



**Skills for wellbeing**

**Full Resource handbook**

**Skills for Wellbeing**

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**Skills For Wellbeing**

**Week 1**

**Is your stress taking over? Here’s how to find out, and fix it!**

**Introduction**

Welcome to the six week Skills for Wellbeing group. This group is based on a Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) model which teaches us to become our own therapists by understanding and managing stress by looking at our **thinking** (cognitions), **feelings** (emotional and physical) and **doing** (behaviour).

One of the aims of The Skills for Wellbeing group is to develop tools and skills to manage and lessen the impact of significant life events and stressors. According to CBT, it is largely our thinking about (and interpretation and processing of) events, no matter how challenging they are, that leads to our emotional and behavioural stress reactions. Think about it - 10 different people can find themselves faced with exactly the same situation, but all 10 will think and feel and behave differently about it. So in this course we will be looking at different ways of responding to our thoughts, our behaviours and ways of changing our emotional responses to events to lessen stress and improve wellbeing.

**What is stress?**

You have likely been referred to this group because you are experiencing some difficulties with stress. Stress can be triggered by everyday events (such as being stuck in traffic), major life events (relationship breakdowns, loss of job, bereavement) or it can be influenced by our early experiences and biological nature. Stress occurs on a spectrum, at one end we have normal, everyday stresses but at the other end of the spectrum it can lead to problems such as anxiety and depression.

Not all stress is unhelpful, sometimes stress can sharpen our senses and stimulate us to perform better in certain situations. Stress is not a mental illness but is our body’s way of motivating us and alerting us to danger. It is cortisol (the stress hormone) that motivates us to get us up out of our beds in the morning and to function day to day. Normal stress is part and parcel of life and it comes and goes according to the situations that we are in.

Stress becomes a problem when there is no obvious trigger, it impacts on our daily functioning and we can’t get rid of it even when we try. Unhelpful stress consumes us, and slows us down. It can make you doubt yourself and after a while will give you the feeling that you are no longer in control of your own life. Unhelpful stress can lead to depression, because when experiencing unhealthy stress we stop believing in ourselves. Furthermore, unhelpful stress can lead us to stop doing things that we used to enjoy and which actually buffered us from unhelpful stress.

If you can identify with ‘unhelpful stress,’ and feel consumed by it then this CBT based group will help you look at how stress affects you and learn skills and strategies to reduce your stress. CBT has a strong evidence base as an effective treatment for a number of mental health difficulties and as a way of improving wellbeing.

Everybody responds to stress differently so it is helpful to have a clear idea of what factors might be contributing to your stress. Please look at the form on the following page and spend some time considering how stress is impacting on you.

**Let’s look at the impact of Stress on our Thinking, Emotions, Physical Sensations and Behaviour**

**Five Factor Model** (Padesky,1986)

**Situation**

Where? When? Who with? What happened? How?

**Thoughts & Images**

What went through my mind at that time? What disturbed me? If I had those thoughts/images/memories – what did that say or mean about me or the situation?

**Body / Physical sensations**

What did I notice in my body? What did I feel? Where did I feel it?

**Moods / Emotions**

What emotion did I feel at that time? What else?

How intense was that feeling? (0 – 100%)

**Behaviours / What I did or didn’t do**

What helped me cope and get through it? What didn’t I do or what did I avoid doing? What automatic reactions did I have? What would other people have seen me doing?

**Thoughts:**

**Anxious (Future Focus)**

* Worry – predicting the worst case scenario (What if...)
* Mind racing
* Difficulty concentrating
* Memory impairment
* Hypercritical

**Low Mood (Past Focus)**

* Rumination
* Thinking negatively about ourselves, others or the world
* Suicidal ideation
* Difficulty concentrating
* Memory impairment
* Hypercritical

Notice the overlaps between the experience or anxious feelings and low mood?

**In week 3 we will focus on thinking and changing how we respond to unhelpful thought patterns**

**Emotions**

**Anxious**

* Nervous
* Worried
* Frightened
* Tense
* Dread
* Agitated
* Unsettled
* Stressed
* Trepidation

**Low Mood**

* Tearful
* Sad
* Detached
* Numb
* Hopeless
* Worthless
* Helpless

**As our thoughts, behaviours, physical state and emotions are all connected we will see changes to our emotional state as we work on the different aspects each week.**

**Body/ Physical Sensations**

**Anxious**

* Heart races or skips a beat
* Chest feels tight/painful; sensation of choking
* Tingling or numbness
* Sweating
* Stomach churning
* Feeling jumpy or restless
* Tense muscles
* Panic symptoms/attacks
* Agitation,
* Sleep Disturbance
* Fluctuating appetite
* Reduced appetite

**Low Mood**

* Lethargy
* Decreased libido
* Increased sensitivity to pain
* Low energy
* Sleep disturbance
* Fluctuating appetite
* Varied appetite

**Next week we will be looking at the physiological response to stress and learning strategies to manage these. Behaviour**

**Anxious**

* Avoidance/Safety behaviours
* Short Tempered
* Overly active
* \*Worry Patterns
* Drink more alcohol
* Eat more or less
* Self-harm

**Low Mood**

* Inactivity
* Isolation
* \*Rumination Patterns
* Drink more alcohol
* Eat more or less
* Self-harm

Notice the overlaps between the behavioural experience of anxious feelings and low mood?

\*Although worry and rumination are cognitive processes (thoughts) we can do them so often and automatically that they can be considered behavioural patterns at times.

**During session 4 we will focus more on changing the behaviours that maintain stress and negatively impact on well being.**

**Breaking the Cycle**

As you will have realised, the way that stress impacts on the different areas in our lives actually keeps stress going. As we have more negative thoughts we will likely feel worse and this will have an impact on how we behave and how we feel physically. The good news is that as these areas are all connected if we change one of them it has the knock on effect of changing the others.

**The Steps to Work through Stress (Anxiety/Depression)**

* **Step 1:** Understand how stress works, especially the links between what we do, where we do it, how we do it, and how it makes us feel.
* **Step 2:** Identify particular areas of life where the way we’re responding to stress isn’t helping and learn how to change the response.
* **Step 3:** Learn to approach difficult situations rather than avoid them (we’ll look at this in session 4).

As you can see, the initial steps in working through stress requires us to raise awareness of how stress is impacting on your life. Often an area where this can be seen most clearly is in activity levels. We often stop doing things that give a sense of achievement, enjoyment and closeness to others when we are under stress.

**ACTIVITY DIARY INSTRUCTIONS**

* Write briefly in each box: What you did (brief description), one word that describes your mood and rate the intensity of your mood on a scale of 0-10%, your sense of **Achievement** for the activity on a scale of 0-10 (A0-10) your sense of **Closeness** to others (C0-10) and sense of **Enjoyment** (E0-10). An activity may be sitting down, or lying in bed, not only washing dishes, walking etc.

(Write in each box) Example: Watching TV with son, Sad 6&, A0, C7, E4

* After completing the diary you might notice patterns in your mood variations and how particular activities affect your mood. You can complete a Five Factor Model to examine the above findings in more detail. This will help us to plan a more healthy range of activities which give you a sense of Achievement, Enjoyment and Closeness (this will be covered in Session 4).

**Activity Diary**

For each day write briefly in each box: **What you did** (brief description), One word to describe your **Mood** and rate the **intensit**y of your mood on a scale of 0-100%. Your sense of **Achievement** out of 0-10, Your sense of **Closeness** to others out of 0-10, and your sense of **Enjoyment** out of 0-10.

An activity could be sitting down, lying in bed, washing some dishes etc.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Day** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Time** | **What I did** | **Mood** | **Intensity**  **(0-100%)** | **Achievement**  **(A0-10)** | **Closeness**  **(C0-10)** | **Enjoyment**  **(E0-10)** |  |
| **6-8am** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **8-10am** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **10am-12 noon** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
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After completing this diary, you may notice patterns in your mood variations and how particular activities may affect your mood. You will then be able to plan a healthier range of activities that give you a sense of achievement, closeness and enjoyment, (Using another blank form)

**Homework**

**It is important that you allow yourself the time and opportunity to become familiar with the techniques discussed during group meetings. Like all new skills the more we practice them the more confident and capable we become. Setting time aside on a daily basis and practising the techniques allows us to use these new found skills as part of our everyday lives making them more easily accessible at times of difficulty.**

**An invitation prior to next meeting:**

**Build self awareness.**

* Complete **Activity Diary** to notice what a typical week looks like for you.
* Any activities noted on the activity diary that evoke a stress response can be explored closer by completing a **Five Factor Model** (below). By making a note of situations in which we feel stress can help build self-awareness. This enables us to note the physical sensations, thoughts, emotions and behaviours associated with the stress

**Five Factor Model**

**Situation**

**Thoughts & Images**

**Body / Physical sensations**

**Moods / Emotions**

**Behaviours / What I did or didn’t do**

**Skills for Wellbeing**

**Week 2**

**Physical Reaction to Stress - Stress and the Body**

This week is looking at the way that our body can respond to stress, more specifically looking at the fight or flight response which is the most common experience in anxiety. There are other ways that our body responds to stress. All of these can be thought of as our body’s defence mechanisms and can be helpful in specific stress situations.

* FIGHT – which gives rise to feelings of frustration and irritation or even rage where we want to shout, hit out or be aggressive.
* FLIGHT – which gives rise to feelings of anxiety and fear, which means we want to escape.
* SUBMISSION – which gives rise to wanting to appease or close down, hide, not say anything, make oneself as small as possible
* FREEZE - which gives rise to a state of near-paralysis because of the overwhelming nature of the threat
* DISSOCIATE –which gives rise to feelings of wanting to turn away/inward and zone out.

**Fight, Flight or Freeze response**

As we will explore more in session, the fight or flight response is a very primative and necessacary survival mechanism that our body has. It all starts in a part of the brain called the amygdala, this is the brain’s threat alarm. It is activated by any sense of threat and operates on a better safe than sorry principle. When it preceives danger then it instantly sends a distress signal that gets the body ready to respond to this danger.

The difficulty is that as this part of the brain is very primitive it isn’t good at assessing whether something is actually a physical threat to us or just something scary we are thinking about. The more sophisticated part of our brain can imagine all sorts of scary things and the amygdala sends the signal to our body to respond as if that threat is infront of us.

The Freeze response occurs when we are in a situation that the brain very quickly concludes we can neither fight nor flee from the threat. This can give rise to those defence mechanisms of freezing, submitting or dissociating.

