MANAGING MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

**Physical Self-Care**
- Nutrition
- Sleep
- Exercise
- Water intake
- Medication
- Supplements
- Breathing

**Spiritual Self-Care**
- Prayer
- Meditation
- Spiritual community
- Forgiveness
- Finding purpose and meaning

**People Support**
- Family
- Friends
- Psychiatrist/therapist
- Minister/rabbi
- Support group
- Day treatment
- Community service

**Mental/Emotional Self-Care**
- Positive self-talk
- Positive beliefs
- Feeling one's feelings
- Mood journal
- A library of positive memories
- Psychotherapy
- Family of origin healing
- Working through grief
- Working with a good therapist

**Lifestyle**
- Structure/routine
- Relaxation
- Setting goals
- Fulfilling work
- Time in nature
- Pleasure

**The Goal**
To feel vital and balanced, free from depression and anxiety.
DEPRESSION SYMPTOM CHECKLIST

The symptoms of depression vary widely from person to person. Which of the following feelings and symptoms do you experience?

- feeling low
- feeling sad
- difficulty with sleep
- compulsive eating
- no appetite
- low self-esteem
- hopelessness
- obsessed with the past
- hating my life
- helplessness
- anxious
- apathetic
- difficulty concentrating
- tense
- agitated
- quiet
- withdrawn
- guilty
- hateful
- angry
- hoping to die
- plan to kill self
- self-critical
- no motivation
- worthless
- excessive worrying
- fatigue
- heaviness
- fear
- disorganized
- cries easily
- empty, void
- like a failure
- unbearable
- dead inside
- body aches
- miserable
- alone
- feelings of loss

If there are other symptoms that you experience please list them.

It is important to identify the symptoms that you are experiencing so that a course of intervention can be determined. Often, when someone is depressed they have numerous physical symptoms. These symptoms or sensations can be purely related to stress and depression or may have a physical basis. Therefore, if you have not been recently examined by your physician it is a good idea to make an appointment to rule out any physical complications that are contributing to your experience of depression.

Possible medical causes could be:

- endocrine system problems (such as a malfunctioning thyroid)
- medication interactions
- acute or chronic stress reactions
- allergies
- PMS
- chronic health problems
- drug/alcohol abuse or dependence
- recently stopped smoking
- recent surgery
- seasonal affective disorder

Managing depression requires that you gain some sense of control over the depression. Because everyone's experience is unique to them it is necessary that you take the time to increase your awareness, take the risk of trying some interventions, and make the commitment to follow through. Managing depression requires that you take responsibility for improving the quality of your life. If your depression has been chronic and severe discuss antidepressant medication with your physician. There may be a biological or genetic factor influencing your mood which requires a medical intervention. Once this is determined then you must decide what you are going to do. This is accomplished by developing a Self-Care Plan. The significant components of a Self-Care Plan include:
SELF-CARE PLAN

Develop a personalized self-care plan for optimal emotional health and a positive sense of well-being. This does require a commitment to health and follow through. It is recommended that there be a medical exam for clearance to participate in desired physical activity. Components of a self-care plan include:

1. Utilization of relaxation techniques to decrease body tension and to manage stress.
2. Review the social supports available to you. If necessary, work at developing an adequate and appropriate support system. Utilizing your social supports can offer relief, distraction, and pleasure. Make a list of your supports.
3. Initiate a journal. Instead of keeping thoughts and feelings inside, where they can build up and cause confusion and emotional/physical distress, get them down on paper. A journal is useful for venting thoughts and feelings, clarifying issues, and problem solving. It can also be helpful in determining patterns, relationships, health, and emotional functioning. Keeping a journal will help you monitor progress in life goals.
4. Get adequate sleep and rest.
5. Smile and have laughter in your life. Be spontaneous at times and playful.
7. Approach each day with a purpose. Be productive by outlining daily structure. No task is too small to feel good about. Each step can be important to reach goals that you develop.
8. Avoid being self-critical. Be as kind and understanding of yourself as you would be to another person. Use positive self-talk to reassure yourself, to cope effectively, and to allow yourself to see that there are always choices.
9. Be sure to build in to your schedule time for relationships and pleasurable activities.
10. Take responsibility for your own life. Life is about choices. Understand yourself, your behaviors, your thoughts/beliefs, and your motivations.
TEN TIPS FOR BETTER SLEEP

People suffer from insomnia for different reasons. Sleep disturbance can be related to physiological changes such as menopause, medical problems such as hyperthyroidism, emotional distress such as depression or anxiety, changes in lifestyle such as having a baby or any other changes which may influence daily patterns, and general life stressors. Take a few minutes to review what may possibly be related to the difficulty that you are experiencing with sleep. If it has been some time since your last physical examination or you think that there may be a relationship between the sleep disturbance and physiological changes or a medical problem, make an appointment with your physician to identify or rule out health-related issues. If health-related issues are definitely not a factor then consider the following ways to improve your sleep.

