
Workbook 7

Changing altered behaviours: unhelpful behaviours

Dr Chris Williams



Overcoming Depression
A Five Areas Approach

Section 1 Introduction

In this workbook you will:

- revise the vicious circle of unhelpful behaviours;
- learn some brief hints and tips of ways to reduce unhelpful behaviours;
- practise a structured approach to plan a reduction in an unhelpful behaviour;
- answer a series of questions to see whether your level of drinking may be mentally and physically worsening how you feel.

In workbook 1, you looked at how depression or anxiety may result in a *vicious circle of unhelpful behaviours*: starting (or increasing) behaviours that might act to worsen how you feel. This might include starting drinking, becoming very dependent on others, trying to spend your way out of depression, etc. This is the target for change within the current workbook.

When somebody becomes depressed or anxious, it is normal for him or her to alter their behaviour to try and get better.

Helpful activities may include:

- talking to friends for support;
- reading or using self-help materials to find out more about the causes and treatment of depression or anxiety;
- going to see their doctor or health care practitioner to discuss what treatments may be helpful;
- maintaining activities that give pleasure such as meeting friends, etc.

Sometimes however, the person may try to block how they feel by using unhelpful behaviours e.g.:

- withdrawing into themselves and cutting themselves off from all their friends;
- using alcohol to block how they feel;
- harming themselves as a way of blocking how they feel (e.g. self-cutting);
- trying to spend their way out of depression (retail therapy);
- becoming very demanding of others;
- taking risks in what you do.

A vicious circle of unhelpful behaviours can result.

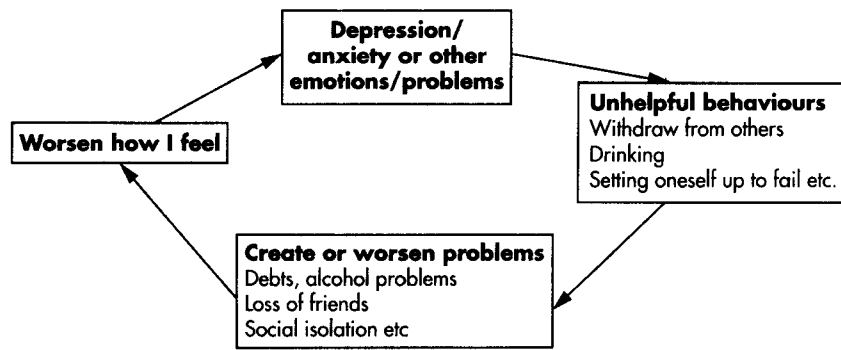


Figure 7.1 The vicious circle of unhelpful behaviour

My unhelpful behaviours

Please look at the following questions and **tick yes** if you have found yourself doing these things in the last week.

- Am I misusing alcohol to block how I feel? Yes No
- Am I misusing other substances such as illegal drugs to block how I feel? Yes No
- Am I becoming excessively clingy and dependent? Yes No
- Am I setting myself up to fail? Yes No
- Am I setting myself up to be let down and rejected? Yes No
- Am I trying to spend my way out of how I feel (retail therapy)? Yes No
- Am I taking risks for example crossing the road without looking, or beginning to gamble using money you don't really have? Yes No
- Am I sleeping in as an active choice to avoid doing things or meeting people? Yes No
- Am I being very demanding or excessively seeking reassurance from others? Yes No
- Am I eating excessively to block how I feel ('comfort eating'), or over-eating so much that this becomes a 'binge'? Yes No
- Am I becoming very promiscuous – sleeping with a number of people as a means of blocking how you feel emotionally? Yes No

Other (write in)

- Q. Are you doing certain activities or behaviours that are designed to improve how you feel? Yes No
- Q. Are some of these activities unhelpful in the short or longer-term? Yes No
- Q. Overall have unhelpful behaviours worsened how you feel? Yes No

Section 2 Hints and tips for dealing with unhelpful behaviours

The following questions ask about some common unhelpful behaviours and provide some hints and tips to help change these:

Q. Are you misusing tablets such as illegal drugs?

Yes No

Misusing tablets such as illegal drugs can worsen symptoms of depression and anxiety and may prevent you getting better. This is especially true of cocaine, amphetamines and heroin.

