

Session 6: ‘What have I learned so far?’ Consolidating your achievements and dealing with setbacks

We have now reached the halfway point of the group. This session and the assignment that follows it are given over to two topics: consolidation and dealing with setbacks.

First, a quick revision of what we’ve covered so far.

In session 1 we looked at the vicious cycles that keep depression going: negative thinking and assumptions; rumination and self-criticism; emotional sensitivity and mood shifts; avoidance and withdrawal; unhelpful coping behaviours; and loss of motivation and physical symptoms.

We asked you to identify which of those areas you thought you needed to work on and we asked you to keep a record over the week of two times when you avoided something you thought was difficult or painful and two times when you didn’t avoid an activity. We asked you to notice whether you felt better or worse in each situation and whether the problem seemed easier to manage or more difficult.

We then asked you to set some meaningful goals for yourself and we looked at how to break those goals down into small steps and put them on a scale from 1 to 10, where 1 is no progress and 10 is that the goal is achieved. We looked at the importance of scheduling activities so that they get done.

We then looked at the areas of your life where you might find it helpful to increase your activities: work and study; self-care and home management; private leisure; social leisure; and family and relationships.

We then looked at the obstacles that slow you down and the resources you draw on that help you make progress.

By now you've probably had some mixed experiences of success and setbacks. Given what we know about how depression works some of those setbacks may have been hard to deal with.

One way of looking at a setback is to acknowledge that when all of us try to make changes not only are setbacks inevitable they are potentially invaluable. Setbacks are inevitable because we can't possibly anticipate everything that will happen when we start out trying to change. Some bits we thought would be difficult turn out to be much easier than expected and some parts cause us to stumble when we least expect it.

A good model that helps to explain how we can deal with setbacks is Prochaska and DiClemente's model of The Cycle of Change. They suggest that there are a number of distinct phases to making a change that follow on from each other, as follows:

- 1) Precontemplation: is the point at which we're telling ourselves, 'I haven't got a problem so there's no need to change anything, no matter what anyone else may say'.
- 2) Contemplation: is the point where we start to think 'I do have a problem and I am contemplating change but I'm not sure I know how much I really want to change, or even how to change'
- 3) Preparation: is when we say to ourselves and others 'I've decided to change and am planning the steps I need to take'
- 4) Action: is when 'I'm putting my changes into action'
- 5) Maintenance: is the hard work where 'I'm keeping the changes going even in the face of difficulties'
- 6) Relapse/setback: is the moment when it dawns on us that 'I couldn't keep my changes going for the time being'

Although each phase is important it is the setback phase that is in some ways the most important. What you tell yourself after a setback will determine what happens next. If you tell yourself the setback is a disaster you will probably be thrown back into precontemplation or contemplation. If you can learn from the

setback then you can go back to preparation or action straight away, once you've picked yourself up and dusted yourself down.

For the first part of this week's assignment we would like you to think about a time in the past when you've had a setback that you now see as something you learned from. Take a moment to fill in the reflective questions below.

Give an example of a setback in your life that you eventually overcame:

Write down what helped you to get through the setback:

Write down what you learned from dealing with the setback:

Helen, who had lived with depression on and off for many years, remembered a time when she had been made redundant from an office job she disliked. At the time she was very fearful about trying to get another job. She wrote that she had only coped with the support of her partner and because having young children she had needed to keep going as best she could.

Not being able to find a job right away she took some time to study Maths, English and a computer course and also did some volunteering. With the contacts she made and the confidence she got from stretching herself a bit she went on to get part-time work as a teaching assistant, where the hours and the work suited her much better. On looking back she reflected that had she never been made redundant she might still be stuck doing a job she disliked and, hard though it was at the time, being made redundant was the best thing that could have happened to her. Helen said that on reflection it turned out that she was a lot more resourceful than she had given herself credit for.

Once you've completed the exercise above take a moment to look at the progress you've made. Write down as many things as you can think of that you have started to change, even if they've only changed in really small ways or the change has been difficult to keep going. Look for obstacles you've had to deal with and those that still make it difficult to keep going with the changes you're making. Ask yourself what you've learned from the setbacks you've had to face. Write down what the next step will be as a result of what you've learned. Use the 'Progress chart' worksheet to help you.

