Lovereading.co.uk
Helping you choose your next book

You loved your last book...but what are you going to read next?

Using our unique guidance tools, Love**reading** will help you find new books to keep you inspired and entertained.

Opening Extract from...

Challenging Depression and Despair

Written by Angela Patmore

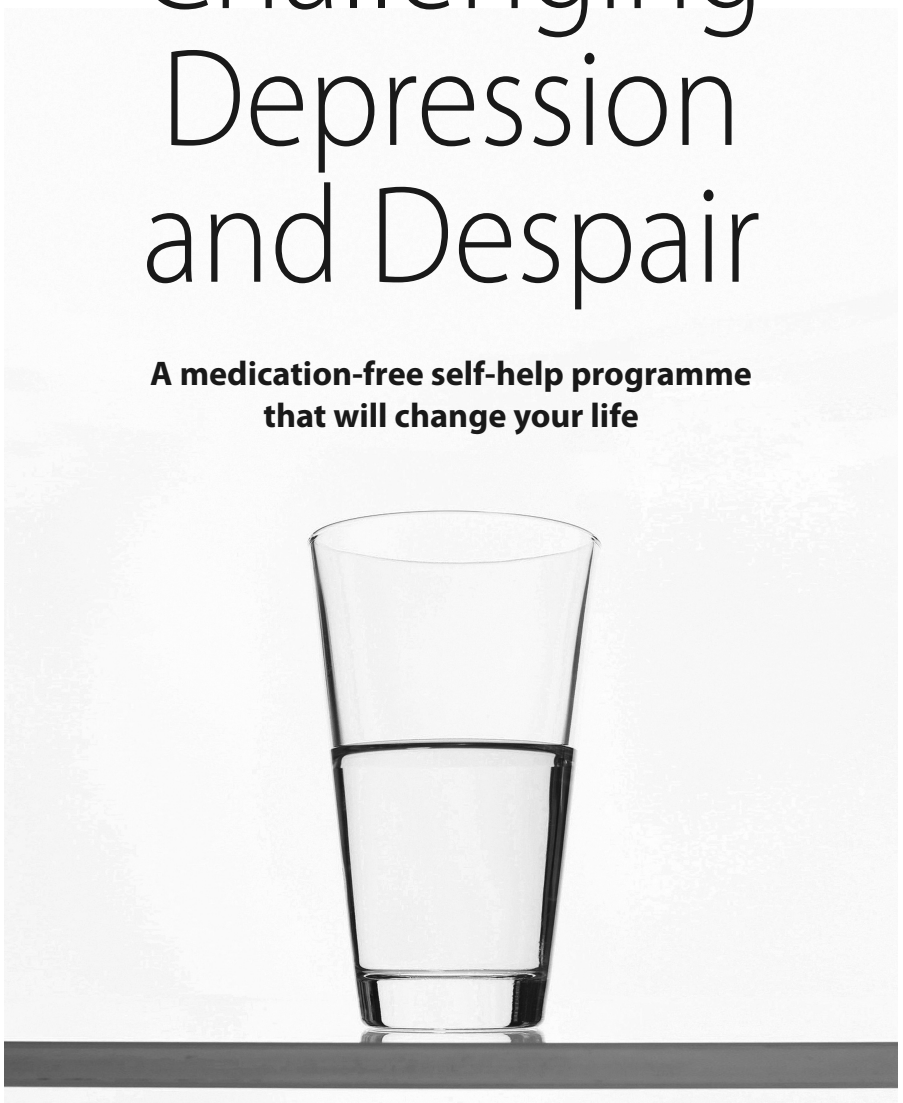
Published by How To Books Ltd

All text is copyright © of the author

This Opening Extract is exclusive to Love**reading**.
Please print off and read at your leisure.

