

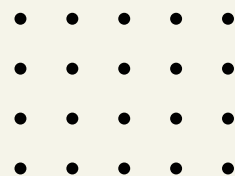
LIFEHACK

Expand your toolbox of life skills and strengthen your mental wellbeing



Main Module


Boost your mood





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How to Use this Workbook

LifeHack is a self-help programme in which you learn various life skills for all sorts of situations you might encounter in life. This program is based on Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and consists of reading material and interactive exercises. Four domains are covered: your emotional well-being, your studies, your social life and your self-esteem.

Each domain consists of one main module and two related optional modules. The best way to do the programme is to complete one domain per week by doing the main module and any of the optional modules that seem relevant to you. Therefore, the whole programme will take approximately 4 to 6 weeks.

You can find a list of resources in the community [here](#) when you need support. Counselling and Psychological services are available at HKU for current students. It is free-of-charge, professional and confidential. Don't hesitate to seek help if needed.

Enquiries and Feedback
CEDARS – Counselling and Person Enrichment Section (CoPE)
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Main Module

Boost your mood

Introduction

Most of us prefer feeling good in life. And while it's definitely not possible (or necessary!) to be happy all the time, we also aren't completely powerless over our emotions. Most people don't know that there are ways to influence how we feel, but in this module you're going to learn those secrets.

So after today you will...

- Understand how our emotions are linked to (and can be influenced by) our thoughts and behaviour
- Learn 3 hacks to manage or influence your emotions



Before we get into it: describe your personal goal(s) with regards to your mood. What would you like to achieve after doing this module? (answer A)

Let's go!

Emotion interconnectedness

Did you know that research has identified hundreds of different emotions? People seem to be great at feeling feelings, which is wonderful - until they turn negative and start bothering us.

Most people think that their feelings are caused by the situation they are in. Something happens, and that causes you to feel a certain way, right? Well, not exactly. It turns out that our feelings are generally **not** caused by our circumstances (barring extreme and life-threatening ones), but **rather by our thoughts and our behaviours**.


The link between thoughts and feelings

Imagine you asked a new friend to hang out this Saturday via Whatsapp. You can see your message has been read (blue checkmarks), but there's been no response for a day...

How would you feel in this situation?

Here are a few possible ways to feel in this situation. For example, see why each person feels that way.

Jaina would feel rejected	She thinks the fact that they haven't responded clearly shows that they don't want to hang out. They probably don't really like me after all...
Maria would feel understanding	She thinks I'm also really slow to respond to Whatsapp messages, I'm sure they'll get back to me when they have the time.
Ishtar would feel hopeful	She thinks we really hit it off last time we hung out, so I'm pretty sure they will want to hang out again. They probably just forgot to reply or something.



As you can see: people who think negative thoughts (Jaina), also feel negative feelings, whereas positive thoughts lead to positive feelings (Ishtar).

Take another look at the feelings you wrote above. Why do you think you feel that way; what kinds of thoughts went through your mind?

The link between behaviour and feelings

Meet Nell. Nell is an introvert who is very shy and nervous about speaking to strangers. One day, Nell goes to a party, and this is where the timeline splits.

What happens in timeline A?

Nell does what comes naturally: she sticks to herself, sits quietly in a corner and leaves the party within an hour. She has a terrible experience and feels pretty bad about herself afterwards.

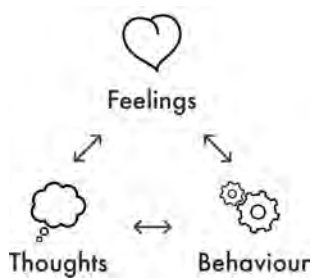
What happens in timeline B?

Nell really pushes herself to get out of her comfort zone: she goes up to talk to some friendly looking people, gets on the dancefloor (which is awkward at first but it soon gets better), and ends up staying at the party for several hours. She was quite anxious at first, but eventually actually had fun and she feels very proud of herself.

