

The Depression Activity Book

FOR KIDS



Ascension EAP

www.ascensionWIEAP.org

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What Is Depression?

Have you heard the word “depressed” before? How about “sad,” “hopeless,” or “empty?” All of those words are FEELINGS (also known as “emotions”). Other types of feelings include mad, scared, or glad. Can you think of a few other feeling words? Draw or write them here:

One way we experience depression is in our feelings, but we can also feel it in our body. When we feel sad, hopeless, or alone for too long, our body may begin to feel more tired than usual. We may have trouble doing normal things like going to school, finishing our chores, or even hanging out with friends because it just takes too much effort. We may eat more than usual, or not eat much at all. We may sleep a lot, or not enough. Some people describe depression like living in cement--everything just seems harder.



Ok, so now you know that depression is a feeling, but it can also be felt in the body. There's one more part to depression--thoughts. You've heard the saying, “think happy thoughts”--and that is good advice, but sometimes it's hard to think happy thoughts. Sometimes our thoughts get stuck on sad, bad or negative things, and it's hard to get rid of them. When a person feels depression in their emotions and their body, they might also notice that they've become stuck on negative thoughts.

Conquering Depression

Now that you know what depression is, I'm wondering if you have ever felt depressed. If you are a human being, then you probably have! Feeling sad or depressed from time to time is normal, and everyone feels it at one time or another. Sometimes, though, something sad or bad happens, and what starts out as normal sadness becomes too strong and stays too long. You might begin to feel more tired, hopeless, and even worthless. When that happens, you might be experiencing depression.



This Depression Activity Book is full of information and tools to help you get a handle on depression that might be causing problems in your life. I need to warn you though--it's pretty much impossible to make sad or depressed feelings go away completely. You are still a human being, and we are supposed to feel all kinds of different emotions! Even though you will still feel sad sometimes, you can learn how to conquer depression so that it doesn't take control in your life.

Draw a picture or write a paragraph about what your life will be like when depression doesn't bother you anymore. Use lots of details!

- What would you do?
- How would you feel?
- What would you think?

A large, empty, light gray rounded rectangle with a thin black border, intended for a drawing or written response.

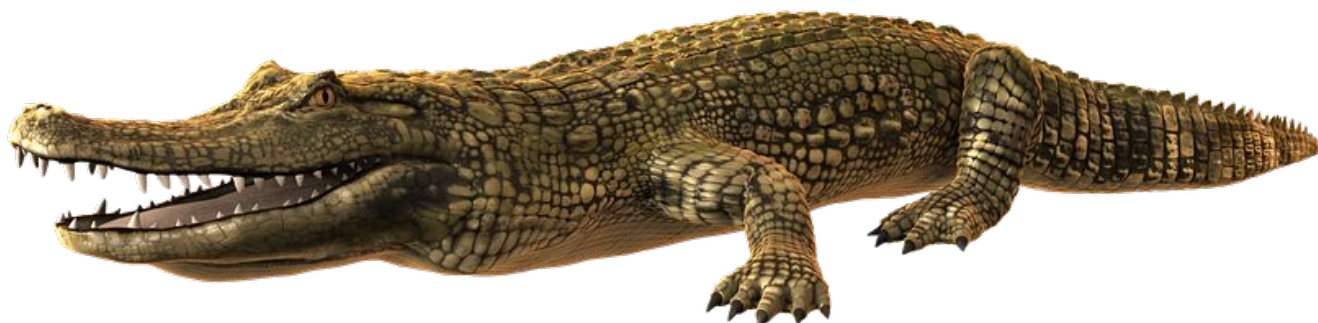
You Are Not Depression

Depression is a thing you HAVE in your life; it is not who you ARE. Some people think of depression like a storm cloud that won't go away; others think of it like chains that drag them down. Draw a picture or write a poem about the depression that bothers you.

Fight or Flight

You know that depression has 3 parts: thoughts, feelings, and reactions in your body. Let's talk more about that "reactions in your body part."

When we are faced with something dangerous or scary, our body reacts immediately! Our blood pumps faster, our eyes get bigger, our breathing gets faster, and our muscles get tense. This is called your "fight or flight" system. It changes the way we think, feel and behave in order to keep us safe in dangerous situations. Our body gets us ready to face that man-eating crocodile! --or at least run away! When a person feels this way too strongly or too often, they might be experiencing anxiety.