Challenging Depression and Despair

A medication-free self-help programme that will change your life



Angela Patmore

howtobooks

To my parents

Published by How To Books Ltd,
Spring Hill House, Spring Hill Road,
Begbroke, Oxford OX5 1RX
Tel: (01865) 375794
Fax: (01865) 379162
info@howtobooks.co.uk
www.howtobooks.co.uk

How To Books greatly reduse the carbon footprint of their books by sourcing their typesetting and printing in the UK.

All rights reserved. No part of this work may be reproduced or stored in an information retrieval system (other than for purposes of review) without the express permission of the publisher in writing.

The right of Angela Patmore to be identified as author of this work has been asserted by her in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

© 2011 Angela Patmore

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-84528-439-8

Cover design by Baseline Arts Ltd, Oxford
Produced for How To Books by Deer Park Productions, Tavistock, Devon
Typeset by Baseline Arts Ltd, Oxford
Printed and bound in Great Britain by Bell and Bain Ltd, Glasgow

NOTE: The material contained in this book is set out in good faith for general guidance and no liability can be accepted for loss or expense incurred as a result of relying in particular circumstances on statements made in the book. The laws and regulations are complex and liable to change, and readers should check the current position with the relevant authorities before making personal arrangements.

Contents

Introduction … xi

Part 1 CONQUERING DEPRESSION: THE KNOWLEDGE

1. **Drugs for Despair** … 3
   - 'Pull yourself together' … 3
   - 'Out of the medicine chest into the mouth' … 4
   - 'Sunshine pills' … 5
   - Other SSRIs … 6
   - Seroxat … 7
   - And finally – how well do they work? … 7
   - Notes … 9

2. **'Is It Just Me?'** … 13
   - The depression pandemic … 13
   - To hell with that lot – what about me? … 14
   - Emotions under new management … 15
   - Are my feelings symptoms? … 16
   - Nobody understands me … 17

3. **When Words Fail You** … 21
   - Scientists 'discover' literature … 22
   - How literature 'works' … 23
   - The 'blue devils' … 24
   - Exercise … 25
   - Note … 26

4. **The 'Born Loser'** … 29
   - Mindsets of doom … 29

Deaf to all entreaties … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … 30
The 'gloom and doom' merchants … … … … … … … … … … … … 33
The Puritans and the 'castaway' … … … … … … … … … … … … 33
Defying 'fate': Daniel Defoe … … … … … … … … … … … … … 34
Exercise … 36

5. Mental Illness Labels … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … 39
The 'I need a syndrome' syndrome … … … … … … … … … … … 40
Wounding the mind … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … 43
Problems with 'PTSD' … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … 44
Notes … 46

6. The Harm of Calm … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … 49
The 'stress' business … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … 49
Sloppy science … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … 53
Notes … 57

7. Crises and Revelations… … … … … … … … … … … … … … 59
Escapist strategies … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … 59
Revelations and epiphanies … … … … … … … … … … … … … 61
'Complexity science' … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … 61
The brain's battle stations … … … … … … … … … … … … … 63
The light at the end of the tunnel … … … … … … … … … … 65
Notes … 66

8. Stop 'Giving Up the Ghost' … … … … … … … … … … … … 69
Resignation, not 'stress' … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … 70
The sting in the tail … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … 70
The helpless profile … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … 71
Helpless thinking … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … 73
How NOT to be helpless… … … … … … … … … … … … … … … 74
The need for pressure … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … 76

Bullying … 77
Notes … 78

9. Accepting Loss … 81
Coming to terms with loss … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … 81
Self-pity … 82
Types of loss … 83
Loss itself … 83
Mourning … 85
Five little lifelines … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … 86
Four-legged loss … 87

10. Going for the 'CC' … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … 89
The arousal curve … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … 90
Going for the golden feeling … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … 90
CC pursuits … 91
Assignment … 92
Thrill-seeking … 94
The arts … 95
Go on – give yourself a thrill! … … … … … … … … … … … … … … 96