Important task

If you are using illegal substances on a regular basis, this may act to prevent you getting better. If you are using these drugs, we strongly suggest that you discuss this with your health care practitioner, who will be able to advise you how to help cut down and stop your substance misuse.

Q. Are you becoming very suspicious and demanding?

Yes No

Try to be at least a little less demanding of others. If you have been saying unhelpful comments to others, try to reduce them. It will not help you or others to be very demanding of them. By holding back, you will begin to build up your trust in others, and also they will find it easier to offer you support. The best way of overcoming the concerns or worries that might be driving your suspicion is to undermine them by choosing not to act on them. At first this may be quite difficult.

Q. Are you setting yourself up to fail?

Yes No

This is an important pattern of behaviour to notice because it is likely that it will continue to keep you feeling low in mood or anxious and may reinforce beliefs of failure. Try to look for this pattern of behaviour, and if it is present ask yourself – ‘Do I really benefit by doing this?’ Try not to set yourself up to fail because it is likely that these actions will reinforce underlying beliefs of failure or incompetency and thus act to keep your depression and anxiety going.

Q. Are you setting yourself up to be let down or rejected?

Yes No

This behaviour is likely to keep you feeling upset. It may reinforce thoughts of rejection. Try to look for this pattern of behaviour, and ask yourself – ‘Is this really helpful?’ These actions will reinforce underlying beliefs of unlovability or worthlessness and thus act to worsen how you feel. Try to act against this pattern by stopping doing actions that may lead you to be let down or rejected in this way.

Q. Are you trying to spend your way out of depression?

Yes No

This can be very expensive and doesn't work. It can also create a new range of practical problems as a result of debt. Practical changes such as avoiding carrying too much money with you when you shop and leaving your credit cards at home may help in the short term. You could also plan what you are going to buy in advance so there are no impulse buys. In the longer term though, you need to find more effective ways of improving how you feel than spending your way out of it.

Alcohol – a potentially unhelpful behaviour

Alcohol can sometimes be misused. In small doses, drink can make the person feel more relaxed and block out worries. If taken at larger doses for a number of weeks or months it can cause a number of important problems.

The recommended highest levels of alcohol to be taken *each week* are:

- 22 units for women, and
- 28 units for men.

Useful information: 1 unit is half a pint of bitter or lager, or 1 glass of wine, or one measure of spirits. These values vary, so strong lagers or beers, or fortified wines, etc. will contain far more than one unit of alcohol.

Q. How many units of alcohol do you drink a week: 

Choice point

If you drink more than the recommended levels, please answer the following questions. Otherwise, move to section 4.

Section 3 The impact of alcohol on you

Alcohol at high levels can cause a range of problems. Think about the following areas and then answer the questions.

Thinking changes as a result of alcohol:

- High levels of alcohol can worsen depression and prevent recovery.
- It can worsen worry and panic attacks.
- It can lead to acute bouts of confusion or violence in drunkenness.
- It can cause the person to become increasingly suspicious and paranoid.
- It can lead to psychological addiction with craving if abruptly stopped.

Q Do you have any of these mental symptoms?

Yes

No

Physical changes as a result of alcohol:

- Alcohol can lead to physical addiction with withdrawal symptoms such as sweatiness and sickness if abruptly stopped. This is called **alcohol dependency**.
- It can cause damage to parts of the body (for example causing stomach ulcers, cirrhosis of the liver, epileptic fits or damage to important body organs such as the pancreas).

Q. Do you have any of these physical symptoms?

Yes

No

Social changes as a result of alcohol:

- It can cause problems at home such as arguments with family and friends.
- It can lead to debts.
- It can lead to mistakes at work, arriving late etc. that can lead to difficulties at work.
- Accidents, violence and car crashes are all common social consequences of alcohol dependency.

