

A COMPREHENSIVE GUIDEBOOK
for Depression Recovery and Prevention

Your
HAPPINESS
TOOLKIT

16 *Strategies for*
OVERCOMING
DEPRESSION

And Building a Joyful, Fulfilling Life

CARRIE M. WRIGLEY, LCSW



MORNING LIGHT
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Your Happiness Toolkit:

16 Strategies for Overcoming Depression, and Building a Joyful, Fulfilling Life

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*For more information, visit **CarrieWrigley.com***

*Dedicated to those who struggle,
those who are trying to help, and those
who simply seek to remain happy and
hopeful in a challenging world.*

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F O R E W O R D

The tools described in this book have the power to help you overcome depression. *BUT* - in order for them to work for you, *you* need to work them.

You might be a little disheartened by that last statement. But that's actually the very thing that makes this book so hopeful—***it gives YOU the power.*** Taking responsibility, as Carrie Wrigley has written, “*puts you in a position of significant power and control within your own life.*”

As someone who has often struggled with depression, I used to bristle at the mere suggestion that I might somehow be responsible for it. I'd get defensive if someone tried to tell me to just “snap out of it,” or “be more grateful,” or try some newfangled therapeutic approach.

It was as if they believed I wasn't a victim of my depression—that it was somehow within my realm of control. *It wasn't!* No one wants to feel depressed. No one wants to feel suicidal. I didn't choose these feelings, they chose me! ***Depression—I thought—was caused by forces completely outside of my control.***

But that kind of mentality only strengthened and perpetuated my depression. Because—and this is important—if depression

is caused by forces outside of my control, then how can I possibly have any sort of power over it?

According to that kind of mentality, I can't. I'm powerless. I have no hope of moving forward, because I am a victim of my circumstances.

But then, I heard a talk by Carrie Wrigley. In her talk, she spoke about depression, and offered practical tools for overcoming it. She didn't talk about "*getting by*," or *mitigating* the symptoms, or learning how to *cope* with it. No, she was offering practical advice on how to **overcome** it.

Think of it: here was an educated therapist, with years of experience working with countless clients. And she was telling the audience—and the world—that there is a way to *overcome* depression.

Her words lit a fire inside of me—a fire borne of hope.

I anxiously read everything she had written, and I even interviewed her for a number of different projects. Her words had a profound impact on my life, and have helped me (and many others) to move forward from despair into healing and recovery.

And the most beautiful thing about this book is this: **it gives you the power to move forward.** It isn't some knowledge that only a select few people can understand. It isn't a new or expensive drug. It isn't part of a lifetime subscription. *This is real, effective, and practical power that lies within you.*

YOUR HAPPINESS TOOLKIT

So, if you—or someone you know—is struggling with depression, I invite you to read this book, and put its principles into practice. Because the principles work—if *you* work them.

And *that* is very hopeful indeed!

—Seth Adam Smith

Author of Your Life Isn't For You, and You—Unstuck
sethadamsmith.com

INTRODUCTION

This is not another book about depression. This is a book about **RECOVERY** from depression, and it is a guidebook for **PREVENTING** depression in the **first place**. It is a comprehensive manual brimming with practical, drug-free strategies you can use—starting *today*—to help yourself, or someone you care about.

Here, you will learn the difference between what *feeds* depression, and what *fights* it. You will learn how to intentionally and consistently build a style of life that promotes happiness, wellness, and productivity. You will learn how to depression-proof yourself and those around you, by following simple, practical guidelines that even young children can understand.

This is a book intended to empower and embolden YOU—whether you have struggled with depression for decades, or just mildly felt its early impact in yourself or in others. You may be someone who is responsible for others' care—as a parent, professional healer, teacher, or religious leader—who wants better tools for helping those within your care who struggle. Or, you may be a reasonably happy person who has **NEVER** wrestled with depression—and you want to keep it that way! Whatever your situation, and whatever your life or family history, you can learn and apply these principles of emotional wellness to help yourself and others.

INTRODUCTION

I have been a counselor for over thirty years, specializing in the treatment of depression, anxiety, abuse, grief, trauma, addiction, relationship issues, and other related problems. I have sat on the front lines of terrible pain with hundreds of struggling people over the years. And I have joyfully watched as they have rebuilt and revitalized their lives, by diligently applying these healing ideas that I have shared with them.

