
Workbook 6

Changing altered behaviours: reduced activity

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Overcoming Depression
A Five Areas Approach

Section 1 Introduction

In this workbook you will:

- revise the vicious circle of reduced activity;
- see an example of a person called Anne who plans a way of increasing her activity levels;
- practise this approach yourself and review how your planned activity went;
- plan a further activity to put into practice.

In workbook 1 (*Understanding depression*), you looked at how depression may result in:

- A *vicious circle of reduced activity*: stopping doing things that previously gave you a sense of pleasure or achievement. For example you may have stopped reading, or going out, or meeting up with friends or doing hobbies. By removing these things your depression worsens as a result. These changes will be targets for change within the current workbook.
- A *vicious circle of unhelpful behaviours*: starting (or increasing) behaviours that might act to worsen your depression and keep you depressed. This might include starting drinking, becoming very dependent on others, trying to spend your way out of depression, etc. You will find out about this within workbook 7.

When you become depressed, it is normal to find it is difficult doing things. This is because of:

- low energy and tiredness (*'I'm too tired'*);
- low mood and little sense of enjoyment or achievement when things are done;
- negative thinking and reduced enthusiasm to do things (*'I just can't be bothered'*).

It can sometimes feel as though **everything** is too much effort. A vicious circle of reduced activity may result.

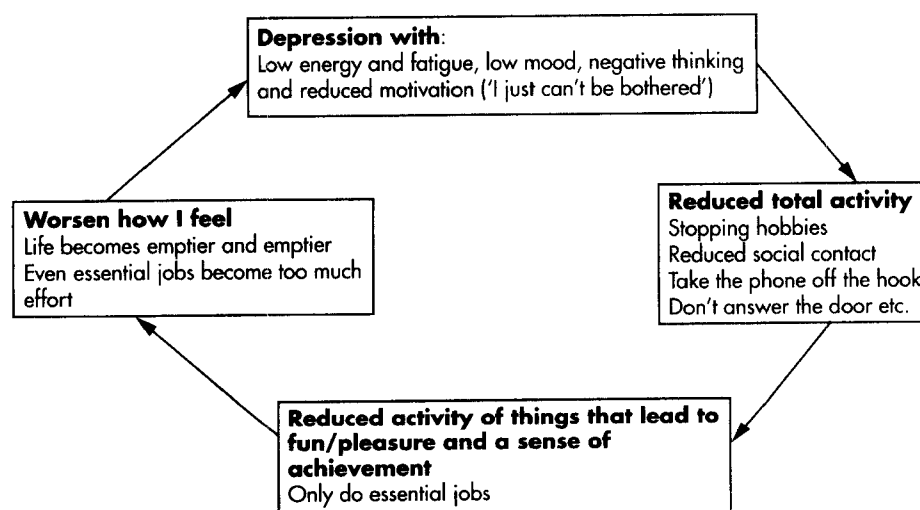


Figure 6.1 The vicious circle of reduced activity

If this vicious circle is happening to you, this workbook will help you to make changes in what you do. To break this vicious circle, you will need a clear plan involving a number of steps in order to bring about lasting change.

Choosing targets for change

You may have tried all sorts of previous attempts to change, but unless you have a clear plan and stick to it, change will be difficult. Planning and selecting which behaviours to try and change first is a crucial part of successfully moving forwards. By choosing which activities to focus on to start with, this also means that you are actively choosing at first not to focus on other areas.

Setting **targets** will help you to focus on how to make the changes needed to get better. To do this you will need:

- **short-term** targets: thinking about changes you can make today, tomorrow and the next week;
- **medium-term** targets: changes to be put in place over the next few weeks;
- **long-term** targets: where you want to be in 6 months or a year.

Think about and answer for yourself these questions:

Q. What might be the advantage of planning to change just one reduced activity at first?

Write your answer here:



Q. What are the potential dangers of trying to change everything at once?

Write your answer here:



Section 2 Overcoming reduced activity

By working through the seven steps outlined below you can learn an approach that will help you to plan clear ways of overcoming your reduced activity.