Q. Do you have any of these social symptoms?

Yes

No

Alcohol dependency means that the body and mind become so used to the presence of alcohol, that if alcohol is suddenly completely stopped or is reduced too quickly, a range of withdrawal symptoms can occur. These might include sleeplessness, irritability, sweatiness, sickness, headaches and at its extreme, confusion, hallucinations and very serious physical illness which requires urgent medical assessment and treatment.

Q. Overall, do you believe that you are experiencing drink problems?

Yes

No

Thank you for answering these questions. **If you are drinking to excess**, unless you can reduce the amount you drink, you are likely to cause yourself increasing problems in each of these areas. You need to tackle your drinking problem **now**. You may be tempted to downplay or ignore your drinking and believe it is not a problem. This is often part of the problem of excessive drinking. Please discuss this with your health care practitioner.

Important task

If you are regularly drinking more than **22 units of alcohol a week (women)** or **28 units (men)**, and less than 49 units/week, this is higher than the recommended healthy alcohol intake. If this is the case, then you need to try to cut down the amount you drink. Try to reduce your overall drinking each week. Build in at least two days without any drink to allow your body to recover. Discuss how best to do this with your health care practitioner.

Important task

If your drinking is **above 50 units/week**, this is well above the healthy drink range. If you stop drinking completely now, it is possible that you will notice some symptoms of withdrawal. Please try to cut down the amount you drink in a slow step-by-step manner. If you do not do this, it is unlikely that you will quickly get over your feelings of depression or anxiety. Discuss how best to do this with your health care practitioner.

Section 4 Overcoming unhelpful behaviours

By working through the seven steps outlined below you can learn an approach that will help you to plan clear ways of overcoming any unhelpful behaviours.

Example: Problems of excessive drink

Paul is a 35 year old man who is depressed and anxious. He has continued to work in his office job, but has felt lower and lower in confidence. He has begun to drink every day 'to steady my nerves'. He is now drinking around 20 pints (40 units) of beer a week. He drinks 2 pints every night at home and also 8 pints on a Saturday night which is above the recommended healthy alcohol range for a man (28 units a week). He is becoming worried that he will become addicted to the drink, and decides he wants to 'do something about it'.

Compare his plan 'to do something about it' against The Questions for Effective Change:

The Questions for Effective Change	Paul's Plan	
1 Will it be useful for understanding or changing how he is?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
2 Is it a specific task so that he will know when he has done it?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
3 Is it realistic : is it practical and achievable for him?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
4 Does it make clear what he is going to do and when he is going to do it?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
5 Is it an activity that won't be easily blocked or prevented by practical problems?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

His goal is **not specific** enough. It does not tell Paul **what** to do nor defines the steps needed to reach the goal. Because of this, the plan fails the *Questions for Effective Change* test. Poorly defined plans do not address the questions 'What am I going to do?' and 'When am I going to do it?' and Paul's goals therefore need to change in order to help him have a clearer plan of what to do.

Paul's first task is to decide on a specific plan to reduce his unhelpful drinking. He therefore keeps a **drinking diary** to record his drinking over a one week period in order to define his current drinking. Having done this, he confirms that he is drinking 20 pints a week. Paul decides that his *medium-term* target is to reduce his drinking to only two pints of beer twice a week over the next two months. He needs to write a clear step-by-step plan that is likely to be successful and to do this he needs to decide on a realistic first step to take. He sees his doctor to discuss this, and together they agree that his first step should be to reduce his drinking to 15 pints a week to begin with. To achieve this he needs a clear initial plan. He does this by using a seven step approach to plan his reduction in his drinking.

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

Paul's unhelpful behaviour:

I am drinking 20 pints a week at the moment. I want to reduce my drinking to 15 pints a week to begin with.