I have some good news for you! The fight or flight system isn't the only sheriff in town. Oh no! The rest & digest system also comes into play. This system puts the brakes on, and tries to get everything to just calm down! When your rest & digest system is at work, you will feel more at ease, peaceful and calm. You will be able to drift off to sleep at night, and wake up in the morning refreshed.

An active rest & digest system means your immune system is working. That means you fight off disease and germs pretty well. Your digestion will work too, which is getting nutrients from the food you eat into the bones, muscles, tissues and glands that need it.

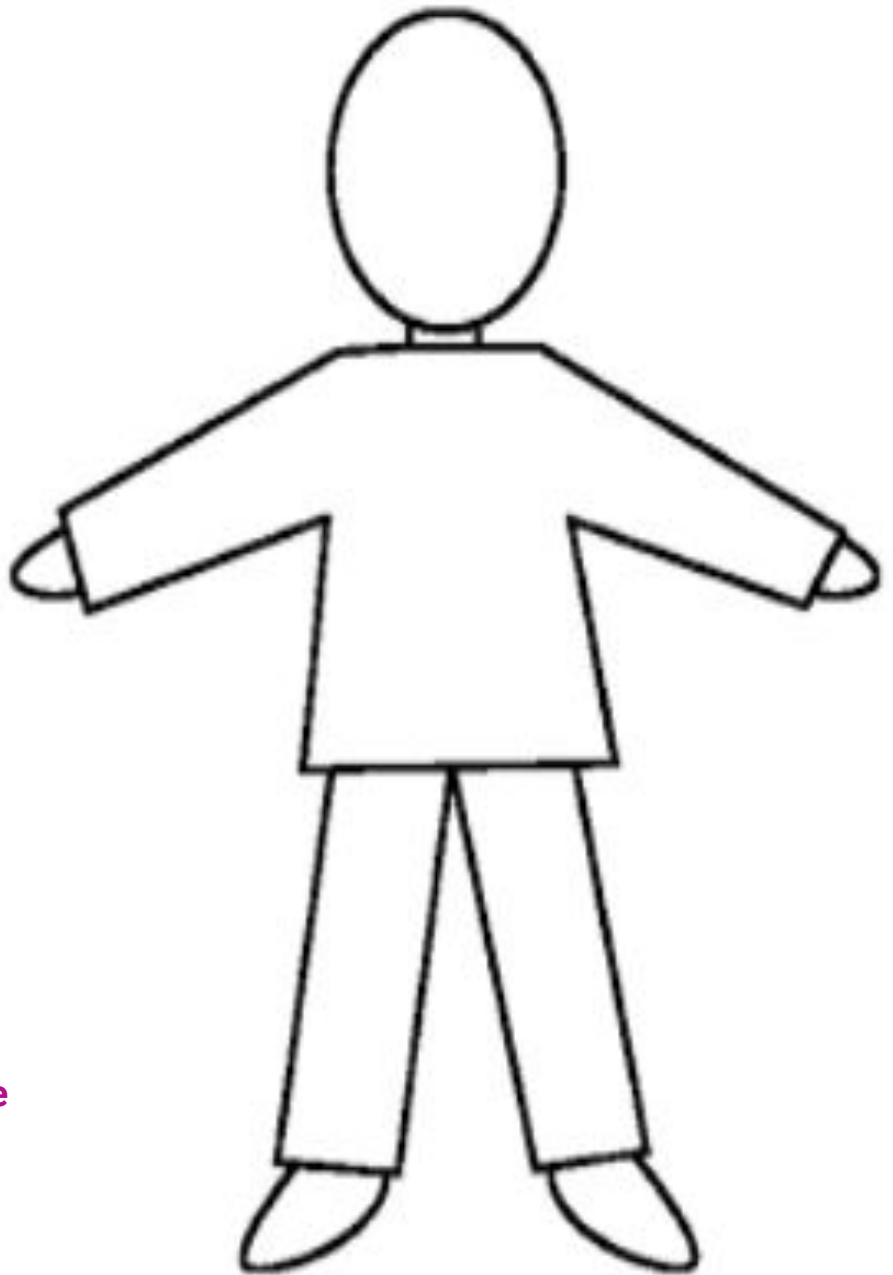
Low & Alone

Remember how we said the rest & digest system is like the brakes--it counteracts the fight or flight system. Our rest & digest system is working when we feel sad, disappointed, or even grief--those feelings are completely normal! When our rest & digest system works too strongly, too often though, we might begin to feel sluggish, slow or tired all the time. Our brain might begin to get stuck on sad, negative or hopeless thoughts. Sometimes people refer to this feeling as the “low & alone” zone, otherwise known as depression.