Again: the person and the situation are the same, but the feelings are very different. And in this case, it's because of the actions Nell did or didn't take.

Can you describe a situation in which you pushed yourself, and ended up feeling better because of it?

The interconnectedness of thoughts, behaviours and feelings



As you can see from these examples, the situation itself doesn't change - yet people still feel differently about it depending on their thoughts and behaviours. This simple model shows the interconnectedness of these three aspects: emotions, thoughts and behaviour all influence each other.

Thoughts can evoke certain **emotions** and cause certain **behaviour**

Behaviour can evoke certain **emotions** and lead to certain **thoughts**

Emotions can cause certain **behaviour** and lead to certain **thoughts**



These three elements are basically interconnected gears: turning one will automatically turn the others!

So then the way to influence our emotions becomes very clear: we need to tweak our thoughts or change our behaviour. And now you're now going to learn how :)

The thoughts gear



First, we're going to tell you about 2 'thought-centered' hacks to boost your mood.

Hack #1: Happy little thoughts

The first hack is to purposefully add positivity to your daily life. Here's two ways you can try out.

Positivity cards



The first way is through so-called positivity cards. With this technique you create a collection of physical, tangible positive thoughts by following these steps:

1. Have several small cards or pieces of paper ready to write on (you can cut up some A4 paper or use post-its), and find something the cards can go in, such as a bowl or box.
2. Take some time to think about the positive things in your life, such as what you're good at, are grateful for, things you appreciate or enjoy. You can also ask friends or family what they like about you.
3. Now write as many positive thoughts on the cards as possible, one thought per card. Put all the positive cards in the bowl or box. Keep going until you have at least 20!
4. Place the bowl or box somewhere in sight, and grab a random card every day. Then take a minute to contemplate what the thought on the card means to you.
5. Keep expanding your collection: every time you come up with a new positive thought, add it to the bowl or box. This way you're adding more and more positivity to your life!

NEXT LEVEL HACK

Any time someone visits you, ask them to add a positive card about you to the collection, such as a happy memory together or something they like about you (without showing you!). That way, sometimes you'll find a happy surprise!

Examples of positivity cards

- I'm physically healthy
- My parents love me
- I have great friends
- I'm doing well at uni
- I like my smile
- I'm very considerate
- Dogs make me happy
- I like painting
- I like my room
- I'm good at organising
- I'm happy with the studies I picked
- I love watching old Friends episodes

Gratitude journal

Many people tend to focus more on what they don't have, than what they do have. This technique is aimed at drawing more attention to what you're grateful for and increasing your positivity levels that way.

Now think about your life for a minute. Consider all the different aspects: family, friends, romance, work, education, health, hobbies, finances, and whatever else is going on in your life. What are you grateful for? Don't focus solely on the huge things, there are lots of smaller things to be grateful for too and the key to positivity lies in noticing these smaller things.



Write down at least 5 things to be grateful for:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Examples of smaller things to be grateful for

- The sun is shining today
- I had a lovely talk with my close friend
- I had fun playing a video game
- My favourite TV show is on today
- I feel fit and healthy
- My partner got me a gift last week
- I'm working on a really interesting project right now
- I enjoyed practicing my hobby today

Keep a gratitude journal: take a few minutes every day to write down 3 to 5 things you're grateful for, for example in a notebook or on your phone (you can even look for a free app!).

The longer you do this, the more you'll notice the small, daily things to be grateful for.



Hack #2: Fact checking

The second hack in the 'thoughts gear' has to do with minimizing the effect our **negative** thought have on our emotions. An effective 3-step strategy for dealing with these negative thoughts is called 'Fact checking' - which means exactly what it sounds like: to check the facts and gain a more realistic (less negative!) picture of the situation.

Let's go over each of the 3 steps.

Step 1. Identify the emotion

Putting a finger on the exact emotion you're feeling is the first step to fact checking. Let's practice this: think of a recent situation or event in which you felt some sort of negative emotion.

