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**Change How You Feel
by Changing the
Way You Think**

Dennis Greenberger, PhD | Christine A. Padesky, PhD



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THE GUILFORD PRESS

Praise for *Mind Over Mood*

“Only rarely does a book come along that can truly change your life. *Mind Over*

Mood is such a book. Dennis Greenberger and Christine A. Padesky have dis-

tilled the wisdom and science of psychotherapy and written an easily understandable manual for change.”

—*from the Foreword by Aaron T. Beck, MD, developer of cognitive therapy*

“Based on over 40 years of front-line research, this renowned book provides clini-

cally proven strategies to help you manage your mind and the emotions that can

so easily destroy your quality of life. Drs. Greenberger and Padesky show how

your thoughts affect your feelings and teach step-by-step skills so you can free

yourself from painful moods. The first edition of this book was a classic—the

second edition is even better, and will be a trusted guide for even more people

across the globe.”

—*Mark Williams, DPhil, coauthor of The Mindful Way Workbook*

“Over a million people have used *Mind Over Mood* to alleviate—and in many cases eliminate—the suffering caused by depression and other psychological problems. Drs. Greenberger and Padesky are brilliant therapists whose thoroughly updated second edition is informed by the latest research and therapeutic innovations. Science has demonstrated incontrovertibly that changing the way we think about emotional situations is among the most powerful ways to change emotions themselves. Everyone struggling with challenging moods or emotions should read this book.”

—*David H. Barlow, PhD, ABPP, coauthor of 10 Steps to Mastering Stress*

“True to its title, this book really can help you transform your thinking so you can make lasting changes.”

—*Judith S. Beck, PhD, President, Beck Institute for Cognitive Behavior Therapy*

Mind Over MOOD

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For Professionals

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Wil em Kuyken, Christine A. Padesky, and Robert Dudley



Mind

Over

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S e c o n d e d i t i o n

Change How You Feel

by Changing the

Way You Think

Dennis Greenberger, PhD

Christine A. Padesky, PhD

Foreword by Aaron T. Beck, MD

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Foreword

Only rarely does a book come along that can truly change your life. *Mind Over Mood* is such a book. Dennis Greenberger and Christine A. Padesky have distilled the wisdom and science of psychotherapy and written an easily understandable manual for change. The first edition of this book has been read, reread, and recommended to others by therapists, patients, and people seeking to improve their lives.

When I first began developing cognitive therapy (CT) in the late 1950s, I had no idea that it would become one of the most effective and widely practiced psychotherapies in the world. Originally, this therapy was designed to help people overcome depression. Our positive results in treating depression were followed by widespread interest in CT. Today CT is the most widely practiced form of psychotherapy in the world, in large part because the treatment has been shown to produce positive, often rapid outcomes with enduring effects.

CT has been successfully used to help patients with depression, panic disorder, phobias, anxiety, anger, stress-related disorders, relationship problems, drug and alcohol abuse, eating disorders, psychosis, and most of the other difficulties that bring people to therapy. This book teaches readers the central principles that have made this therapy successful for all these problems.

Mind Over Mood has proven to be a significant milestone in the evolution of CT. Never before have the nuts and bolts of CT been spelled out so explic-

itly in a step-by-step fashion for the lay public. Drs. Greenberger and Padesky

generously provide the guiding questions, hints and reminders, and worksheets

that they have developed in their own clinical practices; these materials can serve as both a vehicle and a road map for people seeking to make fundamental

changes in their lives. This is a rare and special book that can easily be used for self-help or as an adjunct to therapy. Not only a self-help book, it has been

used to teach graduate students in mental health fields and psychiatric residents

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how to practice CT effectively. It is unusual for a book to be written so simply

that it can be used for self-help and yet teach such important principles that it can guide the highest levels of education. *Mind Over Mood* has proven to be one of the best-selling CT books, with translations in more than 22 languages.

I'm pleased that this second edition of *Mind Over Mood* offers expanded sections on how to use CT for anxiety, which reflect developments in the field

since the first edition was published. This new edition also includes sections on mindfulness, acceptance, forgiveness, gratitude, and positive psychology. Readers learn how to incorporate these principles within the CT model to help relieve distress and build happiness.

