you want your subconscious to receive and act upon. To get results, remember to send the same message every day for a while. Continuity is important.

Decide which message you are going to start with. For example:

To become more confident—to like yourself more—to feel less guilty about little things in your daily life—to worry less—to cope in a calmer way—to feel more peaceful—to feel more contented—to feel more loving towards yourself and others—to resist alcohol—to stop smoking or to keep calm during panic.

Feed in only one message at a time. When you have achieved the results you want, feed in the next.

What is your first aim for yourself? What is the second? What is the third? Think about it. Then sit down quietly for a few minutes and make a list. If you keep a diary, the back of your diary is a good place for this list. Choose positive messages that will lead to better functioning. Work out what to change. What sort of person do you want to be? Choose the messages that will help you achieve that goal. There is no reason to ever stop feeding messages into your internal computer—that is what it is there for.

In twenty or thirty days (for some people within a week) you will find that you are starting to respond to your messages. You will be aware of the changes taking place inside you. You will begin to feel differently about the aspects of yourself on which you have been working. For example, if you have been feeding in the



message 'I want to accept how I look while wearing glasses', then you will begin to like and feel greater acceptance of yourself. You will notice a change in your feelings and behaviour. Not only will you feel better about yourself, but you will react more positively towards yourself and other people.

There are two proven methods of feeding messages to yourself. Both are effective: choice depends on individual preference. Choose the one you find easier. You can try both, one immediately after the other, if you like. Using both will give a double impact. But remember that consistency is important. Whichever method you choose must be practised daily, at least for a while.

Method A: visualisation

Once you have decided on the kind of a person you want to be and have written down some major messages that will help you achieve your goal, try to visualise the new you. If you could suddenly see yourself as you would like to be, what kind of picture would you have in your mind?

One of my clients, a woman in her late thirties, saw herself as calm, confident, warm, outgoing, relaxed, competent, communicating without effort, peaceful and happy. In her visualisation she was entertaining all her husband's business associates, a task she had previously dreaded. In her imagination, she was a confident, competent and attractive hostess, laughing and relaxed, communicating spontaneously and well with each group in the room. A month after beginning to practise visualisation, she started to feel more relaxed about entertaining people she barely knew or had never met before, and for the first time in her life she started to enjoy the experience.

Once you have set your visualisation goal, hold the picture for a minute and feed it into your mind. Do this exercise when you are relaxed. If you can't hold the picture for a minute, don't worry—just hold it for as long as you can. Some of my clients were able to

hold their picture for only a second or two initially, but within a couple of weeks could hold it for more than a minute.

If the picture turns negative (you see yourself as not coping or you are starting to feel critical about yourself), *stop immediately* and concentrate on one of the beautiful scenes you use in relaxation exercises. Return to visualisation tomorrow. Eventually you will be able to hold a positive picture of yourself.

Method B: verbalisation

Decide what you wish to achieve, as described above. When in a state of deep relaxation, feed in words such as:

I will feel more calm and peaceful from now on.

Repeat these words six to eight times, concentrating on the meaning of what you are saying. Feed in only one message at a time. When you have achieved what you set out to achieve, change the message and repeat the process.

Because you are feeding a positive message into your subconscious daily, you will begin to feel better about yourself with time. It is only a very small step between feeling better, and acting in a better way towards yourself. You will respond to the way you are programming your internal computer. So use your imagination, because that is the way to reach your subconscious.

The talent of imagination is a positive and powerful friend if it is used correctly. It provides an effective means for achieving the results we want. The ideal is to work on ourselves at both levels: *from within* (through positive thinking, mental relaxation and imagination) and *from outside* (through taking constructive action, setting goals, working towards goals, changing behaviour and establishing better habits).



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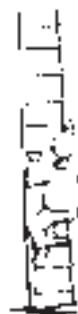
step 5: let go of your anxiety

Take constructive action and don't waste your energy on anxiety and constant worry. Do what you have to do in order to fulfil your responsibilities and the tasks you have set yourself, but let go of your anxiety about doing so. It is enough to cope with the task on hand. If you are worried, anxious or tense about everything you do, you are surrounding every action with a negative aura.

When you feel anxious or indecisive, you are robbing yourself of your ability to cope effectively. The following example may explain this better: suppose an action or job requires 10 per cent of your mental energy; if you allow yourself to become tense and anxious, or fuss about the job, you may use 80 per cent of your mental energy to do the same job. What a waste of energy!

Separate anxiety from action

The moral is to take constructive action. That means concentrating on the task as much as you can and forgetting about yourself and your anxieties. In this way you completely separate the task from your anxieties, and will avoid unnecessary draining of your precious mental and physical energy. Separating anxieties from actions demands self-discipline, but you can do it. You simply use your will to establish new and better habits of thinking and feeling. You are in control of what you feed into your mind. You can acquire the habit of automatically separating anxiety from action. I am not saying that all the problems that surround you can be solved overnight. They can't, but you can change



your attitude towards them overnight. The following example illustrates this.

The case of Carl

One of my clients was on the verge of a nervous breakdown, probably due to high stress and job-related anxiety. Too many demands were made of him in his workplace. ‘Carl’ was a foreman, and at any time there would be at least seven things requiring his immediate attention. Carl got into an anxious state every time he faced this situation—as a result he experienced feelings of absolute panic most of his waking hours. He said:

When I am confronted with a whole lot of things that I have to attend to, or when urgency comes into the situation, I feel all energy leaving my body. It seems almost to drain out of my limbs, and I am left physically and mentally weak and helpless.

We discussed how Carl could separate the jobs from his feelings of anxiety, and worked out a coping plan.

We decided that, when confronted with too many urgent things at once, Carl would take a deep breath and ‘invest five minutes’—he would remove himself from the situation and sit down quietly for five minutes to think through the jobs and make a plan. He would write down, in order of priority, a list of what had to be done over the next three hours (or during the morning, the afternoon, the shift or even the next hour, depending on the situation). He would then deal with the first issue on his list or start the first job, concentrating solely on that issue or job—putting all his energy into it but forgetting about himself. That way he would not allow himself to become tense or anxious. He separated anxiety from action.

In doing so, Carl mentally isolated himself from all other work, including past and future events and requirements. He would not

even think of the next job, or of what was going to happen in ten minutes. As far as possible, he would block out all competing thoughts and external distractions, adopting the principle of living fully and for the moment, giving all he has to the task in hand. He would work as if there were no past and no future.

As soon as the job was done, Carl would cross it off his list and forget about it. He would then move to the next job on the list and concentrate on it as he had done with the first. He would repeat the process until all the jobs had been tackled.

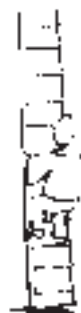
After a few days, Carl could see that learning to compartmentalise in this way, and focusing on action rather than anxiety, considerably reduced his stress level and left him with a greater reserve of mental as well as physical energy. It took him only one week to get used to his new approach to work. A fortnight later, he said that he would function that way both at work and at home from then on. He must have been successful, as I have not heard from him since.

Make decisions

Decisiveness is an important part of letting go of anxiety. A problem characteristic of anxious and depressed people is that they cannot make decisions, even small ones like whether to have another cup of tea.

In some of us, the need to make a decision induces great anxiety. We worry about the need to make a decision, we worry about making it and, having made it, we worry about whether we have made the correct decision. Even simple decisions throw us into turmoil and cause nervous exhaustion. In the end we opt out of decision-making altogether, whenever it is possible to do so.

Of course, this is the worst thing for our well-being. Opting out of making decisions feeds the fear of decision-making, and adds decision-making to the list of things we believe we cannot do. This in turn reduces our ability to cope, our level of self-confidence and our self-esteem.



What is the answer?

It is quite usual for someone who is depressed or in an anxious state to want to avoid making decisions. You are not strange and you are not going mad, even if you feel you are. This is a temporary state even if it has been going on for a long time—you have only just decided to do something about it. You may need to reassure yourself often that your indecisiveness is only a symptom of your present condition. The cycle of oversensitiveness and overreaction is doing its worst with your nervous system and your feelings about yourself. It is important to accept that it is normal to feel as you do at the moment. As you begin to move out of this state and rebuild your reserves of mental and physical energy, you will find that indecisiveness, like the other symptoms of anxiety and stress will cease to worry you.

You can take a large step forward by facing the fear of decision-making and getting on top of it. You can cope with making decisions: you have coped in the past with large and small decisions. A fear faced and worked through is a fear overcome. Remember that it is your fear of making decisions that is holding you back, not your inability to make them. Admit your fears to yourself (and to trusted others), then take that further step: deal with them! By making decisions you will lose the fear of decision-making.

Perhaps you can't yet face making big decisions. Don't worry—start with small ones. Once you have made a few little decisions, you can try to make it a habit not to opt out of unimportant decisions. Eventually you can try some bigger ones. Every time you make a small decision, you are getting closer to coping with bigger ones.

Don't remain in a state of indecision

While you remain in a state of indecisiveness, you are feeding your anxiety and draining your nervous energy. Remember that the more you opt out of decision-making, the less you are programming yourself to want to make decisions. Take your courage in

your hands and try to separate anxiety from the decision. This will help you make the decision.

Sometimes the separation of anxiety from action occurs suddenly and apparently by itself. This can happen when a really traumatic event occurs. The story of 'Janet' shows that separating anxiety from action and decision-making, and getting rid of anxiety, is possible even in extreme cases.