When our fight or flight is activated it is typical for physical changes, outlined in the picture below, to occur as our body attempts to prepare us for the perceived threat/danger. However we are all individual, so you may experience some of these symptoms more than others. Regardless, when we experience these symptoms it can feel scary and we can worry there is something wrong with us. However, when we experience these symptoms in response to perceived threat it is actually a sign our body is working as it should.

Two main processes occur in the body during fight/flight response. The Autonomic Nervous System speeds up; this is the system in the body that is responsible for regulating heart rate, breathing and the digestive system. This increase in heart rate and breathing is to allow us to get more oxygen pumped around the body, which increases our stamina and strength. The other main process to occur in the body during fight or flight is our muscles tense. This allows us to be ready for action and better able to evade danger or threat. All of the uncomfortable sensations that accompany our fight/flight response happen for a good reason and are not dangerous, but in many of the modern and social situations we experience they can feel unhelpful.

Heart beats faster

Breathing becomes faster

Muscles become tense

We sweat more

Our brain and senses sharpen considerably

Digestive system slows down– leads to feelings of nausea and need to visit the toilet

Dizziness

Sensation of choking



**The Effects of Over breathing**

Session 2 of this group spends some time discussing the role that breathing and overbreathing plays in anxiety. This is because breathing is generally an unconscious process that is influenced by the fight/flight response but it is something that we can bring under conscious control. We can learn to control our breathing to activate systems in our body that let us know we are not in danger.

As discussed in the group, when we over breathe the balance of oxygen and carbon dioxide is tipped so there is less carbon dioxide than oxygen. This causes a number of chemical changes in the body that can lead to symptoms like dizziness, light-headedness, confusion, breathlessness and blurred vision. It can also lead to symptoms in certain parts of the body such as an increase in heart rate to pump more blood around, numbness and tingling in the extremities, cold clammy hands and muscle stiffness.

Over breathing, or hyperventilation, is something that can occur suddenly but more commonly it occurs gradually so we may not be aware we are doing it until we experience these uncomfortable sensations. Often people can also have the sensation when over breathing that they are not getting enough oxygen or have a choking sensation, the opposite is true but this can increase over breathing and trigger panic sensations. Early signs that we may be overbreathing can be yawning or sighing a lot. So monitoring and changing our breathing can be instrumental in avoiding and reducing anxiety.

As with the other symptoms associated with anxiety, these changes are NOT HARMFUL.

**Switching off the Stress Response**

The good news is that this primitive stress response can be turned down as we activate other systems in the body and brain.

***Relaxation response.*** These include deep abdominal breathing, focus on a soothing word (such as peace or calm), and progressive muscle relaxation, visualization of tranquil scenes, repetitive prayer, yoga, and tai chi.

***Physical activity.*** People can use exercise to stifle the build up of stress in several ways. Exercise, such as taking a brisk walk shortly after feeling stressed, not only deepens breathing but also helps relieve muscle tension.

***Social support.*** Confidants, friends, acquaintances, co-workers, relatives, spouses, and companions all provide a life-enhancing social net — and may increase longevity. It's not clear why, but the buffering theory holds that people who enjoy close relationships with family and friends receive emotional support that indirectly helps to sustain them at times of chronic stress and crisis.

**Belly Breathing**

1. Note the level of tension you’re feeling. Put one hand on your stomach and one on your chest. If breathing from your chest you will see the hand on your chest move more and it means you are probably taking shorter, shallower breaths that are associated with anxiety. As you do this exercise try to see if you can move your breath down in to your belly. Don’t worry if you can’t to begin with, it takes practice!

2. Inhale deeply and slowly through your nose in to the bottom of your lungs. As you inhale deeply, the abdomen should expand outwards and so you might notice that the hand that is placed on the abdomen will rise also. You should notice that the chest only moves slightly.

3. When you’ve taken a full breath, pause for a moment and exhale slowly through your nose or mouth. Exhale fully and allow your body to just let go.

4. Do ten full abdominal breaths. Keep the breathing smooth and regular. To help to slow down the breath, we can count on each inhalation: 1 and 2 (slowly). Pause briefly and then exhale, again counting 1 and 2 and 3 and 4. Repeat this until your breathing slows down and you feel less anxious and more relaxed.

**Practicing Relaxation**

Once we are able to relax ourselves using the whole exercise, we need to learn how to use this skill in our day to day life. This involves learning how to recognise tension in our body and letting it go before it builds up. Remember, the aim of learning relaxation is that eventually you will be able to turn off the fight or flight response quickly in difficult situations.

**Shortening the relaxation exercise**

Over the next few weeks, shorten the exercise gradually. For example:

1. Try tensing and relaxing particular muscle groups rather than all of them.

2. Relax the particular area of the body that feels tense. Tighten the

muscles and then relax. Think about the muscle relaxing.

3. Change your posture to a relaxed one when you notice yourself getting

tense. Drop your shoulders down.

**Practise in increasingly difficult situations**

1. Once you are reasonably good at basic relaxation, start off by trying relaxing in different situations, e.g. watching T.V, or washing up.

2. Once you can relax when engaged in normal activities, try to relax in

situations which make you tense. This may take a great deal of

practise.

3. Start with easier situations first, then build up to more difficult

situations.

4. Remember to regularly check each muscle group for tension.

5. Once you have become good at carrying out relaxation, keep carrying

out the whole relaxation exercise about once every week or every

couple of weeks.

**5,4,3,2,1**

Often when we are feeling stressed or overwhelmed we can feel as if we are not present, our thoughts might be focused on the future or past or we may have the sensation of feeling unreal or disconnected from the present moment. This is a quick exercise to bring us back in to the present moment and can be used along with calm breathing and relaxation.

* **5 - LOOK:** Look around for 5 things that you can see and name them
* **4 - FEEL:** Pay attention to your body and think of 4 things that you can feel/touch. For example, you could say, I feel my feet against the floor, I feel the chair, or I feel the material of my clothing.
* **3 - LISTEN:** Listen for 3 sounds. It could be the sound of traffic outside, the sound of typing or the sound of your tummy rumbling.
* **2 – SMELL:** Say two things you can smell or would like to smell or taste.
* **1 – TASTE:** Say one thing you can smell or would like to taste.
* **Focus on the Breath**

**Self Care**

* When we have experiences which lead to us feeling stressed, we tend to also be neglectful of self and our needs.
* When our critical self is in charge, they are not interested in our needs.
* Self soothing is essential, not a weakness or indulgence.
* Oxygen mask analogy
  + If you were on a plane with a child, and the oxygen masks come down, whose mask do you put on first? Generally people will say the child, it’s actually your own before you put on the child’s to ensure that you are well enough to be able to assist them. This is a good example of how we should consider our own needs, it is necessary we practice good self care. If we do not then we will find our resources are used up and we are unable to care for others.

**Alternative Methods of Self-Care/Social Support**

* Yoga
* Tai Chi
* Gentle swim
* Walk in the countryside
* Massage
* Reflexology
* Aromatherapy
* Candlelit bubble bath
* Something creative e.g. baking, painting, reading writing, cooking
* Spending time with friends/loved ones
* Music
* Hobbies
* Exercise
* Mindfulness

**Homework**

**It is important that you allow yourself the time and opportunity to become familiar with the techniques discussed during group meetings. Like all new skills the more we practice them the more confident and capable we become. Setting time aside on a daily basis and practising the techniques allows us to use these new found skills as part of our everyday lives making them more easily accessible at times of difficulty.**

**An invitation prior to next meeting:**

**Build self awareness.**

* Complete Activity Diary to notice what a typical week looks like for you. Use the activity diary to schedule in time for practicing relaxation exercises
* Practice Belly Breathing. Initially do this at a time where you are at your most relaxed and you know you will not be disturbed. As you build confidence in this skill it can be used at any time in response to stress.
* **Practice “Deep Relation” Exercise, available free online:** [**https://stresscontrol.org/relaxation-mindfulness/**](https://stresscontrol.org/relaxation-mindfulness/)
* Over the next few weeks, shorten the exercise gradually. For example relaxing particular muscle groups. As you become more familiar with relaxation you can move on to using Track 9 – Quick Relaxation.
* Practise in increasingly difficult situations. Initially choose a time when you are quite relaxed and then as you become more familiar with noticing and relaxing tension in your body use it in more anxiety provoking situations.

**Activity Diary**

For each day write briefly in each box: **What you did** (brief description), One word to describe your **Mood** and rate the **intensit**y of your mood on a scale of 0-100%. Your sense of **Achievement** out of 0-10, Your sense of **Closeness** to others out of 0-10, and your sense of **Enjoyment** out of 0-10.

An activity could be sitting down, lying in bed, washing some dishes etc.

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After completing this diary, you may notice patterns in your mood variations and how particular activities may affect your mood. You will then be able to plan a healthier range of activities that give you a sense of achievement, closeness and enjoyment, (Using another blank form in appendices)

**Skills For Wellbeing**

**Week 3**

**Stress and your Thinking**

This week we are looking at the role that our thoughts play in stress and learning ways to challenge the unhelpful thinking patterns that we can all get in to from time to time. We often think that external events cause us distress but in this week we start to explore that there is a crucial step between the event and our response that we can influence – our thinking. We commonly talk about events as if this step does not occur, for example – my partner made me angry.

**Event** **Consequence**

Partner is late Feel angry

**Event**  **Belief** **Consequence**

Partner is late They’re disrespectful Feel angry

The belief is like the lense through which we view the event. It is our perception of the event that causes the emotional distress, not the event in itself. As covered during week 3 we can have a number of different thoughts in relation to the same event.

**Event**  **Belief** **Consequence**

Partner is late I hope they’re ok Feel worried

**Thoughts and Emotions**

There is a strong link between our thoughts and our emotions but it is important as we start looking at challenging our thinking so that we can identify what our thoughts are and what are our emotional responses. Thoughts pop into our mind; they can be neutral, pleasant or unpleasant. Sometimes they might be like images or words, we could think of thoughts as being stories that our mind gives us.

Emotions are our responses to these thoughts. They can be pleasant or unpleasant and usually impact on how we feel physically. If you look at the following list of emotions you can probably consider in the 5 factor model how you might behave, think and physically feel differently when experiencing these emotions.

Tense Enraged Frightened Cheerful

Annoyed Happy Panicky Euphoric

Unhappy Exhilarated Frustrated Mad

Calm Keyed Up Scared Uneasy

Anxious Irritated Flat Sad

Depressed Joyful Tired Discouraged

Angry Excited Nervous Jealous

**Labelling your Thoughts**

It is very common for our thoughts to fall into categories that we call “*unhelpful thinking styles*”. We all have these styles to some degree and we tend to find that we use some styles more often than others. It is very helpful to become familiar with these thinking styles and try to recognise them in our day-to-day thinking. Once we have identified the style, it is easier to consider alternative – and more helpful – thoughts i.e. if we are “All or Nothing” thinking then it might help to consider a range of outcomes that could occur in between the two extreme outcomes. Some common unhelpful thinking styles are listed on the next page.

