

ACTUALLY, I'M NOT OK

BY DANNY BAKER



Actually, I'm Not OK

written by
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Introduction

As anyone who's ever suffered from depression knows, it can make you feel like you're living in a body that fights to survive, with a mind that tries to die.

It can make you feel scared, miserable, empty, numb, ashamed, embarrassed and unable to recognise the fun, happy person you used to be.

It can make it impossible to be able to construct or even envision a future.

It can make you feel so confused and mixed up that you can't see a single answer for any of the problems in your life, and it can make you feel devastatingly helpless as a result.

It can be so overwhelming that it can feel as if you're fighting to keep your head above water when it's up to your nose, and the water keeps getting deeper, and you don't know how to swim, and there's no one around to save you, and no matter how much you kick and struggle and scream, you just keep sinking. And after a while, it can make you question, *what's the point? What's the point in continuing to fight a battle I don't think I can win?* And it can make you wonder if everything wouldn't be better if you just disappeared.

Under any circumstances, depression is a horribly, *horribly* difficult illness to deal with. However, what makes it all the more crippling is that due to the stigma surrounding it, many sufferers don't feel as if they can talk about it with their loved ones. Consequently, instead of receiving the care and support they need, they keep all their pain to themselves, and thus have that pain compounded by feeling isolated, alone, and misunderstood.

And unfortunately, I know exactly how this feels.

My name's Danny Baker, and in case you don't know, I'm the co-founder of The Depression Project, and an ex-depression sufferer myself. In fact, from 2008 until the beginning of 2012, I suffered from life-threatening bouts of depression that led to alcoholism, drug abuse, medicine-induced psychosis and multiple hospitalisations; and when I was first afflicted by the illness, I had very few people to talk to about it. Like so many others, I was too scared to tell my friends what I was going through, and on the rare occasions I tried to, the conversation would never go the way I'd want. Consequently, I felt bereft of support, and even more broken, miserable and lonely than I already was.

Over time, though, I realised that being able to talk about my depression was a skill like anything else, and as I continued to hone it, I started having a lot more of the open, honest, comfortable conversations that I wanted to have. As a result, in the latter months and years that I battled the black dog, I was able to cultivate a wonderful group of friends and family members who I could turn to for help, which made the road to recovery a whole lot smoother.

ACTUALLY, I'M NOT OK

The ultimate guide to helping you feel comfortable talking about your depression – so that you can get the support you so richly deserve

Like the subtitle says, in this book, I'm going to teach you everything you need to know in order to feel comfortable opening up and talking about your depression – so that you can develop the understanding, caring

network of supporters you deserve to have around you. To make sure you know exactly how we're going to achieve this together, below is a chapter by chapter breakdown of what this book will cover.

CHAPTER 1: WHY IT'S A GOOD IDEA TO TALK ABOUT YOUR DEPRESSION

The less sold you are on the benefits of opening up about your illness in the first place, then the less likely it is that you're going to actually do so. Accordingly, we're going to start by quickly outlining the reasons why it's important to talk about your depression with the people closest to you. While some of these reasons are fairly obvious, it's my guess that there'll also be a couple of "surprise reasons" that you haven't yet thought of!

CHAPTER 2: CONQUERING ANY FEARS, WORRIES OR OTHER RESERVATIONS YOU HAVE REGARDING OPENING UP ABOUT YOUR DEPRESSION

Even if you're convinced that it's a good idea to talk about your depression, you may still have a few fears, worries or other reservations that are holding you back from doing so. For this reason, in this chapter we'll confront the most common concerns you're likely to have head-on, in particular:

1. The fear that other people will judge you – for example, by thinking that you're a "freak", "crazy" or that "something's wrong with you".

2. The fear that people won't understand, and respond with something annoying like "you just have to get over it", "everyone has bad days sometimes", "you just need to do more of XYZ to feel better", or "chin up, buttercup!"
3. Shame – because you feel that having depression is a character defect, and/or that you're "weak" or a "failure" for struggling with it.
4. Not being comfortable admitting particularly "sensitive" aspects of your depression to others (for example, that you've self-harmed or attempted suicide before).
5. Embarrassment – because you feel you have a "good life", and that therefore, you have no reason to be depressed.
6. The worry that by telling your loved ones about your depression, you'll be bringing them down and/or becoming a burden to them.
7. Not wanting to appear vulnerable – for example, because you're a mum or dad and for this reason, you expect yourself to be the "strong one".
8. The worry that no-one will care.

CHAPTER 3: PREPARING TO HAVE A CONVERSATION ABOUT YOUR DEPRESSION

In this Chapter, we'll delve into how you can prepare to tell someone that you struggle with depression. Specifically, we'll cover:

1. Getting in the right “mindset” to have a conversation about your depression.
2. How to decide who to tell.
3. How to decide how much to tell them.
4. How to decide where to tell them.
5. And, how to decide when to tell them.

CHAPTER 4: HAVING THE CONVERSATION

In this chapter, I’m going to show you the different ways you can start a conversation about your depression – and as part of doing so, I’m going to share with you a letter I wrote which you can use as a template to explain to your loved ones exactly how depression affects you, as well as the ways you’d like them to support you through it. In chapter 4, I’m also going to show you how to handle your friend or family member’s response to you telling them about your depression – whether good, bad or ugly – and lastly, I’ll show you how to resolve the conversation so that you get what you want out of it.

CHAPTER 5: THE EASIEST WAY TO GET ONGOING, ON-POINT SUPPORT FOR YOUR DEPRESSION

Even after you’ve told your loved ones that you struggle with depression and they’ve committed to supporting you, it can still be really hard for them to do so in an effective way. This is because as you well know,

depression can be different things at different times – for example, exhaustion one day, overwhelming misery the next, feeling pretty good the next day, and then staying in bed and hiding from the world the day after that. And, when depression can be so many different things, it's very difficult for your loved ones to know how you're feeling at any particular point in time – and consequently, at any particular point in time, it's very hard for them to know how to help you.

However, The Depression Project has developed what we call the Storm To Sun Framework – which is something that solves this problem by making it easy for you to express exactly how you feel at any given moment.

This is the framework that I *wish* I could've used when I suffered from depression, and I know that it's something you're going to find really, *really* helpful!



OK my friend, so now that you know exactly what we'll be covering, it's time to get started. I can't wait to go on this journey with you, and to do everything in my power to help you get the support for your depression that you deserve!

All my love,

Danny Baker,

Ex-depression sufferer, and co-founder of The Depression Project.

Chapter 1:

Why it's a good idea to talk about your depression

Like we've said, the less convinced you are that it's worth talking about your depression, then the less likely you are to actually do it. Accordingly, let's begin by outlining the seven reasons why it's beneficial to tell the people closest to you that you're struggling with depression. Like I also mentioned in the introduction, while some of these reasons are pretty obvious, I think you'll also find a couple of subtle, uncommonly talked about reasons that might take you by surprise!

REASON #1: TO GAIN SUPPORT

As you and I both know, depression is an excruciatingly difficult illness to deal with under any circumstances, but it's even harder to manage when you're trying to do so all by yourself. For this reason, having people you can turn to for comfort and support when you're struggling can make a world of difference.

REASON #2: TO REALISE THAT YOU'RE NOT ALONE

Keeping your depression to yourself usually goes hand-in-hand with feeling isolated and alone, which almost always serves to intensify your suffering. However, knowing that there are other people who understand you, who know what you're going through and who are on your side can be very, very comforting.

REASON #3: SO THAT THEY CAN HELP YOU SEE THE LIGHT AT THE END OF THE TUNNEL

Like we've said, one of the most important reasons to tell someone that you're suffering from depression is to gain their support.

Similarly, another reason why it's critical to open up to the people closest to you is so that on your worst days, those people can give you the hope and encouragement you may need to be able to see the light at the end of the tunnel. After all, as you may have experienced, sometimes it's possible to get so trapped in the fog of your misery that you can't see any way out. Consequently, it sometimes takes another person to point out to you that there will be better days ahead, and that even though you may not be able to see it right now, that it is possible to recover and be happy again.



On those really difficult days when it seems impossible to go on and you feel like giving up, just remind yourself that you've been there before and you've survived every time, so you can survive this time, too.

REASON #4: TO DEVELOP DEEPER RELATIONSHIPS WITH YOUR LOVED ONES

One of the least talked about benefits of being open about your depression with your friends and family members is that it can often cause you to have deeper, more meaningful relationships with those people. Speaking from experience, I'd often find that telling one of my friends that I suffered from depression would then induce them to share

one of their own trials or tribulations that they were going through or had been through previously. As a result, we'd end up having a really personal, meaningful conversation that would often lead to more personal and meaningful conversations in the future – and so, our relationship would naturally deepen, and the two of us would grow closer together.

REASON #5: TO HELP YOUR LOVED ONES UNDERSTAND WHY YOU MAY BE ACTING DIFFERENTLY FROM USUAL

Another critically important reason why I encourage you to tell your loved ones that you're struggling with depression is so that they can understand why you may have been acting differently from usual. For example, when you're depressed, you may often prefer to stay at home rather than go out and socialise, and as a result, you may not see your friends or family for a number of days, weeks or even months. If they have no idea that you have depression, then they might conclude that you're simply avoiding them – perhaps because you're angry or upset with them, or because you no longer value your relationship with them. However, if you instead take the time to explain that the reason you haven't seen them lately isn't in fact because of anything to do with them personally, but rather just because you've been battling depression and have needed some time to yourself, then they're much more likely to understand as opposed to jump to false conclusions. The same goes for if you've been moody around your loved ones, for example, or if you've been irritable, quiet, unresponsive, detached, aggressive, angry, or if you've outwardly displayed any of depression's other unfortunate symptoms.

REASON #6: TO HELP YOU UNDERSTAND WHAT MAY BE

TRIGGERING YOUR DEPRESSION

In order to recover from depression, you first need to figure out precisely what's causing it. There are many ways to do this – the main one being going to therapy – but an additional helpful method is to talk to the people closest to you about your condition and see what they think some triggering factors may be. After all, your partner for example may notice that when you don't get a good night's sleep, that you're really cranky and crabby the next day. Similarly, your parents might notice that your mood plummets when you spend time with your narcissistic partner.

REASON #7: TO DECREASE THE STIGMA SURROUNDING DEPRESSION

The more we all talk about depression, then the more we all, gradually and collectively, eliminate the stigma surrounding it, and thus create a more understanding, compassionate, supportive world for people with depression.

LET'S END THE STIGMA



KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THIS CHAPTER

There are seven reasons why it's beneficial to talk to your loved ones about your depression:

1. To gain their support;
2. To realise that you're not alone;
3. So that they can help you see the light at the end of the tunnel;
4. To develop deeper relationships with those people;
5. To help them understand why you may be acting differently from usual;
6. To help you understand what may be triggering your depression;
7. To decrease the stigma surrounding depression.

Chapter 2:

Conquering any fears, worries or other reservations you have regarding opening up about your depression

Before writing this book, I posted a question on Facebook to The Depression Project's 1,000,000+ followers:

“What’s the #1 thing that makes it difficult for you to open up about your depression?”

And there were a LOT of responses, with some of the most common being:

“I’m scared that no-one will understand.”

“I’m worried that people will judge me and think I’m crazy. Or even worse, that they just won’t care.”

“It’s shameful for me to admit that my depression makes it hard to do even simple things like having a shower.”

“The feeling that I’m a failure and that I’ve let my family down.”

“I don’t want to be a burden to my loved ones and cause them to worry about me all the time.”

“The frustration at hearing annoying, overly simplistic advice like ‘just think positive’”

“Being the mum and therefore having to be the strong one.”

“Being told that I have nothing to be depressed about because I have a ‘good life’ and that there are people in the world who are worse off than me.”

So, in this chapter, we're going to confront common concerns like these head on, and I'm going to empower you to be able to overcome them.

1. CONQUERING THE FEAR THAT OTHER PEOPLE WILL JUDGE YOU – FOR EXAMPLE, BY THINKING YOU'RE A “FREAK”, “CRAZY” OR THAT “SOMETHING'S WRONG WITH YOU”

This is a fear that plagues a lot of people who struggle with depression, including myself when I used to battle the black dog. However in my experience, it's a trepidation that's largely unfounded. After all, I have told every single one of my friends and family members about my depression; my memoir *Depression is a Liar* about my struggle and eventual recovery has been downloaded almost 100,000 times; and as the co-founder of The Depression Project, I frequently share my experiences with depression to our 1,000,000+ person community – and, aside from in a handful of cases, I have never felt judged for having suffered from depression. If that seems unbelievable, then let me remind you that the World Health Organisation estimates that 350 million people have depression worldwide. So, while it may not seem like it, depression is very, very common, which means that the majority of people have been touched by it in some way or another – either because they've battled it themselves, or because someone close to them has. Accordingly, most people recognise depression as a legitimate illness, and while not everyone will understand it very well (I'll get to this in the next section), the majority of people will not judge you or think you're a “freak”, “crazy” or that there's “something wrong with you” because you've been diagnosed with it.

As regards the minute percentage of people who may judge you, I'd like to share an idea with you that's always helped me:

Those who matter don't mind, and those who mind don't matter.

In other words, the sort of people you want in your life are not going to judge or debase you for having depression, and if a few people do, then quite frankly, you're better off without them, because they're not the sort of people you'd be able to have a close relationship with anyway. This is a lesson I specifically remember my psychologist teaching me before I released my memoir *Depression is a Liar* in 2013.

'So Danny, how've you been feeling?' he asked when I arrived.

