

## FURTHER INFORMATION?

For further information about stress, anxiety, depression, or any mental health issue, contact:

- ▶ A medical practitioner.
- ▶ Your local community health centre.
- ▶ Mental Health Foundation of Australia (Victoria)  
270 Church Street, Richmond VIC 3121  
Tel: (03) 9427 0406 Fax: (03) 9427 1294  
Email: mhfvic@pacific.net.au  
www.mentalhealthvic.org.au
- ▶ Mental Health Foundation of Australia  
270 Church Street, Richmond VIC 3121  
Tel: (03) 9427 0407 Fax: (03) 9427 1294  
Email: mentalh@mira.net www.mhfa.org.au
- ▶ ARAFEMI (Association of Relatives and Friends of the Emotionally and Mentally Ill)  
Suite 1, 1091 Toorak Road, Camberwell VIC 3124  
Tel: (03) 9889 3733 Fax: (03) 9889 2878  
Telephone Support: (03) 9889 1777
- ▶ Department of Human Services website lists  
Community Mental Health Services in each region.  
www.dhs.vic.gov.au

### *Publications available for purchase:*

*(GST included)*

- Understanding Depression \$22.00
- Your Guide to Understanding and Managing Stress \$22.00
- Adolescent Health and Wellbeing: A Guide to Effective Coping \$22.00
- Your Guide to Responsible Gambling \$22.00
- Healthy Relationships: Healthy Schools \$22.00
- Postpartum Psychological Disorders \$22.00
- 'Why Me?' Video - Stress/Anxiety/Depression \$25.00

## THE OPTIONS PROJECT

The Options Project is a community mental health research, education, and promotion campaign, working to promote mental health in the community. The Project has produced a range of educational and health promotion materials.

### Project Management:

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# Negative Emotion

## Dealing with Negative Emotions

Sadness  
Anger, Jealousy  
Hate

An information brochure produced by  
**THE OPTIONS PROJECT**  
Mental Health Foundation of Australia  
270 Church Street Richmond VIC 3121



## UNDERSTANDING NEGATIVE EMOTIONS

A negative emotion can be described as any feeling which causes you to feel miserable, undermine your confidence, or feel negatively towards yourself or others. Obvious ones are hate, anger, jealousy and sadness.

Negative emotions are not bad. For example the sadness involved with bereavement is natural and appropriate. What causes problems with negative emotions are how we express them. Examples of expressing negative emotions inappropriately are anger with violence, or anger expressed by ignoring or avoiding a person or situation causing bad feelings. An appropriate way of expressing anger is to use assertiveness with non-aggressive language, facial expressions and tone of voice.

Strong negative emotions can impair people's ability to think rationally and see the situation in it's true perspective. People see only what they want to see, or remember only what they want to remember, thus perpetuating the grief of anger. Negative emotions can be acute (momentary), involving a brief episode, or they can go on for long periods of time causing constant discomfort (chronic).

The longer a negative emotion goes on, the more it becomes an entrenched pattern of thinking and the harder it is to change. If it's not attended to it can become an illness, like depression, and require drug treatment or counselling.

## WHY ARE NEGATIVE EMOTIONS SO HARD TO COPE WITH?

Humans are conscious beings and have more emotions than most other creatures. Our range of feelings is also much greater.

For example:

- ▶ Anger can range from mild irritation to blind fury
- ▶ Envy over our partner's apparent interest in someone else can turn to jealousy and hatred.

Our emotions have a biological or physical component. Our brain responds to our emotional state by releasing chemicals and hormones which send us into a state of arousal. This can be either pleasant (in the case of positive emotions), or unpleasant in the case of negative emotions. So they are psychological (what we think) and biological (what we feel). This is a complex process and often we don't acquire the skills to deal with bad feelings (for example boys are taught not to show emotion).

Often we lack the coping skills to deal with negative emotions. In today's complicated society with job insecurity, confusion over gender roles and relationship difficulties, these skills are invaluable.

## HOW CAN WE COPE WITH NEGATIVE EMOTIONS?

- ▶ Don't catastrophise (blow things out of proportion and constantly go over and over them). This is guaranteed to keep arousal levels topped up and help us feel bad.

Try to be rational "I know I'm bound to feel bad from time to time but I can cope, so what can I do to make myself feel better now" (walk, read, music etc).

- ▶ Learn a relaxation technique. Regular relaxation reduces stress levels and allows us to cope better with negative emotions.
- ▶ Learn about the process involved in grief and loss .
- ▶ Exercise. Exercising briskly for 20 minutes, three times a week can lift mood by releasing 'feel good' chemicals in your brain called 'endogenous opiates'. The effect is accumulative, so allow a couple of weeks to begin to feel the real benefits. Walk up to 20 minutes a day.
- ▶ Let go of the past. Constantly going over negative events in the past robs us of the present and makes us feel bad.
- ▶ Don't be embarrassed to seek professional help. Ask a Doctor, Citizens Advice Bureau or Community Health Centre. They can all refer to a counsellor or help us find what we're looking for (perhaps a support group).
- ▶ Life is not always easy. However, we all have a right to comfortable emotions for as much of the time as is possible. Information about coping skills and the right help from the right people and professionals can go a long way towards helping us deal with negative emotions.