

Stabilizing Someone with Unregulated Moods / Thoughts (Step 2)

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Creating a stable environment and daily routine

After we have identified specific sensory stimuli and social interactions that have a calming or an energizing effect on our loved one (using the Gathering Clues Worksheet in Step 1), we want to intentionally include these in the home environment and in the daily routine.

We know people with a dysregulated mood and/or thought patterns may react negatively if we try to talk to them directly about their problems, so we will start with an **indirect approach that introduces more positive stimuli** into their environment and routine.

One theory about mood disorder (such as bipolar disorder) is that it is linked to dysregulated neurotransmitter systems and vulnerability in the circadian system.

Circadian rhythm is our physical, mental and behavioral pattern that follows a 24-hour cycle.



These processes are present in most living creatures (including animals, plants, and microbes), and are affected by external stimuli, such as light and dark.

Nearly every organ and tissue in the human body has a biological clock. A master clock (of about 20,000 neurons in the brain) coordinates all these biological clocks

Structuring a moderately active and consistent daily routine helps stabilize a person's circadian rhythm.

For more information on circadian rhythm, you can visit the [National Institute of General Medical Sciences website](http://NationalInstituteofGeneralMedicalSciences.gov).

Social rhythm therapy seeks to stabilize someone's circadian rhythm by structuring (and creating consistency) in a person's wake / sleep, activity / rest, and social interaction / alone time.



Our **sleep / wake cycle** has a powerful effect on our circadian rhythm.

Exposure to light at night (especially blue light such as computer screens) disrupts our internal clock. Chronic exposure to light at night also has a serious impact on health – seen in jet lag and night-shift workers (fragmented sleep)

Seasonal changes (which also involve changes in daylight) can also affect circadian rhythm, and trigger depression (and Seasonal Affective Disorder).

We can use external stimuli to help someone transition into a more regular sleep / wake routine.



It can be useful to mimic the change in light and sound that occurs in nature in the evening in the morning. In the evening, the sun slowly sets (with light gradually fading away) and birds becoming quieter. During the night, there might be gentle soothing sounds (like the wind rustling leaves, or ocean waves lapping the shore). In the morning, the sun slowly rises and the birds and animals become more animated. These changes in light and sound impact the body's production of melatonin (a key neurochemical in sleep / wake cycle). We can structure the home to mimic these changes in light and sound (including background sounds at night), with tools such as dimmer switches, music systems, or phone apps.

Some individuals find it helpful to take melatonin supplements to help facilitate sleep. Some people who struggle with [Seasonal Affective Disorder](#) (depressive symptoms triggered by seasonal changes) find it helpful to take Vitamin D supplements and exposure to sunlight and/or full-spectrum lights.



A healthy diet, physical exercise, and outdoor activity (with exposure to sunlight and fresh air) are also an important tool in helping stabilize the circadian rhythm.

We usually need to start by building on existing food and activity interests (rather than trying to change them).

Even if their current “exercise” is as simple as walking to the store, it is still a positive activity that exposes them to sunlight (a source of Vitamin D) and fresh air (oxygenating the blood).

Medical researchers are discovering that a “brain-gut connection” related to the enteric nervous system (ENS) of 100 million nerve cells in our gastrointestinal tract from esophagus to rectum.

This ENS system sends signals to the central nervous system (CNS), and it appears the irritation in the gastrointestinal system can trigger mood changes (such as anxiety or depression). This seems particularly strong for individuals with irritable bowel syndrome or functional bowel problems.

Probiotics may [help some people](#) with gastrointestinal (and associated mental health) problems.



Researchers at Harvard Medical School are discovering the importance of [nutritional psychiatry](#) – the positive influence of a healthy diet on mood. For example, diets high in refined sugars affect insulin production and increase inflammation and oxidative stress – and can worsen symptoms of mood disorder. Healthy diets such as the [Mediterranean diet](#) (healthy fats and carbs, high in fruits, vegetables, nuts) can lower depression symptoms.

We want to use the data from our “Gathering Clues Worksheet” (Step 1) to (a) introduce positive self-calming stimuli into the person’s living environment, and (b) slowly nudge the person toward a healthier sleep / wake cycle and diet, and some form of physical activity / exercise.

Circadian Rhythm Worksheet

Sensory Stimuli



SIGHT HEAR SMELL TASTE TOUCH

And MOVEMENT



Which sensory stimuli help the person **calm down** – **become energized** ?
Have I placed plenty of these in the environment for “as needed” use ?

Sleep / Wake Cycle



What sensory stimuli can I use to help regulate the sleep / wake cycle ?
(using lighting / music, calming or energizing sensory stimuli)

Diet



Can I make healthier versions of the person’s favorite foods?
Can I replace use honey or fruit as a sweetener versus sugar ?

Physical Activity



Can I use the person’s interests to promote more outdoor activity / fresh air?
What activities can help promote blood circulation (massage / shower)?