

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 If depression has led you to become isolated and withdrawn then a powerful first step to combating the depression is to break your isolation and start building a network of support.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?



"I found it helpful when I did tell my housemate what was going on with me. I thought no one would want to listen to me but I was wrong, and talking about it did make me feel a bit better – verbalising what I felt instead of keeping it inside." – Anala

- 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.")

- What do I not want the person to do/say?

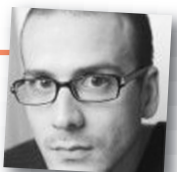
If you are worried that the person you're going to speak to will do/say something that you don't want, then you can tell them this. For example, if you are speaking to a parent you might want to say, "I don't want you to make a big fuss over this and I don't need you to do anything practical at the moment.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

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)."



"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.



