

7 Barriers to Overcoming Anxiety

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1. Self-Defeating Goals

COMMON INDICATORS

Thoughts:

- "I've got to find a way to get rid of these feelings".

Feelings:

- Anxiety about feeling anxious.

Actions:

- Avoiding situations perceived as anxiety producers or staying in "safe" situations.

GENERAL INFORMATION

When you are having difficulty accomplishing a goal, it is natural to question whether you are trying hard enough or whether something is wrong with you. Sometimes, however, it is neither. The goal itself can be the problem. Unrealistically high goals, for example, can cause anxiety. When your main goal is to *feel* better ("Feeling" goal) rather than to *do* better, you usually end up feeling worse. When your main goal is to *do* better ("Doing" goal), hoping in the long run if not sooner, to *feel* better, you usually end up doing and feeling better.

STEPS TO REMOVING THE BARRIER

1. Watch for these common self-defeating goals:

- Trying to be perfect right now. Perfection is not possible during the few short years we live on this earth.
- Trying to control anxiety. Anxiety is viewed as the enemy rather than as a healthy warning signal that something in your life can be improved.

- Trying to avoid situations believed to be responsible for undesirable emotions such as shopping centers, freeways, bridges, or elevators. *This* shifts responsibility for solutions away from yourself to the environment, which cannot always be controlled.
- Trying to control people or situations you cannot really control. By doing this you are mentally hitting your head against the wall.
- Trying to find relief through another person's presence. This shifts responsibility for solutions away from yourself to others. Promotes unhealthy dependency.

2. Think of several occasions when you overcame feeling anxious.

Key Point: Every time you have ridden the wave of anxiety to its crest, you have also ridden it down to the point of feeling comfortable again. How did you do it? What were your goals? This results in increased awareness of what has worked for you in the past.

3. Notice how your goals that resulted in feeling better had little, if anything, to do with directly *trying* to feel better. They usually focused on thinking or doing something, rather than on trying to feel better.

- Examples of "Doing" goals:
 - *Situation:* Your heart is loudly pounding prior to giving a speech.
 - *Doing Goal:* Concentrate on notes and look at only a few friendly faces in the audience.
 - *Situation:* You break out in a cold sweat in the grocery store.
 - *Doing Goal:* Remind yourself you are still physically healthy and you only feel as though you are having a heart attack. Focus on finding the items on the shopping list and completing the purchase.
 - *Situation:* You have difficulty breathing while driving.
 - *Doing Goal:* Safely pull over and listen to soothing music until the emotional volcano finishes erupting and passes. Resume driving to destination.

4. Look for opportunities when you are not extremely upset to choose between a "Feeling" goal or a "Doing" goal in order to more readily comprehend their differences. When you pursue a "Feeling" goal, notice what is different from when you pursue a "Doing" goal.

Example: No matter how hard Lorraine tried to feel relaxed going shopping, she failed. In fact, the harder she tried to feel comfortable, the more uncomfortable she felt. Rather than trying so hard to feel comfortable, she switched to a "Doing" goal of simply getting the shopping done. With her new goal she succeeded just about every time. Although the anxiety did not immediately disappear, at least she felt good about accomplishing her main goal--doing the shopping.

5. Begin each day with a written list of "Doing" goals--goals you are going to pursue, regardless of how you feel.

Key Point: As you put less energy into trying to control or eliminate certain feelings, you will have more energy to do whatever you wish.

2. Fighting to Control Anxiety

COMMON INDICATORS

Thoughts:

- "I've got to get myself under control."
- "I must make myself relax or else . . ."

Feelings:

- Anxious or frightened about not being able to control feelings; loss of confidence.

Actions:

- Running from a situation or reaching out to be rescued, or both.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Sometimes when you are extremely anxious, you may find yourself making a common mistake--attempting to futilely control, fight, or eliminate the stream of emotion. As a result a dam is created that blocks the natural flow of emotion, thereby causing unpleasant feelings of anxiety to grow in magnitude and intensity. Rather than simply acknowledging the unpleasant feelings of anxiety--and finding a way to better manage yourself or your circumstances--you end up with compounded or dammed feelings. Now you have two problems: the original anxiety and dammed anxiety.

