

Chapter 1
**“HOW ARE
YOU?”**



When someone asks “How are you?” it can set off a cascade of thoughts in your mind. Despite the fact that this has become a greeting, it is a serious question and it makes you wonder “What mood am I in?” Have you ever examined your mood and what impact it has on your life? This book will help you to explore a range of mood issues that confront people every day, addressing the characteristic feelings and emotions, the triggers and outcomes. Of course, you are also reading this to discover what you can do about these issues. This book will show you strategies that can be used to overcome mood problems and lead a happier and more content life.

The chapters in this book are organized around the moods and emotions that people feel, both positive and negative, all of the time. Your mood is your conscious state of mind or your predominant emotion. Mood is an umbrella term for all the emotions and affective states that you experience. An emotion is a more specific term than mood. An emotion is your perception of a feeling, more related to individual experiences. The affective state is a technical term, from psychology, and relates to what is seen on the outside as a sum of all those moods and feelings you subjectively experience. Moods have what is known as a “valence”, which describes overall whether the mood you are experiencing is either positive or negative. The valence of a mood has become part of our everyday language; it is commonplace for someone to describe themselves as being in a good mood, or a bad mood, or their mood is low.

This book deals with issues around moods such as hope, anger, distress, unhappiness, well-being and self-esteem. All of us must deal with these moods during our lives. An important starting point is for you to identify which of these mood issues you are experiencing and the extent to which they are operating. Chapter 2 will help you to think about the ways moods develop and how these may influence your life. Chapters 3 to 8 cover some of the

different moods you may experience, both positive and negative, in more detail and within each of these chapters there are coping mechanisms and strategies for improving the quality of your mood. The final three chapters cover more general techniques to improve your mood and your ability to cope whatever comes your way.

Why do I experience moods?

It does seem odd to me, when we are a technologically advanced society, and humans have become powerful over nature, able to cure disease, start wars, fly to the moon, and yet, you and I still experience the feelings of emotion which contribute to something so primeval as a mood. Scientists have identified that emotions developed in animals to help us survive in our environment. Emotions are experienced by lots of different animals – as you could imagine when you see a cat running away from a perceived threat, the cat is more than likely scared. When a dog is barking we assume it is angry. An emotional response has been an essential part of the survival of our species, and we accept and embrace many emotions such as happiness and affection.

However, a problem is encountered when your mood, or its valence, has a detrimental effect on your life. Some philosophers, such as Plato, believed that emotions were undesirable and sometimes evil. This view does not exist now, and we understand that emotions are essential and often a very positive source of motivation. You will be taken through a range of the moods describing positive and negative aspects and sometimes the underlying physiology that will help to explain your feelings and responses to situations. To be clear, your physiology is the state of your body, the processes which happen that are beyond your active conscious control.

Some clarification about the use of the words positive and negative when talking about emotions. We use the terms positive and negative as they are widely understood and help us group the kinds of emotions that people generally want to experience more of (positive emotions such as joy) and those they want to manage better or reduce (negative emotions such as anger and frustration). Negative emotions such as anger can have a useful outcome in that when angry we are more likely to stand up for our rights – providing a drive to be assertive as opposed to passive in a situation where our rights are violated.

A bit about us

My name is Shane, and I live and work in Newcastle in Australia. I have extensive experience working as a psychologist, in the community and in hospital settings, and as a scientist. I will be drawing on these experiences throughout this book. In my work I have met many people dealing with all sorts of issues, from the very severe and serious mental health problems through to more minor mood issues that cause them problems. In my scientific work as a health researcher and whilst gaining my PhD, I have collaborated with Dr Graham Law, who is a medical scientist and statistician.

Graham lives in York in England and is Head of Biostatistics for an Institute within the School of Medicine at Leeds University. He has published over 75 scientific research papers, and two books, and leads fellow scientists within an academic environment. His knowledge and experience will help in interpreting the scientific findings so that you can be reassured that there is good evidence for you to base your decisions on.

I will take the things that work best when people struggle with their mood, to give you hope and optimism in dealing with your

own issues. I aim to prevent the downward spiral that is characteristic of mood disorders. By using these stories I hope that the knowledge that patients, psychologists and scientists have acquired through their journey can be helpful to you.

When I see people as a psychologist my opening question is usually "How are you?" This is a simple start, and yet this straightforward question can bring forward a wave of thoughts, memories and feelings into the open and make them accessible to analysis. The main issues we talk about, often for hours, are their thoughts. Each person brings with them an amazing story. If I were speaking with you, my hope would be to understand how you got to where you are, how you arrived there in the first place and why you keep returning to the same place. My objective is for you to feel better. During our sessions together, people usually thank me for understanding where they are coming from and pointing them in the right direction to show them a way to feeling better. I hold their hand. That is all, a guiding hand.