Time after time in this work, I have watched light come back into once-darkened eyes, and vitality pour back into once-shriveled souls. I have seen people powerfully take their lives back, restored to vibrancy and hope. I've seen people regain their sense of purpose, repair old areas of brokenness, and revitalize their cherished relationships, and their personal wellness. I have seen people literally transform their lives in fundamental ways—replacing depression with happiness, health, and vitality.

I know these principles and techniques work, because I have tested them for decades—in my counseling practice, in my family, in my teaching, and in my own personal life. These are ideas I found first to help myself, early in my life, through a series of depressive episodes. I have personally known the crushing weight of depression. I have felt its iron grip, heard its destructively demoralizing voice, and experienced the very physical, as well as emotional, impact of its dark presence. But I have also felt the profound joy and victory of learning to cast off that terrible weight, and intentionally build something better. I have likewise seen that joy and triumph in others I've shared these ideas with. Now, I want that same joy and relief for YOU.

So, use this guidebook in whatever ways serve YOU best to meet your needs, both now and in the future. You might want to read it first from beginning to end, to familiarize yourself with the broad range of tools and techniques available to help you. Or, if you have a specific identified need, you might want to go directly to the chapter that is most relevant for you now, and then return to the others later. In the back of the book you will find additional resources, in case you need more intensive research or learning on a given topic.

Use this book to help you GET strong and STAY strong emotionally—and to help others around you to do the same. *Depression need not be permanent, and happiness is an attainable and sustainable condition—IF* you know and consistently apply the principles associated with enduring happiness. Let this be a powerful guidebook for you, in that lifelong adventure of discovery, transformation, and healing.

—Carrie M. Wrigley, LCSW

A QUICK START GUIDE

Overcoming Depression and Building Happiness

Like the *Quick Start Guide* provided with a new electronic device or piece of software, **Section I** will acquaint you with the most essential ingredients for overcoming depression and strengthening emotional wellness. Each chapter in this section includes **Transformational Tools** that you can start using right away, as Quick Start Strategies, to help you build a solid foundation of happiness and well-being.

Then, **Sections II–IV** will help you to build on that foundation with more detailed instructions. These sections serve as a more *comprehensive owner’s manual*, providing guidance, layer by layer, to help you create a healthier brain and a happier lifestyle. These sections draw on a rich variety of **wellness-enhancing strategies**, enabling you to assemble your personalized Happiness Toolkit.

Finally, **Section V** offers *additional resources*, which provide deeper understanding and context, to point you to more information regarding tools that you can strengthen further over time.

YOUR HAPPINESS TOOLKIT

What It Is, How to Build It, and Why

- 1–1 What Is *Your* Happiness Toolkit?
- 1–2 How to Build *Your* Happiness Toolkit
- 1–3 Why *You* Should Build *Your* Happiness Toolkit
- 1–4 People-Pleasing, Perfectionism, and “Productivity”
- 1–5 Transformational Tool #1: *The Wellness Grid*

1–1 What Is *Your* Happiness Toolkit?

The purpose of this book is to teach you how to build *Your* Happiness Toolkit. This is a do-it-yourself resource that is entirely unique to you—an absolutely portable, completely customized toolkit of practical strategies you can use to overcome depression and build a happy, fulfilling life—no matter what challenges you face.

While others can advise you in selecting your particular set of tools, and perhaps help you learn how to more effectively use

them—ultimately, the responsibility for building and using *Your Happiness Toolkit* rests entirely with you. This puts you in a position of significant power and control within your own life. It also enables you to affect other lives in powerful positive ways—whether within your own family, or beyond.

Your Happiness Toolkit is a completely portable resource that you can literally take with you everywhere you go, into any circumstance you might face, at any time throughout your life. It is a dependable resource that is always available to you—even in the middle of an unexpected storm, a death in the family, or any other difficult circumstance you might encounter, now or in the future. It increases your resilience, expands your self-confidence, and strengthens your capacity for joy—whether in good times, or in challenging times.

