

"Your Toolbox for Tackling Depression"

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As a therapist, my objective is to provide a comprehensive toolbox of easy and practical depression-busting tips—all in one place—that you can immediately put into practice to improve your mood and your thoughts as you work to prevent or overcome depression.

Anyone can fall prey to anxiety or depression given the right stressors and situational circumstances. Living with depression or anxiety is like living under a dark cloud. It can feel like you have little control over your own mind and have lost the ability to feel positive emotions. You just don't feel like you. Approximately 25% of adults in the U.S. (1 in 4) experience anxiety or depression.¹ It's far too common and can happen to anyone resulting in mild, moderate or severe depression.

Those with either of these common mental health issues often experience fear, worry, sadness, irritability, unexplained fatigue or lack of energy, general negativity or pessimistic thinking, cognitive distortions, lack of motivation or drive, avoiding people and social situations, teariness, restlessness, helplessness, hopelessness, emptiness, guilt or feelings of worthlessness far beyond that which we all experience at some point or another. Depression is particularly noteworthy when these feelings last for more than two weeks.

For men, depression especially tends to show up as anger, irritability, emptiness, negativity, aggressiveness, withdrawal, and feeling stuck or uptight. They often think that just because they don't feel sad or hopeless that they aren't experiencing depression. Mental health issues can also induce physical symptoms like aches and pains or trouble sleeping.

Mental health issues like depression and anxiety are diseases of the mind and body. Suffering is involuntary like any other illness but can be managed. Depression has nothing to do with one's personal character or faithfulness. Clinical depression and anxiety aren't due to a character flaw or moral failing. It isn't something where affected individuals can just tell themselves to snap out of. It's a legitimate, complex physiological mental health issue with physical, social and relational aspects as well. It's like diabetes or cancer but has even greater psychological and relational components. Due to its many dimensions and complexities it isn't just something that a pill alone will be able to cure.

Depression and anxiety are generally caused by both genetic and environmental factors. The underlying causes are a combination of nature and nurture. There can be biological susceptibilities to biochemical imbalances in the brain and/or issues caused by life experiences like neglect, abuse or other traumas that contribute to depression. These difficult life experiences can also increase the

risk of succumbing to self-medicating addictions. Neglect, abuse and trauma tend to train you to believe some very depressing or anxiety-inducing things about yourself, your life and others.

Like addiction, infertility, health, marriage or parenting challenges, depression is a common difficulty in many peoples' lives. As a therapist who helps clients with mental health issues, and as someone who has personally struggled with depression, I have compiled the following toolbox for tackling depression. These suggestions can both prevent and help people out of the mental muck of depression and into a life of peace, contentment and even joy. There is hope and help for feeling happiness and contentment again!

My objective here is to provide a comprehensive toolbox of easy and practical depression-busting tips—all in one place—that you can immediately put into practice to improve your mood and your thoughts as you work to prevent or overcome depression. This toolbox of tips for tackling depression includes the following:

1. *Exercise / Get Active*
2. *Get Enough Sleep*
3. *Eat Healthy/Be Healthy*
4. *Connect with People*
5. *Set Healthy Boundaries*
6. *Get Some Sunlight*
7. *Engage in Process Writing*
8. *Do Meditation, Mindfulness or Yoga*
9. *Stop the Stinkin' Thinkin' / Change Your Negative Self-Talk*
10. *Stay off Social Media*
11. *Use EFT Tapping*
12. *Smile and Laugh*
13. *Accept Yourself, Let Go of Perfectionism and Practice Self-Compassion*
14. *Get Educated about Depression*
15. *Take Supplements and / or Medication*
16. *Participate in Counseling and / or a Support Group*
17. *Partner with God*

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1. **Exercise / Get Active.** Whether you're more likely to go for a walk, a run, play tennis or dance, just get your body moving.

¹ "Mental Health By The Numbers," *National Alliance on Mental Illness*, accessed September 20, 2012, <https://www.nami.org/Learn-More/Mental-Health-By-the-Numbers>.