Why do you need this book?

All of us have moods that go up and down: that is completely normal. It is also reasonable to assume that any mood you are experiencing will not last forever. This includes both good and bad moods, and often time is one of the most important parts of dealing with a distressing mood.

This book, and the techniques we will show you, will help you to work out why you feel the way you do. It will help you to discover the reasons behind some of your thoughts and the reason you are experiencing a feeling. It will also describe, and walk you through, some effective techniques to help you deal with these mood issues. If, however, your mood is impacting in a serious way on

your life, you should seek professional advice. This book is not a replacement for medical and psychological care when that is necessary.

Fundamental principles

I will be using some of the key principles that I use in my work; they will help you to explore your feelings, look at the consequences of your mood, and hopefully develop some strategies to feel good. The fundamental principles that I start with are listed in the box below. Knowledge, or content, is what you say or the actual verbatim words you use. It is overt and extrinsic. But of course, this is often less interesting than what is going on underneath, the subtext or other meaning you can establish from delivering the words.

Principles of therapy

- The attitudes and concepts are more important than the knowledge.
- An empathic response is the only way forward – for others and indeed yourself.
- All behaviour has a function.
- Collaboration is the way.
- Remember content and process.

As an example you may say “I really like going to work”. The words are the “content” of the message. “Process” is everything else: tone, syntax and semantics, and conveys a meaning intrinsically. The statement above could be phrased as a question if there is a rising tone at the end of the sentence, or as a statement of fact. The

process or way you speak the statement guides the listener to the next step, and if phrased as a question leads you to attempt to answer the question. If you fail to show enthusiasm when conveying your exclamation about going to work, or you often come in late or call in sick for work, then the process says a lot more than the content. So is the statement "I really like going to work" correct? You can use the understanding of process to develop insight into the situation, and to respond accordingly.

The hardest parts to therapy are being attentive to the feelings of the client: listening. In this book you will learn the skills of listening to yourself, gaining insight in a way that involves warmth and genuineness. There are reasons you do what you do or as many therapists say "Behaviour is functional". When I sit with a person in therapy they often present a list of symptoms, sometimes in a letter from their doctor. These allow me to give you a direction and we talk about what these symptoms mean to you. This collaboration is the way therapy works, and this book will allow a similar collaborative effort to develop.

How you can use this book

The content of the book is important but it is not the main aspect of what we hope you will achieve by reading it. To get the most out of this experience, we suggest reading a chapter per week to allow enough time to play with some of the concepts you have read. Allow yourself the time to think about the relevance each chapter has to you, explore the concepts and engage in the techniques introduced throughout.

With help from Graham, I will detail the latest research and you will use evidence-based strategies to make the changes required using a simple "post-it" note technique. You will also find helpful

boxes throughout, marked with a hot-air balloon icon, which offer insightful scientific material which supports the techniques and learning you will develop along the way.



Some might say that this represents being filled with hot air, but I like to think it is a symbol that is going places, exactly as I hope you will be during this book. A lesson in metaphor I guess.

Using the “post-it” note technique

My first supervisor had a powerful intellect. He always made progress with the most difficult problems, and with the hardest cases, by moving with his clients to a point of hope. Where there was light at the end of the tunnel. He did this by condensing all his knowledge on a discipline and a subject to a simple “post-it” note. We will use “post-it” notes in this book to remind you of what techniques to practise.

The “post-it” note strips away any pretence at being too intellectual or clever in addressing very complex problems you face. People have a short attention span and often this is out of necessity. Your world may be traumatic and requires you to look everywhere for threats, seemingly at the same time. By being concise, the unnecessary aspects to theory and any hyperbole are removed, leaving the honest and open discussion about your problem at hand. Once you master the skill, you can move on. Now let’s get started with our first “post-it” note technique on the next page.

Each chapter covers a different type of mood

At this point, a descriptive list of feelings and emotions would seem a simple way for you to map your mood to the chapters.

"Post-it" note technique

On a "post-it" note, write down a few words or sentences on why you bought this book, or why you picked it off the shelf. Or perhaps someone else bought this book for you; what do you think they wanted you to explore? You could write down your most important goals. What do you hope to achieve by reading this book?

Take some time over this, give it some thought. You may wish to improve your overall mood, or there may be parts of your life that you wish to be improved. For example, I would write down that I want to strike a better balance between my work and family life. But what you write will be personal to you. This exercise may feel uncomfortable, but please persevere.

Now put the note somewhere safe. You might leave it in this book, or stick it up in a room in your house. As the weeks go by and you become more self-aware, you may want to add to this note, or change it.

