

Mood, Mind, and Motivation

Depression, thought traps, avoidance, and the skills that interrupt the cycle

What this workshop covers

- Workshop 1 established the foundations — the infrastructure resilience runs on
- Workshop 2 addresses what happens when the foundations aren't enough: low mood, depression, thought traps, and avoidance
- These are among the most common experiences in college — not signs of personal failure, but signals worth understanding and responding to
- Four modules: what low mood and depression actually are • behavioral activation • thought traps • avoidance and exposure
- Each module includes skills you can use immediately — not just concepts to understand

Module 1

Low mood and depression

Not sadness. Something more like fog — and it is both common and treatable.



Out of suffering have emerged the strongest souls; the most massive characters are seared with scars.

— Kahlil Gibran

Depression on a college campus often looks like withdrawal, numbness, and disconnection — not dramatic suffering. It is easy to miss until it has been present for months.

What depression actually looks like in college

- Common signs: persistent fatigue, loss of interest in things that used to matter, withdrawal from friends, irritability, brain fog, hopelessness
- Depression in college often doesn't look like crying — it looks like lying in bed unable to start anything, skipping meals, going days without leaving the room
- It often begins when stress outweighs available energy for too long — the system depletes and collapses into low mood
- Depression and anxiety frequently co-occur: anxiety activates, depletes, and what follows is often depression
- Depression is not a character flaw, a lack of discipline, or something to push through alone — it is a clinical condition and it responds to treatment

Depression vs. a hard week — knowing the difference

- Hard weeks produce temporary distress that lifts when the stressor resolves — exams end, the paper gets submitted, the situation changes
- Depression persists after the stressor resolves, or exists without a clear stressor at all
- The clinical threshold: if sadness, low energy, or loss of interest lasts more than two weeks and is interfering with functioning — it is time to reach out
- You don't need to decide whether it's 'bad enough.' If you're wondering — reach out.
- The Dean of Students office, campus counseling center, and health center are all appropriate first contacts — they will help you figure out the right level of support