This helps the feel-good hormones flow and helps distract you from the ruminating thoughts in your mind. Physical activity counters too much mental activity—or overthinking things.

Exercise can be as effective as antidepressants for those with mild depression and some doctors even hesitate to prescribe medication until a good exercise regimen has been started.

Begin small and find something you are likely to enjoy. Just getting out and doing something different than you normally do can jumpstart your mind and your mood. I like to suggest the “5-minute rule” of doing any exercise for just 5 minutes in the beginning because it can psychologically feel more doable than a major exercise regimen—especially if you’re already struggling with motivation to do anything.

ACTION ITEMS:

- Go for a walk, run or some other activity
- Turn on some fun music and dance—both for the movement and to uplift your thoughts and emotions.
- Set even just small goals for physical activity recognizing its powerful anti-depressant effects.

2. **Get Enough Sleep.** Getting sufficient rest (7 - 9 hours) so that your mind and body can relax and process the experiences and emotions of your day is essential in maintaining good mental health. Your brain will have an even harder time thinking positively when it’s in a state of sleep deprivation. The key to healthy sleep is to consistently get to bed and then awaken at the same time each day to assist your internal sleep clock.

If you have trouble falling asleep or staying asleep you might consider reading a book before bed (not electronically), writing out 10 things you’re stressed about to help put them somewhere off your mind, or trying Melatonin supplements that can be a safe way to get a better night’s sleep. Practice slow, deep breathing to relax your mind and body for sleep. If there’s just too much going on in your life affecting the amount of sleep you are getting, see if you can cut back on just one thing.

ACTION ITEMS:

- Get 7-9 hours of good sleep.
- Use some of the suggestions to clear your mind and practice relaxation techniques to sleep better.

3. **Eat Healthy/Be Healthy.** Feeling depressed tends to encourage a slide into eating unhealthy, self-soothing foods. What we put into our mouth is just as important as what we put into our mind and can significantly affect our thoughts and emotions. You might even think of food as medicine for your brain and body. If you can change even one eating habit to be a little healthier, it can make a difference in how you feel. It is true that you are what you eat.

Cutting out sugar, soda or caffeine and adding even just one vegetable or an extra glass of water can help you combat the “stinkin thinkin” in the brain. Sugar can be especially detrimental during the winter months when seasonal depression can be particularly challenging.²

A client recently shared how after going away on a getaway she let her sleep, healthy eating, and exercise slip, which messed her up enough that she felt like a wreck depression-wise until she could get back on track. This is why exercise, sleep and healthy eating are at the top of the list for reducing depression.

Recent research also identifies inflammation in the body as a culprit in depression.³ Lifestyle factors such as aerobic exercise, maintaining a healthy body weight, getting enough good sleep, reducing stress, eating a healthy diet, consuming omega-3 fats can all help reduce inflammation and its depressing effects on the body and mind.

ACTION ITEMS:

- Eat healthy foods.
- Make other lifestyle changes such as maintaining a healthy body weight, reduce stress, eat omega-3 fats, etc.

4. **Connect with People.** Depression tends to make us isolate ourselves and avoid social contact. That exacerbates the loneliness and “loser-ness” we are already feeling. Solicit the help of a few trusted friends or family members to assist you and help you avoid disconnecting. Let them know you are struggling with depression or anxiety and that you just need someone you can talk to without feeling like they need to fix anything. Push yourself to reach out to care and attend to them as well so that neither of you will feel like it’s a one-sided relationship.

Depending on the depth of your depression, rather than staying home, push yourself to go out with friends or family members to activities or join a group or a volunteer organization to have pre-scheduled social or service opportunities. It can pull your mind out of depressive thinking even just temporarily and help retrain your brain. Service and social interaction can help you get outside yourself and counter the preoccupation with self that depression or anxiety tends to induce.

