

WHY DO I FEEL SO BAD?

By Dr. Chris Williams



**Canadian Mental
Health Association**
Mental health for all

**LIVING LIFE
TO THE FULL**

Too much to do

Friends hate me

Someone close
is really sick

LOST MY JOB

FAILED
TEST OR
EXAM

We broke up

Being
bullied

BEING
SICK

NO ONE
TO TALK
TO

Best friend
ignored me

Bad day at
school / work

Got criticized

I'm all
alone

GOT KICKED
OFF THE TEAM

I've got
no money



You feel bad because you're in a vicious cycle

The way you feel is affected by things that happen to you. Like the bad things on the opposite page. Those things are all outside of you. Sometimes, you can change what's happening outside, but often, you can't do much about them.

And when you allow them to affect your mood, the vicious cycle kicks in and you feel worse and worse and worse ...



**Turn over to see
how it works**

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I'M A
TERRIBLE
FRIEND!

First, an outside event affects you

When something happens, you naturally notice it and think about it.

Example: You forget your friend's birthday

You may think "I'm a terrible friend!"

This is called Altered Thinking

Altered thinking can set off a chain reaction inside you that affects the way you feel and what you do.

When your altered thinking is negative (like "I'm a terrible friend!"), the vicious cycle is triggered and you can end up feeling really low, not getting out of bed and even feeling sick.

Let's watch the vicious cycle in action

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**ALTERED
THINKING**

**ALTERED
FEELINGS**

Being
bullied

I FEEL
GUILTY

BEING
SICK

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Altered thinking leads to altered feelings

If you think “I’m a terrible friend!” you’re going to feel pretty low, sad or guilty.

Maybe you feel as if you’ve let your friend down, or you might feel guilty because you know you should have been more organized.

So now what happens?

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TEST OR
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We broke up

**ALTERED
THINKING**

**ALTERED
FEELINGS**

Being
bullied

I'VE GOT A
STOMACH
ACHE

**ALTERED
PHYSICAL
SYMPTOMS**

NO ONE
TO TALK
TO

BEING
SICK

Best friend
ignored me

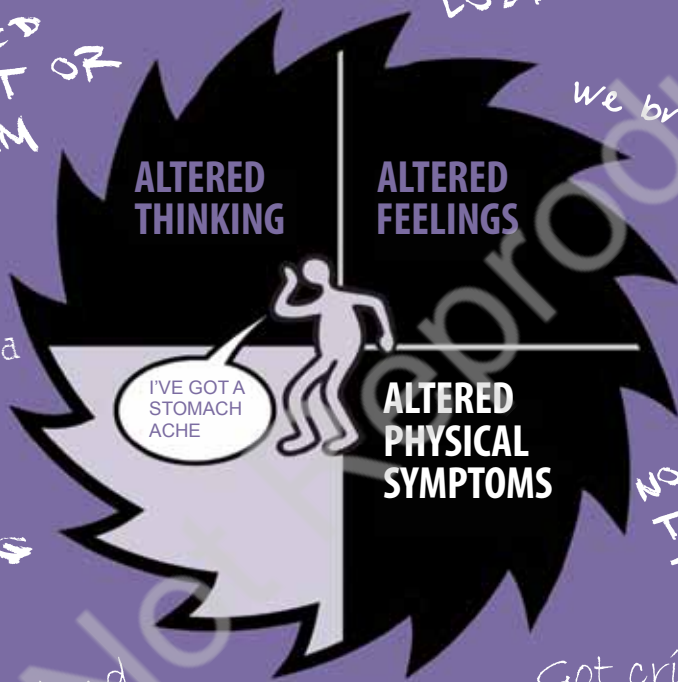
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Altered feelings lead to altered physical symptoms

When you feel low or guilty, you can get sweaty and tense and your stomach or your head can ache. Sometimes you can feel really tired.

Your hands might feel clammy, or you feel really tense and can't sit still.

Ever had a sinking feeling or felt your heart racing? It's probably that old vicious cycle spinning round!

What next?

Too much to do

Friends hate me

Someone close
is really sick

LOST MY JOB

FAILED
TEST OR
EXAM

We broke up

**ALTERED
THINKING**

**ALTERED
FEELINGS**

LEAVE ME
ALONE I'M SICK

Being
bullied

**ALTERED
BEHAVIOUR**

**ALTERED
PHYSICAL
SYMPTOMS**

NO ONE
TO TALK
TO

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Altered physical symptoms lead to altered behaviour

It's only natural. You're really tired, you have a headache or maybe feel tense, so you don't feel like going out, or even getting up. You steer clear of people who might ask if you sent a card or present. You stay in and hardly do any exercise. You're not eating right and you seem to catch all the bugs that are going around.

You even end up at the doctor's, asking why you can't seem to shake off this virus you've had for weeks.