Example: Anne's isolation

Anne lives alone and has been feeling depressed for about six months. She identifies that she has several areas of reduced activity.

Identifying Anne's Vicious Circle of Reduced activity

Reduced or stopped activity or behaviour	Tick here if you have noticed this
Going out/meeting friends	✓ <i>I have stopped meeting up with lots of friends</i>
Poor or reduced self-care (e.g. washing less, paying less attention to your appearance, leaving clothes on for longer, not shaving or combing your hair)	
Neglect food – eating less or tending to eat more 'junk' food, or food that takes little preparation	
Stop/reduce doing hobbies/interests such as reading or other things you previously enjoyed or did to relax	
Are you 'letting things go' around the house	✓ <i>I just don't feel like cleaning the house any more</i>
Have you stopped answering the phone or the door when people visit?	✓ <i>I certainly don't answer the door – I wouldn't have anything to say</i>
Do you find that you are not opening or replying to letters/bills	

On answering the following three questions Anne determines that she is experiencing a *Vicious Circle of Reduced activity*.

- | | | |
|--|------|----|
| 1 Have I stopped doing things I used to enjoy as a result of how I feel? | Yes✓ | No |
| 2 Has this removed things from life that previously gave me a sense of pleasure/achievement? | Yes✓ | No |
| 3 Overall, has this worsened how I feel? | Yes✓ | No |

Step 1: Identify and clearly define the problem as precisely as possible

The important first step is making sure that Anne identifies a single initial target problem that is *clearly defined*. This step is particularly important as she currently feels overwhelmed by several different problems. In doing this, it is important that she chooses a target problem that:

- 1 Will be *useful* for changing how she is.
- 2 Is a *specific* target problem so that she will know when she has done it.
- 3 Is *realistic*: it is practical and achievable.

Anne has identified several areas of reduced activity. It is not possible to overcome all of these areas at once. Instead she needs to decide which one area to focus on to begin with – this means putting the other areas on one side for the time being. Anne has decided that the specific area of reduced activity that she is going to focus on is:

Anne's initial target area: I have stopped meeting up with lots of friends

Step 2: Think up as many solutions as possible to achieve this initial goal

One difficulty that people often face when they have chosen which initial problem area to focus on is that they cannot see any ways of dealing with it. It can seem too difficult to even start tackling it. One way around this is to try to step back from the problem and see if any other approaches are possible. This is called *brainstorming*.

In brainstorming:

- The more solutions that are generated, the more likely it is that a good one will emerge.
- Ridiculous ideas should be included as well even if you would never choose them in practice. This can help you to adopt a flexible approach to the problem.

Useful questions to help you to think up possible solutions might include:

- What *ridiculous* solutions can I include as well as more sensible ones?
- What helpful ideas would others (e.g. family, friends or colleagues at work) suggest?
- What approaches have I tried in the past in similar circumstances?
- What advice would you give a friend who was trying to tackle the same problem?

Anne sits with a piece of paper and thinks about possible ways she could start to meet up with her friends again. Read Anne's list below:

- *Hire a hall and a band and invite all my friends to a party.*
- *Ask my friend Sarah round for coffee.*
- *Phone my friend Sarah.*
- *Have a meal out with friends at the local Indian.*
- *Cook a meal at home and invite some friends.*

The aim here is to try and list as many potential solutions to the problem as possible.

Step 3: Look at the advantages and disadvantages of each of the possible solutions

The aim here is to examine the pros and cons of each potential solution that has been listed. Below is Anne's list of advantages and disadvantages.