In the presence of caring people, you also have more chance to touch, hug and have eye contact (whether you are the receiver or the giver). This can create oxytocin, which is a bonding hormone that can make you feel more connected. Any appropriate opportunities you may have to give or receive an 8-second hug or other touching moment (i.e. someone’s arm around you or being arm-in-arm with someone) is particularly potent in releasing that wonderful oxytocin.

² “Avoid Too Much Sugar If You Have the Winter Blues,” December 13, 2019, <https://www.newsmax.com/health/health-news/sugar-depression-winter-holidays/2019/12/13/id/945831/>. Carina H. Fowler, Stephen S. Ilardi, Michael S. Namekata, Daniel J. Reis, Erik K. Wing. “The depressogenic potential of added dietary sugars.” *Journal of Medical Hypotheses* 134 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.mehy.2019.109421>

³ Lynn Allison, “Inflammation May Be the Cause of Depression,” March 6, 2020, <https://www.newsmax.com/Health/health-news/inflammation/2020/03/06/id/957206/>.

ACTION ITEMS:

- Set up some trusted friendships to be there for you when you need some connection.
- Pre-schedule social and service opportunities to proactively address the depression.
- Push yourself to reach out or to go out.

5. **Set Healthy Boundaries.** Setting healthy physical and emotional boundaries with others is essential for both physical and emotional health. Not having boundaries is like leaving the door to your home open or unlocked allowing anyone—including unwelcome guests to enter at will.

Setting and enforcing boundaries in your relationships especially with people who aren't always good at respecting you, helps you: 1) take responsibility for your own well-being, 2) communicate your needs, 3) protect your self-esteem, 4) maintain self-respect, 5) require respect from others and 6) generally enjoy healthier more equal relationships.

When we don't have healthy boundaries with others it can make us more susceptible to making too many personal sacrifices and/or allowing ourselves to be treated poorly causing emotional pain that can lead to dependency, depression, anxiety, and even stress-induced physical illness.

ACTION ITEMS:

- Take responsibility for your own well-being and show yourself more respect by setting and enforcing healthy physical and emotional boundaries.

6. **Get Some Sunlight.** Sunlight stimulates feel-good hormones and neurotransmitters. Make sure you open the blinds or curtains in your room and/or home first thing every day as part of your regular depression-busting routine. The winter months can especially make feelings of depression even worse due to the lack of sunshine ("winter blues" or Seasonal Affective Disorder – SAD).

Getting out in the sun when it does shine can do wonders, as can getting a full-spectrum light to use indoors. These light boxes can help with regulating the circadian cycles (internal clock) and the serotonin and melatonin levels that help with sleep and mood issues. Full-spectrum lights can make a difference for people especially during the winter months but can be helpful even year-round for those who don't get out in the sunlight enough.

ACTION ITEMS:

- Open your blinds
- Get out in the sun as often as you can
- Get a full-spectrum light box to use every morning as you get ready for the day.

7. **Engage in Process Writing.** Sometimes no one is available to listen to when you need to talk. And sometimes there is simply too much to say. Journal therapy is a way to always have someone to help you process what you're thinking and feeling. It's like having an ongoing written conversation with God.

Sometimes free-flowing written conversations are needed and other times it's easier to just write out a list of "I feel..."

statements to express the anger, frustration, guilt or sadness you are feeling. Giving your genuine thoughts and feelings a voice has a way of giving them light and air. It validates your feelings and allows them to begin to dissolve. Negative feelings buried alive don't tend to die on their own. They need some processing to begin to go away.

Some clients have said that they find it helpful to alternate their "anger lists" with a "grateful list" in order to feel in balance or to keep negative emotions from getting out of control. Developing a habit of listing expressions of gratitude increases feel-good hormones, strengthens the immune system and improves personal relationships.

Other clients find that they won't or can't stomach any positives until they truly feel heard in their hurt and pain. Those who try to skip the step of identifying and acknowledging their inner demons and negative emotions often find they feel stuck much of the time and don't really get better. See what works best for you.