It is a resource that—because you select and build it yourself—is absolutely custom-fit to you personally. It begins with positive strategies that you may have used previously in your life, in times of prior struggle or challenge. It builds on your existing strengths—and then, a layer at a time, adds new skills and capacities.

1–2 How to Build *Your Happiness Toolkit*

Nobody comes into this world with a fully stocked Happiness Toolkit. All of us arrive here as vulnerable, dependent little creatures—unable to feed ourselves, comfort ourselves, or move ourselves around. It is only over the process of time that we learn how to hold up our own little heads, walk on our own little feet, meet our own needs, and soothe our own distresses.

As human beings, we are designed with the lifelong capacity to grow, learn, and change. We draw on that natural capacity, from our earliest days as tiny infants, to our final days as aging adults. We each acquire new insights and skills—a little at a time, over the process of time. Our brains are constantly engaged throughout our lifetimes in the process of neuroplasticity—building new pathways of understanding and capacity, new cellular and neurological structures to support positive new growth.

This is not a process that ends in childhood—or even in adolescence. Literally until the day we die, our brains are capable of learning, changing, and growing. So, it is never too late to “teach an old dog new tricks.” Nor is it ever too early to teach a young child practical skills for building and maintaining happiness throughout life.

“A little at a time, over the process of time.” It is in this way that you will build *Your Happiness Toolkit*. In fact, happily, it is in this way that you have already built some of the most important elements of your lifetime capacity for happiness—though you may not be aware of it currently.

As you will learn in this book, from the time that you were born—perhaps even before you were born—you were pre-designed and pre-equipped with tools and abilities that can help you to *become* happy and to *stay* happy, no matter what. We will review what some of those tools of happiness are, tools that you already know how to use—though you may have forgotten their existence, or put them aside for a time.

We will also be discussing other happiness tools that you have most likely already learned, in the natural process of growing up. We will identify those tools, dust them off a bit, and expand upon them—building on strengths you’ve already acquired, and adding to capacities you’ve already developed—but perhaps never before glimpsed the full power of.

We’ll also explore various factors in modern life that may have diverted you away from happiness skills you had once developed. We’ll discuss why depression and suicidality are growing so fast in our time—and what *you* can do to stem the tide of depression—in yourself, or in those you care for.

You’ll also undergo training in using powerful new happiness tools that you have perhaps *never* heard of before. These new resources will most likely take more time, energy, and effort for you to acquire and master, since you are likely less familiar with them. But, like a complex drill-bit set, or an innovative new power tool, these more complex tools can be amazingly effective—once you know what they are and how to use them. As you begin your acquaintance with these new tools, you can actively remember and make use of those more familiar tools that you have had available since early childhood.

Remember—“a little at a time, over the process of time.” In this way, one step at a time, you’ll be adding tools—old and new—to *Your Happiness Toolkit*. You’ll be doing this mindfully—proactively—incrementally—*gradually*.

So, don’t be discouraged if it doesn’t happen all at once, if some of the tools seem too challenging to master, or if other people seem

further along in the process than you seem to be. This isn't a race, and it isn't a competition. *You start from where you are, and then build from there.* That's how anything of value gets created. And it's how you'll build *Your Happiness Toolkit* —“a little at a time, over the process of time.”

1–3 Why You Should Build Your Happiness Toolkit (The Four “Whys”)

There are at least four reasons why *you* should build *Your Happiness Toolkit*—starting today:

1. Because you—and only you—can build it.
2. Because it is more and more needed, in the world we currently live in.
3. Because a happy life is a much more rewarding, satisfying, and productive life.
4. Because your level of happiness greatly impacts those around you (positively or negatively).

Now, let's explore each of these four reasons—these Four “Whys”—in turn:

Why #1: Why You—And Only You—Can Build Your Happiness Toolkit

You, like every other human being on earth, are an absolutely unique, exquisitely distinct individual. No one else has your specific DNA, your life history, your exact personality, your hopes

and dreams, your strengths and weaknesses, your sufferings and triumphs—your past, present, or future. You are the only one of you that there ever has been, or that there ever will be.

As a result, your depression and your happiness are also exquisitely unique and personal—and can only be fully understood and fully addressed by *you*. Though others can advise, assist, and support you in your quest, ultimately *you* are the only human being that can truly and entirely get into your own head, and heal your own life, from the inside out. This book will teach you how to do just that.