Suggestion	Advantages	Disadvantages
1 Hire a hall and a band and invite all my friends to a party.	I'd meet lots of people. It might be fun.	The idea is far too scary. I know I couldn't cope with it at the moment. Anyway, it would cost a fortune and I can't afford that sort of thing.
2 Ask my friend Sarah round for coffee.	I like Sarah and it would be nice to catch up. She's been on holiday and I want to know whether she met anyone there.	This is only a little bit scary, but how would the conversation go? There may be some long embarrassing silences.
3 Phone my friend Sarah.	We always used to natter by phone and we used to enjoy it. She's one of my oldest friends, so it would probably be easy.	I haven't spoken to her for at least two months and I'm not sure what we would talk about.
4 Have a meal out with friends at the local Indian.	I like curry and it would give me a chance to catch up with my friends.	Again, I'm not so sure about this. It feels like this might be going a step too far. It might feel like a very long night, and I'm not sure I can cope.
5 Cook a meal at home and invite some friends.	I like cooking and it would give a focus for me to work towards.	It could go wrong – it would put me under a lot of pressure getting all the food in. I'm not sure how many people I should invite. This seems quite stressful.

Step 4: Choose one of the solutions

The chosen solution should be realistic and likely to succeed. This decision will be based on your answers to step 3. Anne decides on Option 3 – to phone her friend Sarah. Option 2 (to ask Sarah round for a coffee) might also have been possible, but on balance Anne prefers Option 3 as it seemed to be more realistic, practical and achievable at present.

KEY POINT

The initial target that is chosen should be something that helps Anne tackle her target problem. It is important that she is realistic in her choice so that it does not seem impossible for her. You will see later how Anne can build upon this initial target for change with subsequent additional targets that will help her to move forwards.

Step 5: Plan the steps needed to carry it out

This is a key stage and is something that many people have some difficulty completing to begin with. Anne needs to generate a clear plan that will help her to decide exactly *what* she is going to do and *when* she is going to do it.

It is useful for Anne to *write down* the steps needed to carry out the solution and to be specific about what she will do. This will help her to remember what to do and allows her to predict possible blocks and problems that might arise. The *Questions for Effective Change* should always be asked as part of

the fifth step of the Problem Solving approach and can help Anne to re-check how practical and achievable her plan is.

The question for effective change

Is the plan one that:

- 1 Will be *useful* for understanding or changing how I am?
- 2 Is a *specific task* so that I will know when I have done it?
- 3 Is *realistic*: is it practical and achievable?
- 4 Makes clear *what* I am going to do and *when* I am going to do it?
- 5 Is an activity that won't be easily blocked or prevented by practical problems?

The aim of these questions is to try to help Anne plan what she is going to do effectively.

Here are Anne's reflections on the five questions for effective change:

1 Will it be useful for understanding or changing how I am?

'Even though I worry how the conversation will go, I think it will be useful for me to do this anyway. I think that is an important thing for me to change and it will get me back into contact again with someone I like'.

2 Is it a specific task so that I will know when I have done it?

'I'm clear what I am going to do – I'll phone her up this evening. That way I'll definitely know whether I have done it or not'.

3 Is it realistic: is it practical and achievable?

'Is it realistic – yes, I can do that, I'd be lying if I didn't admit to myself that the idea of doing this scares me a bit because I don't know what she'll say to me, but it's really only a little bit scary – I am sure I can do this'.

4 Does it make clear what you are going to do and when you are going to do it?

'I will phone her this evening, after 7pm – she will be home from work then'.

5 Is it an activity that won't be easily blocked or prevented by practical problems?

'Now then, what might block it? Maybe she won't be in when I phone. If so, I'll phone again later tonight or try again tomorrow. I am so worried that there may be some gaps in the conversation and that will be very embarrassing. I'll get around that by writing down three or four things we could cover in the conversation. I could ask her about the holiday – where she went, the hotel, beaches and food. I also really want to know about whether she had a good time, and whether she met anyone there. I need to plan out how to ask that! The only other thing that I can predict could prevent me doing this is if I lose my nerve and try to put off calling her tonight, but I think it will be alright'.

Anne's goals are *clear, specific and her target is realistic*. She knows *what* she is going to do and *when* she is going to do it. She has predicted potential difficulties that might get in the way. This seems like a well thought through plan.

Step 6: Carry out the plan

Once Anne's plan is complete, she should carry it out. Anne phones Sarah that evening. Initially Sarah is out and Anne has an immediate negative thought that *'I knew she'd be out – what's the point'*. Anne thinks back to her plan and decides to do what she had planned if Sarah is out at first. Anne therefore phones back again later that evening and finds that Sarah is in. Sarah is delighted to

hear from Anne and they chat for over half an hour. They have so much to chat about that Sarah asks if they can chat again the next day. Overall, Anne realises that she has gained some pleasure from the conversation, and a definite sense of achievement and that her predictions about how it would go wrong were unfounded.

