overcoming

depression and low mood

a five areas approach

fourth edition

- CBT workbooks
- Written by a CBT expert
- Proven to work
- Step-by-step success
- Advice for friends and family

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Dr Chris Williams
Overcoming Depression and Low Mood

A Five Areas Approach
Overcoming Depression and Low Mood
A Five Areas Approach
Fourth Edition

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Buying the books in bulk: Bulk copies of the book are available at discounted rates direct from the publisher and also from www.fiveareas.com
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Introduction

Welcome to the fourth edition of Overcoming Depression and Low Mood: A Five Areas Approach. It’s been good to hear from so many people who have benefitted from using this resource. Hopefully, whether you are a practitioner or a member of the public wanting to use these resources in your own life, you’ll find at least something that helps.

This book teaches important information about how low mood can affect your life. It aims to help you work out why you sometimes feel low, anxious, angry or guilty. It also teaches proven practical skills to help change how you feel.

By using the clearly described practical tools in these workbooks, you can make helpful changes to your life.

Who are the workbooks for?

You may be using the workbooks for yourself, or perhaps you are a close friend or family member wanting to know more about depression and low mood and how to help. Many healthcare practitioners also use the workbooks and they are widely used across a range of countries with tens of thousands of people who have benefitted from this approach.

The course can be used by people with problems ranging from mild distress through to more severe depression. The key thing is that you feel able to use the materials and want to use this approach.

Using the workbooks

Picking the right time to do the course is important. For example, if your concentration, energy or motivation levels are far lower than usual, you may find it very hard to keep your mind on things or to make changes. Other approaches such as antidepressant medications may be more appropriate first – or can be used alongside this approach. If you find that you struggle to use the workbooks, or you feel worse as you work through them, please discuss this with your doctor or other healthcare practitioner. The course is not meant to replace getting the right level of support for more severe mental health problems.
Introduction

Which workbook should you use first?
There is no right or wrong way to use the workbooks. Many people find it helpful to first read the two workbooks in Part 1 (Starting out and Understanding why you feel as you do). This is because these workbooks give you an overview of the approach.

Working through these workbooks will also help you to decide which of the Making Changes workbooks in Part 2 of the book you should read. You can use as many or as few workbooks in the course as you wish. You will feel most motivated to try to make changes if you use the workbooks that tackle problems you have noticed in your life and that you yourself want to change.

There is no right or wrong choice of workbooks to use, or a set course you must complete. The key to creating change in your life is using the workbooks that address problems relevant to you, and putting what you learn into practice.

Getting support from others
It can be hard making changes when you feel low. Many people start off trying to improve things with lots of motivation. But part of feeling low is that it’s easy to get discouraged or talk ourselves out of change. That’s entirely normal and is very human. (Think how hard people find it to keep New Year resolutions even when they aren’t feeling low!).

Time and time again people using resources like this have found the benefits of working with someone else to support and encourage them when things feel hard. We therefore suggest that you partner up with someone to help you as you use the course, for example, a health or social services worker, your doctor, a voluntary sector worker or a trusted family member or friend.

The amount of support can be quite short – perhaps just 20 to 30 minutes over say four to six weeks. The important thing is to have someone else there, helping you, discussing ways of getting round possible blocks to change, and, of course, to say well done when things move forward.

A word of encouragement
Depression affects lots of people at some time in their lives. Fortunately, it has now become clear that by changing certain thoughts and behaviour patterns you can greatly improve how you feel. The content of these workbooks is based on the cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT; a kind of talking treatment) approach. The developers of CBT have found many effective ways of tackling the common symptoms and problems people face when feeling low.
This course is written in a way that clearly explains what to do, so that you can test the effect of these different suggestions in your own life. The workbooks aim to help you to regain a sense of control over how you feel.

The course does work

Research has been done involving people who used a previous edition of this book. The research found that, compared with people receiving usual care for depression, people using the workbooks with support:

- On average improved far more.
- Felt better and were more active.
- These benefits were present at both four and 12 months later.

The course can make a big difference if you can commit to using it. Having someone else to encourage you is also important.

International use of this approach

This course is widely used and recommended by professionals across the world.

- It was one of the first 100 recommended books to receive the ABCT (Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies) seal of approval – a leading North American organization for Cognitive Behavioural Therapy.
- In the UK, the Overcoming depression and low mood book, and the companion book Overcoming anxiety: a five areas approach are both named among the 30 books chosen to be made available in every library across England as part of the national healthy reading Book Prescription Scheme.
- In Scotland, people can self-refer to receive free copies of the resources with phone-based support from NHS24 (the NHS Living Life Service).
- In England, the book and companion anxiety book are both recommended as resources in the Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) courses.
- Well over 200,000 people have signed up for free online training using this course.