Drs. Greenberger and Padesky have been students, colleagues, and friends of mine for many years. Together, they have a unique blend of talent, experience, and education that has helped bring this book to fruition. Dennis

Greenberger has been an innovator in the application of CT in inpatient and outpatient settings. His work has focused on developing highly effective treat-

ment programs based on psychotherapy research. Dr. Greenberger established

and directs the Anxiety and Depression Center, a CT specialty clinic in New-

port Beach, California. The Anxiety and Depression Center serves as a model

for the provision of warm, compassionate, empirically guided CT for children,

adolescents, and adults. In addition to directing this center, Dr. Greenberger teaches and provides supervision to psychiatric residents, graduate students in psychology, and clinicians looking to develop and refine their CT skills.

Dr. Greenberger served as the President of the Academy of Cognitive Therapy, an organization that I founded, which certifies the competence of cognitive therapists.

Christine A. Padesky and I have worked together since 1982, teaching CT to thousands of therapists worldwide. After hundreds of hours of conversations

together, she understands CT better than almost any other therapist. I have observed and admire the warmth, clarity, and focus she brings to her relationships with clients.

Dr. Padesky founded the Center for Cognitive Therapy, now in Huntington Beach, California, in 1983. It has become a major international CT training center for therapists. She personally has taught CT to more

than 45,000 therapists in 22 countries. She is well respected by her colleagues

and has won statewide, national, and international awards for her many origi-

nal contributions to the field. Two of her early contributions were the development of the five-part model to understand distress and the seven-

column Thought Record. Readers of this book have benefited and will benefit by

learning to apply these methods to their own problems. She is a Distinguished

Founding Fellow of the Academy of Cognitive Therapy and an international consultant to therapists, clinics, forensic hospitals, and educational programs.

Drs. Greenberger's and Padesky's superb abilities and extensive experience as therapists, innovators, and educators are melded in this exemplary book. In

the same way that *Cognitive Therapy of Depression*, which I cowrote with John

Foreword

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Rush, Brian Shaw, and Gary Emery (New York: Guilford Press, 1979), revolutionized how therapy was conducted, *Mind Over Mood* sets the standard for

how CT is utilized. Its explicit instructions help therapists and readers adhere more closely to established CT principles and consequently improve the qual-

ity of their therapy and their lives. *Mind Over Mood* is an effective tool that puts

CT in the hands of the reader.

Aaron T. Beck, MD

Professor Emeritus of Psychiatry

University of Pennsylvania

President Emeritus

Beck Institute for Cognitive Behavior Therapy

Acknowledgments

We are indebted to Aaron T. Beck for his pioneering development of cognitive therapy. His work is the foundation and inspiration for *Mind*

Over Mood. As mentor, colleague, and friend, he helped both of us define our

careers as psychologists. He actively supported this project and generously pro-

vided critical feedback to improve the book's value. We hope that this second

edition of *Mind Over Mood* is consistent with his vision of cognitive-behavioral

therapy (CBT) and provides clear guidance so people can help themselves – a

central commitment of his own work, and one that he has passed along to us.

Kathleen A. Mooney critiqued early versions of this book and provided

detailed feedback on every chapter. Her gentle honesty, unending enthusiasm,

and creativity as a skilled cognitive therapist, as well as her editorial and visual

design expertise, substantially enhanced the content and format of the book.

For example, she recommended we include Helpful Hints and Reminders and

later designed the icons that make these easy to find. Her generous contributions of ideas at every stage made this a better book.

Our editor at The Guilford Press, Kitty Moore, has always been a strong advocate for *Mind Over Mood* and a source of encouragement for us. In fact, everyone with whom we work at Guilford consistently reflects the profession-

alism, intelligence, and integrity that make Guilford a leader in mental health publishing. We extend special appreciation to Seymour Weingarten, Editor-in-Chief, for sharing our vision.

Rose Mooney's feedback on an early draft of the first edition led to restructuring of several chapters to improve readability. She served as our image of the ideal thoughtful reader as we were writing this book.

The CBT community contributed to this book in innumerable ways. We are grateful to all the researchers around the world who work so hard to learn what people can do to help themselves loosen the grip of troubling moods. We

owe a debt of gratitude to the tens of thousands of therapists who embraced the

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Acknowledgments

first edition of our book enthusiastically and used it in so many creative ways

with their clients. Many of these therapists generously offered their ideas on how we might improve *Mind Over Mood*. We feel privileged to enjoy friendships as well as close working relationships with so many in our field. Our sec-

ond edition is designed to reflect the art and science of evidence-based therapy,

which this dedicated community of therapists and scholars helps shape.

