

# Brief Coping Strategies for Depressed Children and Teens in Primary Care



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# Disclosures

Komal Sharma-Patel, Ph.D. has no disclosures of financial interests or conflicts of interests

# Topics

Motivational Interviewing Strategies

Coping Skills

# Major Depressive Disorder in Youth: Emotions, Behaviors, Cognitions (Thoughts)

- Emotional symptoms: Sadness/crying, irritability
- Behavioral symptoms: Anhedonia, sleep difficulties, changes in eating, social withdrawal
- Cognitive symptoms: Feelings of worthlessness or low self worth (“I am stupid,” “I am ugly”) and/or hopelessness (e.g., “My life is getting worse”)

# Stages of Change, as relates to Motivational Interviewing

**Precontemplative:** unwilling to change due to lack of awareness, value their independence, feel overwhelmed or rationalize their current presentation = DON'T THINK THERE IS A PROBLEM/CONCERN

**Contemplative:** ambivalent, weighing pros/cons of change, feel "stuck"

**Preparation** ("yes but"): see change as important and view self as capable of change but put off steps toward making change

**Action:** making behavioral, emotional and cognitive changes

**Maintenance**

Link to Stages of Change [here](#)

# How to Gain Commitment to Engaging in Coping Strategies: Basic Motivational Interviewing Techniques with Teens

## Offering choices:

- e.g., Would you prefer to talk first about school, friends or family?

## Open ended questions:

- “*If* you decide to make a change, how would you do it?”---emphasis is on getting child’s perspective
- “Why is your mother/caregiver/teacher worried?”
- “What might your life look like 6 months from now? (If remained the same/made a change)
- “What do you make of all this?”

## Values identification:

- Ask patient to sort out cards with values or select from a list (examples: strength, compassion, determination, community, family, ambition, friends, nature)
- Follow up on how the patient is living in line or discrepant to their stated value
- E.g., what does being strong mean to you?

# Basic Motivational Interviewing Techniques with Teens (continued)

## Reflective Statements

- **Simple reflections:** Repeating and paraphrasing
- **Complex reflections:** Reflecting both sides of ambivalence; using metaphors
- **Reinforce stated change portion of the talk**—e.g., if the adolescent says, “I know what to do to cut back on vaping, but I am not sure if I am ready,” then you could say, “You really believe that you can do this *when you are ready*.”

## Affirmations or positive statements about the patient’s behavior or characteristics

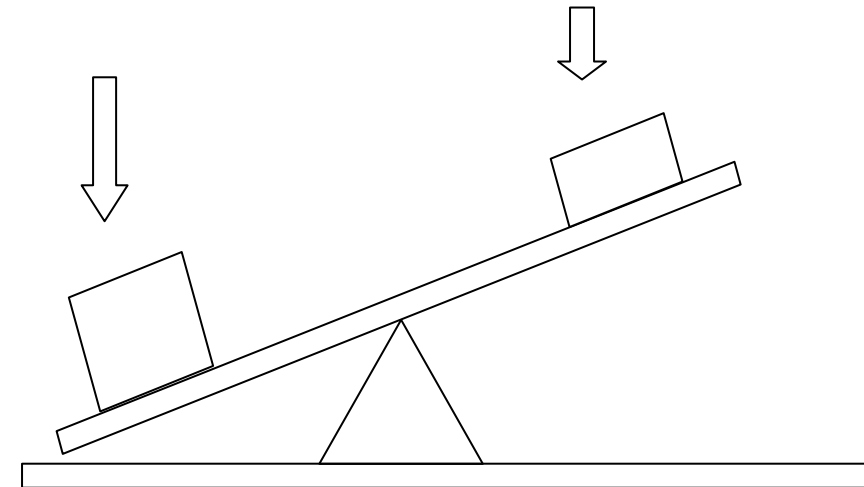
- Be honest and specific
- Instead of saying, “you’re smart,” try, “It’s smart that you are thinking through your options” or “You are willing to consider difficult decisions to make the best choice for yourself at this time.”
- Do not be overly enthusiastic about change statements at the expense of the expressed ambivalence

# Motivational Interviewing Decisional Balance

Goal: to better understand reasons for change, status quo and/or ambivalence

Video of MI demo linked [here](#)

	Benefits/Pros	Costs/Cons
Making a change		
Not changing		





# Decisional Balance Worksheet

Continue to....		Change to....	
Pros	Cons	Pros	Cons

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# Coping Strategies to Address Emotional Symptoms

Goal: Not to change the situation, but to gain self control and/or “ride the wave of emotion” until it passes

## Deep Breathing

- Exercise for Kids and Teens: [Video](#)
- Smell the flower, blow the candle. [Video](#)
- Videos for older kids, or for those who prefer visualizations-no words: [Video 1](#), [Video 2](#), [Video 3](#)