11. Getting Tough … 99
Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde revisited … … … … … … … … … … … … … 99
Life skills … 101
Mental strength and weakness … … … … … … … … … … … … … 103
'Hardening' … 104
Now I'd like you to meet Esmeralda! … … … … … … … … … … … 105
Brain training made easy … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … 106
Inside the blackened room … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … 107
Note … 108

12. Meet the Advisory Panel … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … 111
The Team … 111

Part 2 BEATING DESPAIR: THE CHALLENGES

13. One: The Unblocker Challenge … … … … … … … … … … … … 119
A sense of wonder … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … 121
Why do people just sit there? … … … … … … … … … … … … … 122
Improvisation … 123
Rules for improvising … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … 124
The unblocker … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … 126
What panel members thought … … … … … … … … … … … … 127
Note … 128

14. Two: The Fitness Challenge … … … … … … … … … … … … 131
Nature and despair … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … 131
The dirty word … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … 132
Gym … 135
Swim … 135
Slim … 135
Slowly does it … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … 137
What panel members thought … … … … … … … … … … … … 137

15. Three: The Task Challenge … … … … … … … … … … … … 141
Problem-solving grids … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … 141
'Brainstorming'… … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … 145
'Oh-no' tasks … 146
What panel members thought … … … … … … … … … … … … 148

16. Four: The Social Challenge … … … … … … … … … … … … 151
Nervousness … 151
Being 'shy' … 152
Go up and talk … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … 153
Doormats and divas … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … 156
Assertiveness exercises … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … 158

Taking the social challenge … … … … … … … … … … … … … … 160
What panel members thought … … … … … … … … … … … … … 162

17. Five: The Mood Change Challenge … … … … … … … … … … 165
The 'before and after' face experiment … … … … … … … … … … 165
Emotional victims and emotional victors … … … … … … … … … 166
Engaging with the arts … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … 167
Classical music … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … 168
Great works of fiction … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … 169
Classics of the cinema … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … 171
What panel members thought … … … … … … … … … … … … … 172
Notes … 174

18. Six: The Nature Challenge … … … … … … … … … … … … 177
Big open spaces … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … 177
'Barrier beliefs' … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … 179
Record your experience … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … 180
Getting involved with Nature … … … … … … … … … … … … … 181
Gardening … 183
What panel members thought … … … … … … … … … … … … … 184
Notes … 185

19. Seven: The Performance Challenge … … … … … … … … … 187
Nerves are good, boring is bad … … … … … … … … … … … … … 187
On their hind legs … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … 187
Presentation skills … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … 190
Two kinds of presentation … … … … … … … … … … … … … … 190
Eleven tips for preparing talks … … … … … … … … … … … … … 191
Flying by the seat of your pants … … … … … … … … … … … … 193
Keeping a record … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … … 194
What panel members thought … … … … … … … … … … … … … 196

20. Eight: The Creative Challenge … 199
You *are* creative! … 199
Hemispheres … 201
Imagination … 201
Off with the fairies … 203
Originality … 203
The screen-staring society … 204
How to 'step aside'? … 205
What panel members thought … 206
Note … 208

21. Nine: The Fear Challenge … 211
The scared dog puzzle … 211
Phobias galore! … 212
The mouse fear … 213
Desensitisation … 215
Going towards fear … 216
Pinning down your fears … 217
Trouncing fear: the nature of the ninth challenge … 217
Psychological dares … 218
What panel members thought … 221

22. Ten: The Life Challenge … 225
The slow sedation of wants … 226
Your own motivation … 228
Dreams and goals … 229
Taking the pledge … 231

Index … 233

Introduction

Congratulations on having the courage to choose this book. Even if you were simply attracted by the title, this tells me that there is hope for you. You have the potential to benefit from the contents, because you haven't yet gone belly-up on your condition, as so many in this nannying age have been lulled into doing. It also tells me that the 'softly softly' approach to depression, kind and sympathetic though it may appear, hasn't cured you, and that you are looking for something different.

