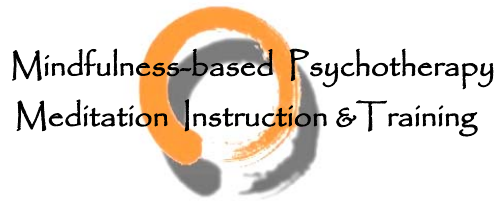


Montclair Health Associates



A Comprehensive Weight-Loss Program for
Children and his/her Family



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I Should be Happy

Happiness is, and isn't, what you think

When you think, *I should be happy*, do you feel better? Most people do not. Most of us focus on the difference between how we are feeling and how we *want* to feel. This difference leads to rumination, a self-critical pattern in which we replay negative thoughts over and over.

Most people with depressed mood suffer from this cycle of thinking. Once sad, unhappy, or negative feelings make their way into our thoughts they produce two major effects: First, we feel more unhappy leading to a worsening mood; Secondly, because of our depressed mood, we focus on our deficiencies- what is wrong with us- and what we have to do about it. It's like a dreadful play being acted out in front of us: we don't want to watch, but we can't turn away either. This usually sounds like, *"What is wrong with me? I should be happy. Why am I so weak?"* Our negative thinking has become automatic.

Unhappiness and sadness are normal feelings- an unavoidable part of being alive. They are not the same thing as depression. But when thinking reawakened by a depressed mood tells us that we are the problem, we want to get rid of those feelings right now at all costs. Even if that cost is telling ourselves something is wrong with us.

Depression starts as a reaction to a tragedy or setback in our life. If unrecognized, depression forges a connection in the brain between sad mood and negative thoughts, so that even normal sadness can reawaken major negative thought patterns. Then, even everyday difficulties can start the descent into depression.

We can learn that it isn't the events themselves that drive our emotions, but our beliefs or interpretations- what we tell ourselves about the event- that either allows us to go on, perhaps feeling appropriately temporarily sad, or, to then sink into depression. If our mood sinks, we are then even more likely to interpret things badly without any awareness of what we are doing. This is done not because there is actually something wrong with us, but because our efforts have taken us in the wrong direction. Getting out of depression requires new skills that take us in the right direction.

How to understand and work with your thinking patterns:

- Depression has four key elements: feelings, thoughts, body sensations, and behaviors, through which we respond to the events in our life.
- Every time a person gets depressed, the connection in the brain between mood, thoughts, the body, and behavior get stronger, making it easier for depression to get triggered again and again.
- Over-thinking is the problem that leads to depression, not to the solution. We blame ourselves for what we are feeling, even though we are experiencing one of many possible reactions to a given situation.
- We invite you, by learning and practicing a new effective skill, to let go of the tendency to try to force things a certain way and work with your thoughts in a new way, allowing you *freedom* from depression.