Module 2
Build your support network

Depression thrives on isolation and inappropriate ‘independence’. Relying on others when appropriate is an important life skill, and vital when depression is beating you down. Depression can be a serious condition and it is always advisable to seek professional support if you think you may be depressed. Use this module to find the right help and support, and build a secure network with a variety of support options.

Contents
1. Breaking isolation
2. Building my support network
3. Consulting counsellors & doctors
4. Am I depressed? Identifying what’s wrong
Depression really thrives when you feel alone or isolated. Reading the Student Stories on this site can make a difference to this. But nothing can substitute for human-to-human contact, especially when we know that someone else knows how we really feel.

This worksheet will help you think about small, immediate ways to break your isolation, and about how to prepare to take the first step of telling someone how you feel.

1. Reaching out

Brainstorm:
What is one small way I can reach out to someone else/other people, so I’m just a little less lonely or isolated? List up to 5 ideas, making sure you stick to things that don’t feel too difficult or threatening, but don’t expect to ‘feel like it’. (eg. ring home for a chat or contact an old friend, stay on after lectures to hang out with classmates, ask a housemate if you can walk in to uni with them instead of going on your own, speak to someone who looks left out, just smile at someone in the corridor, ask someone over for a cup of tea, say yes to an invitation you would usually say no to, ‘people watch’ at the park for a while)

1. ____________________________________________________________________________________________

2. ____________________________________________________________________________________________

3. ____________________________________________________________________________________________

4. ____________________________________________________________________________________________

5. ____________________________________________________________________________________________

Now consider your list and set yourself the challenge of doing at least one of them this week. Choose the easiest one first and write yourself an intention statement to make it a clear goal for this week.

My breaking isolation intention statement:

Example:
This week I will ___ Offer to cook dinner for my housemate Gemma ___(what)___ on Friday night ___(when)___ and stay on in the kitchen for a chat afterwards ___(where)___ instead of eating cereal in my room as usual ___(how/long)___

This week I will _____________________________________________(what)
_______________________________________________________(when)
Once you have managed to do one, or if that one doesn’t work out, then you can go on to choose another one.

See also the ‘Connecting with others’ page and worksheet for ways to plan ongoing contact with others, to break the pattern of loneliness and isolation that depression often reinforces.

2. Consider telling someone how I feel

Read the list of possible people you could talk to on the ‘Breaking isolation’ page.

Ask yourself:
If I could imagine telling someone how I am really feeling right now, who would it be? Spend some time thinking about who the easiest person would be to talk to first.

Build on these first steps by using the ‘Build support networks’ section to identify the best people to talk to, in order to get some support with how you are feeling.

If you are moderately or severely depressed, or if you feel that you are possibly at risk to yourself, then you should make it a priority to see a doctor or counsellor. See the ‘Counsellors & doctors’ section for how these professionals can help.

“I didn’t feel I really had anyone I could talk to, because it was my first year and I didn’t feel that close to anyone yet, but I eventually told my flatmate, Pete, and he made a point of at least coming in and giving me a bit of company every day.” – Daniel
Building my support network

A good support network is vital for everyone, depressed or not. Human beings are social animals and human contact is as essential to us as food and shelter is. If depression has led you to become isolated and withdrawn then a powerful first step to combating the depression is to break your isolation and start building a network of support.

This worksheet will help you identify the sources of support you have available to you, and plan how you will draw upon them as appropriate.

1. Telling someone how you feel

Even if you are having plenty of social contact, it can feel lonely when no one knows how you are really feeling inside. Telling someone how you are feeling is a powerful way to break the isolation of depression, and a vital step in building a network of support.

Read about the benefits of telling someone how you feel on the ‘Talking to someone’ page, and consider the suggestions for the wide range of people you could consider talking to.

Brainstorm:
Who could I think about talking to? Who else?
(Write down as many ideas as you can think of without censorship – writing down a name at this stage doesn’t mean you have to follow through with it. Include family members, friends, uni staff, peer supporters, anonymous helplines etc.)

Consider:
Now look back at your list and think about:

• Which person on the list would it be easiest for me to talk to first?
• What would I want to say? What is the simplest way to describe how I am feeling? (Eg. “I’m not sure why, but I’ve been feeling really low lately. I just felt like I needed to tell someone about it.”)

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• What do I not want the person to do/say?
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2. Challenge – what’s stopping you?

Talking to someone else about how you are feeling can make an enormous difference, but if you are used to keeping up a ‘front’ then this may seem like a big step to take. Read the ‘What’s stopping you getting help?’ page and try to challenge the unhelpful attitudes which may be preventing you from seeking help – human contact and connection is vital for all people, and it isn’t ‘weak’ or a sign of ‘failure’ to ask for someone else’s support.

A powerful way to overcome these barriers is to write down your intention in a clear, time-specific goal.

So write your intention down with a ‘who, when, how, what’ structure. “I am going to speak to ____ (name) on ____ (day & time) and ____ (how). I will tell him/her that ____ (what).”