If you are not able to identify the exact symptoms of your insomnia keep a sleep journal for 2 weeks and write down your sleep-wake cycle, how many hours you sleep, and all the other details related to your sleep disturbance.

1. **Establish a regular time for going to bed, and be consistent.** This helps to cue you that it is time for sleep. Going to sleep at the same time and awakening at the same time daily helps stabilize your internal clock. Having a different sleep-wake schedule on the weekends can throw you off. For the best results be consistent.

2. **Do not go to bed too early.** Do not be tempted to try to go bed earlier than you would normally need to. If you have started doing this then identify the reason why (depression, stress, boredom, pressure from your partner). When people go to bed too early it contributes to the problem of fragmented sleep. Your body normally lets you sleep only the number of hours it need. If you go to bed too early you will also be waking too early.

3. **Determine how many hours of sleep you need for optimal functioning and feeling rested.** Consider the following to determine the natural length of your sleep cycle.
   A. How many hours did you sleep on the average as a child?
   B. Before you began to experience sleep difficulty how many hours of sleep per night did you sleep on the average?
   C. How many hours of sleep do you need to awaken naturally, without an alarm?
   D. How many hours of sleep do you need in order to not feel sleepy or tired during the day?

4. **Develop rituals which signal the end of the day.** Rituals that signal closure for the day could be tucking the kids in, putting the dog out, and closing up the house for the night . . . then . . . it’s time for you to wind down by watching the news, reading a book (not an exciting mystery), having a cup of calming herbal tea, evening prayers, or doing something like meditation, deep breathing exercises, or progressive muscle relaxation. All of these behaviors are targeted for shifting your thinking from the daily stressors to closure that the day is over and it is time for rest so that you can start a new day tomorrow.

5. **Keep the bedroom for sleeping and sex only.** If you use your bedroom as an office or for other activities your mind will associate the bedroom with those activities which is not conducive to sleep.
6. A normal pattern of sex can be helpful. However, it is only helpful if you are engaging sex because you are interested in being close to your partner. Sexual stimulation releases endorphins that give you a mellow, relaxed feeling. Be careful to avoid trying to use sex to fall asleep. It can backfire because you are taking a pleasurable, ultimately relaxing behavior and putting expectations on it that can lead to pressure and feeling upset.

7. Avoid physical and mental stimulation just before sleep time. Exercising, working on projects, or house cleaning, watching something exciting on television, or reading something that has an exciting plot just prior to going to bed can energize you instead of helping you to have closure at the end of the day.

8. Be careful of naps. Some people are able to take naps and feel rejuvenated by them without interfering with their sleep-wake cycle. Other people may be overtired for various reasons and benefit from an hour nap early in the afternoon. However, for others it can be sabotaging. If you take naps skip them for a week. If you find that you are sleeping better without the naps then stop napping.

9. Get regular exercise. Regular aerobic exercise like walking can decrease body tension, alleviate stress, alleviate depressive symptoms, and contribute to an overall feeling of well-being. Less stress better sleep.

10. Take a warm bath one to two hours before bedtime. Experiment with the time to determine what works best for you. A good 20 minute soaking in a warm bath (100–102°F) is a great relaxer. It raises your core body temperature by several degrees which naturally induces drowsiness and sleep.

Be careful not to obsess about sleep. When someone is experiencing sleep disturbance they can become so focused on the issue of sleep that they nearly develop a phobia about not getting it, which creates a lot of stress and tension for them at the end of the day instead of relaxation which is necessary for the natural sleep rhythms to be initiated. Instead, try to relax and think about something pleasant. If, after 20 minutes, that does not work get up and go to another room to meditate, or engage in some other ritual that you find helpful to inducing feelings of drowsiness so you can sleep.
25 WAYS TO RELIEVE ANXIETY

1. Positive thinking. Look for the opportunity instead of the negative.
2. Task oriented. Feel good about your efforts and accomplishments.
3. Accept yourself. Don’t be self-critical. If there is something you want to change then change it.
4. Be flexible. Not everything is black and white. Be open to the gray area of things.
5. Develop realistic goals. Evaluate what it will take to reach a goal.
6. Develop a positive view of life.
7. Nurture your spirituality.
8. Distract yourself from stressors. Sometimes you have to put everything aside to relax and have fun.
9. Deep breathing, relaxation, meditation, or visualization.
11. Spending time with people you enjoy.
12. Keeping a journal for venting, and at the end of every entry closing with something positive.
13. Take time regularly to do activities that you enjoy.
14. Utilize your support system. This could be friends, family, individual therapy, group therapy, or community support groups.
15. Practice being assertive. You will feel better for taking care of yourself.
16. Good communication.
17. Take short breaks throughout the day. Take 5 to 10 minute breaks throughout the day to relax and remove yourself from stressors or demands.
18. Regular exercise. Walking is excellent for decreasing body tension and alleviating stress.
19. Get adequate rest and sleep. If you don’t get enough sleep you can’t cope well.
20. Practice good nutrition.
21. Massage. A good way to relieve muscle tension and relax.
22. Choose to be in environments that feel good to you.
23. Work on your financial security.
24. Practice good time management.
25. Do things that demonstrate respect, care, and nurturing of the self. That means take good care of you.