'Yeah, really good on the whole. But I've been a bit nervous lately about publishing my memoir. I mean, a lot of people who know me don't know that I used to suffer from depression, so what are they going to say when they find out I did? And what are they going to say when they discover that it led to alcoholism, drug abuse, medicine-induced psychosis and multiple hospitalisations? What if some people I know read my book, conclude that I'm a freak, and then decide they don't want to be friends with me anymore?'

'I don't think anyone is going to think that,' my psychologist said. 'But even if a few people do, then it doesn't really matter, does it?'

I was shocked.

'Huh? How can you say that it doesn't matter?'

My psychologist smiled at me gently.

‘When you release your memoir, Danny, there are going to be a lot of people who find it inspiring, uplifting and encouraging – and I think there are even going to be some people who find it life-saving. However, you may also get a few people who can’t deal with what you’ve been through, and who for that reason, may choose to distance themselves from you. But let me ask you this: if a person chooses to distance themselves from you because they don’t like your past or because they think you’re a “freak”, as you put it, then do you think you’d ever be able to have a good relationship with someone so judgmental anyway?’

I thought about it for a few moments.

‘No,’ I eventually said. ‘I guess not.’

‘Would you even want to be friends with them?’

I considered that question for another few moments before shaking my head.

‘No.’

‘So then why would you care if a few people think like that after reading your memoir? Those who matter don’t mind, and those who mind don’t matter, remember?’

I really took that advice to heart, and ever since that conversation, I’ve never worried about what people might think of me when I tell them I’ve suffered from depression (but like I said, almost everyone has been accepting of it, and in reality, I’ve only very rarely felt judged).

2. CONQUERING THE FEAR THAT OTHER PEOPLE WON'T UNDERSTAND

Now, while it's unlikely that many people will judge you for having depression, unfortunately, I'd be lying if I told you that everyone will understand what you're going through. Sadly, because there's very little education about depression and mental illness in schools, in the workplace, in the media or anywhere else, a lot of non-sufferers don't properly understand it, and thus say things that can come across as insensitive, derogatory or dismissive like:

"You just need to get over it."

"But there are so many people who are worse off than you!"

"Everyone has bad days from time to time."

"Life's too short to worry so much."

"It's all in your head."

"You just need to [insert piece of trivial / unhelpful advice]."

"What do you have to be depressed about? You've got a great life!"

"Chin up, buttercup!"

Like you no doubt have, I've heard these sorts of comments before, and like you no doubt did, I also found them to be very annoying and frustrating. However, what I eventually came to realise is that people are NOT usually saying these things to be mean or because they don't care about you. In reality, they almost always DO care, and much more often

than not, they are genuinely trying to help when they say these things. The real problem is that they just don't understand depression very well at all – because they haven't struggled with the illness themselves, and because like I said, there's not much education about depression in schools, the workplace, the media or anywhere else. This was a very important realisation for me to make, because when I thought that the reason people said things like *“we all have bad days now and then”* or *“just get over it”* was because they were uncaring or perhaps even stupid, I had no faith that they'd ever be able to support me through my depression, and I felt lonely, isolated and even more miserable as a result. However, as soon as I realised that the main reason people said these things was actually just because they didn't understand depression properly, it filled me with hope – *“because if I can just help them better understand depression,”* I remember thinking, *“then there is a good chance that they will then be willing to support me the way I'd like them to.”* And, once I was able to better educate them about depression, this is exactly what happened.

We'll talk in detail about how you can help other people better understand depression in the latter chapters of this book – I promise! But for now, just know that the chance that someone may not initially get it is not a great reason to avoid telling them that you have depression.

3. CONQUERING THE SHAME OF DEPRESSION – BECAUSE YOU BELIEVE IT'S A CHARACTER DEFECT AND THAT YOU'RE “WEAK”, A “FAILURE” OR “ABNORMAL” FOR STRUGGLING WITH IT

When I was first diagnosed with depression, this is exactly what I believed. I used to think that struggling with depression meant that I was weak – *“because strong people are on top of their emotions, and don't let anything*

get to them". I used to think that struggling with depression meant that I was a failure – *"because successful people have everything in their life sorted out, and don't need any help or support from anyone"*. And, I used to think that struggling with depression meant that I was "abnormal" and that it made me a "loser" – *"because normal, everyday people and particularly winners don't have days where they hate their life and wish they were dead"*.

But having these beliefs just proved that even though I struggled with depression myself, I didn't actually understand depression very well at all. And, the more I grew to understand it, the more I realised that depression is an *illness*, and that in the same way I wouldn't think of myself as "weak", a "failure" or a "loser" for suffering from a physical illness like cancer for example, I couldn't think of myself as "weak", a "failure" or a "loser" for suffering from a mental illness, either. And, not only did I eventually come to understand depression for the illness that it is, I eventually learned that it is an extremely, *extremely* common illness at that – one that according to the World Health Organisation, afflicts 350 million people worldwide. I realised that just like me, there were millions of other people who felt overwhelmed. I realised there were millions of other people who struggled to get out of bed some days. I realised there were millions of other people who thought about ending their life sometimes. I realised that all these people understood my pain and felt the same things I did, and that together, we all formed a 350 million person fraternity that's represented by every age, gender, nationality, colour, creed and profession there is. And, when I came to understand this, it further cemented in my mind that I was not "crazy", "weak", a "loser" or a "failure". Rather, I just happened to suffer from one of the most common illnesses in the world, that's all.

And of course, the same goes for you, my friend. You just struggle with a very, very common illness as well, and you have absolutely NOTHING to be ashamed of!

IN CASE NO-ONE TOLD YOU TODAY:



You are NOT stupid.

You are NOT ugly.

You are NOT a failure.

You are NOT worthless.

You are NOT weak.

You are NOT crazy.

You are NOT a loser.

Your depression is lying to you when it tells you all of these things, and the truth is that you're still the same wonderful person you've always been.

To help reinforce this point even further, what I'd really like you to do right now is to take a moment to ask yourself:

If someone I love told me that THEY were suffering from depression, would I think that THEY are weak, a failure, or a loser? Or, would I think of them as the same good person they've always been, who just so now happens to have a really common illness?

I'm guessing that you would indeed still think of them as the good person they've always been, and absolutely NOT think of them as "weak", a "failure" or a "loser". And, this highlights an extremely important feature of depression: when you struggle with this illness, you tend to be much, much, much harder and more critical of yourself than you would be of anyone else in the same position as you. Usually, this happens without you even realising it, which is why asking yourself this question can be incredibly powerful, and remind you that:

1. Just like your hypothetical loved one who told you they had depression, you are NOT "weak", a "failure" or a "loser" for struggling with it yourself.
2. In general, you need to try and be a whole lot kinder to yourself.

ANOTHER COMMON REASON WHY PEOPLE WITH DEPRESSION OFTEN THINK THEY'RE WEAK:

A second extremely common reason why people with depression often think they're weak is because they negatively compare themselves to how they were before they had depression – or alternatively, they negatively compare themselves to everyone around them who doesn't have depression. For example, by thinking:

*"How come everybody else apart from me can manage to have a shower every day?
How come I'm the only one who doesn't have the energy to go to social outings?
How come cleaning my house feels like climbing a mountain? It's because I'm just weak, that's why!"*

However, the reason why you may find it difficult to do these tasks is not because you are weak – it's because you're currently fighting a painful, debilitating illness that drains you of all your energy. Consequently, saying that you're "weak" for not being able to do as much as someone who doesn't have depression or as much as yourself before you had depression is like criticising someone with pneumonia, a broken leg or another physical ailment as being weak for not being able to do as much as someone who doesn't.

Again, it comes back to accepting that depression is a legitimate illness – and once you accept this, you're much less likely to be ashamed of struggling with it, or to criticise yourself for any decreased ability to function.

Just to remind you one last time, you are NOT weak for struggling with depression. On the contrary, you are strong, and you should feel proud of yourself for being a warrior, and for having the courage you need to fight such a debilitating illness.



4. MANAGING THE DISCOMFORT OF ADMITTING PARTICULARLY “SENSITIVE” ASPECTS OF YOUR DEPRESSION TO OTHERS

Many people are reluctant to open up about their depression because they're uncomfortable disclosing particularly “sensitive” aspects of their illness – for example, that they've self-harmed before; or that when they've been at their lowest, they've sometimes gone days without showering. However, it is important to note that your thoughts, feelings and emotions are your own, and how many or how much of those thoughts, feelings or emotions you choose to divulge to any particular person is completely up to you. For example, if you want to tell someone that you suffer from depression, but you don't want them to know that you've sometimes gone days without showering, then you don't have to share that with them. If you don't want to tell them that you've self-harmed before, then you don't have to do that either. If you don't want them to know that you cry yourself to sleep some nights, then that's another thing you can choose to hold back. Again, you only have to tell them as much – or as little – as you feel comfortable with.

In saying that, however, this advice comes with an important caveat, and that's that I strongly, strongly advise you to tell your doctor/psychologist/medical team absolutely everything. The reason for this is that while it's perfectly OK to hold back certain aspects of your illness from your loved ones, it's not in your best interests to keep secrets from your doctor, psychologist, psychiatrist, counsellor, or anyone else on your treatment team, because doing so can influence the care you receive, and in order for that care to be the most effective it can be, your treatment team need to know exactly what you've been thinking and feeling.

5. CONQUERING THE SHAME THAT COMES FROM FEELING LIKE YOU HAVE A “GOOD LIFE” AND THEREFORE NO REASON TO BE DEPRESSED

Unfortunately, this is a very common source of shame and embarrassment that holds a lot of people back from talking about their depression. However, while feeling as if you don't “deserve” to suffer from depression because you live in a nice house, have a caring family and have a good job, for example, is indeed understandable on the one hand, what it ignores is that your “life circumstances” is only one factor of several that contributes to your depression. In particular, other contributing factors that have little or nothing to do with your “life circumstances” include:

Your Thoughts: Just because you have a good life circumstantially, it doesn't mean that you're exempt from struggling with negative thoughts, from overthinking or from worrying about the future, for example – all of which are major contributing factors to depression.

Your Emotions: Just because you have a good life circumstantially, it doesn't mean that you're exempt from feeling painful emotions such as sadness over something bad happening; regret that something else didn't happen; hopelessness about something that's out of your control; or worthlessness as a result of struggling with low self-esteem, for example. Once again, all of these emotions (and so many more) are capable of fuelling your depression, too.

Your Behaviours: Just because you have a good life circumstantially, it doesn't preclude you from engaging in unhealthy behaviours that can contribute to depression – such as negatively comparing yourself to

others; letting what other people think of you dictate your actions; or not sleeping very much each night, for example.

Your Genetics / Chemical Imbalances In Your Brain: Just because you have a good life circumstantially, it doesn't mean that you don't have a genetic predisposition to depression, or that you don't have a chemical imbalance in your brain that contributes to you being depressed. On the contrary, you could indeed have both of these things regardless of how "good" your life is.

In short, like I've been repeating and repeating, depression is an illness, and because it's an illness, absolutely ANYONE – including you – can be affected by it – regardless of how good your life is circumstantially, and regardless of whether or not there are people "worse off" than you.

Another way of looking at this that will lead you to the same conclusion is that if someone you knew who has a similarly good life told you that *they* were struggling with depression, would you say to them that *they* have no reason to be depressed? Or, would you acknowledge their feelings and be able to empathise and relate to them? I'm 99.9% sure you would do the latter – and if you don't think that someone else who has a similarly good life to you has no reason to be depressed, then it doesn't make sense to think such a thing about yourself then either, does it?

Yet another rebuttal to the "*I don't deserve to have depression because there are people in the world who are worse off than me*" fallacy is that if someone who was circumstantially "worse off" than you told you that they were happy, would you then say to them: "*but you can't be happy – because there are so many people in the world who are better off than you!*" Once again, you almost

certainly wouldn't – which highlights just how flawed and invalid the *“I don't deserve to have depression because there are people worse off than me”* notion actually is.

6. CONQUERING THE FEAR THAT IF YOU TELL YOUR LOVED ONES ABOUT YOUR DEPRESSION, YOU'LL BRING THEM DOWN AND/OR BECOME A BURDEN TO THEM

This is yet another common concern, particularly when it comes to talking about your depression with the people who are closest to you. However, it's important to remember that your loved ones are your loved ones for a reason. So, while it may be difficult for them to come to terms with the fact that you have depression, the people who truly care about you would almost certainly still prefer to know, because they'd want to try to help you through it, and because they'd hate for you to have to suffer in silence.

Depression does not make you a burden. What's a burden is having to carry on fighting an illness that no-one else can see.



If you're not convinced that your loved ones would prefer to know that you're struggling with depression, then try to imagine the shoe being on the other foot. Once again, try asking yourself the question: *if someone I loved had depression, would I want to know about it so that I could try to support them? Or, would I rather them suffer in silence all by themselves?*

In the same way that you'd almost certainly want to know so that you could lend a helping hand, your loved ones would too. Not only that, but like we said in Chapter 1, an important reason to tell them about your depression is to explain away any uncharacteristic behaviour that you may be exhibiting, so that those people know not to take that uncharacteristic behaviour personally. For this reason, opening up to your loved ones about your depression actually tends to *improve* – not compromise – your relationship with them. Like we mentioned in Chapter 1 as well, there's also a good chance that it will bring the two of you closer, since this is what often naturally happens when you share something intimate and personal with someone.

7. CONQUERING THE FEAR OF APPEARING VULNERABLE – FOR EXAMPLE, BECAUSE YOU'RE A MUM OR DAD AND EXPECT YOURSELF TO BE THE “STRONG ONE”

First off, let me say that this is an admirable sentiment. However, it is also a flawed one, because if you never get any support for your depression, then:

- Your depression is likely to get worse over time;
- You run the risk of getting burned out and eventually breaking down.