## Self soothe –Goal: to do things that are pleasant or comforting to provide relief

- **Vision**—people watch, window shopping, look at a favorite picture, sunset, watch a funny video
- **Sound**-listen to music (that does NOT intensify the negative emotion), nature sounds
- **Smell**-put on a favorite lotion or spray, use scented soap, aftershave, body wash; lemons, cookies, peppermint
- **Taste**-favorite comforting foods or flavors
- **Touch**-bath/shower, favorite clothing, blanket, pet

# Coping Strategies to Address Emotional Symptoms

(continued)

**Mindfulness**—being in the present moment and observe thoughts, feelings reactions, using all 5 senses—with no judgment or efforts to push away negative reactions

- **Going for a mindful walk**
  - listening to sounds, scents, touch/textures, visuals
- **Eating mindfully**
  - smelling an orange, observing the texture and appearance (color) of the peel, and taste
  - Chocolate – silky, sweet, smooth
  - Popcorn – crunchy, buttery, bumpy

# Coping Strategies to Manage Behavioral Symptoms

- Scheduling of pleasurable activities or “Opposite Action”---to address anhedonia
- **Provide psychoeducation (“Why bother”):**
  - Activating part of the brain that is not getting stimulated and release of endorphines and dopamine (i.e., neurotransmitters associated with pleasure)
  - “Out of Practice”-Rebuild routine/habit or practice of doing activities
- **“How to”: Schedule activities to do daily at a specified time, having them rate their mood prior to activity and after activity**
  - For younger kids, collaborate with caregivers to create and/or select from a “menu” of pleasurable activities to do daily (example: chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.youthadtoolbox.org.au/sites/default/files/documents\_global/G5v%20Pleasurable%20Activites.pdf)
  - For teens, have them identify a range of activities that fit their values (e.g., community service, kindness, physical health, family, friends), interests, and goals (e.g., want to clean room, eat healthy, do homework)

# Coping Strategies to Manage Behavioral Symptoms

## Opposite action—“Switch it up”

- **Anger** gets us ready to attack/ It activates us to attack or defend.
  - **Opposite** show kindness/concern/empathy/perspective taking or walk away.
- **Shame** gets us ready to hide. It activates us isolate.
  - **Opposite** raise your head up, give eye contact, shoulders back.
- **Fear** gets us ready to run or hide. It activates us to escape danger.
  - **Opposite** go towards, stay involved in it, build courage.
- **Depression** gets us ready to be inactive. It activates us to avoid contact.
  - **Opposite** get active.
- **Anxiety or Disgust** gets us ready to reject or distance ourselves. It activates us to avoid.
  - **Opposite** push through and get through situation.
- **Guilt** gets us ready to repair violations. It activates us to seek forgiveness.
  - **Opposite** apologize and mean what we say.

# Coping Strategies to Manage Behavioral Symptoms

- Sleep hygiene
  - Discuss use of electronics and negotiate 'phone/tv' free time frame prior to sleep
  - Introduce progressive muscle relaxation (Child: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cDKyRpW-Yuc>; Adolescent: option 1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pyxvL1O2duk> and option 2: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D7QoBABZu8k&t=3s>)
  - How to 'shut off mind' from negative thoughts
  - Identify wake and sleep times, and eliminate naps (or reduce to 30 minutes)
- Eating routines
  - Discuss healthy and regular eating—and schedule specific meals

# Cognitive strategies

Thinking Traps-all or nothing (black and white) thinking, negative labeling (I am stupid, ugly), overgeneralization (e.g., one bad experience means that all will be bad), mind reading

- Typical strategy is to challenge them by looking at the evidence that supports the thought and evidence that doesn't support it, and then generating an alternate thought

"I can't do anything right"—"I made a mistake; Everyone does that and I can learn from it."



Simple strategy: "Even if true, without checking the facts, how helpful is it when you think this way? What happens to your mood when you believe it to be true? What about your behavior?"



# Cognitive strategies

Cognitive defusion: Looking at thoughts rather than trying to change them; Noticing them rather than getting 'stuck' on pushing them away or holding onto them. In other words, letting thoughts come and go, while just observing the process

- “You are not your thoughts”: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oQXmmP4psbA&t=92s>
- Leaves on a stream: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r1C8hwj5LXw>
- Sushi train metaphor: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tzUoXJVIowo>

# Additional Coping Strategies

- Cope ahead
  - When you know that you are going to be encountering a situation that may elicit negative emotions (e.g., difficult conversation with a parent/friend/romantic interest, making a presentation in class)
  - **Identify the situation and the anticipated emotion, decide on coping strategy, imagine the situation, rehearse coping strategy**

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