ACT FOR LIFE: TAKING CHARGE OF LOW MOOD / DEPRESSION

“If we don’t decide where we’re going, we’re bound to end up where we’re headed.” Chinese saying

**Dysphoria, rumination & depression**

- **What is dysphoria & what is it good for?**
  - As a normal, psychologically-healthy, reaction to loss or if an obstacle cannot be overcome, dysphoria occurs and serves to terminate the goal-seeking behaviour, thereby conserving resources. Put simply, dysphoria = unpleasant, uncomfortable feelings such as sadness or irritability.
  - Dysphoria may also prevent the premature pursuit of alternative goals, thus inhibiting futile actions.
  - There is nothing “disordered” about sadness or dysphoria. It is part of the human experience.

- **What is depression?**
  - If one cannot disengage from goal-seeking behaviour, dysphoria may escalate and culminate in clinical depression.
  - If someone is not willing to allow sadness & loss in their lives, they may become depressed (see below on “dirty pain”).

- **What is rumination and why is it often unhelpful?**
  - Rumination – an attempt to solve the problem of “feeling bad” by figuring it out.
  - It exacerbates dysphoria into “dirty pain” of clinical depression. (e.g. “why am I feeling depressed? I shouldn’t be. I hate feeling like this” and perhaps feeling angry or anxious about feeling depressed).

- **Effects of rumination:**
  - Increase in depressed mood
  - Increase in recall of negative life events
  - Increase in self-criticism & self-blame
  - Increase in pessimism about future
  - Reduction in generation of effective solutions, confidence in them & likelihood of implementation
  - Perpetuation of rumination and perception of its “insight-value”

  Taken from Zettle (2007)

**Barriers to Action**

- **F = Fusion** (stuff your mind tells you that gets in the way when you get caught up in it)
- **E = Excessive goals** (your goal is too big, or you lack the skills, or you lack the resources)
- **A = Avoidance of discomfort**
  - Unwillingness to make room for the discomfort this challenge brings
- **R = Remoteness from values**
  - Losing touch with - or forgetting - what is important or meaningful about this

The antidote to F.E.A.R. is D.A.R.E.

- **D = Defusion**
- **A = Acceptance of discomfort**
- **R = Realistic goals**
- **E = Embracing values**

With permission from Russ Harris

**Resources**

- “The Happiness Trap” by Russ Harris
- “The Mindfulness and Acceptance Workbook for Depression” by Kirk Strosahl and Patricia Robinson
- “Full Catastrophe Living” by John Kabat Zinn
- You can also join the following Yahoo Group
  - [http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/ACT_for_the_Public/](http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/ACT_for_the_Public/)

Some of these will be available from libraries, including UNSW.

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