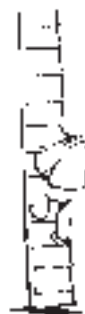
The case of Janet

For most of her married life Janet had suffered anxieties of various kinds. Her family regarded it as part of her nature. Janet had not made a decision for a very long time. She usually felt too down and lethargic to do so. She told herself that she didn't really have preferences, she didn't care which way things went. Her husband, Tom, who was very supportive, had long since given up asking Janet what she wanted to do, or even how she felt about things. He took all the responsibility and made all the decisions himself. This allowed Janet to slip further into a state of child-like dependence, until she was barely functioning as an adult. Eventually things became so bad that she would not leave the house without Tom, and she did not cope at home when he was out. One night Tom suffered a stroke.

Suddenly and dramatically their roles were changed. Tom had become the dependent one and Janet had to be responsible for caring for them both. At first, people around them thought that Janet would be incapable of doing this; they expected that she would not allow herself to cope. Everyone thought that Tom would end up in an institution.

Janet surprised everyone by stating that she intended to care for Tom at home. For a few weeks after his stroke, Tom had to remain in hospital, which gave Janet a short time to get herself together.

The immediate hurdles were the many important decisions that Janet had to make within a short time. Big decisions and smaller



ones, all were essential. The biggest decision Janet made was obviously the decision to care for Tom herself. Her usual anxiety about decision-making seemed not to have been a factor. Possibly unconsciously, she let go of the anxiety and made the decision to care for the man whom she loved. Almost automatically, she was able to separate her anxiety from the decision. Janet did fear the future and felt unsure about her ability to cope day after day. She suddenly realised that she had been depressed for a long time and decided that she needed to get herself together. It was at this point that she sought help from a psychologist.

Janet and I did some intensive work together. She had little time—Tom's condition had stabilised and the doctors were talking about his being ready to go home.

Janet's big decision did not solve all her problems. She had not completely overcome her fear of decision-making, although she now tended not to try to opt out of decision-making. After all, she knew that Tom was in no state to make decisions, and there was no one else. By far the worst part of making small as well as big decisions was the anxiety she felt after having made the decision, about whether she had made the correct or best decision.

We decided that Janet would use the following way to cope with the anxiety. Having made the decision and taken appropriate action, Janet would say to herself:

*I have been through all that, I have made my decision,
it is finished action.*

Then she would put the issue firmly out of mind and concentrate on the next thing. In this way Janet learned the habit of looking ahead rather than back. She found that saying the words aloud reinforced them. Telling herself firmly and aloud 'It is finished' seemed to be effective.

There are similarities between my advice to Janet and that to

Carl, the foreman. In both cases the message was to do one thing or make one decision at a time, concentrate totally on it, then dismiss it and move on to the next task to be done or decision to be made.

Janet became increasingly confident about making small decisions. She had learned to separate feelings of anxiety from the task of decision-making—a new skill that led to noticeable improvements in other areas.

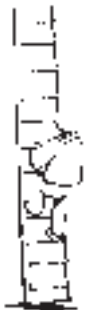
Rules that work

The rules that Janet applied in making small and daily decisions were as follows.

- 1 Face decisions: do not avoid them.
- 2 Take action: don't get anxious or worry because you are faced with having to make a decision.
- 3 Make the decision quickly: a few minutes spent assessing the situation or problem is long enough for small decisions.
- 4 Decide what appears to be the most logical and sensible thing to do at the time.
- 5 As soon as possible, act on your decision.
- 6 Having made your decision, let go of the issue. Don't worry about it. It is now finished business. Move on to the next thing you have or want to deal with. Remember, even if you have made a wrong decision (and everyone makes wrong decisions a lot of the time), you will still benefit from having made the decision. You can always reverse it later by making a new decision.

The principles for making small decisions apply equally to larger, more important decisions. The only difference is that you should not make instant decisions on big and important issues. Big decisions deserve time and serious consideration, but they still don't deserve anxiety!

With big decisions you should apply both logic and feeling. You weigh the pros and cons, you may even seek the advice of others. Remember, you seek advice only—you do not ask others to



make the decision for you. You ask yourself questions such as:

What are the long-term effects of the possible courses of action? What do I feel about this issue? Why do I feel this?

Writing down facts and feelings on paper can help. The issue or problem needs to be thought through carefully, without anxiety. Then you can make the best possible decision at the time, and your life continues as you move on to the next task.

Despite Tom's disabilities, the quality of life for him and Janet improved tremendously. Step by step, Janet moved out of her depression. She even learned to cope with her inordinate fear of the consequences of decision-making. She and Tom could support one another and their relationship became happier than it was before Tom's illness.

step 6: face problems and overcome them

Deal with problems as soon as possible

We create anxiety and inner stress when we try to ignore our problems instead of facing and dealing with them constructively. The idea that *'If I shut my eyes it will go away'* never works. It makes us lose our peace of mind and robs us of the inner balance that is vital for effective functioning.

Important problems that we are trying to ignore tend to intensify. Sooner or later, because of the anxiety and stress they cause, we are going to be forced to look at them and deal with them. Otherwise we will feel powerless and helpless.

Powerlessness

We put ourselves in a position of powerlessness when we avoid taking action to resolve problems that cause stress and anxiety. We need to feel in command of what is happening to us and free to make our own way, although of course we must accept responsibility for the consequences of our decisions and actions—this is part of being an emotionally mature and fully functioning adult. Being in a position of powerlessness—feeling that everything is happening to us, that we have no say in it and can do nothing—sows the seeds for depression.

Helplessness

We put ourselves into a position of helplessness when we allow ourselves to feel controlled by our problems, or when we do not



take constructive action to resolve them. Taking action, even a small one, puts us in a position of power again. Being in a position of power in turn prepares the way for further constructive action. Taking action feeds our self-confidence and helps equip us for the next step.

Make changes

From the first reaching-out comes the belief that perhaps you are not as trapped and helpless as you feel. You can make changes. You have sown a seed of hope.

It is rare to see the total answer to a problem when you first look at the problem. Problem-solving is usually a step-by-step process. You don't see the second step until you have taken the first, you don't see the third step until you have taken the second, and so on. Gradually the picture reveals itself and possible solutions or answers become clearer. I look at problem-solving like a jigsaw—only by moving each piece separately does the picture begin to emerge.

Many of us hold back from moving because we cannot see the total picture. It is almost as though we want to have a guaranteed result or answer before we take the first step. Life does not work that way. We have to take certain risks, for which there are no guarantees. You have to decide to take an initial step, which is sometimes a matter of trial and error. What matters is making that initial move. As long as the initial step is based on common sense and you do what seems best at the time, you need not fear the outcome of problem-solving.

You lose by not trying, and you can always change direction. There is much to be gained from trying. It makes you motivate yourself. It releases energy, because your anxiety is reduced. It rebuilds your confidence and self-esteem when you receive the positive feedback that results from a successful step. By trying, you also program yourself to take further steps and thus move from powerlessness to power, from helplessness to control.

Difficult problems

Not all problems can be solved easily, and some may actually be unsolvable for quite a while. However, there is always something you can do to improve a situation. In other words, you can reduce the severity or the size of all problems. If it seems impossible to make a positive change and you feel really trapped by a problem, perhaps you have not explored all the options, or thought the problem through fully and calmly. Perhaps you do not have enough faith in yourself and your ability to change things. Feeling locked in by a situation does not mean that you need to actually be locked in by it (see Step 5, on separating anxiety from the task or problem).

Accept that not every problem has a perfect answer, but also accept that you can at least partly resolve most problems. It is important for your mental and physical well-being that you take immediate action and make the changes that you are able to make. The following plan should help you deal with the problems immediately facing you.

Make a plan

Eliminate as many causes of anxiety and stress as possible by taking immediate action. Deal with your problems. You can do this in the following way:

- 1 Take a large sheet of paper and divide it into three sections by drawing vertical lines (that is make three columns). Label the first column 'Problem', the second column 'Ideal Solution' and the third column 'Workable Solution'.
- 2 In column 1, under 'Problem', list your immediate problems in order of importance or severity. Put what you regard as the biggest or most urgent problem first, the second-most important problem second, and so on.
- 3 In column 2, under 'Ideal Solution', write the ideal solution (what you would really like to do about the issue or situation,



if it were humanly possible) to each problem listed in column 1.

- 4 In column 3, under 'Workable Solution', write a practical and workable solution that you could try for each one of the problems.

Apply the solution written in column 3 as soon as possible. In some cases the workable solution might be an initial solution, a kind of first aid or Band-aid. Don't worry about that. What is important is that you are taking action and thus reducing your anxiety and stress about the problem or situation.

In some instances you will be able to gradually move towards the possibilities you have written in column 2. Even if that isn't possible, at least you have identified the major causes of your anxiety and stress and taken constructive action to deal with your problems.

Take the positive step

Remember: there are few problems that cannot be improved, even if they cannot be solved completely. Take the first positive step now.

step 7: take constructive action despite negative feelings

Positive thinking and positive feelings

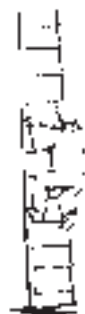
By now you have successfully implemented Step 1 and replaced many negative thoughts with positive thinking. This step asks you to deal with negative feelings as well as negative thoughts. Obviously they are closely connected, but I believe that it is legitimate and useful to distinguish them.