Develop a self-care plan. Incorporate these strategies and others to develop a plan of self-care behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes that can become a new and healthy lifestyle. That is preventive medicine.
PLAN OF ACTION FOR DEALING WITH ANXIETY

1. Recognize and identify anxiety symptoms, and situations related to it.
2. Develop relaxation skills. Most people will be able to feel relaxed by using progressive muscle relaxation. If you have made a good effort to use it and do not find that it is relaxing for you then it is your responsibility to try other techniques until you find one that is effective for you. Other techniques include deep breathing, visualization, meditation, body scanning, and brief forms of progressive muscle relaxation. This is a very important part of managing anxiety. Because of the way the nervous system works it is physically impossible to be stressed and relaxed at the same time. Learn a relaxation technique.
3. Confront anxiety. Make a commitment to understand and deal with the issues underlying your experience of anxiety.
4. Problem solve. Once you have identified the underlying issues contributing to the anxiety you experience deal with the issues that you can do something about and let go of the issues that you cannot do anything about.
5. Develop positive self-esteem. If you do not accept and like who you are, how can you effectively manage the things that are causing your anxiety. The managing of anxiety is about lifestyle changes. This requires a commitment to yourself. To make this commitment and follow through will depend on how important your well-being is to you.
6. Exercise. Aerobic exercise, especially walking is a good stress reliever. It decreases muscle tension, increases energy, and can improve sleep. You will experience the benefits of walking after several weeks of commitment to this anxiety relieving strategy. It feels good to take care of yourself.
7. Using positive self-talk. How you talk to yourself will make a big difference in how you interpret things around you, how you choose to feel, and how you choose to respond. In other words, how you talk to yourself affects your entire life experience. Practice positive, rational self-talk and incorporate daily use of positive affirmations.
8. Keeping a journal. A journal is a great tool for venting your feelings and thoughts. It takes emotional energy to keep all of this “stuff” inside. Get it out. Writing your thoughts and feelings can also clarify issues. Problem solve these issues to alleviate distress and to unclutter your mind. A journal is also a great way to monitor your consistency and actual commitment to the changes necessary for managing your anxiety.
9. Confront and change self-defeating behavioral patterns and personality traits. This means changing perfectionistic, controlling, codependent behaviors. These behaviors do not help you get your needs met and they do not make you feel better. Contrary, they generally leave you feeling stressed, frustrated, anxious, angry and over time resentful.
10. Desensitize phobias. If there are specific situations that elicit extreme anxiety for you then work with your therapist using a technique called systematic desensitization.
11. Utilize your support system. If you do not have a support system then develop
one. Start by putting in place the supports that you need for confronting and dealing with your anxiety. A support system can include your therapist (individual or group), your physician, family members, friends, people at your church, etc. Generally the reason why a person lacks a support system is because they have made the choice to not allow others to help them. Instead, they have this distorted belief that it is only themselves that can be there to support other people.

12. Energize yourself with pleasure and humor. This means spending time with people you enjoy and doing activities that you like. Laughter is a great stress reliever. Have laughter in your life everyday.

13. Practice good nutrition and get adequate sleep. You must take care of yourself to live life fully which includes work, relaxation, and pleasure.

14. Develop assertive communication. Being able to say “no” and to otherwise effectively express yourself is a skill. If you do not have it learn it. To get your needs appropriately met requires that you speak honestly and appropriately about what you want and need.

15. Develop self-nurturing behaviors. You are so good at taking care of the needs of others. Practice doing things that feel good to you.

If you have developed a program for managing anxiety and are consistently practicing it you are probably feeling much better. Because change is difficult, people need to feel motivated to do things differently. Originally, it was the extreme distress and physical symptoms that facilitated your change. Sometimes when people start feeling better they quit following through on the changes in their thinking and their behaviors. This can lead to a relapse of symptoms. If a relapse happens to you view it as an opportunity to understand the importance of the components of your management program and the validation that if you do not make a commitment to take care of yourself your body will keep sending you the message that it needs to be taken better care of.

Some people experience relapse as a normal part of their recovery from extreme stress and anxiety. It could be that they are consistently practicing all of the parts of their program but reexperience some symptoms. This has likely happened because there was so much body tension that you may go through one or more stages of a readjustment. So if you are consistently doing what is prescribed in the way of changes continue even if some symptoms reoccur. They will subside. Remember, it took a long time to get to this state, and it may take a while to alleviate all of the emotional and physical distress. Therefore, think of relapse as a normal, predictable part of recovery.