Some common symptoms of depression include:

- ☐ Heavy arms or legs
- ☐ Tiredness
- ☐ Broken heart/heavy chest
- ☐ Pit in the stomach
- ☐ Not hungry/too hungry
- ☐ Feel empty or alone
- ☐ Think about death or dying
- ☐ Feel worthless or guilty
- ☐ Crying
- ☐ Get mad over small things
- ☐ Hard time having fun
- ☐ Feel restless or “on edge”
- ☐ Hard to think or concentrate
- ☐ More aches and pains than usual

On this person, draw the symptoms you’ve experienced:



Depression Log

It is helpful when we can recognize when our depression is bothering us and how it affects us. So here's a challenge: for the next several days, keep track of when your depression causes problems for you. Try to notice what your body feels like, what you are thinking about, and what you do when that happens. Also notice if there is something that caused you to feel or think that way in the first place.

	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5
What happened?					
How my body felt:					
What I thought:					
What I did:					

There are no right or wrong answers. This activity is just about helping you to NOTICE what is happening, not really change anything just yet. We'll talk about that next.

Coming Out of the Depression Pit

Some people say that battling depression is like trying to climb your way out of a pit--and that is a good way to describe it! One way to do that is to counteract our body's desire to just lay around and do nothing. I get it--you have no energy, you're not sleeping well, your body is tired, but this is not healthy! It's time to get active, and beat this depression! Most people aren't ready to get up and run a marathon just yet. You probably need to start small and work your way up to the big things, so let's get started.

List or draw 3 activities that you LIKE to do:

List or draw 3 activities that you HAVE to do:



Draw or write some things you can or will do
TODAY!

Activity Log

Sometimes it's hard to get the motivation (or energy) to do things, but you can't beat depression by just sitting around! Here's a challenge for you: for the next five days do at least 1 thing you LIKE to do, and 1 thing you HAVE to do. Notice how you feel before the activity, and then how you feel after the activity, using a scale of 0-10.

Scale: Terrible = 0 Okay = 5 Great = 10

	Before activity, how I felt (0-10)	A few words about my feelings	Activity I chose	After activity, how I felt (0-10)	A few words about my feelings
Day 1 Activity 1					
Day 1 Activity 2					
Day 2 Activity 1					
Day 2 Activity 2					
Day 3 Activity 1					
Day 3 Activity 2					
Day 4 Activity 1					
Day 5 Activity 2					

Climbing the Mountain

Imagine what it would be like to climb a mountain. You have to start at the bottom and work your way up. The farther up you go the harder it becomes as the mountain becomes more steep and your body gets tired. On the other hand, climbing the mountain also becomes easier in some ways, because you've had some practice in those tricky places, and you are getting better and better at navigating the climb. When you get too tired, you may need to stop and rest for awhile. Once you get some strength back, you keep going--higher and higher and higher until... YOU MADE IT! That was a difficult journey! How do you feel?



In some ways conquering depression is like climbing a mountain. The steps become more challenging as you go, but the higher you go the more ready you will feel to take the next step. Here are a few tips for your journey:

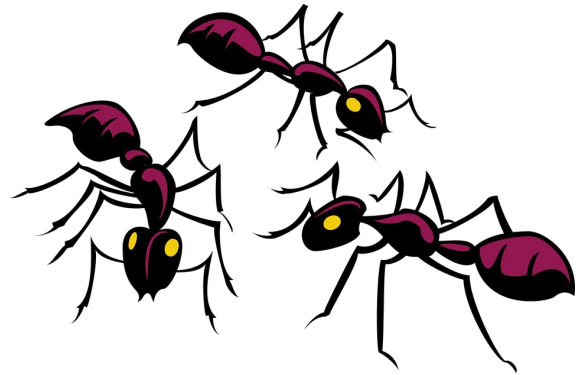
- ↑ **Start small.** The more in shape you become, the faster you can climb the mountain, but the same is true for conquering depression. Remember to challenge yourself, but avoid becoming overwhelmed.
- ↑ **Decide how long you will practice the activity.** Once you meet that goal, can you increase the time, or do something a little more challenging?
- ↑ **Celebrate each milestone.** This is hard work, and you are doing it!
- ↑ **Don't give up!** You can take breaks and rest for a little bit, but don't stop. Keep trying, even when the work gets really hard. You can do it!

Note each milestone achieved with its date below. Write a word or note about what each one meant to you.

