

**Your Recovery Workbook:**

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**Managing Depression**

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# YOUR RECOVERY WORKBOOK: MANAGING DEPRESSION

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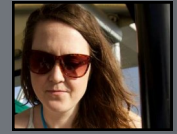
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS



1. Introduction	Page 2
2. Understand depression	Page 3
3. Overcome roadblocks	Page 7
4. Avoid guilt and shame	Page 8
5. Motivate yourself	Page 9
6. Have more flexible thinking	Page 10
7. Find hope	Page 14
8. Know warning signs	Page 15
9. Seek treatment	Page 17
10. Find support	Page 18
11. Plan for a healthy recovery	Page 20

## **A Coping Story:**

A young woman woke up every morning wondering if there was any point in getting out of bed. She avoided going places. She didn't like herself or her life. One day, she wanted it all to end. She didn't know what was happening or where to go for help. After finding out that she had depression., she worried about what her friends would think. Some friends started avoiding her, but others were supportive. Her medication and counseling didn't seem to help at first, but a few weeks later, things didn't seem as gloomy. Some days were still hard, but she learned to cope with stress in her life, manage her depression, and be more active with her friends. She found that there is hope and that she is worth it.

# 1. INTRODUCTION



- Depression is very common, yet it makes people feel alone and hopeless.
- Things you should do to recover from depression are harder because it drains your energy, making you less likely to eat well, be active, and see things as they really are.
- Managing depression means learning to cope with gloomy, negative thoughts and controlling stress that can add to depression
- Taking an active role to fight depression and improve your mood, can keep you from feeling helpless or overwhelmed.
- Finding support is important as you manage depression. Take care of your body and mind as you seek treatment and learn to cope.
- Your health care team can help you find the right kind of treatment. Both medication and/or counseling can be very effective.
- Even with effective treatments, you may feel discouraged because recovery isn't quick.
- Depression, stress, and anxiety often happen together. That's why I suggest that you also read *Your Recovery Workbook: Coping and Relaxation* (which you can download free at [www.healthvista.net](http://www.healthvista.net)'s Recovery Resources or Store page).
- This workbook is a guide for overcoming "roadblocks" and having more hope.
- Contact your doctor or health care provider for questions that you have.

**"THE LOWEST EBB IS THE TURN OF THE TIDE."  
~ HENRY WADSWORTH LONGFELLOW**

## 2. UNDERSTAND DEPRESSION



If you are depressed, you know what it feels like. It is much more intense and disabling than people who have not experienced depression can imagine.

Depression is **not** a normal part of aging or a usual response to loss or grief.

It is not from personal weakness. Anyone can get depression, at any age.

**Possible symptoms of depression** (*Mark the ones you may have had*)

- A sad mood that stays for months or years and interferes with everyday life
- Less interest and pleasure in doing things
- Changes in appetite or weight
- Not being able to sleep, or sleeping too much
- Tired or having no energy—Feeling sluggish or “stuck”
- Not being able to make decisions or focus on things
- Feeling worthless, guilty, or hopeless
- Having thoughts of death or suicide

It is wrong if people think that you can just “snap out of” depression. It is a serious illness—Recovery takes time.

When you and your family know what to expect, you are less likely to be discouraged or to feel inadequate if you don’t recover quickly.

You need to have some compassion for yourself—Take the time you need to heal.

Allen, J. G. (2005). Coping with depression. Retrieved from <http://www.menningerclinic.com/education/clinical-resources/coping-with-depression>

Try to understand the bigger picture of your illness, so you can focus on the unique things that would help you manage depression.

## POSSIBLE REASONS FOR FEELING DEPRESSED



Depression, stress, and discomfort can come from many personal and emotional factors that affect your body and mind. *(Mark below what you think may be affecting you)*