**Unhelpful Thinking Styles**

**All or Nothing Thinking** (sometimes called ‘black and white thinking’) - This is when we perceive ourselves, events or the world around us as being either all good or bad, right or wrong, success or failure, etc. We forget about all the ‘shades’ in between these extreme opposites. Examples of all or nothing thinking can be:

*If I’m not perfect I’m a failure*

*I do it right or not at all*



**Overgeneralising –** This is when we draw conclusions based on a single event. These conclusions tend to be very broad and predict patterns based on little evidence. Always, never

****

**Mental filter –** This refers to when we only pay attention to particular kinds of information or evidence. For instance, we might notice our limitations but not see our successes. We might

**Disqualifying the Positives –** This refers to when we discount or explain away the good or positive things that have happened or that we have done. We may do this for a variety of reasons, one of which might be that they do not support a belief we have about ourselves, others or the world we live in. For instance, you might respond to someone saying you are a nice person for holding the door open for them by stating “it’s what you’re meant to do”. Often, without meaning to, we distance ourselves from appreciating the positives.

****

**Catastrophising –** Often referred to as ‘making a mountain out of a molehill’ or **‘**blowing things out of proportion’. This can be like viewing the world through glasses made with magnifying lenses; that make danger or unpleasant events appear and feel bigger and more difficult to manage. This can also work in reverse, where we might minimise and shrink certain events to make them seem less important. Regardless we are not seeing event in their true form and proportion to address.

**Jumping to Conclusions –** We can jump to conclusions in two different ways:

**4 + 4 = 10**

1. **Fortune Telling –** when wepredict the future
2. **Mind Reading –** when we think we know what others are thinking

It’s all my fault

**Personalisation –** This refers to when weassume responsibility or blame for something that is not actually our fault. The opposite can also be the case; that we might blame others for events that were our responsibility.

**Shoulds, Musts and Ought To’s –** These critical words can cause frustration when we apply them to ourselves and others. It can lead us to feel guilty and as though we are failing to meet certain standards. When we try to apply them to others it can be frustrating when we cannot control the actions of others or we feel they are not meeting certain standards. Often these critical words do not encourage us to be flexible or compassionate to ourselves or others.

Shoulds

**Emotional Reasoning –** Because we feel a certain way we presume that our thoughts must be true. E.g. *I feel embarrassed so I must have made a fool of myself*.

Labelling

**Labelling –** This refers to when we assign labels to others or ourselves that are unhelpful and not always accurate. E.g. *I’m useless* or *They are selfish.*

**Standing back from your Thoughts**

In this week we have learned different ways of standing back from thoughts and changing how we relate to them. It is important to find what strategies work for you. Recognising the unhelpful thinking style of your thought and weighing up the evidence can be helpful in seeing an alternative perspective that you may have been overlooking.

For some people, they may find it helpful to practice detaching from a thought and using imagery – such as the buses metaphor – to let the thought pass. We could think of our thoughts as being like buses – they come and go, one after the other and can take us to different places. Imagine that you are standing at the East Kilbride bus station and you’re waiting for a bus to Glasgow but then the bus to Hamilton comes along – do you get on it? We can be like this with our thoughts; we attach to them and get taken away by them even though the thought isn’t taking you where you want to go. There is actually a difference between having a thought and thinking. Having a thought is the bus coming to the station, thinking is when we get on it, attach emotion to it and follow it where it goes. We can’t control whether we have the thought in the first place but we can choose not to get on it. Sometimes it might be that we only notice we are following a thought after some time, we are already on the bus going towards somewhere we don’t want to go, but we have the choice to get off that thought bus as we see that it is not helpful.

**Worry Time**

* Set aside 20 minutes each day for worrying
* If a worry comes up during the day, postpone it to this time
* Only worry for the 20 minutes, anything you did not worry about postpone to the next day
* If when you get to worry time an issue no longer worries you – don’t worry about it!
* Use “Dealing with worry” guide to help think through the worries you’re having
* Don’t do it too close to bed time

**Homework**

**It is important that you allow yourself the time and opportunity to become familiar with the techniques discussed during group meetings. Like all new skills the more we practice them the more confident and capable we become. Setting time aside on a daily basis and practising the techniques allows us to use these new found skills as part of our everyday lives making them more easily accessible at times of difficulty.**

**An invitation prior to next meeting:**

* Continue relaxation practices
* Complete Thought Record
* Use Activity Diary to schedule in relaxation and worry time if this is an issue for you
* Read through Dealing With Worry self help guide

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Situation**  What happened? Where? Who with? | **Emotional**  **and Physical Response** | **Automatic Thoughts** | **Unhelpful Thinking Style** | **Evidence that supports the thought** | **Evidence that does not support the thought** | **Alternative more balanced thought** |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

**Activity Diary**

For each day write briefly in each box: **What you did** (brief description), One word to describe your **Mood** and rate the **intensit**y of your mood on a scale of 0-100%. Your sense of **Achievement** out of 0-10, Your sense of **Closeness** to others out of 0-10, and your sense of **Enjoyment** out of 0-10.

An activity could be sitting down, lying in bed, washing some dishes etc.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Day** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Time** | **What I did** | **Mood** | **Intensity**  **(0-100%)** | **Achievement**  **(A0-10)** | **Closeness**  **(C0-10)** | **Enjoyment**  **(E0-10)** |  |
| **6-8am** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **8-10am** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **10am-12 noon** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **12-2pm** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **2-4pm** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **4-6pm** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **6-8pm** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **8-10pm** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **10- midnight** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

After completing this diary, you may notice patterns in your mood variations and how particular activities may affect your mood. You will then be able to plan a healthier range of activities that give you a sense of achievement, closeness and enjoyment, (Using another blank form)

**Skills For Wellbeing**

**Week 4:**

**Behaviour**

**Aims;**

Why is Behaviour So Important?

Behaviour and Anxiety:

* Avoidance & Safety Behaviours
* Exposure Rationale
* Creating a Hierarchy
* Bonus Skills: Goal Setting & Problem Solving

Behaviour and Mood:

* Importance of Variety and Pleasure
* Charging our Battery
* Activity Schedule

**Why is behaviour so important?**

Almost everything we do can be classified as behaviour. Behaviours create a link between ourselves and the world around us. Behaviours impact on all aspects of our life, for example:

* **Feelings** - if we take action and progress towards desired goals then we gain a sense of achievement rather than a sense of failure/guilt we would get from avoiding behaviours that we think would be helpful (e.g. engaging in pleasurable activities, self-care, self-development or facing your fears).
* **Physical sensations** - if we avoid pleasurable activities or withdraw from social contact, our mood can become depressed which results in low energy, increased sensitivity to pain and poor concentration. Also, we can choose to engage in breathing and relaxation exercises when our fight or flight becomes activated in stressful situations, therefore choosing a helpful behaviour.
* **Thoughts -** we are more likely to think of ourselves positively when we engage in more helpful behaviours (increased confidence and sense of achievement/enjoyment).Also, the more we avoid something, the more likely we are to fear it.
* **How others experience and react to us** - if we are withdrawn/isolated or snappy then people are less likely to respond the way we would like them to (e.g. Social support).

**Our Role in Behaviour**

Many of our behaviours occur outside of our awareness and can therefore feel ‘automatic’ or as if we have no control over them. This is especially true of behaviours that we have used for a very long-time. However, our behaviours *are* a result of the choices we make, even if we are not aware of them in the moment (think back to session 3 and the role of *thoughts* in influencing our interpretation of a situation).

It is important to start bringing awareness to the choices we make. Once we become more familiar with the decisions we make and why we make them, we are more empowered to make more helpful choices and ask if our behaviour is actually helpful in the long-term. Choosing new behaviours is not an easy process; however, it is comforting that the ability to changes is in our hands. New behavioural patterns take time to build but with perseverance, they can become the new norm.

A strategy that can help with choosing new behaviours is to take ownership of the decisions we make. Whether you make a helpful or unhelpful choice, it is important to recognise your role within that process. Not to beat yourself up, but instead to recognise there are alternatives (effective or otherwise). When you take ownership of your choices you no longer view yourself as a victim to circumstances (e.g. ‘it’s just the way I am’) and are more likely to create meaningful change in your life.

Another strategy that can help us make different choices is to identify the function of our behaviour. Ask yourself, what is the need you are trying to meet by engaging in this behaviour? Once we understand or are honest about the function the behaviour is serving then we can look for alternative behaviours that fulfil this need but are more beneficial in the long-term. For example, remember the cat from session 1 sitting on the couch watching TV and having a beer? “Am I doing this as a treat after a productive day, or am I doing this to avoid more productive behaviours or avoiding/suppressing stress/emotions/chores/etc”.

**Anxiety or Low-Mood?**

Anxiety and low-mood tend to influence our behaviours in different ways. When we are anxious we are more likely to *avoid* anxiety provoking situations, use *safety behaviours* to cope with anxiety provoking situations and *worry* repetitively without implementing helpful solutions. However, low-mood is more likely to make us isolate ourselves from the people in our lives; withdraw from activities we used to do; ruminate on past events instead of trying to find a solution to our problems; and disengage from or delay doing functional tasks e.g. household chores, personal hygiene, paying bills etc.

It is common for there to be overlap, especially when suffering from both anxiety and depression i.e. someone might choose to not go to a friend’s party because they are anxious about making small talk (avoidance) and feel like no-one wants to talk to them (withdrawal). Not going to the friend’s party due to anxiety can also lead to low mood due to isolation and critical thoughts.

Regardless, once we have identified the unhelpful behaviour we can choose the most appropriate strategy to tackle it. The next section will help you to identify some unhelpful behavioural responses, such as avoidance and safety behaviours.

**Part 1**

**Unhelpful Behavioural Responses**

*Avoidance behaviour* is a defence mechanism by which a person avoids or removes themselves from unpleasant situations.

*Safety behaviours* are coping behaviours used to reduce anxiety when we feel threatened or overwhelmed. It is an attempt to gain a sense of safety. However, we begin to rely upon these and attribute any successes to the safety behaviour rather than our efforts.