If you are foolish enough to allow your negative feelings to rule you, you will never overcome anxiety, move out of depression or improve your self-image and confidence. These are harsh words, but they express reality. Negative feelings are powerful anchors that keep you right where you are—if you let them.

Caught in a self-made trap

Many of us remain unhappy and unwell because we allow ourselves not only to be limited by our negative feelings, but are almost governed by them. We could and should have come out of our anxiety and depression, but cannot because we are locked in by our negative feelings. Trapped in a self-made net, we keep strengthening and repairing it.

The situation is like a ship with all sails set and billowing in the wind. The ship should be quickly gliding over the water, but it isn't. It remains stationary because it still has a number of anchors, firmly embedded and restraining it even though conditions are right for it to move. We have to haul in our anchors (our negative feelings) and take full advantage of the wind that would move us along if we allowed it to do so.



Dwelling on negative thoughts and the feelings they elicit, feeding them into our hearts and minds, allowing them to dictate our course of action, means being firmly restrained by self-thrown anchors. I don't advocate denying feelings or refusing to acknowledge them; rather, I suggest that we refuse to be limited by them.

Control your feelings: don't let them control you

Feelings are important, but we must recognise that they are changeable and subject to many influences. Health, happiness, friends, the environment, what we have seen on television or read in a book and many other factors influence what we feel. Many times we act on feelings alone and do not bring logic and willpower to bear. Nor do we question why we have certain feelings at particular times. One of my friends is an elderly pensioner who lives alone and often feels depressed. He knows that he should get out of his flat and walk his dog a couple of times a day, but he just doesn't feel like it. Often he won't go outside his front door. Sometimes he doesn't go out for two weeks, by which time he feels even more lonely and depressed.

You must try to own and accept your feelings, and take great care that they are not owning you. It is possible to accept your feelings and act constructively even if they are unhappy or negative.

The case of Mary

'Mary', one of my clients, wondered why she was not losing her anxiety more quickly. She felt that she was doing all the right things in following this program—relaxation, exercise, correct diet, making imagination work, and so on. Suddenly she got stuck in what I might call the 'feeling groove'. If she didn't feel like going to work, she didn't go. If she didn't feel like keeping an engagement to visit someone, she didn't turn up.

Mary had been overanxious about small things in her life for some time and feared that she was becoming depressed. What

brought things to a climax was being asked to move to another department at work, although she liked her current job and work-mates. The proposed move also coincided with the loss of her boyfriend.

Fortunately, Mary had good self-motivation. She was intelligent and thought well enough of herself not to be content to remain downcast for long. She sought my help and started this program, making rapid progress. Then, quite suddenly, she seemed to come to a halt. At first she thought that she may have been moving through the steps too quickly, but she knew that she had been making good progress. One day I heard her say:

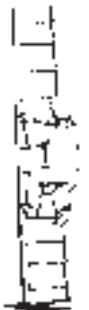
I didn't feel like going to work this morning, so I just stayed in bed.

This simple, possibly unintended statement gave me the answer to her problem. 'Were you sick?', I asked. Her answer was:

Oh no, I wasn't sick. I just didn't feel like getting up and going out.

Mary had given in to her feelings and allowed her feelings to control her—a sign that an old habit had reasserted itself. She was being dictated to by her negative feelings and obeyed them without question. During subsequent discussions I realised that Mary was repeating this pattern. Her passing feelings dictated whether she did anything, went anywhere or saw anybody.

Giving in to these feelings is like feeding them, helping them grow and letting them take over. Mary had to regain control of her feelings, not allow them to control her. Being an intelligent woman, Mary could see this and made a decision that in the future she would be neither fooled nor held back by her feelings. She decided that she, Mary, was going to be in control.



We decided that, unless she was physically quite ill, Mary would get up and go to work each morning whether or not she felt like it. She would go out and about as normal, if necessary carrying her negative feelings with her, but not thinking about them. We decided that Mary would interact with people, concentrating on them and the tasks in hand, not dwelling on her feelings while she was at work or with others.

Take action despite your feelings

It is better to be with people for a short time than to give in to negative feelings and avoid people altogether. This advice is similar to the advice I gave my pensioner friend mentioned above. It is better to go out with your dog for even ten minutes than give in to negative feelings and stay home altogether. You will profit from making the attempt even if initially you can't last the distance.

Not making an attempt means reinforcing your negative feelings and entrenching yourself even more deeply in a habit of non-action—a habit that must be overcome for the sake of your well-being. Remove your anchors and you will find that the output of energy creates even more energy.

When I saw Mary later, she said:

*Once I found that I was taking action despite feelings,
I began to feel motivated to take action in all areas of
my life.*

Mary is in control of her life now. She is cheerful and confident. She has found her former happy self again.

The lesson you have learned

You must accept, own, work through and where possible express your feelings, but you shouldn't be limited by them. You cannot allow them to dictate to you or govern your actions. You and no one else are in control of your actions.

If necessary, imagine that you have wrapped up all your negative feelings, that you have put them in a backpack and that you can now move unhindered by the backpack—both your arms are free and you can do what you want. Obviously, it is best to dump the backpack and move on completely unrestricted. If you can't do this at first, don't feel anxious about it. As you again take charge of your life, the backpack will become unnecessary, if not useless.

It is better to go out for even a short time than not at all, to work for ten minutes at a job rather than not start it. You should live as fully as you can, without getting overtired. See yourself as having power over your life, and use that power.

You have the gift of will. Your correctly directed will and determination give you the power to overcome the limiting effects of negative emotions.



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step 8: cater for your self-concept, build your self-esteem

The importance of a good self-concept

The term 'self-concept' is used to describe our view of ourselves. Your self-concept determines how you see and how you feel about yourself. Self-esteem is part of the self-concept. Self-esteem refers to our (often unconscious) appraisal or evaluation of ourselves. Although, taken literally, self-concept and self-esteem emphasise different ways we think about ourselves, the meanings of the terms are very similar. The terms are thus often used interchangeably.

Those of us with a good self-concept have high self-esteem—we value ourselves and believe in ourselves. We see ourselves in a positive way and are confident about ourselves in most situations.

If we have low self-esteem our self-concept suffers. That means that we do not feel good about ourselves and cannot see ourselves in a positive way. Because our behaviour and our actions in the outside world depend so much on how we feel about ourselves, those of us with low self-esteem will have difficulty not only with ourselves but in our interactions with others.

Our self-concept is probably the most important part of us in relation to our ability to cope in life, and the joy and happiness we derive from being alive. Our self-concept is the core of us as an individual, and we are influenced by it continuously in large and small things, in our private experiences and our interactions with other people.

The way in which we cope with problems and situations—handle stress, interact with other people, our attitude towards



others and ourselves, the openness and trust we show, our motivation to achieve and to succeed—all depend on one aspect of our personality, our self-concept.

If we have a bad self-concept we find it difficult to accept ourselves—we have a low opinion of ourselves and thus don't like ourselves.

Our self-concepts range from very poor to excellent. Although the basis of our self-concept and self-esteem is constructed in childhood and adolescence, events in our adult lives continue to shape, and might even change, our view and evaluation of ourselves.

The need for unconditional self-acceptance

To function adequately, our self-esteem must be reasonably high. The good news is that we have the ability to build up our self-esteem and thus improve our self-concept. The bad news is that we are equally able to reduce our self-esteem and thus severely damage our self-concept. Control and choice lie in our own hands.

It should be obvious, from this, how vital it is to make sure that we have a positive self-concept and build up our self-esteem. The way to do this is to continually (many times a day!) send positive messages of acceptance, praise and regard for ourselves to ourselves. If other people's attitudes towards us provide positive messages about ourselves, so much the better; however, by far the most important thing is that we send positive messages to ourselves.

Until we can accept ourselves unconditionally, we cannot improve our self-concept. The tragedy is that so many of us accept ourselves merely conditionally, when only unconditional self-acceptance provides the personal confidence that we need for really successful functioning in life.

What is the difference between conditional and unconditional acceptance? Conditional acceptance has a big 'if' attached. If you like and accept yourself only when you perform well, when you succeed, when you measure up to the expectations you have of

yourself—then you are not accepting yourself unconditionally. You are setting conditions for self-acceptance.

Self-acceptance works in the same way as our acceptance of others. If we accept people only when they act in ways we approve, in ways in which we want them to act—our acceptance of them is conditional. Until we unconditionally accept ourselves and those who are important to us, we are not accepting in the fullest way.

Unconditional acceptance has no ‘ifs’ attached. It accepts others just as they are, whether or not they measure up to our expectations. This does not mean that we always approve or like our own or other people’s actions and ways. It does mean that we accept the individual, whether ourselves or another person, and respect their right to be themselves. We should unconditionally accept ourselves as well as others.

If our self-acceptance is conditional, we cannot protect our self-image and we will never be able to improve our self-esteem. Our state of emotional balance, inner security, contentment, peace and coping with self and others depends on our degree of unconditional self-acceptance.

The origins of self-concept and self-esteem

The basic building-blocks of our self-concept and self-esteem were produced in early childhood and during adolescence. We learned to view ourselves in the way we thought our parents and other important adults viewed us. When our elders seemed to think that we were okay, we felt that we were okay. If we thought that our father or mother thought we were bad, we saw ourselves as bad. The amount of emotional nurture, acceptance, love and trust we received determined how we felt about ourselves then, and to a large extent it determines how we feel about ourselves today.