Q. Is this a clear, focused **initial target**?

Yes ✓

No

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

- 1 *I could go away on holiday somewhere I can't buy drink.*
- 2 *I could reduce what I drink on Saturday night to only 3 pints. That would get me to 15 pints.*
- 3 *I could cut my Saturday intake to 6 pints to begin with and drink only one pint for three of the other nights.*
- 4 *I could join Alcoholics Anonymous.*

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
1 I could go away on holiday somewhere where I can't buy drink.	<i>It would be nice to get away from it all.</i>	<i>I can't afford to go away. I bet I'd drink just as much there anyway. It would have to be a desert island – I'd find somewhere to get some beer otherwise!</i>
2 I could reduce what I drink on Saturday night to only 3 pints. That would get me to 15 pints.	<i>I would get down to 15 pints a week as I wanted. I'd save some money.</i>	<i>I've been told by my doctor that it's best to try to have a realistic target. I like going for a drink with my friends and we stay out all night. It would be just too hard to cut down this much all at once.</i>
3 I could cut my Saturday intake to 6 pints to begin with and drink only one pint for three of the other nights.	<i>It would mean that I could plan a slower reduction in what I drink – this might work a lot better.</i>	<i>I'd need to have a good plan that I know I can keep to. This sounds like I could do this. I've tried before and quickly given up when I've set myself unrealistic goals.</i>
4 I could join Alcoholics Anonymous.	<i>Others might encourage me to give up. It would be good to know I'm not on my own.</i>	<i>I don't want to stop drinking completely. I want to try on my own. I don't think my problems are that severe at the moment.</i>

Step 4: Choose one of the solutions

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

Paul decides on Option 3, and to do this with help and advice from his health care practitioner. This plan chosen should be an option that fulfils the two criteria of being helpful and achievable:

a) Is it helpful?

Yes ✓

No

b) Is it achievable?

Yes ✓

No

Step 5: Plan the steps needed to carry it out

My plan to reduce my unhelpful behaviour

Paul's Target: 'I could cut my Saturday intake to 6 pints to begin with and drink only one pint for three of the other nights.'

Paul thinks about how he can apply the questions for effective change in deciding on his plan:

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

Yes. I could learn that I can cut it down, if I use the right plan.

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 want to have cut down to 15 pints a week. That will be my target and I'll spread the reduction in what I drink over four nights.

3 Is it realistic: is it practical and achievable?

Yes, I could cut to 15 pints to begin with. I don't want to stop completely, but that seems realistic. I know from what my doctor told me that if I try to stop all at once I'll probably not succeed, and also I might have some problems of alcohol withdrawal – I don't want that.

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

If I cut back to six pints on Saturday and have only one pint on Sunday, Wednesday and Friday I could do that. I'll start tomorrow.

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

What could prevent this? I'm due to go to Bob's party next Saturday. There's bound to be drinking there – I'd need to set myself a limit on that day. I could tell them I'm driving. I also need to stop buying in six packs for the time being – they are too tempting when I am feeling low. The most I'll buy now is two cans. That should help because I know that when I've had one can, I often have a few more.

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

The questions for effective change

Is the planned changed activity one that:

Paul's plan:

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

Step 6: Carry out the plan

Paul manages to put his plan into action for the first few days and he feels quite good about himself and how things are going. Things don't go according to plan though, when he goes to Bob's party. He has two cans to drink, and then thinks 'what the heck, let your hair down'. He ends up drinking ten pints of beer in a binge and has to take a taxi home. The next day he wakes up feeling worse and thinks about giving up the planned reduction in drinking completely. After a few hours, he begins to think about what he has learned before from his doctor about having to stick to a clear plan if he is going to succeed. He remembers his doctor telling him that it is likely there will be occasional hiccups, but that can still work out for the good – he can learn from what happens and plan to avoid making the same mistake again. Just because a set-back occurs doesn't mean that everything is over. Paul therefore tries again and re-starts his plan. He is able to succeed in reducing his drinking and reaches a limit of 15 pints a week.

Step 7: Review the outcome

Paul's review:

Write what happened here:

Things have gone quite well. I managed to get down to 15 pints over the second week of trying. There was that major problem at Bob's party, but I've managed to overcome that. Just because a set-back occurs does not mean that everything is over.

