



# Coping with Depression & Negative Emotions

If you are experiencing a major depressive episode, you might exhibit some of the following symptoms:

- 1 Depressed mood (**main feature**)
- 2 Loss of interest and/or ability to enjoy everyday activities (**main feature**)
- 3 Feelings of helplessness or hopelessness
- 4 Appetite or weight changes
- 5 Sleeping problems (too much or too little)
- 6 Irritability or restlessness
- 7 Loss of energy
- 8 Excessively negative thoughts about yourself
- 9 Increased difficulty in concentration (often leading to poorer short-term memory and difficulties making decisions)
- 10 Fatigue
- 11 Increased thoughts of death, suicide, and/or self-harm

In addition to these symptoms, you might also experience negative emotions. Negative emotions commonly associated with a depressive episode include anger, guilt, and shame.

## The Nature of Emotions

Each emotion you experience, whether negative or positive, is related to an event, experience, or circumstance. The event could be external to you (outside) or internal (inside), such as a memory or a physical change (drug-induced, hormonal, or caused by illness). Our thoughts (how we make sense of these events or experiences) can be very powerful in influencing our emotions (how we feel about ourselves or our work in relation to the event we are reacting to). Other factors such as pain, hunger, and the amount of sleep you've had in the past several days can also impact your thoughts and emotions.

— Specific events or circumstances are different than the reactions (thoughts and feelings) they can inspire in that they are merely stimuli *or facts* and therefore not subject to being correct or incorrect. The validity of an event or circumstance depends on our ability to perceive it.

Thoughts, on the other hand, can be accurate or distorted depending on factors such as the amount of information we have and the extent to which we are able to control our biases. Their validity is based on their accuracy.

- Feelings are usually highly related to the thoughts and interpretations we assign to our experiences. Whether we experience an emotion (or even the nature of that emotion) is not typically in question (e.g., if we are sad it is true that we are sad), but because our interpretation of an event can change, our emotions can and will change along with it. Therefore, we can accept the validity of an emotion in the moment because we feel it, but we do not need to accept that we must feel this emotion because this conclusion is related to our thoughts about the event.

- With depression, you can have emotions such as anger, guilt, and shame in the absence of an event or *facts* that might have triggered the emotions. The good news is that you can change the negative feeling or the intensity of the negative feeling by doing the skills called *Check the Facts*.

*Check the Facts* will help you examine the facts of the situation and decide if your negative feelings are in reaction to a) something that actually occurred (*facts*) or b) your thoughts. If it is your thinking that has led to the negative emotions, you can examine those to determine if they are accurate. In rejecting distorted thoughts in favor of more accurate thoughts we will typically be rejecting more extreme negative thoughts for positive, neutral, or even less negative thoughts. Doing this can improve your emotions by either altering their quality or intensity.