Overall, many people have been helped by this approach. But can it be useful for you?
Introduction

Making a commitment
Sometimes making changes is easier said (or written) than done. All of us feel discouraged and overwhelmed from time to time. This is even more likely in times of low or anxious mood.

Therefore, I would like to encourage you to try to make a commitment to use this course and to keep at it even if you feel discouraged or stuck for a time. Set small goals and aim to move things forward step-by-step by focusing on just one workbook at a time. Be realistic. Bear in mind your motivation and energy levels so that you don’t try to do more than you can at one time. This will help you to get as much from the course as you can at the moment.

The Starting out workbook gives some suggestions of how you can pace things, and also some suggestions of what to do if you are struggling.

Online resources
Three online resources are available to support users of the course:

1. www.llttf.com (www.livinglifetothefull.com; Twitter @llttfnews). This popular resource is designed to support readers of this course. There’s also a popular forum where you can make comments, or ask questions of other people using the same course.

2. www.llttf.com/shop for resources and books (for members of the public)

3. www.fiveareas.com (Twitter icon @fiveareas for practitioner support and training). This dedicated site is aimed at practitioners and points to the whole range of Five Areas resources, including books, handouts, training courses, translations, accessible versions, and more.

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**Training**

Training courses for practitioners are available. Contact us at events@fiveareas.com or alternatively visit [www.fiveareas.com/training](http://www.fiveareas.com/training).

**Acknowledgments**

The illustrations in the workbooks have been produced by Keith Chan, kchan75@hotmail.com.

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It’s likely you’ll find some parts of the course help more, and others less. If you have comments or suggested changes please do let me know via feedback@fiveareas.com and this really helps shape future content.

Finally, I hope the course proves helpful.

**Dr Chris Williams**  
*MBChB BSc MMedSc MD FRCPsych Hon Fellow BABCP*  
*January 2014*
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Part 1

Understanding why you feel as you do
Starting out ... and how to keep going if you feel stuck

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www.fiveareas.com @fiveareas (practitioners)

www.llttf.com/facebook

Dr Chris Williams

overcoming depression and low mood a five areas approach

Overcoming Anxiety, Stress and Panic © Dr Chris Williams 2015
I’m not happy with things as they are

I really want to do something that helps

I need to make some changes

I can’t keep going on as I am

I’ve no time to read these workbooks!

I like the idea of a course

I don’t understand what the course is about

I tried it and it didn’t work

Nothing will make any difference

Are you feeling like this?
If so... this course is for you.
What you will learn:

- How to get the most out of this course.
- Make a clear but flexible plan of when to use this and the other workbooks.
- Discover how to overcome common blocks to change.

About the course

The workbooks in this course aim to help you understand why you feel as you do. They will teach you important life skills that will help you to turn the corner.

Why should you use these workbooks?

People use these workbooks because they want to make changes in their lives. You, the reader, are in control – and you can work on things at a time that suits you. Time and time again, people are surprised to see the amount of change they can make themselves using a structured approach.

These workbooks use an approach called cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT, a kind of talking treatment). Don’t worry though – there won’t be any more jargon like that in the rest of the course. Research has shown that self-help materials based on the CBT approach work well for problems such as depression and anxiety. Research on this book has also shown that it works very well as a treatment for depression. People using the book felt less depressed and were more able to live their lives as they wanted. This is why this book is one of only 30 books to be chosen to be included in every public library in England as part of the national Books on Prescription scheme.

Reference

www.plosone.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0052735
www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-21083458

Getting going

Well done! You’ve done something that quite a few people struggle to do – you’re still reading.

It can sometimes seem really hard starting to change. Have you ever bought or been given a book or a DVD and never even opened it or even taken the wrapper off? Using this course is no different. In fact, in some ways it’s harder because it’s not a book that’s there for entertainment. Instead these are workbooks which aim to help you to change how you feel.
Overcoming Anxiety, Stress and Panic © Dr Chris Williams 2015

Starting out ... and how to keep going if you feel stuck

What should I read first?
People usually start by working through these two workbooks:

- This one – Starting out... and how to keep going if you feel stuck
- And then Understanding why you feel as you do.

They will help you work out how your low mood is affecting you and help you decide which other workbooks to use.

Developing a routine

Routines can be powerful. For example, if you are used to having a snack while you watch television, sometimes just sitting in the same chair can make you feel hungry!