Few parents realise how fragile and precious a child’s self-concept is, and how strongly adults influence the development of their child’s self-concept and self-esteem. In many cases, parents



unknowingly limit how their children will function in adult life, the amount of confidence they will have in themselves as adults, the amount of trust they will have in others, and their acceptance of themselves and other persons.

Our early experiences are important in the development of our self-concept and self-esteem, but we are not totally stuck with what we are as a result of our childhood and adolescence. Living with a poor self-image and low self-esteem and blaming our childhood for it, is a cop-out. If we make a decision to build a stronger self-concept for ourselves, everything else will fall into place.

The case of 'Ronald', a former client, illustrates a number of the factors involved in this and shows the part they play in building up someone's self-concept.

The case of Ronald

Ronald appeared to have suffered from a poor self-image all his life. His low self-image was reflected in almost everything he did, and was especially noticeable in his interactions with other people or when attention was focused on him. When I first met him, Ronald had been suffering for a considerable time from a mild depression that had no obvious cause.

He had a safe though uninspiring job, and a wife and children who loved him. In his childhood he had been less fortunate. His mother was an overworked, tired woman and his father seemed to have been a perfectionist, who ruled the family with an iron fist. The expectations Ronald's father held for his seven children were unrealistic, involving standards that they found impossible to meet. Ronald felt that nothing he did had ever measured up to his father's requirements, and he and his siblings were continually criticised despite their efforts to please. The father made his children feel bad and think badly about themselves.

Eventually Ronald just gave up and made sure that he was at home as rarely as possible. At the age of forty-seven, which is when

I first met him, Ronald still felt ill at ease whenever he saw his father. He said that he did not ‘feel himself’ whenever he was in his father’s presence or thought deeply about his father.

It is easy to understand why Ronald felt inadequate and insecure—childhood conditioning can have a very strong and lasting influence. If childhood experiences are mainly negative, they can affect us adversely even in adulthood, unless we do something about repairing our self-image.

Ronald’s childhood experiences manifested in his lack of confidence in himself as an adult. He really believed that he could not cope with anything new or unfamiliar. He did not have enough confidence to apply for a more interesting or better paid job, or to seek further training. Ronald could not understand why anyone would want to employ him and didn’t believe that any of his work-mates could like him. He even felt insecure about the love of his family. *How could anyone love or like me?*

Ronald rejected himself emotionally in the same way that his father had rejected him when he was younger, and followed the pattern that was established then. He actively fed his low self-esteem and feelings of self-doubt by continuously putting himself down, reacting negatively to most things and most people, opting out of accepting any challenges, however small, and never verbally or physically reaching out to others. In short, Ronald did everything he could to maintain his low self-esteem.

There are many of us like Ronald, who are on the verge of depression or who are chronically mildly depressed because of low self-esteem. Unfortunately, we then tend to fall even deeper into depression, especially when we experience a traumatic event, a personal crisis or high stress. Due to our low self-esteem and accompanying feelings of insecurity, we believe that we do not have the inner resources to swim through life’s waves and resurface.

Many of us believe, as Ronald did, that if we have low self-esteem then that is simply the way we are, and the best thing to do



is to accept that fact and live with it, because there is nothing we can do about low self-esteem. How wrong we are!

How to build your self-esteem

As I explained to Ronald, human beings, no matter how old we are, are always developing. Life is an ongoing process and we have new chances every moment to replace the destructive messages in our inner computer or subconscious with new and better messages, making ourselves into the person we wish to become.

It is part of the human condition to be constantly changing. You don't have to be, and you are not going to be, the same person as you are now in four months or in two years. How you are going to change is largely up to you—only you can decide what you want to do, just as only you can make the changes to improve your quality of life. Too many of us retain our self-limiting attitudes and the depressive feelings that accompany them because we actively feed our low self-esteem.

How many of us had a perfect childhood? Not many, I think. What I do know, however, is that we don't have to be constrained for the rest of our lives by the consequences of an unsatisfactory childhood. As adults we have options to explore and the freedom of choice. If we choose to remain limited because of negative parental influences, then that is our choice. Sadly, it is the choice Ronald made. Things could have been different for him, if only he had the faith in himself and the courage to start working on himself. He was unable to muster the willpower to give it a go. To this day he is looking for easy answers. He is waiting for someone or something, outside himself and his own efforts, to fix everything for him.

Lack of will and inability to see that he could explore options and make choices prevented Ronald from helping himself. You must not make the same mistake.

Self-discipline and willpower

Your will is an integral part of you as a person. It allows you to be a determined person. If willpower is not used, it can grow weak and ineffective. Used wisely, your will can help you develop your strengths, talents, skills and inner resources, as well as your personality. The value of human will lies in its balanced use. Used with thought and self-discipline, will is a force that helps you achieve the goals you set for yourself. Motivating yourself to do something means having the will to do it.

One privilege of being an adult is that you have the ability to explore options and to make choices. Many options are open and you can make decisions for yourself. You need not be limited by childhood conditioning or stuck in a rut, because every day you have the chance to start a new routine, a new life. Each day brings opportunities to succeed in something. If you do not use these opportunities, that too is your choice.

Each morning when you wake up ask yourself:

How am I going to use this day? What choices in my favour am I going to make? What opportunities am I going to grasp? What challenges am I going to meet? Which temptations am I going to resist?

And most important of all:

*What will I be able to do to increase my self-esteem?
How much better will I feel about myself by the end of this day?*

Be assertive and have the courage to be the real you

As well as using your will, exploring options and making choices, a number of other factors can help you increase your self-esteem.



Some have already been covered in earlier steps of this program. These include self-acceptance, giving yourself credit for success, replacing negative thoughts with positive ones, separating anxiety from action, letting go of anxiety and sending positive messages of all kinds to yourself by using your power of imagination.

Two other important tools for building self-esteem are not allowing yourself to be put down by others without responding assertively, and always being yourself.

Don't allow yourself to be put down

It is not in your best interest, nor in the best interest of others, to permit them to put you down and get away with it. Every time you passively accept an insult you damage your self-esteem, because you have lost respect for yourself through not standing up for yourself. Just as a loss of self-respect damages your self-esteem, your reduced self-esteem lowers your overall self-concept.

Do you realise that it is you who teaches people how to treat you? If you fail to set limits on how you wish to be treated by others (the limits you set may differ for different people), they may think that they can put you down and get away with it. Allowing them to do this is wrong for both you and them. Not taking action means you are condoning their behaviour. If you continue to choose not to take action and not to set limits, how can you expect positive changes in the behaviour of others towards you?

When dealing with people who have tried to put you down, a simple statement such as 'I don't accept what you say' will probably be sufficient most of the time. If a stronger response is required, ask the person to explain why they said or acted as they did.

It is not the main purpose of this program to teach you assertiveness, so I will not deal with this topic any further at this point. Just one warning: if you have difficulty in responding assertively when other people put you down, undermine you or treat you unjustly, you may benefit from some training in assertiveness. If you decide to do this, make certain that you choose a

responsible trainer who will teach you in a balanced way (with equal emphasis on other people's rights and on your own rights).

Assertiveness—the ability to stand up for yourself—is basically a sign of emotional maturity. However, it can be destructive if wrongly understood and used, for example, if it is used solely for getting your own way. That type of assertiveness is often taught to managers in industry and in business, to salespeople and others whose job it is to persuade other people to accept their views, goods or promises. It is not the type of assertiveness you want, as it has nothing to do with the emotional maturity you are trying to attain.

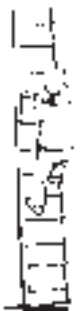
It is important not to allow other people to damage your self-esteem and get away with it, and equally important not to damage the self-esteem of others by your behaviour towards them. Above all, do not damage your self-esteem by putting yourself down. If you are in the habit of doing so, you should study the information on negative thinking and practice (see Steps 1 and 4) until that habit is broken and replaced with positive thinking.

Be yourself

You owe it to yourself to be yourself at all times. To be anything else is to sell yourself short and then nobody profits. It is stressful to continually try to match other people's notions of what you should be like and how you should act. If you always try to conform to the expectations of other people you will eventually reach a state of inner conflict and confusion.

It actually takes more mental energy not to be yourself than it takes to be yourself. The strain of continually trying to present an acceptable front is enormous. If you never relax and feel acceptable as you are, you are misdirecting a lot of energy that could be used for more positive purposes and actions.

Not to be yourself is to undermine your self-esteem. When you are not being yourself, you are not accepting yourself as you are or would like to be. Good self-esteem and a good self-concept depend upon approving yourself and your actions.



Being yourself does not mean that you should practise self-indulgence and destructive or insensitive behaviour towards other people. Being yourself is not a licence to be selfish. You can make choices. You can develop your inner resources and strengths, and grow towards true maturity and wisdom. If you do this, you will find that you are valuable to yourself and others. Or you might choose to sell yourself short by settling for minimal functioning and personal survival. That is second-best. You should accept yourself and other people, not settle for second-best.

step 9: set your goals and motivate yourself

The aimless drifting of the exhausted

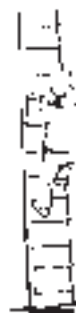
If we are anxious or depressed, we find it difficult to become motivated. We tend to drift without much aim, hoping that someone or something is going to put things in order for us (like Ronald in Step 8). We do not really want to take responsibility for ourselves, our actions or directions.

