

DEPRESSION TOOL KIT

Get stuff done & advocate for yourself

Thank you for subscribing to my blog, Fashionably ill. As a free gift, I've attached my Depression Tool Kit. The Kit contains:

- **10 Strategies for Getting Stuff Done When You're Depressed**
- **4 Scripts for Difficult Conversations/Scenarios**

Often, I find that telling people (friends, family, employers, and professors) we're depressed is so difficult that we don't engage in these conversations at all. When we are exhibiting symptoms of depression, others may perceive us as unreliable. Many people do not understand what depression symptoms looks like, which restricts our potential support network. I use my experience in living with mental illness and working in mental health nonprofit to help others.

I live with bipolar 2, polycystic ovarian syndrome, Myasthenia Gravis, asthma, and psoriasis. I graduated cum laude with two majors from Northwestern University. In addition to Fashionably ill, my award-winning blog, I write for multiple websites including The Huffington Post. I have given a **TEDx Talk ("How to Get Stuff Done When You Are Depressed")** and have spoken at health conventions.

When you have rough days, I hope you can pull this kit out and find the strength to pursue your goals and advocate for yourself. (P.S. If you like it, please encourage your friends to subscribe at www.fashionablyillgift.com)

xoxo Jessica Gimeno



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HOW TO GET STUFF DONE WHEN YOU'RE DEPRESSED

TEN STRATEGIES

1 Label all tasks by level of difficulty as 1, 2, 3

When you are depressed, focus on a 1-level task first (eating breakfast). As you finish 1 and 2-level tasks, you build confidence to tackle 3-level tasks (finishing a paper, assignment for work).

3 Say "NO" to non-essential tasks

ESSENTIAL

- Work Assignment
- School Paper
- Seeing your Doctor

NON-ESSENTIAL

- Church Bake Sale
- Watching the Game
- Unplanned Dinner Party

5 Give yourself credit

Give yourself points for every task you complete (e.g., taking a shower or eating breakfast). As you complete tasks, you build confidence.

Instead of saying "30 more minutes of exercise", say "GO ME! YAY! I did 10 minutes already!"

7 Practice mindfulness

15 MINUTES OF

- Deep breaths (in and out every 5 seconds)
- Meditation-focus on concept (e.g. peace)
- Prayer
- Daily Affirmations

9 Identify "Allies"

Ally = someone you can be vulnerable with w/o consequences

e.g., emailing a friend to say you will respond to his email ASAP but "you've been depressed lately"

2 Schedule an appointment with your therapist ASAP

HAVE PHONE NUMBER ACCESSIBLE

Too depressed to leave the house or have transportation issues? Try web therapy (e.g., Skype)

4 Classify tasks by urgency

WHEN IS IT DUE?

4 = due today

3 = due tomorrow

2 = due this week

1 = due next week

When depressed, focus on 4 & 3 tasks

6 Exercise

Exercise releases "endorphins," AKA "feel good hormones," which help fight stress & depression. Just fifteen minutes can make you feel better. Exercise breaks monotony and helps you find answers to problems.

e.g., Aerobics, Yoga, Pilates, Treadmill

8 Reward yourself

SET A QUOTA

"If I finish this paper, then I can watch Sandal live!"

OR

"If I meet this deadline, I can get a McFlurry at McDonald's"

10 Communicate in advance

Sample e-mail to a friend (Not boss or work supervisor)

**Hi Mike,
I am interested in collaborating with you. Thanks for the offer. Right now, I'm fighting some depression. I've been in bed all day. I will get back to you ASAP.
Thanks,
Jessica**

DEPRESSION SCENARIOS

FOUR SCRIPTS

SCENARIO

1

Missing a Party

You missed a friend's party because you were depressed. Now, your friend is hurt. It's best to talk as soon as possible over the phone or in person. Text messages and online communication often lead to misunderstanding.



Conversation

"I am so sorry I missed your party. I was looking forward to it but got depressed that day. I would still love to celebrate your birthday with you. We can have lunch at your favorite place."

SCENARIO

2

Paper Due

You have a paper due but are severely depressed (or manic/hypomanic for some with bipolar disorder). It's important to contact your professor and seek help (seeing your psychiatrist, for example) before the episode snowballs. It's ideal to ask in advance-not the night before the paper is due.



Sample Email

Dear Professor Green,
I have been trying to work on my paper but I've been really depressed for a week. I have diagnosed depression (or bipolar disorder). I have been seeking help. Attached, you'll see a letter from my psychiatrist. I am asking for an extension. With an extension, I can finish this paper.
Regards,
Jessica

SCENARIO

3

You Need to Ask Your Employer for Accommodations

Ask Jan (the U.S. government's website explaining accommodations) says, "Remember that you have a right to keep information about your disability private. It is not necessary to inform coworkers and colleagues about your disability or need for accommodations. While they may be aware of accommodations, they are not entitled to know why. Your employer is required by the ADA to keep your disability and medical information confidential and to give it to managers, only on a need-to-know basis."



Conversation

"Thank you for meeting me. I have diagnosed depression (or bipolar disorder). I have a letter from my doctor explaining my diagnosis. With proper accommodations, I know I can do a great job. (List a few, key past accomplishments.) One of the consequences of my illness is an irregular sleep-wake cycle. With accommodations like (insert what you need here), I am confident I can do my job well."

Examples of Work Accommodations for Depression & Bipolar Disorder from www.askjan.org

- Flexible Schedules
- Working from home
- Leave for counsel
- Increased natural lighting

SCENARIO

4

No Sleep

You slept at 3 am due to an episode of severe depression (or mania/hypomania in cases of bipolar disorder). It's impossible for you to go to work on time or at all the next day.



Sample Email

Dear Susan,
I didn't get any sleep last night and will be unable to come to work today. I experienced a (hypomanic) episode. I am seeing my doctor today. I would like to make up my work by staying after hours on Thursday and Friday and working this Saturday. I can provide you proof of my work. Please let me know what would be acceptable to you for keeping my work on schedule.
Thank you,
(John)