If you are worried that the person you’re going to speak to will do/say something that you don’t want, then you can tell them this. For example, if you are speaking to a parent you might want to say, “I don’t want you to make a big fuss over this and I don’t need you to do anything practical at the moment. I just need you to be there for me, so I can get it off my chest.”

“I always used to think that if you needed to talk about your problems you were weak or something. But talking over my problems was the best thing that I ever did.”

– Darren
Example:
“I am going to speak to Sally (name) tomorrow after class (day & time) and ask if we can go for a coffee because I want to talk to her about something (how). I will tell him/her that I have been feeling really low lately, which is why I haven’t been coming out as much. I will tell her she doesn’t need to do anything, but I just wanted someone else to know how I was feeling (what).”

My plan for talking to someone about how I feel:

I will talk to ______________________________ (who)
on ______________________________ (when)
______________________________ (how)
I will tell him/her ______________________________ (what)

3. My potential support network

A strong support network consists of more than just one person, and has a variety of supporters offering different kinds of support. Read the ‘Peer support options’ and ‘Uni/college support options’ pages. You could also refer to the ‘Counsellors & doctors’ and ‘More ideas & resources’ sections.

Use the attached spidergram to fill in all the potential people and places that you could get relevant help from. Also note down what kind of help you could ask for from each – (eg. advice and possible hardship loan from finance office, company from a friend, getting things off my chest with Mum etc).

See the ‘Worried about someone?’ page for ideas about what non-professional supporters can realistically offer.

Consider:
Look at all the possible sources of support you have identified. Circle the person you have already identified to talk to and at least 3 more options, from different sections. Use the intention statement space below to plan when and how you will make contact with the further 3 people.

My support network intention statement:

1. I will speak to/contact ______________________________ (who)
on ______________________________ (when)
______________________________ (how)
I will ask for the following help ______________________________ (what)
2. I will speak to/contact ___________________________________________ (who)
on _______________________________________________________________ (when)
____________________________________________________________________ (how)
I will ask for the following help ________________________________________ (what)
____________________________________________________________________

3. I will speak to/contact ___________________________________________ (who)
on _______________________________________________________________ (when)
____________________________________________________________________ (how)
I will ask for the following help ________________________________________ (what)
____________________________________________________________________

If you are moderately to severely depressed, and especially if you feel you may be at risk of causing yourself harm, then you should include a professional like a doctor or counsellor on your list and contact them as a priority. See the ‘Counsellors & doctors’ section for more information about how these professionals can help.

You can use the ‘Am I depressed?’ worksheet to identify whether and how depression may be affecting you. Use your answers as a helpful way to communicate your concerns to a doctor or counsellor.
Building my support network

Family members

Professional support (counsellors & doctors)

Other peer support options

Friends

Academic support

Alternatives

Other student support services
Consulting counsellors & doctors

Depression can be a serious condition and it is always advisable to seek professional support if you think depression may be affecting you.

This worksheet will help you consider what doctors and counsellors can offer, and help you prepare yourself so that you can get the most out of your appointments with these professionals.

1. Seeing a doctor

A GP doctor is the starting point within the healthcare system. Your doctor is the right person to diagnose depression and to advise you on the best treatments for you. A doctor will discuss pros and cons of medication with you, but the decision about taking them is up to you – don’t avoid seeing the doctor just because you don’t want to take medication.

Read the ‘Consulting a doctor’, ‘Pros and cons of medication’, ‘Medication vocabulary’ and ‘Other mental health services’ pages. To help you think through the decision to see a doctor, think about what your concerns are and what you would hope to gain.

My concerns about going to see a doctor are:

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What I would hope to gain from seeing a doctor:

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It can help to prepare what you want to say:

Example:
I will identify the GP I want to see by ________ ringing the surgery and asking if any of the GPs specialises in depression and when they are available ________

“One thing I realised is that GPs are human beings much like ourselves. They see countless people through their doors a day. Not all of them have taken me seriously, take someone with you to stress how you’re feeling.”
– Tonya
I have prepared what I want to say, as follows: “I have been feeling low lately and I wanted to check this out with you as I think I may be depressed. If this is the case, I am not sure I want to be given medication, but would like to find out more about this and other options to help me feel better.”

I have completed the ‘Am I depressed?’ worksheet to take with me to the appointment so I can explain my symptoms clearly YES / NO

I want to ask the following questions: ______ I want to know for sure whether what is going on can be labelled ‘depression’ and how bad it is ______

____ I want to know more about the side effects of antidepressants, and whether I’d still be able to drink alcohol and if it will make any difference to the pill ______

____ I want to know what other options I have besides taking tablets ______

If the appointment doesn’t feel helpful, I will get a second opinion by: ______ Trying again with another GP, or maybe go to the counselling service first then try again after that if they think it would be a good idea ______

My GP appointment preparation intention:

I will identify the GP I want to see by: ________________________________________________________________

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I have completed the ‘Am I depressed?’ worksheet to take with me to the appointment so I can explain my symptoms clearly YES / NO

I want to ask the following questions:

____________________________________________________________

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_________________________ ________________________________
If the appointment doesn’t feel helpful, I will get a second opinion by:

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2. Seeing a counsellor

Counselling is about talking to someone who understands what depression is and what can help. Counsellors are professionally trained to work with people on their personal and emotional issues, including depression and suicide. They offer a chance to talk freely to someone who doesn’t know you and won’t judge. They don’t generally tell you what to do, but help you understand things better and find a way forward.

