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Author Talk - Navigating Depression a tool for the journey

Author of the Navigating Depression card set, Kate Skilbeck in a discussion about her experience in creating the cards.

As a psychologist and the author of the Navigating Depression cards, can you tell us why you wanted to create a resource to support people to talk about depression?

There are countless struggles and sources of pain in our lives. It can be tough. Some of these things are outside of our control. Some things we simply cannot change, like the event of a global

pandemic, for example. However, there are things we can do that helps us navigate through challenging times, and not only survive but learn to thrive and grow stronger through adversity.

Through the practice wisdom of many therapeutic modalities, ancient and contemporary, we know a lot about how to attend skilfully when working with difficult states, such as depression and other forms of emotional distress.

The Navigating Depression cards are a means to bring these interventions into a form that is engaging, accessible, inspiring and applicable to people's everyday life. The intention of the card set is to give people the opportunity to engage in a journey of reflecting on their experience of depression in order to build effective tools to help them navigate skilfully through and beyond the sometimes very challenging territory of chronic sadness.

We created Navigating Depression as a therapeutic resource that brings together the best of evidence-based practice from a broad range of modalities. It is designed to meet the diverse learning styles and needs of a broad range of people, young and old. Navigating Depression is primarily about building resilience and mental health and wellbeing.

The cards use the metaphor of travel or a journey - why is this a useful metaphor when talking about depression?

Navigating Depression uses the metaphor of living life as a 'journey', which provides a fertile metaphoric framework for people to share their stories, learn, and find meaning, as they 'chart their course' through life. This metaphor is reflected in the symbolism within the artistic design, as well as in the language and metaphors used to describe the therapeutic explorations and applications.

The travel metaphor also extends to descriptions of mood—weather can be gloomy, freezing, stormy, dark, bright or warm, for example, just like mood. It also extends to terrain and territory—landscapes can be barren, dense with foliage, remote, isolated, mountainous, full of valleys and peaks, riddled with quick sand but they can also contain look-outs, clear views, big sky, pathways, tracks and sign-posts.

Navigating Depression

There are four suits in the cards. How do they work?

Each suit, and each card, has been created and informed by evidence-based research and practice, and have strong therapeutic underpinnings. The cards may be used in a variety of ways, from travelling consecutively through each suit, to drawing and reflecting on the concepts held within a single card.

A full description of the cards and how they can be used is outlined in the comprehensive booklet that companions the card set. This includes the theoretical rationale for the suits and cards, as well as references to the evidence-based interventions that are featured on the cards.



The Navigating Depression cards include five characters. Can you tell us a bit about them? Why did you want to include characters?

The Navigating Depression cards have been designed to be inclusive of people from a range of different backgrounds. They include characters of various ages, genders and cultural backgrounds.

The five characters were developed to portray the common and lived experience of depression, highlighting the fact that people experience it across the lifespan. We are targeting this resource to young people through to older adults. We also want to honour and celebrate the diversity of people within our society and in doing so hope that the characters are inclusive, accessible and relatable.

As life is not a solo journey—we are social beings—we hoped that the group of characters may be able to denote a sense of having fellow travellers on this journey of navigating life with all its challenges and wonders.

Everyone experiences suffering at some point so we wanted the resource to speak to our common humanity and highlight our shared experiences. We also hope the characters can be used to inspire and enrich a sense of empathy and compassion for ourselves and others.

Some of the cards may depict more than one character, which is meant to highlight the importance of nurturing relationships, seeking help, and giving support and encouragement to ourselves and others, when you are travelling through depression. In terms of the metaphor of the journey, the relationships and dynamics between characters can also symbolise the benefit of creating a back-up and support crew.

There are lots of resources to support people experiencing depression. How are the Navigating Depression cards different? What do they bring to the conversation?

Navigating Depression is unique as it is a tool that can support safe, reflective conversations which help people explore and navigate important themes related to depression. They have a particular focus on thoughts, feelings, struggles, strengths, resources, hopes, values, dreams and aspirations.

Navigating Depression can be used in a number of different ways. You can use them on your own as a tool to support self-reflection, for journaling or to prompt other creative responses to depression. They can also be used with a 'supportive other' who can help you explore, navigate and map a journey towards a preferred destination.

This conversation-starting tool was designed to support people as they explore their personal experience of depression and reflect on what has led them to becoming depressed. They can also be used to help people explore their experience of distress and low mood, build a repertoire of adaptive coping strategies to help them move through and learn from the experience, look towards a preferred future, and make powerful choices that help them recover and live with purpose.

Navigating Depression

How do you see the cards being used in different settings?

Anyone can use these cards. Here are a few ways people could use them.



- Private and personal reflection. As prompts for journaling or other creative arts. People could put individual cards on a fridge or window ledge as reminders.
- Around a kitchen tables with families. This resource is a strong psychoeducation tool. It is designed to help facilitate safe, consensual conversations that are relevant and salient, open and explorative. They are conversation starters designed to encourage self-reflection and skill building, which makes them great to use with families.
- Schools. Great for teachers, wellbeing officers and mental health practitioners. As the cards include words and images, they can also be fantastic prompts for use in for Art, English, Biology, PE, Health, Psychology and Drama classes.
- Primary prevention tool. The cards can be used to talk about mental health more broadly within a prevention context. Can be used to talk about resilience building, risk factors, protective factors and how to develop a toolkit of strategies and skills to help people stay well.
- Workplaces. Great for use in teams, for peer support and in supervision. Use with organisations to build a positive culture that values self-care, looking after ourselves and each other, helps employees build resilience, and enhance their personal and professional mental health and wellbeing. It is a tool that could be used to counter or prevent employee burn-out, vicarious trauma and build effective stress management practices.
- Social workers, youth workers, counsellors, psychologists. The cards can be used to help engage clients in a reflective or therapeutic journey. Can be used for early intervention or with targeted groups, at-risk young people, for relapse prevention or as an intervention tool.
- Workshops. Use in training environments to talk about mental health and self-care.

Do you have any tips for how and when to introduce the cards into a conversation?

- Be familiar with the cards—if possible, read the booklet before you use the cards, play with the cards, ask yourself the questions and practice the experiential exercises.
- Human suffering is a universal experience. Depression is common - it is important to acknowledge our common humanity.
- Be sensitive to the fact that exploring the causes and impact of depression is likely to give rise to painful material which may be challenging for the client. Be sensitive to people's vulnerability and provide a safe, consensual and invitational space.
- Make sure to introduce the cards at an appropriate time and that there is going to be ample space to explore, contain and consolidate the learnings with enough time.
- Be curious, open, compassionate and kind.
- Be interested, focused and listen for understanding.
- Let the person lead the conversation