And you know what happens then? The cycle goes round again, only this time, you're already sick, staying in bed and fed up, so you get even worse.

Vicious, these vicious cycles, aren't they?

Now for the *good* news!

**YOU
CAN
STOP
THE
CYCLE!**

You know the great thing about cycles?
They turn both ways!

In the same way that just one thing (an altered thought) led to everything else getting worse, you can start to make it better by changing one thing.

Just by eating differently or doing more exercise, or changing the way you think about some things, you can affect **all the other things in the cycle** and start to feel better.

Sounds too easy? Turn over for an example.



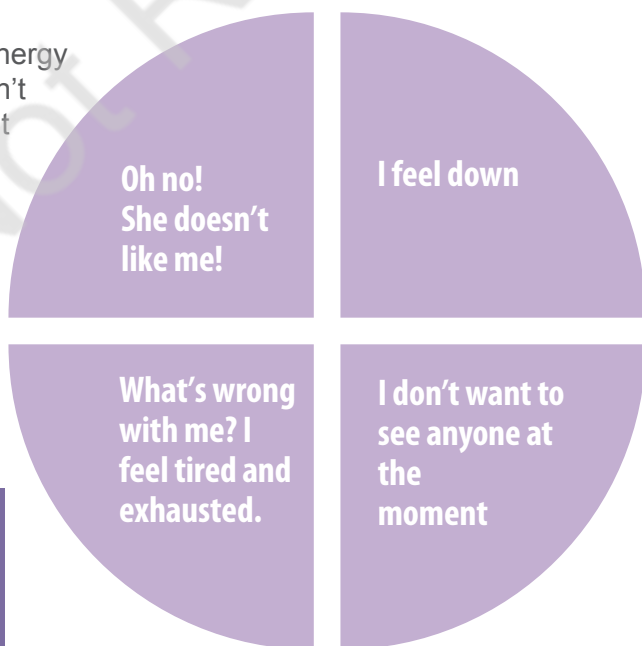
How to stop the cycle

start here

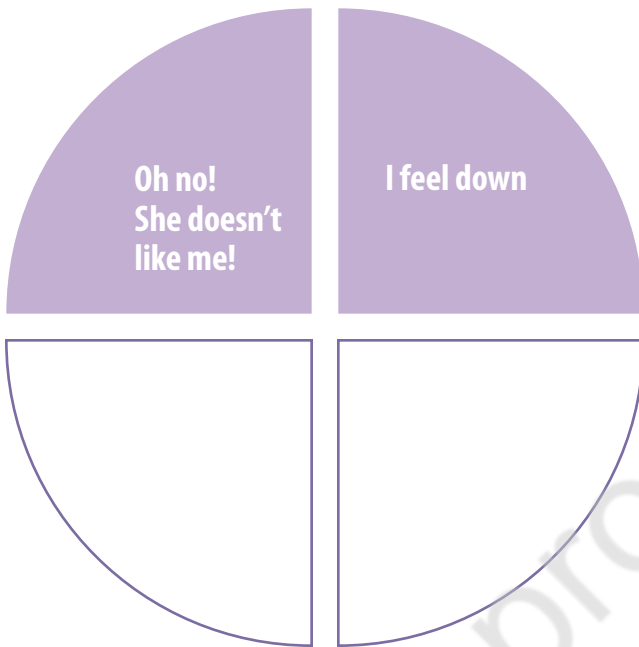
1. You're walking down the hallway at school and someone you know ignores you



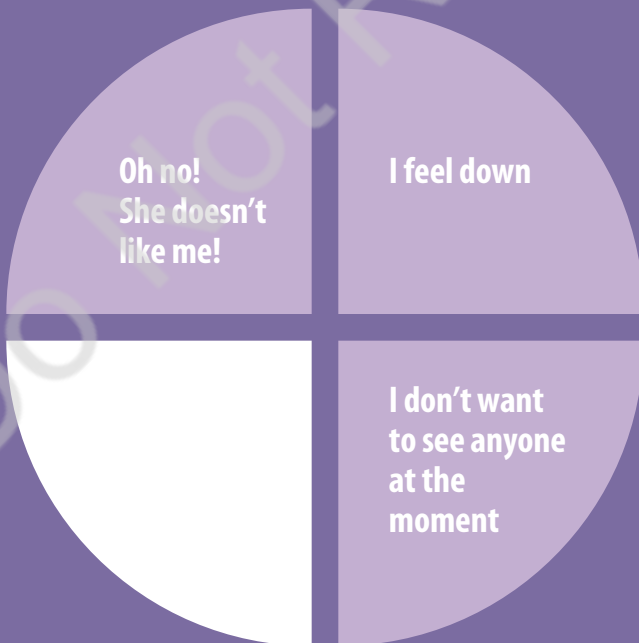
4. You have no energy and maybe can't sleep that night because you are worrying about what happened—altered physical symptoms