1. My counselling service contact details
Find the contact details of the counselling service on your campus at www.student.counselling.co.uk or use your campus student support web pages. Record the details here if you wish.

_____________________________________________________________________
(phone)

_____________________________________________________________________
(email)

_____________________________________________________________________
(address)

2. How and when I will ask for an appointment
You can usually phone, email or go in person to make an appointment. Sometimes you may be able to use a ‘drop in’ service to make initial contact. Have your current timetable with you, so you can provide your availability for an appointment.

I will phone/email/go in person/use drop-in (what) on ______________________ (when)

3. My preparation for the counselling appointment
You may be asked to fill in a ‘pre-counselling’ form or other type of questionnaire, ahead of the first counselling session. This helps you to prepare for the session so that you can get the most benefit from it. If you are not asked to complete a form, then you can use the following questions to help you prepare for your first counselling session. First read ‘What is counselling?’ and ‘How can counselling help?’ It may also be useful to complete the ‘Am I depressed?’ worksheet first. You can take it with you to the session so you know you’ll remember what you wanted to say.

Counselling was a turning point for me. Not to say that it ‘fixed’ the issues but rather gave me an alternate perspective on myself and how to treat how I was feeling.” – Mark

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A summary of the problem that I am bringing to counselling:

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Relevant background info about my family and childhood:

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How my problem is affecting my uni work (if at all):

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Use your answers on the ‘Am I depressed?’ worksheet to help you identify the most important aspects of how you are feeling and how your life is being affected.
What I want to get from the counselling/what aspect I want to focus on:

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The outcome I would like from counselling – the differences I would want to feel and see in my life:

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Use the ‘Am I depressed?’ worksheet (see the ‘What is depression?’ section) to help you prepare for a doctor’s or counsellor’s appointment.
Am I depressed?
Identifying what’s wrong

Use this worksheet to check whether and how depression may be affecting you.

1. Screening questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>YES/NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>During the last month, have you often been bothered by feeling down, depressed or hopeless?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>During the last month, have you often been bothered by having little interest or pleasure in doing things?</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you answer YES to both questions then fill in the warning signs checklist.

2. Check the warning signs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Warning signs</th>
<th>Yes/No?</th>
<th>If yes, how many days in last two weeks? Which ones?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Persistently sad, anxious, empty or generally low mood</td>
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<td>Loss of interest/pleasure in doing things</td>
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<td>Lethargy/decreased energy</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Problems with sleep (including too much)</td>
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<td>Appetite/weight changes</td>
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<td>Increased tearfulness</td>
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<td>Poor concentration/difficulty with decisions</td>
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<td>Hopelessness/pessimism</td>
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<td>Feeling bad about yourself, guilty, or helpless</td>
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<td>Restlessness or being fidgety, or else markedly slowed down</td>
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<td>Thoughts of death or suicide</td>
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Remember that many of these signs are an occasional part of normal life.

But depression may be a factor if you have been
- persistently sad, anxious, empty or low AND
- you have experienced at least 3 or more of the above signs on more than half the days in the last two weeks

Take it seriously and take action – preferably get professional help.

Turn overleaf for a more detailed personal survey to help you assess the specific ways in which depression is affecting you personally.
3. My daily life and functioning assessment

This detailed personal survey provides a useful inventory of the ways in which depression is affecting your daily functioning.

This is a useful record to show a doctor or other professional. It will also help you choose the most effective strategies for tackling your depression and moving forward.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Life area</th>
<th>Section A: Say if present and give details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feeling low</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-hurting</td>
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<tr>
<td>Suicidal thoughts</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feeling bad about yourself</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feeling hopeless</td>
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<tr>
<td>Worries about illness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feeling unattractive</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other worries</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Feeling angry</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section B: Describe changes</th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eating</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sleeping</td>
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<tr>
<td>Getting out of the house/your room</td>
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<tr>
<td>Exercise</td>
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<td>Drinking</td>
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<td>Smoking</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other substance use</td>
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<td>Ability to study</td>
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<td>Concentration on course</td>
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<tr>
<td>Concentration on other things</td>
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<tr>
<td>Getting work done on time</td>
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<tr>
<td>Being busy in general</td>
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<td>Time with friends</td>
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<td>Going out</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sexual activity</td>
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<td>Hobbies/societies/other interests</td>
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<td>Ability to do paid work (if relevant)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Finances</td>
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<tr>
<td>Any other relevant area</td>
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</table>