



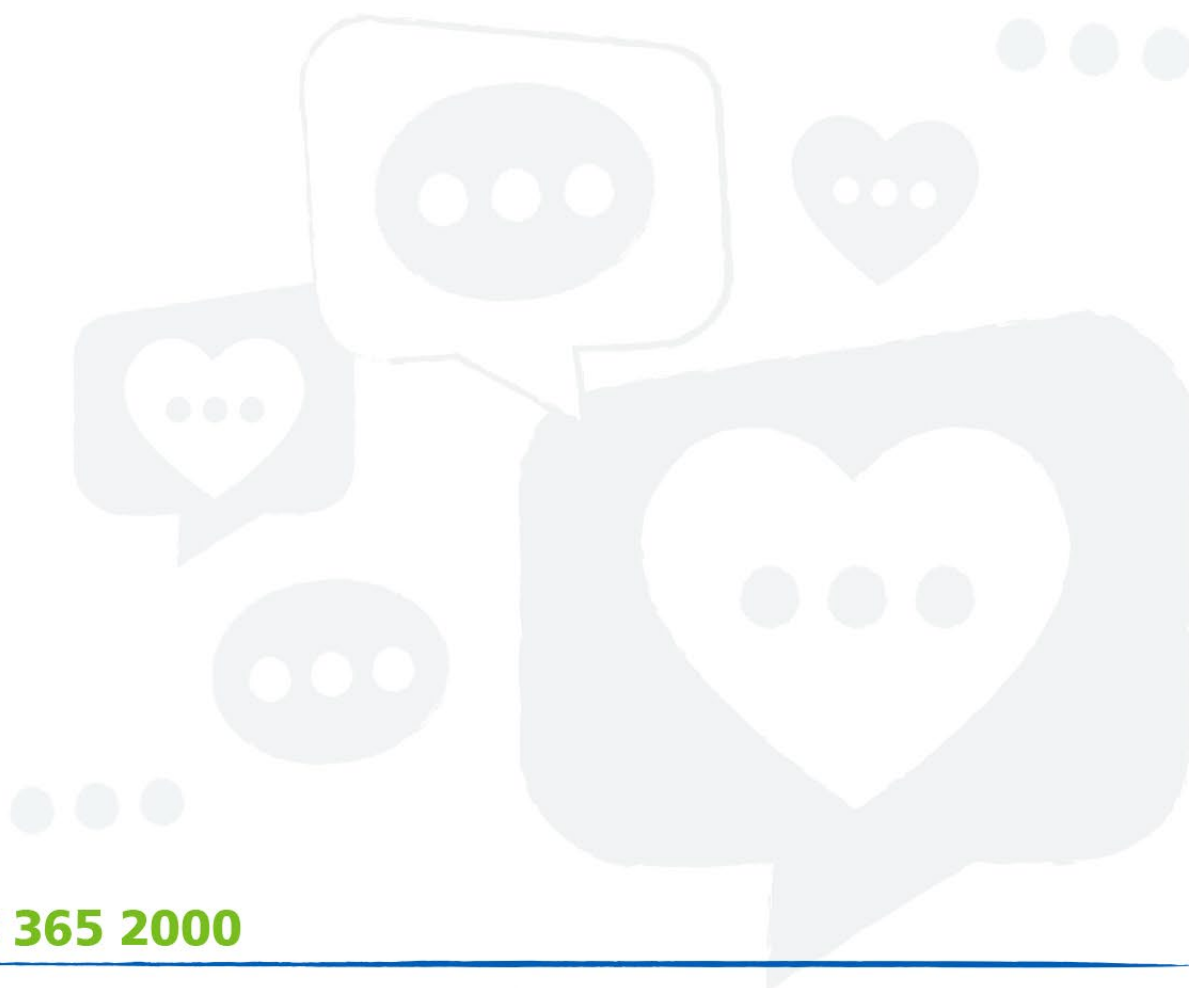
Talking Therapies

# Workbook...

LTC No. 4

## Worry management

A guide for people living with a long-term health condition



**0300 365 2000**



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Work through the above contents and tick once completed.