Well, you've come to the right place. This book is offered as a lifeline to people at the bottom of the bottomless pit of despair. It will explain the research and the thinking behind the 'tough love' approach, much of which may be new to you because it flies in the face of current trends, and it will culminate in a programme of ten challenges that will enable you to change your entire attitude to emotional health. Your self-empowerment will come from the knowledge of the first and the experience of the second.

When I was young, I suffered from suicidal despair, cried for days, sobbed in the street, lost all my self-respect, took an overdose, was dragged back to life and then floundered about for ages through research, training and academic degrees looking for a magic mindset that would make me happy and self-reliant.

I can tell you now that softly-softly therapies, however well intentioned, made me worse. 'Stress management' and avoidant strategies promising protection from serious problems made me helpless. Yet if someone had handed me this book when I was down, I could have been spared years of anguish. Let me save you the trouble I went through. If all else has failed, it's worth a try.

DECLARATION OF EMOTIONAL INDEPENDENCE

There are many books that medicalise your mind. This will not be one of them. Human emotions are what make us tick. The negative ones may be unpleasant, but even these are not without purpose and they are part of our normal development. Cutting-edge science on the brain suggests they are also important to our creative life. Feelings should not be 'pathologised' – turned into a disease. You can learn to *master* your negative emotions by understanding and channelling them. But you do not need a lobotomy.

Books on mental health issues tend to mollycoddle the reader. Well, you won't get any 'tea and sympathy' out of me. I am, to quote the *New Statesman*, 'widely regarded as a heartless bitch'.[1]

THE 'STRESS' OGRESS

My book on 'stress' caused a storm of controversy because it questioned the whole basis of current diagnosis and soothing treatment. Though it was shortlisted for the MIND Book of the Year Award, it did not offer to help manage anybody's 'stress'. What it recommended was removing the whole stress ideology from people's heads like a rotting tooth, so that they could feel normal again, talk about their various feelings and experiences without recourse to a medical dictionary, and find new confidence and courage to face their problems head on.

The Truth About Stress[2] said that spreading 'stress awareness' made people believe they were mentally ill when they were not, and that selling calm-down products and 'expertise' on the basis of this deception was profoundly immoral. It set out to dispel fears about negative emotions and their impact on health, offering empowerment and hope to millions of 'stress' sufferers.

DROWSY NUMBNESS

Unlike 'stress', which covers literally hundreds of different feelings and physiological states, 'depression' generally means just one thing:

A powerful, mind-destroying emptiness
that saps the strength and the will.

If you are depressed you feel as though a light has gone out in your soul. This is what the poet Keats called the 'drowsy numbness that pains the sense'[3] and it is not only disastrous to life but dangerous to health. It should not be mollified with tea and sympathy, but faced down and defeated.

Unfortunately this will not be achieved by my sitting in a pool of tears with you and saying, 'there there, poor soul, you are too delicate for this world – have another pill'. Routing your inner deadness will require courage and intelligence from you, and clear, practical, common sense, evidence-based strategies from me. Although you are unlikely to believe it until you are shown the evidence later on, 'tea and sympathy' and soothing 'stress management' may have helped to get you precisely where you are today.

Theories about abnormal psychology and psychiatry can lead to morbid introspection and self-diagnosis on the part of the patient victim, or the victimised patient. The sufferer may then be trapped in a cycle that confirms his or her status as a 'mental patient' and produces more negative thoughts, more anxiety, more symptoms and more treatment.

For anyone caught in this cycle, a new door is needed at the clinic that says:

WAY OUT AND STAY OUT!