Why #2: Why *Your* Happiness Toolkit Is More and More Needed, in the World We Currently Live In

A quick scan of the daily headlines is enough to show that the world seems to be getting more and more challenging and undependable—environmentally, politically, sociologically, and personally. Natural disasters of numerous varieties are becoming ever more fierce and commonplace, as environmental pressures strain and drain our embattled planet. Conflicts between nations and political infighting within governments are becoming ever more chronic—and ever more ugly. Traditional connections within families, communities, businesses, and places of worship are eroding—or even shattering—at an unprecedented pace.

In the face of these and other challenges, we may find ourselves feeling overwhelmed, depressed, anxious, and ill-equipped to deal with it all. While understandable, these common reactions ultimately only add to our general distress, and escalate the very problems they are triggered by. In times when everything around

us might feel increasingly uncertain, it is ever more important that we have a consistent internal resource that can sustain us through whatever challenge we might face, now or in the future.

A single lit candle can cast light across an entire room. A single bright star in the night sky can be a powerful source of needed hope and steady direction. When we learn to develop internal strength and resilience, when we have a steady resource for building and maintaining happiness that goes with us wherever we go, we can be a significant force for good—first in our own lives, and then in the lives of those around us.

Why #3: Why a Happy Life Is More Rewarding, Satisfying, and Productive

Happiness is a state of being that we universally aspire to. In our personal lives, workplaces, family relationships, and communities, we are most energetic, most resilient, most connected, and most productive when we are *happy*. Unhappiness, in contrast, drains our energy, reduces our effectiveness, strains our relationships, and vastly decreases our productivity—whether at home, at work, or elsewhere.

Learning how to be happy, therefore, is perhaps the single most important life skill we can acquire, and that we can extend to our children and to our loved ones. It is not an automatic state of being—particularly in our twenty-first-century world, where happiness is becoming increasingly counter-cultural. Learning to be happy is learning to be part of the solution, rather than part of the problem. It is a state that must be chosen, a path that must be consistently and consciously selected—not just once, but often—even daily.

Learning to choose happiness means—learning to make choices that lead to happy consequences. Throughout this book, we will be exploring various factors that will help you learn how to do that—day by day, and year by year, throughout your lifetime.

Why #4: Why Your Level of Happiness Impacts Those Around You (Positively or Negatively)

Depression is notoriously contagious. It has a draining, discouraging impact—not just on the sufferer, but on those around them as well. Knowing this, some depressed people are tragically tempted to end their own lives—hoping it will end their personal misery, and also believing, “*Everyone will be better off without me.*”

Sadly, nothing could be further from the truth. That desperate act of self-elimination tends to fuel more pain and lasting agony in survivors than almost any other human behavior. The answer is not to end *life*. The answer is to end *unhappiness*—and to replace it, actively and intentionally, with something far better.

Psychologist Michael Yapko, in his insightful book *Depression Is Contagious*, notes that it is often assumed that depression is passed down genetically, without our choice or consent; and that automatic transmission of our “bad genes” is something that we can’t prevent or control. Certainly research and observation have confirmed that when one family member struggles emotionally, it is more difficult for other family members to resist the negative pull of depression and other emotional challenges.

But, Dr. Yapko also points to new research indicating that it is not just loved ones sharing DNA with the sufferer who might be affected. Individuals with no genetic connection whatsoever—like roommates, coworkers, or fellow students—can be “contaminated” with the impact of someone else’s depression, just as easily as a family member can. Depression *is*, in fact, contagious, he writes—whether there is a genetic connection, or not. Depressive thinking, communication, behavior, and relationship patterns can have a profoundly contagious effect on others—with or without shared DNA.

But—happily—it works the other way around too. *Happiness can also be contagious*. So, one of the most powerful and important “why’s” for building *Your Happiness Toolkit* is this—to help clear the path for your loved ones and others around you to be able to avoid depression, and find happiness themselves.