# Managing Worries

## What is worry?

Everyone experiences worry from time to time, especially when faced with difficult or uncertain situations. However, some people worry a lot to the point that it begins to affect their wellbeing and causes chronic feelings of nervousness, stress and anxiety.

Worry can be defined as a type of self-talk in which we predict that negative events will happen in the future and over-estimate the possibility of disaster. Worrying thoughts tend to be characterised by 'what if?' statements, for example:

- What if my sugar reading is high?
- What if I'm caught in traffic and don't have a snack with me?
- What if my manager doesn't understand my condition?
- What if I get ill?
- What if I lose my job?

## The Anxiety Equation:

$$\text{Anxiety} = \frac{\text{High estimation of danger}}{\text{Low estimation of coping abilities}}$$

# Managing Worries

## Practical vs. hypothetical worrying

There are two types of worry that we will be looking at in this workbook. The first are worries we can do something about. This is when your worries centre on a real life, current problem that needs to be solved. For example, if you were told that your blood sugar readings were quite high you might worry about things. With these worries we are often trying to solve the problem by worrying about it, running through different scenarios and strategies in our minds in the hope of finding a solution.

Another type of worry is hypothetical worry; worries we can't do something about. This is when we worry about events that may never happen, and which we have no control or influence over. For example, If you have had a cardiac event, you might worry about dying from a heart attack in the future.

This may set off a chain of further worries, for example “what if I can’t work and have problems financially, what will my children do if there is no income, and then...”. This chain can be very difficult to stop once it gains momentum, leaving you feeling anxious, nervous and tense.

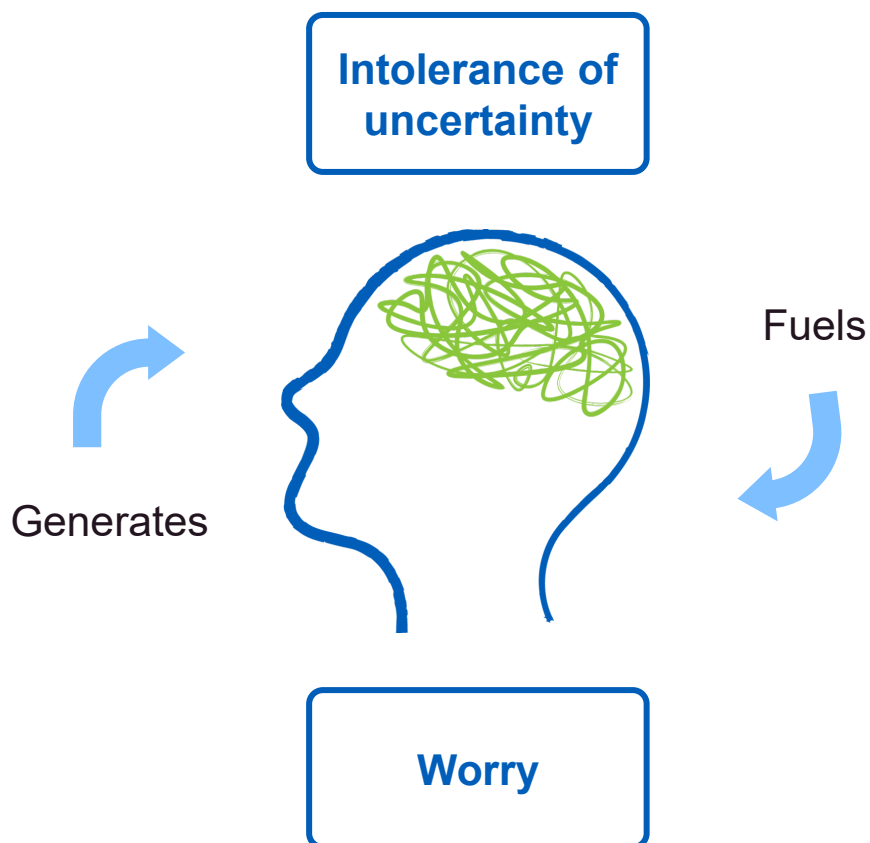


# The role of uncertainty

Think about the types of things that you worry about. Would you be worried if they were completely certain? If you could gaze into a crystal ball and know with absolute certainty what will happen with your career, your finances, your family and your health, would you still worry about them? The answer is probably no.