Having family history of depression/Having imbalanced brain chemicals	Having anger turned inward (silent anger/hurt)
Lacking assertiveness (not standing up for yourself or your needs)	Having lived with bullying, trauma, abuse, or neglect (especially as a child)
Using addictive substances including alcohol (a depressant), marijuana, street drugs, etc.	Comparing yourself to others or expecting too much of yourself
Avoiding social activities, fun, and support	Having a poor diet or problems with sleep
Not having enough money.	Not being with people who have positive thinking
Lacking courage, insight, or confidence	Feeling overwhelmed, defeated, or confused
Feeling trapped in an unhealthy relationship	Not taking care of your body, or being inactive
Not being able to cope in a healthy way	Having grief, loss, or self-blame
Having too much stress, pain or disability	Being unwilling to change your thoughts or behaviors
Having values that don't match your actions.	Lacking comforting relationships or spiritual connections
Lacking meaning and purpose in your life	Disliking your job, boss, or other people at work or at school

Adapted from Coyle, B. R. (2007). Stress, anxiety and depression DBD. MyTherapySession, Inc.

***What are some other stressors that may be adding to your depressed mood?***

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When depressed, you can still make choices and have some control to get out of it. *(Star the things above that you would you like to work on as a goal for improvement.)*

DESCRIBE YOUR DEPRESSION OR STRESS



Draw a picture, write a poem, or pen a story about your problems:

A large, empty rectangular box with a double-line border, intended for the user to draw a picture, write a poem, or pen a story about their problems.

## YOUR BRAIN AND BODY



Depression is a real illness. Even though it is a “chemical imbalance,” that doesn’t mean it can only be treated with medication. Brain chemistry can also be changed by talking to a therapist, coping with stress, or by how you live your life. People can reverse negative thoughts and recover from depression.

*(Mark the thoughts below that you think would help – Say them aloud)*

- When I am depressed, I know things look gloomier than they really are.
- It is OK to feel sad about the situation, but I can get through it
- What would I say to a friend who was depressed?
- I am not a worthless person. No one in this world is truly worthless. I am just going through a really tough time and need to be kind to myself.
- Even though I don’t want to do anything, I will make myself get up and do something. It might help me feel better.
- Even though I feel bad, I should go outside or go out with friends and do something enjoyable or useful.
- I need my friends and family the most when I am feeling the worst.
- Talking to someone can help by focusing some attention outside of myself.
- The first step is to imagine myself doing and enjoying the things I used to do.
- I can set very small goals and get back to doing some of the things I need to do.

***THE WORLD AROUND YOU CAN CREATE STRESS IN YOUR MIND. UNLIKE THE OUTER WORLD, YOUR INNER WORLD IS WITHIN YOUR CONTROL.***

### 3. OVERCOME ROADBLOCKS



Depression cause barriers to having balance in your life and improving your mood. Identify what keeps you from doing pleasant activities.

*(Circle the excuses you have been using)*

I'm just not interested	I'm too tired. I would rather stay in bed.
I don't have anything to wear.	I can't handle it!
What will people say if they see me like this?	I don't want to be with other people right now.
The weather outside is not nice.	I would just be miserable if I went.

Write down an activity you have been avoiding that might be pleasant for you:

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Think about possible solutions and *write them down* (without making any decisions about whether they would work for you or not).

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Talk to someone you trust and do some problem-solving together. Decide what is realistic and what would work for you. Act it out, then try it. ***My plan of action:***

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Ask yourself how well it worked for you and consider if the plan should be changed. Try again and create new habits. ***My new plan of action:***

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## 4. AVOID GUILT AND SHAME



Some people have feelings of guilt, shame, or self-blame that can slow down your recovery. *(Mark any irrational or distorted beliefs below that can lead to you feeling guilt)*

- No matter what I do, I am always wrong.
- It's my fault if anyone in my family fails or is unhappy.
- There is only one right way to do things.
- I have to do what people expect of me.
- It's wrong to be concerned about myself.
- No one should die, feel hurt, or be in pain.
- I don't deserve to be happy.

Ask yourself the questions below. *(Write your answers and discuss them with someone)*

- What is the problem that is making me feel guilty?
- Whose problem is it really?
- Recognize when you feel guilt, but allow yourself to let it go.
- Is my guilt making the problem look bigger than it is?
- How would it look if I didn't have any guilt?
- If the problem is really someone else's, don't keep it. Give it back.

Modified from Messina, J. J. & Messina, C. (2010). Retrieved from <http://www.jamesjmessina.com/toolsforpersonalgrowth/handlingguilt.html>

Even if you feel some guilt, you don't have to accept it. You may have done nothing wrong. If you did do something wrong, do what you can to make it better.