Paul's review:

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

'Try to stick to the plan. If things go wrong, don't give up, but try to adjust so that you get back on target'.

The example used shows how the technique might be applied to Paul's situation. However, it also can be applied to alter any unhelpful activity.

Planning the next steps

Paul's *medium-term* target is to reduce his drinking to only two pints of beer twice a week over the next two months. He needs to have a clear step-by-step plan that is likely to be successful. He therefore needs to plan out the next steps to take after this first step.

Paul's strategy:

Problem behaviour: drinking too much	Units/week*	Time
Drinking 2 pints every night and 8 pints on a Saturday night	40 units	Week 0
↓		
Drinking 6 pints on Saturday, 1 pint on three nights and 2 pints on the other nights	30 units	Week 1
↓		
Drinking 4 pints on Saturday, 1 pint on five nights and Wednesday with no drink	18 units	Week 3
↓		
Drinking 3 pints on Saturday, 1 pint on three nights and 3 nights with no drink	12 units	Week 5
↓		
Drinking 2 pints on Saturday, 1 pint on two nights only	8 units	Week 7
Target drinking level: <i>Four pints of beer a week</i>	8 units	Week 8

*Note: one unit of alcohol is the same as a glass of wine, a single short such as whisky, or half a pint of beer, so one pint contains two units of alcohol.

Paul then uses the 7-step approach to plan each step so that he has a clear written plan of what he will do each week. He finds that he is able to reach his target over the next two months.

KEY POINT

Paul's medium-term plan is in fact made up of a number of separate steps – in this case 5 steps – and each step can be planned out in detail using the 7-step approach. Each one builds on the previous ones to help to move forwards. Over a number of weeks this can add up to a very significant total change in what he is able to achieve.

You now have the opportunity to try this approach yourself.

Section 5 Overcoming your own unhelpful behaviour

Apply what you have learned from Paul's example and use the questions below to help you to work through the Seven Step approach to reducing your own unhelpful behaviour.

The following table summarises different unhelpful activities that are commonly seen when someone becomes depressed or anxious. A wide range of different unhelpful behaviours have been summarised here to help you to think about the changes that may occur.

Think about each of these activities. How has how you feel affected your own behaviour?

Problems of unhelpful behaviour		
Look back at your answers to these questions on page 7.3. Tick yes if you have found yourself doing these things in the last week.		
Am I misusing alcohol to block how I feel?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Am I misusing other substances such as illegal drugs to block how I feel?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Am I becoming excessively clingy and dependent?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Am I setting myself up to fail?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Am I setting myself up to be let down and rejected?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Am I trying to spend my way out of how I feel (retail therapy)?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Am I taking risks for example crossing the road without looking, or beginning to gamble using money you don't really have?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Am I sleeping in as an active choice to avoid doing things or meeting people?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Am I being very demanding or excessively seeking reassurance from others?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Am I eating excessively to block how I feel ('comfort eating'), or over-eating so much that this becomes a 'binge'?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Am I becoming very promiscuous – sleeping with a number of people as a means of blocking how you feel emotionally?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
✎ Other (write in):		
Q. Are you doing certain activities or behaviours that are designed to improve how you feel?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Q. Are some of these activities unhelpful in the short or longer-term?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
Q. Overall have unhelpful behaviours worsened how you feel?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>

In order to create a clear plan of how to move forwards, the key is to apply the principles you learned by looking at Paul'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 area** that you wish to change at the present time.

Once you have chosen one target problem area, write it down here

My **initial** target is:.....

Q. Is this a clear, focused target for change? Yes No

To begin with, record the unhelpful behaviour over several days. Make a written note of:

- When the behaviour/activity occurs?
- How much and how often do you carry out this behaviour/activity (e.g. how many units of alcohol drunk, how many times you've sought reassurance, etc.)?
- How long it lasts for?

Use this information to help you to clearly identify the unhelpful behaviour that needs to be changed. Look back to Paul's example if you need help or discuss it with your health care practitioner.

