

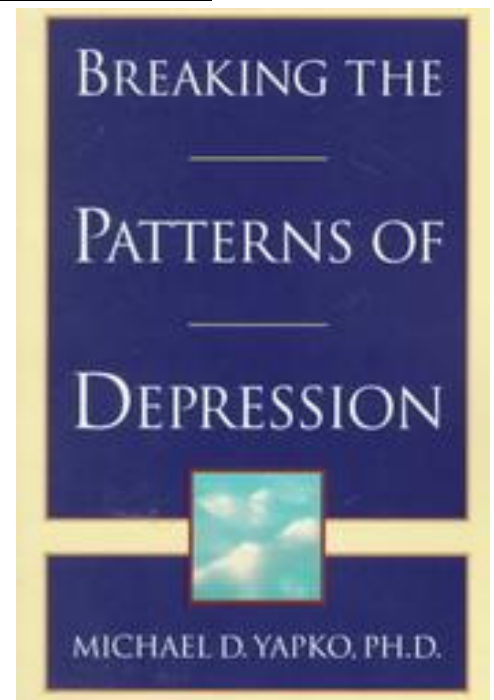
BREAKING THE PATTERNS OF DEPRESSION

Author: Michael D. Yapko

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Reviewer: Robyn McNiece (May 2007)

As author Michael Yapko states in the introduction to *Breaking the Patterns of Depression*, his purpose is to provide a reference for a 'self-help' approach to recovery. This is not intended as a substitute for professional medical advice when necessary; rather, he recommends support from a reputable psychotherapist together with a course of medication where indicated.



Initially the author outlines his positive approach to the experience of depression. Rather than a passive acceptance of this disorder the direction is towards change, recovery and prevention. Statistics outlining differences in age and gender, urban/rural occurrence in the US at the time of publication are given, together with a discussion of the emotional, financial and social costs. The author suggests that with less security in the workplace and in social and family relationships Western society promotes depression. The problem is seen as a combination of three components - biological, psychological and sociological - working together in a mind/body interaction.

Yapko rejects Freud's focus on childhood feelings and experiences regarding this as being a less useful approach for effective treatment than a psychodynamic model of therapy. This model addresses cognition (thoughts may be damaging); behaviour (actions may limit recovery); and interpersonal relationships (difficulties may cause and be perpetuated by depression).

In the cognitive approach the author explains that what and how we think affects physical, emotional and behavioural responses. He aims for the correction of "cognitive distortions" (p. 47), (detailed in a later chapter). These errors in the thinking process may be corrected by developing the ability to step outside one's thinking, emphasising the objective rather than the subjective approach to life experiences.

The behavioural model encourages development of the ability to change actions which lead to depression by learning the skills to "do something

different" (p. 49). The reader is encouraged to behave in ways that will work positively towards recovery.

For successful interpersonal skills Yapko promotes the negotiation of clear and realistic guidelines in relationships through the open and honest expression of feelings. There is value in the development of a sense of community rather than a preoccupation with self.

Emphasis is placed on the significance of how we interpret and respond to what happens in life; it may not be possible to change external circumstances but it is possible to change our reactions to them by focussing on solutions rather than the problems themselves. The reader is persuaded to identify his/her own patterns of vulnerability and to develop a personal strategy for recovery. This 'take action now' approach is encouraged by the frequent insertion of exercises under the headings 'Learn by Doing' and 'Pause and Reflect'. The author's responses to questions relating to preceding information are provided as a guideline but the reader is encouraged to use these exercises to develop a personal strategy for addressing their depression.

Outlining the "patterns of depression" (p. 96) Yapko discusses the importance of external forces such as family and society in shaping our individual experience. He promotes the development of our own personal values together with an ability to adjust to the reality of changing circumstances. Life's constant changes mean that values may change over time. The author explains various 'styles' that can lead to patterns of depression. Examples of such styles include "global thinking" (everything is bad); "attributional style" (it's all my fault); and "perceptual style" (turning small problems into catastrophes), (pp 109 - 130). In order to address these damaging cognitive styles self-awareness and self-acceptance are encouraged as well as relaxation techniques.

While the past must be acknowledged, a preoccupation with the past is discouraged. A focus on positive possibilities for the future is the goal for the depressed person. The author discusses the significance of a sense of purpose, an awareness of cause and effect and encourages an emphasis on realism. He states: "realistic attitudes towards both hopefulness and hopelessness will provide the balance necessary to plan for the future" (p. 157).

When we interpret life's circumstances the author explains that everyone projects meaning according to their own frame of reference, shaped by background, beliefs and values. When faced with ambiguity (which is in most circumstances) it is personally empowering to acknowledge that we

have choices and to step outside our entrenched beliefs and evaluate them. Do they work positively for us?

The reader is advised to be wary of taking on excessive responsibility or inappropriate guilt through feelings of obligation to satisfy the expectations of others or to meet one's own. Distorted thinking to do with control may take the form of "helplessness illusion" or "control illusion" (p. 256 - 270). It is vital to learn to distinguish what is and is not within one's control.

The book's final chapters deal with building healthy boundaries through self-awareness, self-acceptance, the ability to communicate needs and limits and learning the skills to cope with conflict. The placement of these boundaries serves to strengthen one's individuality while accepting that of others. A chapter focuses on building healthy relationships, discussing 'hurtful' love and 'healing' love, followed by another offering advice on choosing therapy services

The final chapter, a brief seven pages of essential reading, outlines positive steps to follow in order to carry on through a life without depression.

Yapko concludes with appendices listing the 'self-help' exercises which are interspersed throughout the book and lists professional organisations relevant to the US reader. There is an excellent bibliography offering further reading opportunities as well as an extensive index.

Breaking the Patterns of Depression is recommended as a valuable text for any reader associated with depression either through their own experience or that of a friend or family member. Although this book was published in 1997 the information and advice is still relevant ten years later. Michael Yapko displays a holistic understanding of the disorder and offers common-sense information and advice through a 'self-help' method addressing both recovery and maintenance of good health.