Describe the situation itself: what happened exactly? (answer B)

What was the exact emotion you felt in this situation?

There could also be several. (answer C)

Having trouble pinpointing the exact feeling?

Then you can use the emotion wheel. Start by selecting the main category (the inner ring), then the subcategory (middle ring) and then pick your exact emotion (outer ring). Note that not ALL feelings are in this wheel, so it's perfectly okay to write down a feeling that's not on the wheel.

Step 2. Find the thoughts

Next, you've got to figure out what might be causing that emotion. As you saw earlier, it's often related to our interpretation of a situation and the thoughts we have about it. Check out this video on how our thoughts influence our feelings ([The video transcript is available on p.20](#)):



Go back to answer B & C on p.9 to recap the situation and the emotions you felt.

What triggered this emotion? What negative thoughts did you have about the situation? If you need a bit more help in identifying the thoughts, check out the examples below.

Write down all the negative thoughts you had about this situation.

Common negative thoughts

Thoughts about yourself: I'm not good enough, I can't do this, etc

Thoughts about what others will think: I'm going to look like an idiot, people don't like me, etc

Thoughts about the future: I'm never going to pass this class, I'm not going to make any new friends, etc

Jaina's example:

She thinks "The fact that they haven't responded clearly shows that they don't want to hang out. They probably don't really like me after all..."

Step 3. Check the facts

The third step is to check whether your thoughts are factual, or whether they contain assumptions. Most of our negative thoughts are riddled with inaccuracies and bias.

Common inaccuracies in our thoughts

All or nothing thinking	You see things in black and white categories, either perfect or utterly horrible and use words like always, never, all, totally, everyone and no-one. "My paper totally sucks!"
Fortune telling	Assuming you know what's going to happen in the future. "I'm going to fail this test anyway" or "I'll never get over this".
Mind reading	Assuming you know other people's thoughts and feelings without them having told you. "My project partner probably didn't like the work I did on our project."
Only noticing the negative	You ignore the positive things about the situation and focus only on the negatives. You did a presentation and got both positive and constructive feedback, but you think about the criticism over and over again and 'forget' the positive feedback.
Exaggeration	You blow the consequences and influences of your problems out of proportion. Small things become big disasters. "If I don't have a high enough grade average, I won't get a good job!"
Labeling	Labeling yourself (or others) based on shortcomings, instead of separating the situation or action from your identity. For example, making a mistake and thinking "I'm such an idiot." instead of "I made a mistake".
Jumping to conclusions	You see someone do something (behaviour), and infer what they must be thinking or why they do that thing (their motivation). Someone checks their watch and you think: "They must be bored of me."
Personalization	Taking the blame for things when they're not connected to or caused by you at all. "They didn't smile at me, I must've done something wrong."

Take another look at Jaina's thoughts when her new friend didn't instantly reply to her message. Can you uncover some of the assumptions and thinking errors in this thought before reading the answer?

"The fact that they haven't responded clearly shows that they don't want to hang out. They probably don't really like me after all..."

Assumptions:

- They didn't respond because they didn't want to hang out. This is the mind reading inaccuracy, and jumping to conclusions.
- This is very clear (i.e. there can be no other explanation). Thinking in absolutes, like all or nothing thinking.
- Which means the person does not like me. Seeing behaviour but inferring motivation, classic jumping to conclusions.




But none of these assumptions are based on facts. The only actual fact is that there hasn't been a response yet, but why that is or what it says about the relationship is completely made up.

Now look at your own thought(s) on [p.11](#) again.

Analyse the thought(s): which parts are factual and which parts aren't? Ask yourself questions like:

- Is there another side to the story?
- Is the thought exaggerated?
- What assumptions is the thought based on?
- Does it include predictions about the future?
- Does the thought draw premature conclusions?
- What would I say to a close friend if they had this thought?