Be prepared to deal with the possibility of a relapse. If it does occur, it is likely that the symptoms will not be as intense or last as long as they did before. This is because you have developed skills to manage your anxiety.
AFFIRMATIONS

Repeating daily affirmations starts to shift the energy of your nervous system from that of a victim to a woman who possesses power and assuredness. Choose one or more of these statements that resonate deeply with you. It will prove cathartic. Commit to a specific time each day to recite these. Looking at yourself in the mirror may be helpful.

1) I have the power to break free.
2) I am strong. I am beautiful. I am healthy. I am confident.
3) I am intelligent. I am wise.
4) I respect myself. I am true to myself. I honor myself.
5) I am safe. I am protected.
6) I will rest and heal my wounds. I will recover.
7) I will nurture and take care of myself. I will be compassionate towards myself.
8) I am not to blame for what happened. I forgive myself.
9) I don’t have to compromise. I deserve better.
10) I have the ability to make my own decisions and decide what is best for me.
11) I trust myself. I will listen to my instincts and my inner voice.
12) I am independent. I can make my own choices and decisions.
13) Only I can define my own life. Nobody else can define who I am.
14) I trust my inner voice, intuition, feelings, and perception.
15) My life is valuable. I cherish my life.
16) I deserve freedom and respect.
17) I have a strong, powerful voice.
18) I have integrity and truth on my side.
19) I am free. I am untouchable. I am powerful.
20) I have unlimited potential and unlimited power within me. I can do anything.
21) I will be creative and resourceful as I open into my healing process.
22) I feel positive.
23) I will have a happier, healthier life.
24) I embrace my future with open arms.
25) I love who I am. I love who I will be.
26) I am hopeful, determined, courageous, inspired.
27) I am passionate about life.
28) I will be transformed through this experience.
29) I am open to my possibilities for the future. I can do anything.
30) I am at peace with myself. I am at peace with the world.

Write your own personal affirmations here. What do you want to shift in your own life? What do you want more of?
TIME MANAGEMENT

Time is defined by how we use it. If you feel like you are constantly rushing, don’t have enough time, are constantly missing deadlines, have many nonproductive hours, lack sufficient time for rest or personal relationships, feel fatigues, and feel overwhelmed by demands, it is likely that you suffer from poor time management.

FOUR CENTRAL STEPS TO EFFECTIVE TIME MANAGEMENT

1. Establish priorities. This will allow you to base your decisions on what is important and what is not, instead of wasting your time.
2. Create time by realistic scheduling. People tend to misjudge how much time tasks will really take to accomplish. Therefore, give yourself adequate time to accomplish a given task and eliminate low-priority tasks.
3. Develop the skill of decision making.
4. Delegate tasks to others. If you tend to control everything or believe that only you can do whatever it is, then realistically evaluate all the tasks that you do and you will be surprised to find that many people in your life are capable of doing some of the things that you do.

HOW TO START YOUR TIME MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

1. Making an initial assessment of how you spend your time takes approximately 3 days of observation. Keeping a journal specifically to log how you spend your time will clarify your time management or lack thereof. This will be easy to manage if you break up the day into three parts:
   A. From waking through lunch.
   B. From the end of lunch through dinner.
   C. From the end of dinner until you go to sleep.
2. It will take one day to define and prioritize your goals and activities.
3. To adequately develop a habit of effective time management will take between 3 and 6 months.

Once you begin your time management program continue to do a weekly review to monitor your consistency and progress. Maintain an awareness of what you are doing and why. You will find that effective time management will significantly reduce your stress.
A GUIDE TO MEDITATION (THE TIME FOR MEDITATION IS DECIDED BY THE INDIVIDUAL)

Meditation is a silent, internal process in which an individual attempts to focus their attention on only one thing at a time. It doesn’t matter what the focus of attention is, only that all other stimuli are screened out. There are a variety of ways in which to practice meditation. Different meditation techniques are suited for specific purposes. Therefore, it is necessary to determine the needs or desired goal prior to determining the meditation technique to be utilized. The following meditation technique is general in nature and may be altered accordingly. Meditation does not eliminate the problems in a person’s life. However, the resulting decrease in stress and tension would be an obvious contribution to an improved ability to cope.

Five steps of instruction on meditation will be presented. It is suggested that an individual experiment with the various techniques to determine which step they elicit the most comfort, ease, and benefit from. During periods of experimentation make an effort to increase the awareness for changes in both internal and external experiences.

STEP 1:
Preparation and Determining Your Posture

Find a quiet place. Practice daily, at the same time each day, for at least 5 minutes. Choose a comfortable sitting position. Sit with your back straight and remain alert. Be sure that you are comfortable, that clothing fits loosely, and that the environment lacks distractions.

