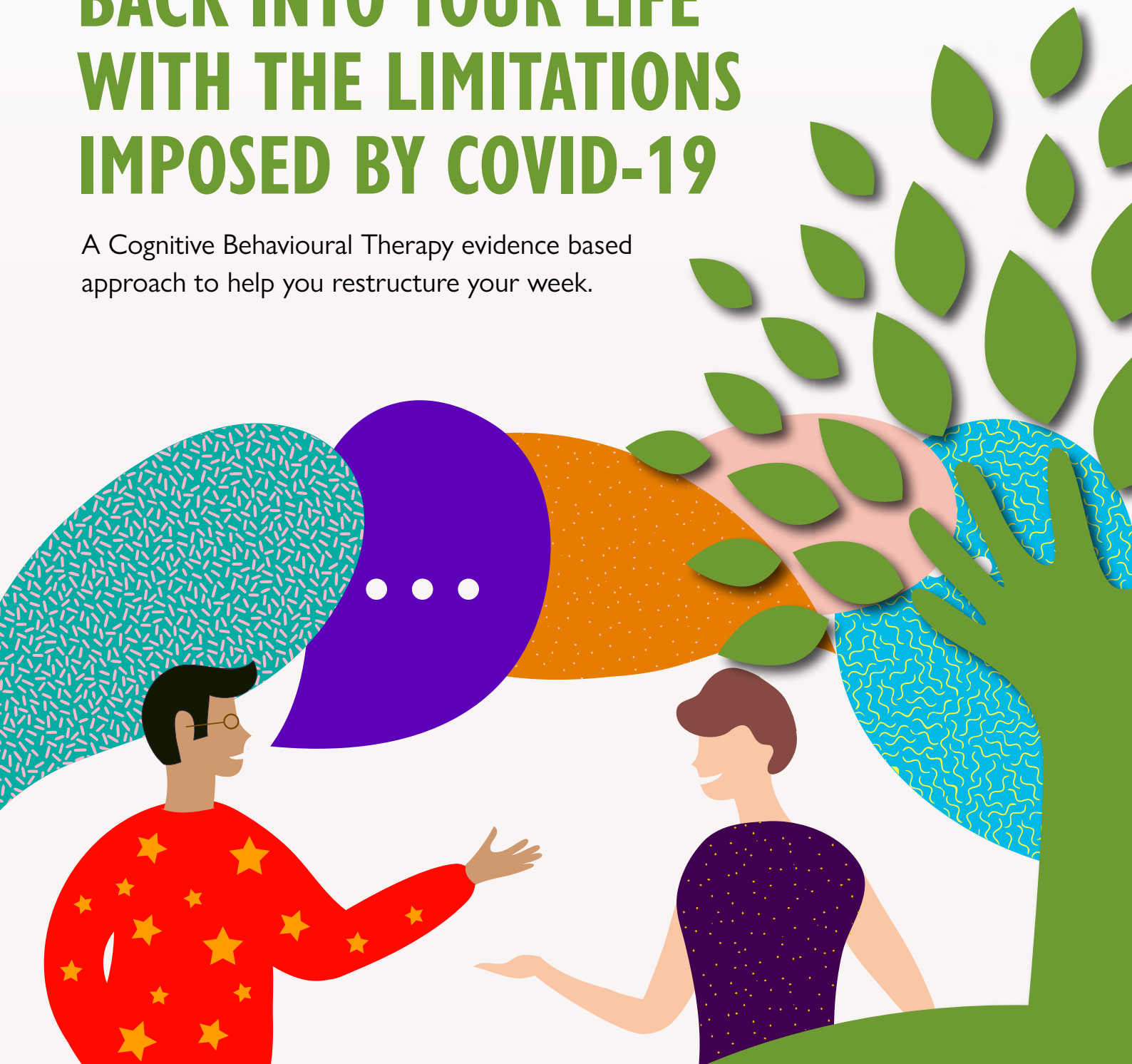


GETTING STRUCTURE BACK INTO YOUR LIFE WITH THE LIMITATIONS IMPOSED BY COVID-19

A Cognitive Behavioural Therapy evidence based approach to help you restructure your week.



GETTING STRUCTURE BACK INTO YOUR LIFE WITH THE LIMITATIONS IMPOSED BY COVID-19

YOUR WELLBEING SERVICE IS HERE TO HELP

During this challenging time with COVID-19 placing limitations on us all, this self-help approach is here to help you put much needed and helpful structure back into your life. Being self-help, this approach has been designed for you to work through on your own. At times however, you may find yourself struggling with a specific Step.

IF SO, YOU ARE NOT ON YOUR OWN!