Now formulate 3 (or more) arguments and reasons why the thought is not (totally) true:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Lastly, use these arguments to formulate a more nuanced, realistic thought. What is the new thought? (there can be several):

Jaina's example

Jaina comes up with 3 arguments against her negative thought:

- I don't know for a fact what this person thinks or feels.
- There could be all sorts of reasons for the delay, such as ... and ...
- I will not blame myself for all the bad things that happen.

Her new thought is: "Unless they tell me they don't want to hang out, I will not assume they don't like me. There is probably a good explanation for the lack of reaction, so I'll wait a bit longer. If there's no response tomorrow, I'll send another message to ask whether they forgot to reply."

So to recap...

You have now learned the lifehack of 'fact checking'! Here are the steps one more time:

- Identify the emotion
- Find the thoughts
- Check the facts and formulate a more realistic thought

The behaviour gear

Now that we've worked on the 'thoughts' gear, we can work on the 'behaviour' gear, which is the second way to influence how we feel. And we're going to do that with an amazing hack called 'opposite action'.

Hack #3: Opposite action

This hack is actually very literal: opposite action means acting opposite to how we feel like acting in situations we're not quite happy. Check out some examples below. For each example, take a second to think of an opposite action yourself before reading the opposite action.

Examples	Opposite Action
You're afraid of something and try to avoid it.	Going towards the thing you're afraid of, or exposing yourself to it more.
You're embarrassed of a mistake you made and want to hide it away.	Sharing your experience with others.
You're feeling sad or down and want to stay in bed all day.	Going out to do any kind of activity.

Remember Nell?

She was an introvert at a party who pushed herself to talk to talk people and get on the dancefloor. This is the textbook example of opposite action: she went against her natural inclination to quietly sit in a corner. And it paid off: she had fun and felt proud of herself.



Let's practice this using the same situation you described earlier. (refer to answer B on p.9)

In which you felt this way: (refer to answer C on p.9)

When you were in that situation, and feeling that way, how did you feel like acting? What was your natural inclination?

Now define the opposite action for this behaviour. This doesn't have to be only 1 action, there can be several opposite actions too.



Next time you're in an unpleasant situation, remember this hack and try it out. If you really go for it (don't half-ass!), it almost always works to make you feel better!





Barriers to taking action

We know, we know... Taking action can sometimes be easier said than done. There is no 1 simple, foolproof method to changing our behaviour, but here are some general tips:

- **Uncover your barriers**

What exactly is stopping you from performing the behaviour? Perhaps you worry about what others might think, or about failing, or something else. After pinpointing the barrier (in 99% of cases these will be certain negative thoughts) you can apply the 'fact checking' technique from the previous chapter to challenge the barrier.

- **Start small**

Think of the smallest possible thing you could do (so it doesn't feel so daunting) and build your way up.

- **Plan and practice**

Decide exactly what and when you want to do it, and if possible do a testrun (such as practicing a behaviour with someone you trust first).

