
Workbook 10

Planning for the future

Dr Chris Williams



Overcoming Depression
A Five Areas Approach

Section **1** **Introduction**

In this workbook you will:

- summarise what you have learned about getting better and create a plan to use if you begin to feel worse again in future;
- produce a list of your own 'early warning signs' to help you watch out for signs of worsening depression or anxiety;
- find out about how to set up your own regular review session to help you put into practice what you have learned.

Planning for the future

This section summarises some principles that you may find helpful when it comes to planning how to face the future. It can sometimes be helpful to think of yourself as being on a journey of recovery. When you first started working on your problems, it is likely that you had a range of different problems you wished to tackle. During the treatment, it is to be hoped, things have improved in at least some areas since you began your journey down this path.

The following are some questions to help you identify **what** has been helpful for you and what things have helped you move on. Write down your thoughts in the space below each question:

My journey:

Q. What is different now from before? What gains have I made? How have I improved in each of the five areas?

- In my thinking?



- In my feelings and in the physical symptoms I notice?



- In my behaviour?



- In the practical situations, relationships and practical problems that I face?



Q. What have I done to make this happen?

- In my thinking?



- In my actions?



Q. How can I apply these changes to future problems?



Q. What new skills have I gained that I can use to help me continue to improve?



Q. How can I continue to use what I have learned in my everyday life?



Q. What things might get in the way of me doing this? How can I deal with these obstacles? What practical steps can I take?



Try to see if you can summarise what you have learned as **general rules** that you can apply in life. You can write as many or as few rules as you want. The following example summarises what Paul (who had experienced problems of depression and anxiety) has learned:

Example – Paul’s rules for life:

- 1 *When I begin to feel depressed and anxious, I need to do something about it before it worsens.*
- 2 *I can control my negative thoughts by using the thought worksheets.*
- 3 *Don’t withdraw from others when I feel down – they can really help me pick up.*
- 4 *Avoid drinking too much – it only makes things worse.*
- 5 *When I feel overwhelmed by problems – just tackle them one at a time.*

Now, try this for yourself

Q. What have you learned about getting and staying better?

My rules for life

1

2

3

4

5

Looking for signs of relapse

One of the most important things is to be aware of vulnerable times so that you can plan out in advance what to do if you are beginning to feel worse for whatever reason. Sometimes, certain situations make people feel especially bad or seem particularly difficult to cope with. Everyone is different. Different problems may affect people in very different ways. They could include times such as:

- when you feel let down, rejected or abandoned by someone (e.g. after a relationship difficulty or breakdown);
- after something important seems to have either gone wrong or you have a fear that it will go wrong;
- when you think things are beginning to get out of control.

Q. What are my possible *high-risk situations* in terms of setbacks?



1

2

3

Q. What do I need to do differently if I encounter these situations?



1

2

3

Watch for early warning signs

One helpful approach is to try to watch out for early signs that problems such as depression or anxiety are returning. Try to write out a short list of warning signs to watch out for. This may include things like:

- *Altered thinking* Noticing increased extreme, negative or unhelpful thoughts that begin to dominate your mind.
- *Altered feelings* Such as feeling down and low or beginning to feel anxious.
- *Altered behaviour – reduced or avoided activities* Beginning to withdraw from others or activities (**reduced activity**) or to increasingly avoid certain situations (e.g. by staying in bed later and later).
- *Altered behaviour – unhelpful activities* Drinking more alcohol or carrying out other **unhelpful activities** as a means of blocking how you feel.
- *Altered physical symptoms* For example, of growing tension or restlessness, or a worsening of your sleep or appetite.
- *Situation, relationship and practical problems* A build-up of problems that begin to feel overwhelming.

The following example summarises how Anne looked back to identify her own early warning signs of recurring depression.

Example: Anne's early warning signs

Anne has identified that her early warning signs are:

- **Altered thinking** Becoming very negative and predicting that things will go badly (negative predictions). Having a very negative view of myself. Overlooking good things that happen (mental filter).
- **Altered feelings** Feeling low and weepy, and also feeling very little at all, as though my emotions are becoming numb.
- **Altered behaviour** A tendency to want to withdraw and ask my sister not to visit. Stopping doing things I normally enjoy such as going for a walk or going to the shops.
- **Altered physical feelings/symptoms** Feeling very low in energy and finding it difficult getting up in the morning.
- **Situation, relationship and practical problems** Feeling overwhelmed by problems and not acting to overcome them.

In addition, it can be helpful if Anne can identify one **key early warning sign**. This should be a key symptom that she can watch for and that was present quite early on when she became depressed before.

My key early warning sign:

'I am going to watch out for times when I feel really tired, not just a bit tired, but times when I feel exhausted all the time and just want to stay in bed.'

This key early warning sign means: **Do something now to treat the depression.**

Example: Paul's early warning signs

Paul has identified that his early warning signs are:

- **Altered thinking** Mind-reading that others don't like me. Losing confidence. Predicting the worst will happen (catastrophising).
- **Altered feelings** Feeling low and weepy, or starting to feel very anxious all the time.
- **Altered behaviour** Trying to block how I feel by drinking more than normal. Beginning to avoid things that seem scary.
- **Altered physical symptoms** Feeling really tense and jittery.
- **Situation, relationship and practical problems** Beginning to put off handing work in, and becoming unassertive in sorting things out. Letting problems go unaddressed.