If you can share your honest pain with your loving Heavenly Father and Savior, it can help you feel closer to them and help you heal. They already know what you are thinking, feeling and going through, so being honest and open with your feelings—even the unpleasant ones is vital for beating depression. These writings are just for your own processing. Many people find it additionally therapeutic to burn or shred them as a symbolic way of letting them go.

ACTION ITEMS:

- Get yourself a process writing notebook.
- Get in the habit of writing out both "anger/frustration lists" and "grateful lists."
- Burn or shred your lists to help let them go.

8. **Do Meditation, Mindfulness or Yoga.** Each of these clinical treatments have been empirically studied for help with anxiety and depression. Meditation, mindfulness and yoga assist with relaxation, stress management, increased immunity and greater mental discipline—all vital to mental, emotional and physical health.

As an easy beginner's guide to meditation simply close your eyes and focus on your breathing for a few minutes every day. While doing so, you can also increase your connection with God by repeating in your mind something like, "I'm listening" with each "out" breath. These practices can help with controlling your thoughts and developing deeper communion with God in a much more personal and profound way.

Any time you can just sit and be silent instead of filling every moment with activity or noise it ministers to the healing power of mindfulness and meditation. Make friends with silence in your daily life. Enjoy some each day as if it were a valuable vitamin.

Mindfulness basically means being more mentally, emotionally and physically present in the moment in a non-judgmental and accepting state. Mindfulness increases your awareness as you become more in tune with your senses—sight, sound, taste, touch and smell. Even five minutes in meditation or mindfulness can do wonders for slowing down a racing mind and calming both mind and body.

The practice of meditation and mindfulness develops mental discipline, which helps you gain greater power over depression's negative thought patterns. Every time you pull your thoughts back to your breathing or to the statement, "I'm listening," it's like weight lifting for the muscles of the mind. Developing greater mastery over your thoughts is a vital step in overcoming anxiety or depression.

Meditation, focusing on your breathing, being more mindful, and utilizing the powerful physical and psychological effects of yoga can all help with the next step of stopping the stinkin' thinkin' that tends to run rampant in the depressed or anxious mind. Yoga is especially vital in overcoming trauma as well.

ACTION ITEMS:

- Close your eyes and focus on your breathing for a few minutes every day. Repeat in your mind something like, "I'm listening" with each "out" breath.
- Sit in intentional silence every day.
- Be more mentally present or mindful of your surroundings through all your senses.
- Start a practice of yoga.

9. **Stop the Stinkin' Thinkin' / Change Your Negative Self-Talk.** While depression is a chemical imbalance of the brain and/or imbalance in the body it creates a psychological ailment of the mind. Depression creates mental habits of negative, depressing ruminating thoughts and beliefs. To stop the depression, train your brain to stop the stinkin' thinkin' of unrealistic expectations, all-or-nothing thinking, having a victim or blaming mentality and other unproductive habits of the mind. Watch for and learn ways to stop self-defeating and self-sabotaging patterns in your brain (often with the help of a therapist).

One self-help tool to change your thinking is to listen to uplifting, informative audio books, podcasts, etc. that help reprogram the brain away from stinkin' thinkin'! Listening can be even more powerful than reading because it is like having positive, reprogramming "background music" going on in the background of your mind. Think of it as mental nourishment for the mind. Some good audio books for this might be: *You Can Heal Your Life* by Louise L. Hay, *Self-Compassion* by Kristin Neff, or *Loving What Is* by Byron Katie.

Catch yourself when you assume negative intentions or outcomes and over-generalize them to everyone and everything. Ask yourself, "What if a positive outcome were to occur instead?" and let your mind ponder the possibility. Catch yourself when you minimize positives that happen in your life. Just say, "Stop!" to negative thoughts.

Actively developing the habit of positive self-talk and stopping self-criticism can work wonders on depression and anxiety. You might think of any negative thought or feeling that comes along as poison for the mind. Such thoughts may show up, but you don't have to let them stay. They are unwelcome intruders. Simply acknowledge their presence, then send them away! A good self-talk mantra to repeatedly feed your mind might be something like, "I'm doing the best I can, and my best is good enough."