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 found in Step 3.


This plan 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"/>

My option:

Step 5: Plan the steps needed to carry it out

My plan to reduce my unhelpful behaviour

 Write your plan down here.

Your task is to carry this out during the next week.

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

The questions for effective change	My plan:	
Is my planned changed activity one that:	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>
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 No
- Q. Did it help me to tackle the target problem? Yes No
- Q. Were there any disadvantages to using this approach? Yes No
- Q. What have I learned from doing this?

When you have completed your planned reduction of the unhelpful behaviours:

Think again about how your plan to reduce the unhelpful behaviour went:**Q. How easy was it for you to reduce the unhelpful behaviour?**

Very difficult ————— Very easy
0 10

If it was fairly easy:

This shows that you chose something that you could successfully complete. Choosing realistic targets for change is important. Sometimes the plan can seem too easy. If this is the case, you have the option of choosing something that is a little harder next time.

If it was quite hard:

Choosing realistic targets for change is important. Sometimes it is tempting to choose a target 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. 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. 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:

This is probably because you had planned it well. At some time, something that you haven't planned may stop your plan to reduce the unhelpful behaviour. If so, try to learn from it. 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 6 Planning the next steps

You will need to slowly build on what you have done in a step-by-step way. You have the choice to:

- Stick at the target you have achieved.
- Focus on the same unhelpful behaviour but plan to reduce it further.
- Or select a new unhelpful behaviour to reduce.

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

Choosing a new unhelpful behaviour to reduce

Choices for the target unhelpful behaviour	Advantages	Disadvantages
Stick at the level you have achieved.	You may be happy with this. The key is whether the behaviour is still at a level that is harming you or others.	You have to plan so that the level of behaviour doesn't drift up again.
Focus on the same unhelpful behaviour but plan to reduce it further.	Step-by-step approach will allow you to make progress over time.	Your target must be realistic. Being too ambitious may lead you to give up.
Or select a new unhelpful behaviour to reduce.	Allows you to focus on another area you think is important.	The danger is moving from topic to topic and not maintaining changes in any one area.

You must decide for yourself which decision is the best for you. It is not possible to deal with every unhelpful behaviour 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 unhelpful behaviour* that you wish to change at the present time.


Problems of unhelpful behaviour

Please look at the following questions and **tick yes** if you have found yourself doing these things in the last week.

- | | | |
|--|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Am I misusing alcohol to block how I feel? | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Am I misusing other substances such as illegal drugs to block how I feel? | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Am I becoming excessively clingy and dependent? | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Am I setting myself up to fail? | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Am I setting myself up to be let down and rejected? | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Am I trying to spend my way out of how I feel (retail therapy)? | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Am I taking risks for example crossing the road without looking, or beginning to gamble using money you don't really have? | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Am I sleeping in as an active choice to avoid doing things or meeting people? | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Am I being very demanding or excessively seeking reassurance from others? | Yes <input type="checkbox"/> | No <input type="checkbox"/> |

Am I eating excessively to block how I feel ('comfort eating'), or over-eating so much that this becomes a 'binge'? Yes No

Am I becoming very promiscuous – sleeping with a number of people as a means of blocking how you feel emotionally? Yes No

 Other (write in):

Q. Are you doing certain activities or behaviours that are designed to improve how you feel? Yes No

Q. Are some of these activities unhelpful in the short or longer-term? Yes No

Q. Overall have unhelpful behaviours worsened how you feel? Yes No

Once you have chosen one target area that you wish to change, write it down here:

My next target is:.....


In order to create a clear plan the key is to again create your own clear **action plan**. This will help you to practice and reinforce your skills in creating this plan.

Do:

- Plan to alter **only** one or two key unhelpful behaviours 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 the change 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 things 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 bring about slow but steady changes in a planned, step-by-step way. By doing this, you will be slowly able to re-build your confidence, and increase your control over any unhelpful behaviours.

My notes

A series of horizontal dotted lines for writing notes.