

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)

ACT put simply.....

- Accept your internal experience
- Choose a Valued Direction
- Take action

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)

- 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/

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