Worrying tends to be about future events, for which certainty is impossible.

Worrying is a reaction to uncertainty. People who worry a lot tend to have a low tolerance of uncertainty. Even a small amount of uncertainty can cause worry.



# Unhelpful behaviours

In worry, our behaviours are also altered. For example, we may be trying to achieve certainty by finding out more information or putting off making decisions until we can be absolutely certain that we will make the right decision. Look at the list of unhelpful strategies below and tick the ones that apply to you.



## Looking for lots of information

Looking for lots of information to help us come to a decision only increases the uncertainty and triggers more worry.

The additional information does not necessarily make things clearer but just gives us more information to consider and worry about.

Also, with more information, there is increased risk of finding contradictory facts, which again leads to more uncertainty and worry.



## Scanning for uncertainty

Worriers are on the lookout for uncertainty nearly all the time.

Scanning does not mean that uncertainty is reduced, in fact the opposite happens- it increases.



## Avoiding committing yourself

Rather than choosing to commit or not commit, worriers avoid doing either, which leaves them hanging in uncertainty

Worriers often avoid commitments because they can't be sure how it will turn out



## Procrastination

This is where worriers find every excuse to avoid dealing with an uncertain problem or issue e.g. putting off a conversation with the GP about current diet because they aren't sure how the conversation will go.

# Unhelpful behaviours

## ☐ Seeking reassurance and avoiding responsibility

It is helpful in the short term because we usually feel much better once someone has told us that everything will be ok, but it is generally short lived. Worriers can seek reassurance repetitively, but this triggers more uncertainty and worry.

## ☐ Overprotecting others - avoiding giving others responsibility

Worriers tend to look out for others and at the same time worry about them. This is a “just in case” strategy.

## ☐ Checking and re-checking-avoiding making mistakes

Worriers often feel uncertain about decisions or choices they have made and consequently revisit decisions or choices to see if they have done the right thing.

The ‘what if’ question sows a seed of doubt, so we check the answer to reduce worry, however this only creates more.

## ☐ Post-mortem worry

Once worriers have made up their mind about a decision, they then doubt whether they have made the right decision. They will ask “what if I have made the wrong decision?” Their questioning stimulates uncertainty.

## ☐ Thought suppression

One unhelpful way to deal with worries is to try and push upsetting thoughts out of your mind or trying not to think about something that is worrying you. See the Pink Elephant experiment below to see why this may not be helpful.

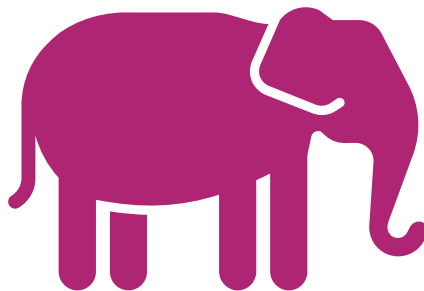
# Unhelpful behaviours

## The Pink Elephant Experiment

**Step 1:** Close your eyes and try very hard **not to** think about a pink elephant for the next 60 seconds.  
**What happened?** Chances are all you could think about was a pink elephant! Often people find that by trying to push thoughts or images out of their mind they come back even stronger.

**Step 2:** Close your eyes and try very hard to keep thinking about a pink elephant for the next 60 seconds. Try and hold that image of a pink elephant in your mind. Were you able to do it, or did your mind wander?