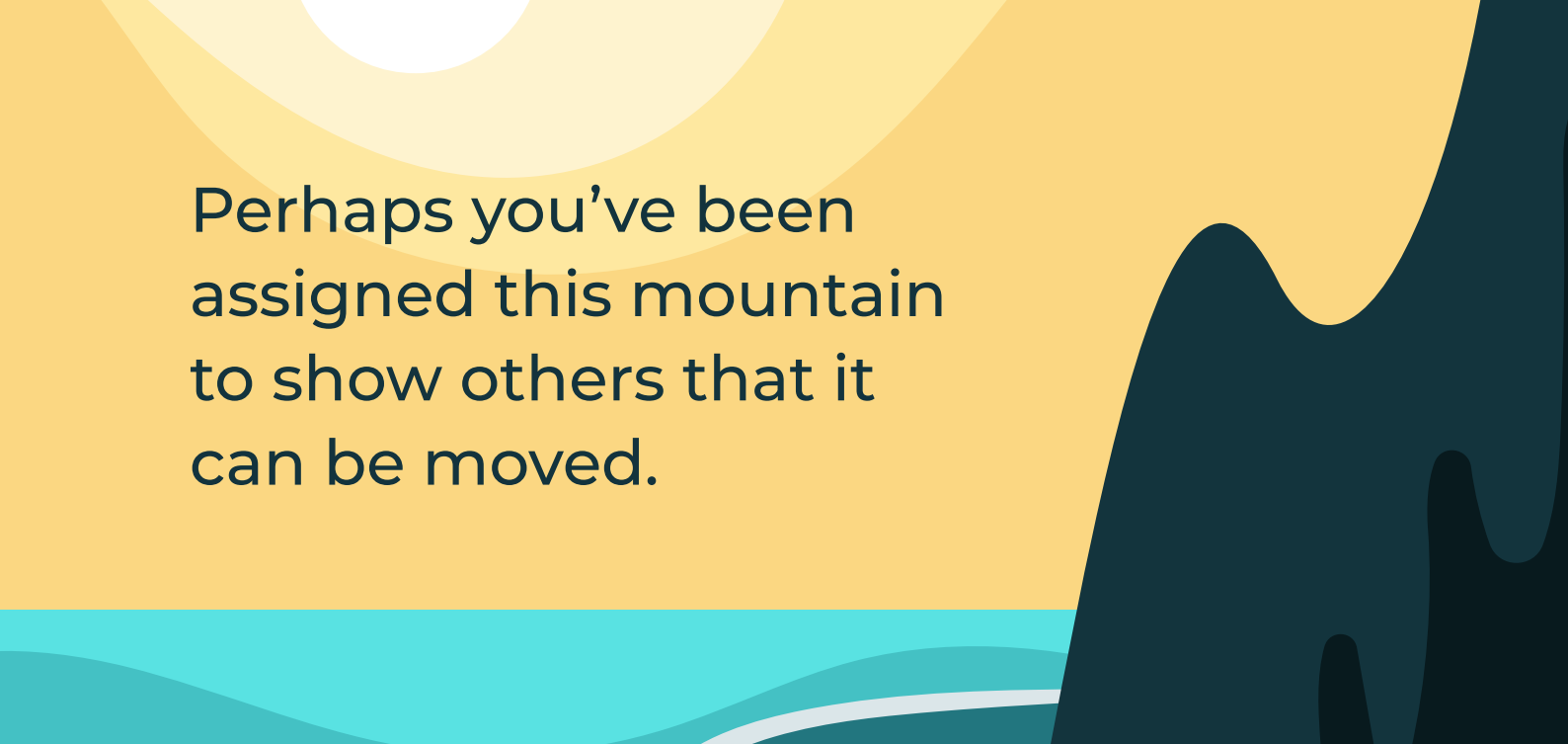
And, if your depression is getting worse and worse over time and you're getting more and more burned out, then ask yourself honestly:

Is refusing to reach out for support improving my ability to function and help the people I'm trying to be strong for? Or, is it actually hindering it?

The answer is that it's almost definitely hindering it, which is just one of several reasons why the "I can't reach out for support because I'm supposed to be the strong one" ideology is misplaced.

Other reasons why this notion is flawed is also because:

- If they knew you were fighting depression, your loved ones who you're trying to be strong for would want you to ask for help rather than suffer in silence, wouldn't they? So, by not asking for support and growing more and more depressed and burnt out, aren't you actually doing something that would make them upset?
- If your loved ones who you're trying to be strong for were struggling with something now or in the future, then would you rather that they reach out for support, or continue to suffer in silence? I'm guessing that you'd much rather they reach out for support – and if that's true, then doesn't you reaching out for support now actually set a positive example for them to emulate?



Perhaps you've been assigned this mountain to show others that it can be moved.

- Like I've been emphasising throughout this chapter, depression is an illness, not a weakness – and in the same way that it isn't weak to reach out for support if you have cancer, pneumonia or another physical illness, it isn't weak for you to reach out for support if you struggle with depression or another mental illness, either. Not only that, but if admitting that you're struggling with something and reaching out for support is a difficult thing to do, then rather than being a sign of weakness, doing so is actually a sign of strength.

8. CONQUERING THE WORRY THAT NO-ONE WILL CARE

One of the cruellest traits of depression is that it can make you hate yourself, and thus convince you that everyone else in your life – including your friends and family – also hate you as well (or at the very least, that they couldn't care less about you). If you feel this way, then please know that this is just the illness talking. After all, this is what

depression does – it tries to convince you that you're not as good as everyone else, that nobody likes you, that you'll never recover, and that the world would be better off without you.

But depression is a *liar*.

You *are* as good as everyone else.

You *can* recover.

The world is *not* better off without you.

And people *do* care about you.

And, the sooner you tell someone what you're going through, the sooner you'll be able to see this for yourself.

Don't believe everything you think. After all, depression is a LIAR!



COGNITIVE REFRAMING

On top of everything that I've already mentioned, one additional strategy you can use to help overcome any fears, worries or other reservations you may have regarding opening up about your depression would be to do some cognitive reframing. This is something you may've heard of in therapy, where the aim is to change your perspective on a given situation – typically from one that's focused on the “negatives” of that situation to one that's more focused on the “positives”. In particular, when it comes to helping you feel more comfortable telling someone about your depression, cognitive reframing can be used to “replace” your fears, worries and reservations with perspectives that are much more optimistic and uplifting. For example:

“What if they think I'm crazy or a freak?” could be replaced with *“what if they accept me?”*

“What if they think I'm not enough?” could be replaced with *“what if they believe I'm enough even on my worst days?”*

“They won't understand me” could be replaced with *“with time, patience, and education, almost anyone can understand depression”*.

“Having depression means I'm flawed” could be replaced with *“depression is an illness that can affect absolutely anyone”*.

“Having depression means I'm weak” could be replaced with *“I'm actually really strong for fighting this illness”*.

“I have a ‘good life’ and therefore no reason to be depressed” could be replaced with *“depression is caused by a multitude of factors, which means that even people with a ‘good life’ can suffer from it”*.

“Talking about my depression will make me a burden to others” could be replaced with *“my loved ones would rather help me through my depression than have me suffer in silence”*.

By reframing your fears, worries and reservations in these ways, it will become much, much easier for you to overcome them, and as a result, you'll feel a lot more comfortable opening up about your depression.

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THIS CHAPTER

There are several common fears, worries or other reservations that may be preventing you from opening up about your depression, including:

1. The fear that people will judge you.
2. The fear that people won't understand you.
3. Shame – because you feel that having depression is a character defect, and/or that you're “weak”, a “failure” or a “loser” for struggling with it.
4. Not being comfortable admitting particularly “sensitive” aspects of your depression to others.
5. Embarrassment – because you feel you have a “good life”, and that as a result, you have no reason to be depressed.
6. The worry that by telling someone about your depression, you'll be bringing them down and/or becoming a burden to them.
7. Reluctance to being vulnerable because you're “supposed to be the strong one”.
8. The worry that no-one will care.

However, you can do the following to overcome these worries, fears and reservations:

1. Remind yourself that because depression is so widespread and common these days, that it's unlikely anyone will judge you and think that you're a "freak", "crazy" or that there's "something wrong with you" because you struggle with it.
2. Remind yourself that even if some people don't immediately understand exactly what you're going through, that you can help them understand over time, and that as a result, they can turn into wonderfully caring supporters.
3. Remind yourself that depression is an illness – not a character defect or something that you're "weak", a "failure" or a "loser" for struggling with. You're also not weak if you sometimes can't function as well as you used to before you had depression, or as well as other people who don't have depression – since decreased ability to function is a natural and direct consequence of depression.
4. Remind yourself that when you're reaching out for support from a loved one, you're under no obligation to share any aspect of your depression that you're not comfortable sharing.
5. Remind yourself that there are many factors that influence your depression, including your thoughts, your emotions, your behaviours, your genetics and the chemical balances

in your brain – which is why it's entirely possible (and very common) to struggle with depression even when you have a “good life” circumstantially.

6. Remind yourself that the people who care about you would much rather know about your problems and do what they can to help, as opposed to have you suffer in silence all by yourself.
7. Remind yourself that even if you feel like you're supposed to be the “strong one”, it's still imperative that you reach out for support – so that you can avoid burning out and having your depression worsen. Also, remind yourself that reaching out for support sets a positive example for your loved ones who you're trying to be strong for, and is no doubt something they'd want you to do for your own well-being.
8. Remind yourself that depression is a liar, and that while the illness can sometimes make you feel as if no one cares about you, that this is just simply not true.
9. Use cognitive reframing to try to “replace” your fears, worries and reservations with perspectives that are more optimistic and uplifting.
10. Although I didn't mention this explicitly in this chapter, it can also be helpful to remind yourself of all the benefits that come from opening up about your depression and asking for support (which we identified in Chapter 1). Doing this can give you inspiration to overcome the fears, worries and reservations you have about doing so.

Chapter 3:

Preparing to have a conversation about your depression

In order to feel comfortable telling your loved ones about your depression, it's extremely helpful to do some preparation beforehand. Specifically, it's important to try and get in the "right mindset", and to also carefully consider who to tell, how much to tell them, where to tell them and when to tell them. We'll turn our attention to each of these issues now.

GETTING IN THE RIGHT MINDSET

Like I said at the start of this book, it was a while before I was able to have open, honest, fruitful conversations about my depression. Initially, they tended to be awkward and uncomfortable, and rarely concluded with me getting what I wanted out of them. I used to wonder why that was so, and in time, what I discovered was that the reason why those early conversations wouldn't go as smoothly as they could have was because I myself wasn't in a mindset that allowed me to come across as calm, comfortable and secure in the fact that I had depression.

Let me explain. You see, because depression is so minimally discussed, a lot of people don't know very much about it. Consequently, when you tell someone about your illness, while there may be some people with inaccurate, pre-conceived notions about depression who'll make misguided comments like *"you just need to get over it"* or *"I thought you were stronger than that"*; there'll also likely be many other people who simply listen, and then take their cue from you about how they should feel about it. The reason why is because people tend to be swayed by the opinions of others on topics that they themselves don't know very much about.

For example, if you don't know very much about NBA basketball, but you know that your friend watches it every single day, then you'll probably believe them when they tell you that the Milwaukee Bucks are almost guaranteed to beat the New York Knicks when they play each other (at least at the start of 2020 while I'm writing this!).

If you don't know much about economics, then chances are you're going to believe an economist when they tell you that a fall in the interest rate is likely to cause the currency to depreciate.

If you don't know much about surf safety, then you're likely to believe the lifeguard when they tell you that the current is too strong for you to go swimming.

Similarly, because a lot of people don't know a great deal about depression, how *they* feel about it will often be influenced by the way *you* feel about it, because you – by virtue of having depression – are likely to be perceived as an “authority” on the topic – similar to how your basketball-watching friend, the economist, and the lifeguard were in our examples above. Consequently, if you give off the vibe that you think you're “neurotic”, “strange”, “abnormal” or “crazy” because you struggle with a mental illness, then there's a good chance you'll influence the person you're talking to into feeling that way about yourself and your condition too. Not only that, but if you're uncomfortable with the fact that you struggle with depression because you think it means that you're “neurotic”, “strange”, “abnormal” or “crazy”, then you're almost certainly going to find talking about your depression very uncomfortable, and in a social setting, discomfort is contagious. After all, the more awkward and uncomfortable you appear to be, the more awkward and uncomfortable the person who you're talking to is likely to be as well. And, under such

circumstances, it's almost impossible to have a calm, fruitful chat about your depression.

Let me now show you how this works in practice. Below is an example of the way a typical conversation about my depression would usually go with someone when I was first diagnosed – a time when I found talking about my condition extremely anxiety-provoking, because I'd (very wrongly) concluded that having depression meant that I was “weak”, “abnormal” and “inferior to everyone else”.

Me: “I have something I really need to talk to you about.”

Friend: “Oh, OK. What's that?”

Me: “Look, um, it's pretty serious. It's pretty crazy. Are you sure you're ready for me to drop this bombshell on you?”

Friend: (Fidgeting uncomfortably) “Ah ... yeah? I think so?”

Me: (Looking away) “I just got diagnosed with depression. How messed up is that?”

Friend: (Fidgeting even more uncomfortably) “Oh, um ... yeah. I guess that is pretty messed up.”

Me: (Still looking away) “Yeah ...”