**Avoidance**

Avoidance behaviours are one of the most common coping strategies adopted when dealing with mental health difficulties. On the one hand, avoidance makes a lot of sense. When we experience the unpleasant thoughts, feeling and emotions that anxiety causes, it is natural to choose a behaviour that makes these difficulties go away. When we experience this relief from our symptoms, our brain learns that avoidance can make us feel better and therefore it more likely that we will choose avoidance in the future...because it feels good (this process also explains why we choose other unhelpful behaviours like smoking, alcohol and comfort eating). However, avoidance is only a short-term solution because it does not address our original concern; it does not give us the opportunity to learn we can cope; it often leads to feelings of guilt, failure and subsequently an increase in anxiety; and limits the type of life we live which can make us more vulnerable to developing depression.

**Safety Behaviours**

A safety behaviour is something we do that helps us feel safe when we are anxious. This behaviour tends to reduce our anxiety in the short-term, however, in the long-term it maintains our anxiety; as we avoid facing our fears and do not learn that we can indeed cope.

* Always carrying a Diazepam, just in case
* Carrying a paper bag in case a panic attack occurs
* Over-preparing (travel plans/conversations/tasks)
* Pretending to be doing something on your phone to manage anxiety waiting on a bus/train/friend/etc.
* Seeking reassurance frequently to avoid any uncertainty
* Avoiding all eye contact when going out of the house
* Agreeing to go to an event but only for a set period of time

**More examples exist, can you think of any you do?**

When we use safety behaviours we tend to attribute our successes to the safety behaviours and not to our own efforts or capabilities. This reinforces the likelihood of us using them again. Safety behaviours undermine our confidence and reinforce the belief that we can’t cope on our own without these safety behaviours.

If you happen to use several safety behaviours at the same time, try eliminating them one-by-one. With this approach, we change the term *safety behaviours* to *approach behaviours.* This is because we can use and gradually reduce our safety behaviours to help us approach things we were previously avoiding. For example, someone may initially avoid a shopping centre completely but then decide they will attempt to go to the mall if they can carry their diazepam, wear sunglasses and listen to music the whole time (three separate approach behaviours). Although this is still employing safety behaviours, it can be classed as progress as they are no longer avoiding the situation completely. Over time, the person would look to reduce the approach behaviours to eventually prove that they can go to the shopping mall without these other strategies in place. We go into this process more later on when creating a Hierarchy (see below).

**Anxiety Response**

**Avoidance/**

**Safety Behaviour?**

Anxiety

Time

This graph represents our **predicted** anxiety response over time. Let’s use an example of going to a social gathering we are anxious about.

**Black Line:** Before the event, we can sometimes predict that our physical and cognitive response to anxiety will continue to increase and increase, until we hit breaking point.

**Yellow Line:** Or we think that our anxiety response will increase quite high but remain there unless we do something about this, e.g. avoid, engage in safety behaviours.

This graph below now shows what research says is our actual anxiety response over time.

Anxiety

Time

**Avoidance/**

**Safety Behaviour**

**------>**

**Green line:** But what research actually shows us is that if you remain in the anxiety provoking situation long enough the anxiety response dies down gradually on its own.

**Red line:** However, what often happens is that our anxiety response is triggered (the green line) and we utilise either avoidance or safety behaviours, in an attempt to reduce anxiety, which works well in the short-term. But in the long-term this only maintains our anxiety; as we never get to see and experience that anxiety will reduce without these behaviours. We often over-estimate the threat/danger and underestimate our ability to cope. It is only in the latter end of this green curve that we learn to more accurately assess similar events in future and we see that we can indeed cope. It is in the latter end of this green curve that we build confidence and self-esteem.

**Blue line:** When we remain in anxious situations long enough for our anxiety to at least reduce by half, and perform this often enough, our anxiety response (green line) reduces and does not last as long.

**Avoidance Summary**

By going through the process of facing your fears without avoidance, escape or safety behaviours you learn that:

* You can cope more with difficult situations than previously assumed
* That the stress does not increase to the point where you lose control or something terrible happens.
* That you may be overestimating the amount of danger

**Face Your Fears?**

Often we overestimate the danger/threat a situation presents and underestimate our ability to cope with the situation. This evaluation and our anxiety can alter our behaviour by making us choose to avoid anxiety provoking situations or use safety behaviours.

By facing our fears and remaining in an anxious situation we provide ourselves with the opportunity to re-evaluate both the danger/threat and our ability to cope. This creates a more accurate picture of both the world around you and your abilities to cope with it.

However, when doing this process there are two golden rules: **often enough** and **long enough**. It’s not enough to expose ourselves to an anxiety provoking situation just once, we need to do this often enough and we need to remain in the situation long enough for our anxiety to reduce by at least half (see hierarchy below on how to manage this).

**Creating a Hierarchy of Fears**

Facing our fears can be incredibly daunting so it is useful to create a hierarchy of anxiety provoking situations, with larger goals being broken down into smaller more manageable goals. This allows us to build up our confidence gradually rather than undermine it by tackling too much early on and becoming overwhelmed. We begin with the least anxiety provoking situation (such as walking to the front gate) and only progress to the next stage when the predicted anxiety has reduced by half. Gradually we attain our eventual goal by confronting anxiety often enough and long enough for us to become more accustomed and increase confidence. ***A Hierarchy template is included in the back of this handout.***

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Activity** | **Predicted Anxiety (0-100)** |
| Walking to the front gate | 20 |
| Walking to the end of the street with a friend | 30 |
| Walking to the end of the street alone | 40 |
| Going to local shop with friend | 45 |
| Going to local shop alone | 50 |
| In the supermarket with husband when quiet | 60 |
| In the supermarket with husband when busy | 75 |
| In the supermarket alone when it is quiet | 80 |
| At the supermarket entrance alone when busy | 95 |
| In the supermarket alone when it is busy | 100 |

**Behaviour and Mood**

Behaviours can influence our mood and energy levels. The following categories are important to consider when trying to improve or maintain your mood:

* + Pleasure
  + Variety
  + A Sense of Achievement/Mastery
  + Physical Activity
  + Self-care/Comfort/Kindness
  + Connection with Others

Notice how this links to the ACE (achievement, connection and enjoyment) diaries we have been asking you to complete over the last few weeks. If you are experiencing low-mood (that is not a direct result of an obvious trigger e.g. bereavement, breakdown of a relationship, significant life stress) then it is likely that improvements are needed in finding a healthy balance in the above areas.

**Charging Our Emotional Battery**

As human beings, we only have a finite number of resources to help us cope with life. When we refer to our emotional battery, we are talking about our own ability to cope, function and feel good. When assessing our current or future behaviours, we need to establish if the behaviour is likely to *drain or charge* our emotional battery. Some examples of draining behaviours include, but are not limited to: people pleasing, task focus as avoidance and prolonged inactivity. However, behaviours can also boost our emotional battery e.g. spending time with friends, enjoying hobbies, self-care and exercise. Charging activities can increase our mood and energy levels which means we are more likely to do other activities that will reduce our stress (problem solving) and boost our wellbeing (achievement, connection and enjoyment).

**Drain or Charge?**

Every activity can be assessed in terms of how much it *drains* you and how much it *charges* you. For instance let’s use walking the dog as an example. You may rate walking the dog as 3/10 for difficulty (with 1 being no difficulty and 10 representing impossible), but may rate the reward you get from walking the dog as 8/10. Therefore your gains outweigh the difficulty of the task and it charges your emotional battery. However, if you experience chronic pain then walking the dog might be an 8/10 for difficulty and only a 3/10 for pleasure due to the pain from walking. In this instance, walking the dog would be considered a draining activity rather than a charging/rewarding activity. This example helps to show us that what charges or drains our emotional battery can be different based on our current circumstances and preferences. Remember circumstances change, so it is useful to ask yourself if an activity still charges you or gives you a sense of reward rather than assuming it still does when your circumstances have changed. So if you used to enjoy walking the dog but now experience regular pain and difficulty doing this activity, does it still provide the same reward? Most likely not, and therefore your behaviour may need to change to account for your new circumstances (i.e. delegate this activity if possible and explore other activities that will provide reward).

Some behaviours can be draining in the short term but give long term gain. For example, socialising with friends may be particularly draining in the short term if you are socially anxious, but in the long-term it’s rewarding when we maintain pleasurable relationships, minimise isolation and face our fears. This can be a difficult situation to analyse so you may consider adapting the behaviour to a more favourable one. In this example regarding socialising, you may consider changing the location or timing of when you meet to reduce the amount of drain it causes you but maintain the reward and long-term benefits or regular social contact with good people.

The handout on the next page can be used to help you bring awareness to how draining or charging each behaviour/activity can be for you.

**Rate your activities**

In the table below, write down some activities that you currently do or would like to do and rate them in terms of how much you think they drain you (how much effort do you have to put in to complete the activity) versus how much they charge you. The first example shows that going for a walk is likely to make this person feel better as it is quite easy for them and is also quite rewarding (charging activity). The second activity is not as good because they do not enjoy cooking and get very little reward from it (draining activity). Use this structure to score the majority of things you do to see if all your activities combined drain you or charge you. Ideally, you would like a higher score in the charge column.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Activity** | **Drain (0-10)** | **Charge (0-10)** |
| Going for a walk | 2 | 6 |
| Cooking | 7 | 2 |
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**Activity Scheduling:**

Life can be busy and stressful at times and sometimes we tell ourselves that we don’t have the time or energy to do activities that charge our batteries and our self-care suffers. In this instance we typically prioritise draining behaviours (i.e. chores, people pleasing, etc) to the point where there is no time in the day left for charging behaviours/activities. Over time this can make us feel more and more drained and our mood suffers. However, often we *can* find the time for these charging/rewarding activities **if** we prioritise them and plan ahead to schedule them into our day. The aim is to create a weekly balance between the “have to’s” and the “want to’s”.

In the ACE activity handout near the back of this booklet:

1. First fill in the times in your week that are predetermined (i.e. work hours, picking up kids, sleep).
2. Now with the remaining time, prioritise one (or several) positive/charging activities to look forward to. Eventually you’re looking for eventually working towards a balance between ‘want to’ and ‘have to’ activities.
3. Now schedule the ‘have to’ behaviours (i.e. laundry, cleaning, cooking, food shopping).

**Tips:** If you have went through a prolonged period of time inactive then look to increase your activities gradually so as not to overwhelm yourself. If you find you have no time left after you first fill in the predetermined times of your day (step 1) then you may be spinning too many plates just now and may need to reassess time commitments. Also keep in mind that you may not have to do *all* the “have to’s”, sometimes we get into the habit of over assuming responsibility for the running of a household or helping others and forget that we have the option to delegate. Don’t be afraid to ask for help or reassess your responsibilities. Choosing not to delegate may even be classed as an unhelpful behaviour that you can start taking more ownership of and challenging your fears about asking for help. If your struggle is more with empty spaces then give yourself permission to try new activities and hobbies to discover what you enjoy.