This book will examine 'depression' in a new way. It will not make a syndrome out of your condition. My background is academic research and life skills training. I am not your therapist. You are certainly not my patient. You are therefore not going to be labelled with a medical-sounding name like 'depressive' or 'manic-depressive' or 'bi-polar' or 'cyclothymic'. Your feelings will not be referred to as 'flat affect' or 'clinical depression' or 'SAD (Seasonal Affective Disorder)' or any other term beloved

of all those Head Help Honchos out there with authority over your psyche. The simple expression that past generations would have used is to say that you are dejected or 'in despair'. And if you are in despair, you should not be seen as

- a research project
- a guinea pig for psychological theories and treatments
- a market opportunity for 'stress management' firms
- a target for giant pharmaceutical companies
- a 'hopeless case'
- mad.

Interestingly, the UK government recently announced a policy shift over the next ten years that will take a more proactive approach to mental health issues, looking at ways of promoting emotional well-being and personal growth instead of trying to treat millions of syndromes. This book will have the same sunny priorities.

It will aim not merely to sympathise or tranquillise, but to exhilarate. I will offer alternatives to the fashionable calm-down culture that has seen 'stress' and 'depression' statistics skyrocket – creativity, courage, common sense and the sort of life skills with which, as a Department of Employment Restart trainer, I was able to help the long-term unemployed get their lives back together again. These will include techniques and strategies for

- self-empowerment
- problem-solving
- morale-boosting

- improvisation
- facing and conquering fears
- exploiting nervousness
- accepting challenges.

The graduated exercises will be based on research evidence linking mental and physical challenges with emotional health and resilience.

A number of the exercises will involve spontaneity and improvisation. Depressed people find it very hard to act at all, let alone naturally. Yet learning how to be spontaneous can revitalise one's sense of wonder, hope and self-worth. The learning curve will reveal that nervousness is perfectly normal and natural, and that fear and desire are often intimately connected. We may dread situations that are nevertheless important to our goals. This being the case, the only real failure is not to try.

EMBRACING THE REST OF YOUR LIFE

By learning to conquer fear and anxiety rather than seeking to avoid or tranquillise them, you will gradually learn a higher level of emotional strength and self-determination, and you will be able to take a more gung-ho approach to life and life's problems, reducing the need for either chemicals or therapies.

I shall go on to explain the science behind 'toughening up' or inurement, and encourage you to jump out of your present psychological box and accept challenges. Avoidance of fear, tension and pressure, although they may have become a way of life in our 'stress managed' age, are not a way *to* life. In fact everyone actually needs pressure in order to achieve emotional health and operate on all cylinders, and there is sound science to suggest that we live longer if we rush about. It maintains what are known as our heatshock proteins, responsible for keeping cells in good repair and prolonging our lives.

As we shall see, for some people accustomed to avoidance and helplessness, 'depressed' may literally mean '*de*pressed' – having insufficient pressure.

LOOK OUT: DEPRESSED PERSON BEHAVING BADLY!

How do you tell the difference between a person in despair and someone who is not, even before they open their mouths? The despairing person *behaves* differently. Do any of the following seem at all familiar to you?

- **Sleep indiscipline** – sleep a lot, or in the daytime to 'catch up' on lost night-sleep.
- **Avoiding fitness** – not exercising, apart from walking from the car to the shops, school gate, etc. Eating lots of comfort foods containing fat and sugar. Deliberately ruining one's body to show how bad one feels inside.
- **Avoiding work** – can't work, dread work, taking 'sickies' or duvet days.
- **Escaping tasks** – putting off tasks that are difficult, annoying, scary or challenging. Using displacement activities – doing *other* things to avoid the tasks you can't face.
- **Helplessness** – waiting until help arrives, waiting for rescue. *Not* taking the initiative.
- **Self-protection** – avoiding situations that make you feel worried, nervous or 'emotional'.
- **Submissiveness** – allowing yourself to be treated as a doormat.
- **'Eyes down'** – looking at the floor when talking, or the footpath as you walk outside, staring into the little pool of sorrow at your feet.

CHICKEN AND EGG, OR JUST CHICKEN?