(Awkward silence)

As you can see, because I'd project the sentiment that having depression meant that I was “messed up”, then the person who I'd be talking to – usually not knowing any better and thus taking their cue from me –

would similarly conclude that I was “messed up” for having depression also. Not only that, but because I’d be so awkward and uncomfortable talking about my illness, they would almost always feel very awkward and uncomfortable talking about it too. As a result, the conversation would quickly fizzle out, and never result in me getting the support I needed.

On the other hand, when you project the notion that depression is “just an illness that you’re dealing with” and “nothing to be ashamed of”, then the person who you’re talking to – once again taking their cue from you – is much more likely to gravitate towards that notion also. Similarly, the more comfortable you appear to be when talking about your depression, the more comfortable they are likely to be too, and the more likely it is that you’ll end up having that candid, genuine and easy-going conversation about your depression that you want to have. After several months, this is what my experience started to be – when I finally realised that having depression didn’t mean that I was “weird” or “inferior to everybody else” – as you can see from the transcript below.

Friend: “Hey Danny, how come you missed Bill’s party the other night?”

Me: “Mate to be honest, I just wasn’t in the right headspace for it. I’ve actually been going through a pretty rough time lately – in fact, earlier in the year I was diagnosed with clinical depression – and on that particular night, I just needed a bit of time to myself.”

Friend: “Oh, OK. I didn’t know you had depression.”

Me: “Yeah, I’ve had it for about a year now. I’m working hard to beat it and I think it’s getting better, but there are some days when I feel really low and I don’t want to do anything.”

Friend: “I’m sorry to hear that, but I’m glad you’re getting better.”

Me: “Yeah thanks mate, I’m definitely on the mend.”

Friend: “You know, now that I think about it, you’re not the only person I know who has problems with depression. Another one of my mates recently mentioned that he’s going through it as well.”

Me: “Yeah, it’s actually a really common illness. Not everyone knows this, but it’s estimated that about 350 million people suffer from depression worldwide.”

Friend: “Wow, I never realised how prevalent it is.”

Me: “Neither did I until I was diagnosed.”

Friend: “It’s surprising that something so widespread is talked about so little.”

Me: “Tell me about it, but it’s good that lately ...”

And that’s kind of how the conversation would go. Because I’d project the image that depression is “just an illness that I’m dealing with” – instead of something that meant that I was “abnormal” – the person who I’d be speaking to would tend to accept it as such as well. Not only that, but because I’d come across as being comfortable talking about

my depression, the person listening would usually feel comfortable talking about it too. As a result, it became much easier for me to have calm, candid chats about my depression, and thus develop a supportive network of friends and family members who I could turn to for support.

Another type of conversation that's more applicable to me these days is the one that often occurs as soon as I meet someone. Since I'm the author of a memoir called *Depression is a Liar* and a fictional story called *I Will Not Kill Myself, Olivia* – not to mention that I'm also the co-founder of The Depression Project – the topic of depression inevitably comes up. You'd probably think it would be really awkward to talk about mental health with someone I've just been introduced to, but in reality, because I'm at peace with what I've been through and I'm comfortable discussing it, it's really not awkward at all. In fact, the conversation usually goes something as follows:

Person I've just met: “So Danny, I hear that you're an author! What books have you written?”

Me: “A fictional story called *I Will Not Kill Myself, Olivia*, its sequel, and a memoir called *Depression is a Liar*.”

Person I've just met: “Oh, OK. So I take it that you've had some experience with depression, then?”

Me: “Yeah, when I was younger. I was in a pretty bad way for a few years there, but these days I'm really happy and healthy, so I wrote a memoir and another book to try and give current sufferers hope, and to try and pass on some of the things I learned in the course of my recovery.”

Person I've just met: “That’s really great that you can use your experiences to help other people.”

Me: “Yeah, it is. In a way, it makes everything I went through seem worth it. Almost as if it all happened for a reason.”

Person I've just met: “Yeah, that’s really cool. My brother actually suffers from depression as well, and ...”

You see, because I’d be so comfortable and secure talking about my depression, then the person listening would usually feel comfortable talking about it too. Now, like I said before, this may not always be the case – since you may encounter some people with inaccurate, pre-conceived notions about depression who’ll make misguided comments like *“it’s all in your head”* or *“chin up, buttercup”* (we’ll talk more about how to deal with them in Chapter 4). However, it’s still been my overwhelming experience that with most people, at least, the more accepting you appear to be about your depression, the more accepting the person you’re talking to is likely to be as well.

BUT HOW DO I BECOME MORE COMFORTABLE TALKING ABOUT MY DEPRESSION?

At this point, I know what you might be thinking:

“OK, I understand that because many people don’t know very much about depression, that the sentiments I project about it are often going to be the sentiments that the person I’m talking to will adopt themselves; and, I understand that the more comfortable I am talking about my illness, then the more comfortable they are likely to be as well. However, I feel very uncomfortable talking about my depression – so what can I do to feel more relaxed discussing it?”

If this is how you feel, then my guess – based on communicating with thousands and thousands of people who've battled depression – is that you're uncomfortable talking about your illness because you fall into one or both of the following categories:

1. You're uncomfortable talking about your depression because you're worried about what people are going to say, how they're going to act, or what they're going to think.
2. You're uncomfortable talking about your depression because right now, you yourself are uncomfortable with the fact that you suffer from depression (for example, because you think that having depression means that you're a "freak", a "loser", "strange", "abnormal", or "not as good as everyone else").

If you're uncomfortable talking about your depression because you're worried about what people are going to say, how they're going to act, or what they're going to think, then I encourage you to remind yourself of what we talked about in the previous chapter. In particular, that:

1. Because depression is so widespread these days and most people know at least one person who's struggled with it, it's unlikely that anyone's going to judge you and think that you're a "freak" or "crazy" for struggling with it.
2. Even though some people may not understand, if you take the time to correct their misconceptions and patiently educate them about depression, then there's a good chance

that sooner or later, they will understand, and that they'll then be happy to support you.

On the other hand, if you're uncomfortable talking about your depression because right now, you yourself are uncomfortable with the fact that you struggle with it, then I encourage you to remind yourself that:

1. **Depression is an illness, and you have nothing to be ashamed of.** Like we said in Chapter 2, whenever you feel like a “freak” or a “crazy person” or anything like that for suffering from depression, remind yourself that what you have is an illness. And, just like you wouldn't feel ashamed of having a physical illness, there's no reason to feel ashamed of having a mental one, either.
2. **You are not alone.** Like we also said in Chapter 2, please take solace in the fact that you are not the only person in the world who suffers from depression. Just like you, there are millions of other people who feel overwhelmed. There are millions of other people who struggle to get out of bed some days. There are millions of other people who feel exhausted for no reason at all. And, there are millions of other people who think about ending their life sometimes. All of these people understand your pain and feel the same things you do, and together, you all form a 350 million person fraternity that's represented by every age, gender, nationality, colour, creed and profession in the world. You are not alone. You are not “crazy”. You are not a “freak”. And you have nothing to be ashamed of. You just happen

to suffer from one of the most common illnesses in the world, that's all.

- 3. Remember that you are so much more than just your illness.** When I was first diagnosed with depression, I thought of myself as a “depressed person”. But in time, I came to realise that while I did suffer from depression, there was also so much more to me than just my illness. I was a son, a brother, a grandson and a friend. I was a writer. I was a basketball player. I was someone who loved to read. I was someone who loved to travel. I was someone who loved to go to the beach. I was someone who loved to follow the NBA. I was someone who loved to do charity work, and someone who always tried to help people less fortunate than myself. I was someone who loved to think about the deep things in life, someone who loved to laugh about the silly things, someone who was always there for a friend in need, and someone who never minded so much what I was doing so long as I was doing it with the people I loved. I could go on and on, but my point is that I – just like you, just like anyone with depression – was so much more than just my illness. And, once you realise that even though you're struggling with depression, that you're still the same good, decent person that you've always been, then your depression becomes much easier to talk about, because thinking about it in this way allows you to retain your self-confidence, self-worth and self-respect.

You are NOT your illness.
You have an individual story
to tell. You have a name,
a history, a personality.
Staying yourself is part of
the battle.



Before we move on to the next part of this chapter and discuss who in particular you should talk to about your depression, I'd just like to close this one by saying that as with anything, practice makes perfect. The more you talk about your illness with your loved ones, the more comfortable you are going to feel, and the easier you are going to find it. It will in all likelihood be difficult at first – even if you apply everything that's discussed in this book – but it will start to feel more and more natural over time, and all the benefits that come from talking about your depression are well and truly worth taking those initial steps out of your comfort zone. I promise!

WHO IN PARTICULAR SHOULD YOU TALK TO ABOUT YOUR DEPRESSION?

Once you feel as if you could talk about your depression comfortably enough, then it's time to carefully consider who you're going to open up to about it.

To start with, it's almost always in your best interests to tell the people closest to you – such as your spouse, your parents, and anyone else you interact with on a regular basis. The reasons for this are threefold:

1. Firstly and most obviously, your closest circle of friends and family members are the ones who are most likely to support you.
2. Secondly, like we mentioned in the first chapter, your depression may sometimes cause you to act in ways that are out of character – for example, by being overly angry, aggressive or irritable; or by being reclusive and avoiding almost everyone you know. Since it's the people closest to you who are most likely to experience this change in behaviour, I encourage you to tell them what you're going through so that they can understand, and therefore not take any uncharacteristic behaviour personally.
3. Thirdly, like we also mentioned in the first chapter, the people closest to you can sometimes give you insight into what may be triggering your depression.

Of course, telling friends and family members who you're somewhat less close with than your "inner circle" can also be very beneficial too – after all, the more support you have, the better! However, when it comes to this group of people, you may choose to be a little more picky about who you decide to talk to about your depression. While you're mulling this decision over, it's important to bear in mind that the "best" people to open up to will have the following characteristics:

- **They will be caring.** The more caring they are, the more likely it is that they'll be willing to support you.
- **They'll be open-minded as opposed to judgmental.** The more open-minded and the less judgmental they are, the more likely they'll be to try to understand you.
- **They will be trustworthy.** You obviously need to feel confident that anything private you tell that person won't be repeated to others without your permission.
- **They will be a good listener.** This is key to you having an open, honest conversation about your depression.
- **They will be comfortable discussing something serious and personal.** Not everyone has this capacity, but it's essential that anyone who you choose to talk to about your depression does.
- **They will be someone who you feel comfortable around.** The more comfortable you are with someone, the easier it will be for you to talk to them about your depression.

Additionally, it helps if the person has also had some prior experience with depression— either because they've battled it themselves, or because someone close to them has. However, there's usually no way to tell whether someone has had any such experience, and regardless, it is certainly not a necessary prerequisite to them being a caring, understanding, supportive person to talk to about your depression.

Surround yourself with people who are good for your mental health.



ONCE YOU DECIDE WHO TO TELL, HOW DO YOU DECIDE HOW MUCH TO TELL THEM?

Many people believe that talking to someone about their depression necessarily entails telling them *everything* about their illness. However, like we discussed in Chapter 2, your thoughts, feelings and emotions are your own, and how many or how much of those thoughts, feelings or emotions you choose to divulge to any particular person is completely up to you. For example, if you want to tell someone that you suffer from depression, but you don't want them to know that you've sometimes gone days without showering, then you don't have to share that with them. If you don't want to tell them that you've self-harmed before, then you don't have to do that either. If you don't want them to know that you cry yourself to sleep some nights, then that's another thing you can choose to hold back. You only have to tell them as much – or as little – as you feel comfortable with.

In saying that, however, this advice comes with a couple of caveats:

1. **You need to tell your doctor and your medical team everything.** While it's perfectly OK to hold back certain aspects of your illness from your loved ones, you cannot keep secrets from your doctor, psychologist, psychiatrist, counsellor, or anyone else on your treatment team. Doing so can influence the care you receive, and in order for that care to be the most effective it can be, your treatment team need to know exactly what you've been thinking and feeling.
2. **Remember that everybody's reaction to you telling them that you struggle with depression – including the level of empathy and support they provide – is dependent upon what you actually tell them about your depression.** Accordingly, if you're feeling so depressed that you cry yourself to sleep some nights, for example, then while you have every right to keep that information to yourself when you tell someone about your depression, it's not then fair to feel angry at that person for not offering the level of care, empathy or support that you believe should be offered to someone who's going through such a severe bout of depression. After all, if you didn't tell them how severely depressed you feel, then how were they supposed to know? This isn't a caveat per se to the notion that you should only tell someone as much as you feel comfortable with, but it is something important to keep in mind.

WHERE'S THE BEST PLACE TO TELL SOMEONE THAT YOU STRUGGLE WITH DEPRESSION?

Once you've decided who you're going to talk to about your depression and how much you're going to tell them, you have to choose a place to have the conversation. While there's no one perfect location that will suit everybody, the spot you choose should ideally satisfy the following requirements:

1. **It should be somewhere where you feel at your most comfortable.** Like we've said, the more comfortable you are talking about your depression, then the more comfortable the person listening is likely to be as well, and the greater the chance that the conversation will go the way you want it to. For this reason, it's important that you pick a location where you feel as comfortable as possible, whether that be at your house; at your favourite bar, café or restaurant; or somewhere else.
2. **It should be somewhere relatively quiet.** It's not ideal to be trying to have a deep, meaningful conversation over loud music at a nightclub, for example, so in addition to picking a place you feel comfortable at, it's best if you choose one where it's quiet enough to have a proper chat.
3. **It should be somewhere that's private.** You're unlikely to feel at your most comfortable when there are people sitting a foot away who can hear everything you're saying, or when you're being interrupted every few minutes. So, it's best to choose a spot where you have some privacy.

IS IT OK TO TELL SOMEONE OVER THE PHONE OR VIA EMAIL OR FACEBOOK?