Squashing ANTs--Part 1

Do you know what ANTs are? No, not the creepy crawly kind--we all know what THOSE are! I'm talking about

Automatic
Negative
Thoughts



A big part of depression is the thoughts we think. Sometimes we get stuck in a negative thought loop, and we just can't make it stop! Those thoughts are ANTs--Automatic Negative Thoughts. Ants are fun to watch in nature, but ANTs are not fun to have stuck in your head, so let's talk about some ways to get rid of them.

The first thing we have to do is figure out what ANTs are bothering us. Here is a list of common ANTs. Check the ones that bother you, and then add some of your own:

- ☐ I'm stupid.
- ☐ I'm ugly.
- ☐ No one likes me.
- ☐ People will laugh at me.
- ☐ Everyone is better than me.
- ☐ I will mess up or do terrible.
- ☐ I wish I were dead.
- ☐ Life is meaningless.
- ☐ I am worthless.
- ☐ There is nothing good.
- ☐ I can't stop thinking about blood, death or violence.
- ☐ No one understands me.
- ☐ I am all alone.
- ☐ I am a burden to others.
- ☐ Nothing ever goes right.
- ☐ Write your own:



Squashing ANTs--Part 2

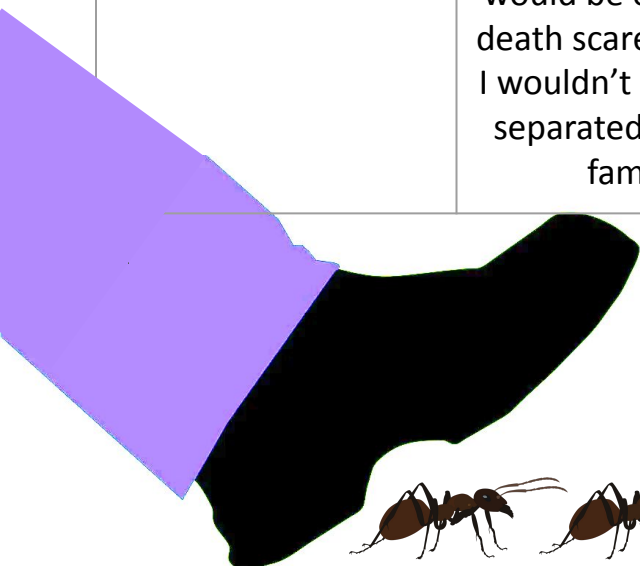
Now that you have a better idea of what your ANTs might be, it's time to start squashing them! One way to do that is to ask ourselves 2 questions:

1). Is this thought true? (Like, really really 100% true?)

2). Is this thought helpful?

If you answered NO to either of these questions, then we need to squash that ANT by coming up with a new thought that is more true, and more helpful. Let me give you an example of how this works.

ANT	Is it 100% true?	Is it helpful?	New true/helpful thought
"Nothing good ever happens. I wish I were dead!"	It's not 100% true that nothing good EVER happens. I did have fun at the birthday party last week. It's not 100% true that I wish I were dead. Sometimes I think being dead would be easier, but death scares me, and I wouldn't want to be separated from my family.	"Nothing good ever happens" is not a helpful thought, because it makes me feel sad and hopeless. I wish I were dead is also not helpful--it makes me focus on the bad things instead of noticing things that are good in my life.	Sometimes I feel disappointed by the bad things that happen in life, but there are times when really great things happen, too! Though I think being dead might be easier, I know that what I really want is to feel better, so that I can enjoy my life.



Squashing ANTs Activity

Now it's your turn. Use the same ANTs you identified before, and decide if thinking those things are true and helpful. If not, come up with new thoughts that ARE true and helpful.

ANT	Is it 100% true?	Is it helpful?	New true/helpful thought
	YES / NO (circle one)	YES / NO (circle one)	
	YES / NO (circle one)	YES / NO (circle one)	
	YES / NO (circle one)	YES / NO (circle one)	
	YES / NO (circle one)	YES / NO (circle one)	

Managing Depressed Emotions

Ok, so we talked about ways to get your body to counteract depression, by overcoming the heavy, tired, lazy feelings by challenging yourself to do activities every single day. We talked about how to overcome depressing thoughts, by deciding if those thoughts are true and helpful, and then coming up with better thoughts. Now we have to figure out how to shift our depressed feelings to feelings that aren't so sad or distressing. The good news is that the things we do to shift our emotions may also help our body function better, and our thoughts to be more positive. It's a win, win, win! Here are some ideas:

Listen to upbeat music. When we are sad we tend to want to watch, listen to and think about sad things, but this is not helpful! Instead, make a playlist of songs that are fun, energetic, and positive, to give your mood a boost.