**Now let's
stop the
cycle!**



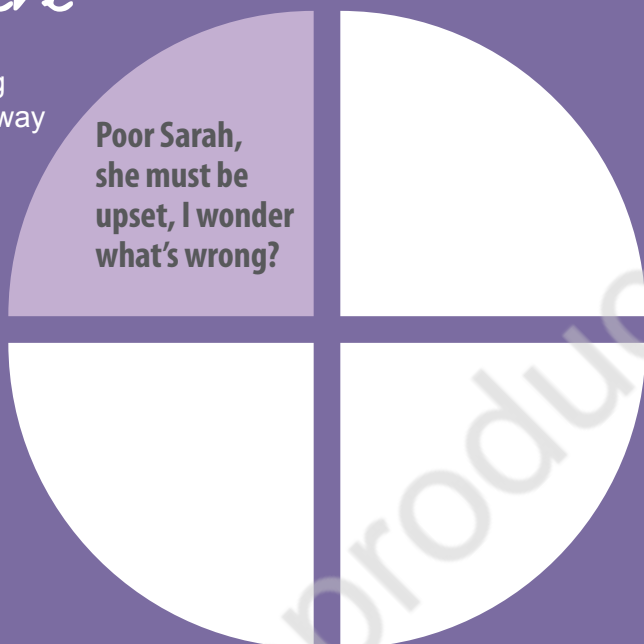
2. This makes
you feel
bad—altered
feelings



3. You go home
and avoid
other people's
company—
altered
behaviour

start here

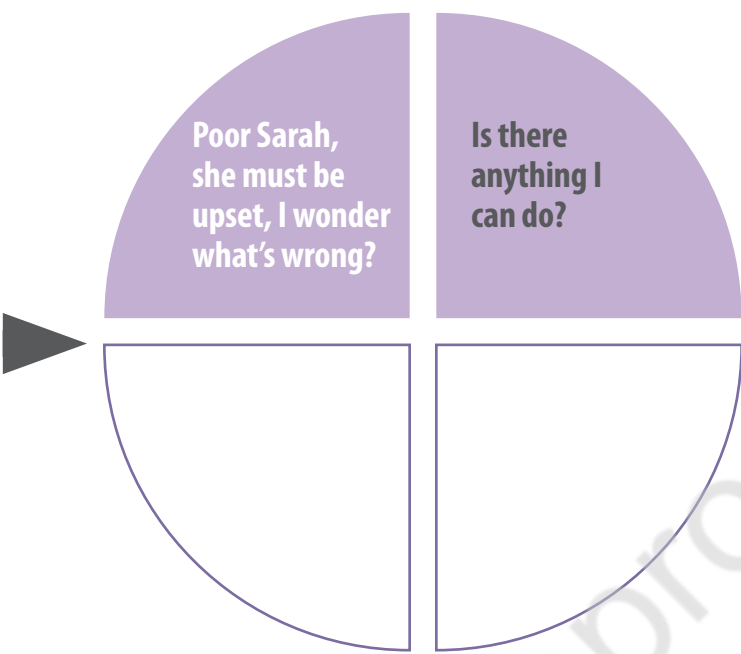
1. You're walking down the hallway at school and someone you know ignores you



4. You arrange to see Sarah later and discuss practical things you can do to help




See how it works?



**Poor Sarah,
she must be
upset, I wonder
what's wrong?**

**Is there
anything I
can do?**

- 2.** You're concerned, so you run after her and ask what's wrong



**Poor Sarah,
she must be
upset, I wonder
what's wrong?**

**Is there
anything I
can do?**

- 3.** Sarah explains and you listen like a good friend

**I feel good about
myself because
I'm helping
someone else.**

WHERE TO GET MORE ADVICE AND SUPPORT

You might find you need more resources than this booklet can give.

Try contacting your local branch of the Canadian Mental Health Association. See www.cmha.ca

You can also contact Kids Help Phone if you would like to talk to someone over the phone or online right away. See www.kidshelpphone.ca

Look out for these other resources



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**Canadian Mental
Health Association**
Mental health for all

The Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) is the most established, most extensive community mental health organization in Canada. CMHA provides advocacy and resources that help to prevent mental health problems and illnesses, support recovery and resilience, and enable all Canadians to flourish and thrive. The CMHA network includes more than 11,000 volunteers and staff in over 330 communities across Canada.

About the author

Dr. Chris Williams is a medical doctor and psychiatrist who also has a First Class Honours degree in Psychology. He is a widely recognized teacher and researcher in the area of cognitive-behavioural therapy self-help and works as a professor of psychiatry at the University of Glasgow, Scotland, UK.

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