Of course! After all, the most important thing is that you tell who you want to tell – regardless of what medium you choose to communicate through. So, if you feel more comfortable opening up about your depression in a non-face-to-face manner, then that's the way you should go about doing so. I'll even help you do this in the next chapter, when among other things, I'll share with you a letter that you can use as a template to explain to your loved ones exactly how depression affects you, as well as the ways you'd like them to support you through it.

WHEN IS THE RIGHT TIME TO TELL SOMEONE THAT YOU'RE STRUGGLING WITH DEPRESSION?

Just like when it comes to choosing the “right location”, there's no such thing as a “right time” that will work for everybody. Rather, choosing when you're going to tell someone about your depression involves taking into account the following factors that are unique to your own particular situation:

1. **How in need you are of support.** The more severe your depression and the more in need you are of support, the sooner you need to tell someone about your illness – and, if you're feeling suicidal and you think you might attempt to take your own life, then you need to tell a doctor, a therapist, a crisis support service, a friend or a family member immediately. However, if your depression is less

severe than that and you're not in urgent need of help from your loved ones, then you can afford to take your time a bit more if you choose.

2. **When you feel “ready”.** As we've intimated, there can be a bit of preparation that goes into telling someone that you have depression, so unless you're in urgent need of assistance, it can often be best to wait until you feel prepared.

3. **When there's enough time to have a proper conversation.** Five minutes before their train is due to arrive is not the best time to tell your friend that you suffer from depression, for example. Instead, it's better to wait until there's time to have a proper conversation that won't feel rushed.

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THIS CHAPTER

1. Because depression is so minimally discussed, a lot of people don't know very much about it. Consequently, when you tell someone about your condition, they are often going to feel the same way about it as you do. As a result, if you give off the vibe that you think you're "neurotic", "strange", "abnormal" or "crazy" because you suffer from a mental illness, then there's a good chance you'll influence the person you're talking to into feeling that way about yourself and your depression, too. However, if you project the notion that you just have an "illness that you're dealing with" and that it's "nothing to be ashamed of", then the person listening – once again taking their cue from you – is much more likely to adopt that viewpoint as well.
2. The more comfortable you appear to be talking about your depression, the more comfortable the person you're talking to is likely to be as well, and the much more likely it is that you'll end up having that candid, genuine and easy-going conversation about your depression that you want to have.
3. If you feel uncomfortable talking about your depression, then chances are that it's because:
 - You are worried about how people are going to react; or
 - Because you believe that having depression means that you're a "freak", "strange", "abnormal", or "not as good as everyone else".

If it's the first category of people you fall into, then remind yourself that most people are unlikely to judge you and think you're a "freak" for struggling with depression, and that even if someone doesn't properly understand depression, there's a good chance that you'll be able to educate them and therefore turn them into a helpful supporter.

If it's the second category of people you fall into, then please remember that you have nothing to be ashamed of for suffering from depression, that you are not alone, and that you are so much more than just your illness.

4. It's important to tell your closest circle of friends and family members about your depression because:
 - They are the people who are most likely to support you;
 - So that they understand why you may be acting out of character, and thus know not to take any uncharacteristic behaviour that you may be exhibiting personally;
 - So that they can give you some insight into what may be triggering your depression.

5. When considering which, if any, people outside of your closest circle to talk to about your depression, bear in mind that the "best" people to open up to will be:
 - Caring;
 - Non-judgmental;

- Trustworthy;
 - Good listeners;
 - Comfortable discussing something serious and personal;
 - Someone who you feel comfortable around.
6. When deciding how much to tell a particular person about your depression, it's important to remember that you are the owner of your thoughts, feelings and emotions, and that for this reason, you only need to tell that person as much – or as little – as you feel comfortable with. However, it's also important to remember that you need to tell your treatment team everything, and that everybody's reaction to you telling them that you struggle with depression – including the level of empathy and support they provide – depends on what you actually tell them about your illness.
7. The location at which you choose to tell someone about your depression should ideally be:
- Somewhere where you feel at your most comfortable;
 - Somewhere that's quiet;
 - Somewhere that's private.
8. When deciding when to tell someone about your depression, consider how urgently in need you are of support, and how ready you feel to have a conversation about your illness. Additionally, I encourage you to make sure that whenever you do choose to open up, that there's enough time available to have a proper conversation.

Chapter 4:

Having a conversation about your depression

Once you're convinced that it's beneficial to talk about your depression; addressed all your fears, worries and reservations that are associated with doing so; gotten into the right mindset; and decided who to tell, how much to tell them, where to tell them and when to tell them, it will (finally!) be time to go ahead and have that all-important conversation about your depression. In this chapter, we'll start by covering the different ways that you can begin this conversation, and then move on to addressing how you can handle another person's response to what you've told them (whether good, bad or ugly), as well as how you can resolve the conversation to get what you want out of it.

HOW CAN YOU BEGIN A CONVERSATION ABOUT YOUR DEPRESSION?

Broadly speaking, there are three main ways you can start a conversation about your depression:

1. By raising it within the natural flow of conversation either in person or over the phone.
2. By making a special point of bringing it up either in person or over the phone.
3. By giving the person a letter (or sending them an email, Facebook message, etcetera) that explains your depression and the ways you'd like them to support you through it (I've drafted one for you).

RAISING IT WITHIN THE NATURAL FLOW OF CONVERSATION EITHER IN PERSON OR OVER THE PHONE

This was usually my preferred method, because it tends to come across as casual and laid back – and, like we've said, the more relaxed you appear to be when talking about your depression, the more comfortable the person listening to you is likely to be as well. Here are a few examples of how I might've slipped my depression into a conversation in the past.

EXAMPLE #1

Friend: 'So Danny, how've you been lately?'

Me: 'Not too good unfortunately, mate. I've actually been going through a pretty rough time, and to tell you the truth, I've been diagnosed with depression.'

EXAMPLE #2

Friend: 'Hey buddy, you going to Cassie and Jake's housewarming on the weekend?'

Me: 'Nah, don't think so mate.'

Friend: 'How come?'

Me: 'I'm just not quite feeling up to it, I'm afraid. To be honest, I've been going through a pretty rough time lately – in fact, I've actually been diagnosed with depression – and some days, I just need time to myself.'

EXAMPLE #3

Me: 'What are you up to tomorrow, mate?'

Friend: 'Nothing much, why?'

Me: 'Just wondering if you wanted to go down to the park and play some basketball with me.'

Friend: 'Yeah sure, sounds good.'

Me: 'Cool.'

Friend: 'You've been playing a lot lately, haven't you?'

Me: 'Quite a lot, yeah.'

Friend: 'You training for a big tournament or something?'

Me: 'Nah, just need the exercise. To be honest, I've actually been going through a really difficult time lately – a doctor even diagnosed me with depression – and I find that exercising a lot and being really active just helps me cope with it.'

MAKING A SPECIAL POINT OF BRINGING IT UP EITHER IN PERSON OR ON THE PHONE

Alternatively, rather than raising your depression within the natural flow of conversation, you may prefer to make a special point of mentioning it. For example, by saying something like:

“I’ve been feeling really down lately. Would you mind if we talked a little bit about it?”

Or:

“I haven’t told many people this, but I’ve actually been struggling with depression lately. If it’s OK with you, then I’d really like to talk to you about it now.”

Again, I personally prefer naturally weaving it into conversation, because it tends to come across as a bit more laid back and relaxed. In saying that, however, if you don’t have much experience talking about your depression, then it can be difficult to raise it organically, and for this reason, you may prefer to make a special point of mentioning it. As always, just do whatever you feel most comfortable with.

NEW: SENDING A LETTER THAT EXPLAINS YOUR DEPRESSION (WHETHER VIA EMAIL, SOCIAL MEDIA, THE POST, ETCETERA)

Even with the help of the strategies I’ve shared with you in this book, it can still be difficult and nerve-wracking to have a face-to-face or even a phone conversation about your depression. If this is how you feel, then sending your loved ones a letter that clearly explains your depression and the ways you’d like them to support you through it could indeed be the answer. To that end, have a look at the letter I’ve drafted for you below – which you’re welcome to customise any way you like, and then send it to whoever you like (we’ve also given you this letter as a separate word document, so that you can easily customise and share it).

Dear [RECIPIENT'S NAME],

I am giving you this letter because you are someone who is very important to me, and because I would like to think that if one of us is ever going through a difficult time, that we could be open about it, and in return, be listened to and supported. This is really hard for me to talk about, [RECIPIENT'S NAME], but as it so happens, I am in fact going through something extremely hard right now, so I'm getting in touch with you firstly, to help you understand why I may have been acting a little differently from usual lately; and secondly, so that I can suggest a few helpful ways for you to support me if you'd like to. You may be wondering why I'm writing to you instead of just calling or speaking to you face-to-face, to which I would ask you to please bear with me, because due to the stigma surrounding depression, it can be really, really difficult to talk about. It's also not something I'm used to doing, so right now, I feel I have the best chance of expressing myself the way I want to in writing. After you've finished reading this letter, you're welcome to ask me questions if you have any, and in time, I hope to be able to talk about my depression with you in the same way that we talk about everything else.

Anyway, like I said, right now I'm struggling with depression, and before I tell you about a couple of the ways you could help me through it, I'd really like to share with you what suffering from this illness actually feels like. It's really important to me that I explain this to you, because while you may already have a pre-existing idea of what depression is, it can affect different people in very different ways, which means that your understanding of depression may not match my own experience. Also, because depression carries a stigma and isn't openly talked about very much, it's unfortunately very common for people who've never been through it themselves to underestimate just how difficult, painful and

life-affecting depression can actually be. In fact, it's so difficult, painful and life-affecting that personally, I find it really challenging just to put its severity into words. But, to try to help you understand it – and to help you understand how depression affects me individually – I've written some of the ways that other people describe this condition below – each of which I can really relate to:

[NOTE: Below you'll find almost 50 short descriptions of depression – all of which have been voted “extremely accurate” by The Depression Project's community. If you find it hard to put your depression into words, then we encourage you to include the ones that most resonate with you into your own personal letter (the more the better, I tend to think). Of course, you can also include your own explanation of depression here, too.]

“Depression is seeing no future, and no answer for any of the problems in your life.”

“When you have depression, nothing is enjoyable. Nothing can make you smile.”

“It feels like you're a ghost ... not a part of the real world.”

“It's like drowning ... except you can see everyone around you breathing.”

“Depression is a dark, inescapable place. It's like being locked in a room with no light, windows or door. It's so dark you can't even see your hands in front of your face let alone find a way out.”

“Depression is the inability to construct or envision a future.”

“Slipping into depression feels like falling down a dark bottomless shaft, wondering if and when your fall will ever be caught. And as you look back to where you fell from – which is where you know you need to get back to – you can see it receding further into the distance, the proverbial light becoming dimmer and dimmer, while the shaft into which you are falling becomes deeper, darker, and all the more enveloping.”

“Depression to me is like having your mind replaced by another one that makes me feel worthless and numb to life – even to my friends and family. It deprives me of feeling anything other than a sense of perpetual sadness, never quite knowing the source of it but knowing that feeling well. Depression has stolen my confidence and now I no longer feel I am worthy of anyone’s love. Depression calls me names and makes me have awful thoughts, and there have been times when depression has felt so overwhelming that I’ve wanted to kill myself.”

“It’s like being stuck in a box that you can’t get out of – a very dark place where you feel so low that even simple tasks are difficult. You feel completely alone.”

“A total loss of who you are.”

“Standing underneath a floor of glass, screaming and banging on it trying to get the attention of the rest of the world going about their lives without you. The problem is no-one can hear you or even knows you’re trapped there.”

“Depression is like the heart or the mind breaking.”

“Depression is a state in which nothing tastes, smells, or feels right and you are unable to think or make decisions – yet you still have to carry on

doing all those things. And so much of the time you just don't have the energy or the desire. But you still carry on anyway.”

“The belief that you just don't matter.”

“Like the death eaters in Harry Potter have caught you and sucked all the goodness from you.”

“Swimming through treacle.”

“Multiple emotions: fear, despair, emptiness, numbness, shame, embarrassment and an inability to recognise the fun, happy person you used to be.”

“Depression is losing the desire to partake in life.”

“It's like trying to breathe when you're covered in tar.”

“Depression makes you feel like you're an actor playing you – one that's always forced to smile.”

“Being depressed sometimes feels like tunnel vision – regardless of anything going on in your life, you can feel miserable and overwhelmed for no reason at all.”

“Nothingness.”

“Cancer of the soul.”

“Torture.”

“It's just like being inside a wheel that's spinning and spinning and you don't know when it's going to stop.”

“Living in fog all the time – a world without colour or laughter.”

“Like living in a dark tunnel with no light at the end, and no air to breathe, no matter how deep a breath you take.”

“Feeling completely alone – even when you’re surrounded by people.”

“Complete and utter hopelessness.”

“Living in hell.”

“Like mourning the death of someone you once loved – you. When you look in the mirror you see only dead eyes. There is no spark. No joy. No hope. You wonder how you will manage to exist another day.”

“Trying to keep your head above water when it’s up to your nose. And getting deeper. And you can’t swim.”

“Feeling numb inside. The world and time just passes by and nothing brings you joy.”

“Feeling dark, lonely, scared. Sleep is the only escape from your pain.”

“It’s like being a prisoner and the jailer both.”

“Waking up to another disappointing day, and feeling that heaviness in your chest that never goes away.”

“Just wanting to stand in a field and scream your head off – but you don’t know why.”

“Like your mind is paralysed.”

“Depression is silence. It’s total isolation in a room full of people. It’s feeling the drag and pull of life making you smaller by the day.”