Coping skills can help avoid guilt. How do you cope when you feel guilty?

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*GOD, GRANT ME THE SERENITY TO ACCEPT THE THINGS I  
CANNOT CHANGE, THE COURAGE TO CHANGE THE THINGS  
I CAN, AND THE WISDOM TO KNOW THE DIFFERENCE.  
~ THE SERENITY PRAYER BY REINHOLD NIEBUHR*

## 4. MOTIVATE YOURSELF



To give your life more meaning and purpose, put your limited energy toward what is really important to you. Tell others about your plan and accept their support. Identify what motivates you. *(Mark below what is important, and star the top 3)*

Family or friends	Enjoyment or fun	Personal success
Physical health	Independence	Power or status
Mental health	Money or security	Professional success
Things that are yours	Spirituality or values	Other _____

If health is your motivator, there are many things you could work on, like sleep problems, eating, or being more active. You can't force yourself to sleep or to feel pleasure, but **you can force yourself** to do some activities **in small steps**.

- You can make yourself sit up in bed, get out of bed, or walk, and increase your activity from there.
- Adding activity and exercise can make you feel better and improve your wellness.
- If you make an effort to do activities that might give you pleasure, you have a good chance to lift your mood, open up your thinking, and gain support.
- Even if you feel alone, you don't have to be. Tell other people how you are feeling and sometimes they can help motivate you.

**"WHAT YOU DO TODAY CAN IMPROVE ALL YOUR TOMORROWS." ~ RALPH MARSTON**

## 6. HAVE MORE FLEXIBLE THINKING



**Emotion and thinking are woven together.** Negative thoughts make you feel sadder, and a depressed mood causes more negative thoughts.

Depression can be a response to things that happen, but how you think about those events—and about yourself—plays a big role in how severe and long-lasting it is.

Negative thinking about yourself, the world, and your future is common.

**Focus on what you can do rather than what you can't do. Everyone has strengths, but it's hard to see them when you are depressed.**

Ruminating is when your thoughts repeat themselves over and over. It can make you more depressed and anxious. This usually leads to “spinning your wheels,” seeing only the negative side of things, and putting yourself down.

**The first step is being aware** if repetitive thinking is a problem for you. If so, ask yourself if there is anything you can do right now (about the problem you can't seem to stop thinking about). If the answer is yes, focus on that specific problem, talk to someone, and do some problem solving. If the answer is no, distract yourself with relaxation techniques, prayer, music, television, or other activities. You can quit thinking about it, but it may take some practice.

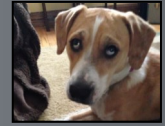
Aaron Beck developed cognitive therapy, a well-researched treatment for depression. It can help prevent going deeper into depression and can encourage you to:

- Identify automatic negative thoughts and asking if they are accurate thoughts
- Consider more reasonable ways to think about them
- Change negative beliefs about yourself (e.g. instead of thinking of yourself as being worthless, you can understand, encourage and support yourself.)

Cognitive therapy can also be combined with behavioral therapy. Changing your thoughts can change how you feel, and then change what you do.

Going to therapy isn't easy to commit to when you are depressed, but it really helps you to cope and gain insight. The benefits of therapy last a long time.

# KNOW YOUR REALITY



It has been said that the formula for happiness is reality divided by expectations. If your reality is lower than how you expect life to be, you are likely to feel unhappy.

So, it would be best to balance your reality to be closer to your expectations. By making this change, you can have less stress during your recovery.

*(Write your answers to the questions below or use another paper if you need more space)*

<b>Improve my reality</b>	<b>Lower my expectations</b>
How can I increase my coping skills, goal setting, or problem-solving skills?	What do I expect my life to be like at home? Work? In my relationships?
Is there anything that I can change about my situation? What? How? When?	What do I expect of the world? Other people? Myself?
Is there anything that I can change about what I do or how I react to this situation?	Is there another way of looking at the situation?
What help or resources would I need to make things better?	What would I say to a friend in this situation? What would I expect of him or her?
Have I done all I can do to make it better? If I accept that this is just the way things are right now, would it help me cope better?	Instead of struggling uphill through life in top gear, how could I lower my expectations? Would it help me feel better?