In the same way, you might wish to set aside a particular place to complete the workbooks. For example, sit on a chair at the kitchen table with a pen and some blank paper to jot down ideas as you read. Plan enough time so that you can get really involved in the workbook – preferably half an hour or so, if you have sufficient energy and concentration for this. If you have others around you, like young children who might interrupt, try to choose a time when they are asleep or away at nursery or school. Or see if a friend or relative could take them for a time while you work on the course.

Getting into the mood: doing something physical can help you get started

You may feel physically and mentally sluggish when you feel low or when you aren’t sleeping well. A good start to using the workbooks is to do something physical first. For example, get up and walk around the room and – if you have them – up and down the stairs. Then sit down in a chair like a kitchen chair that is upright and forces you to sit straight rather than slump back. Now start reading the workbook. Have some pens and paper handy so you can make notes and write in the book.

If you feel tired halfway through, stop, get physically going again, stretch, have some cold water, then get back to it.
Starting out ... and how to keep going if you feel stuck

But my life is too busy/unpredictable to use the course

Wouldn’t it be great if we could always just sit down and plan a time to work? But sometimes life is busy, unpredictable or hard. If so, just take the time you can.

Here are some suggestions of how to build on this first step during the rest of the course.

Some dos and don’ts for getting the most out of the course

Do:

- Slow it down. Focus on using and applying just one workbook at a time.
- Get a pen. Writing things down means you are thinking and learning. In fact it’s more than that. Sometimes you actually work out what you really think about something when you write it down.
- Write it down. Things can look different when we write them down. We can notice patterns and habits we might otherwise miss. Sometimes we can start to really work out what is happening when we see it on a page in black and white. Therefore, answer the questions straight away rather than thinking you will come back to it later.
- You might not wish to write in the book – it may be something you don’t like to do or you may have borrowed the book from a library or someone else. If so, you can write your answers on a separate sheet of paper.
- Many of the worksheets in the course are also available for download from www.llttf.com/odlm
- Answer all the questions – and do try to stop, think and reflect as you read.
- Ask: How might I use this in my life?
- Try out what you read in the workbooks. You’ll find a Planner sheet at the end of each workbook to help you to decide how to do this.
- Be realistic. You are more likely to succeed if you try changing things one step at a time rather than throwing yourself into things and then running out of steam.
- Re-read the workbooks. You may find that different parts become clearer or seem more useful on reading a second time.
- Use the workbooks to build up the help you receive in other ways, such as talking to friends, or from self-help organizations and support groups.
- Keep it organized and easy to handle. Create your own resource pack of key worksheets and other resources you use to improve how you feel.
- Log on to www.llttf.com to get access to free modules and resources.
Starting out ... and how to keep going if you feel stuck

Don’t:
• Push and read through the entire workbook in one go. You need time to take it in and time to practice.
• Expect a sudden miracle cure. Change takes time and practice.
• Try to do this completely on your own. Supportive encouragement from a health professional or social care worker can really help you keep on track.
• Try to read the workbook when you are distracted, such as times when you are trying to do other tasks.
• Cut yourself off from other useful supports. You can do this course alongside other treatments, such as seeing your doctor or taking an antidepressant. These approaches can all be helpful parts of moving forward.

Finding extra support

Having someone around who can offer support and encouragement can help. This is especially important if you are struggling or feel stuck. Sometimes just the act of telling someone – a family member, friend or health worker – that you are working on something, or plan to do a certain activity on a particular day can really help. Just knowing that someone else may ask you how it’s going could help spur you to action. You might go through your answers to the questions in the workbooks with them, or keep your answers private and only discuss some of the course content.

Building your motivation to change

Imagine it is 10 years in the future. You have made important changes in your life and things are much better. Write yourself an encouraging letter about why you need to make changes now.
Dear (your name)

Signed:
Me

Change takes time and effort
Sometimes it’s easy to forget how hard it is to learn new information or skills that you now take for granted. Think about some of the skills you have learned over the years. For example, if you can drive or swim or ride a bike, think back to your first driving/swimming lesson or attempt to cycle without stabilizers. You probably weren’t very good at it that first time, yet with practice you developed the skills needed to do it. In the same way, you can help overcome how you feel by practicing what you learn, even if it may seem very hard at first.

Write down some other things you have learned that took time:

**KEY POINT**

You can’t expect to be able to swim immediately. You may need to start at the shallow end and practice at first. Pace what you do and don’t jump straight away into the deep end.

**Be realistic**

It’s important not to approach this course either far too positively or far too negatively. It would be untrue to claim that if you use this course you are guaranteed results. What we can guarantee is that this approach has helped many thousands of people – and that the workbooks teach clinically proved approaches that have been a help for many. Hopefully, at the very least you will learn some interesting and helpful things along the way.