Unfortunately this is oversimplifying a complex series of issues and you won't benefit from this book using that approach. I must ask you to indulge me by spending time reading each chapter to gain maximum benefit.

Chapter 2 focuses on your hopes for your future, by looking at how questioning your beliefs and thoughts can help you achieve your goal to feel good. It will help you to assess how sound your thoughts are which is the basis of the theories we use.

Anger is a normal emotion for humans, as it is an essential skill used for survival. Anger becomes a problem when it is not managed properly and Chapter 3 deals with this issue.

Chapter 4 discusses some of the strengths you have, and your belief in your capabilities, which is referred to as self-efficacy. Strengthening your self-efficacy will lead to improvements in your achievements, and allow you to improve your mood.

Chapter 5 explores distress and ways to deal with it. The word distress is sometimes used interchangeably with the word stress. However as you will discover this is not strictly correct. A life with no stress is impossible but you will learn how to avoid it impacting negatively on you and therefore causing distress.

The identification and strategies for dealing with low mood, or depression as it is sometimes called, are in Chapter 6 “Unhappiness”. Depression is the sadness a person experiences when they think about earlier life experiences or their future. It is a lethargy that permeates the soul of the person and marks their thinking. This chapter will outline how depression influences a person’s thinking in the most negative of ways.

Your feeling of well-being, explored in Chapter 7, tries to bring out in you positive ways to improve your feelings about your achievements and where you are. Chapter 8 will help you to examine your self-esteem, and to develop ways to improve this mood. These two features of your mood have been repeatedly connected with good health and quality of life.

Chapters 9 and 10 are designed to consolidate the techniques you have been developing and to introduce some methods to improve your mood and well-being. These involve techniques such as mindfulness, sleep hygiene and relaxation methods. And round-

ing this all off in Chapter 11 I will ask you to see how far you have come. You will realize the distance travelled over the course of working through the book.

Myths around mood are harmful

Why am I introducing myths at this point? Some myths are traditions, accepted ways of doing things that are often unquestioned. Many of these myths, at their core, are mistaken beliefs that are shown to be false through evidence.

A common myth around mood issues is believing a person should "get on with it", show a "stiff upper lip", or "pull their socks up". Through self-improvement, accessing treatment where required, gaining support from friends and family and just living their life, many people are showing a level of achievement which is commendable and should not be minimized. Some people think that having mood problems is equivalent to having a weak mind. I wonder if those same people would have the courage to continue holding onto that myth of a weak mind after a discussion with Churchill who suffered from his own problems with low mood.

More extreme myths lead to people with more serious issues being painted as violent, or incompetent. These simplistic notions end up making people feel objectified, not a person anymore but a scary monster to be feared or ridiculed. It affects a person's view of themselves, and when a person accepts these prejudiced views, people who need real help are reluctant to seek treatment, or withdraw from life. The person's self-worth suffers. Attitudes such as these usually involve inaccurate information, with the outcomes being hurtful depictions in the media or as the subject of jokes.

Starting to deal with mood issues begins with respect for yourself

How you acquire self-respect can be as simple as using respectful language both when talking about others but especially about yourself. Things such as “a person who has diabetes” is more respectful than labelling a person “diabetic”. Of course this is not about the issues around controlling your glucose, but it is important that society, and you, recognize that labels can lead to problems. By emphasizing abilities, you highlight strength, identify opportunities and are not constrained by the language of limitation.

When you do not respect yourself, this can lead to many difficulties, which some people describe as the “sick role”. Talcott Parsons described this first, in 1951, where being “sick” was perceived as having benefits for the person, giving an individual a reason for not completing their various responsibilities. It is easy to take on this attitude when there is no visible injury, but the person reports a low mood. If you think in terms of people looking to benefit from some low mood, or the sick role, then it is a slippery slope ending in labels such as “waster” or “slack” to describe people that do not seem to be able to operate at their full capability.

A common belief is that “if I can’t see it then it doesn’t exist”. Although your mind does not have a cast on it like a broken leg would, when a person suffers a mood issue, they need the same kind of support a pair of crutches can bring. For the mind to really heal, it requires weeks if not months of care and attention to learn and implement the strategies required to manage your mood.

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy may help

You might have heard the phrase “you think the way you feel”. Your thoughts and beliefs determine your emotions and, in many cases,

your behaviours. In Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) this can be explained with the ABC model. An activating event (A) initiates a belief (B) and a belief causes an emotion or other consequence (C). Therefore, your thoughts and beliefs determine your emotions and, in many cases, your behaviours. This is a difficult concept to understand, let alone apply. It is a process that takes time whilst simultaneously dealing with distress. It has been compared to juggling a whole lot of burning torches and I say "in order for you to extinguish the torches and stop juggling, you first must read a book on how to juggle and extinguish torches, all the while you are still juggling."

