



## Solving problems

If you're depressed, anxious or stressed, your problems may seem pretty overwhelming at times. It's often helpful to learn new ways to deal with these problems.

One way to manage is to use what's known as 'structured problem solving'. This method can help you get by when you've got issues to sort out in your life or when things go wrong. This might include:

- Falling out or fighting with your friends
- Family problems
- Boyfriend/girlfriend troubles
- Losing your job or not being able to get one
- Medical problems
- Issues with sex or sexuality
- Being bullied or picked on
- Troubles with drugs or alcohol
- Problems with school/uni or studying
- Hassles at work.

Using structured problem solving, you can work through your problems by:

1. Working out what's happened to make you feel this way
2. Recognising the support you have, your own strengths and how you've coped with similar problems in the past
3. Learning new ways to deal with your troubles
4. Feeling in control and confident that you can deal with problems better in the future.

## Changing your thinking

If you're depressed or anxious, you tend to have a lot of negative thoughts about yourself ("I'm a failure"), the world ("there's nothing good out there") and the future ("it'll never get better"). These negative thoughts can get in the way of your recovery and increase your chances of becoming depressed again later on.

It's really important that you recognise when you are having these unhelpful/negative thoughts and challenge them with different ways of thinking.

Treatment that focuses on changing your thinking is called 'cognitive behavioural therapy' (CBT). CBT is based on the idea that the way you think affects the way you feel.

### How does structured problem solving work?

Single out one problem that's worrying you and write it down.

Work out what options you have available to solve that problem and write them down too.

List the pros and cons of each option, taking into account the resources you've got, such as friends, people you can talk to, money and transport. Of course it all depends what the problem is.

Choose the best option to deal with the problem.

List the steps you need to take to carry out this option.

Carry out your plan, then record how it went and whether you'd use the same plan again.

Everyone has problems of one kind or another and we all go through stressful situations. Using CBT, you can learn different ways of thinking to help you cope - no matter what kind of problem you're up against.

If you're the type of person who tends to criticise yourself a lot or think negatively more often than not (frequently thinking "I'm a failure", "no one cares", "my life sucks" or "I can't do anything to make this better"), then you might find CBT helpful to manage your depression.

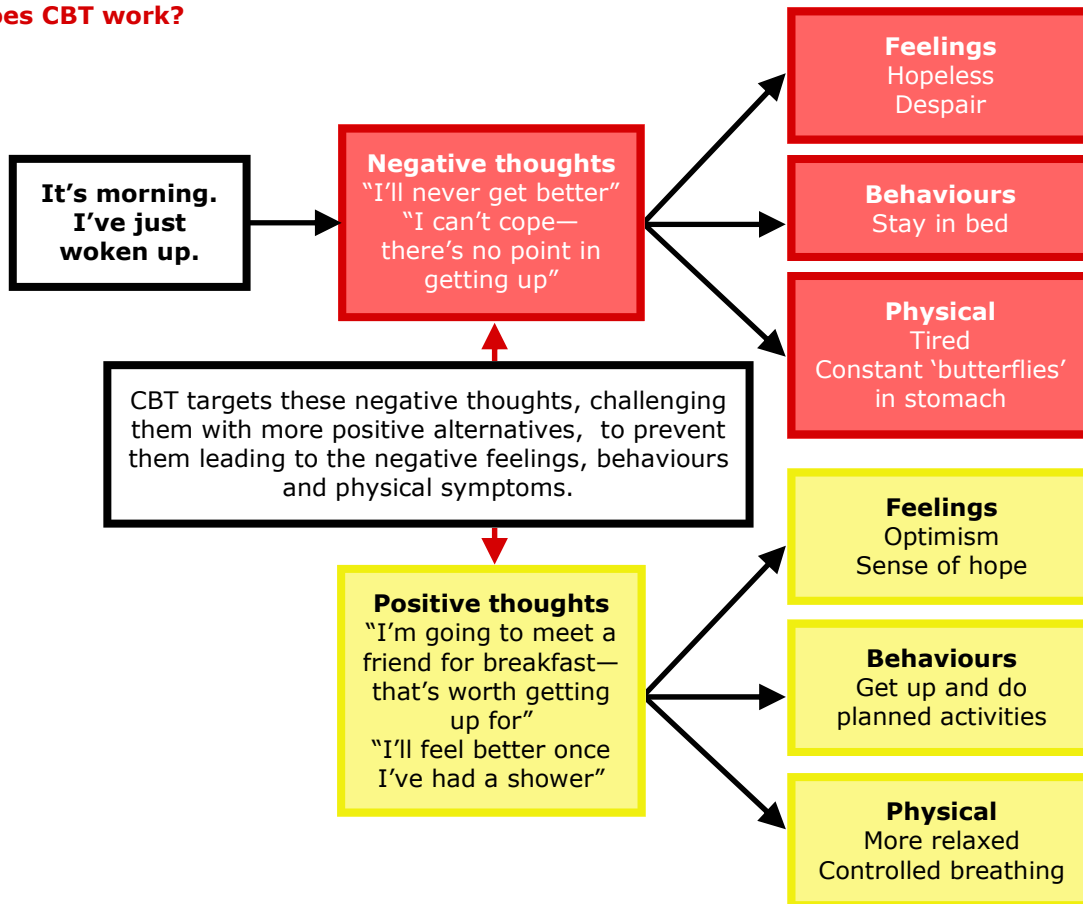
Even if you're not experiencing depression, learning about and using CBT strategies is a good idea as it can decrease your chances of developing depression later on.