STEP 2:
Breathing

Close your eyes and focus on the sensations you are experiencing. With your eyes closed take several deep, cleansing breaths. Notice the quality of your breathing. Notice where your breath resides in your body, and how it feels. Try to move your breath from one area to another. Breathe deeply into the stomach (i.e., the lower area of the lung) and continue up until you reach the chest (i.e., the upper lung region). Likewise, when you exhale, start at the bottom, gently contracting the abdomen and pushing the air out of the lower lung. During this process be focusing on how you feel and how the breathing feels. This technique takes the shortest amount of time.

STEP 3:
Centering

There are focal points, or centers in the body which enhance certain abilities when focused on. The middle of the chest is the heart center, the center of the forehead is the wisdom center, and the navel is the power center. There are other focal points, but these are most commonly used. Concentrating on the heart center increases and intensifies a person’s compassion and offers the experience of being one with the universe. Focusing on the wisdom center expands wisdom and intuition. Focusing on the power center enhances the experience of personal power. The collective focus on all three centers represents compassion, wisdom, and power.

STEP 4:
Visualization and Imagery

Visualization creates mental imagery impressions that can consciously train your body to relax and ignore stress. The use of visualization is wide ranging. It has been used to improve athletic performance, and can be a powerful contributor toward the goals of self-development and self-exploration. To fully experience the varying sensations associated with different images meditate on the following topics, adding others to expand your experience if you choose:

1. A mountain lake
2. A forest
3. A happy time in your life or pleasing experience
4. Having as much money and success as you want
5. Radiating physical health
6. White light
7. Nirvana
8. A spiritual icon (Jesus, Buddha, Mohammed)

Choose a visualization that symbolizes what you want or are looking for in your life and meditate on that symbol daily.

STEP 5: The Word

Words are powerful and focusing your meditation on certain words or phrases can be enlightening. The word or phrase is similar to what was described for visualization and imagery except, instead of a mental picture, the power of words are used instead. Most people are familiar with associating the power of words with positive affirmations.

Meditating words is generally done by repeating the word or phrase that have meaning to you. Some examples are:

1. Love, God, Peace, or Creator
2. I am prosperous or my life is spiritually filled
3. Relax and feel the peacefulness
1. This too shall pass and my life will be better.
2. I am a worthy and good person.
3. I am doing the best I can, given my history and level of current awareness.
4. Like everyone else, I am a fallible person and at times will make mistakes and learn from them.
5. What is, is.
6. Look at how much I have accomplished, and I am still progressing.
7. There are no failures only different degrees of success.
8. Be honest and true to myself.
9. It is okay to let myself be distressed for awhile.
10. I am not helpless. I can and will take the steps needed to get through this crisis.
11. I will remain engaged and involved instead of isolating and withdrawing during this situation.
12. This is an opportunity, instead of a threat. I will use this experience to learn something new, to change my direction, or to try a new approach.
13. One step at a time.
14. I can stay calm when talking to difficult people.
15. I know I will be okay no matter what happens.
16. He/She is responsible for their reaction to me.
17. This difficult/painful situation will soon be over.
18. I can stand anything for a while.
19. In the long run who will remember, or care?
20. Is this really important enough to become upset about?
21. I don’t really need to prove myself in this situation.
22. Other people’s opinions are just their opinions.
23. Others are not perfect, and I won’t put pressure on myself by expecting them to be.
24. I cannot control the behaviors of others, I can only control my own behaviors.
25. I am not responsible to make other people okay.
26. I will respond appropriately, and not be reactive.
27. I feel better when I don’t make assumptions about the thoughts or behaviors of others.
28. I will enjoy myself, even when life is hard.
29. I will enjoy myself while catching up on all I want to accomplish.
30. Don’t sweat the small stuff—it’s all small stuff.
31. My past does not control my future.
32. I choose to be a happy person.
33. I am respectful to others and deserve to be respected in return.
34. There is less stress in being optimistic and choosing to be in control.
35. I am willing to do whatever is necessary to make tomorrow better.
RELAXATION EXERCISES

DEEP BREATHING (5 MIN)
1. Select a comfortable sitting position.
2. Close your eyes, and direct your attention to your own breathing process.
3. Think about nothing but your breathing, let it flow in and out of your body.
4. Say to yourself: “I am relaxing, breathing smoothly and rhythmically. Fresh oxygen is flowing in and out of my body. I feel calm, renewed, and refreshed.”
5. Continue to focus on your breathing as it flows in and out, in and out, thinking about nothing but the smooth rhythmical process of your own breathing.
6. After 5 minutes, stand up, stretch, smile, and continue with your daily activities.