Example: Occasionally Boyd felt a tightness in his chest. Although several visits to the doctor failed to find any medical problems, he began to worry that the tightness might lead to not being able to breathe. He decided to fight the tight feeling himself by breathing more rapidly. Without realizing it, his attempt to control anxiety symptoms by over breathing caused a second problem--the lowering of carbon dioxide in the blood and subsequent feelings of numbness, tingling of the hands, and dizziness. The harder he tried to breathe, the worse he felt. This vicious cycle is often referred to as hyperventilation.

Rather than fight the symptoms, I suggested he apply the common cure for hyperventilation: place a paperbag over your head and face, loosely covering your nose and mouth; breathe normally for five to fifteen minutes; take a small breath approximately once every five seconds; and

breathe through your diaphragm instead of your chest. Your stomach will move in and out instead of your rib cage. Boyd did this and with more carbon dioxide in his body--and no more fighting of the initial feelings by over-breathing--he gradually began to feel better.

Rather than fighting to control anxiety--which generally causes more anxiety--it is much better, at first, to learn to control the way you respond to the emotional symptoms. As a result, *there are* no more anxiety attacks.

Fortunately, the common symptoms of an anxiety attack (rapid heart beat, rapid breathing, numbness, dizziness, and difficulty breathing), naturally tend to subside when left alone to run their course. Although little can be done to immediately make the storm go away, fighting the feelings only serves to prolong and intensify them.

STEPS TO REMOVING THE BARRIER

1. Think of a time you felt nervous when, instead of trying to control the feelings, you focused your attention on controlling something else.

Example: Most people accept feeling nervous before an athletic or musical performance as normal and try to weather, rather than fight, the discomfort as best they can. As soon as the performance begins, they focus on what they are doing as opposed to how they are feeling, and the nervousness naturally subsides and disappears.

2. Remind yourself of the body's natural, God-given ability to heal and calm itself down as long as there is no artificial interference. Think of times you trusted your body to successfully take care of itself with little or no help.

Examples:

- When you had a cold or virus, you knew it was just a matter of time before you would be feeling better again. *Reason:* You trusted your immune system to do its job, even though you may not have fully understood how it worked.
 - After a vigorous physical workout, you were confident your rapid heart rate, perspiration, and fatigue would subside in a reasonable amount of time. *Reason:* You had faith in your body's natural ability to calm down.
3. After eating, you knew the food would be digested and properly used by the body without any effort on your part. *Reason:* Again, simple faith in your body.
 4. Every day, notice at least three times when your body naturally and automatically corrects itself. As you do this you will begin to regain some of the faith and confidence you lost in your body's ability to survive.

5. Think of times you felt extremely anxious. Remember what happened when you tried to make yourself feel calm. A good example of this is trying to get sweaty palms dry before an important meeting--the harder you tried, the worse it got.
6. Think of a time you experienced something similar to an anxiety attack but responded by just reassuring yourself and letting it run its course.

Example: Recently I was jolted out of my sleep by an earthquake and thought the house was going to collapse and that I would die. I was scared to death. Shaking uncontrollably I could hear my heart pounding. It took about an hour before my body relaxed enough to go back to sleep. Not until the second or third day did I feel completely normal.

7. Think of an anxiety attack as an automobile engine overheating. As the steam is pouring out, you control your response by waiting for the engine to cool off before attempting to do anything. Even after the steam subsides, it takes additional time before the engine is cool enough to work on. If you tried to control the steam or make the engine cool off prematurely by throwing cold water on it, you could burn yourself or damage the engine.
8. Instead of fighting your emotional steam, decide to observe the intensity with interest and a rational realization that it will eventually subside. Rather than trying to control how much steam comes out of your emotional engine, control the reassuring thoughts you run through your mind.
- 9.

Repeat to yourself:

"I will allow my body to blow off steam and cool off. Then I will take preventive or corrective action."

10. While waiting for the anxiety symptoms to subside, do something simple and meaningful despite the intense feelings--lie down and let the emotional earthquake run its course, take a walk, listen to some music, vacuum the living room, or read a book.

Key Point: If you do any of these with the intent to force the wave of internal motion to subside, you will unwittingly cause it to escalate.