“It’s like falling into a well or a deep dark hole and having no ladder to climb to help you get out of it. You get trapped in the darkness feeling cold and numb.”

“It makes me feel like I’m a tiny seed stuck at the bottom of a pot plant – the more I try to grow and break free, the more dirt and soil falls on me, suffocating me and pushing me down.”

“Depression for me is a force so powerful that I fear I may never be free of it.”

“Being depressed is all your emotions taken away from you – apart from negative ones like sadness, anxiety and fear.”

“It’s a ten tonne ball of lead in your gut that you’ve no choice but to drag everywhere with you. And you’ve got to try and look normal doing so.”

“Every day is a struggle and I feel like it’s ground hog day – same shit, different toilet.”

“It’s a thief ... it takes everything from you and leaves you to die.”

“It’s peaceful water to the outside world, but a raging tsunami below the surface.”

“It’s more painful than any physical pain I’ve ever experienced. And NO-ONE can see it.”

“Depression is hating yourself so much you can’t look in the mirror.”

“Depression is waking up wishing you’d died in your sleep.”

Like I said, [RECIPIENT’S NAME], unfortunately, I can relate to so many of these descriptions, and I hope they help you understand a few things in particular about depression that I really want you to know.

The first is that suffering from depression is much, much more than just having a bad day or feeling sad. As you of course know, a bad day is just that – a bad day – and sadness is a temporary emotion. But, as a lot of the above descriptions indicate, depression can make people feel utterly miserable – not for just one day, but for weeks, months, or even years on end. It can make people feel exhausted. It can make people feel completely worthless. It can make people hate themselves. It can make them self-harm. And worst of all, it can make them feel suicidal, and drive them to carry out those thoughts. Depression is a word many people throw around pretty casually – e.g. “I have to go to work on Monday, that is so depressing” – but when it’s used in its clinical sense, it describes a debilitating, torturous, gut-wrenching illness that unfortunately, affects every aspect of my life. This is why I may have – unintentionally – been acting a little differently from normal lately, or why you may have found me to be less responsive to communication or a bit more isolated. If that’s the case, then I am sorry. I promise you it’s nothing personal and that I’m not angry at you or anything. It’s just because I’m going through something excruciating right now, and almost every day, it’s taking its toll on me.

The second important thing I’d love for you to understand is that depression is an illness – one that has been shown to have many different contributing factors such as chemical imbalances in the brain, negative life events, excess stress, an unhealthy lifestyle, distorted thinking

patterns, low self-esteem, any number of painful emotions like anger or heartbreak, and even the weather. And, because depression is an illness, then even though it means that I'm going through some really difficult things right now, it doesn't mean that I'm "crazy" or a "freak" or anything like that. I'm still the same person I've always been – the same [YOUR RELATIONSHIP TO THE LETTER RECIPIENT] that you've been close with for a long time. The only difference is that now, I'm also battling an illness as well. So, in the same way you wouldn't think any less of me if I told you I had diabetes, a broken leg or any other physical injury or illness, I really hope you don't think any less of me just because I'm now telling you that I struggle with a mental illness.

Thirdly, not only is depression an illness, but it's also an extremely complicated one. For this reason, I can't just "snap out of it", or get over it just by "thinking a bit more positively" (believe me, if it was that simple, I'd do it). Unfortunately, depression doesn't have an easy quick fix like "just going for a run", "getting out of the house more" or "doing something fun" (again, if getting rid of depression was this simple, then there wouldn't be 350 million people in the world who suffer from it). Like I said above, depression is usually caused by a number of complex factors like negative life events, excess stress, distorted thinking patterns, etcetera – all of which "mutate together" to bring about this illness. This means that, in reality, trying to overcome depression is much more comparable to putting together a ten thousand piece puzzle, than it is to just doing "A", "B" or "C" and being instantly cured. What makes "putting together this ten thousand piece puzzle" even harder is that treatment methods that work for some people don't work anywhere near as well for others – unlike with, say, a broken leg, where the road to recovery is relatively straightforward. In this way, an even more accurate metaphor for

recovering from depression than “having to put together a ten thousand piece puzzle” would be: “having to put together a ten thousand piece puzzle when you have no concrete instructions to follow, and no exact picture of what the puzzle is supposed to look like”. This is why breaking free of depression is really, really hard, and while I’m doing my best to try to get better, there are days when I feel exhausted, hopeless, confused, and terrified that I’ll never be able to recover.

If you’d like to help, [RECIPIENT’S NAME], then there are a couple of things you could do that, while they may seem small or insignificant, would really, really mean a lot to me.

The first is to just try to understand what I’m going through, and to not judge or belittle me for it. It’s hard enough having to battle an illness like depression, but if the people you care about most in the world don’t take it seriously or think worse of you for it, it not only makes someone with depression feel really upset, but also extremely alone and abandoned. On the other hand, by acknowledging how difficult and painful depression can be and doing your best to understand it, it makes us feel respected instead of belittled, and goes a long way towards helping us feel less isolated.

Secondly, it would really mean a lot if from time to time, you’d be there for me if I need someone to talk to. As you probably know yourself, it can often be really cathartic to talk about what’s troubling you – and this is particularly true when it comes to depression, because like I’ve said, it can be an extremely, extremely lonely illness. Of course, I’m not expecting you to be available to support me 24 hours a day or anything like that, but just knowing that I’m free to call you if I need to makes me feel very loved and cared for. The same goes for if you call or text me from time to time to ask

if I'm OK, or to invite me to do something fun together like go for a walk in the park or to watch a movie, for example. I may not always feel well enough to take you up on your offer, but again, just knowing that you're there for me will in and of itself make me feel much, much better.

Lastly, when we do talk, it can help if you remind me that even though what I'm going through is really, really hard, that it is possible for me to overcome it. Unfortunately, one of the cruellest features of depression is that it can trick the sufferer into thinking that their pain is permanent, and that they're destined to be miserable for the rest of their life.

Sometimes this happens to me, and if we're talking on one of those days when everything feels really hopeless, it's helpful if you remind me that if I get the right help and keep on fighting, that it will be possible for me to take back control of my life from depression and start to enjoy myself again.

OK, [RECIPIENT'S NAME] – I don't think I have anything else more to say in this letter except for THANK-YOU. This has been a really difficult letter for me to write, because like I said at the start, it's hard to open up about something as personal as depression – particularly because it's an illness that a lot of people stigmatise. But the fact that you've read this far means the absolute world to me, so once again, I would like to say thank-you.

All my love,

[YOUR NAME].

P.S. If you have any questions about anything I've written, then feel free to ask! I promise I'll do my best to answer them.

If you decide to customise this letter to your own needs and then give it to your loved ones, then I hope it helps you get the support you deserve, my friend. If you don't want to do this, then I still hope that reading it has helped you put your own depression into words – which will still make it easier for you to talk about your depression through the medium you choose.

HOW TO HANDLE ANOTHER PERSON'S REACTION WHEN YOU TELL THEM THAT YOU HAVE DEPRESSION

Of course, whenever you tell someone that you're struggling with depression, I hope they'll be supportive and caring right off the bat. For example, by saying something like:

“I love you.”

“I'm here for you.”

“Is there anything I can do to make you feel better?”

“Would you like to talk about what you're going through?”

“I've suffered from the same thing myself.”

“I'm sorry you're in pain.”

“This must be very hard for you, but you're going to get through it.”

“Is there something we can do to take your mind off it?”

“I don't quite understand what you're going through, but I'm here to support you anyway.”

Each of these responses is warm and supportive, and should make it relatively easy for you to open up about your depression. However, not everyone may respond in this way. Unfortunately, like we talked about in Chapter 2, some people may initially make annoying comments like “you just have to think positive!”, because they don’t realise how debilitating of an illness depression actually is. Like we also said in Chapter 2, other people may try to pinpoint why you might be depressed and offer what’s usually overgeneralised, simplistic advice about what you can do to feel better; whereas others may not know how to respond and thus be relatively silent. For this reason, prior to telling someone that you’re struggling with depression, it’s useful to think about the different ways they might react, and about how you can respond to those different reactions.

And, like I promised you earlier, that’s exactly what we’re going to do right now!

WHAT IF SOMEONE SAYS SOMETHING IRRITATING THAT CLEARLY SHOWS THEY DON’T KNOW VERY MUCH ABOUT DEPRESSION?

Unfortunately, when you tell someone that you’re battling depression, it’s possible they’ll respond in a way that comes across as insensitive, uncaring or dismissive of your illness. This of course can be incredibly frustrating, but like we said in Chapter 2, usually the reason someone makes a comment like “*you just need to get over it*” or something along those lines is NOT because they’re a bad person who doesn’t care about you; rather, it’s usually because they don’t properly understand how depression affects people, and/or they don’t appreciate how debilitating of an illness it can actually be.

And for you, this is really good news, because you can help them understand depression and thus turn them into a loyal, caring supporter!

Accordingly, if someone says something that comes across as insensitive, uncaring or dismissive of your depression, I really encourage you to NOT get your back up and start deriding them for not knowing more about depression. Instead, I encourage you to calmly and collectedly explain to that person why what they're saying isn't true, and offer them an alternative viewpoint that will help them understand depression – and thus yourself – much better than they do at present.

To show you how you can do this in practice, below is a list of common insensitive, uncaring or dismissive comments people might make about your depression, and what I suggest you say in response.

Comment: “You just need to get over it.”

Response: “I wish I could, but unfortunately, it's not nearly that simple, because depression is a serious illness that's caused by a combination of factors like negative thoughts and emotions, changes in brain chemicals, behaviours, and also your environment. It's a really complicated problem to deal with that requires treatment from a number of different angles, and until you get better, it can affect literally every aspect of your life. For example, it can make you feel so tired and overwhelmed that you can't get out of bed; it makes it harder to concentrate at work; your relationships suffer because you don't have as much positive energy to put into them as you otherwise would; and when you have depression, you waste so much time hating yourself and feeling worthless,

and being so damn miserable that you lose all hope that life will ever get better. I know it's difficult to understand, but I really want you to understand it, because when no-one does, it makes me feel extremely lonely, and my depression gets even worse. Plus, I could really use some support. So, if you don't mind, I'd like to tell you a bit more about depression so that you can understand what I'm going through properly, and then hopefully be able to lend a helping hand. Would that be OK?"

Comment: "You're just looking for attention."

Response: "It's really quite the opposite, mate. If you want to know the truth, I've actually been suffering from depression for X weeks/months/years now, but every day, I fake a smile and pretend I'm fine, because I'm scared to tell anyone how I'm really feeling. On the rare occasions I do tell someone like yourself, I feel uncomfortable, and scared, and nervous, and it takes all the courage I have to bring myself to do it. Believe me, the absolute last thing I want is attention – I promise you. But, I could really use your support, which is why I've reached out to you today to tell you what I'm going through."

Comment: "You can't be depressed, because there are so many people in the world who are worse off than you."

Response: "Yes, there are people in the world who are worse off than me, but that doesn't mean that it's not possible

for me to suffer from depression. After all, depression is caused by a LOT more than just your environment, or how much money you have, or how stable your home life is, for example. It's also caused by the way you think – like whether you struggle with negative thoughts, overthinking, or whether you just worry about the future all the time. It's caused by having low self-esteem, and the way you handle different emotions. It can be caused by your past and difficult things that happened in your childhood; and also negative behaviours like comparing yourself to other people; and lots and lots of other factors as well. So, even though I have a good life circumstantially, it doesn't mean that I'm immune from struggling with an illness like depression. Does that make sense?"

Comment: "But you don't look depressed."

Response: 'You're right, I don't – but that's only because due to the stigma surrounding mental illness, I fake a smile and pretend I'm fine. The truth though is that this is a very difficult time for me. I'm really, really struggling, and I'd really appreciate your help.'

Comment: "We all have bad days now and then."

Response: "You're right, that's true – but unfortunately depression is much, much more than just a bad day. It's actually a serious illness that's caused by a combination of

factors like negative thoughts and emotions, changes in brain chemicals, your behaviours, and the situation you're in. It's a really complicated problem to deal with that requires treatment from a number of different angles, and until you get better, it can affect literally every aspect of your life. It can make you feel so tired and overwhelmed that you can't get out of bed; it makes it harder to concentrate at work; your relationships suffer because you don't have as much positive energy to put into them as you otherwise would; and when you have depression, you waste so much time hating yourself and feeling worthless, and being so damn miserable that you lose all hope that life will ever get better. And the worst part is that depression can go on for weeks, months or even years on end, and sometimes people just snap and end up killing themselves to escape it. So, like I said, depression is a LOT more than just having a bad day – you know what I mean?"

Comment: "I thought you were stronger than that."

Response: "I am strong, but I'm also sick. Not everyone knows this, but depression is actually a serious illness that's caused by a lot of different factors like low self-esteem, negative thoughts, unhealthy behaviours like comparing yourself to other people, worrying about the future too much, relationship problems, money problems, not enjoying your job, insomnia, painful experiences that happened in your childhood, the balance of chemicals in your brain, and lots and lots of other things, too. It has absolutely nothing to do

with not being strong, and when you say that, it really hurts my feelings, and it makes me feel extremely misunderstood.”



This is just a little reminder that you are brave, courageous and strong for continuing to fight an excruciating, debilitating illness that's always trying to break you.