Adding to your grateful lists each day can help highlight the positives in your life and counter the negatives. Actively watch for 5 to 10 specific things you can jot down each day for which you are grateful.

ACTION ITEMS:

- Notice negative thoughts and send them away.
- Practice positive self-talk – "I'm doing the best I can, and my best is good enough."
- Focus on positives. (Keep a gratitude journal.)
- Give your brain mental nourishment by listening to uplifting music, podcasts, audio books, etc. to reprogram your thinking.

10. **Stay Off Social Media.** Depression, anxiety, low self-esteem and poor sleep habits all have some correlation with social media use and the social comparison and envy it engenders. Since social media posts tend to reflect the best of someone's characteristics and activities it can easily exacerbate feelings of inferiority and negatively affect one's psychological well-being—especially when one is already struggling with depression.

Developing the ability to focus on the positive characteristics of oneself is vital to eradicating depression. A constant barrage of the idealized lives (and bodies) of others whether through social media or any other forms of media often provides fuel for depressed thinking. Given the addictive nature of social media platforms as an easy escape, it can eat up needed sleep time and affect one's ability to sleep well especially when cell phone or screen time use is significant in the hours directly before bedtime.

Social media use can also negatively affect one's actual social interactions with real people in real time. Connecting with people is an important aspect of reducing depression, so being mindful of one's social media use is important.

Some prescribing physicians often encourage their patients to first reduce their social media activity and other screen time before they will even prescribe antidepressant medication. Whether you cut out social media completely for a time or at least cut back to minimal levels, the change can bring a boost to your life and psychological well-being.

ACTION ITEMS:

- Cut back and take some social media breaks to free yourself from social comparisons and the time wasted.

11. **Use EFT Tapping.** One of my favorite self-help tools for letting go of negative thoughts and feelings and reprogramming more positive perspectives is something called Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT). It's an energy therapy technique utilizing the philosophy of energy meridians associated with acupuncture except you tap on certain spots on your face and body instead of using needles. You might think of it as "psychological acupressure" or detox for your brain.

You can find information and videos about EFT tapping online or here is a simple [handout](#) I use with clients. Next to process writing, this is one of the tools that helped me most in

overcoming my own depression. It is a powerful self-help tool in your toolbox for healing.

ACTION ITEMS:

- Use the EFT tapping tool to release anxiety and any negative thoughts and beliefs.

12. **Smile and Laugh.** Any time you see a mirror smile at yourself even if just to exercise your facial muscles. It sends a signal to the brain that you are happy. It may take some time to change the mental message, so keep on smilin'!

Humor can put a pause on depression as well. Give yourself a mental break by watching a funny movie or find some comedy clips to get you laughing. Smiling and laughing can counter the default negative thinking of depression convincing you that life is always sad, dreary or depressing.

ACTION ITEMS:

- Smile at yourself every time you see a mirror.
- Find ways to laugh.

13. **Accept Yourself, Let Go of Perfectionism and Practice Self-Compassion.** Women seem to be especially good at self-judgment, guilt and shame—never feeling like they are good enough. Men aren't exempt from this “not-enough” syndrome. Learning to gently accept things as they are rather than resisting “what is” can bring a significant measure of peace despite our difficulties. (Think “Serenity Prayer.”)

You've heard the phrase, “That which you resist, persists!” Accepting what is, trusting the Lord, and learning to see yourself through the eyes of compassion are all necessary in breaking the spell of depression. You can trust that the Lord is mindful of you and has a purpose for all things (see Doctrine & Covenants 122:7).

Being human universally means we will make mistakes and have at least a few struggles and weaknesses. Perfectionism expects that we won't make mistakes, but the reality and key to emotional health is expecting that we *will* make mistakes. We are all imperfect humans having an earthly experience where we get to practice being okay when we might not actually be okay. Being *good enough* really is good enough. By partnering with God, we can be okay being imperfect and be okay being good enough.