The bonus skills included in this booklet can help you set goals and problem solve to better support your work whether it is anxiety your looking to reduce or low mood your looking to improve.

**Bonus Skills**

**Bonus Skill 1: SMART GOALS**

The following guidance exists on goal setting to help increase our chances of achieving our goal. This does not only apply to fears but to any goal we wish to achieve.

**Specific** – The more specific the better. How do we know we attain our goal if it is vague? (e.g. Go to the gym = vague. Whereas going to the gym Monday and Thursday this week is more specific). Use the following questions to help: What do I want to accomplish? Why do I want to accomplish this? What are the requirements/restraints?

**Measureable** – What changes will have occurred when we have reached our goal? What smaller steps indicate we are closer to achieving our goal?

**Achievable** – Is the current goal achievable under your current circumstances and with current resources (social, financial, etc)? What are the steps I could take? It’s important to adjust goals to be achievable as this sets us up for a better chance of success and this boosts our confidence rather than undermines it when we set unrealistic goals and then fail to reach them.

**Relevant** – Is this your goal or someone else's? It’s important that our goals are our own, that way we are living the life we want and not the one we think we should live to please others. Is this a relevant goal for this point in your life? Is this goal in line with my long-term objectives?

**Time-bound** – When do you aim to achieve your goal by? Having a time limit in place helps to drive and motivate us further, thus improving our chances of achieving our goal. How long will this take? When exactly am I going to work on this? How do I fit this into my current routine?

**Bonus Skill 2: Problem Solving**

Problem solving is a normal part of life and we continuously do it every day, often without even realising. However, some problems are more difficult or overwhelming than others and we can struggle to see or implement a solution. When this happens, it is useful to adopt a specific problem solving approach. If we problem solve effectively, it can help bring clarity to a difficult situation; reduce anxiety; identify solutions; and help us choose a realistic plan to implement.

***The template for problem solving is near the end of this handout*.**

**Part 1** – Be specific in identifying the problem. The more specific the problem the more this will help the other parts of the journey. You may find your original problem consists of several smaller problems. If required, go through this process for each smaller problem.

**Part 2** – This step is designed to increase motivation to come up with, and act upon, a solution to the problem. It is not to dwell on the negative or become self-critical.

**Part 3** – This is again to increase confidence. Spend a little more time upon this stage than Part 2. Often athletes use this visualisation technique as research shows it helps to improve their performance and focus.

**Part 4** – At this stage we do not censor ideas, the unusual, impractical and illegal are welcome here. It’s a creative process, so no judgement (e.g. Robbing a bank).

**Part 5** – Here we evaluate each option to see if it is practical, achievable (in the present), and preferable. Weigh up the pros and cons for each solution.

**Part 6** – Here we work out a specific plan. Using the SMART Goals technique, that we discussed earlier, is really useful here. The more specific the plan the more likely we are to stick to it and achieve our goal. Break the plan down into the smallest of steps. No step is too small! For example, we might think that phoning our energy supplier is the first step to sorting a problematic bill but we could actually break it down into the following: find the bill; identify my account number; get a pen and paper ready to take notes; decide on a suitable time to phone; write out a list of things that I need to learn from the phone call; ask for staff members name for future reference; expect there to be some issues getting to speak to the right person; be prepared to summarise my understanding of the conversation; be prepared to ask the staff member to repeat or clearly state next steps...make the phone call.

This kind of detailed problem solving means we are more likely to be prepared for obstacles. The smaller steps could also be spread over different days too if that makes it more achievable and less intimidating.

**Part 7** – Action is key, a good plan is of no use to us unless we implement it!

**Part 8** – Review – Compassion is key here. If our solution doesn’t go to plan then beating ourselves up about this is not going to help improve our mood or help us achieve our aim. If it didn’t go to plan then what can we change to help us more next time? What went well that we can continue to do and build upon our strengths? Plans are very rarely perfect and smooth going on our first attempt, this is not failure; this is the learning process that we all go through. It’s part of being human. And don’t forget if your plan went well, reward yourself! Acknowledge your efforts regardless of the outcome. This builds our confidence and self-esteem, this helps us on our journey to a greater sense of wellbeing.

**Planning for obstacles**

It is important to remember that things rarely ever go how we expect or want them to go. Planning and preparing for obstacles allows you to create a more effective problem solving plan that overcomes these obstacles and improves your chances of obtaining a desired outcome.

One of the most common obstacles can be a lack of motivation or energy. However, if we wait for our motivation to return before doing anything then we could be waiting forever. Research has shown that action has to come before we feel motivated. To get the ball rolling with motivation we need to prepared to do things despite a lack of motivation. This can be a very difficult and daunting process. The most effective way to start breaking that cycle is to start introducing small changes to your routine that factor in more helpful behaviours. It is best to plan exactly when you are going to introduce this helpful behaviour and then do that activity regardless of how you feel at the time. If you carry out the activity you are more likely to feel the benefits from it. This can make us feel more invigorated and likely to carry out the activity again in the future. This process may need to be repeated several times, it can help to ask yourself “how will I feel if I don’t do this?” and “how will I feel if I do complete this?” (short-term vs long-term gain/pain). If you complete the task despite not wanting to do it, praise yourself and appreciate how you managed to push through despite your feelings. If you choose to not complete the task, take ownership of your choice and try identifying how you might adapt your plan to make it more achievable in the future.

*\*\*\* Below is a list of templates from today’s session and previous sessions for you to use as you see fit. It is not a pre-requisite to complete them for next session. As always, if you have any questions about their use or application, please feel free to ask in future sessions.*

**Templates**

**Hierarchy**

Make a list of situations that trigger your anxiety. Put them in order of least anxiety provoking at the top (1) to the most anxiety-provoking at the bottom (10). Give each one a rating (0-100) of how distressing you predict each activity or situation will be.

**1**

**2**

**3**

**4**

**5**

**6**

**7**

**8**

**9**

**10**

**Problem Solving Process**

|  |
| --- |
| **Part 1: Clearly State the Problem** |
|  |
| **Part 2: What if I Don’t Solve the Problem?** |
|  |
| **Part 3: What if I Do Solve the Problem?** |
|  |
| **Part 4: Brainstorm** |
|  |
| **Part 5: Choose the Best Option** |
|  |
| **Part 6: Work Out a Plan** |
|  |
| **Part 7: Put it Into Action** |
|  |
| **Part 8: Review** |
|  |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Situation**  What happened? Where? Who with? | **Emotional**  **and Physical Response** | **Automatic Thoughts** | **Unhelpful Thinking Style** | **Evidence that supports the thought** | **Evidence that does not support the thought** | **Alternative more balanced thought** |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

**Activity Diary**

For each day write briefly in each box: **What you did** (brief description), One word to describe your **Mood** and rate the **intensit**y of your mood on a scale of 0-100%. Your sense of **Achievement** out of 0-10, Your sense of **Closeness** to others out of 0-10, and your sense of **Enjoyment** out of 0-10.

An activity could be sitting down, lying in bed, washing some dishes etc.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Day** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Time** | **What I did** | **Mood** | **Intensity**  **(0-100%)** | **Achievement**  **(A0-10)** | **Closeness**  **(C0-10)** | **Enjoyment**  **(E0-10)** |  |
| **6-8am** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **8-10am** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **10am-12 noon** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **12-2pm** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **2-4pm** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **4-6pm** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **6-8pm** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **8-10pm** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **10- midnight** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

After completing this diary, you may notice patterns in your mood variations and how particular activities may affect your mood. You will then be able to plan a healthier range of activities that give you a sense of achievement, closeness and enjoyment, (Using another blank form)

**Skills For Wellbeing**

**Week 5:**

**Assertiveness and Values**

**Aims:**

* To learn assertiveness techniques
* To learn about values and how acting upon these can improve mood

**What is Assertiveness?**

Being assertive means we are communicating our **needs, feelings, opinions and rights** in a firm but fair way. This means we can express what is important to us whilst maintaining respect for what is important to other people. When we understand how to be assertive, we are clear on what we are entitled to and where our boundaries are. This can help manage our anxiety and feel more confident during difficult conversations.

When we are assertive we express our **feelings** in a direct, honest and appropriate way. We are able to recognise what our individual **needs** are and realise it is ok to have them met. If our needs are not met we can feel undervalued, rejected, angry or sad. Being assertive is also about appreciating our **rights** (see below) and standing up for them in a way that does not violate another person’s rights. Finally, assertiveness is being able to express and value our **opinions** irrespective of other people’s views.

**Communication Styles**

Assertiveness is one of three communication styles alongside the *passive* communication style and the *aggressive* communication style.

The table below highlights the key differences between the styles. It is common for people to refer to a *passive-aggressive* communication style and this is when someone switches between both passive and aggressive styles (e.g. stays quiet until they get so frustrated they shout in anger) or combines them in one moment (e.g. saying “I’m fine” in an angry tone). Typically, the switch between passive and aggressive occurs because resentment builds up with being passive until the frustrations gets too much and the individual becomes aggressive. When we are passive, we do not have our needs met and this usually builds up to breaking point and we feel the need to lash out. Alternatively, someone using an aggressive approach may try to adopt a passive approach if they feel guilty about the way they have behaved. Either way, both passive and aggressive styles end up damaging relationships. Using an assertive approach brings clarity to our communication and a productive compromise can often be reached.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Passive** | **Assertive** | **Aggressive** |
| Thinking your needs do not matter as much as others | Recognising your needs matter just as much as other peoples’ needs | Thinking only your needs matter |
| Giving in | Compromising | Taking |
| Trying to keep the peace | Making sure things are fair for you and others | Looking out only for yourself |
| Remaining silent, not being heard | Talking and listening | Talking over people |
| Allowing yourself to be bullied | Standing up for yourself and setting boundaries | Bullying others |
| Not saying what you think | Expressing your point clearly and confidently | Shouting and sometimes aggression and violence |
| Damages relationships – others respect you less | Strengthens relationships – other people know where they stand | Damages relationships – others do not like aggression |
| Damages your self-esteem | Builds self-esteem | Damages others self-esteem |

Below is a table that summarises the differences between Passive, Assertive and Aggressive Communication styles:

The first (yellow) row in the table displays the differences in **thinking** between these communication styles. The next five (blue) rows show how our **behaviours** differ between these communication styles. Finally, the last two (green) rows of the table show some of the **consequences** of these different communication styles.

