

Module 4:

Tools to help solve problems



This module will show you how to:

- use the stepping stones method to identify and solve problems
- make lists of potential solutions
- choose what might work for you
- make plans and review their impact

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Plan for today's session

How was your week?

What would you like to talk about today?

Evaluating today's session

Summary of what we talked about today

What will I do during the week?

How was today for me?

Name: _____ Date: _____

Using stepping stones to solve problems

In the previous module, you filled your stress bucket with the things that may have made you unwell. Now you are going to look at ways to manage what is in your stress bucket. These ways of managing should help you feel better over time and help prevent relapse.

Activity: Take a minute to review your [stress bucket worksheet](#).

Problem solving: using the stepping stones method⁸

Sometimes we feel our problems are too big to solve. But if we approach them step by step, we find out that we can solve them.

The **stepping stones** method of problem solving will help you think about your problem and break it into small parts that you can manage.

Stepping stones: Six steps to solving your problem

- Step 1: Identify what the problem is
- Step 2: List all the solutions you can think of.
- Step 3: Think and talk about the possible solutions.
- Step 4: Choose the best solution.
- Step 5: Plan how to do the best solution or make it happen.
- Step 6: Set a date to review what has happened.

⁸ The material in this section is based on material from the third edition of **The Mental Health Handbook, A Cognitive Behavioural Approach** by T Powell. It was published in 2009 by Speechmark Inc.

Step 1: Identify what the problem is

Let's look at an example of how the stress-bucket and the stepping stone method work together by viewing how Sam used them. He looked at his stress bucket and decided his big problem was being isolated and lonely. He thinks this is making him unwell.

Sam used the stepping stones process to think about this problem and what contributes to it. Here is what his first stepping stone looks like.

My problem is:

I am isolated and lonely.

What do I do or think in my life that contributes to this problem?

1. I never go to the cinema anymore.
2. I think people think I'm boring, so I avoid them.
3. I sit at home during the week.
- 4.

Sam has identified three things that make him isolated and lonely.

Activity: Fill in the worksheet [Step 1: Identify what the problem is](#).

.....

Step 1: Identify what the problem is

Worksheet

Look at your stress bucket and pick one problem. Talk and think about the problem. Try to be as clear and specific as you can about the problem.

My problem is ...

What do I do or think in my life that contributes to this problem?

Name: _____ Date: _____



Step 2: List all the solutions you can think of

When Sam moved on to step 2, he thought of five possible solutions to his problem. Here is what his second stepping stone looked like.

What can I do to solve my problem?

1. Join a local social group.
2. Go for a walk in the park every day.
3. Ask my neighbours if I can do any odd jobs for them.
4. Ring a friend I haven't seen for a while and ask them if they'd meet me for coffee.
- 5.

Activity: Fill in the worksheet **Step 2: List all the solutions you can think of.**

.....

Step 2 continued: List all the solutions you can think of

Worksheet

Write down possible solutions to your problem. Write the first things that come to mind. Don't worry now about whether you can do them or not. The important thing now is to think of as many solutions as possible.

My problem is...

Name: _____ Date: _____

Step 3: Think and talk about possible solutions

Step 3 is thinking and talking about the possible solutions. This helps you consider the advantages and disadvantages of each possible solution. Here is what Sam wrote about his first two possible solutions.

What are the advantages and disadvantages of my possible solution?

1. Join a local social group.

Advantage: It would increase my chance of meeting people and making new friends.

Disadvantage: I would be very nervous going into the group.

2. Go for a walk in the park every day.

Advantage: I would see people and be able to say hello to them.

Disadvantage: I might get very tired and then not want to do anything else.

Activity: Fill in the worksheet [Step 3: Think and talk about possible solutions](#).

Step 3: Think and talk about the possible solutions

Worksheet

Look at your list of possible solutions. Write down the main advantages and disadvantages of each one.

What are the advantages and disadvantages of my possible solutions?

1.

Advantage:

Disadvantage:

2.

Advantage:

Disadvantage:

3.

Advantage:

Disadvantage:

4.

Advantage:

Disadvantage:

5.

Advantage:

Disadvantage:

Step 4: Choose the best solution

The next step is step 4. Choose the best solution for you – this is the one that you think you can do with little stress.

Here is what Sam decided. He put one to three stars next to the possible solutions. One star is good and three stars is best.

What can I do to solve my problem?	
1. Join a local social group. Advantage: It would increase my chance of meeting people and making new friends. Disadvantage: I would be very nervous going into the group.	***
2. Go for a walk in the park every day. Advantage: I would see people and be able to say hello to them. Disadvantage: I might get very tired and then not want to do anything else	*
3. Ask my neighbours if I can do any odd jobs for them. Advantage I would talk to my neighbours. Disadvantage: I'd be very nervous that they might say no or give me something I can't do, which would make me feel worse, not better.	no star
4. Ring a friend I haven't seen for a while and ask them if they'd meet me for coffee. Advantage I would see old friends. Disadvantage: They might say no, and that would make me feel worse.	**

Sam decided joining a local social group was the best solution. He decided asking about odd jobs wasn't a good solution at this time, so he didn't put a star.

Activity: Do the activity [Step 4: Choose the best solution](#).

Step 4: Choose the best solution

Look back at your worksheet from step 3. Put one to three stars next to each possible solution. Three stars is the best solution.

Step 5: Planning how to do the best solution

Now it's time to make your solution work. Make an action plan. List the specific steps you can take that will help you reach your goal.

Here is Sam's action plan for his best solution. He has five steps for making his solution happen.

What is my problem?

I am isolated and lonely.

What is my best solution for now?

Join a social group.

What steps can I take to make my solution happen?

- | | |
|--------|--|
| Step 1 | Look up adverts for groups online and in newspapers. |
| Step 2 | Phone a few groups and write down starting times and places. |
| Step 3 | Pick a group and ring them to book a place. |
| Step 4 | Before I go to the group, go to their meeting place so I know where it is. |
| Step 5 | Put a reminder in my phone, so I remember to go to the group. |
| Step 6 | |
| Step 7 | |

Activity: Fill in the worksheet **Step 5: Plan how to do the best solution.**

Step 5: Plan how to do the best solution

Worksheet

Write your steps here. If you need more space, use the back of the worksheet.

What is my problem?

What is my best solution for now?

What steps can I take to make my solution happen?

Step 1:

Step 2:

Step 3:

Step 4:

Step 5:

Step 6:

Step 7:

Name: _____ Date: _____

Step 6: Review what you have done

The last step is to review what you have done. Pick a date when you will review your plan. Perhaps you would like to talk about it with your therapist in a week or two.

Here is Sam's review.

Date to review my plan?	Wednesday 14 March
Did I follow all the steps in my plan?	No
If I didn't, what step did I miss? Why?	I didn't ring and book a place. This is ok because the ad said I could just turn up.
Did I do what I wanted to do?	Yes
If I didn't do what I wanted to, what else should I do?	
If I did do what I wanted, is there anything else I should do?	I should keep going to the group, even though I am still nervous.

Activity: Fill in the worksheet [Step 6: Review what has happened](#).

Step 6: Review what has happened

Worksheet

Review your own plan. Congratulate yourself even if you haven't completed your plan yet. You have used the problem solving stepping stones, and you deserve to congratulate yourself for that.

Date to review my plan

Did I follow all the steps in my plan?

If I didn't, what step did I miss? Why?

Did I do what I wanted to do?

If I didn't do what I wanted to, what else should I do?

If I did do what I wanted, is there anything else I should do?

Name: _____ Date: _____