We all have our own struggles that show up in a variety of ways at any given time. I love how Elder Henry B. Eyring recommends that we assume that everyone we meet is going through something difficult.⁴ I also love how Elder Dieter F. Uchtdorf reminds us that we are all imperfect and all struggle differently from each other.⁵

Sometimes people feel like it's their fault if they have depression. But depression isn't anyone's fault any more than any disease is your fault. No one chooses cancer. No one chooses depression. All the ways we beat ourselves up and think we are not good enough, not worthy enough, not perfect enough, not lovable enough are just tools of the adversary to keep us stuck in the muck of self-denigration, which fuels depression.

A helpful tool in addition to the grateful list we discussed earlier, is keeping a daily numbered log of 5 specific things you like, love, or appreciate about yourself. This list helps you accept yourself as you are and have more compassion for yourself. Self-acceptance and compassion are how we can most easily improve ourselves anyway. You can begin to reprogram your self-view to that of a person with strengths and worth by keeping this list and learning to focus on your positives.

It can also be helpful to listen to the audio book *Self-Compassion* by Kristin Neff who teaches us to be mindful of or allow in present-moment awareness our pain and our personal difficulties rather than over-identifying with any of our negative feelings. Self-compassion is the ability to be kind instead of judgmental with ourselves and to see our struggles and weaknesses as part of the universal human experience. You might think of self-compassion as treating yourself and speaking to yourself the way you would a best friend who was struggling.

Perfectionism is a perfect poison for anyone—especially anyone struggling with depression or anxiety, whereas self-compassion is great for combatting the perfectionism that fuels depression. Self-compassion has been found to reduce a variety of negative psychological states such as anxiety, depression, stress, perfectionism, shame, body dissatisfaction, and eating disorders. It is a skill requiring practice and mental discipline.

ACTION ITEMS:

- Accept things as they are.
- Let yourself be an imperfect human who makes mistakes.
- Let go of perfectionism.
- Keep a daily log adding 5 things you like, love or appreciate about yourself.
- Listen or read the book *Self-Compassion* by Kristin Neff.

14. **Get Educated about Depression.** After doing some of the other suggestions here to start feeling better first, it can then be helpful to seek out learning about the particular struggles you are having. Getting educated can help you overcome your challenges more easily. The Lord will direct you to the specific resources you need.

Some good books on depression to consider are: *The Depression Cure* by Stephen S. Ilardi, *Cognitive Behavioral Therapy* by Ryan James, *Undoing Depression* by Richard O'Connor, any of the *Change Your Brain* resources by Daniel G. Amen, M.D., or *You Can Heal Your Life* by Louise L. Hay. You might start by reading some of the reviews to see which ones speak to you.

ACTION ITEMS:

- Learn about depression by reading good books on the subject.

15. **Take Supplements and / or Medication.** Research shows that depression is best beaten by both medical or physiological help (medicine and/or supplements) and

⁴ Henry B. Eyring, *Ensign*, Nov 2018, “Try, Try, Try.”

⁵ Dieter F. Uchtdorf, *Ensign*, May 2012, “The Merciful Obtain Mercy.”

psychological help (counseling - to help change thoughts, feelings and behaviors), which are the next two depression-busting tools.

Mild, situational or seasonal depression may resolve itself with some of the other suggestions here, but many times some kind of chemical or physiological assistance will be needed. If the above suggestions haven't been enough to get you back onto a happy track, then a supplement and/or an antidepressant may be needed to get your brain's neurochemistry back in balance. Often times this physiological step will be needed in order to do the other psychological work necessary for retraining your thoughts in order to overcome depression.