Notice that assertiveness holds a healthy balance between passive and aggressive, and that its consequences for yourself and others are positive rather than destructive. However, beginning to use assertive communication can seem scary and intimidating at the start. That’s why we offer assertiveness techniques and reminders of your rights; to help ease anxieties.

**Rules of Assertion**

**I have the right to...**

* Respect who I am and what I do
* Recognise and express my own needs as an individual
* Make mistakes
* Change my mind if I choose
* Say no if I don’t want to do something
* Make decisions without having to justify them or apologise for them
* Not take responsibility for the actions of other adults
* Interact with others without being dependant on them for approval
* Say I don’t understand

**Tips for Being Assertive**

* Ask for what you want *(rather than hoping someone will notice what you want)*
* Request time to make a decision
* Make clear statements about how you feel and what you think.
* Be straightforward and honest so you can say your point effectively
* Avoid apologising and giving elaborate reasons for saying no
* Tell the person if you are finding it difficult
* Respect other people and their right to be assertive
* Remember that it is better in the long run to be truthful than breed resentment and bitterness

**How to Get Started**

**Five Steps to Assertiveness:**

* 1. Decide what you want – this reflects your rights (refer to Rules of Assertion)
  2. Decide if it’s fair – this reflects the other person’s rights
  3. Be prepared to take risks
  4. Ask for it clearly (Using Assertiveness Techniques)
  5. Keep calm (other Anxiety Management strategies can help)

**Assertiveness Techniques**

**Technique 1: The Broken Record:**

The Broken Record is a basic assertiveness technique whereby we repeat what we want over and over again – calmly. This is particularly useful when dealing with a persistent individuals or situations where you feel vulnerable. Once you have prepared your script, you can relax and repeat your argument. Here’s an example below with the assertive response in bold print.

John: Can I borrow £10 from you?

Neil: **I cannot lend you any money**

John: I’ll pay it back as soon as I can, I really, really need it.

Neil: **I cannot lend you any money**

John: But you wouldn’t miss £10 surely. You are my friend, aren’t you?

Neil: Yes, I am your friend but I **cannot lend you any money**

**Technique 2: “I” Statements**

Using I statements helps us to own our needs and wants. They can be used to clarify our stance without placing expectation or judgements upon others whilst opening the lines of communication.

Avoid using “You” statements such as “You will do this”, “You have to…”, “You make me….”. These can put the person that you are addressing on the defensive and may decrease the likelihood of getting what you want. Some examples of “I” statements include:

I would like to….

I want to….

I would appreciate it if…..

I feel……..

E.g. “I get very upset when you arrive late for dinner because I put a lot of effort into preparing the meal and when I have to serve the food cold, all my efforts seem to have been in vain”.

**Technique 3: Scripting**

We remember scripting by using D. E. S. C:

* **D –** Describe the situation, relationship or practical problem that is important to you
* **E –** Explain how you feel about the situation or problem
* **S –** Specify your needs or what you want to happen to make things different
* **C –** Consequences, how will making these changes improve the situation for you and others

**Additional Hints and Tips**

**Body Language:**

* **Stand Tall** – this makes you appear more confident. Hunched body language makes us appear more passive. Being too close or leaning over someone can appear aggressive.
* **Eye contact** – avoiding eye contact can look passive.
* **Relaxed** – being relaxed will help you stay in control, maintain credibility and increase the chance of your desired outcome.

**When saying “no” is a struggle:**

Remember:

* To be straightforward and honest so you can say your point effectively
* You have the right to say no if you don’t want to do it
* Avoid apologising and giving elaborate reasons for saying no
* You can tell the person if you are finding it difficult
* It is better in the long run to be truthful than breed resentment and bitterness within yourself

**Values**

Values are guidelines that help us be the people we want to be. They form part of our identity and can be used like a compass because they give us direction. This direction can be used to inform decision-making so we make choices based on what is most important to us. When we make choices based on our values, we are more likely to live a life that fulfils us; consequently reducing anxiety and low-mood. It is common for people to be so focused on what they are moving away from (e.g. anxiety, stress, depression, conflict) that they do not think about what they are moving towards. When we are concentrated on where we are going and why (e.g. being a good parent, being a considerate partner), we are more likely to feel a sense of purpose, confidence and determination. This sense of direction and motivation can help us reduce avoidance and safety behaviours which also leads to a decrease in difficult emotions like guilt and blame.

There is no ‘right and wrong’ when it comes to values. You think of them like your favourite ice cream flavour. You may prefer strawberry whilst the next person prefers chocolate, neither is wrong, it is just personal preference. Examples of common values include:

1. Acceptance: to be open to and accepting of myself, others, life etc
2. Adventure: to be adventurous; to actively seek, create, or explore novel or stimulating experiences
3. Assertiveness: to respectfully stand up for my rights and request what I want
4. Authenticity: to be authentic, genuine, real; to be true to myself
5. Beauty: to appreciate, create, nurture or cultivate beauty in myself, others, the environment etc
6. Caring: to be caring towards myself, others, the environment etc
7. Challenge: to keep challenging myself to grow, learn, improve
8. Compassion: to act with kindness towards those who are suffering
9. Connection: to engage fully in whatever I am doing, and be fully present with others
10. Contribution: to contribute, help, assist, or make a positive difference to myself or others
11. Conformity: to be respectful and obedient of rules and obligations
12. Cooperation: to be cooperative and collaborative with others
13. Courage: to be courageous or brave; to persist in the face of fear, threat, or difficulty
14. Creativity: to be creative or innovative
15. Curiosity: to be curious, open-minded and interested; to explore and discover
16. Encouragement: to encourage and reward behaviour that I value in myself or others
17. Equality: to treat others as equal to myself, and vice-versa
18. Excitement: to seek, create and engage in activities that are exciting, stimulating or thrilling
19. Fairness: to be fair to myself or others
20. Fitness: to maintain or improve my fitness; to look after my physical and mental health and wellbeing
21. Flexibility: to adjust and adapt readily to changing circumstances
22. Freedom: to live freely; to choose how I live and behave, or help others do likewise
23. Friendliness: to be friendly, companionable, or agreeable towards others
24. Forgiveness: to be forgiving towards myself or others
25. Fun: to be fun-loving; to seek, create, and engage in fun-filled activities
26. Generosity: to be generous, sharing and giving, to myself or others
27. Gratitude: to be grateful for and appreciative of the positive aspects of myself, others and life
28. Honesty: to be honest, truthful, and sincere with myself and others
29. Humour: to see and appreciate the humorous side of life
30. Humility: to be humble or modest; to let my achievements speak for themselves
31. Industry: to be industrious, hard-working, dedicated
32. Independence: to be self-supportive, and choose my own way of doing things
33. Intimacy: to open up, reveal, and share myself -- emotionally or physically – in my close personal relationships
34. Justice: to uphold justice and fairness
35. Kindness: to be kind, compassionate, considerate, nurturing or caring towards myself or others
36. Love: to act lovingly or affectionately towards myself or others
37. Mindfulness: to be conscious of, open to, and curious about my here-and-now experience
38. Order: to be orderly and organized
39. Open-mindedness: to think things through, see things from other’s points of view, and weigh evidence fairly.
40. Patience: to wait calmly for what I want
41. Persistence: to continue resolutely, despite problems or difficulties.
42. Pleasure: to create and give pleasure to myself or others
43. Power: to strongly influence or wield authority over others, e.g. taking charge, leading, organizing
44. Reciprocity: to build relationships in which there is a fair balance of giving and taking
45. Respect: to be respectful towards myself or others; to be polite, considerate and show positive regard
46. Responsibility: to be responsible and accountable for my actions
47. Romance: to be romantic; to display and express love or strong affection
48. Safety: to secure, protect, or ensure safety of myself or others
49. Self-awareness: to be aware of my own thoughts, feelings and actions
50. Self-care: to look after my health and wellbeing, and get my needs met
51. Self-development: to keep growing, advancing or improving in knowledge, skills, character, or life experience.
52. Self-control: to act in accordance with my own ideals
53. Sensuality: to create, explore and enjoy experiences that stimulate the five senses
54. Sexuality: to explore or express my sexuality
55. Spirituality: to connect with things bigger than myself
56. Skilfulness: to continually practice and improve my skills, and apply myself fully when using them
57. Supportiveness: to be supportive, helpful, encouraging, and available to myself or others
58. Trust: to be trustworthy; to be loyal, faithful, sincere, and reliable

\*Values list copied from [www.actmindfully.com.au](http://www.actmindfully.com.au), Dr Russ Harris.

**Disconnected from our Values**

Sometimes we can become disconnected from our values. This can happen for a number of reasons such as:

* + Placing too high a priority upon pleasing others that we forget about pleasing ourselves
  + Feeling overwhelmed by life events
  + Becoming preoccupied with the ‘have to’s’ in daily life and forgetting/neglecting the ‘want to’s’.
  + Being unaware of or resisting a shift in our values (e.g. Becoming a parent can shift what we prioritise as important)

**Clarifying our values (Values Wheel)**

Since acting in line with our values can help us lead more pleasurable and fulfilling lives, it is important for us to clarify and connect with our values. It can be hard to identify what our values are so it can be helpful to think of them from a variety of perspectives. For example, how would you like people to remember you in the future? What nice things would you like people to say about you at your 80th birthday party?

In this course, we have decided to use a **values wheel** because this not only help us establish how important certain values are to us but also identifies how close we are to living a life in line with those values. The four steps to using the values wheel are:

* 1. Beside each value place a score (0 – 10) to identify how important each value is to you
  2. Now shade in the rings for each value showing how much you currently fulfil each value (with 0 = the centre point)
  3. Are there any differences between how important a value is and how much you fulfil it?
  4. If so, begin to form goals to incorporate more value based activities into your life. (e.g. Spend more time on self-care or social relationships)

**Working with Values**

Once we have connected with our values, it is important to remember that living in line with our values is an ongoing process. Values are different from goals in the sense that values are a way of doing things (e.g. being **supportive** as a friend or **hard-working** as an employee) as opposed to goals we achieve along the away (e.g. calling our friends regularly or meeting a deadline at work). Try to be aware of when you act in line with your values and reward your effort. This helps to build positivity, purpose and self-respect. There can be occasions when we have to prioritise one value more than another, this can be a difficult process to navigate but it a normal part of our lives. Finally, try not see values as set rules that are rigid and must be adhered to at all times. It is ok to deviate, explore or try new things. This may result in us identifying values we never knew we had. However, if we start to feel lost or confused, we can always reconnect with our values to bring us guidance.