Step 7: Review the outcome

Anne should look at what happened when she carried out her plan. How successful was her plan in tackling her original target problem? Did her plan go smoothly, or were there any difficulties along the way? What has she learned from carrying out her plan?

Q. Was the selected approach successful?

Anne's review:

Yes✓ No

Q. Did it help me to start meeting up with people again (the target problem)?

Yes✓ No

Q. Were there any disadvantages to using this approach?

Yes No✓

Q. What have I learned from what happened?

☞ That went really well. I almost gave up when Sarah wasn't in. I'm really pleased that I stuck to the plan and phoned her back. We had a great chat. The two things I have learned are:

1). Just how useful it is to have predicted that Sarah might not be in when I phoned. When that happened it was discouraging, but it wasn't a great shock. I quickly challenged my initial negative reaction and phoned again.

2). All my concerns about it being very embarrassing and anxiety provoking weren't true. I did feel anxious when I got through to her, but I noticed that the anxiety quickly began to fall as I chatted to her.

Building on what Anne has learned – putting together a step-by-step approach to overcoming her avoidance

The next key stage is for Anne to build upon this initial step so that she has a clear plan to move things forward still further. To do this, she needs to think about her short, medium and longer-term targets. The key is to build one step upon another, so that each time Anne plans out and completes the 7-step approach she can then consider what the next step will be. Without this sort of approach she may find that although she takes some steps forward, these are all in different directions and she will lose her focus and motivation as a result.

Anne's step-by-step approach weekly targets	Time scale
1 Phone Sarah.	Week 1
2 Contact other old friends and acquaintances by phone.	Week 2
3 Arrange to meet up with Sarah at my flat.	Week 3
4 Go for a curry with Sarah.	Week 4
5 Arrange to meet a few people for a meal out at a restaurant.	Week 5 and 6
6 Ultimate target Be able to have 3 or 4 friends round to my flat for a meal.	Week 7


The key is to do everything at the right pace, so that change happens, but not so quickly that it seems too fast or too scary.

The example used shows how the technique might be applied to Anne's situation. However, it also can be applied to alter any problem of reduced activity. You now have the option of practising this approach.

Section 3 **Creating your own plan to increase your activity levels**

The following table summarises activities that are commonly altered when someone becomes depressed. A wide range of altered behaviours have been summarised here to help you to think about the changes that may occur. It is likely that you will have noticed changes in at least some of these activities. Sometimes people are not at first aware of how their depression has affected them.

Think about each of these activities. How has depression affected your behaviour?

Reduced or stopped activity	Present in my case? (tick if present)
Going out/meeting friends.	
Poor or reduced self-care (e.g. washing less, paying less attention to your appearance).	
Neglect food – eating less or tending to eat more ‘junk’ food, or food that takes little preparation.	
Stop/reduce doing hobbies/interests such as reading or other things you previously enjoyed or did to relax.	
‘Letting things go’ around the house.	
Stopped answering the phone or the door when people visit.	
Not opening or replying to letters/bills.	
Other (write in):	
	
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- | | | |
|--|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1 Have I stopped doing things I used to enjoy as a result of how I feel? | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2 Has this removed things from life that previously gave me a sense of pleasure/achievement? | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3 Overall, has this worsened how I feel? | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |

In order to create a clear plan of how to slowly re-introduce activities which previously gave you a sense of pleasure and achievement, the key is to apply the principles you learned by looking at Anne’s plan.

Step 1: Identify and clearly define the problem as precisely as possible

It is not possible to deal with every problem all at once. In fact, if you try to change everything at once you will be potentially setting yourself up to fail. Please select only *one problem of reduced activity from above* that you wish to change at the present time.