Most importantly, we thank more than a million readers of our first edition of *Mind Over Mood*. Some of you wrote on every page of the book until it was filled with your thoughts and heartfelt emotions. Others copied worksheets over and over again until you mastered the skills. Your efforts, commitment, and thoughtful feedback inspired us as we worked for three years on

this second edition. In addition, every one of our clients has asked questions and shared experiences that contributed to our understanding of how people change. Although we are unable to acknowledge you by name, this book is

a product of your openness and hard work. You have taught us to be better therapists and writers. Your lessons to us are reflected in this book.

We are also grateful that our own collaborative process in writing this book was such a pleasure; our work was accompanied by laughter and discov-

ery. We literally wrote each page together – a process that was labor-intensive,

but led to a book far better than what either of us could have produced alone.

Dennis Greenberger and Christine A. Padesky

On an individual basis:

Thanks to Deidre Greenberger for her warmth and love. Her unwavering faith

in me and in this project is a source of continuing strength and inspiration.

Her intelligence, humor, spontaneity, curiosity, and wisdom have added to this book and to my life. And thanks also to Elysa and Alanna Greenberger, the two sweetest blessings in my life.

Weekly meetings and informal consultations at the Anxiety and Depression Center with Perry Passaro, Shanna Farmer, David Lindquist, Janine Schroth, Robert Yeilding, Bryan Guthrie, and Jamie Flack Lesser have contributed to this book in significant ways. Our thought-provoking discussions embrace the

principles and expand the boundaries of CBT in ways that have influenced

this second edition. I always learn from and am impressed by how talented and

experienced therapists use the principles and strategies in *Mind Over Mood* to

create positive client outcomes. A special acknowledgment to my good friend

and trusted colleague Perry Passaro. He has helped sharpen my thinking and added dimension and new meaning to what cognitive therapy can be.

Dennis Greenberger

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My entire career is indebted to Aaron T. Beck. His first books set the course for my career, and our nearly 40-year friendship has enriched each year of my

life immeasurably. His curiosity, creativity, humor, collaborative spirit, and kindness still inspire me every day.

Kathleen Mooney, my partner for the past 35 years, contributes to all my CBT projects. She has an ability to recognize good ideas and make them better by infusing them with her creative vision, and this book exemplifies her contributions. Kathleen sustains and inspires me with her energetic spirit, honest critique of ideas, unwavering support, and humor. Whether navigating

new territory or finding my way home, I rely on her wisdom and guidance.

Each day is better because of her.

Christine A. Padesky

A Brief Message

for Clinicians

and Interested Readers

Outcome research demonstrates the effectiveness of cognitive- behavioral therapy (CBT) for a wide variety of psychological problems, including depression, anxiety, anger, eating disorders, substance abuse, and relationship

problems. *Mind Over Mood* is a hands-on workbook that teaches CBT skills in a clear, step-by-step format. It is designed to help readers understand their problems better and make fundamental changes in their lives, either with the aid of a therapist or on their own.

Clinicians can use *Mind Over Mood* to structure therapy, to reinforce skills taught to clients, and to help clients continue the therapeutic learning process after formal therapy ends. With extensive worksheets and mood questionnaires,

this book actively enlists clients' participation in applying what is learned in therapy to everyday life experiences. CBT skills are taught sequentially, and as

readers progress through the book, new skills build upon previously learned skills. The book's structure, along with Helpful Hints and troubleshooting guides on how to navigate common "stuck points," helps readers success-

fully apply CBT principles so they can resolve their problems and experience

greater happiness and life satisfaction.

We are very pleased and humbled by the widespread popularity of the first edition of *Mind Over Mood*. At the time we wrote it, we intended to use empirical findings about what made therapy effective to write a book that therapists could use to improve their own therapy outcomes. One of the excit-

ing features of CBT is that it teaches clients skills to help them become their

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own therapists. We hoped that a clear manual teaching these skills would resonate both with self-help readers and with therapists as a guide for therapy.

Mind Over Mood was recognized as an inaugural recipient of the Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies Self-Help Book Seal of Merit.