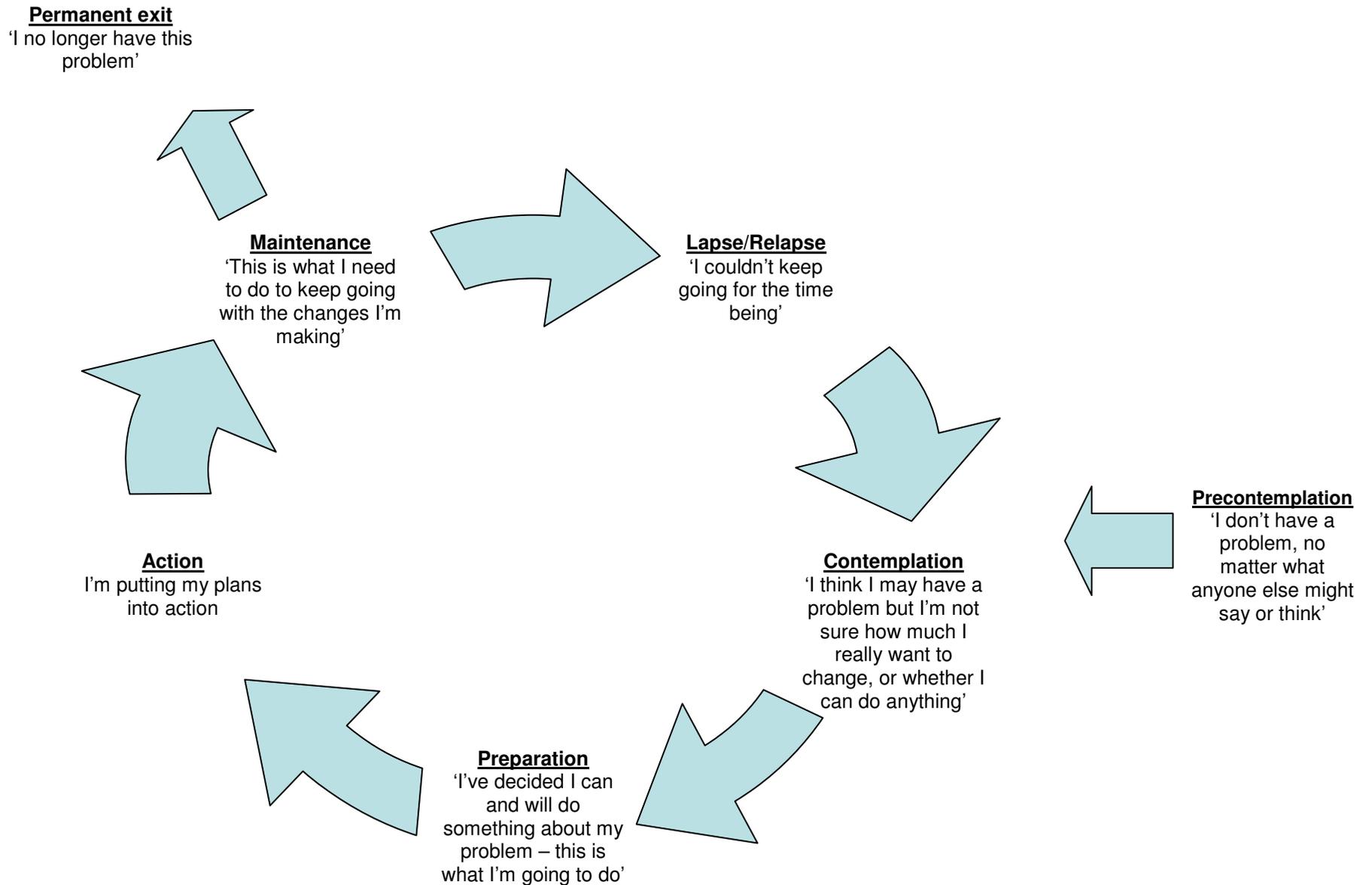
Come back and tell us how you've got on.

Until we see you again, Good Luck

Progress chart

Progress towards goal	Setbacks	Lessons learned	Next step
Personal care and home management			
Private leisure			
Social leisure			
Work and study			
Family and relationships			

The Cycle of Change (Prochaska and Di Clemente)



Activity Schedule

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Morning 1							
Morning 2							
Afternoon 1							
Afternoon 2							
Evening							