Many people who are hesitant about taking medication will often consider trying other helpful supplements. You can check out the naturally occurring compound - SAM-e, or EmpowerPlus Q96, which is a multi-vitamin for the brain. (You can learn more about SAM-e in the book *Stop Depression Now* by Richard Brown and search online for more information on EmpowerPlus Q96.) These two supplements have shown the most success in naturally assisting my clients in the physiological processes needed to combat depression. There are also other supplements like Omega-3 fatty acids (fish oil) that can help.

People have found that these supplements help them reduce stress, feel more at peace and have an overall improvement in their sense of well-being with minimal to no side-effects. I personally found SAM-e to be a life saver when I experienced post-partum depression many years ago. SAM-e is backed by research and is even being recommended by the medical community, which is rare for an alternative supplement. Talk to a doctor and do your own research to see what makes sense for you. Not all doctors will be familiar with supplements or alternative health approaches for mental health issues. Many people have also found medication to be a lifesaver. See what makes the most sense to you.

There is no shame in having to take something for depression any more than there would be in having to take insulin for diabetes. But keep in mind that because of the complex nature of depression and anxiety a pill alone won't do the trick without incorporating some of the other suggestions here—especially counseling.

A client mentioned how much she appreciated this article about depression because for most of her life she just let the medicine do its thing but never took on doing the psychological work also needed to root out her insecurities and negative ways of thinking.

ACTION ITEMS:

- Consider adding helpful supplements to your daily regimen to help with brain chemistry issues.
- Talk to a medical professional about possible medication.

16. **Participate in Counseling and / or a Support Group.** The two most important steps in overcoming depression are counseling plus addressing the brain chemistry with either supplements or medication as I just mentioned. Having a nonjudgmental and therapeutically helpful person to talk to is

pretty vital in being able to address the underlying experiences and beliefs that fuel depression.

A good counselor can help you identify and address any underlying trauma, abuse or emotional neglect—especially helping you change any negative or limiting core beliefs picked up from your upbringing and other life experiences. Some of these beliefs may include, “I can't trust others to be there for me,” or “I'm not important,” or “I'm not loveable,” etc. Counseling can help you change depressing ways of thinking and reprogram the way you see yourself and the world. A good counselor can offer a profound gift of helping you to feel truly seen and heard—sometimes for the first time. Counseling can help address social or relational skill deficits, and help you develop better coping and problem-solving skills.

Since depression is present in more than half of the cases of suicide, it can lead to suicidal feelings. A counselor can work with you to collaboratively determine a good safety plan and help with coping strategies.

If you don't know where to start with all these depression-busting tools a good first step is to find a counselor who can help you figure out your next best steps. Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) is a common empirically validated approach to addressing depression. In addition to CBT, a counselor has many tools and approaches to help with the specific aspects of your struggles as well as the challenges that depression can bring to your relationships.

Couples or family counseling can also help a spouse or loved ones who are trying to love and support you through your depression and give them some support as well. Support groups can be so helpful in decreasing your feelings of loneliness and isolation by sharing your journey with others having similar challenges. You are not alone. You'll probably want to start with a counselor, though, before a support group to get the more specific and personal direction you'll need in the beginning.

One of the most comprehensive resources for finding a good counselor (or a support group) in your area is to search PsychologyToday.com. You can specify all the specific characteristics you would like in a therapist (i.e. gender, counseling issue, therapeutic approach, religious preferences, insurances taken, etc.)

ACTION ITEMS:

- Find a good counselor to help walk with you through overcoming your mental health issues.
- Consider finding a support group to help you through your journey as well.

17. **Partner with God.** This is the most important step in this whole process and should technically be the first step, but many people overlook the practical need to turn to our Savior, Jesus Christ, and submit our lives and our challenges to Him. We can literally partner with God who is then able to help us in ways we are not able to help ourselves. Those who have actively worked the “12 Steps” of addiction recovery know that some challenges are simply out of our human reach.

When we turn our lives and our will over to God and humbly trust in Him, His will and His timing—even when

things aren't happening the way we think they should—we are able to access His mighty enabling and strengthening power. Confidence and faith in Him to do for us what we cannot do for ourselves according to His will allows us to endure better, endure longer or overcome our challenges when we couldn't have done so on our own.

