

Session 7: Personal values

When people come to our Overcoming Depression group we tend to notice that they often fall into one of two camps. The first is those people who have found themselves doing less and less of the things they used to enjoy, who avoid necessary tasks and whose routine is badly disrupted - they are often tired, irritable and down. When we talk about scheduling they will say that they know they should be doing more but they just can't face it, they don't feel like it, and what's the point anyway as they won't enjoy it.

The second is those people who are so busy doing one thing (usually work or looking after other people) that there is no room in their life for themselves - they are often stressed, exhausted, resentful and unhappy. When we talk about scheduling they say they know they should be making time for themselves but can't possibly stop doing any of the things that they are already doing because they will let other people down, or that other people depend on them, or they won't do a good enough job.

Despite the different strategies, the outcome is much the same: a sense of being overwhelmed and feeling defeated.

What both these groups have in common is that they are managing the time available to them in a way that stops them having a life where they achieve important personal goals and get to enjoy doing so.

By now you'll have looked at the consequences of avoidance in different areas of your life. Even if you're relentlessly busy or pressured you're probably avoiding activities in at least one important area of your life so it's unlikely you have a sustainable balance of activities.

We also hope you'll have noticed that when you do schedule small steps towards your personal goals that you get a feeling of achievement and even satisfaction. Who knows, you may have already found that once you start doing more of what's important to you, you find it easier to tackle things you find hard in other areas of your life. Once you've cleaned the front room, how much easier is it to go out for the cup of coffee your friend suggested that you just couldn't face a couple of days ago?

Gillian Butler and Tony Hope in their book 'Manage Your Mind' (Oxford University Press) make the point that *time management is personal management* - and that the point of time management is to help you to spend more of your time doing the things that are important to you and that help you to reach your goals.

Part of the reason we don't manage our time well is as a result of self-criticism. Unfortunately the more you criticise yourself the less you do and the more opportunity you give yourself for destructive rumination.

Butler and Hope suggest that the real problem with time management is that our actions are out of line with your values and goals. First, let's clarify the difference between values and goals; values are a sense of the overall direction and purpose of your life, goals are concrete examples of purposeful activity (and taking time out to relax could be a purposeful activity!) that serve your values. For example, being kind is a value, not a goal, whereas deciding to volunteer to help with a charity collection is a goal that may express the value of kindness or compassion.

There's a thought experiment you can carry out that will help you to clarify your values. It can be a little scary if you're depressed so if you find it upsetting or that you start to dwell on it, make sure you have something else you can do to distract yourself afterwards. We think it's important enough to include that we hope you will find it more useful than painful.

The experiment is to imagine your funeral - your funeral comes at the end of a life that finally you have felt happy with, a life where you have made peace with your demons and achieved most of the things you could reasonably have hoped to achieve.

At your funeral - which you are in the fortunate position of being able to watch unobserved - you hear three people give a eulogy about you. Each person has chosen to speak because you were important to them and they want to say some words to mark your passing. Those three people are someone from your family; a dear friend; and a colleague.

Now ask yourself - what would I like them to say about me, in particular about the kind of person I was? Don't leave this in your head - and please don't dwell on thoughts of your death or your funeral, instead write down your answers below - remember it's

what you would like them to say, not what you fear they might say, so focus on your positive qualities:

The family speaker would say I was...

My friend would say I was...

My colleague would say I was...

When Angie did this exercise she thought hard about what she would like people to be able to say about her and filled out her answers as follows:

The family speaker would say I was...

A kind and loving daughter who always had time for others. A smart girl with a warm heart. Someone who always did her best and wasn't afraid to try something new.

My friend would say I was...

A person who kept going even when her troubles got on top of her. A loyal, warm and funny friend who you could trust with anything. Someone with strong principles who backed them up with action.

My colleague would say I was...

A hard worker who showed good attention to detail and always tried to do the best she could. A reliable, friendly colleague who would help out if someone else was struggling.

Now take a look back at what you have written - ask yourself: 'what values are expressed in the things I would like people to have noticed about me?'

Here's an exercise you might find useful. Take a look at the list of values below. For each value tick the column that best describes its importance to you. The empty rows are for you to write in your own values if you would prefer to do so.

	Not important to me	Somewhat important to me	Very important to me
Respect			
Quality			
Tolerance			
Responsibility			
Unity			
Peace			
Thoughtfulness			
Happiness			
Friendship			
Hope			
Love			

Patience			
Courage			
Care			
Appreciation			
Humility			
Honesty			
Simplicity			
Understanding			
Trust			
Co-Operation			
Faith			
Kindness			
Compassion			
Intelligence			
Making a contribution			
Creativity			
Curiosity			
Persistence			
Achievement			
Being non-judgemental			
Connectedness			
Commitment			

Now take a look at the column 'Very important to me'. Write down each one below and add a personal definition. Use the examples below to guide you.

- 1) _____
- 2) _____
- 3) _____
- 4) _____
- 5) _____

Angie's values looked like this:

** Kindness and compassion is showing myself and others the same consideration*

** Intelligence is using my mind to the best of my ability*

** Making a contribution is being a part of my community*

** Creativity and curiosity is expressing myself fully*

** Persistence and achievement is using my time for good ends*

Now take a moment to think about the goals you would like to work towards in the group across each of the five areas we looked at a couple of weeks ago. Match up each goal with one of the values you've written in your personal statement: write it next to the goal:

Area	Goal and value
Home management	
Private leisure	
Social leisure	
Family and relationship	
Work and study	

Angie's smart goals were as follows:

Area	Goal and value
Home management	<i>To tidy all the stray paperwork once a week; to keep the kitchen clean and get the clutter out of my bedroom in the next two weeks - commitment to self</i>
Private leisure	<i>To enrol on evening classes in pottery and creative writing by the end of the month - intelligence, creativity and curiosity</i>
Social leisure	<i>To phone my friend Helen once a week and arrange to go out - connectedness</i>
Family and relationship	<i>To call my mother once a fortnight to ask how she and Dad are - kindness, connectedness</i>
Work and study	<i>To volunteer at the local charity shop once a fortnight - making a contribution</i>

In our group we have been looking at overcoming avoidance by encouraging you to notice the effect your avoidance has on your mood and on your ability to get done the things you need to do. We have tried to help you to identify meaningful goals that take you towards the life you want to have. We have tried to make those goals manageable by asking you to break them into small steps and then to schedule when you will attempt to complete them. And we have looked at what helps you to take steps to achieve your goals and what obstacles you have to overcome.

In this handout we are asking you to look at what makes those goals important to you. As you take small steps towards your goals we would like you to try to keep in mind these reasons so that when you feel discouraged or overwhelmed you can remind yourself that you are in the process of building a life not just free from depression but one in which you are able to live the life you'd truly like to be living.

Come and tell us how you get on. Until we see you again 'Good Luck'

Activity Schedule

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