If we are highly anxious and depressed we often feel emotionally drained and nervous exhaustion. The last thing we want to do is to work, even towards our own recovery and well-being. We don't really want to do anything. We just want to be left alone.

Although we may have legitimate reasons to feel this way, allowing such depressive feelings to continue is the worst thing we can do to ourselves. Our exhaustion has placed us on a downward path that has only one destination—remaining in a state of powerlessness and eventually giving up on ourselves. We are caught in a vicious circle: our negative feelings are feeding apathy; apathy is feeding hopelessness; hopelessness is feeding our negative feelings. If we are caught in this self-limiting destructive circle, we must break it by taking control of ourselves.

The 'I don't feel like it' state

Several steps have already emphasised the importance of taking power into your own hands. You take power by acting for yourself and on your own behalf, not remaining in a state of powerlessness and hopelessness. When you are thinking about it, wondering



whether you will take power back into your own hands, the first step out of apathy seems enormous. But once that step has been taken, no other step will ever be as difficult. There is only one way out of your present situation, and that is by taking a series of small steps that make up the pathway back to health and a feeling of well-being.

You have to follow the principle of taking action despite the ‘I don’t feel like it’, ‘I don’t care’ and ‘I don’t want to’ feelings that are holding you back. No one can do just what they want all the time. Every task has aspects we don’t like. We put certain jobs off many times but eventually we have to attend to them. A busy parent often doesn’t feel like doing the washing, ironing or shopping with young children. A student doesn’t feel like studying for a mandatory but apparently unimportant subject.

As a matter of fact, I don’t want to write this chapter at this moment either. It’s a beautiful Sunday afternoon. I would rather go for a walk along the beach or sit in my garden and read the papers that I haven’t had time to look at during the week. I am not finding it easy to stay inside and write. Some people think that writing is a highly pleasurable activity, that the words come easily, smoothly and with little effort. To the contrary: writing can be very hard work. It only happens with effort, commitment and a great deal of self-discipline.

I am writing this chapter now because I have set myself the goal of writing consistently (daily, where possible) and finishing by a certain deadline. I have set a realistic deadline, but one that is not far off. So I keep writing, despite my ‘I don’t want to’ and ‘I can’t be bothered’ feelings—and despite the other set of equally negative feelings that make me think ‘How do I know that what I am writing will be of enough value to others? Is what I am writing good enough for me to persevere?’ So, you see, everyone experiences these types of negative feelings. But if we obeyed them, none of us would ever make a change.

Don't wait for the 'right' mood to set goals

The goals that we set give direction to our lives. Without short-term and long-term goals it is difficult to steer in a specific direction, or even to find a direction. Too many of us are in a state of aimlessness, which does not bring contentment or satisfaction. An aimless life lacks a sense of purpose and fulfilment. We should be in charge of ourselves, be boss of ourselves, as far as possible. Most of us have opportunities and choices: whether we take advantage of the opportunities is our own choice.

Besides providing direction, setting goals releases the mental energy that was previously tied up in anxiety or apathy. Setting goals focuses our attention on something outside ourselves. It produces interest in what we are going to do and, sometimes, enthusiasm. It extends us beyond ourselves, it broadens our horizon and our view of ourselves.

It is a mistake to wait for the 'right' emotional state before you start setting goals for yourself. If you wait to be in the right mood to do something, you might never do it. You must set some goals (that is, an exercise in logical thinking) and start trying to achieve them (that is, an exercise in willpower), then, as you move towards achieving the goals you have set, you will experience a positive feeling (that is, an emotional uplift). After this, everything will become easier.

Next, you will begin to feel satisfaction and a sense of purpose. You may become charged with enthusiasm, but perhaps not straight away. First, you have to practise experiencing a positive feeling. Don't allow your present state of apathy or lack of enthusiasm to prevent you from taking the important step of motivating yourself. You will start feeling satisfaction and some fulfilment.

Remember, the title of Step 9 is 'Set your goals and motivate yourself'. It is not 'Motivate yourself and set your goals'. It is not by chance that the words are written in this order. Goal-setting comes first, and motivation will follow. Setting a goal gets motivation going.



A method for setting goals

There are different methods for setting goals. The one described here is likely to work for you, as it has worked for many of my clients.

Most of us like to set large, long-term goals for ourselves first then deal with the smaller monthly, weekly or daily goals that lead to the achievement of the bigger goals. This is a good way to proceed if you are in good health and generally feeling on top of things. However, it is not always the best method if you are in a highly anxious or depressed state.

When you are in a state of exhaustion, low energy or low self-esteem, you probably find it hard enough to think of what you want to achieve in the next week or even today, let alone in a few months, next year or three years. One day at a time is enough to cope with initially.

Your first effort might be to make each day as satisfying and valuable as you can. Get as much happiness and fulfilment from each day as possible. Learn to appreciate the little things that bring joy each day, things that can give a lift to any moment of your life, such as sunshine, a warm room in winter, a beautiful piece of music, a picture, laughter, a small act of kindness, telephoning a friend, and so on. Each day contains many opportunities for pleasure but we often overlook them because we take them for granted or have switched ourselves off from our surroundings.

The first step back to emotional and physical well-being is to get back to the basics. And what is more basic than to learn to again appreciate the simple but beautiful things around us? What are the simple joy-bringing things in your life? Start looking for them now.

If you develop an appreciation of the little joys to be found in daily living, you are building protection against anxiety and depression. You may be wondering where goal-setting comes into this. Well, this is the start of it. Your first goal is to find daily positive things and events, and learn to appreciate them.

Your second step is to set small goals for yourself at the beginning of each day (or the evening before). This will move you further each day. To begin with, plan to achieve one small aim each day and one larger goal each week. The following course of action might help.

Daily goals

Sit in a quiet place and think about what you really want to achieve in the short term. Write down the goals that are most important to you, in order of their importance. Choose the seven most important goals from the list for your first week.

To start with, avoid very difficult or demanding goals. As you achieve more, you will grow in confidence. Choose seven goals that you feel you have a reasonable chance of achieving at this stage. Then try to achieve one goal each day.

The following list offers examples of daily goals. Some are small, some require more effort. Only you know what you might be able to tackle at the moment. It does not matter how small your goal is, as long as it extends you even a little. The examples are not in order of importance.

- Go for a walk.
- Do some window-shopping.
- Change your hairstyle.
- Make a phone call that you have been putting off.
- Visit someone.
- Invite someone to dinner.
- Tackle a small job you have been putting off.
- Write the letter you have not wanted to write.
- Set limits to your drinking.
- Tidy and clean your room.
- Start getting your finances in order.
- Make a plan to save some money each week.
- Set limits in dealing with a difficult person.



- Offer help to someone.
- Express your feelings to someone who is close to you.
- Visit your local public library.
- Make enquiries about adult education courses in your area.
- Look at a newspaper.

Don't be either too hard or too soft on yourself. Choose things that you want to do for yourself, for your first list of seven goals. The next week, write down another seven goals.

Keep track of your achievements

To reinforce your progress, it is a good idea to keep track of your achievements. One way of doing this is in a progress diary. This is a diary or notebook in which you write your daily goal (after you have achieved it!) and other positive things you have achieved that day. Write only your successes in your progress diary—there is absolutely no need to list your failures. Everyone has failures, and the fact that you have them proves that you are a normal person. Accept your failures, learn from them, then forget about them and try again.

Read your progress diary often and enjoy the positive feelings it brings. Read it when you are feeling disheartened. The diary is not only a proof of your progress, but a source of great consolation and encouragement.

Keep achieving a goal a day until it becomes a habit and you are automatically tackling what you are aiming for. At that point you can stop making lists of daily goals.

Weekly goals

Most of us find that we get into the habit of daily goal achievement after a month or so. If you have achieved daily goals on most days of a month, set yourself weekly goals. Look at this as a promotion—you are ready to extend yourself further.

Make your weekly goals a little larger and more significant

than the daily ones. They should stretch and challenge you more than daily goals. However, make sure that your weekly goals are realistic and attainable. Write a list of weekly goals that you would like to achieve. From now on, work to achieve one of these bigger goals each week.

One such aim might be to achieve, each day for a week, the goal of being positive in your dealings with a person who you really don't like or who you find difficult to cope with. Another weekly goal might be to take particular care in dressing and grooming, or to leave home for at least an hour every day for the week. This is one way of making progress. Another is to set individual bigger goals that you want to achieve once during that week, for each week.

The following list offers examples of ideas for weekly goals. Once you start exploring your choices in things you would like to improve, you will find many additional weekly goals.

- Plan a dinner party for some close friends.
- Give a party.
- Investigate a special outing for yourself and some friends.
- Start studying something.
- Try a new hobby.
- Buy a new outfit.
- Reorganise your work (or home) schedule.
- Make plans to redecorate a room in your flat or house.
- Take a practical step to improve your work situation in some way.
- Do something positive to improve a relationship you are not happy with.
- Speak up in a group situation (over an issue you feel strongly about).
- Plan a surprise for someone.

Continue meeting your weekly goals for three months. Use your progress diary to list your successes.



Long-term goals

At the end of three months, when weekly goals have become a habit and you have been able to achieve most of the goals you have set for yourself, start thinking about some long-term goals you would like to achieve.

To achieve long-term goals you may find it helpful to ask yourself the following questions:

What do I really want for myself from life? In general?