**\*\*\* The forms below are additional copies for you to use as you see fit. Do not feel you have to attempt these for our next session\*\*\***

**Hierarchy**

Make a list of situations that trigger your anxiety. Put them in order of least anxiety provoking at the bottom (10) to the most anxiety-provoking at the top (1). Give each one a rating (0-10) of how distressing each activity or situation would be.

**1**

**2**

**3**

**4**

**5**

**6**

**7**

**8**

**9**

**10**

**Problem Solving Process**

|  |
| --- |
| **Part 1: Clearly State the Problem** |
|  |
| **Part 2: What if I Don’t Solve the Problem?** |
|  |
| **Part 3: What if I Do Solve the Problem?** |
|  |
| **Part 4: Brainstorm** |
|  |
| **Part 5: Choose the Best Option** |
|  |
| **Part 6: Work Out a Plan** |
|  |
| **Part 7: Put it Into Action** |
|  |
| **Part 8: Review** |
|  |

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Situation**  What happened? Where? Who with? | **Emotional**  **and Physical Response** | **Automatic Thoughts** | **Unhelpful Thinking Style** | **Evidence that supports the thought** | **Evidence that does not support the thought** | **Alternative more balanced thought** |
|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

**Sleep Diary**

Complete this form each day: write in the shaded area just before bed and the non-shaded area in the morning.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Day/date** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Mood level during the day:**  **(None) 0 -10 (high)** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Fatigue level during the day:**  **(None) 0 -10 (high)** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Naps taken during the day:**  **What time?**  **How long for?** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Activity level during the day:**  **(None) 0 -10 (high)** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Caffeine, nicotine, alcohol during the day?**  **During the evening?** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **What did I do just before going to bed?** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Time I went to bed?** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **What did I do in bed?**  **(i.e read, sex or TV)** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **What time did I put the lights out?** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **How many minutes before I fell asleep?** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **What time did I wake up at?** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Number of times I woke up through the night?** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **Number of hours I slept?** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **On waking up in the morning how rested due I feel?** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

**Values Wheel**

**Skills For Wellbeing**

**Week 6**

**Sleep Hygiene and Setback Management**

**Session Aims:**

* Complete CORE-10 and HADS
* Sleep Hygiene
* Setback Management
* Feedback Form

**Sleep**

**Why is sleep important?**

* Alongside eating and drinking, sleeping is one of the most important factors for us to function on a daily basis.
* We can survive longer without food than we can without sleep.
* Sleep deprivation can lead to issues with concentration, problem solving, mood, hallucinations and many other areas.
* 17 hours without sleep can lead to the same performance impairments as 2 alcoholic drinks.

**If Sleep Basics are Not Enough**

* You might want to consider the *sleep retraining* programme.
* This is a strategy pioneered by Prof. Colin Espie.
  + - For more information and useful resources visit [www.sleepio.com](http://www.sleepio.com/)
    - Sleep retraining involves a strict step-by-step guide to restructure your sleeping pattern

**Basics Sleep Tips:**

* Sleep at regular times, stick to a routine.
* Wind down during the evening and don’t do anything mentally or physically challenging within 90 minutes of bedtime. Wind down your body and mind, some examples are: light yoga stretches, mindfulness meditations, a warm bath or reading a book.
* Put the day to rest long before bedtime (worry time, or to do/reminder lists).
* No bright lights before bed (e.g. phones, tablets, computers, TV or room lights). This tells your brain it’s time to wake up.
* Make sure your bedroom is comfortable – not too cold, warm, noisy or bright. Make sure your mattress, pillows and bedding are comfortable (the average mattress lifespan is approximately 8 – 10 years).
* Keep sleep for bedtime only; no napping during the day in the armchair/sofa/bed.
* Avoid caffiene and alcohol. If you have to drink caffeine, try not to consume any after 3pm.
* Avoid eating, drinking or smoking during your wind down as these stimulate the body or can make us wake more often during the night. Also avoid these when you wake during the night. Try nicotene patches if cravings during the night are an issue.

**Advance Sleep Techniques:**

Use these in addition to the basic sleeping tips above if you are still struggling to get sleep. The techniques below are difficult to put into practice but are proven to be helpful to create a sleeping pattern. If you try these give them a chance to work, it may take a number of days and even weeks to create a helpful sleeping pattern. If we lie in bed for hours worrying or watching TV then the brain does not associate bed with sleep. This process helps to train our brain and body that it should be falling asleep when we go to bed.

* If you can’t sleep within a quarter of an hour of putting the light out, get up and go into the living room. Use the same rule if you wake during the night. Remember your wind down rules though and try relax.
* Go back to bed only when you feel ‘sleepy tired’ again.
* Repeat these steps as often as required.
* To work out your sleep schedule, calculate your average sleep length over the course of one week (total number of hours slept in a week divided by 7 e.g 42/7 = 6 hours a night average).
  + Decide on your prefered rising time e.g. 7:30am
  + Aim to stay awake until a time when you will get your average number of hours before your rise time e.g. 6 hours before 7:30am is 01:30am
  + Even if you do not fall asleep at this time (1:30am), you should still rise at 7:30am, regardless of how much sleep you have had.
  + Stay awake all day – do not nap – and repeat until you have established this routine for 5-7 days.
  + Gradually, make your bed time 30 minutes earlier (1:00 then 12:30 then 12:00) until you reach the time you would like to go to sleep on an average day e.g. 11:00pm
* Always follow your plan 7 days a week. If you deviate from the plan, try to go back to it as soon as possible.
* Aim for minimum of 5 hours sleep
* Give up trying to sleep. Keep your eyes open and gently resist sleep or adopt a carefree or accepting attitude to wakefulness. Pressuring ourselves to sleep only makes us frustrated, anxious and even less likely to sleep. Try to avoid getting upset or frustrated.
* Remind yourself that sleep will come naturally.

**Setback Management**

* Setbacks are a normal part of life!
* In this instance, a setback refers to a sustained increase in anxiety or decrease in mood that is not explained by our current circumstances i.e. Bereavement, job loss, relationship troubles etc
* It is normal for our mood and anxiety to fluctuate in response our life stressors, but if the issues are *persistent* or *disproportionate* to our circumstances, then we should consider if our thoughts and behaviours are being helpful or part of the problem.

**Potential Stressors**

We discussed potential stressors in session 1. Some of these were internal stressors (i.e. thoughts/perceptions, physical feelings, emotions and our own behaviours). Some of these were external stressors, whether within or out with our control. Let’s remind ourselves of some potential stressors before continuing on to how we can deal with these stressors through life.

* + Internal Factors – physical feelings, thoughts, emotions, behaviour
    - Medical conditions
    - Lack of self-care/compassion
  + External Factors
    - Lack of Social Support
    - Finances
    - Housing
    - Relationships
    - Difficult working environment

Note that some of the stressors above can be both internal and external in nature. For instance, finances may be an issue partly due to a restricted amount of money coming into your household. However finances may also be a stressor due to an overuse of ‘retail therapy’ to avoid distressing emotions or because we find it difficult to say no to others requesting money from us.

**How To Manage Despite Life Events**

**Normalise Stress:**

Remember session 2. Fight or flight is a normal human response, it means our body is working the way it is meant to. Try to be compassionate to your body; it only knows how to respond to physical threat and it’s trying to protect you the best it can. It might not always be convenient in social situations responding to emotional or cognitive threat, but it’s trying. It’s our job to use the skills learned (breathing/relaxation techniques/thought challenging) to tell the body we’ve got it covered; that it doesn’t need to continue with fight or flight. The more we practice these skills in calmer moments the more effective they become in more stressful situations later on (it’s just like building a muscle gradually over time).

**Awareness of Thinking/Behavioural Habits:**

The more aware we are of our unhelpful thinking and behavioural pattern the more we are able to step in and plan more helpful alternatives. Awareness is not enough on its own to create change, we need action too. Awareness can provide insight that informs our actions.

**Skills:**

* + **Physical reaction** – 2/4 breathing, progressive muscle relaxation, 5,4,3,2,1 technique.
  + **Thoughts** – evidence for thoughts, balance unhelpful thinking styles, buses technique, dealing with worry booklet.
  + **Behaviours** – avoidance/exposure hierarchy, approach behaviours, behavioural activation, values, assertiveness, goal setting and problem solving.

**Goals:**

Remember SMART goals. Setting yourself realistic goals in bite-size chunks helps us to attain larger overarching goals that would otherwise seem intimidating or overwhelming. By setting realistic aims we increase our chances of success and gain a sense of achievement and progression. When these goals are in line with our values then we are much more likely to be living the life we wish, rather than the life we think others want us to live. This increases our mood.

**Awareness of Triggers & Anticipate Events:**

When we are aware of our triggers we can better anticipate times when we need to utilise problem solving skills and create a plan to help us cope better than we otherwise would. In this plan we can utilise our learned coping skills and review how this went afterwards to help refine our plan for future scenarios. Triggers are understandable and can change throughout our life, they are not fixed in stone (e.g. social anxiety can reduce through facing your fears often enough and long enough). When you anticipate a more stressful period of time in your life remember to balance this with normalizing and self-care. Be kind to yourself.

**Wellbeing**:

Exercise, sleep, diet, self-care and good support all help to boost our sense of wellbeing and ability to cope with stress. We’ll discuss this in more detail later on.

**Strengths:**

Be aware of your strengths and don’t be afraid to use them. Sometimes we tend to focus upon our perceived shortcomings and forget about, or underestimate, our strengths. If necessary remind yourself of strengths you used each day (e.g. compassion, planning, courage in facing our fears, determination to participate in helpful behaviours despite a lack of motivation, etc).

**Utilise Learned Tools from Skills Group:**

Don’t forget to utilise the tools learned in our skills for wellbeing sessions. If necessary read over your materials to jog your memory, keep them in a safe place and they’ll always be there to help you if you need a reminder. It can be difficult to change unhelpful patterns, however the choice is in your hands whether or not to use the skills we’ve covered, and even add to the lists yourself.

**Social Support/Self-care:**

Social support and self-care are key. Remember the oxygen mask analogy. It is not selfish to look after yourself, it is essential. Your social circle can provide another form of self-care, especially when we utilise it.

**Exercise**

Physical activity helps maintain and improve wellbeing in a number of ways:

* Physical activity releases endorphins (the ‘happy hormone’ which increases mood and reduces the sensation of pain)
* It reduces the symptoms of depression and anxiety
* It burns off adrenaline created by the anxious fight of flight response
* It can improve our confidence, self-esteem, sense of self-control and mastery; as we show ourselves we can rise to a challenge and develop our abilities
* It increases our ability to cope with stress
* It helps to improve our sleep
* The physical benefits of exercise also contribute positively to our mood (e.g. reduced risk of developing chronic illnesses)

The UK Chief Medical Officers’ Guidelines (2011) highlight the physical and emotional benefit of adults participating in a weekly total of either: 75 minutes of vigorous exercise; 150 minutes of moderate exercise or a combination of both. What do we mean by vigorous and moderate?