MENTAL RELAXATION (5 TO 10 MIN)
1. Select a comfortable sitting or reclining position.
2. Close your eyes, and think about a place that you have been before that you found to be a perfect place for mental and physical relaxation. This should be a quiet environment, such as the ocean, the mountains, a forest, a panoramic view, etc. If you can’t think of a real place, then create one.
3. Now imagine that you are actually in your ideal relaxation place. Imagine that you are seeing all of the colors, hearing all of the sounds, smelling all of the different scents. Just lie back and enjoy your soothing, rejuvenating environment.
4. Feel the peacefulness, the calmness, and imagine your whole body and mind being renewed and refreshed.
5. After 5 to 10 minutes, slowly open your eyes and stretch. You have the realization that you may instantly return to your relaxation place whenever you desire, and experience a peacefulness and calmness in body and mind.

TENSING THE MUSCLES (5 TO 10 MIN)
1. Select a comfortable sitting or reclining position.
2. Loosen any tight clothing.
3. Now tense your toes and feet. Hold the tension, study the tension, then relax.
4. Now tense your lower legs, knees, and thighs. Hold the tension. Study the tension, then relax.
5. Now tense your buttocks. Hold and study the tension. Relax.
6. Tense your fingers and hands. Hold and study the tension, then relax.
7. Tense your lower arms, elbows, and upper arms. Hold it, study it, relax.
8. Tense your stomach, hold the tension, feel the tension, and relax.
10. Tense the lower back. Hold and study the tension and relax.
tension, then relax.
13. Now tense the shoulders. Hold and study the tension. Then relax.
14. Now tense your entire head. Make a grimace on your face so that you feel the tension in your facial muscles. Study the tension and then relax.
15. Now try to tense every muscle in your body. Hold it, study it, then relax.
16. Continue sitting or reclining for a few minutes, feeling the relaxation flowing through your body. Know the difference between muscles which are tense and muscles which are relaxed.
17. Now stretch, feeling renewed and refreshed, and continue with your daily activities.

MENTAL IMAGERY (10 TO 15 MIN)

Mental imagery can deepen relaxation when used with other techniques, or may be used by itself. The purpose is to calm your body, thoughts, and emotions. It gives you the opportunity to take a break from tension and stress. Mental imagery uses all of your senses to create and recreate a relaxing place, perhaps a meadow, a walk through the woods, along the beach, or perhaps a special place from your memory.

Prepare your environment so that you can complete this relaxation exercise without interruption. Spend some time getting comfortable. Close your eyes, as you scan your body for any tension. If you find tension, release it. Let it go and relax.

Relax your head and your face.
Relax your shoulders.
Relax your arms and hands.
Relax your chest and lungs.
Relax your back.
Relax your stomach.
Relax your hips, legs, and feet.

Experience a peaceful, pleasant, and comfortable feelings of being relaxed as you prepare to make an imaginary trip to a beautiful place.

Take a deep breath, and breathe out slowly and easily. Take a second deep breath, and slowly breathe out. Allow your breathing to become smooth and rhythmic.

Picture yourself on a mountaintop. It has just rained and a warm wind is carrying the clouds away. The sky is clear and blue, and the sun is shining down.

Below you are beautiful green trees. You enjoy the fragrance of the forest after the rain. In the distance you can see a beautiful white, sandy beach. Beyond that, as far as you can see, is a crystal clear, brilliant blue water. A fluffy cloud drifts in the gentle breeze until it is right over you. Slowly, this little cloud begins to sink down on you. You experience a very pleasant, delightful feeling. As the fluffy cloud moves down across your face, you feel the cool, moist touch of it on your face. As it moves down your body, all of the tension slips away, and you feel yourself completely relaxed and happy.

As the soft cloud moves across your body, it gently brings a feeling of total comfort and peace. As it sinks down around you it brings a feeling of deep relaxation. The little cloud sinks underneath you, and you are now floating on it. The cloud holds you up perfectly and safely. You feel secure. The little cloud begins to move slowly downward and from your secure position on it, you can see the beautiful forest leading down to the beach. There is a gentle rocking motion as you drift along. You feel no cares or concerns in the world, but are focused completely on the relaxed feeling you experience. The cloud can take you any place you want to go, and you choose to go to the beach. As you move to the beach, the cloud gently comes to the ground and stops. You get off the soft cloud onto the beach, and you are at peace. You take some time to look around at the white sandy beach, and the beautiful blue water.
can hear sea gulls and the roar of the waves. As you feel the sun shining on you, you can smell the ocean air. It smells good. As you walk slowly on the beach, you enjoy the feeling of the warm clean sand on your feet. Just ahead on the beach is a soft blanket and pillow. You lie down and enjoy the feeling of the soft material on the back of your legs and arms. As you listen to the waves and the sea gulls and feel the warmth of the sun through the cool breeze, you realize that you are comfortable, relaxed, and at peace. You feel especially happy because you realize that you can return to this special and beautiful place any time you want to. Feeling very relaxed, you choose to go back to the place where you started, knowing that you will take these peaceful and relaxed feelings with you. There is a stairway close by that leads you back to the room where you started. As you climb the five steps, you will become more aware of your surroundings, but you will feel relaxed and refreshed. You are at the bottom of the stairs now, and begin climbing.