Suppressing thoughts is not a helpful or effective way of dealing with your worries. Trying to push worries out of your mind and stop thinking about them will probably make them worse. For more effective strategies, see the next section on **Helpful Behaviours**.



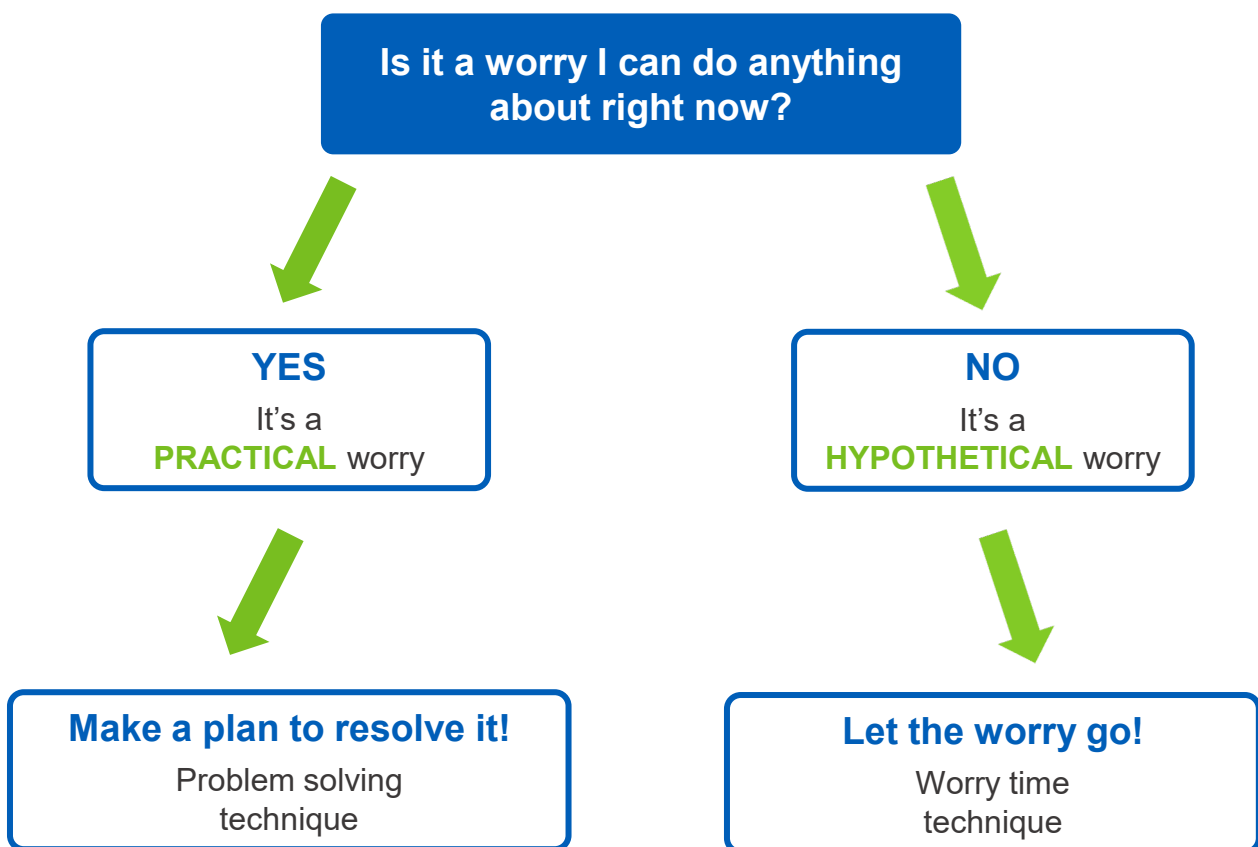


# Helpful Behaviours

## The Worry Tree

The worry tree is a good way of deciding what type of worry you are dealing with and what strategies would be most helpful.

Start at the top of the worry tree and work your way down.