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3. Difficulty distinguishing feelings from facts

COMMON INDICATORS

Thoughts:

- "I am a feeling person. Going against my feelings would be dishonest. So when I am afraid to go outside, I do not leave my house."

Feelings:

- Volatile and conflicting.

Actions:

- Debating with self, disregarding important facts.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Just as instruments in an automobile provide essential information for safe driving, feelings provide necessary information for making wise, sensitive, and rational decisions. For example, if your head--and the objective facts--say you are reasonably healthy and safe while your heart is pounding rapidly, it is generally better to rely on your head. Important decisions are best made with 90% head and 10% heart.

Key point: No matter how strong feelings may be, they cannot change the facts.

STEPS TO REMOVING THE BARRIER

1. Make more objective and sensitive decisions, by taking the following actions:

- Take several 3x5 cards, write down the two important principles below:

Important decisions are best made with 90% head and 10% heart.
Feelings do not change facts.

- Place the cards where you can see them at least a dozen times a day (on your refrigerator, T.V., bathroom mirror, or visor of your automobile).
- Whenever you find your head and heart in conflict, let the conflict act as a trigger to remind you to repeat to yourself the words on the cards.

Say to yourself:

"Important decisions are best made with 90% head and 10% heart.
Feelings don't change facts."

- To increase your understanding of these two principles, discuss them with others

2. Make a list of past, present, or potential situations where your head and heart are not in total agreement. *Note:* The fewer such situations, the happier and more at peace you will be.

Examples:

- The *fact* that you have a healthy body is not changed because you *feel*/like you are going to die.
- The *fact* that you have inherent worth is not changed because you *feel*/worthless.
- The *fact* that someone has had too much to drink is not changed because he *feels* he can drive safely.
- The *fact* that you have certain skills is not changed because you *feel*/inadequate.

3. For each situation you wish to resolve in which your head and heart are in conflict, take a piece of paper and draw a vertical line down the center. On one side of the line write down all the pertinent facts that come to mind.

4. On the other side of the line write down your feelings. If there are any feelings not supported by facts, place a big question mark by those feelings. For example, your heart is medically healthy yet sometimes you feel you are having a heart attack; or you have a college degree yet you feel unintelligent. As a result you are now in a better position to objectively and sensitively think about your situation.

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4. Basing Personal Security on Feeling Calm

COMMON INDICATORS

Thoughts:

- "I can't stand to feel upset."
- "I can't do anything until I feel better."
- "I need to feel better before I act."

Feelings:

- Insecure.

Actions:

- Trying to appear calmer than you feel.
- Avoiding situations where you feel uncomfortable.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Traveling through this life, you may sometimes experience more anxiety and insecurity than you prefer. If, however, you attempt to find an anxiety-free way through life--in a futile attempt to feel secure--ironically you will experience even more anxiety and insecurity. *Reason:*

You avoid learning and participating in events that provide for the development of greater security. Since eMOTION is constantly in MOTION, basing any sense of security on naturally unstable feelings is in and of itself insecure.

STEPS TO REMOVING THE BARRIER

1. Think of times you felt insecure but in fact had every reason to feel quite secure. *Example:* Tad frequently felt anxious and insecure during graduate school, even though he ended up receiving straight A's.
2. Remind yourself of the importance of doing something constructive regardless of how you feel.

Ask yourself:

"If I'm going to feel uncomfortable for awhile, would I rather feel uncomfortable and get something done, or would I rather feel uncomfortable and get nothing done."

3. Practice doing constructive things, even though you do not initially feel comfortable doing them. *Result:* The more you do so, the less uncomfortable you will feel, and if you continue to feel uncomfortable for awhile, at least you have accomplished something constructive.
4. Look for things you can do to bring greater happiness and security, even though they may not make you feel good immediately. For example, exercise regularly; eat moderately; get sufficient rest; involve yourself in church, civic, academic, or professional activities; read a good book; visit a friend; etc.

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5. Vivid imagination

COMMON INDICATORS

Thoughts:

- "I can see it now . . ."

Feelings:

- Frequently feeling an intense eruption of emotion.

Actions:

- Daydreaming, dwelling on upsetting events, putting yourself in other people's circumstances.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Imagination has many facets. Most everyone enjoys gazing up at beautiful clouds, visualizing vivid, imaginative shapes and scenes.