Which came first, the strange behaviour or the despair? Depressed people say they behave this way because they are desolate. But habits like these increase feelings of desolation. They may even *cause* them. If normal people adopted these habits, many would almost certainly become depressed.

Now let's look at the comparative *non*-despairing behaviour:

- **Regular sleep** – getting up at a set time each day (with an alarm clock if necessary) and going to bed at more or less the same time each night. *Avoiding* daylight snoozing (known as 'practising sleep hygiene'), even when tired. Most people experience sleepless nights occasionally while the brain works on a particular problem. The more regular sleep rhythm returns in due course.

- **Embracing fitness** –– not to sculpture the body to some ideal shape but simply to *feel* healthy. Exercising at home, taking regular walks or going to a gym, 'park and walk'. Eating lots of fruit and vegetables, cutting out fatty and sugary foods.

- **Embracing work** – taking a pride in one's work, doing the best job possible, thinking of new and better ways of doing one's job, enjoying being useful, finishing what one has started.

- **Tackling rotten tasks** – 'getting on with it', getting things done and dusted, getting them over with.

- **Self-reliance and self-rescue** – Taking the initiative. 'I'll do it myself. If it's something I can't do by myself, I'll ask for assistance. I'm not just sitting here waiting for rescue, as this would annoy me.'

- **Embracing challenges** – doing difficult, scary things that make you excited and exhilarated because they provide a buzz when you've done them.

- **Assertiveness** – saying courteously and considerately what you want and when you want it. Saying 'no' if you don't want it. Courteously repeating yourself if they didn't get you the first time. No need for growing resentment or aggression or 'scenes' if you are assertive in the first place.

- **Eyes on the world** – looking at the person you are speaking to, looking around you when you go out, looking at people's faces, having a curious approach to what's going on out there.

By slowly switching from the first set of habits to the second set, you will notice your mood begin to lift and lighten. You don't have to try them all at once – just one or two that capture your imagination. Human beings were never meant to be negative and avoidant. That's why we were given brains.

Avoidance and indiscipline may be fashionable, and there may be more opportunities for avoidant and sloppy behaviour now than previous generations enjoyed, but escapist and lazy habits don't make people emotionally more robust, or more content, or more cheerful. They make them more scared and cowardly and miserable, because they destroy the brain's interaction with the world.

This is your Heartless Bitch talking. Straighten up and fly right!

NOTES

1. Zoe Williams, 'All too much', *New Statesman*, 13 February 2006.

2. Angela Patmore, *The Truth About Stress*. Grove Atlantic, 2006.

3. 'Ode to a Nightingale', John Keats.

The Author

For nearly four years Angela Patmore was a life skills trainer with the Department of Employment's Restart programme for the long-term unemployed in Colchester. During her tenure the small company for which she worked, Mojo Associates, enjoyed a better outcomes record than all of the region's other training providers combined.

She is the author of books on a variety of subjects but is mainly known as a social issues writer. She produced one of the earliest books on sports psychology in the UK, *Playing on their Nerves*, and was the official biographer of Britain's first and most famous agony aunt, Marje Proops. As part of her research Angela was given access to Marje's two million readers' letters stored in the *Daily Mirror* archives.

Her last book, *The Truth About Stress* (Grove Atlantic, 2006) was shortlisted for the MIND Book of the Year Award.

Angela is a former International Fulbright Scholar with a first-class honours degree in English and a Masters from the College of William and Mary, Virginia. As a University of East Anglia research fellow at the Centre for Environmental Risk (a World Health Organisation collaborating centre) she worked with scientists to produce a meta-analysis of the research literature on 'stress' that gave rise to the 1998 London conference, 'Stress – A Change of Direction'. The conference attracted over sixty national newspaper and television features and brought together critics of 'stress management' from medicine and the sciences, from psychology, the emergency services and the arts.

Under the chairmanship of former Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sir John Stevens, she has also served as a member of the External Experts' Advisory Group on 'stress'.