This Self-Help Seal of Merit is given only to books that:

- Employ cognitive and/or behavioral principles.
- Have documented empirical support for the methods presented.
- Include no suggestions or methods that are contraindicated by scientific evidence.
- Present treatment methods that have consistent evidence for their effec-

tiveness.

- Are consistent with best psychotherapy practices.

Therapists can feel confident that the skills their clients learn by using *Mind Over Mood* are the skills that have been shown in decades of research to produce the best treatment outcomes for depression, anxiety, and other mood problems. Research demonstrates that clients not only get better but experience longer-lasting improvement (have lower relapse rates) when they learn the skills taught in *Mind Over Mood* and are able to apply these skills on their own, independently of a therapist.

The second edition of *Mind Over Mood* is substantially improved over the first edition, reflecting more than two decades of innovations in research and therapy. This new edition incorporates and integrates additional, empirically supported methods: imagery, acceptance, and mindfulness; fear ladders and exposure for anxiety; tolerating distress and ambiguity; and positive psychol-

ogy. There is also a fully updated presentation of behavioral activation, relax-

ation, and cognitive restructuring approaches for mood management. At the same time, this edition retains the core features of the first edition that made it so popular and useful for readers and therapists.

Over the years, we have been surprised and impressed with the creative

ways in which *Mind Over Mood* is used by clinicians and readers.

Psychology

graduate schools and psychiatric residency programs around the world use

Mind Over Mood as a required text for teaching CBT. *Mind Over Mood* has been

translated into more than 22 languages, and the skills taught have proven to be relevant to people in diverse cultures and across the economic spectrum.

A colleague told us that as she was walking into a clinic in Bangladesh, she saw a woman drawing in the dirt with a stick. When she got closer, she realized that the woman was writing out the Thought Record from the first edition of *Mind Over Mood*. Another colleague told us that Aboriginal leaders in Australia found the five-part model from Chapter 2 of *Mind Over Mood*

A Brief Message for Clinicians and interested readers xvii

one of the most culturally relevant models for linking CBT ideas with their own long-standing cultural wisdom. The book has been used in well-known addiction treatment centers, psychology clinics, hospitals, and forensic units, as well as with homeless populations. And, of course, the majority of copies have been purchased by individuals who discover it for self-help or have the book recommended to them by mental health professionals. These many uses

of *Mind Over Mood* speak to the desires of both clinicians and members of the

lay public to learn and use practical, proven strategies for mood management.

The first edition of *Mind Over Mood* was accompanied by a companion book, *Clinician's Guide to Mind Over Mood*, which provided in-depth recom-

mendations for effectively incorporating *Mind Over Mood* into therapy for vari-

ous client problems and in different clinical settings. A revised edition of this

Clinician's Guide will be available in 2016.

We hope that this second edition of *Mind Over Mood* will continue to be a useful guide for people who want to positively transform their moods and their lives. Whether *Mind Over Mood* skills are developed by using a stick in the dirt or a digital device, the goal is the same – for people to learn skills that lead to greater happiness and life satisfaction.

We urge clinicians to be curious and take a learning perspective when they use *Mind Over Mood* with clients. Each person's experience of the world

is different, and yet common principles can be used to understand how those experiences are formed and can be transformed. Psychological knowledge and

the principles of psychotherapy have advanced since *Mind Over Mood's* first edition. We have done our best to incorporate these new ideas and findings

into this second edition, so that it continues to reflect the best of evidence-based therapy practice.

Dennis Greenberger

Christine A. Padesky

Sign up at www.guilford.com/MOM2-alerts to receive e-alerts with the latest information from the authors plus special announcements about e-book editions, a Spanish-language edition, the second edition of the Clinician's Guide

to Mind Over Mood (coming in 2016), and other Mind Over Mood news.

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Mind Over MOOd

1

How Mind Over Mood

Can Help You

An oyster creates a pearl out of a grain of sand. The grain of sand irritates the oyster.

In response, the oyster creates a smooth, protective coating that covers the sand and

provides relief. This protective coating is a beautiful pearl. For an oyster, an irritant

becomes the seed for something new and beautiful. Similarly, *Mind Over Mood* will help

you develop something new: beneficial skills to lead you out of your current discomfort.