If needed, trained Practitioners at the University of Exeter Wellbeing Service with expertise in supporting this approach are ready to offer support by e-mail, video-conference or over the telephone. See website for information on how to do this.



You are in control of the way you choose to work through this workbook. Therefore, the speed you want to go using the workbook is down to you alongside how you put the techniques you'll learn into practice.

THE IMPORTANCE OF HAVING STRUCTURE IN OUR LIVES

Our lives are made up of a range of activities we do every week. For example, a week at University may involve you engaging in different:

- *Routine* activities such as having breakfast, attending lectures and seeing your personal tutor.
- *Pleasurable* activities.
 - These are very much individual but may include things such as going for a coffee with friends, spending time back at home with your family or engaging in clubs and societies at the Student Guild.
- *Necessary* activities such as completing assignments, paying bills and getting groceries.
 - These may not be much fun to do at times, however need to be completed to avoid unhelpful consequences.

Whilst not all activities may be enjoyable, they give your life structure, meaning and some activities you may value.

THE PROBLEM WITH COVID-19

COVID-19 places restrictions on our activities and is likely to disrupt the normal structure of our lives. However, to maintain good wellbeing and keep purpose in our lives it's very important we keep some structure.

It's very likely that as a student at the University of Exeter, your life has been highly structured to accommodate all the demands associated with a high level of academic study and to make the most of the wide range of Guild clubs, societies and other opportunities. Limitations imposed by COVID-19 are therefore especially likely to have disrupted the structure you had in your life and even more so if now at home.

This self-help approach will help you put new structure back into your life, enabling you to carry on with the demands of your University study whilst maintaining your wellbeing.

HELPFUL TIPS

Before you get started, sharing some tips may be helpful. Many of these have come from people that have used self-help approaches before.

Give it your best shot

Because you will not have experienced the demands imposed on you by COVID-19 before, you may initially struggle with some Steps covered by this approach. But just give the approach your best shot. That's all anyone, including yourself, can ask of you.

Expect to have good and bad days

After using the approach for a little time, hopefully you will notice yourself putting structure back into your life. However, as is normal, you will have good days and not so good days. This is all to be expected, but on occasions like this the University Wellbeing Services can help.

Avoid Boom and Bust

Working through this approach, you should go at a rate best suited to you. However, often slow and steady works best.

Involve family and friends

Given the limitations of COVID-19, you may be using this self-help approach from home and just being with your family and having others around may be helpful. They may be able to help you if struggling in any way with specific Steps, can help you look at things differently, find ways to solve problems or sometimes just for a chat. However, you might be living away from others you trust and find helpful, so you can't ask for face-to-face advice, but you could consider using the telephone or having a video chat.

Ask for help

Although this is self-help, if you find yourself struggling with any Step then please send the Wellbeing Practitioner an email, being as specific as possible about the Difficulty you've experienced with the self-help approach. They will initially provide e-support including specific advice on ways to overcome any difficulties with any of the stages. This approach will hopefully help you to learn how to manage your worries better in these uncertain and challenging times.

GET STARTED AND PUT STRUCTURE BACK IN YOUR LIFE!

This self-help approach consists of 5 Steps:

STEP 1: Categorise common activities you did before restrictions imposed by COVID-19

STEP 2: Adapt activities to account for limitations imposed by COVID-19

STEP 3: Organise activities by how difficult they are to achieve now

STEP 4: Plan new activities to create a new structure for yourself

STEP 5: Give it a go!

STEP 1: CATEGORISE COMMON ACTIVITIES YOU DID BEFORE RESTRICTIONS IMPOSED BY COVID-19

Think about the range of specific activities you *did before* restrictions came into place that gave structure to your life. Now categorise the activities you *did before* COVID-19 into three main types of activities areas that make up the structure of people's lives.

ROUTINE

Do regularly and often everyday things such as making breakfast, having a bath or shower, keeping fit etc.

PLEASURABLE

Bring pleasure and maybe of value to you. These are very much individual to you and nobody can tell you what these should be, what one person enjoys another may really dislike. These may have included activities such as going to the cinema with friends, taking the dog for a walk or helping out with a Guild Society or club.

NECESSARY

Very important and often will lead to unwanted consequences if not done. For example, even with the limitations imposed by COVID-19, you may still be required to undertake on-line study, complete assignments or revise for upcoming exams.



WORKSHEET A: COMMON ACTIVITIES DONE BEFORE RESTRICTIONS

ROUTINE <i>e.g. morning shower, completing work for each module, going for a run</i>	PLEASURABLE <i>e.g. chatting about University life, going to the cinema with University friends, playing tennis</i>	NECESSARY <i>e.g. organising food shopping and arrange home delivery</i>

STEP 2: ADAPT ACTIVITIES TO ACCOUNT FOR LIMITATIONS IMPOSED BY COVID-19

Under restrictions imposed by COVID-19, some activities you've listed in Step 2 are likely not able to be done.