Personally? Career- or work-wise?

What am I trying to achieve in the long term?

What direction do I need to take to achieve these ends?

What planning should I do for this? Now? In the future?

Am I on the right path now, or should I consider changing direction?

Again, write down all your goals, think about them then set a realistic pace for working towards achieving them. Do not force yourself to achieve them; rather, work consistently towards their attainment. This way you will achieve better results and reach more goals in the long run.

Finally, don't attempt any long-term planning and goal-setting while you are overanxious or depressed. You will cope with long-term goals much more successfully once you are on top again. In the meantime, follow the step-by-step process of achieving daily then weekly goals, and you will steadily build your strength and confidence to the point where you are ready and able to cope with long-term planning.

For the moment, take one step at a time, one day at a time. Attaining your goal for today is enough—it means that you are successful.

step 10: meet your own needs

Unrealistic expectations

It is important to our well-being to have a positive and active orientation towards life. This and meeting our own needs go together; they are inextricably intertwined.

Too often we rely on others for the fulfilment of our needs. We tend to expect others to anticipate and meet most of our needs for us. This expectation is not only unfair to others, it is unrealistic. No other person, no matter how close, can or should be expected to provide most answers for us. We are responsible for finding answers for ourselves, as far as possible.

When we unrealistically expect another person to be everything to us, we are placing a tremendous burden on that person, a burden that they can usually sustain for only a limited time. Situations where this tends to occur are in family life, marriage and other close relationships.

The case of Esther

Unfair demands are often made on the mother in a household. Almost without thinking, family members expect her to be all things to them and for them, and to provide nearly all the comforts. Mothers can become mentally and physically exhausted without anyone realising what is happening.

Esther, a former client, had allowed herself to be placed in this situation. She drove her children to and from school, music lessons, ballet, football, and so on every day. She helped her

Esther

husband with office work and telephone-answering in the business he ran from home. She also helped the family finances by doing other people's ironing and mending. She frequently had her children's friends to stay at weekends, and tried to be a good wife, mother and housekeeper.

Was this a case of overwork? Was Esther's family thoughtless? The answer to both questions was 'Yes'. However, it was also a case of someone not setting limits, not stating her personal needs clearly and seeking to meet them. Esther lived through and for her family, and never reminded herself that she too had needs.

Sometimes we blame those around us or feel resentful because they are not meeting our legitimate and reasonable needs without us stating what those needs are. It is unfair and unrealistic to assume that other people should anticipate our needs, know what they are and meet them for us. It also shows lack of emotional maturity. An attitude of 'Why don't you know how I feel and what I need' has no place in emotionally mature relationships.

Although the primary responsibility for meeting personal needs lies with us, we all have some needs that can also be met by others. It is up to you to clearly state to other people what those needs are. You have no right to feel resentful of someone who has failed to meet your need, if you have not clearly told them what that need is.

Emotional maturity

One person, no matter how loving and motivated, cannot be everything. No individual can possibly meet all the needs of another. Often, enormous problems occur in a relationship because one partner has such an expectation of the other. This can lead to the partner on whom such unrealistic and unfair demands are being made, feeling trapped. Partners who have found themselves under such pressure have told me how it makes them feel:

Whatever I do, it is never enough—I can never satisfy

him—She drains me so much until I feel there is nothing of myself left—My life is not my own any more—He depends on me for everything—I feel eaten up, I can never have any space just for me any more—The more I give the more is demanded of me—I long for a little time for myself.

Making such unfair demands shows a lack of emotional maturity. It is reasonable to expect your partner to meet some of your needs, but it is unreasonable to expect your partner to be all things. And yet that is what often happens. One partner clings to the other, wants to live for and through them, and feels hurt and frustrated when the partner fails to meet the impossible expectations placed upon them.

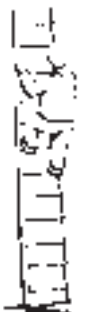
A mature approach

Emotional maturity will allow you to maintain a balance between meeting your own and others' needs, and having another person meet some of your needs. It is not difficult to achieve this maturity. Both you and your partner could find it helpful to ask two basic questions about your personal needs and your needs as a couple:

Which of my needs can I meet without the help of other people (and without the help of my partner)?
Which needs should I involve other people in, because I need their help? (also ask yourself whether these are real needs or merely wishes)

Needs vs wishes

We have many wishes, but few real needs. In fairness to ourselves and those around us we must learn to distinguish between them. For example, you may want your partner to go shopping with you because you enjoy his or her company, but you may not really need such company or assistance on the shopping trip. If your partner



had intended to do something else and you are capable of driving yourself to the shopping centre, is it proper for you to present your *want* as a *need*? If, however, you had recently come out of hospital after an operation and couldn't lift the shopping bags or carry them to the car, then you would have a legitimate need for assistance.

Needs do not have to relate to physical problems. If you were driving to see your child with whom you had to sort out a major personal problem and needed a friend's emotional support to do so, you would have a need rather than just a wish for the friend to come with you.

You can clarify your thinking by asking yourself 'Is this a need or just a wish?' If you present a need (which should be spelled out, not left for the other person to guess) then your friend or partner has a responsibility to try to meet your need if it is possible and reasonable to do so.

It is up to you to try to meet your own needs, before you take them to others. If you don't try to meet your needs before you ask others to meet them, you are opting out. As in all opting-out situations, you are then feeding the negative aspects of your nature and failing to extend yourself. The loss of confidence in yourself leads to lower self-esteem and a low self-concept.

What are your needs?

In order to clarify your needs, you might look at four major aspects of your life. We all have physical, mental, emotional and spiritual needs. Think separately about each of these areas of need, and ask what your needs are and how you are meeting them. It will help if you list your needs in each area. You may find that you have fewer needs than you thought. That is good, because it means that your needs are being met even though you aren't aware of it. It may also mean that, although your needs are being met, your wishes aren't.

If you have discovered some needs, decide to work on one list at a time to meet those needs. Next to the needs, write down ways

in which they could be met. Then write down how you could begin to meet each need. Then start on the first need or two, and try to meet them today or this week.

Most of us are reasonably good at meeting our physical needs. Our very basic physical needs are food and shelter. The next most important needs are exercise, health and a reasonable amount of physical comfort.

Our mental needs are met through all sorts of mental stimulation, such as the stimulation we obtain from listening to radio, reading newspapers, watching television, reading, studying, communicating with others, thinking about things, and so on. The areas in which most of us discover unmet needs are the emotional and spiritual areas.

How to progress

As you learn how to meet your own needs, your first task is to make lists of your needs, then start meeting one or two of them—obviously you are not going to be able to meet every need on all your lists at once. Start with your list of physical needs and try to meet two to four of them in the first week. In subsequent weeks meet further needs. Soon you will be meeting the majority of your needs yourself.

In time, you will find that your needs are met in many ways and from different sources. Some needs you will meet yourself; some other people can meet for you; for example, your partner, family, friends, teammates or workmates. You will satisfy some needs through creative outlets such as hobbies, sports, educational and social activities. Some needs will be met through extending yourself mentally by studying or taking a course, or reading serious books. You will meet other needs by helping others, doing voluntary or community work, being a member of a club or community group, and so on.



Meet your need to be needed

One of your most important needs is to be needed by someone. It is difficult to lead a happy and satisfying life if this need is not met.

If you are naturally in a position where you are needed, for example, a parent with dependants, carer, teacher, doctor or police officer, you may sometimes wish that the need was not met quite as fully. If your need to be needed is not met, you must find a way of meeting it. If there is no one around you to whom you can give, find someone. Do some voluntary work with elderly people or deprived children, or visit the sick. As well as helping others, you yourself will benefit enormously. Giving service and love to others is a vital aspect of life.

If you are overanxious or depressed you may feel that giving service to others is beyond you at the moment. This feeling is realistic and understandable, but it is based on fear and lack of confidence. If you want to move out of your depression or anxiety more quickly, find someone you can help, and do it as soon as you can. Extend yourself by giving, but don't allow yourself to become overtired.

Donate your time and help on a regular basis, if you can. You will benefit even more from a regular commitment to someone or some cause than from irregular bouts of service. There might be an elderly person in your street who needs to be taken shopping once a week. You might choose to make hospital visits to people who receive no visitors. You might like to become a regular visitor to a home for the aged, or help a disabled person in your area. You could offer to read books onto cassette for vision-impaired people. All charities and community aid projects need helpers. One way of finding out what you could do is to ask at your local Citizens Advice Bureau.

People in your immediate neighbourhood may need help. There are students of all levels and ages who need coaching. Single parents often appreciate help—offer to babysit, so that they can go out

for a while. Sick and lonely people are found in every neighbourhood. Don't be afraid to reach out to them.

Helping others is one of the best remedies for anxiety and depression. You will benefit greatly from giving to others. You may think that it is you who does all the giving, but you will find that what you gain far exceeds anything you are giving. You are fulfilling your need to be needed.

Do something nice for yourself every day

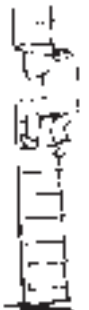
Many of us find it very difficult to be good to ourselves. We are good to others, but find it easier to emotionally chastise than to reward ourselves. If you do something nice for yourself you are saying:

I'm a worthy and worthwhile person. I deserve a treat that gives me pleasure and happiness. I value myself sufficiently to give myself this treat.