The skills you learn by using this book will help you feel better and will continue to

have value in your life long after your original problems are gone.

We hope that, like many people who have learned the methods taught in this book,

you will look back at the initial discomfort that led you to *Mind Over Mood* as a “blessing

in disguise,” because it provided you the opportunity and motivation to develop pearls

of wisdom and invaluable new perspectives that will help you enjoy the rest of your life

more fully.

HOW WILL THIS BOOK HELP YOU?

Mind Over Mood teaches you strategies, methods, and skills that have been shown to be

helpful with mood problems such as depression, anxiety, anger, panic, jealousy, guilt,

and shame. The skills taught in this book can also help you solve relationship problems,

handle stress better, improve your self-esteem, become less fearful, and grow more con-

ident. These strategies also can help you if you are struggling with alcohol or drug use.

Mind Over Mood is designed to teach you skills in a step-by-step fashion, so you can rap-

idly make the changes that are important to you.

The ideas in this book come from cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), one of

today's most effective forms of psychotherapy. "Cognitive" refers to what we think and

how we think. Cognitive-behavioral therapists emphasize understanding the thoughts,

beliefs, and behaviors connected to our moods, physical experiences, and events in our

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Mind Over Mood

lives. A central idea in CBT is that our *thoughts* about an event or experience powerfully

affects our emotional, behavioral, and physical responses to it.

For example, if we are standing in line at the grocery store and think, "This will

take a while. I might as well just relax," we are likely to feel calm. Our bodies stay

relaxed, and we may start a conversation with someone standing nearby or pick up a

magazine. However, if we think, “They shouldn’t have such a long line. They should

hire more clerks,” we may feel upset and irritated. Our bodies become tense and fidgety,

and we may spend our time complaining to other customers and the clerk.

Mind Over Mood teaches you to identify and understand the connections among your

thoughts, moods, behaviors, and physical reactions in everyday situations like this one,

as well as during major events in your life. You will learn to think about yourself and

situations in more helpful ways, and to change the thinking patterns and behaviors that

keep you stuck in distressing moods and relationships. You will discover how to make

changes in your life when your thoughts alert you to problems that need to be solved.

In the end, these changes should help you feel happier, calmer, and more confident. In

addition, the skills you learn using *Mind Over Mood* help you create and enjoy more posi-

tive relationships.

HOW WILL YOU KNOW IF THIS BOOK IS HELPING?

For any of us, it is much easier to keep trying something when we know we are making

progress. For example, when we first learn to read, we often begin by learning the alpha-

bet and recognizing individual letters. Initially, we need to put a lot of effort and practice

into recognizing letters. As our skill develops, our recognition of letters becomes easier

and more automatic. Over time, we stop paying attention to individual letters, because

we have learned to put these letters together and learn simple words. As new readers, we

may scan a page looking for words we know. Over time, we develop the skill to read

simple sentences, and we know we are making progress when we can read more compli-

cated sentences, paragraphs, and simple books. Soon we are not attending to individual

words, but to the meaning of what we are reading. In school, children become better

readers year by year, and their reading-level progress can be measured by tests.

Similarly, you will be able to notice and measure the progress you make in using

Mind Over Mood. In the early weeks, you will learn individual skills. Over time, you will

learn to combine these skills in ways that improve your moods and your life. One way

to measure your progress is to measure your moods at regular intervals as you develop

and practice *Mind Over Mood* skills. Chapter 4 helps you do this and shows you how to

graph your scores so you can see your progress over time.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Mind Over Mood is different from other books you may have read. It is designed to

help you develop new ways of thinking and behaving that will help you feel better.

How Mind Over Mood Can Help You

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These *Mind Over Mood* skills require practice, patience, and perseverance. Therefore, it is

important for you to complete the exercises in each chapter. Even some of the skills that

look easy can be more complicated than they seem when you actually try to do them.

Most people find that the more time they spend practicing each skill, the more benefit

they get.

In the beginning, it is helpful to spend some time on these skills every day. You may

find it helpful to set aside a regular time each day to read about or practice *Mind Over*

Mood skills. If you move too quickly through the book without giving yourself adequate

practice time, you will not learn how to apply the skills to your own problems. Thus

speed of learning is not the important thing. It is more important to spend enough time

with each chapter until you understand the ideas and can use them in your life in a way

that is meaningful and helps you feel better. You may find it only takes an hour or so to

do this with some chapters of the book. For other chapters, it will take weeks or even

months of practice before the skills you learn become automatic and you begin to feel

the full benefit.