Imagination can also create frightening monsters out of shadows on a bedroom wall. Imagination can picture the happy reunion of a loved one coming home for the evening . . . or burning to death in a fiery automobile accident. How you use your imagination is completely up to you. You create your own movies. One client remarked, "I didn't realize the pictures I view in my mind are multiple choice." If you have developed the habit of using imagination in a negative way, it will take time and practice to get it under control.

STEPS TO REMOVING THE BARRIER

1. Think of times you have used imagination in healthy, constructive ways such as relaxing; visualizing a goal; enjoying a book, movie, or music. Also, be aware of times you currently use your imagination in a healthy way.
 1. **Warning:** Do not attempt to eliminate the possibility of negative imagination by unnaturally forcing positive thinking.
2. When you find yourself visualizing an unpleasant event (whether real or imagined), consider whether or not your thinking is constructive.

Say to yourself:

"Important decisions are best made with 90% head and 10% heart.
Feelings don't change facts."

3. **Result:** By frequently asking the above question, your mind will automatically become more skilled in effectively managing the use of imagination.
4. If you wish to calmly think about an unpleasant event, think about it as if you were hearing it reported on the radio or on T.V. Say to yourself, "Three people were killed in the automobile accident, PERIOD. And I refuse to create or dwell on any mental pictures of it." Then get busy and focus your attention on something constructive even though some unpleasant emotions may linger for awhile.
5. If you tend to become overly anxious about possible disasters in your life or the lives of your loved ones, occasionally say "Yes" to picturing the event. Imagine not only surviving the event, but more importantly, picture what you will be doing as you effectively get on with your life.

Example: I found myself feeling anxious about the unlikely possibility something horrible might happen to our son. Late one night, as I watched him peacefully sleeping, I let myself imagine the worst had happened. Just the thought of losing him caused my eyes to well up with tears. But I did not end the picture there. I allowed myself to picture what I would be doing a few weeks after his death. I saw myself being with my wife, working, going to church, even jogging. I was sad, but I could see life going on. As a result, I am less inclined to imagine the worst coming to pass, because I am confident I could survive and life would go on.

6. Review the sources and types of information (positive or negative) that come into your mind each day. Especially examine your habits associated with T.V., radio, newspapers, books, and magazines. Also, think about the information shared in your daily conversations.

7. Minimize, or in some cases eliminate, the upsetting or frightening information you take into your mind.
8. When you think or talk about a situation, notice the words you are using. Are you using imaginative, Hollywood words (often upsetting) or plain, objective, and factual words?

Examples:

Hollywood: My daredevil husband drives like he is in the Indianapolis 500.

Plain fact: My husband often drives 10 to 15 miles per hour over the speed limit.

Hollywood: My heart is going to explode. It is beating like a drummer in a rock band.

Plain fact: My heart is beating a lot faster than usual.

Hollywood: I can't breathe. I think I'm going to die.

Plain fact: I'm having difficulty breathing.

9. Notice how you feel when you use Hollywood words. Practice substituting plain, objective, and factual words.

Note: Once the physical sensations of anxiety are triggered, however, changing words will not cause the body to immediately relax. The longer you were thinking the upsetting thoughts, the longer it will take to feel calm again. As you develop habits of using fewer emotionally charged words, you will feel less anxious in the future.

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6. Unsure How to Prevent or Respond to Anxiety Attack

COMMON INDICATORS

Thoughts:

- "How can I prevent anxiety attacks?" "What do I do when anxiety attacks occur?"

Feelings:

- Worried, discouraged.

Actions:

- Trying one technique after another.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Just as in sailing a ship one does certain things *before* problems occur to help prevent their occurrence, *during* the occurrence of problems to make corrections before things get worse, and *after* problems have

occurred to learn from the mistake and minimize or prevent future problems, the same is true for dealing with the waves of anxiety. As you increase your knowledge and skills in the three previously mentioned areas, you will be better able to minimize and eventually eliminate anxiety attacks.

STEPS TO REMOVING THE BARRIER

The steps for removing this barrier are divided into three sections: *Before* an anxiety attack, *during* an anxiety attack, and *after* an anxiety attack.

