

## ACT FOR LIFE: TAKING CHARGE OF LOW MOOD / DEPRESSION

*"If we don't decide where we're going, we're bound to end up where we're headed."* Chinese saying

### Dysphoria, rumination & depression

- **What is dysphoria & what is it good for?**
    - as a normal, psychologically-healthy, reaction to loss or if an obstacle cannot be overcome, dysphoria occurs and serves to terminate the goal-seeking behaviour, thereby conserving resources. Put simply, dysphoria = unpleasant, uncomfortable feelings such as sadness or irritability.
    - Dysphoria may also prevent the premature pursuit of alternative goals, thus inhibiting futile actions.
    - There is nothing "disordered" about sadness or dysphoria. It is part of the human experience.
  - **What is depression?**
    - if one cannot disengage from goal-seeking behaviour, dysphoria may escalate and culminate in clinical depression
    - if someone is not willing to allow sadness & loss in their lives they may become depressed (see below on "dirty pain")
  - **What is rumination and why is it often unhelpful?**
    - Rumination – an attempt to solve the problem of "feeling bad" by figuring it out.
    - It exacerbates dysphoria into "dirty pain" of clinical depression. (e.g. "why am I feeling depressed? I shouldn't be. I hate feeling like this" and perhaps feeling angry or anxious about feeling depressed).
  - **Effects of rumination:**
    - Increase in depressed mood
    - Increase in recall of negative life events
    - Increase in self-criticism & self-blame
    - Increase in pessimism about future
    - Reduction in generation of effective solutions, confidence in them & likelihood of implementation
    - Perpetuation of rumination and perception of its "insight-value"
- Adapted from Zettle (2007)

### ACT put simply.....

- Accept your internal experience
- Choose a Valued Direction
- Take action

### Barriers to Action

- F = Fusion** (stuff your mind tells you that gets in the way when you get caught up in it)
- E = Excessive goals** (your goal is too big, or you lack the skills, or you lack the resources)
- A = Avoidance of discomfort** (unwillingness to make room for the discomfort this challenge brings)
- R = Remoteness from values** (losing touch with - or forgetting - what is important or meaningful about this)
  
- D = Defusion**
- A = Acceptance of discomfort**
- R = Realistic goals**
- E = Embracing values**

With permission from Russ Harris

### Resources

- "The Happiness Trap" by Russ Harris
- "The Mindfulness and Acceptance Workbook for Depression" by Kirk Strosahl and Patricia Robinson
- "Full Catastrophe Living" by John Kabat Zinn
- You can also join the following Yahoo Group  
[http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/ACT\\_for\\_the\\_Public/](http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/ACT_for_the_Public/)

Some of these will be available from libraries, including UNSW.