Step 1 to Step 2: moving upward
Step 2 to Step 3: feeling relaxed and more aware
Step 3 to Step 4: you are aware of what is around you, and your body is relaxed
Step 4 to Step 5: your mind is alert and refreshed, open your eyes and stretch gently

BRIEF RELAXATION (5 TO 10 MIN)

Get comfortable.
You are going to count backwards from ten to zero.
Silently say each number as you exhale.
As you count, you will relax more deeply and go deeper and deeper into a state of relaxation.
When you reach zero, you will be completely relaxed.

You feel more and more relaxed, you can feel the tension leave your body.
You are becoming as limp as a rag doll, the tension is going away.
You are very relaxed.

Now drift deeper with each breath, deeper and deeper.
Feel the deep relaxation all over and continue relaxing.
Now, relaxing deeper you should feel an emotional calm.
Tranquil and serene feelings, feeling of safety and security, and a calm peace.

Try to get a quiet inner confidence.
A good feeling about yourself and relaxation.
Study once more the feelings that come with relaxation.
Let your muscles switch off, feel good about everything.
Calm and serene surroundings make you feel more and more tranquil and peaceful.
You will continue to relax for several minutes.
When I tell you to start, count from one to three, silently say each number as you take a deep breath.
Open your eyes when you get to three. You will be relaxed and alert.
When you open your eyes you will find yourself back in the place where you started your relaxation.
The environment will seem slower and more calm.
You will be more relaxed and peaceful.
Now count from one to three.

BRIEF PROGRESSIVE RELAXATION

Clench both fists, feel the tension. Relax slowly . . . feel the tension leave. Feel the difference now that the muscles are relaxed.
Tighten the muscles in both arms. Contract the biceps . . . now relax the arms slowly.
Curl the toes downward until the muscles are tight up through the thigh . . . now slowly relax. Feel the tension ease.
Sometime changes can occur just by recognizing the source of the problem. However, most changes come from an accumulation of changes in beliefs, priorities, and behaviors over a period of time. Consistency and an investment in yourself is necessary. Journal writing can be useful for keeping track of a wide variety of things that can help you achieve your goals. Use your journal to record your thoughts and feelings. "Just doing it" can make a difference. Acknowledging underlying thoughts and feelings and writing about them can help increase self understanding, and self-awareness which can make it easier to change old patterns of behavior and to start new ones. Consistently keeping a journal is a strong message to yourself that you want to change and that you are committed to make it happen.

People often experience greater successes when they have established goals. Unpredictable situations do occur which can cause setbacks, but they can also allow for a reevaluation of your problems and can offer an opportunity. However, when goals are defined and the unexpected happens, you are more likely to reach them even if you are initially thrown off course. Most people don't clearly establish their goals, let alone write them down and think about what it will take to accomplish them.

STEP 1
Write down the goals you want to accomplish in the next 12 months. Make them as specific as possible. They should be realistic, but also challenging.

STEP 2
Write down ten goals you want to accomplish this month. These should help you move toward some of your goals for the year. The monthly goals should be smaller and more detailed than the yearly goals.

STEP 3
Write down three goals you want to accomplish today. Goals need to be accompanied by plans to make them happen. If your goals are too large, you are likely to stop before you start. Better to start small and build upward. Small successes build big successes.

STEP 4
Self-monitoring: Keep track of where you are now. Create realistic plans that can get you to your goals.

STEP 5
Begin observing which self-talk has been maintaining the old patterns you want to change. List at least five to ten negative self-statements that feed into your old patterns.

STEP 6
List five to ten positive statements that are likely to help create the new patterns you want to create.

STEP 7
Create challenges that will replace the negative self-talk you listed in Step 5.
STEP 9
Imagination and visualization: Five times each day, take one minute to visualize a positive image.

STEP 10
Building self-esteem: Use your journal to list good things about yourself. Be supportive to yourself.

STEP 11
Each day record three of the days successes—big or small. Praise yourself. Plan small rewards for some accomplishment each week.

STEP 12
In your journal, frequently ask what parts of yourself you are involved with. The various issues you face (e.g., the needy child, the rebellious adolescent, etc.).

STEP 13
Each day, forgive yourself for something you have done. Like self-esteem, forgiveness is one of the keys to successful change. Forgiving yourself for past actions allows you to take responsibility for what happens in the future.

STEP 14
List the fears of success that the different parts of you may have. Work on making success safe.

