



# THE DEPRESSION DOWNWARD SPIRAL

NOTICE THE CYCLE - INTERRUPT IT AT ONE MANAGEABLE POINT

1 / 2



## THE CYCLE IS UNDERSTANDABLE

- Depression can reduce energy, concentration, interest, hope, and the sense that effort will matter.
- Doing less can then mean fewer experiences of pleasure, connection, accomplishment, movement, daylight, or structure.
- That can feed guilt, shame, isolation, unfinished tasks, and more hopelessness. This is a cycle - not a character flaw.



## A COMMON DOWNWARD SPIRAL

- Low mood or depleted energy → doing less or avoiding more.
- Less structure, connection, pleasure, or accomplishment → responsibilities and basic needs may pile up.
- More guilt, shame, hopelessness, or “why bother?” thoughts → even less energy and motivation.



## FIND YOUR CURRENT POINT

- What has changed from my usual baseline?
- What has become harder: sleep, food, hygiene, movement, work, school, caregiving, connection, medication routines, or enjoyable activity?
- What am I avoiding because it feels too hard, pointless, painful, inaccessible, or overwhelming?



## CONTEXT BEFORE SELF-BLAME

- Grief, chronic illness, pain, disability, trauma, discrimination, poverty, caregiving, unsafe relationships, job loss, housing problems, loneliness, and medication effects can reduce energy and opportunity.
- The goal is not to blame yourself for the barrier. It is to identify where support, accommodation, resources, connection, or one manageable action may help.



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2 / 2



## MOTIVATION DOES NOT ALWAYS COME FIRST

- Sometimes a manageable action happens before motivation improves.
- Choose an action small enough for today's capacity. The goal is contact with structure, meaning, pleasure, connection, mastery, or basic care - not proving productivity.
- Examples: open the curtains, drink water, eat something manageable, sit outside, answer one message, or put one appointment on the calendar.



## MAKE THE STEP SMALLER

- If "take a walk" is too much, try standing outside for two minutes.
- If "clean the kitchen" is too much, wash one cup.
- If "apply for jobs" is too much, open the résumé.
- If "socialize" is too much, send one safe person a short message.



## MY INTERRUPTION EXPERIMENT

- Where in the cycle could I interrupt it today?
- What is the smallest action that still counts?
- What barrier could make this harder?
- What support, body doubling, transportation, accommodation, reminder, or resource would make it more possible?



## SAFETY MATTERS

- If depression includes thoughts of suicide, inability to maintain basic safety, or another immediate danger, a worksheet is not enough.
- In the U.S., call or text 988 for crisis support. Call 911 for an immediate life-threatening emergency.
- Evidence base: behavioral activation is an established treatment approach for depression; Cuijpers et al., Clinical Psychology Review, 2026.