Once you have chosen one target activity, write it down here. My initial target activity is:



Q. Is this a clear, focused activity? Yes No

Step 2: Think up as many solutions as possible to achieve this initial goal

Think about things you can do to overcome your chosen reduced activity. Useful questions to help you to think up possible solutions might include:

- What *ridiculous* solutions can I include as well as more sensible ones?
- What helpful ideas would others (e.g. family, friends or colleagues at work) suggest?
- What approaches have I tried in the past in similar circumstances?
- What advice would you give a friend who was trying to tackle the same problem?

Write them in the box below:



Step 3: Look at the advantages and disadvantages of each of the possible solutions

The next step is to think about the pros and cons of each possible option.


Suggestion	Advantages	Disadvantages

Step 4: Choose one of the solutions

Decide on an option based upon what you have thought about in Step 3.

This solution should be an option that fulfils the following two criteria:		
a) Is it helpful?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
b) Is it achievable	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>

Step 5: Plan the steps needed to carry it out

<p>My plan to increase my activity levels</p> <p> Write your plan down here.</p> <p>Your task is to carry this out during the next week.</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 150px; width: 100%; margin-top: 10px;"></div>

Check your plan against each of the questions for effective change.

The questions for effective change		
Is the planned activity one that:	My plan:	
1 Will be useful for understanding or changing how I am?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
2 Is a specific task so that I will know when I have done it?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
3 Is realistic : is it practical and achievable?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
4 Makes clear what I am going to do and when I am going to do it?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
5 Is an activity that won't be easily blocked or prevented by practical problems?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>

You should be able to answer Yes to each of the questions. If you have noticed that your current plan has failed on one of the questions, try to think why this is. What changes can you make to alter or improve it? Try to change or alter the activity so that any poorly planned aspects are improved.

Many people find this approach takes quite a lot of practice. It may also be tempting to be too ambitious. Before moving on, ask yourself again, whether this is a target activity that you can cope with at present. If not, swap it for a more realistic and smaller target. Remember, large changes can be achieved by moving one step at a time. Do not push yourself too hard by being overly ambitious.

If you can answer Yes to each of these 5 questions, it means that your activity is well planned out. Try to write down exactly what you will do and plan to put it into practice this week.


Step 6: Carry out the plan

My Plan:

Carry out your plan, and pay attention to your thoughts about what will happen before, during and after you have completed the activity.


Step 7: Review the outcome

My Review:

 Write what happened here:

My review:

- | | | |
|---|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Q. Was the selected approach successful? | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Q. Did it help me to tackle the target problem? | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Q. Were there any disadvantages to using this approach? | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Q. What have I learned from what happened? | | |

 Write in below:

When you have completed your activity:

Look back and think about your planned activity.

Think in detail about how your planned activity went:

Q. How much of a sense of achievement did you feel while doing the task?

Very little ————— Very much
0 10

If you noticed that the activity gave you a high sense of achievement at the time:

This is important because it shows that by altering your activity, you can also alter your sense of achievement in things. This can provide a powerful tool for overcoming depression. Your experience also shows that you have picked an effective activity to change because it led to this feeling.

If you noticed that the activity gave you only a slight sense of achievement at the time:

Try to think about the factors that robbed you of a higher sense of achievement at the time. Were you aware of any negative or undermining thoughts such as '*I should have done it anyway*' or '*It's a waste of time*'? You can learn how to identify and challenge unhelpful thoughts like these in workbooks 4 and 5. In the mean time, if thoughts such as these are present, please try to **stop, think and reflect** on them rather than immediately accepting them as being true.

Q. How much of a sense of pleasure did you experience while doing the task?

Very little ————— Very much
0 10

If you noticed that the activity gave you a high sense of pleasure at the time:

This shows that by altering your activity you can improve how you feel. Trying to increase your activity levels in this area in a step-by-step way may be helpful in boosting your mood.

If you noticed that the activity gave you only a slight sense of pleasure at the time:

Try to think about the factors that prevented you from experiencing pleasure. Were you aware of any negative thoughts that undermined how you felt? Were you distracted by other concerns and therefore didn't allow yourself to stop, think and reflect on what you were doing? Sometimes, extreme and unhelpful statements or rules (such as *should*, *must*, *got to* and *ought* statements) may come into mind and undermine the person's pleasure in things. Did this happen to you?