Mind Over Mood can be customized so that you can read chapters in an order that

is likely to be most helpful for you. For example, if you have chosen this book to work

on particular moods, at the end of Chapter 4 there is a recommendation that you read

the chapters about moods (13, 14, and/or 15) that pertain to you. You can skip any

mood chapters that don't apply. After you read those chapters, you can follow the chap-

ter sequence recommended for each particular mood or moods. Alternatively, you may

choose to read the book straight through and do the exercises beginning with Chapter

2 and ending with Chapter 16.

If you are using *Mind Over Mood* as part of therapy, your therapist may recommend a

different order for reading chapters. There are many ways to customize development of

Mind Over Mood skills, and your therapist may have their own idea about which sequence

will work best for you. If you are bringing this book to the attention of your therapist,

you might suggest that he or she read the “A Brief Message for Clinicians and Interested

Readers” on pages xv–xvii.

Can You Use Mind Over Mood Skills for Issues Other Than Moods?

Yes. The same *Mind Over Mood* skills that help manage moods can also help you with

stress; alcohol and drug use; eating issues such as bingeing, purging, or overeating; rela-

tionship struggles; low self-esteem; and other issues. It also can be used to develop posi-

tive moods, such as happiness and a sense of meaning and purpose in your life.

What If You Want to Use Worksheets More Than Once?

Throughout the book, there are exercises designed to help you learn and apply the

important skills introduced in that chapter. The worksheets that accompany these exer-

cises are meant to be practiced over time. Additional copies of many of the exercise

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worksheets can be found in the Appendix at the end of the book (and all of them are

available to download for your personal use at www.guilford.com/MOM2-materials), so that

you can copy and use them whenever you think they might help.

Mind Over Mood skills and strategies are based on decades of research. These are

proven, practical, and powerful methods that, once learned, lead to greater happiness and

life satisfaction. By investing time in reading this book and practicing what you learn,

you are taking steps to transform your life in a positive way.

Chapter 1 Summary

X Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) is a proven, effective therapy for depression,

anxiety, anger, and other moods.

X CBT can also be used to help with eating disorders, alcohol and drug use, stress,

low self- esteem, and many other problems.

X Mind Over Mood is designed to teach CBT skills in a step-by-step fashion.

X Most people find that the more time they spend practicing each skill , the more

benefit they get.

X There are guides throughout the book to help you customize the chapter reading order so you can target the moods that concern you the most.

2

Understanding Your Problems

Ben: *I hate getting old.*

One afternoon a therapist received a telephone call from Sylvie, a 73-year-old woman

who was concerned about her husband, Ben. She had read an article about depression,

and it seemed to describe him. For the past six months, Ben had complained constantly

about feeling tired; yet Sylvie heard him pacing around the living room at three in the

morning, unable to sleep. In addition, she said he was not as warm as usual toward her,

and he was often irritable and negative. He had stopped visiting his friends and didn't

seem interested in doing anything. After his doctor checked him and said he didn't have

a medical problem that would explain these symptoms, Ben complained to his wife, "I

hate getting old. It feels lousy."

The therapist asked to talk with Ben on the phone, and Ben reluctantly came on the

line. He told the therapist not to take it personally, but he didn't think much of "head

doctors" and didn't want to see the therapist because he wasn't crazy, just old. "You

wouldn't be happy either if you were 78 and ached all over!" He said he would go to one

appointment just to satisfy Sylvie, but he was sure it wouldn't help.

How we understand our problems has an effect on how we cope. Ben thought that

his sleep problems, tiredness, irritability, and lack of interest in doing things were normal

parts of growing older. Growing old was something Ben couldn't change, so he didn't

expect that anything could help him feel better.

At their first meeting, the therapist was immediately struck by the difference in

Sylvie's and Ben's appearance. In a rose-colored skirt with a coordinating floral blouse,

earrings, and shoes, Sylvie had dressed herself carefully for the meeting. She sat upright

in her chair and greeted the therapist with an expectant smile and bright, eager eyes. In

contrast, Ben sat slumped in his chair, and although he was neatly dressed, he had a slight

stubble on the left side of his chin. His eyes were dull and surrounded by the dark circles

of fatigue. He stood up stiffly and slowly to greet the therapist, saying grimly, "Well, you

got me for an hour."