It's been my experience that if you respond in a calm, collected way like so that gently points out the fallacy in someone's ignorant remark, then that person will often listen to what you're saying and do their best to understand where you're coming from – and, as a result, they can end up becoming one of your most caring supporters. However, if you take the time to try and enlighten them and it's clear that they're clinging to their misconceptions and not really listening to you, then it's generally best to let it go for a while and then try again a bit later on – after all, it's possible that, given a bit more time, they may come around. Unfortunately though, if you try to talk to them a few more times after that and it's just more of the same, then sadly, they're probably not someone who you're going to want to turn to when you're going through a rough patch. While this isn't ideal, it helps to remember that there are plenty more fish in

the sea, and that for every one of those unsupportive people, there'll in all likelihood be a handful of understanding, supportive people who will happily be there for you.

WHAT ABOUT WHEN SOMEONE STARTS TRYING TO “FIX” YOU?

Sometimes when you tell someone that you have depression, they'll respond straight away with something like:

- “You just need to do more of X.”
- “You'll feel better if you stop doing Y.”
- “It's only because of Z – sort that out and you'll be fine.”

It's a bit difficult for me to advise you on how to respond to such remarks, because hearing a variation of the above can affect different people in different ways. For example, some people may appreciate the suggestions, and from there may want to explore with that person the different things they may be able to do to alleviate their illness. If that's you, then by all means run with the conversation and see where it takes you. However, many people feel one or both of the following emotions whenever someone tries to “fix” them like so:

- **Annoyed** – because often the suggestions are overly simplistic, and imply that depression is extremely easy to fix.
- **Unsatisfied** – because often when you pluck up your courage to tell someone that you're suffering from

depression, what you're after is to be supported and listened to – as opposed to being bombarded with misguided solutions.

If you can relate, then here's how you can respond to someone who's trying to "fix" you:

- **If you feel annoyed:** "I appreciate you trying to help, but unfortunately, depression is a lot more complicated than that. It's a serious mental illness that can affect every aspect of your life, and while I wish I could fix it by just doing [insert their suggestion], unfortunately it's nowhere near that simple. To recover from depression, that are a LOT of things that need to be done, like for example, taking medication to balance the chemicals in your brain; going to therapy to overcome past trauma or to learn how to stop hating yourself; evaluating all the relationships in your life and cutting out toxic people who bring you down; overcoming other problems like insomnia for example; and sometimes taking yourself out of a job you hate or even a marriage you're miserable in. So, yeah – overcoming depression is a really, REALLY big job, and though I wish there was a simple quick-fix like [insert what they suggested], there really just isn't. Does that make sense?"
- **If you feel unsatisfied:** "I appreciate you trying to help me find solutions to my depression, but I'm working to overcome my illness with my doctor/psychologist/psychiatrist/counsellor, and we're making good progress."

From you, what I really need is someone who'll listen to me when I need to get something off my chest, and someone who'll be there to support me when I'm feeling low. Do you think you could do that for me?"

Again, it's important to remember to stay calm and in control of your emotions. While it can certainly be irritating when someone tries to "fix" you with overgeneralised suggestions, please try to remember that that person does care about you, and that their heart is in the right place (after all, if they didn't care about you, then they wouldn't bother trying to "fix" you in the first place). Like we've said, such comments merely stem from the fact that depression is minimally spoken about, and thus often minimally understood by people who haven't experienced it themselves. However, the more that we as people with lived experience of depression talk about the illness, the more we will collectively break down these barriers, and help create a world that understands and supports people who suffer from depression.

WHAT ABOUT WHEN SOMEONE RESPONDS BY JUST BEING SILENT OR BY CHANGING THE SUBJECT?

Unfortunately, this is how some people may respond when you open up about your depression – usually because they're just caught off guard, or because they don't really know what to say. When this happened to me, I used to let it slide on that particular occasion, but then raise it the next time I saw them. When that time came, instead of trying to casually slip the subject of my depression into the conversation like I usually would, I would make a special point of bringing it up, and ask that person point blank if we could talk about it together. Sometimes that would work and

we'd have a good chat, but unfortunately, other times they'd be similarly evasive the second time around. If the latter happened, then I'd usually conclude that for whatever reason, that person just wasn't comfortable discussing a serious subject like depression, and moving forward, I'd focus on talking to some of my other loved ones about my illness. While this was a disappointing conclusion to have to reach, it was important for me to remember that that person still did care about me, and no doubt wished me all the best in my recovery – it's just that for whatever reason, they weren't capable of talking about my depression with me.

HOW TO RESOLVE THE CONVERSATION SO YOU GET WHAT YOU WANT OUT OF IT

While you're having a conversation about your depression, it's important to keep in mind what you want to get out of it. For example, is it to have someone to talk to when you're feeling low? Is it to have someone to go to the doctor with you? Is it to have someone to call and check up on you from time to time? Is it someone to play a game of squash with you every Tuesday so that you can get more exercise? Whatever it is, it's important that you communicate your needs to your loved one at some point during the conversation. If they voluntarily offer to provide the kind of support you need, then that's great – but it's a mistake to expect this to happen and then be disappointed when it doesn't. After all, your loved ones are not mind-readers, so how are they supposed to know exactly what you want unless you tell them? Not only that, but like we've said, depression is a very difficult illness to understand if you haven't experienced it yourself, and for this reason in particular, it's up to you to take the lead with your friends and family and communicate exactly what you need from them.

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THIS CHAPTER

1. There are three main ways you can begin a conversation about your depression:
 - By raising it within the natural flow of conversation either in person or over the phone.
 - By making a special point of bringing it up either in person or over the phone.
 - By giving your loved ones a letter that explains your depression and the ways you'd like them to support you through it.
2. If someone, after telling them that you struggle with depression, responds in a way that comes across as insensitive, uncaring or dismissive of your illness, I really encourage you to not get your back up and start deriding them. Instead, I encourage you to remain calm, to do your best to explain to that person why what they're saying isn't true, and to offer them an alternative viewpoint that will help them understand depression – and thus yourself – better than they do at present.
3. If someone, after telling them that you struggle with depression, tries to instantaneously “fix” you with suggestions of how to get better, then:
 - If you're receptive to their suggestions, you can run with the conversation and see where it takes you;

- If you feel annoyed because their advice is overly simplistic, then you can explain to them how serious of an illness depression is, and how overcoming it involves much, much more than simply implementing the suggestion they're making;
 - If you feel unsatisfied because, as opposed to wanting advice from that person, what you really want is moral support from them, then you can make a point of clearly communicating this desire.
4. If someone, after telling them that you struggle with depression, responds by either being silent or by changing the subject, then you can try to broach the subject again on future occasions when they may be more receptive to discussing it.
 5. While you're having a conversation about your depression, it's important to keep in mind what you want to get out of it, and, before the conversation comes to a close, ensure that you communicate those needs to the person you're talking to.

Chapter 5:

The easiest way to get ongoing, on-point support for your depression

Like we mentioned way back in the introductory chapter, even after you've told your loved ones that you struggle with depression and they've committed to supporting you, it can still sometimes be really hard for them to actually do so. This is because as you well know, depression can be different things at different times. For example:

- **One day:** You can feel so exhausted, so miserable and so completely overwhelmed that you just want to lie in bed all day;
- **Then the next day:** You might feel pretty good;
- **Then the day after that:** You might feel a lot worse, but you still try to carry on by faking a smile and pretending that everything is “fine”;
- **Then the next two days:** You might feel so tired and burned out from pretending to be OK that you just want to sleep and not talk to anyone;
- **Then the day after that:** You might be feeling so anxious and stressed out that you can't fall asleep;
- **Then the day after that:** You might want to talk to a friend and be supported;
- **Then the day after that:** You might actually feel fine, and not want to talk about or be reminded of your depression at all;
- **Then the next two days after that:** You might just be pretending that everything is fine, when deep down, you're feeling miserable again.

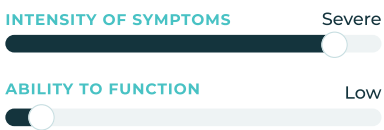
And, when depression can be so many different things, it can be very difficult for your loved ones to know how you feel at any particular point in time – and as a result, it can be very difficult for them to know how best to support you.

Of course, a seemingly simple solution to this problem would be for you to just say how you feel. However, as I'm guessing you've previously experienced, this is often extremely difficult, because:

1. You often feel so many different painful, confusing, exhausting symptoms at once – which makes it very hard to put your depression into words.
2. When you do try to articulate your feelings, language often “fails” you. For example, if you say “I’m tired”, then while this is indeed a correct factual statement, the words “I’m tired” also rarely do justice to just how utterly exhausting depression is no doubt making you feel. Consequently, if you say “I’m tired”, then there’s a good chance it will leave the person you’re speaking to thinking, “but everyone gets tired sometimes – so what’s the big deal?”

However, The Depression Project has developed what we call the Storm To Sun Framework – which is something that solves this problem by making it easy for you to express exactly how you feel at any point in time – which in turn, makes it much easier for your loved ones to know how to best support you at any point in time. This is a framework that I wish I could've used when I suffered from depression myself, and because I know it's something you're going to find really, really helpful, I'm super excited to share it with you now!

THE STORM ZONE



THE RAIN ZONE



THE CLOUD ZONE



In case you haven't heard of it before, the Storm To Sun Framework is comprised of three "Zones" that at any point in time, people with depression can find themselves in.

THE "STORM ZONE"

This is when the symptoms of your depression are very severe – i.e., when it feels like there's a storm raging in your mind. When you're in this Zone:

- Simple tasks like getting out of bed or having a shower may feel like climbing a mountain.
- Faking a smile and pretending to be "okay" may be impossible.
- Fulfilling your day-to-day responsibilities such as going to work can feel unmanageable (and often are).

- In the “Storm Zone”, it’s common to feel so miserable, broken, and hopeless that you convince yourself that depression will always be part of you and that you’ll never recover.

THE “RAIN ZONE”

You can think of yourself as being in the “Rain Zone” when the symptoms of your depression are moderately intense. In this Zone:

- The storm in your mind has calmed down or not yet started – but it could flare up on short notice.
- Because your symptoms are only moderately severe, you may still be able to uphold your responsibilities and carry on with life – but in the course of doing so, you’ll probably get tired much quicker than you otherwise would.
- Feeling “burned out” is common, and you’re prone to snapping easily.
- Socialising and/or interacting with others – while possible – often feels like a burden.

THE “CLOUD ZONE”

This is when the symptoms of your depression are mild. When you’re in this Zone:

- You feel more or less “normal” – in the sense that your days are only mildly impacted by depression.

- You're able to function relatively well without becoming easily tired.
- You're much more likely to want to socialise with friends and family and interact with other people.
- In the Cloud Zone, your motivation is at its highest, so you're most able to do the things that you may have been putting off while you were in the Storm or Rain Zones.

HOW IDENTIFYING WHICH ZONE YOU'RE IN CAN HELP YOU GET THE SUPPORT YOU NEED AT THAT MOMENT

When You Say You're In The Storm Zone:

When you tell someone that you're in the Storm Zone, this lets them know that now more than ever, they need to be most accommodating of your illness; decrease their expectations of you due to your severe symptoms and low ability to function; and that you could really use their support. In practice, this support can often mean being there to listen if you feel like talking; watching a movie at home with you; doing the grocery shopping if you're too exhausted to leave the house; or just giving you space while you survive the storm, recharge your batteries and climb back into the Rain Zone.

When You Say You're In The Rain Zone:

By saying you're in this Zone, you're letting others know that while you can still complete most day-to-day tasks, doing so will be challenging for

you, and may leave you feeling burned out and exhausted. This helps your loved ones understand that while you're unlikely to want as much support as you would if you were in the Storm Zone, that they'll still likely need to be accommodating of your illness (for example, by being OK with you cancelling a meet-up with them on short-notice if you're feeling too drained to go).

When You Say You're In The Cloud Zone:

When you tell someone you're in the Cloud Zone, it communicates that things are presently "OK" – or in other words, that you have mild symptoms, and therefore a relatively high ability to function. This lets them know that right now, you don't need a lot of support, since you're able to carry on with life fairly well. It can also mean that it's currently a good time to catch up and socialize – since in the Cloud Zone, your energy and motivation levels are at their highest.

Furthermore, not only can the Storm To Sun Framework help your loved ones understand how you feel at present and therefore know what to do to help you, but it can also make it easier for you to explain previous and/or future behaviour. For example:

"I'm sorry I cancelled our dinner date two weeks ago – I was deep in the Storm Zone that night, and so I really just felt like being by myself and watching TV in bed."

“No, I don’t think I’ll be able to attend the party on the weekend, I’m afraid. I’m currently in the Rain Zone, and to try to prevent myself from slipping into the Storm Zone, I really need to spend a couple of days just relaxing and taking care of myself – instead of faking a smile at a party and pretending I’m OK.”

KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM THIS CHAPTER

Because it can be difficult for your loved ones to know exactly how your depression is affecting you at any given moment – and therefore, how best to support you at any given moment – it can really help to utilise the Storm To Sun Framework. This can be done by communicating which Zone of the Storm To Sun Framework you're currently in:

1. **The Storm Zone:** This communicates that your symptoms are severe, that you have a low ability to function, and that consequently now more than ever:
 - They need to be accommodating of your illness;
 - They need to decrease their expectations of you – due to your severe symptoms and low ability to function;
 - You could really use their support.

2. **The Rain Zone:** This communicates that your symptoms are moderately severe; that you have a moderate ability to function; and that consequently, while you're unlikely to want as much support as you would if you were in the Storm Zone, that they still need to be mindful and accommodating of your depression.

3. **The Cloud Zone:** This communicates that your symptoms are mild; your ability to function is high; and that consequently, you don't need very much support right now.