Hint

Thinking back on the areas in the week that have been pleasurable can act to boost how you feel. Sometimes people keep a diary and record positive events such as conversations, activities etc. that have provided them with a sense of pleasure or achievement. Use this approach to try to develop a more helpful focus to your thinking. They then build in a time each day to reflect on these events and remember them. In other words they choose to focus and remember positive things.



This idea of choosing to build in a **helpful focus** to at least part of your day can help boost mood. Try this approach to see if it is helpful for you. Decide to keep thinking from time to time about your achievements and take pleasure in what you have done.

Think again about how your target activity went:

Q. How easy was it for you to do the task?

Very difficult ————— Very easy
0 10

If it was fairly easy for you to do the task:

This shows that you chose to do an activity that you could successfully complete. Choosing realistic targets for change is important. Choosing activities that are focused and clear, and which you can succeed in is the key to effective change. Sometimes an activity can seem too easy. If this is the case, you have the option of choosing something that is a little harder next time. By making slow, sure steps you will be able to build your confidence and increase the things you do which give you a sense of pleasure and achievement.

If it was quite hard for you to do the task:

Choosing realistic targets for change is important. Sometimes it is tempting to choose an activity that is too ambitious. Instead, choose activities that are focused and clear, and which you can succeed in. By making slow, sure steps you will be able to build your confidence and increase the things you do which give you a sense of pleasure and achievement. Applying the *questions for effective change* can help you create a realistic action plan.

Q. Did any problems or difficulties occur in what you did? Yes No

If you had some difficulties in carrying out your planned activity:

This provides you with the opportunity to learn useful information for next time you plan an activity. Try to think about what happened. Could you have predicted the problem? What could you have done to prevent it? How could you put what you have learned into practice next time? Sometimes problems are unpredictable. If so, don't let yourself be put off trying this approach. Try it again. Use the problem as an opportunity to learn.

If you didn't have any difficulties in carrying out your planned activity:

It is good that there were no difficulties in carrying out your activity. It is likely that you had planned it well. Before planning any activity, it is important to consider whether it is realistic, and also to try to predict any possible blocks or difficulties. At some time when you do an activity, something may occur that will prevent you completing it. If that is the case, this provides you with the opportunity to learn useful information for next time. Try to think about what happened. Could you have predicted the problem? What could you have done to prevent it? How could you put what you have learned into practice next time? Use the problem as an opportunity to learn.

Section 4 Planning the next steps

Now that you have considered how your planned activity went, the next step is to plan another activity to put into practice over the next week or so. Use what you have just learned about how your activity went to build on what you did.

You have the choice to:

- repeat what you did;
- take what you did and move it on one stage further;
- or select a new area of activity.

There are advantages and disadvantages of each of these choices. Think about what the advantages and disadvantages may be for you.

Choosing a new target activity

Choices for the target activity	Advantages	Disadvantages
Repeat what you did.	Build confidence. Practise activity again. Overcome problems that occurred the first time.	If you found the task easy the first time, it is best to try to choose a more difficult activity.
Take what you did and move it on one stage further.	Step-by-step approach builds confidence in the chosen activity.	Your target activity must be realistic. Being too ambitious may lead you to give up or decide the activity isn't possible.
Or select a new area of activity.	Allows you to focus on another important activity.	The danger is moving from topic to topic and not making changes in any one activity area.

You must decide for yourself which decision is the best for you. It is not possible to deal with every problem activity all at once. In fact, if you try to change everything at once you will be potentially setting yourself up to fail.

Please select *one problem of reduced activity* that you wish to change at the present time.

Problems of reduced/stopped activity

Tick one activity only

Going out/meeting friends.

Poor or reduced self-care (e.g. washing less, paying less attention to your appearance not shaving or combing your hair).

Neglect food – eating less or tending to eat more 'junk' food, or food that takes little preparation.

Stop/reduce doing hobbies/interests such as reading or other things you previously enjoyed or did to relax.