By doing something nice for yourself each day—together with all the other work you are now doing on yourself—you will become more accepting of yourself and your life. You will become a more positive person.

What sorts of treats can you give yourself? There are lots of simple things that might give you pleasure:

- Read a book or magazine for a little while.
- Relax and listen to some favourite music.
- Visit someone you like, for a cup of coffee.
- Potter in the garden or in your shed for an hour.
- Go for a walk.
- Do some window-shopping.
- Do something creative that gives you pleasure (playing a musical instrument, painting, drawing, craftwork, needlework, knitting).



- Chat with a friend on the telephone.
- Surf the Internet.
- Watch a television program outside your normal viewing time.
- Have a nap when you really shouldn't spare the time.

Whatever you decide to do doesn't have to be big. Small things can give as much pleasure as bigger ones. Reward yourself with small things frequently. Big things are okay, but you may not be able to do them frequently and consistently.

Start today and get into the habit of spoiling yourself a little at least once a day. It will do more for you than you expect.

step 11: think and act well, not sick

Are you feeling better?

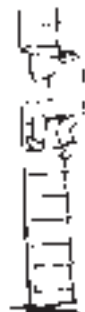
If things have gone reasonably well for you during the past few weeks and you have been consistent in working on yourself, you are likely to be feeling much better by now. However, if you feel that you are not progressing as quickly as you would like, here are two suggestions:

- 1 Retrace your steps as far as this program is concerned and make sure that you are applying, fully and daily, what you have learned up to date.

There are no short cuts. Doing ‘a bit of this and a bit of that’, or following the steps only when you feel like it, does not produce good results for most people. So go back over each step, make sure that you have understood what is required and that you have not left out anything. If necessary, be wise enough to go back a few weeks to where you started to slow down, and start afresh from there. The extra time you spend will be more than compensated for in terms of the end results.

- 2 If you are working through this program by yourself and feel you are not getting anywhere, please seriously consider getting help from a trained and experienced counsellor.

Why suffer any longer than you have to, when a few sessions with a psychologist will move you on and enable you to progress much faster? You may have come to a particular hurdle that your counsellor will be able to help you overcome. There may be influences from the past of which you are unaware, which are preventing you from making the progress



you should. A psychologist will be able to show you how to overcome these.

Program yourself to feel well

The most important ingredients of a state of personal well-being are your attitudes. If you act as if you are feeling well and not sick or depressed, you exert a positive and healing influence over every aspect of your functioning. The positive messages you are feeding into your subconscious create an atmosphere of harmony that makes you think and act well.

Being in harmony within yourself and as far as possible with all things, creates an ideal climate and gives you the best chance of feeling well in mind and body. Your energies can be channelled in a positive way towards achieving this, instead of being misdirected and wasted. Inner conflict, stress, tension and anxiety not only waste your nervous energy, but can negatively affect your physical health. Seeing yourself as unwell or depressed helps to create a state of disharmony and ultimately limits you.

Even when you are ill, you should not focus on your illness and allow it to take over. It is important to remember that feeling unwell or depressed is temporary, and that you are steadily moving towards feeling better even if you do not recover completely.

If you have chronic health problems, you will be better off if you can compartmentalise and concentrate on the aspects of your life that are not directly influenced by your disability. Such positive thinking releases your energy in the direction of healing.

When you feel anxious, tense or depressed, it is easy to act in a way that reflects those feelings and thus limit your functioning. At such times you need to remind yourself to:

Act well, not sick.

You are not feeling well. Actually you are ill. Are you going to make things even worse by allowing yourself to also *act* sick? If

you allow yourself to act sick and look sick, you will feel worse than ever.

If you have not tried this before, you will be surprised to what extent simply acting well (ignoring or hiding the feelings of sickness) will change your attitude and help to lift you out of a low or depressed mood. From today, see yourself as well, not sick, and act accordingly.

Once your attitude towards this important aspect of your functioning is really positive, there will be no holding you back. You will be well on the road to complete harmony with yourself and others.

The importance of grooming

An important part of feeling, thinking and acting well is to look as attractive and well-groomed as possible. It is only too easy to let yourself go, when you are feeling low. Often, if we are depressed we neglect how we look. A neglected appearance reflects our depressed 'I am no good to anyone or myself' or 'Nobody cares' attitude. We think this way because we are feeling low, and neglecting our appearance in turn reinforces our negative attitude. It is a vicious circle that must be broken as quickly as possible, because it leads to self-limiting behaviour and can become self-destructive.

If you continue to let yourself go, you will feel worse. This will cause you to reject yourself still further. The next thing is that you will lose your self-respect and heap more negative feelings upon yourself.

Therefore, whether you feel like it or not, make a daily effort to look as good as possible. Establish a routine of cleanliness and grooming. Take some trouble with your hair and your clothes. Once you have established this routine, you will feel a lot better about yourself.

You have to live with the way you are, so it is important to approve and respect the way you look. The worse you feel, the more important it is that, when you see yourself in a mirror, you see the reflection of someone who looks nice. Insignificant though



looks may seem, the small act of approving of what you see in the mirror helps to change your feelings about yourself. It helps your self-image and self-respect.

If you are the kind of person who cannot be bothered about appearance and who feels it is really not important, I want to say:

Never mind your feelings in this matter, just do it—you can't afford not to.

My own experiences and those of many others have proved this principle to be correct. When you are on top of things and coping really well, you can sometimes neglect your appearance and get away with it. If you are feeling low or depressed, you can never afford to neglect your appearance—your already low self-esteem can't cope with that. When you feel low, your self-esteem needs the positive boost that comes from looking okay.

Also, other people are far more likely to give you support, be understanding and have an accepting attitude towards you if they see that you are making an effort to look okay rather than letting yourself go, even though you are feeling awful. Those around you have to look at you, so you owe it to them to make an effort.

Be your new self

From today, be the new you. Be the person who is not just drifting. Care about looking okay. Start acting the way you wish you could act, as far as possible. To a large extent, you program yourself to be what you are. You yourself feed your mind the messages that determine your self-concept, what you are, how you act and how you are seen by others. What you feed into your mind, and the way you act towards yourself and those around you, ultimately determines what you are going to get out of life and what you will contribute to the lives of others. What kind of life do you wish to have?

step 12: have realistic expectations

Unrealistic expectations set unattainable standards

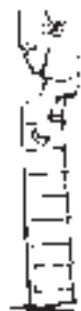
This last step of the program is vital to your present and continued welfare and good functioning.

If you continuously have unrealistic expectations of yourself, you are not accepting yourself as you are. Your feelings of inadequacy, poor self-esteem and low self-concept do not allow it. You are continually putting yourself under pressure—pressure to perform, to measure up, to prove yourself, to try to be what you think others expect you to be. At best, you are accepting yourself conditionally.

At some stage in your life, probably in childhood, you developed a feeling of not being good enough or not quite measuring up to others and since then have tried to wipe out that negative feeling about yourself. Perhaps you tried to erase the feeling by aiming to achieve top performance in everything you do. You have unrealistic expectations of yourself and set impossible standards. When you don't reach the goals, you become frustrated. You despair and want to (and often do) give up trying. In other words, you give up on yourself, convincing yourself that 'I knew that I wouldn't be able to do this. I'm no good anyway'.

Perfectionists

If you are a perfectionist, you set yourself unrealistic standards. You would rather not do a task at all than not reach your standard. As a result, you often do nothing. Failure is quite unbearable for perfectionists, because you interpret lack of success as failure of



yourself as a person, rather than failure to achieve a task.

Some perfectionists fear failure so much that they are afraid to start in the first place. Examples include:

- a woman who fears to have children because she feels that she may not be a good enough mother;
- a man who does not accept a promotion because he may not be the best supervisor the firm has ever had;
- a woman who loves gardening but won't start a garden because she may not do it well enough;
- a man who won't entertain his partner's friends and business associates because he may not be a good enough host;
- a Year 12 student who leaves school after the first term because she fears failing exams.

Perhaps you push yourself extremely hard in everything you do, using far more energy than necessary. Examples are a mother who is trying to be a superwoman to her partner and family, in her job and with her friends, as well as being a perfect housekeeper; a businesswoman competing in a male-oriented workplace who tries to prove that she is better than anybody else; or a highly competitive professional man who lives, eats and sleeps work because he fears that someone could overtake him. Such people create excessive pressure for themselves and those involved with them.

Perfectionism takes over, controls you and can lead to compulsive patterns of behaviour. Perfectionists are unhappy people. You tend to feel that nothing you do is ever good enough and are never satisfied with what you have done.

If you have unrealistic expectations of yourself, you risk being caught in the trap of compulsion. You are at considerable risk of burning out. If you fail, you plunge into deep depression, serious anxiety states or breakdown. Your road back to balance and harmony can be long and difficult. Ultimately, you have to learn to function in a more realistic, relaxed and balanced way.

Preventative action

What can you do to avoid falling into these patterns of behaviour? You can take preventative action by adopting the following resolutions:

- 1 Accept that you must come first. You, as a person, are more important than any work, project, business or study. Keep this in mind and you will have your top priority right.
- 2 Separate yourself from your actions. When you succeed in an undertaking, be pleased that you have acted well. When you are not successful, realise that it is not you but your actions that have gone wrong.
- 3 If you feel the need to prove yourself to yourself and others often, ask why you are feeling that need. Do you need to work on building your self-esteem? Do you need to work on accepting yourself better? Do you need to unlearn the negative conditioning that you may have received in childhood?
- 4 Always have realistic expectations of yourself. If you do not, you may find yourself under enormous pressure, which will create a state of high stress.