# Strategies for Hypothetical worry

## Worry time

As we discovered in the unhelpful behaviours section, trying suppressing worries or pushing them out of your mind isn't particularly effective. A helpful alternative is to **postpone** worry. Agree with yourself a time of day when you have permission to worry, for example at 6pm each evening. Allow yourself 15-20 minutes. If you find yourself wanting to worry about things at any other time of day or night, make the decision to worry about it later, during your pre-arranged 'Worry Time'.

## Mindfulness

Mindfulness has its roots in Buddhism and is about taking a non-judgemental approach to your thoughts and worries. The idea of mindfulness is to let go of your worries without making any attempts to push them away or get involved with them. Try to become a casual observer of your worries – notice that they are there, observe them and then watch them drift away in their own time, just like watching clouds passing across the sky.



### Five ways to be more mindful

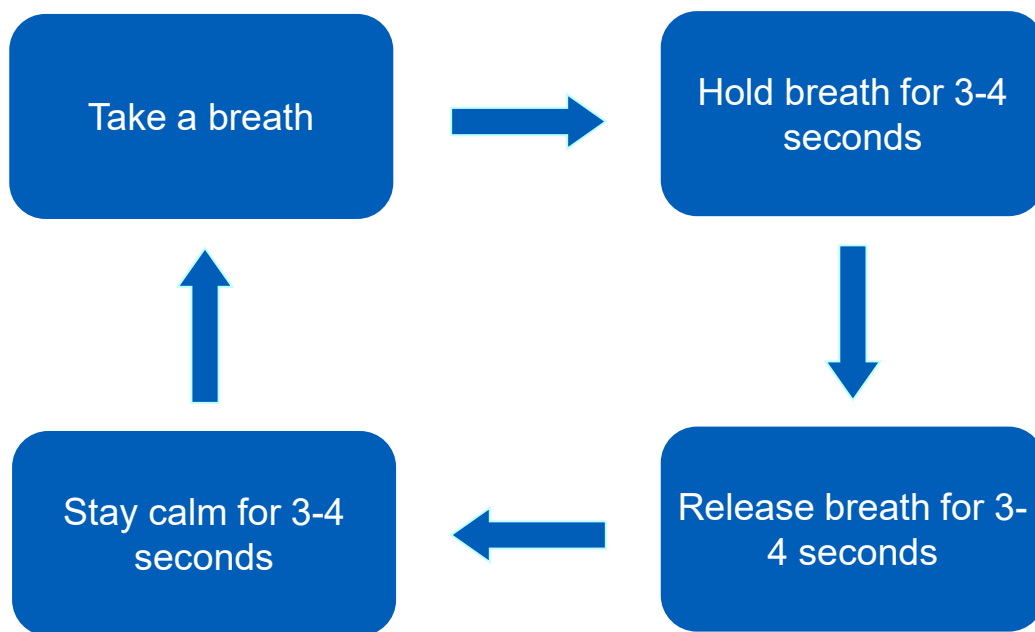
- **Be aware of your worries:** Notice and acknowledge what you are worrying about
- **Observe and listen:** Try to not react to the worry. Instead, observe the worry and listen with interest to what it is about.
- **Let go:** Visualise the worry as a transitional thought, much like a passing cloud or wave on a beach, which comes and goes.
- **Focus on the here and now:** Focus on your breathing, any physical sensations you are currently feeling (e.g. your feet on the floor) and your surroundings.
- **Practice makes perfect:** This can be difficult at first but keep practicing and it should get easier.



# Strategies for Hypothetical worry

## Square breathing technique

This technique is quick and easy to use – it can be implemented anywhere and can be useful in the moment of a stressful situation.



There is no need to take a deep breath – it can be a normal breath, and you should hold it for as long as you feel comfortable.

It doesn't matter how long that is, the important factors is be consistent to make it "square". Do this for 2-3 minutes.