'Letting things go' around the house.

Stopped answering the phone or the door when people visit.

Not opening or replying to letters/bills.

Other (write in):



Once you have chosen one target reduced activity that you wish to change, write it down here. My target activity is:




In order to create a clear plan of how to slowly re-introduce activities that previously gave you a sense of pleasure and achievement, the key is to again create your own clear **action plan**. This will help you to practise and re-inforce your skills in creating this plan.

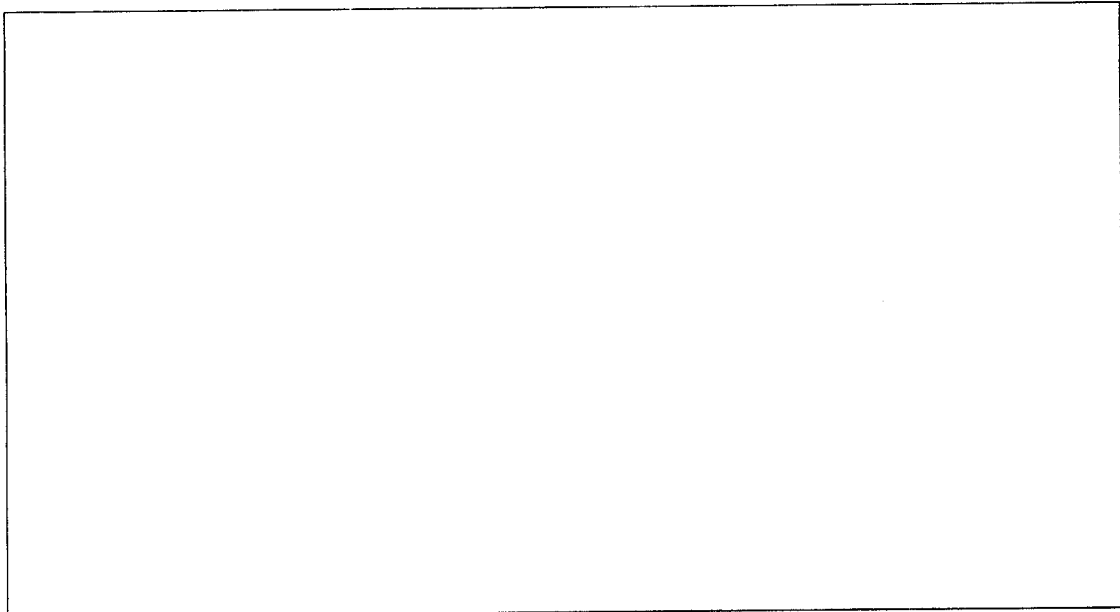
Do:

- plan to alter **only** one or two key activities over the next week.
- produce an **action plan** to slowly alter what you do in an effective and planned way.
- ask yourself the *questions for effective change* to check that your activity is well planned.
- write down your action plan in detail so that you will be able to put it into practice this week.

Don't:

- choose something that is too ambitious a target to start with.
- try to start to alter too many activities all at once.
- be very negative and think, '*nothing can be done*', '*what's the point?*', '*it's a waste of time*'.
Try to experiment to find out if this negative thinking is wholly accurate or helpful.

 Write your action plan here:



Use what you have learned earlier to write your action plan. Plan what you will do and when you will do it. Learn from what happens so that you can keep putting what you have learned into practice. By doing this, you will be able to increase your activity levels in a planned, step-by-step way. By doing this, you will be slowly able to re-build your confidence, and increase your feelings of pleasure and achievement.

Section 5 **Workbook summary**

In this workbook you have:

- revised the vicious circle of reduced activity;
- seen an example of Anne planning a way of increasing her activity levels;
- practised this approach yourself and reviewed how your planned activity went;
- planned a further activity to put into practice.

Putting what you have learned into practice

Please can you carry out a series of **action plans** over the next few weeks to overcome reduced activity in order to give you a sense of pleasure or achievement. Do not try to do everything all at once, but plan out what to do at a pace that is right for you. Discuss this with your health care practitioner if you are stuck or unsure what to do.