The faith and humility of partnering with God and surrendering ourselves to Him brings peace despite any of our challenges. Many of the suggestions here will help you stay in closer contact with your Savior even while you may continue to struggle with feelings of depression. Increase your conscious contact with Him on a daily basis.

Depression is a great refiner's fire. Trust the Lord. Trust that He loves you and knows what He is doing with you and why He is doing it. Let Him refine you by willingly submitting to whatever He would have you go through (see Mosiah 3:19). He may be simply developing compassion, endurance, patience, or a host of other Christlike characteristics, which we came here to develop. Know that He will consecrate your afflictions for your highest good (see 2 Nephi 2:2).

I like to remind myself that God is a lot smarter than I am. His ways are higher and better than our ways (see Isaiah 55:9). I can truly say I'm so grateful now for my trial with depression. Because of it I have learned to turn to Him and turn my will over to Him. I have grown in so many ways and can now help others who struggle. With spiritual submission comes peace and eternal hope despite the difficulties in our lives. All of our difficulties are designed to turn us to Christ. I hope you will believe and let that happen for you. Consider this favorite quote about our mortal afflictions:

No pain that we suffer, no trial that we experience is wasted. It ministers to our education, to the development of such qualities as patience, faith, fortitude and humility. All that we suffer and all that we endure, especially when we endure it patiently, builds up our characters, purifies our hearts, expands our souls, and makes us more tender and charitable, more worthy to be called the children of God, . . . and it is through sorrow and suffering, toil and tribulation, that we gain the education that we come here to acquire.⁶

ACTION ITEMS:

- Partner with the Lord.
- Turn to Him. Talk to Him more often. Trust in Him and His purposes.
- Know that there are divine purposes for your every trial.

Despite our earthly challenges we can find inner peace, contentment and even joy. Taking care of our mental and emotional health is as important as taking care of our physical or spiritual health. By incorporating as many of these strategies into your life as you can you will be more able to overcome your difficulties and live a happier and healthier life. Please feel free to share this toolbox with others.

Related Resources:

- ARTICLE - "[22 Habits of Happy People](#)" by Dr. Mercola
- WEBSITE - [PsychologyToday.com](#) – to find a counselor
- BOOK - [Stop Depression Now](#) by Richard Brown – to learn more about the supplement SAM-e
- HANDOUT - [Emotional Freedom Technique \(EFT\) tapping](#)
- PRODUCT - [Full-Spectrum Lights](#) – for winter blues or any time of the year
- BOOK - [The Depression Cure](#) by Stephen S. Ilardi
- BOOK - [Cognitive Behavioral Therapy](#) by Ryan James
- BOOK - [Undoing Depression](#) by Richard O'Connor
- BOOK - Any of the [Change Your Brain](#) resources by Daniel G. Amen, M.D.
- AUDIO BOOK - [You Can Heal Your Life](#) by Louise L. Hay
- AUDIO BOOK - [Self-Compassion](#) by Kristin Neff
- AUDIO BOOK - [Loving What Is](#) by Byron Katie

BIO -- Laura M. Brotherson, LMFT, CST, CFLE

Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist, and Certified Sex Therapist, Laura M. Brotherson is the founder of [The Marital Intimacy Institute](#) with a mission to help couples create "Sextraordinary Marriages." She counsels with couples, individuals and families in private practice (and online). Laura is the author of the best-selling book, [And They Were Not Ashamed: Strengthening Marriage through Sexual Fulfillment](#), and her latest book, [Knowing HER Intimately: 12 Keys for Creating a Sextraordinary Marriage](#). Laura and her husband are the founders of [StrengtheningMarriage.com](#) — your trusted resource for education, products and services to strengthen marriages ... intimately!

⁶ Orson F. Whitney, quoted by Spencer W. Kimball, in *Faith Precedes the Miracle* (1972), 98.