**Common problems in using the course**

*I’ve no time*

Life can be busy and complicated, especially if you have family or work commitments. There will be many demands on your time. But ...

**Task**

Imagine you have a close friend who is struggling. They don’t like how they feel, and you knew that it is affecting them in lots of different ways. What helpful advice would you give them if they said ‘I don’t have time’?
Write down your encouraging advice here:

...if you would give your friend advice to make some time, could you use that same advice yourself?

**I feel too down to do this now**

Sometimes in really severe depression, it might not be the right time to use these workbooks. But you can always come back to them later if you are finding that things are too much now. If you can’t concentrate for long just go at a pace you can manage. You should also discuss your treatment options with your doctor.

**I’ll never change**

Perhaps the biggest block to getting better is not believing change can happen. Many people find that they gain much more from the course than they first thought they would. Could this be true for you?

**Task**

What words of encouragement would you say to a friend who needed help but believed that change is impossible? Write them down here:

If you would offer helpful and positive advice to a friend, then why not also offer it to yourself?
Starting out ... and how to keep going if you feel stuck

Experiment

In this course, I’m going to ask you to experiment and try things out. Even if you have doubts about the course, or about your ability to use it effectively, try to give it a go and test out what happens. If you still find it doesn’t help at all after you’ve given it a good go, it would be a sensible time to try something different. But perhaps you’ll notice some positive things, even if it’s just one or two things. Perhaps that is worth keeping going for.

Summary

Well done – you’ve got to the last section – and you’re still reading! That’s a very important achievement. So many people who want to change find it hard starting out.

Let’s review what you have learned in this workbook. You have covered:

- How to get the most out of the course.
- How to write a clear but flexible plan of when to use the workbooks.
- How to overcome common blocks to change.

Before you go

What have I learned from this workbook?

What do I want to try next?
Putting into practice what you have learned

You are likely to make the most progress if you can put into practice what you have learned in the workbook. Each workbook will encourage you to do this by suggesting certain tasks for you to do in the following days.

Suggested reading

The *Understanding why you feel as you do* is often a good workbook to read next. It will help you decide which other course workbooks you might need to use.

Making plans

The best plans say:

- **What** you are going to do.
- **When** you are going to do it.

and

- **Predict** things that might block or get in the way of you doing this so you can tackle problems head on.

You may find the following *Planning task* helpful. You can use it to plan any activities or tasks you want – picking a child up from school, getting a repeat prescription, planning to read the next workbook, painting the kitchen – anything.

Here’s an example plan that looks at when and how to start the *Understanding why you feel as you do* workbook. If this is something you would like to do, write your own plan into the Plan below. If you prefer to choose something else, then there are blank versions of this sheet available at the end of the workbook and for download from [www.llttf.com](http://www.llttf.com).

1. **What am I going to do?**

   *Suggestion:* Start to read the *Why do you feel as you do* workbook

   If you decide to do this, think through in more detail exactly what you will do. Do you need to break it down into smaller parts (e.g. get a pen and paper, find the copy of the book or workbook, sit at the table with the door shut and radio off...)? Try to be
clear exactly what you will do – so you will be clear when you’ve done it. Be realistic. Will you plan to read the whole workbook, or just a few pages at a time? Each workbook is also split up into sections that you can work through in smaller sections.

Write what you will do here:

2. When am I going to do it?

What date and time will suit? Many people with low mood notice they feel at their worst first thing in the morning. So you might find that the best time for you to read the workbook is after lunch, in the late afternoon, or in the early evening. If you have young children, think about what you know of their routine. Or you could pick a time when others are around to help look after them. Also, can you plan to read it every day – or do you need a gap to let things sink in?

Write the day and time:

3. Is it well planned?

Next, do a quick reality check on your plan. Is it realistic and well planned? Are you trying to bite off more than you can chew? Is the task small enough for you to succeed, but not so small it makes no difference?

Is my planned task one that:

- Will be useful for helping me move forward? Yes □ No □
- Is clear, so that I will know when I have done it? Yes □ No □
- Is something that I value, or need to do? Yes □ No □
- Is realistic, practical and achievable? Yes □ No □
4. What problems/difficulties could arise, and how can I overcome this?

What could get in the way?

- **Things within you** – low motivation, forgetfulness, talking yourself out of it?
- **Or things outside you** – other people, bad weather, the need for money to do an activity, having to travel or perhaps a task that depends on someone else for success? Unpredictable things may also happen from time to time and interrupt your plans.

Have a back-up time planned for if you can’t start working on the course when you first planned. For example, what if a friend unexpectedly drops by for a coffee, or your baby cries, wakes up or needs a nappy change?