## **How could you improve your reality and/or lower your expectations?**

At home:	At work or other daily routines:
In relationships:	Your money situation, or other:

Modified from Vivyan, C. (2011). Reality vs expectations. Retrieved from [www.getselfhelp.co.uk](http://www.getselfhelp.co.uk)

# SET SIMPLE GOALS



Depression makes it harder to do things you used to do. So, people often just stop doing them. Setting goals can make you feel even worse if you set the goals too high. When people are depressed, things seem to take too much effort. But, you still need a life balance of achievement, closeness to others, and enjoyment.

*(Write below some activities you used to do, but have been avoiding)*

List some routine activities (e.g. showering, cleaning floors, washing dishes, or shopping).

List some pleasant activities (e.g. visiting friends or family, walking in a park, or going out to eat).

List some household activities (e.g. reading the mail, paying the bills, or fixing something).

*(Write the easiest as a specific goal below and then do it today. Write another easy one for tomorrow)*

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*(Write the most important goal and with some help divide it into smaller goals to do later this week)*

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*(Write down the hardest one and ask a friend or family member to help you do it next week)*

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## TRY TO BE MORE POSITIVE



Focus on some of your negative thoughts. (*Write your answers below*)

What is a dark or distressing thought, (word, image, or memory) that make me feel depressed? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What will I tell myself instead? (What is a reasonable alternative to the distressing thoughts?) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What would make me feel better or remind me of good things about me or about my life? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

What have I done in the past that helped when I was feeling like this?  
\_\_\_\_\_

What are my resources for coping and feeling better?  
\_\_\_\_\_

What will help calm and soothe me? (Then, do those things for the next 20 minutes)  
\_\_\_\_\_

Modified from Vivyan, C. (2011). Alternative thoughts & Actions. Retrieved from <http://www.getselfhelp.co.uk/>

Call for help (if it is still needed). Keep important phone numbers by or in your phone in case you feel overwhelmed or out of control.

Friends or relatives \_\_\_\_\_

Health professionals (Call your health care team to find out the best thing to do)  
\_\_\_\_\_

Helpline or Crisis Line (Dial 211 toll-free in most areas of the United States)  
\_\_\_\_\_

Emergency Services (Dial 911 toll-free in most areas of the United States)

## 7. FIND HOPE



- Hope, wishful thinking, and optimism are positive thoughts about the future.
- Wishful thinking and optimism are too light-hearted to be part of recovery from depression.
- Hope is difficult enough to be considered a virtue. It is needed if you struggle with fear and doubt, or after tragedy and suffering.
- To have hope, you need motivation, a sense of direction, and the ability to imagine more than one possible future.
- When you are depressed, you may need to rely on “borrowed hope” from someone who sees things clearly (rather than through a dark lens of depression).
- Sometimes hope comes and goes— What gives you hope may change.
- If hope is mixed with fear and doubt., you may hold back, afraid to hope— It takes courage to be hopeful.
- Sometimes personal growth and valuable insight comes from painful experiences (after severe depression passes).
- It is truly realistic to hope for recovery because there are effective treatments available, with even more that are being researched.
- When you have hope, you may still have setbacks. Even with effective treatment, it is possible for depression to return.

Allen, J. G. (2005). Coping with depression. Retrieved from <http://www.menningerclinic.com/education/clinical-resources/coping-with-depression>

- Sometimes medication or therapy needs to be adjusted.
- Don't be discouraged if you have to be in the hospital or change treatment.
- Expect ups and downs in your journey. Keep going and you will get to recovery.

**“HOPING IS BELIEF THAT SOMEONE IN THE UNIVERSE CARES ABOUT YOU.” ~ PAUL PRUYSER**

## 8. KNOW WARNING SIGNS



Recognize when you need help. Update your mental health provider and make an appointment. Then, be sure to get to your appointment. (*Mark below the signs that you have had. Ask your friends and family to help you watch for them*)

**Undue, long-term anxiety** — Anxiety may be more than you would expect, or without a known cause. It may include constant tension, fear, panic, or switching from one problem to the other.

