Stabilizing Someone with Unregulated Moods / Thoughts (Step 3)

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Creating a stable daily routine

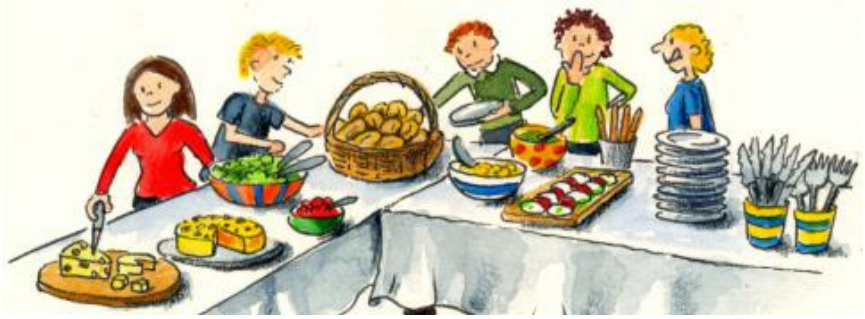
After we have introduced positive stimuli into the environment, and observed when / where / how it works best (Step 2), we want to focus on creating a stable and healthy daily routine.

Of course, our loved one will resist this – IF we try to tell them to do it – so we need wisdom.

How could we solve the following problem?

There are 200 people you need to feed, but they: speak different languages, have varying food preferences / eating habits / time schedules – and you have limited time / resources.

Would it surprise you to know that many hotels solve this problem every day?



Hotels use sensory stimuli (such as smell and visuals) to let people know where and when a meal is served.

People (such as small children) do not need to know what cutlery / plates are needed because they are presented in an organized step-by-step way.

Similarly, people do not need to make complex decisions about their meal selection, because each option is presented in a sequential step-by-step "one decision at a time" manner. There are no "wrong" decisions, because anyone at any time can "go back and redo" a meal item selection.

This is a useful model to keep in mind when we are looking to implement a structured daily routine.

Trying to tell a loved one what they should do rarely works, for several reasons: (a) they are often hyper-focused on sensory stimuli and internal feelings / thoughts so external verbal input from others feels like "background noise", and (b) they are in "survival mode" in the "now" moment and multi-step verbal instructions are too abstract and seem like a distraction from their immediate concern.

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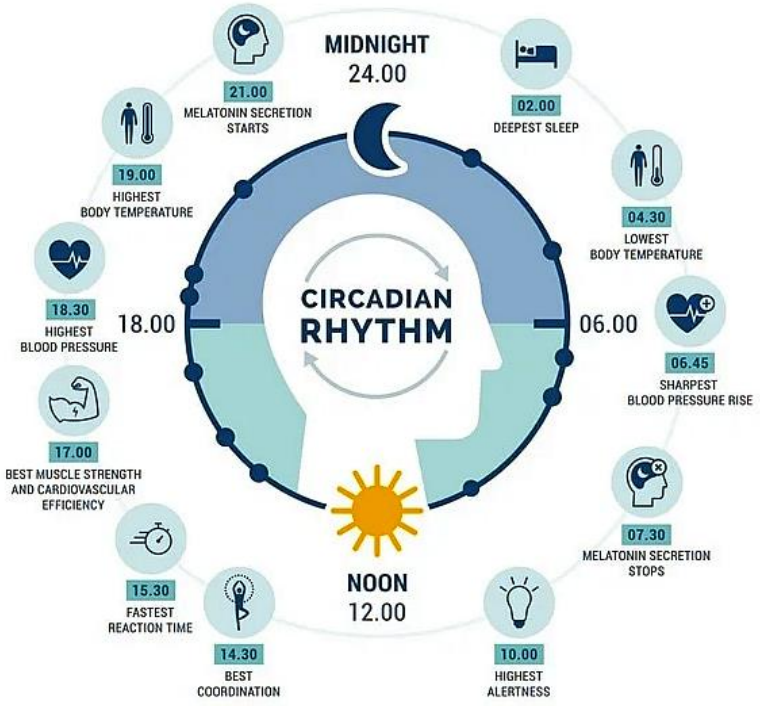
We know people with a dysregulated mood and/or thought patterns may react negatively if we try to talk to them directly about their problems, so we will start with an **indirect approach that introduces more positive stimuli** into their environment and routine.

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.

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 irrit able 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 modo 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  And MOVEMENT 	*Which sensory stimuli help the person **calm down** – **become energized** ?* *Have I 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)?*