CBT looks at the strategies and mechanisms of change. One way it does this is by looking at the causes of behaviours and describing the change processes themselves. This could help you to handle the process of change and to engage in effective behaviour to feel good. CBT also hopes to improve motivation to reach goals. While doing this, it aims to decrease the thoughts and emotions that interfere with helpful behaviours. Through this process you increase your distress tolerance and hopefully you move more of your helpful behaviours from just intentions, to the broader world and your life.

CBT uses interventions such as getting you to measure your thoughts, feelings and behaviours. It uses problem solving and exposure strategies to change the process and reactions you have. One of the major aspects to CBT is cognitive modification or changing your thoughts.

A different way of thinking

CBT is a change technology, but there are many disadvantages and traps to applying this technology. The traps are that I must avoid arguing with you about the beliefs you hold dear. As detailed

above, these beliefs are encased in a fortress of past experiences, many of them distressing, a fear of the future and a belief that there is nothing worth doing anyway. When someone says they are bad and do not deserve good things, it is very hard for me to not reinforce that being judgemental saying “no, you are a good person.”

These change processes identify thinking that is unhelpful. To challenge the use of these thoughts does not motivate you to change by itself and does not, on its own, resolve issues with mood. To change your mood takes time. It often involves using a thought to deal with a feeling. In this book we offer a simpler and easier way to manage your mood.

It will introduce methods that have been proposed from argumentative theory. This is based on the fact that humans are not good at using reasoning alone to make decisions. Such decisions will be based on bias and produce a poor outcome and we will explore the ways you should examine your decisions, and how these impact on your mood.

Moods impact on well-being and health

What are the consequences of poor mood management? Why should you be concerned with your anger, or your anxiety? A person may think and believe that the world is a dark place, filled with disappointment or, in the case of anxiety, danger at every turn. The world itself has too many obstacles and too few positive aspects to sustain them. If this person is asked about their future, again the hopeless feelings emerge and a perceived lack of problem-solving and “people skills” are added to the list of crimes this person believes they are guilty of. This leads to further isolation and avoidance.

The consequences differ between the various mood issues you may have, but when people manage their moods poorly there are serious impacts for the individual, their friends and family, and society as a whole. Negative moods can lead to rumination, where you are obsessed with physical symptoms of your mood, rather than the cause. A person might have serious problems with depression, anxiety or anger.

A particularly difficult consequence of a negative mood can be the problems a person may face in making decisions and using their judgement. This can lead to further anxiety about the "wrong" decision being made and increase the downward spiral. Others may be dealing with social relationships in a negative or even destructive way. A person with low mood may be using, unconsciously, strategies to evoke support and feedback from their loved ones. Or, in others, the opposite strategy of closing themselves off may be used. This can create distance and frustrations in people who may be part of their support network.

This book aims to empower you

The main aim of this book is the delivery of content. However, the exercises you do, the thoughts you have and write on the "post-it" notes are often where you will learn most about yourself, your interpersonal relationships and how you change over time.

As you read through this book, you might well think "this isn't rocket science you know". I take this as a compliment. To me it is a job well done, apart from the way your own mood is now better managed, it means the insight and understanding you have will better serve you when you are challenged again or when you hear a friend experiencing similar problems.

Either way, we hope that by the end of the book, you will feel able to implement the changes you wish to make and also take the next step on your journey; whether like mine it involved writing a book or fulfilling some grand dream of your own. You may need to take a chance to benefit from the risks you have gambled on, and this may be the start of your personal journey. You may need to show courage in placing yourself in a vulnerable position, but

“Post-it” note technique

In therapy, outrageous as this may seem, it is possible to use a single session to make significant progress. It cannot be used with very serious issues, and there are benefits for everyone to spend time contemplating an issue. But, a solution-focused single session therapy assumes that there is one session to make change: one shot.

This method can help you begin developing your strategies for change. I know you haven't yet explored your issues, I will do that later, but I would like you to consider how confident you are that you will be able to attain your goal or goals whatever they may be.

On the “post-it” note from the first technique above, write your confidence in attaining your objective out of ten for each goal, with zero being not at all confident and ten being as confident as you can be. Don't worry if your confidence is low. The aim is to improve your confidence as you work through this book.

in doing this you are able to draw on your wealth of experience that will see you overcome amazing odds.

You are now ready to proceed. Take your time with each chapter, and aim to spend at least a week on each chapter to allow the material to sink in and for you to give it some consideration.