*Write your possible blocks in here:*

Finally, think again about the task and decide whether you need to rewrite your plan to tackle these possible blocks.

5. Write your final plan here:

*What are you going to do?*

*When are you going to do it (day and time)?*

During the course, you can make all sorts of future plans using the *Planner sheet* at the end of this workbook. Many people find that by writing things down it helps them organize things and get things sorted.
Plan, Do and Review

Whatever you choose to do, the first step is to make a plan and then do (or not do!) it. The Planner sheet will help you create a clear and realistic plan. The next step is to use the Review sheet to consider how things have gone, and whether good or bad to learn from it. Copies of both sheets are found at the end of the workbook, and as with all the worksheets can be downloaded from www.llttf.com.

That last part is important. This isn’t about having a time for self-congratulation or criticism. It’s all about planning effective progress and learning about what works and doesn’t in your own life right now.

Look at the Review sheet. It asks you to consider whether you completed the planned task or not. If you have managed to do it as planned, then well done. If not, then what stopped you? Was it something inside you like forgetting, or talking yourself out of it? Or was it something outside you like a child being ill, an unexpected accident or friend dropping by, or perhaps it rained? It’s all about learning how to plan more effectively. How could you plan things differently the next time to tackle this?

Whichever tasks and workbooks you use on this course, keep coming back to this Plan, Do, Review approach. You can even use it to plan the weekly shop!

Other sources of support

www.llttf.com

This popular resource is designed to support readers of this course and is free to use. There’s also a forum where you can make comments, or ask questions of other people who are using the same course.

www.lltf.com/shop

Access a wide range of Five Areas resources, including free hand-outs and relaxation MP3 files.

Worksheets to help you practice

Practice is important to help you master this approach. You can download worksheets of all the key skills used in this workbook from www.llttf.com/worksheets/odlm
Other resources

Here are details of some other Five Areas resources that can be helpful at times of low or anxious mood.

- **24 hours to get a job that really fires you up.** (Highly Commended BMA book awards) (Kindle)
- **Overcoming anxiety: A Five Areas approach.**
- **Are you strong enough to keep your temper?** (Kindle)
- **I’m not good enough** (low confidence). (Kindle)
- **Stop smoking in 5 minutes.** (Kindle)
- **I feel so bad I can’t go on.** (Winner, BMA book awards) (Kindle)
- **Fix your drinking problem in 2 days.** (Kindle) (Linked website: www.llttf4drink.com)
- **Enjoy your baby** (postnatal depression). (Kindle)
- **Reclaim your life from illness, disability, pain or fatigue.** (Kindle)
- **I’m not supposed to feel like this: A Christian self-help approach to depression and anxiety,** C Williams, P Richards and I Whitton (linked website: www.llttfwg.com).

A request for feedback

If there are areas in this course that you find hard to understand, don’t work well for you or seemed poorly written, please let me know. I’m sorry I can’t answer specific questions or provide advice on treatment.

Email: feedback@fiveareas.com

Address: Five Areas, PO Box 9, Glasgow G63 0WL, UK

In your feedback, please state which workbook, book or website you are commenting on.

Acknowledgments

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Starting out ... and how to keep going if you feel stuck

**Planner sheet**

1. *What* am I going to do?

2. *When* am I going to do it?

   *Write in the day and time:*

3. Is my planned task one that:

   - [ ] Will be useful for helping me move forward?
   - [ ] Is clear, so that I will know when I have done it?
   - [ ] Is something that I value, or need to do?
   - [ ] Is realistic, practical and achievable?

4. *What problems/difficulties could arise, and how can I overcome this?*

   *What could get in the way? Write your possible blocks in here:*

   Do you need to rewrite your plan to tackle these possible blocks?

5. *Write down your final plan here*

   *What are you going to do?*

   *When are you going to do it? (day and time)*

   **Your back-up plan:** Think of another back-up solution you could turn to if for whatever reason there are problems with your plan.

---

**KEY POINT**

If you feel worse with symptoms you can still choose to do the planned activity anyway – because it’s important.
Review sheet

What did you plan to do?
Write it here.

What happened? Did you attempt the task? Yes ☐ No ☐

If yes:
- What went well?
- What didn’t go so well?
- What have you learned about from what happened?
- How are you going to apply what you’ve learned?

If not:
What stopped you?
- *Internal factors* (e.g. forgot, not enough time, put it off, concerns I couldn’t do it, I couldn’t see the point of it, etc.).
- *External factors* (events that happened, work/home issues, etc.).
- How could you have planned to tackle these blocks?

Use the *Plan, Do, Review* approach to help you move forward.
Starting out ... and how to keep going if you feel stuck

My notes