**Prolonged or severe depression**—Sometimes, a hospital is what you need if:

- You can't function or take care of yourself, or if your symptoms don't get better—Your treatment plan may need to be changed. Don't wait longer than 6 weeks—You **need** to have effective treatment to make it through depression.
- Medication side effects bother you. Report them to your provider right away. It is not safe to stop taking some medications suddenly—Doses may need to be changed slowly under the care of a mental health provider.
- You have thoughts of suicide or death—You need to get help right away.
- There are sudden changes in mood or behavior, delusions or hallucinations. A careful person who suddenly begins gambling a lot of money and has an extremely high mood and activity level. may be having manic behavior (which can be part of bipolar depression). To have the right treatment, you need the right diagnosis.

**Physical Problems**—Stress and tension can cause pain or physical symptoms that are very real. Medical tests and treatment may be needed—Other disorders may be affecting your health.

Adapted from Mental Illness: Basic Facts, Mental Health Association Milwaukee County. Retrieved from <http://www.mentalhealthlacrosse.org/resources>

ACT FAST; HAVE A GOOD DOCTOR PREPARED TO HEAR FROM YOU;  
KNOW YOUR OWN PATTERNS REALLY CLEARLY, REGULATE SLEEP AND  
EATING; LIFT STRESSES AT ONCE; EXERCISE; MOBILIZE LOVE.

~ ANDREW SOLOMON

# PREVENT SUICIDE



Sometimes people feel hopeless, overwhelmed, and full of emotional pain. When pain feels like it will never end and no other options are seen, suicide may seem like an answer. Suicidal thoughts can be scary and confusing.

Remember that dark and gloomy thoughts affect the way we feel and how we react to things. Depression feels permanent, but **it will change** as it comes and goes.

Suicide is a permanent solution to a **temporary problem**. A better solution is to get through that terrible time by reducing the emotional pain and using coping resources.

**These common thoughts are untrue**—(*Answer the questions below*)

“My friends and family would be better off without me.” (No. It is devastating, and it would make **them** more likely to be depressed and suicidal. If you lost someone you knew to suicide, were you better off without them? How? \_\_\_\_\_)

“Suicide will show them how much pain I am in.” No. Most people can’t understand the depths of depression unless they have experienced it. But your health care team can understand it. What would be a better way to help your family understand?

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Modified from Vivyan, C. (2011). *Alternative thoughts & Actions*. Retrieved from <http://www.getselfhelp.co.uk/>

“It takes courage to kill yourself.” No. It takes more courage to get help and to do the hard work of recovery. Find support until you can find hope.

Who would support you? \_\_\_\_\_

Even if suicidal thoughts are discussed with a crisis line’s trained counselor, like 211 or 1-800-273-TALK (8255) you should also update your health care team. If you are thinking of a plan to kill yourself, call for Emergency Services right away.

- Do not be alone. Do not keep weapons, bottles of pills, or other potentially harmful things nearby if you are thinking about hurting yourself or taking an overdose.
- **Suicidal thoughts can be dangerous. Get help. Stay safe.**

## 9. SEEK TREATMENT



- When you go for help, a basic choice to make is whether to use therapy or medication. Your health care team can help you decide as you learn about your options.
- Research shows that having both for severe depression gives more benefits than using one or the other.
- Antidepressants can relieve symptoms of depression and help you function better. They are not addictive and they don't change your personality.
- Medication doesn't directly solve your problems, but it can make it possible for you to change things for the better.
- Dosages and types of medication differ from person to person. They work best if taken every day as prescribed. Use a reminder system so you don't forget.
- It may take up to 8 weeks to be fully effective— It is not a quick fix. Finding medication that works for you may take a few tries. Be open to trying different kinds.
- Follow directions exactly when changing medications. Stopping or starting them too quickly can be dangerous.
- Common side effects when starting antidepressants include mild appetite loss, nausea, upset stomach, sleepiness or trouble sleeping, jitteriness or anxiety, blurred vision, sweating, dizziness, headache or changes in sexual functioning. Side effects usually get better within the first few days or weeks of starting treatment. Tell your health care provider about any side effects you have.
- Don't take any other medications (prescription or over-the-counter) without first talking to your health care provider about it.
- Medications, alcohol or recreational drugs can interact with your antidepressants to cause dangerous effects or can cause your treatment not to work.