My key early warning sign:

'I am going to watch out for times when I feel I lose confidence and start mind-reading what others think of me.'

Now, try to create **your own** list of early warning signs:

My early warning signs

- *Altered thinking:*

- *Altered feelings:*

- *Altered behaviour:*

- *Altered physical symptoms:*

- *Situation, relationship and practical problems:*

My key early warning sign:

If you notice this **key early warning sign**, this means **do something now about how you feel.**

Sometimes it can help to also talk to others who you know and trust to discover if they have noticed any other early warning signs. If they notice any, you could watch for these yourself, and also ask them to tell you if they notice these themselves.

The purpose of creating this early warning list is so that you can plan how to deal with any future worsening of how you feel at an early stage.

What do you need to do if you start to experience these early warning signs in order to reduce the chances of them leading on to worsening symptoms?

Producing an emergency plan

Imagine you live in a house, which has a smoke detector. One day you hear it beeping while you are watching television. What do you do – do you ignore it and keep watching the television as if there was no problem – or do you get up, find out if there is a problem and try to deal with it? In the same way, if you notice any of your *early warning signs*, you need to have planned what you do in response.

This might include things such as planning to make changes:

In your thinking:

- Stop, think and reflect on your thoughts.
- Go and talk to a health care practitioner about your problems and discuss if you need any other help such as an antidepressant or to see a mental health specialist such as a clinical psychologist, psychiatrist or a nurse.
- **If you have used them before**, continue to use the thought investigation and challenge worksheets in workbooks 4 and 5 to identify and change unhelpful and extreme thinking.

In your behaviour:

- Choose to stay in contact with people who may support you. Choose not to isolate yourself – tell others you trust that you are noticing some problems.
- Tackle avoidance of people or places by going into places you may have recently begun to avoid.
- **If you have used this approach**, create an action plan to plan your activities – use the workbook changing altered behaviour to help you do this.

An **emergency plan** can help you to plan out how to tackle any early warning signs you notice. The following example shows how Anne decides to react to her early warning signs.

Example: Anne's emergency plan

Early warning sign	Emergency plan
<i>Altered thinking</i> : with negative predictions and mind-reading.	To identify and challenge extreme and unhelpful thinking.
<i>Altered behaviour</i> : withdrawing from doing things I like.	Create an action plan to do things that give me a sense of pleasure and achievement.
<i>Altered behaviour</i> : asking my sister Mary not to visit.	Choose to ask Mary over each week for a short period of time.
<i>Altered physical symptoms</i> : feeling low in energy, and worse in the morning.	Plan to do more difficult tasks later on in the day. Do things at a reasonable pace.
<i>Altered feelings</i> : Feeling low and weepy.	Do all the above things, and also go to see my doctor to talk about whether other treatments such as an antidepressant may be useful.

My emergency plan

What is my **emergency plan** in the event of a set-back? Try to be very specific about the things you could do, or the people you could contact to help.

1

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4

5

If the problems begin to worsen in spite of your plan, go to the professionals. If a fire was beginning to worsen at home in spite of your attempts to tackle it, you would call for professional help. Similarly, if you feel worse in spite of your emergency plan, get in touch with your previous health care practitioner or your doctor. They will be able to help advise you as to whether other additional approaches such as the use of medication may be helpful.

The concept of a regular review session

It is important to **continue** using the information and skills that you have learned during the next few months and into the future. One of the advantages of using a workbook such as this one is that it allows you to set particular goals, and review how things have gone. You can also **do this yourself** by setting up a **regular review session**.

How to develop a regular review session

- Get a pen and mark the last day of each month as a 'review session' on your calendar.
- During this review session, try to spend 30 minutes or so to think back over the previous month.

Review session: How has the month gone?

Q. Try to think about things that have gone well and allow yourself to experience pleasure when thinking about this.

- What things have gone well?

✍ Write them down here:

Q. If some areas haven't gone as well as you would have liked, write them down here:



Q. Try to work out what it was about the difficult situation that led this to happen?



Q. Was there anything you could have done differently?



Q. How could you deal with it differently in future?



Write an **action plan** that you can put into practice over the following month. Try to set specific goals and targets. Plan in some activities that will lead you to have a sense of achievement or pleasure or to overcome problems such as avoidance or other unhelpful activities.

- Plan things in a step-by-step way, being very specific about what you want to do and trying to be realistic in what it is possible to achieve.
- How will you try to make sure that you carry out your plan?
- What can prevent this happening? What might sabotage your plan?
- How can you overcome any problems?

You can do this review session more often (e.g. every 2 weeks) if you find this helpful. The purpose is to spend a little time to stop, think and reflect, and plan how to move forwards.

Finally, remember that you are not alone. Your health care practitioner or doctor is there as a resource to work with you and help you move forwards. You can discuss any problems or difficulties with them.