During vigorous exercise our breathing becomes fast, if we were to attempt holding a conversation with someone this would be very difficult due to our breathing rate. Examples of vigorous exercise are: running, high intensity sports or climbing stairs. However with moderate exercise our breathing rate is still increased but not to the point we are unable to hold a conversation. Examples of moderate exercise include: walking, cycling, swimming, tia chi and gentle exercise.

Regardless of whether you are doing vigorous or moderate exercise, try and ensure it is an activity you enjoy. If you enjoy it you are more likely to do it and its more likely to benefit you emotionally. Exercise doesn’t always have to involve gym memberships and specialist clothing; gardening, housework, DIY and walking the dog can be energetic too. Creative outlets are helpful when we are unable to exercise and can provide welcome distractions to daily stressors. For instance, cooking, baking, sewing, painting, singing or playing an instrument.

Not everyone will have a fitness level high enough to start with these weekly targets (75 minutes vigorous, 150 minutes moderate) and that is ok. Start small and build gradually; just 10 minutes consecutive physical activity can provide benefits. Respect your body and increase gradually. Pushing ourselves too hard can lead to injuries and just prolong the process of increasing our fitness level. Patience and dedication are key. Prioritise time for this form of self-care, your body and mind will thank you for it!

**When considering introducing or increasing exercise it is advisable to discuss this with your GP first to ensure it won’t aggravate any pre-existing health conditions.**

**Diet**

Skipping meals and going long periods of time without food can impact our communication skills, often making us snap at people closest to us. It can lower our mood and make us feel more anxious; as symptoms caused by low blood sugar can make us feel more vulnerable. For instance: shaky muscles, fatigue and light headedness. Skipping meals also reduces our ability to cope with stressful situations; as it impacts our ability to: think, concentrate, rationalise, problem solve and goal set.

**By eating every 4 hours (even if it’s just a snack) we avoid these unpleasant experiences and can cope easier with daily life events and predicaments.**

Having a healthy diet can improve our physical and emotional welling. It’s not just about quantity but quality too. The better we look after our body the more it can return the favour. Here is some simple and general advice for keeping your diet healthy.

* 5 fruit or vegetable a day
* Fish twice a week (one oily)
* Cut back on salt, sugar and saturated fats
* Avoid processed foods as much as possible
* Drink enough fluids each day: 2 litres for men and 1.6 litres for women

**Your Wellbeing ‘5 a Day’**

A Foresight Report by the government has highlighted 5 key areas that can help improve our wellbeing throughout our life. Think of each of the below categories as methods to boost your ‘emotional immune system’. Just as a healthy and strong immune system can protect you from viruses, these factors below can protect our mood and resiliance to stressful life events.

**Connect** – Although some of us may prefer more social or alone times than others, we are all social creatures to a degree. It is important to utilise the social support we have. Often a belief that we are burdening others prevents us from using our current social support network. However we are providing them with an opportunity to help someone know, think about how good you feel when you are able to help someone you know. When we decide not to use our social support network we are denying them the chance to feel as good as you do when you help them. Relationships work best when they are mutually beneficial; if one person does all the listening and helping it is natural, in these circumstances, that the listeners mood will eventually be negatively impacted and they will begin to feel drained and at times resentful. So give your social group a chance to support you just as you support them, it’s what they are there for. If you’re not happy with the size or quality of your social circle or support then take steps to change this (e.g. join an interest group to find people with similar interests or tempraments). Overall, connecting with others helps us to feel less alone and more supported.

**Keep Learning** – This doesn’t have to be formal learning via a course but it can be through hobbies and interests. E.g. learning a new language, learning to cook a new recipe, learning a new skill, crafting, etc. Regardless of the form our learning takes, when we keep learning we keep gaining a sense of mastery, achievement and overcoming a challenge. This increases our confidence and self-esteem.

**Take Notice** – By being mindful and taking notice of the present moment we get every bit of pleasure possible from each moment and our mood improves. Mindfulness helps to ground us, which is useful when be experience anxious feelings. When we are more aware of the present we are more aware of unhelpful thoughts and behaviours, this provides us with the opportunity to make different more helpful choices. Being mindful of our present moment, environment or experience with compassion rather than judgement/criticism can help to increase our mood and confidence.

**Give** – It makes us feel good to give compassion and kindness to others. This can be as simple as saying thank you to someone or holding a door open for someone. A simple act can often make a person feel appreciated and valued, this can be especially important if they are having a difficult day. However, it is equally important to give kindness and compassion to yourself. This is not selfish, this is essential self-care that increases our mood and confidence. Be aware of how you treat yourself, talk to yourself or talk about yourself. Negative and critical self-talk undermines our confidence and self-esteem. Treat yourself the way you would treat another fellow human being, you’re worthy of compassion and kindness too.

**Be Active** – As highlighted earlier in this handout, being active helps us physcially. It also helps us emotionally; it burns adrenaline, increases endorphins (our ‘happy hormones’) and increases our confidence.

**Summary: Putting it all Together**

* Practice, Practice, Practice the tools given
* Keep Thought Diaries or Activity Diaries to gain insight into unhelpful patterns 🕮
* Face your fears - break these down to step-by-step action plans (problem solving skills and goal setting)
* Re-engage with values and set meaningful goals. Live the life you want and not the one you think others want.
* Use relaxation techniques on a regular basis to manage stress levels
* Be prepared for setbacks. These are natural and normal, don’t beat yourself up for these, view them as learning opporutnities and put your skills into action. After a setback, it is common to feel like you are back at square one. Remind yourself you now have lot more knowledge and skills to choose than when you were originally at square one.
* Notice early warning signs (avoidance, withdrawal, rumination etc.) and take action to prevent/reduce setbacks
* Remember the importance of Social Support and Self Care.
* Treat yourself with compassion, kindness and understanding. This helps you to flourish and grow.
* Maintain a healthy lifestyle (sleep, diet and exercise) to help boost your ability to cope with stress and increase your mood.
* Keep the Skills for Wellbeing handouts in a safe place to refer to in future if need be
* Reward and congratulate yourself on each step achieved

**Congratulations!**

You have completed the Skills for Wellbeing Group.

Remember to continue to use these skills through your life, just because the course ends doesn’t mean you should stop your journey of self-care.

**Activity Diary**

For each day write briefly in each box: **What you did** (brief description), One word to describe your **Mood** and rate the **intensit**y of your mood on a scale of 0-100%. Your sense of **Achievement** out of 0-10, Your sense of **Closeness** to others out of 0-10, and your sense of **Enjoyment** out of 0-10.

An activity could be sitting down, lying in bed, washing some dishes etc.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Day** | Sunday | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday |
| **Time** | **What I did** | **Mood** | **Intensity**  **(0-100%)** | **Achievement**  **(A0-10)** | **Closeness**  **(C0-10)** | **Enjoyment**  **(E0-10)** |  |
| **6-8am** | Lay in bed  Tired  60%  A0  C0  E7 |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **8-10am** | Made breakfast  Lonely  80%  A6  C0  E3 |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **10am-12 noon** | Tidied up kitchen  Fed up  30%  A10  C0  E0 |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **12-2pm** | Sat in garden with audiobook  Calm  70%  A5  CO  E8 |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **2-4pm** | Watched TV  Relaxed  60%  A2  C0  E8 |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **4-6pm** | Watched TV  See above |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **6-8pm** | Made dinner  Hungry  70%  A9  C0  E6 |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **8-10pm** | Listened to music  Relaxed  40%  A5  C0  E7 |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **10- midnight** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |

After completing this diary, you may notice patterns in your mood variations and how particular activities may affect your mood. You will then be able to plan a healthier range of activities that give you a sense of achievement, closeness and enjoyment, (Using another blank form in appendices)

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Situation**  What happened? Where? Who with? | **Emotional**  **and Physical Response** | **Automatic Thoughts** | **Unhelpful Thinking Style** | **Evidence that supports the thought** | **Evidence that does not support the thought** | **Alternative more balanced thought** |
| I was texting my friend and he didn’t reply but was still online on facebook. | Feel annoyed and have a knowing feeling in my chest | He is ignoring me.  He doesn’t care about me. | Jumping to conclusions | He is online so on his phone but not replying | He might not be online but showing as, or he might be dealing with an urgent thing that take his time. | My friend is busy at the moment but will message me back when he has time. |

Five Factor Model

**Situation**

I was out walking my dog at 8am yesterday morning when I saw Bob. I went to say "hello", but he walked straight past me without looking up.

**Thoughts & Images**

“He didn't care to stop for a quick chat and was very rude" - *"Bob doesn't like me"*

**Body / Physical sensations**

Cheeks flushed, Knot in chest. Deflated, tears forming in eyes.

**Moods / Emotions**

Embarrassed**,** sad, rejected, annoyed

**Behaviours / What I did or didn’t do**

Went straight home and deleted Bob from facebook, decided not to talk to him again.

**Rate your activities**

In the table below, write down some activities that you currently do or would like to do and rate them in terms of how much you think they drain you (how much effort do you have to put in to complete the activity) versus how much they charge you. The first example shows that going for a walk is likely to make this person feel better as it is quite easy for them and is also quite rewarding (charging activity). The second activity is not as good because they do not enjoy cooking and get very little reward from it (draining activity). Use this structure to score the majority of things you do to see if all your activities combined drain you or charge you. Ideally, you would like a higher score in the charge column.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Activity** | **Drain (0-10)** | **Charge (0-10)** |
| Going for a walk | 2 | 6 |
| Cooking | 7 | 2 |
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**Templates**

**Hierarchy**

Make a list of situations that trigger your anxiety. Put them in order of least anxiety provoking at the top (1) to the most anxiety-provoking at the bottom (10). Give each one a rating (0-100) of how distressing you predict each activity or situation will be.

**1**

**2**

**3**

**4**

**5**

**6**

**7**

**8**

**9**

**10**

**Problem Solving Process**

|  |
| --- |
| **Part 1: Clearly State the Problem** |
|  |
| **Part 2: What if I Don’t Solve the Problem?** |
|  |
| **Part 3: What if I Do Solve the Problem?** |
|  |
| **Part 4: Brainstorm** |
|  |
| **Part 5: Choose the Best Option** |
|  |
| **Part 6: Work Out a Plan** |
|  |
| **Part 7: Put it Into Action** |
|  |
| **Part 8: Review** |
|  |

**Values Wheel**