# Strategies for Hypothetical worry

## Relaxation

**Relaxation is a helpful way for us to manage our mood and can help alleviate symptoms of anxiety and stress.**

Relaxation can help you calm down and take a step back from a stressful situation. Relaxation is very individual. What is relaxing for some may not be to others! Although relaxation won't necessarily eliminate the cause of the anxiety, it can make you feel more able to deal with stress once you've released some of the tension in your body and cleared your thoughts.

Check with your GP if you have any concerns about whether these relaxation techniques are suitable for your physical health condition.



Try to make relaxation a part of your daily routine. A good time to do relaxation exercises is before bed, as this will help with sleep.



Relaxation can be tricky at first so try not to feel too disheartened if it isn't effective straight away. .



There are different types of relaxation exercises. Some focus on breathing, some on the body and some on visualisation

You could try the exercises available on the NHS Berkshire Talking Therapies website:

[Progressive Muscle Relaxation – Brief Audio Exercise 1](#)

[Progressive Muscle Relaxation – Extended Audio Exercise 2](#)

# How to relax

## Visual imagery

This exercise uses visualisation and all of the body's senses to produce a relaxed state and a place for you to go to when you need peace.

There are three steps in this exercise:

### Step 1: The journey to your private place

- As you begin your journey take several deep breaths
- As you go through your journey you will be going deeper and deeper into your image
- As you travel pay attention to the sights you pass
- Notice the new sounds you hear
- Be aware of the temperature and the feeling under your feet
- Reach out and touch things, notice how they feel
- Let the tastes and smells enter your image
- Continue until you find a place of rich sensory experience. This is now your private place

### Step 2: Enter your special place

- You are in your private place where you can let go of your worries and anxieties
- What can you see in front of you?
- What is in the distance?
- What do you hear?
- Are there any immediate smells or tastes?
- Reach out and touch the things around you



# How to relax

- How do they feel?
- What is under your feet? How does this feel?
- Are there any new smells or sounds?
- What is the temperature like?
- What do you see above you?
- Focus on the sounds
- Tell yourself that this is your special place that you can visit whenever you want
- Identify a path along which you will travel as you journey through this place
- Memorise every detail of your special place so that you can return easily along the path when you choose to
- Stay in your private place for several minutes allowing your imagination to run free with pleasurable images.

## Step 3: The return home

- Before you start to return home notice how your body feels, you will want to return to this feeling in the future
- Try to recall the best aspects of your journey and your private place
- Prepare to leave by counting backwards from 3 to 1.
- Become aware of your surroundings (people and noises, etc.)
- Move your feet, legs and hands. Move your head in small, slow circles
- Open your eyes feeling re-energised, refreshed and relaxed.



# How to relax

## Quick relaxation

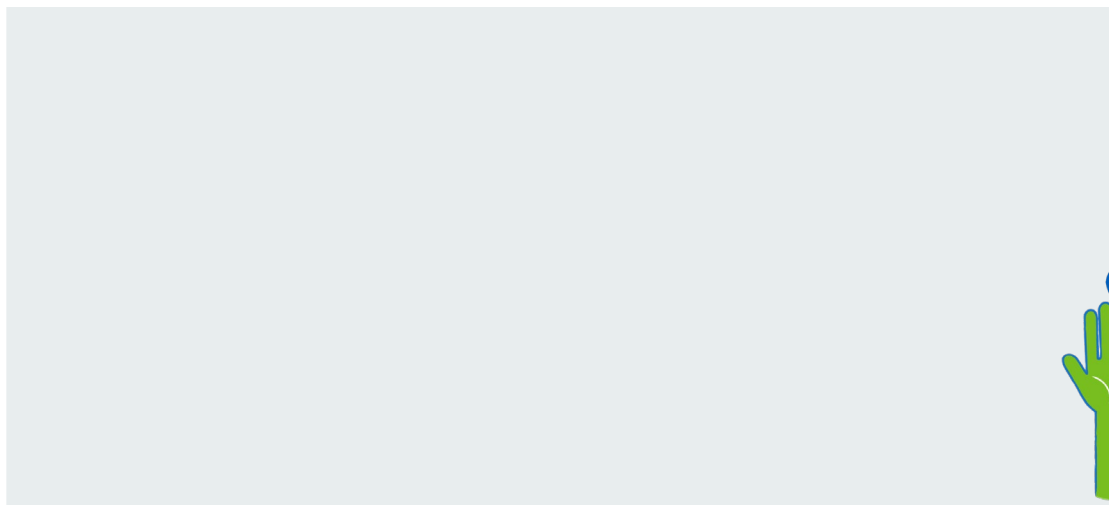
1. Wherever you are (e.g. in the car, supermarket, awaiting appointment etc.)
2. Stop
3. Shoulders down
4. Take 2 or 3 slightly slower, slightly deeper out-breaths (just let the in-breath happen)
5. Carry on with whatever you were doing, but just a little slower