- **Decide that fear or worry won't rule your actions**

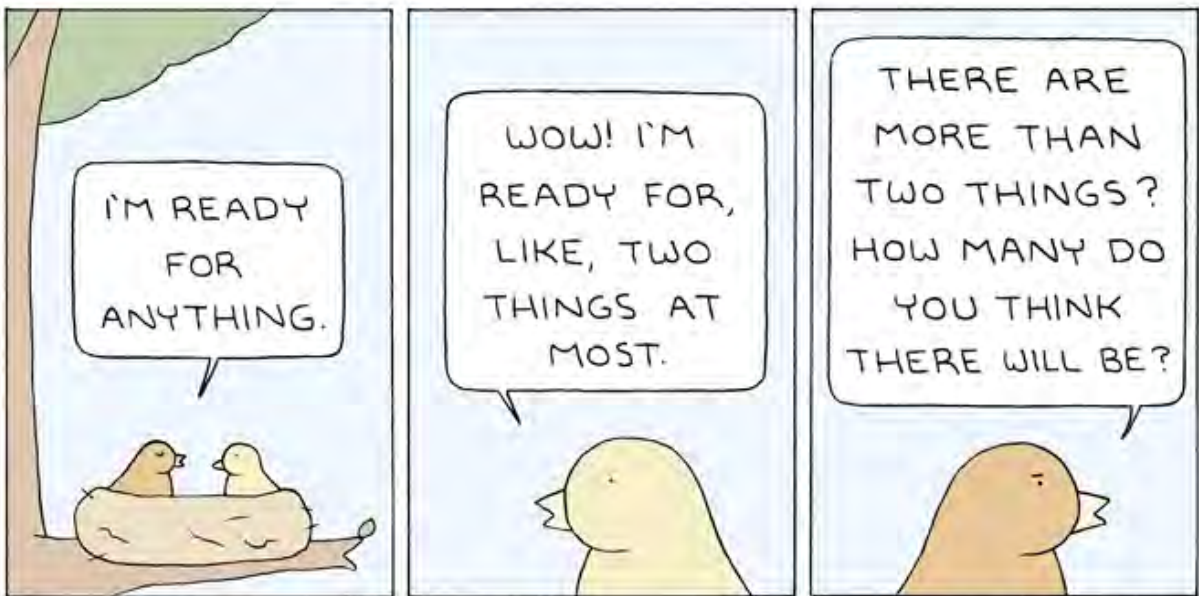
No matter how much you prepare, the moment as you're about to do the thing will always be uncomfortable - if you wait for that to go away you'll never actually do something. Instead, when you feel the fear, decide that you will be able to handle whatever happens and do it anyway.

Now use these tips to ensure that you will take the opposite action you defined above.

What barriers might you face and how can you overcome them?

Anything else can you do to make yourself take the opposite action? Use the tips above.

And with that, you are ready!



Comic by Poorly Drawn Lines

Hack wrap-up



You made it all the way to the end, awesome!

Now let's take a look back at what you said at the beginning of this module.

Go to answer A on p.2 to recap what you wanted to achieve with regards to your mood.

How will you move forward with this goal, using the tips from this module?

This module in bullets:

- Emotions are not caused by the situation we're in, but rather by our thoughts and behaviours.
- You can influence your emotions by changing your thoughts and/or your behaviour.
- Hack #1: Added positivity. Keep positivity cards or a gratitude journal to infuse a bit of good mood into every day.
- Hack #2: Fact checking thoughts. Name the emotion, find the negative thoughts that caused it, check whether those thoughts are fact or assumption and come up with a more realistic thought.
- Hack #3: Opposite action. Act opposite to how you feel like acting to elicit a different emotional response.

Optional mood-related modules unlocked!



We recommend continuing with the ones that are relevant for you straight away and keep the momentum going!

Stress less & relax more - because uni can be stressful and you don't want to let that stress escalate

'Healthify' your lifestyle (diet, exercise, sleep) - because feeling good physically also impacts our mood positively

What did you think of this module? Please let us know your views [here](#).

Supplementary information

Video transcript of "Automatic Thoughts"

This is how our automatic thoughts influence how we feel.

Oftentimes, feelings aren't caused by what's happening to us (even though it might seem that way), but they're actually triggered by our thoughts.

Imagine this situation: a friend doesn't reply for days when you text to ask them to hang out. You might think: 'They don't want to hang out with me' and feel a little rejected. But what if you thought "Exams are coming up, they're probably really busy". Or even "Maybe their phone got stolen by a pickpocket". Would you still feel hurt?

Or another situation: you were supposed to be on a date, but the other person never showed up. You'd probably be very angry: 'What a *bleep* this person is!' But what if you thought "Public transport has been really unreliable lately, maybe they got delayed." Or even "I hope they didn't get in a traffic accident on the way here!". Would you still feel the same?

As you can see from these examples, our thoughts about a situation often dictate how we feel, and not the situation itself. And the key to changing the way we feel, can sometimes be changing the way we think