# Getting things sorted



## How does CBT work?



## What's involved in CBT?

Cognitive behavioural therapy is all about monitoring your thoughts — which is the first step to changing your thinking.

Keeping a diary of your thoughts and feelings, or using a chart like the one on the next page might help you to challenge your negative thoughts with more positive ones.

It might help you to see, for example, that even if you've broken up with your partner, there are other people who care about you or, if you've failed an exam, that you've done well at other things.

Depending on how bad your negative thinking's become, you might want to talk to a counsellor, doctor or health professional about treatments that help you change your thinking.

## For more information

**MoodGYM** [<http://moodgym.anu.edu.au>]  
MoodGYM is an interactive web-based program designed to prevent depression in young people. Using MoodGYM, you can learn some of the cognitive behavioural therapy techniques online.

**beyondblue** [[www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au)]  
The *beyondblue* website had more information about different psychological treatment options at [[http://www.beyondblue.org.au/index.aspx?link\\_id=1.14](http://www.beyondblue.org.au/index.aspx?link_id=1.14)]

## See also

- Ybblue fact sheet: Getting the sleep you need
- Ybblue fact sheet: Dealing with stress
- Ybblue fact sheet: Getting active to beat depression

Ybblue is a youth program of *beyondblue: the national depression initiative*. For more information about depression, anxiety and related disorders, see [www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au)



# Getting things sorted



## Getting thing sorted

You might want to use a chart like this to record your thoughts, feelings and actions in response to events in your life.

What happened	What I thought	What I felt	What I did	What I could do better
<b>Example:</b> Failed a maths test	"I'm no good at maths" "I always fail at everything"	Disappointed, angry, ashamed	I kept my feelings to myself	Talk about it with my friends, family or the teacher
<b>Example:</b> Not invited to a party	"There's something wrong with me" "No one likes me"	Sad, empty, alone	Yelled at my friends, wrote an angry entry in my diary	Confide in a close friend, discuss with them how I was feeling
<b>Example:</b> My parents grounded me	"My friends have been grounded for things too" "This happened for a reason"	Pissed off, but I'll get over it	Told my friends what was happening	Think I've handled this okay

**Source:** Hickie et al. (2000). *Educational Health Solutions*. Reproduced with permission. [www.spheregp.com.au]