Weill Cornell Homecare Partnership. (2010). A depression education toolkit. Retrieved from <http://champ-program.org/static/Patient%20Education%20booklet%20121010.pdf>

## 10. FIND SUPPORT



When you are depressed is the time you need support from others the most. (*Mark below the barriers you have noticed*) It is harder to keep supportive relationships when:

- You are likely to withdraw from them and may want to be alone when depressed.
- You may not have enough energy to interact or respond to them or their needs.
- You are probably not as much fun to interact with when you are depressed.
- You may seek reassurance from them but then reject it.

People who support you may feel helpless and frustrated, but they usually still want to help. They may be irritable at times. (*Mark ways you want to help them*)

- Let them know how you feel and what you need them to do.
- Be grateful when they listen and make you feel less alone.
- Discuss relationship problems related to your depression.
- Use other members of your health care team for support. Widen your sources of support so your family and friends don't have to do it all.
- Be willing to do low-key activities with them (like watching movies) where you don't need to talk or have a lot of energy.
- Accept that there may be fewer supportive people in your life when you are depressed. (Be sure to maintain those healthy relationships when you are well.)

Healthy, close relationships can feel supportive. But being in an unhealthy relationship with conflict can make recovery harder instead of easier. If you start to ask yourself whether to stay in a relationship or go, consider couples' therapy.

Counseling can be helpful for unresolved grief, different expectations, role changes (like leaving home, marrying, having children, divorcing) personality problems or other relationship issues that can cause stress, low self-esteem, and insecurity.

## GATHER YOUR RESOURCES



- The most important part of effective therapy is you. Changes for the better can happen if you are open and honest and actively trying to help yourself.
- You need a solid health care team that helps you feel accepted, with a sense that they are trying to help you. Your team should work together actively toward shared goals.
- Involve a trusted friend or family member as part of your health care team to the extent that you want them to be, if they are willing to be.
- Let your friends and family help you to decrease the stress of things “piling up”.
- Refusing help frustrates those who care about you. Remember that you would want to help them if they were in your situation. Still, continue to try to do what you can for yourself.
- Find the community resources you need — Call 211 for information and referral. (It is not just a crisis line.)
- Ask for help when you need it. Some people may not know how to help you or don't understand what you need. Keep asking until someone helps you.
- Community support programs may be able to help provide housing, employment, legal aid, social activities, and support networks.
- Consider attending support groups in your area. Life is full of changes and challenges. Use your resources, be more flexible, and find your way to wellness and recovery. *What resources do you need?*

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WHEN YOU ARE IN A HOLE, THE FIRST THING TO DO  
IS STOP DIGGING.

# 11. PLAN FOR A HEALTHY RECOVERY



Watch the inspirational video: **The Don't Quit Poem** by Anthony Fernando (2:02 minutes) at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VkCFeNeqyHk>

You are more likely to have a healthy recovery if you learn more about your illness and plan for a better future.

However, that is not easy when you have little energy and the topic of depression is so complex.

Get your questions answered, and learn about your medications and treatments so you are part of the decision-making.

This workbook is meant to simplify your steps to recovery as much as possible and motivate you to make small changes that will balance out your life and your brain chemicals.

**Make a future plan for your recovery to help prevent relapse** (a gradual decline in function that leads to the return of your illness).

When I experience this symptom:	I usually respond by:	Instead, I will try responding:	What others can do to help:
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			

Think about how you can manage depression and anxiety. Use the next page for creative expression as you plan a healthy and successful recovery journey.

**FOCUS ON COPING**



**Draw a picture, write a poem, or pen a story about your coping,  
and what you plan to do:**

A large, empty rectangular box with a double-line border, intended for drawing, writing a poem, or penning a story.



#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mary B. Knutson is a Registered Nurse with a Master's Degree as a Nurse Educator. She has worked to improve education resources in academic settings, research, long-term care facilities, hospitals (including psychiatric units), and community health care agencies with the goal of empowering people and helping them toward better self-care. A collection of health education resources can be found online at [www.healthvista.net](http://www.healthvista.net).

Visit [healthvista.net](http://healthvista.net) for more recovery resources.

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