Unrealistic expectations are created and kept alive by indulging in negative habits, such as continuously comparing yourself and your performance with others. Such comparisons are neither fair nor useful. Different people have different strengths and weaknesses. We have different physical and psychological constitutions and dispositions, and different childhood and life experiences. We also have different personalities, different natural talents, different skills, different educational backgrounds, different opportunities in life and different interests. Under these circumstances, how can you compare two people fairly? You can't.

Continuously comparing yourself with others is a negative approach that serves no useful purpose. It leads to a lowering of self-concept and to unrealistic expectations of yourself. Comparing yourself with others is not the same as modelling your behaviour,



attitudes and thinking on that of other individuals, by whom you feel impressed and whom you admire. Much can be gained by finding models to guide your growth and development. Models can help you set goals for yourself. They also help you to develop and grow.

Rather than comparing yourself with others, it is more reasonable to look at yourself at different stages and times, and ask:

Where am I now (development-wise) in comparison with where I am capable of being? Where am I now with respect to the goals I have set for myself?

Through this program you have found ways of coping with unrealistic expectations, negative attitudes and unproductive behaviour patterns. If you feel that you would benefit from doing so, go back and study the relevant steps again. Focus on the steps that help you increase your self-esteem, self-concept, assertiveness and relaxation, and those about positive thinking and feeling, imagination and other constructive thoughts and actions.

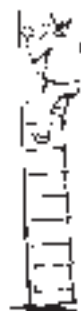
When you set expectations for yourself at a comfortable level, you are encouraged to try to reach the goals you have set. If you set your expectations unreasonably high, you may give up in despair or push yourself and sacrifice too much in the effort to achieve, resulting in excessive stress for you and those around you.

Be content to achieve on a step-by-step basis. Don't try to rise from the basement to the first floor in one gigantic leap. Any attempt to do so is likely to result in injury. You will reach the first floor just as surely and more safely by taking one step at a time.

The need for balance and harmony

Unless there is a good balance in your life, you will not cope as well as you should. Balance and harmony will create the right climate for your best chance of reaching an optimal level of mental, emotional and physical well-being.

You should always keep in mind the balances between work and recreational activity, mental and physical activity, time alone and social interaction, and structured activity and creative outlets. These will give you a happy life.



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appendix: record sheets for self-monitoring

Prerequisites

Fill in the date and record your achievement of the prerequisites each day.

Diet

Write 'yes' for each day on which you have eaten sensibly both in quantity and kind. Put a question mark (?) if you are unsure whether you have eaten sensibly. Leave the cell blank if you have eaten the wrong foods or too much.

Exercise

Write down the number of minutes you have exercised each day. Leave the cell blank if you have not exercised.

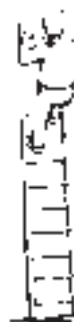
Relaxation

Write down the number of times you have practised relaxation each day.

Week starting Sunday

	Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
Diet							
Exercise							
Relaxation							

Readers are permitted to photocopy these record sheet masters.



*Week starting Sunday***Add Step 1: Replace negative thoughts with positive thinking**

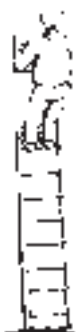
Write 'yes' for each day on which you have practised replacing negative thoughts with positive thoughts. Continue reporting on the prerequisites as before.

Step	Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
Diet							
Exercise							
Relaxation							
1 Thinking positively							

*Week starting Sunday***Add Step 2: Coping with panic and feelings of fear**

Write 'yes' for each day on which you have tried to stop feelings of panic or fear quickly and effectively, before they really start to take hold of you. Put an 'X' for days on which you could not effectively stop an attack. Leave the cell empty if you did not have feelings of panic or fear.

Step	Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
Diet							
Exercise							
Relaxation							
1 Thinking positively							
2 Coping with panic							



*Week starting Sunday***Add Step 3: Confronting your feelings**

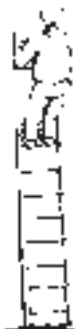
Write 'yes' for each day on which you have tried to confront your feelings, and write them down or express them to others.

Step	Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
Diet							
Exercise							
Relaxation							
1 Thinking positively							
2 Coping with panic							
3 Confronting feelings							

*Week starting Sunday***Add Step 4: Make your imagination work for you**

Do your imagination exercises during relaxation. If walking, running or swimming are your daily exercise, you can practise using your imagination while exercising. Write 'yes' for each day on which you have practised making your imagination work for you.

Step	Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
Diet							
Exercise							
Relaxation							
1 Thinking positively							
2 Coping with panic							
3 Confronting feelings							
4 Using imagination							



*Week starting Sunday***Add Step 5: Let go of your anxiety**

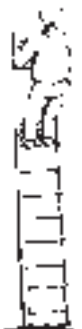
Separate anxiety from action. Even better, don't get anxious. Write 'yes' for each day on which you have practised not getting anxious, or at least separating feelings of anxiety from action.

Step	Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
Diet							
Exercise							
Relaxation							
1 Thinking positively							
2 Coping with panic							
3 Confronting feelings							
4 Using imagination							
5 Letting go of anxiety							

*Week starting Sunday***Add Step 6: Face problems and overcome them**

Write 'yes' for each day on which you have either made a list of your problems or practised finding a workable solution for a problem.

Step	Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
Diet							
Exercise							
Relaxation							
1 Thinking positively							
2 Coping with panic							
3 Confronting feelings							
4 Using imagination							
5 Letting go of anxiety							
6 Facing problems							



*Week starting Sunday***Add Step 7: Take constructive action despite negative feelings**

Remember, it is better to go out or exercise for even a short time than not at all. Do only ten minutes of a job rather than not start it. Write 'yes' for each day on which you have used your willpower at least once.

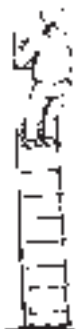
Step	Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
Diet							
Exercise							
Relaxation							
1 Thinking positively							
2 Coping with panic							
3 Confronting feelings							
4 Using imagination							
5 Letting go of anxiety							
6 Facing problems							
7 Acting constructively							

Week starting Sunday:

Add Step 8: Cater for your self-concept, build your self-esteem

Write 'yes' for each day on which you have affirmed yourself at least once. To affirm means to send to your mind messages of acceptance, praise and regard for yourself.

Step	Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
Diet							
Exercise							
Relaxation							
1 Thinking positively							
2 Coping with panic							
3 Confronting feelings							
4 Using imagination							
5 Letting go of anxiety							
6 Facing problems							
7 Acting constructively							
8 Building self-concept							



*Week starting Sunday***Add Step 9: Set your goals and motivate yourself**

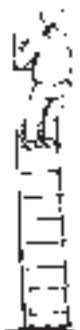
Write 'yes' for each day on which you have attained at least one goal.

Step	Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
Diet							
Exercise							
Relaxation							
1 Thinking positively							
2 Coping with panic							
3 Confronting feelings							
4 Using imagination							
5 Letting go of anxiety							
6 Facing problems							
7 Acting constructively							
8 Building self-concept							
9 Setting goals							

*Week starting Sunday***Add Step 10: Meet your own needs**

Write 'yes' for each day on which you have thought about your real needs, distinguished wishes from needs and determined which needs you cannot meet alone.

Step	Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
Diet							
Exercise							
Relaxation							
1 Thinking positively							
2 Coping with panic							
3 Confronting feelings							
4 Using imagination							
5 Letting go of anxiety							
6 Facing problems							
7 Acting constructively							
8 Building self-concept							
9 Setting goals							
10 Meeting needs							



*Week starting Sunday***Add Step 11: Think and act well, not sick**

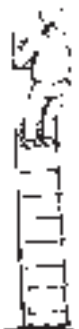
Write 'yes' for each day on which you have started to think and act as the person you wish to be.

Step	Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
Diet							
Exercise							
Relaxation							
1 Thinking positively							
2 Coping with panic							
3 Confronting feelings							
4 Using imagination							
5 Letting go of anxiety							
6 Facing problems							
7 Acting constructively							
8 Building self-concept							
9 Setting goals							
10 Meeting needs							
11 Thinking and acting well							

*Week starting Sunday***Add Step 12: Have realistic expectations**

Have realistic expectation of yourself and others. Don't try to continuously live up to the expectations of others, but compare your own performance with the aims you have set for yourself. Write 'yes' for each day on which you have done your best to be the person you wish to be.

Step	Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
Diet							
Exercise							
Relaxation							
1 Thinking positively							
2 Coping with panic							
3 Confronting feelings							
4 Using imagination							
5 Letting go of anxiety							
6 Facing problems							
7 Acting constructively							
8 Building self-concept							
9 Setting goals							
10 Meeting needs							
11 Thinking and acting well							
12 Realistic expectations							



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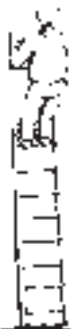
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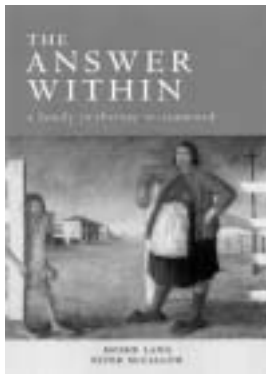
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