As the therapist gently questioned Ben over the next 30 minutes, his story slowly

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unfolded. With each question, Ben sighed deeply and then responded flatly. Ben had

been a truck driver for 35 years, making local deliveries for the last 14 of those years.

After his retirement, he met regularly with three retired friends to talk, eat a meal, or

watch sports. Ben also liked fixing things, working on house projects, and repairing

bicycles for his eight young grandchildren and their friends. He regularly saw his three

children and the grandchildren, and he felt proud to have a good relationship with each

of them.

Eighteen months earlier, Sylvie had been diagnosed with breast cancer. Her cancer

had been detected early, and she had recovered well after surgery and radiation treat-

ment, with no further signs of cancer. Ben became teary as he talked about her illness:

“I thought I’d lose her, and I didn’t know what I’d do.” As he said this, Sylvie jumped in

quickly, patting Ben on the arm: “But I’m OK, dear. Everything turned out OK.” Ben

swallowed hard and nodded his head.

While Sylvie was undergoing cancer treatment, one of Ben’s best friends, Louie,

became suddenly ill and died. Louie had been Ben’s friend for 18 years, and Ben felt his

loss deeply. He felt angry that Louie had not gone to the hospital sooner, because early

treatment might have saved his life. Sylvie said that Ben focused all his attention on

tracking her cancer treatment appointments after Louie's death. "I think Ben thought

he would be responsible for my death if we missed an appointment," said Sylvie. Ben

stopped seeing his friends and devoted himself to Sylvie's care.

"After Sylvie's treatment ended, I knew the relief was only temporary. The rest of

my life will be filled with illness and death. I feel half dead already. A young person like

yourself can't understand this." Ben sighed. "It's just as well. What use am I, anyway?"

The grandkids fix their own bikes now. My sons have their own friends, and Sylvie

would probably be better off if I wasn't here. I don't know what's worse – to die, or to

live and be left all alone because all your friends are dead."

After hearing Ben's story and reviewing his physician's report that there was no

physical cause for the way Ben was feeling, it was clear to the therapist that Ben was

depressed. He was experiencing physical symptoms (insomnia, appetite loss, fatigue),

behavior changes (stopping his usual activities, avoiding friends), mood changes (sad-

ness, irritability, guilt), and a thinking style (negative, self-critical, and pessimistic) con-

sistent with depression. As is often the case with depression, Ben had experienced a number of losses and stresses in the preceding two years (Sylvie's cancer, Louie's death, and the sense that his children and grandchildren didn't need him any more).

Although Ben was skeptical that therapy could help, with Sylvie's encouragement he agreed to go to three more sessions before deciding whether to continue or not.

UNDERSTANDING BEN'S PROBLEMS

During their second meeting, his therapist helped Ben understand the changes he had experienced in the past two years. Using the five-part model in Figure 2.1 on the facing page, Ben noticed that a number of *environmental* changes or major life events (Sylvie's

Understanding Your Problems

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FIGURE 2.1. Five-part model to understand life experiences.

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cancer, Louie's death) had led to *behavior* changes (the end of regular social time with

friends, extra trips to the hospital for Sylvie's cancer treatment). In addition, he began to

think differently about himself and his life (“Everyone I care about is dying,” “My chil-

dren and grandchildren no longer need me”) and to feel worse both *emotionally* (irritable,

sad) and *physical y* (tired, more trouble sleeping).

Notice that the five areas of Figure 2.1 are interconnected. The connecting arrows

show that each different part of our lives influences all the others. For example, changes

in our behavior influence how we think and how we feel (both physically and emotion-

ally). Our behavior can also change our environment and life events. Likewise, changes

in our thinking affect our behavior, moods, and physical reactions, and can lead to

changes in our environment. Understanding how these five parts of our lives interact

can help us understand our problems.

Ben could see how each of these five parts of his experience influenced the other

four, pulling him deeper into his sad mood. For example, as a result of thinking, “All

my friends will die soon because we’re getting old” (thought), Ben stopped calling them

on the phone (behavior). As Ben became more isolated from his friends, he began to feel