BEFORE AN ANXIETY ATTACK

1. Involve yourself in a well-balanced variety of constructive activities such as work, school, family, church, social activities, physical exercise, music, or service. If your life is out of balance in just one area, you will have difficulty making any lasting improvements. Regular aerobic exercise such as walking, jogging, bicycling, or swimming are especially helpful.

2. Develop a healthy mental diet just as you do a physical diet. Feed your mind constructive, uplifting food. Avoid upsetting thoughts as you avoid unhealthy food.

1. **Key Point:** What you feed your mind determines what kind of mind you will have.

Example: People who read wholesome and uplifting material daily are more likely to ride out waves of anxiety without becoming upset than people who read about upsetting things. At the very least, they will be able to overcome anxiety attacks more quickly.

3. Recall some of the anxiety-producing thoughts you tend to think about. Then make a list of those thoughts. Equate your list to identifying the weeds beginning to invade your garden.
4. Seek to be aware of thoughts preceding or triggering an anxiety attack before it occurs and immediately divert your thoughts and attention to something more constructive.

DURING AN ANXIETY ATTACK

1. Determine the degree of anxiety you are experiencing by rating it on a scale of one to ten, with ten being the most intense anxiety ever experienced. Say to yourself, for example, "My body is at a six or a seven."

1. **Caution:** Do not cause additional anxiety by saying "I *am* at a six or a seven." **Reason:** It is easier to manage your body than your entire being.

2. Acknowledge and accept the degree of anxiety you are experiencing, without trying to force the intensity to go down--especially if the intense anxiety hits suddenly like an earthquake.

Say to yourself:

"Before I can feel better, I need to accept the fact my body is at a nine, and I am going to feel crummy for a little while."

Caution: Resist the temptation to analyze why you are having an attack while you are experiencing it. **Reason:** Unless asking why leads to an action-oriented solution, it will just make you feel worse--especially if you do not come up with a reasonable answer.

1. Reassure yourself you will indeed survive, no matter how badly you currently feel.

Say to yourself:

"Though my feelings seem to be saying I'm dying, my head says otherwise; and when in doubt I choose to believe my head."

2. Despite how you feel, do something constructive--even if it is something small.

1. **Caution:** Do not just think about how you feel. Do something.

AFTER AN ATTACK

1. Even after your thoughts and activity are back within bounds, be patient with the way you feel. The length of time it takes your body to relax after extreme anxiety is about ten times as long as the time you were feeling anxious. The ripples in a pond continue long after the rock that caused them is resting on the bottom.
2. Reassure yourself you can learn a great deal from feeling upset, as long as you resist the temptation to ignore your feelings or condemn yourself for having them in the first place.
3. Think about what you can learn from getting upset so you can do something better next time.

Ask yourself:

"What could I have done to prevent myself from getting so upset?"
 "Once upset, what could I have done to minimize the intensity and duration of the feelings?"

4. Instead of just trying to learn from your mistakes, think of some of the times you started to get upset, but instead of dwelling on it, got yourself involved with something else. Think about how you did it. Ask yourself what was different during those times.
 1. **Key Point:** Too often people spend more time dwelling on their mistakes rather than on analyzing and learning from their successes, especially if the successes appear to be an accident or an exception to the norm.

You may wish to study the accompanying chart on the following page to gain a clearer overview of the three different areas of dealing with anxiety attacks.

How to Respond to an Anxiety Attack	
BEFORE	
GOAL:	Prevent or minimize anxiety attack.
METHOD:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Involve yourself in constructive activity, designed to keep your life in balance. 2. Develop a healthy mental diet. 3. Identify and avoid anxiety producing thoughts.
RESULTS:	

Emotions Reasonably Calm



DURING

GOAL:

Ride out the wave and get through the storm.

METHOD:

1. Monitor the intensity of the anxiety on the scale of 1 to 10.
2. Acknowledge and accept the existence of the anxiety without trying to fight or control it.
3. Reassure yourself that you will survive.
4. Do something constructive despite how you feel.