What songs will help boost your mood when you're feeling sad or low?



Who will you spend time with? What activities could you do together?



Spend time with others. Sometimes depression makes us believe we are alone, or that no one cares. This is NOT TRUE!! (That is an ANT.) Don't become a hermit--spend time with people you care about, and who care about you.

Be grateful. Everyday, from the time you get up in the morning to the time you go to bed at night, notice things that are good. It could be anything from your favorite cereal, to cuddling a puppy at the park. There is no limit to the things we can be grateful for.

Draw or write some things you are are grateful for. Think of new things everyday.



It's a Miracle!

Now you have lots of skills and ideas to conquer depression so that it doesn't have control in your life anymore. Remember, you may never be able to get rid of sad feelings COMPLETELY. Everyone feels depressed SOMETIMES, but you are learning how to tame it so that it isn't so out-of-control that it stops you from doing fun things. Even though you've already learned a lot about depression, there are still a few more things you can do to conquer it.

Do you know that your imagination is a powerful tool? When you imagine overcoming depression, you are more likely to do it, and that's what these next activities are all about--using your imagination to conquer depression. The first activity is called "It's a Miracle!" Here's how it works. You pick a situation where something bad happens, then you say "but it's a miracle" and come up with a happy ending to the situation. Here's an example:

A bully was picking on a small child, but...

IT'S A MIRACLE!

They were blasted with a fire hose, fell on their butt, everyone laughed, and they ran away!



Finish the miracles below. Draw or write your answers.

I fell off my bike and scraped my knee,
but...

IT'S A MIRACLE!

A large, empty rectangular box with rounded corners, intended for a drawing or written response.

I had a scary nightmare where a monster
was chasing me, but...

IT'S A MIRACLE!

A large, empty rectangular box with rounded corners, intended for a drawing or written response.

It's a Miracle!--Part 2

Now it's your turn! Think of your own worst-case scenarios, and then imagine your miracle. Remember, this is about using your imagination, so your miracles can be crazy, silly, or amazing. The point is that something good happens in the end. You know how to do it! Unleash your creativity!

Bad Situation:

BUT IT'S A MIRACLE!



Bad Situation:

BUT IT'S A MIRACLE!



My Hero



Everyone knows that a hero has courage, strength, and noble qualities. But what about you? Do you have courage? Strength? Noble qualities? If you've been working on conquering your depression then I am happy to say that you have all of the above!

For this next activity you are going to make a superhero version of yourself. This superhero is going to be you, but with all your best features turned up to epic proportions. Do you want superhuman strength, invisibility, or fearless bravery? No problem! This is your hero, so have fun with it.

Hero name:

Arch nemesis (what
your hero battles):

Awesome qualities (how
your hero acts, even when
no one is watching):

Draw a picture of your hero:

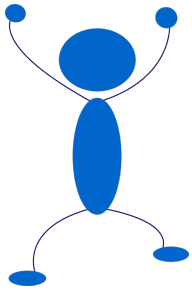
Super abilities (what your hero can do):

Now make a comic strip of your hero battling their nemesis and saving the day.

--	--	--	--

In what ways are you like your hero?

That's a Wrap!



Way to go! I am so impressed that you completed this whole Depression Activity Book. You stuck in there even when the work got hard, even when it wasn't fun, even though you probably had other stuff to do, but you DIDN'T QUIT! That is amazing, and don't let anyone tell you different. How do you feel?

Now that you've finished this book, what else do you need? Do you need to keep working on completing your activities every day? Do you need to keep practicing squashing ANTs? Do you need to keep conquering your depression mountain? If you're like most people, then the answer is YES to all of the above.



For those of us who sometimes have trouble with depression, we have to keep practicing our depression-conquering skills or the depression comes back. The good news is that the more we practice, the less the depression comes back, and the easier it is to make it leave when it does show up. The bottom line is that we can't just quit. Depression is something that we have to conquer everyday. And that's ok!



If you think you might need more help conquering depression, that's ok too. Talk to your parent or a counselor about your depression, and ask them if they can help you stay on track in practicing your skills and climbing your mountain. This is hard work, but it's easier if you work on it with someone else. You've heard the saying, "Two heads are better than one."

Way to go kid!
I'm so proud of you!