1–4 People-Pleasing, Perfectionism, and “Productivity”

Let’s face it. Depressed people are often tender, sensitive souls—people-pleasers, who often put the needs of others over their own needs. For those deeply caring people, it can sometimes be challenging to justify time spent doing *anything* for themselves. If you are like that, it might feel hard at times to justify the time, effort, and attention it may take to build and maintain *Your Happiness Toolkit*.

Ultimately, however, *you can only give what you have to give*. You cannot share what you do not possess. You cannot truly help others

be happy, if you are constantly miserable or depleted yourself. And, strange but true—one of the best ways to promote happiness in those around you is to become and remain happy yourself. So, far from being a selfish act, strengthening *Your Happiness Toolkit* is actually one of the most courageous and powerful things you can do to directly benefit your loved ones and those around you.

On the other hand, some depressed people are highly driven, ambitious, and perfectionistic. These individuals tend to keep themselves busy every second of every day being “productive”—making money or producing other visible results to benefit themselves, their employers, and their families. In this hard-pressed, high-demand, over-crammed schedule, finding time to nourish and sustain themselves can seem next to impossible—and certainly not on the top rung of priority for these driven, perfectionistic individuals.

However, experience has shown that people on this full-tilt schedule of “productivity” will inevitably crash—emotionally, and perhaps also physically—if they continue to neglect their own basic needs. Wise businesses, schools, nations, families, and individuals have, therefore, learned to allocate some regular recovery time for rejuvenation, recreation, and renewal.

Bestselling author Steven R. Covey has masterfully described that reality in his classic book, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. His research revealed that the most effective and successful people are not those who push themselves and others 24–7 to be “productive.” In contrast, Covey found that the “highly effective people” he studied universally engaged in a consistent habit he described as “saw sharpening.” Basically, this means—engaging intentionally and

consistently in behaviors intended to provide continuous renewal—mentally, physically, spiritually, and socially. To *not* do so, Covey found, produces *ineffectiveness*—as is the case with a saw that never gets sharpened, or a car that never gets an oil change.

Far too often in our busy, pressurized world, we fail to allow this needed time for refreshment and refueling. This, in fact, is one of the most common patterns today that fuels widespread emotional dysfunction in both young and old. Commonly referred to as “*depletion depression*,” this means pushing ourselves long past the time when we’ve run out of steam—continuing to work when we have nothing left to give to the work. It is a powerful and pervasive form of self-neglect and self-abuse. And it ends up hurting not just those who do it to themselves, but also to those who must absorb the impact when the inevitable crash occurs—resulting from a body and brain that have been pushed too hard, for too long, with too little recovery time.

So, ironically, one of the best things you can do for your boss and coworkers, as well as for your family and loved ones, is to take good care of yourself. This book will teach you how, step by step, and day by day, as you go forth to build and strengthen *Your Happiness Toolkit*.

1–5 Transformational Tool #1: *The Wellness Grid*

As we conclude each chapter in Section I, you will be introduced to a new Transformational Tool that you can begin using immediately, to strengthen your happiness and wellness. The first of these starter tools is called the Wellness Grid. This is a simple

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tool that allows you to start where you already are, and to begin recovery with what you’re already familiar with.

Here’s how it works. On a blank piece of paper, first create four boxes of roughly equal size, by making a vertical line down the center of your paper, and then adding a horizontal line across the middle, like this:

Now, within each of those four boxes, add a title, reflecting one of the four basic areas of life:

MENTAL	PHYSICAL
SPIRITUAL	SOCIAL

QUICK START GUIDE

Next, under each of those four titles, list actions you know could strengthen you in that particular area of life—drawing on what you already have had some experience with. For example:

MENTAL	PHYSICAL
Read a book Listen to a TED Talk Do a puzzle	Eat more fresh vegetables Exercise 15–30 minutes Declutter a room
SPIRITUAL	SOCIAL
Take a walk in nature Attend a church service Read inspiring literature	Call a friend Do something kind Help a family member

Then every day, starting today, make it a point to do at least one or two things listed on your Wellness Grid. You might want to start small, with the items requiring the least effort. Or, you may prefer to tackle first the items that bother you the most.

This one simple strategy has significant power to help keep you happy and well, if you’re already in good shape emotionally. And it has remarkable power to begin turning the tide of depression in those who currently struggle. So start with this tool, applying it every day. And then, build upward from there.