RESULTS:

Anxiety - Beginning to Subside



AFTER

GOAL:

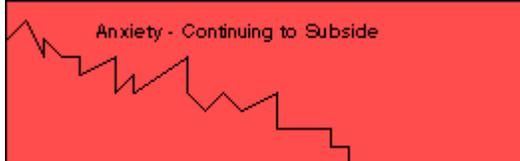
1. Learn to respond to future anxiety attacks in a more rational way.
2. Learn to prevent future anxiety attacks.

METHOD:

1. Be patient with any lingering, undesirable feelings.
2. Reassure yourself that you can learn a great deal from your mistakes.
3. Do not condemn yourself for having an anxiety attack.
4. Determine at least one thing you can specifically do to improve yourself.

RESULTS:

Anxiety - Continuing to Subside



7. Trying Too Hard to Help Others

COMMON INDICATORS

Thoughts:

- "I've got to do something to help him."
- "I can't stand to see him so unhappy."

Feelings:

- Sympathy, frustration, resentment.

Actions:

- Unnaturally altering normal routines, repeatedly talking about the same things, etc.

GENERAL INFORMATION

When someone is hurting, it is only natural to want to help relieve the pain to whatever extent possible. If a person has a painful stomachache, for example, he can be given understanding and perhaps a little advice and encouragement, but not much else. Accepting the obvious limitations of how much help can be given is not difficult in such cases.

When someone is experiencing severe emotional pain, however, there is often a tendency to try to give more help than is possible or even helpful. Attempting to help a person do something he can only do for himself can create confusion over who is responsible for what. The "helper" often ends up carrying too much responsibility, while the person who could benefit from accepting full responsibility is actually weakened by retaining too little. Generally, the most beneficial thing to do is to genuinely believe in the other's ability to solve his own problem.

STEPS TO REMOVING THE BARRIER

1. When someone you care about is feeling depressed, think of what you can control versus what you cannot control.

Result: Knowing the differences will allow you to put more energy into the appropriate areas so you can truly be of help. Draw a vertical line down the center of a piece of paper. On one

side of the line, list what you can control, on the other side of the line, list what you cannot control. Example:

Can Control	Cannot Control
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ ○ Expressing concern and understanding ○ Having faith and confidence in <i>his</i> ability to solve <i>his</i> problems ○ Expecting him to continue acting as a responsible manager ○ Managing my own thoughts, feelings, and actions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ His thoughts ○ His feelings ○ His actions

2. Notice the intent or motive underlying your actions. Is your main purpose to give him the best possible environment and opportunity to progress or to get him to feel, think, and act better?
 1. **Key Point:** You can control what you give in a relationship that may influence the other person, but you cannot control what he chooses to do--or what you get in return.
3. Practice showing respect for his right to feel upset, even if he believes he is not responsible for how he feels.

Say to yourself:
 "He does, after all, have the right to feel depressed, as well as the right to do something about it."

4. **Result:** By giving what you can, rather than trying to do more and becoming a crutch, you give him the best opportunity to learn and progress.
5. You may be thinking, "But he doesn't have the right to make me miserable." That is true, and as you learn to do only what is reasonable for him--but no more than that--you will not be as entangled in his problem. He will be freer to find his solutions, though he may not feel so at first, and you will be free to go about your business (go into the other room to read, leave the house to go shopping, visit a friend and so forth).
6. Do not try to reason with him if he is talking or acting in an unreasonable way--to do so is unreasonable. Do positive and constructive things with him (take a walk, go see a movie, talk about uplifting things, etc.).
 0. **Caution:** Even talking about feeling upset in a reasonable way for more than a few minutes is rarely productive. It tends to prolong or intensify the depression.
7. If he wishes to discuss reasonable ideas and plans for self-improvement, proceed gently without rushing him toward a solution.
 0. **Caution:** Rarely give advice. Be careful not to tread on his opportunity and right to progress in his own way and time.
8. Continue to live your life as normally as possible. Do not make major changes in your routine such as reducing or eliminating your out-of-home activities or staying by the phone in case he calls).
9. Continue to expect (not force) him to perform his usual responsibilities, despite how he feels.

Reason: Lowering your expectations or making unusual allowances tends to convey a lack of confidence in his abilities, inadvertently encouraging additional depression.

Key Point: By caring for someone who is upset, without carrying responsible for their happiness, you give them the best environment and opportunity to climb out of their pit of depression--without getting stuck in it yourself.