STEP 15
Be willing to do things differently. If you don’t, nothing is going to change.
THE POWER OF POSITIVE ATTITUDE

Your attitude will have a significant influence on how you feel and how you evaluate your life experiences. If you are an optimistic person it is likely that you tend to expect a positive outcome even from difficult situations. If you are pessimistic you are likely to expect the worst and probably even look for it. This tendency to expect or look for the negative is sometimes referred to as a self-fulfilling prophecy.

If you have a habit of negative thinking there are things that you can do to improve your attitude.

1. **Change your negative thinking to positive thinking.** This is not as hard as it sounds. Taking the following steps will help you change your negative thinking patterns.
   A. Awareness. Work to increase your awareness for negative thoughts. Keep a journal and write down your negative thoughts. You cannot change the way you think unless you clearly understand how you think and talk to yourself about situations.
   B. Correcting negative thoughts and statements. Once you have identified your negative thoughts and negative patterns of thinking then you can develop positive statements to substitute for the negative ones. It generally is not too difficult to find a different and positive way of viewing things, but it does take a consistent effort to change.
   C. Monitoring your efforts and progress. Again, this is where the journal can be helpful. However, an even better way of assessing your success is by how you feel. If you are changing to a positive pattern of thinking you will find that you worry and catastrophize less, which also contributes to a sense of well-being.

2. **Be Active.** Exercise and other pleasurable activities. Exercise promotes a sense of well-being, decreasing body tension, and decreasing stress. All of which contribute to decreasing depression and feeling good. Spending time with people you like and participating in activities you enjoy are also positive ways of managing depression.

3. **Live one day at a time.** People often waste a lot of energy worrying about “what if.” That means that they are worrying and suffering about something that might not even happen. Then, because they are expecting the worst they do not take care of themselves or other things that need to be taken care of today. Deal with “what is” not “what if.”

4. **Remind yourself that depression ends.** States of emotional distress are generally temporary. If you have felt chronically depressed for a long time talk to your physician about medication that may help. However, it is also important that you take responsibility for yourself and your emotions. Review what you are doing in the way of self-care behaviors to promote emotional and physical well-being.

5. **Refuse to feel guilty.** If there is something that you need to take responsibility for then do it. Apologize or make amends. Then make peace with whatever it is and let go. Feelings of guilt consume emotional energy and prevent a person from moving forward.

6. **Life is about choices.** Some choices have positive consequences and some have negative consequences. Do the best you can and learn from your errors. Accept that throughout your life you will continue to learn, sometimes from mistakes.
DEVELOPING POSITIVE SELF-ESTEEM
IN CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

1. Demonstrate a positive perspective rather than a negative one. “Catch” your children doing something good. This communicates love, care, acceptance, and appreciation. Be careful not to undo a positive statement. For example, “you did a great job of cleaning your room, too bad you don’t do it more often.”

2. Keep your promises. This facilitates trust in parents, while they are role modeling being respectful and responsible. Consistency is important.

3. Create opportunities out of your children’s mistakes. For example, “what did you learn? What would be helpful next time?”

4. Show appreciation, approval, and acceptance. Listen for the feelings behind the words. Active listening to what a child says shows respect and is a way to reflect their worthiness. Being genuinely interested fosters mutual care and respect.

5. Have reasonable and appropriate consequences. Discipline should be a part of learning and encouraging responsible behavior. If a consequence is too long or severe it creates feelings of hopelessness, and a feeling that they have nothing to lose. As a result, it is likely to lead to more opposition and acting out.

6. Ask your children for their opinions, involve them in family problem solving and decision making whenever possible and appropriate.

7. Help your children develop reasonable age-appropriate goals for themselves and help them recognize their progress toward goals.

8. Avoid making comparisons between siblings or peers. Each person is unique and has something special to offer. Recognizing individual attributes is a good thing because it helps a child or adolescent to become more aware of their strengths or assets.

9. Support your children in activities in which they feel accomplished and successful. Everyone feels good about themselves when they are successful.

10. Spend time doing things with your children. The amount of time as well as the quality of time is important. Remember, your children grow quickly and time that has past can never be recaptured. Be sure to take time to have fun and enjoy your children.

11. Encourage your children’s efforts and accomplishments. Genuine encouragement of efforts, progress, and accomplishments promotes positive self-esteem. Children learn to accept themselves, identify their assets and strengths, build self-confidence, and develop a positive self-image.

12. Communicate your love by saying it and demonstrating it. Feeling loved is feeling secure. Love is communicated by mutual respect, which is a cornerstone in the development of independence and responsibility.

13. Accept your children for who they are. This facilitates self-acceptance, self-like, and self-love.

14. Have faith in your children so that they can learn to expect the best in themselves.

15. Focus on contributions, assets, and strengths so that children feel that they are important and have something to offer. Let them know that what they offer counts.