CLOSING THOUGHTS

So that's it, my friend – we've covered the seven reasons why it's beneficial to talk about your depression; addressed the most common fears, worries and reservations that are associated with doing so; analysed how to get in the right mindset to have a conversation about your depression; discussed who you ought to tell, how much you ought to tell them, where you ought to tell them and when you ought to tell them; talked about how to start a conversation about your illness, how to respond to other people's reactions when you broach the subject of your depression, and how to resolve the conversation so that you get what you want out of it; and I've also taught you The Depression Project's Storm To Sun Framework, which can help you get the right support at the right time. By now, I hope you feel much better prepared to have a talk with your loved ones about your depression, and I truly hope that those conversations lead to you developing a supportive network of friends and family members who you can turn to when you need them.

Before we now finish up, I'd just like to say that talking about your depression is something that will get easier with time. After all, it is a skill, and like any skill, practice makes perfect – so even if you find it difficult at first, rest assured that if you keep on pushing yourself to give it a go, then it will gradually become something that comes a lot more naturally to you.

On a somewhat different note, the last thing I'd like to stress is the fact that even though it may appear inconceivable at times, it is possible to recover from depression and find happiness again. To prove this point,

I'd like to share with you an excerpt from my bestseller *Depression is a Liar*, which is a memoir about my struggle and eventual triumph over depression. To put it in context, this excerpt takes place in April of 2010, and at the time, I was a 21-year-old university student and aspiring author.

April, 2010

The days dragged along. This was the worst I'd ever felt. Period. There was no relief from the ceaseless dread. I could barely function. Paying attention in class was almost impossible. Studying was too overwhelming. I'd fallen absurdly behind. I hadn't touched my book in days. I'd quit the job at the law firm I'd been working one day a week at as well – since I needed all my free time to try and catch up on uni. But there was never enough time. I was constantly exhausted. Drained of life. Depression sucked at my soul. My spirit withered. My goal for the day got broken down even further: *just survive the next six hours*, I'd tell myself. *The next four hours. Hold off killing yourself until then* (at which point, I'd tell myself the same thing again).

I'd previously thought I'd get better. I'd always thought that hope and depression were bitter rivals until one inevitably defeated the other, and I'd always thought that hope would win out in the end. But for the first time in my life, I was devoid of hope. I honestly believed that being depressed was just the way I was, and that being depressed was just the way I'd be, for the rest of my life. And, because I was so convinced that I'd never get better, there seemed no point in

fighting my illness. Instead of willing myself to “hang in there” because I believed that my suffering was temporary and that everything would be better one day, I comforted myself with the knowledge that human beings are not immortal. That I would die, one day. One special, glorious day. Then I could spend the rest of eternity mouldering in a grave, free from pain. You might be wondering why I didn’t just kill myself if I wholeheartedly believed that my future consisted of nothing more than excruciating misery. Well, first of all, I still was not a quitter. But more importantly, I didn’t want to hurt the people who loved me.

It’s not fair to commit suicide and ruin their lives, I thought. *So I have to hold on. No matter how much it hurts me, I have to hold on* – which is why I drew comfort from the thought that one day I’d die and finally be free.

When you’re that depressed, that insanely and utterly depressed that you genuinely believe you’ll suffer that acutely for the rest of your days, life seems to lack all purpose. *After all, I thought, what’s the point in working, fighting, striving for a better life if I’m sentenced to one of chronic anguish and despair? There is no better life. There is no life outside of pain. So what’s the point in doing anything but waiting until death finally arrives on my doorstep and whisks me away to the Promised Land?* I was still studying, and I still planned on finishing my novel and trying to get it published – but it was more out of force of habit than anything else. My passion had been drained. My zest for life asphyxiated. I was like a ghost, just drifting through the ghastly days.

'Shit! What's wrong, mate?' an old friend said when I ran into him at uni. 'Perk up, brother!'

I was shocked. One of the most well-known attributes of depression is that it is entirely possible – and very common – to suffer horrifically without anybody knowing. But somehow without realising it, I'd crossed the line from a place where I was able to put on a front and fool people into thinking I wasn't depressed to a place where I was so sick that it was obvious to people I hadn't even seen for a year. When I got home I looked in the bathroom mirror, and realised that I was staring back at a young man whose eyes were exhausted slits, whose whole face shrieked of agonising misery. I was staring back at a young man whose spirit had been broken, whose soul had been destroyed. I was staring back at a young man who, for all intents and purposes, was already dead.

As you can see, in April of 2010, I was so convinced that I'd never get better. I was 100% sure of it. But I really hope you'll be inspired to know, dear reader, that in the eight years since the beginning of 2012, I've been 100% depression-free, and lived a very, very happy life – going on to achieve my dream of becoming an author; travelling to over 85 countries and counting; meeting the love of my life along the way; and founding The Depression Project along with my brother Mathew – which helps millions of people all over the world.

When I was trapped in the throes of depression, I never, ever would've thought I'd be able to get better and enjoy my life again. Not in a million years.

But I did – because depression is a LIAR!.

Recovery IS possible – even during the times when you wholeheartedly feel like it's not.

All my love,

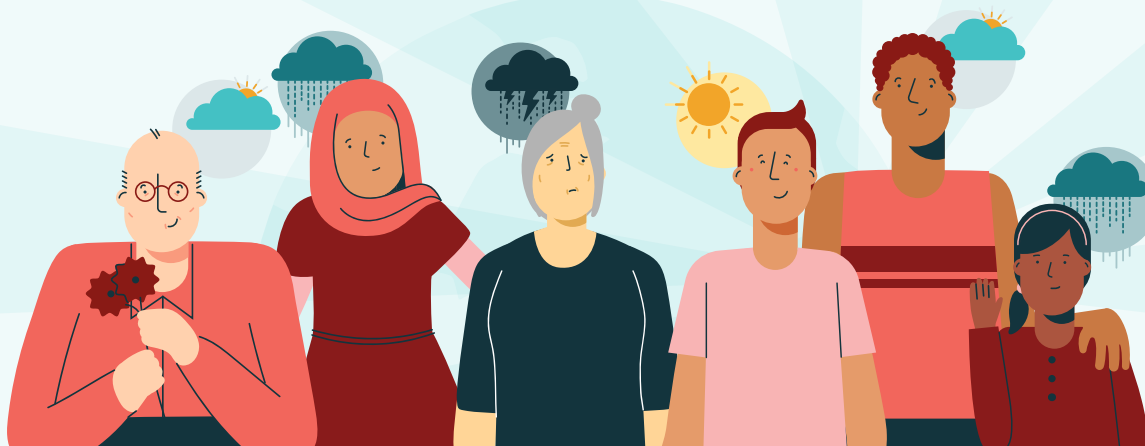
Danny Baker,

Co-founder of The Depression Project.

You are a depression warrior! Brave and resilient. Strong and courageous. Keep on fighting, OK? You will win in the end.

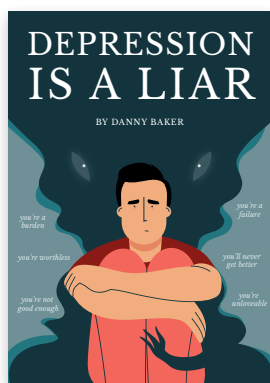
I believe in you!



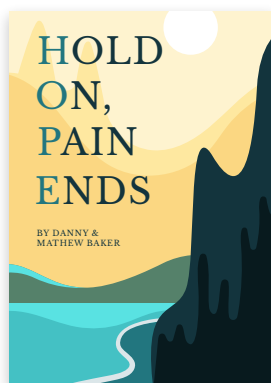


This book is part of The Depression Project’s Depression School – which in case you don’t know, comprises a wide-range of books and online courses that teach you the strategies you need to know in order to overcome depression once and for all.

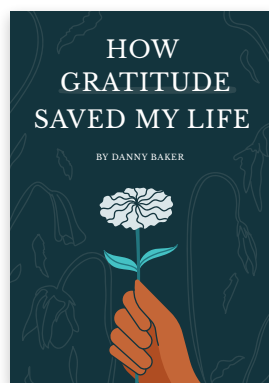
Below are some other books in Depression School that you’re also likely to find helpful. To see which ones are currently available, please visit our website by clicking here.



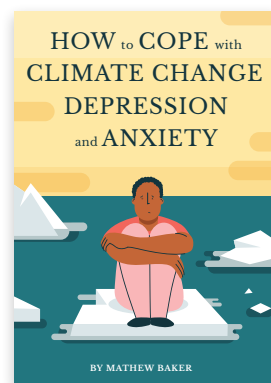
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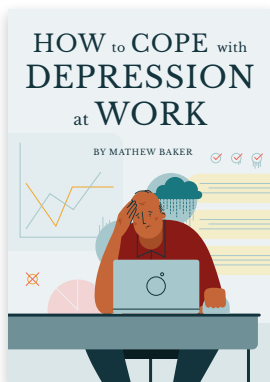
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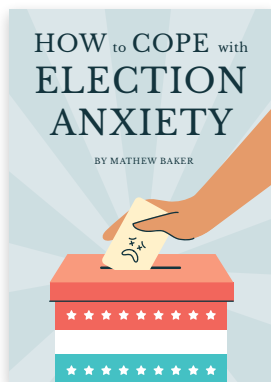
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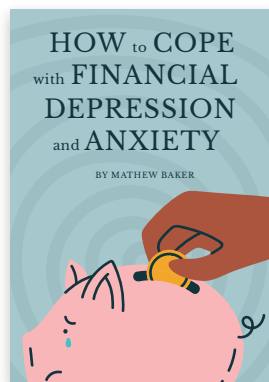
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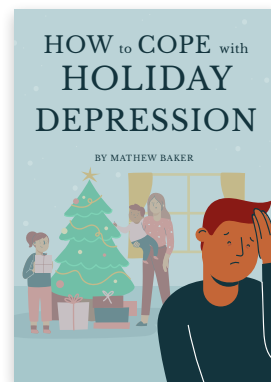
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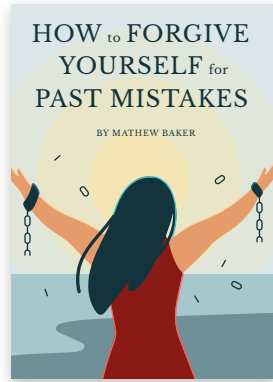
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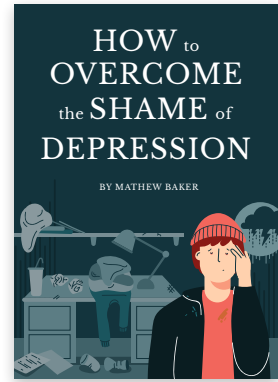
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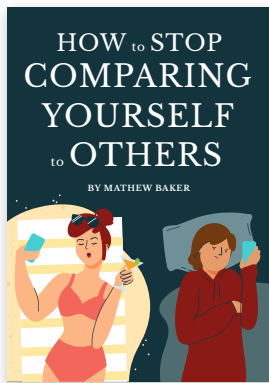
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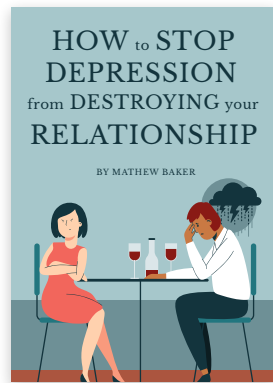
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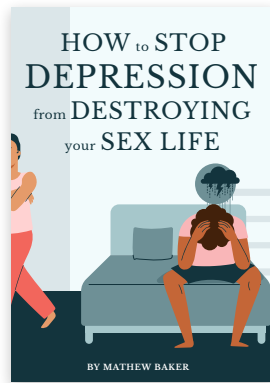
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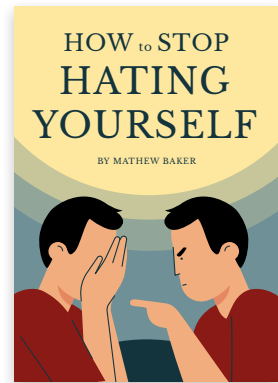
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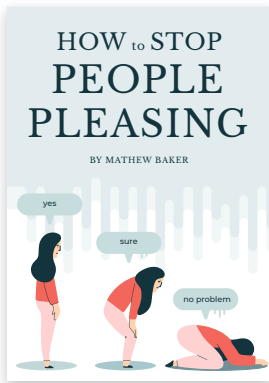
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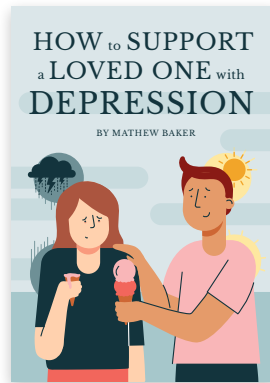
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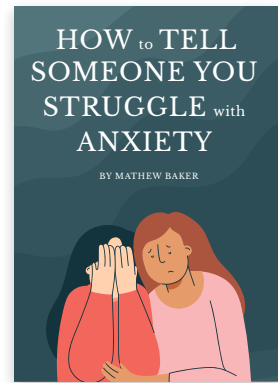
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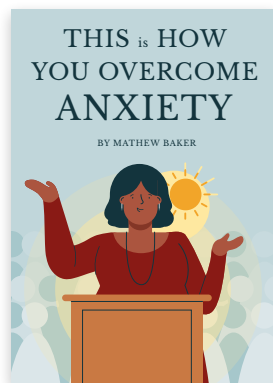
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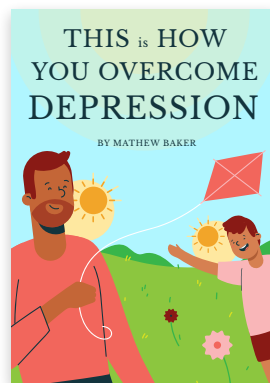
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