The Depression Spiral

The figure below shows one helpful way to think about and understand depression. Our life experience (including depression) is influenced by a number of interrelated factors: our environment, biological factors, our thoughts and beliefs, our behaviors, and our emotions. Each factor can affect the others.

For example: Sue recently began working in a fast-paced, high-pressure job (environmental factor). She began to have thoughts such as “There’s no way I can get all this work done. It’s impossible. If I don’t get it done, I may lose my job.” (thoughts). As a result, she began to work longer hours, cut out all fun activities, and withdrew from family and friends (behaviors). With this decrease in many of the positive, rewarding aspects of her life, she began to feel down, depressed, and more irritable (emotions). As the depression cycle started to take hold, she had more difficulty sleeping and concentrating (biology), which led her to feel even more irritable and depressed (emotions) and she withdrew further from activities she enjoyed (behaviors). At some point in the cycle, the balance of chemicals in her brain also began to alter (biology), which further deepened the spiral of depression.

Changing any area in your life can have a positive effect. Often one of the easiest things people can do to reverse the depression spiral is add valued and/or enjoyable activities back into their lives.