## Other forms of relaxation

- A warm bath
- Listening to favourite piece of music
- Reading a magazine/book
- Stretching
- Gardening
- Drinking herbal tea
- A gentle walk
- Baking
- Knitting/sewing
- Watching a film/tv

It can be helpful to have a list of the activities you find relaxing, so in times of stress, you can refer to this and try and complete one to reduce stress.

**Write down some examples of activities you find relaxing**



# Problem Solving

Problems and obstacles appear constantly in our lives, and we all have different problem-solving abilities. Some people are better at solving problems in certain areas of their lives than others. Some problems or obstacles that come up can be more difficult to solve than others and some may leave you feeling overwhelmed or helpless.

## When could I use problem solving?

Problem solving can be used at any time when you have a problem or difficulty and need to identify a solution. Problem Solving can also help you to achieve the goals that you have set yourself as you can use the techniques to overcome obstacles that may get in your way.

We want to be able to think of a variety of ideas to solve our problems, not just a few. For this we use brainstorming which helps to increase our flexibility and creativity. It also helps to concentrate energy on solving the task ("How can I go forward") rather than negative emotions and thoughts ("Why does everything go wrong").

## The following three steps will help you to overcome these barriers:



### Step 1: Write down the problem



### Step 2: Write down as many solutions as you can think of



# Problem Solving

## Step 3: Weigh up the pros and cons

Write down the advantages and disadvantages of each solution and rate each one for how useful it would be.

Solution	Advantages	Disadvantages	Rating 1-10

**Step 4:** Choose the solution you rated as most helpful to try out.

**Step 5:** Plan your solution.

**Step 6:** Review, and trial a different solution if this one hasn't worked.

# Notes

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# Further resources



## Workbooks

**Centre for Clinical Interventions (CCI)** - <https://www.cci.health.wa.gov.au/>

A range of detailed resources and PDF workbooks available to download for free focusing on a range of depression and anxiety related difficulties.

**Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS** – <https://web.ntw.nhs.uk/selfhelp/>

Self-help guides free to download by PDF and print on a range of difficulties including anxiety and depression.

## Smartphone apps (found on Apple and Google Play store)

**WRAP** – Wellness recovery action app

**Mood Tools** – Depression aid

**Fear Tools** – Anxiety kit

**Insight Timer** – Meditation app

## Websites

**Mind** – <https://www.mind.org.uk/>

**Mental Health Foundation** - <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/>

**NHS** - <https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/>

# Useful contacts...



## Talking Therapies:

**0300 365 2000**

(Open 8am to 8pm Monday to Thursday  
8am to 5pm Friday)

Email:

[talkingtherapies@berkshire.nhs.uk](mailto:talkingtherapies@berkshire.nhs.uk)

## Other contacts:

Berkshire Crisis Team:

**0800 129 9999**

(24 hours, specialist service for  
immediate mental health crisis)

Samaritans:

**116 123**

(24 hours, confidential listening service)

NHS Direct / out of hours:

**111**

(24 hours, physical and mental  
health concerns)

**In an emergency always call 999**