Before you reject any however, it may still be possible to achieve them but in a different way.

Some may be capable of being adapted to make them possible to achieve even with restrictions. Or if you think about what it is in an activity that brings you value, maybe you can replace it with a different activity of equal value.

Look through the Routine, Pleasurable and Necessary activities you listed on [WORKSHEET A](#). Now, think if any can be adapted or replaced to ensure they can be undertaken at the present time.

Go through these activities one-by-one and see if the following techniques can help make them possible.

TECHNIQUES

This technique can be used for certain activities to help you maximise gains by undertaking activities that are still possible whilst minimising losses experienced as a result of COVID-19 restrictions. The technique can support you reconsider all types of activities and help you **select** appropriate tasks to focus on, **optimise** your ability to complete them with the restrictions placed on you and **maximise** gains you personally get from activities you can still engage with.



STEPS

Selection:

- Look through each activity listed on Worksheet A and consider if the activity is currently impossible to achieve within the restrictions imposed.
 - For example, social distancing would simply not make going to the pub or playing team sports possible.
- If you are absolutely certain it cannot be currently achieved put a line through it.
 - But don't rule anything out too soon as other techniques below may still be helpful.

Optimisation:

- As you look through your remaining activities, think about what you would need to help achieve an adapted activity.

For example;

- You may need to invest time to learn to use a new video-chat package to engage in lectures or group discussions.
- Maybe there are support services provided by the University that can serve as a source of help, such as library support to access books or journal articles.

Compensation:

- Think about ways you can compensate for activities you can no longer do.
 - One potentially helpful way to achieve this is to think about things you used to specifically value in activities you can no longer engage with.
 - Once you recognise what you valued, consider if there are alternative tasks you can still do at this time that may be of equal value.

Example

Each week at University, Alex used to enjoy going to the cinema with a few friends to watch a movie. After the movie they would go for coffee to chat about what they'd just seen. Obviously, under restrictions imposed by COVID-19, this was simply not possible and going to the cinema had to stop. However, whilst Alex used to really enjoy going to the cinema and being with friends, he realised that time spent chatting to friends about the movie was really valued. Consideration was therefore given to any way *valued* aspects of this activity could be maintained even with restrictions **[Selection]**. Alex checked out what the University were able to offer that could help them meet online and took the time to find out how to use the software **[Optimisation]**. Once all the friends had learnt to use the software, every week they would take turns to choose a film being streamed on TV and scheduled a time each week to meet on line to discuss the movie **[Compensation]**.

When you have worked through each activity listed on **WORKSHEET A**, write your newly adapted activities and those you can still do on **WORKSHEET B**. Write each activity in the column that best represents the type of activity it is.



WORKSHEET B: ACTIVITIES THAT CAN BE ACHIEVED WITH RESTRICTIONS

ROUTINE <i>e.g. morning shower, completing work for each module, keeping fit on the exercise bike</i>	PLEASURABLE <i>e.g. watching movie and over coffee, chatting to University friends about it by video-chat</i>	NECESSARY <i>e.g. revising for exams, getting mitigation form completed to extend essay deadline</i>

When you've done this, it's also worth thinking about the opportunity COVID-19 may present to get around to tasks you've always put off doing. It may be you've been avoiding these tasks, as they are generally not enjoyable.

Even if this is the case, now may be as good a time as ever to get it done and just think how it will feel if you can get it out of the way.

STEP 3: ORGANISE ACTIVITIES BY HOW DIFFICULT THEY ARE TO ACHIEVE NOW

Based around the activities you've listed in Step 2, create a new structure for yourself that accommodates the restrictions imposed by COVID-19.

However, before moving on, it may be that some activities seem more daunting to do than others. Think about how difficult you believe each activity would be to do in the next week and then write these down on [WORKSHEET C](#) in the appropriate column to represent Difficult.

Least Difficult: Activities you think you could manage in the next week.

Medium Difficult: Activities you would struggle to do in the next week but you think could just about manage them if needed.

These may also include activities where you need to learn different ways to *optimise* the activity you want to achieve.

Most Difficult: Activities you believe are really impossible for you to achieve at present but would still like to achieve.

It may be that you need to learn several different ways to *optimise* the activity you want to achieve and this may take a little time.





WORKSHEET C: ORGANISING ACTIVITIES BY DIFFICULTY

LEAST DIFFICULT	MEDIUM DIFFICULT	MOST DIFFICULT

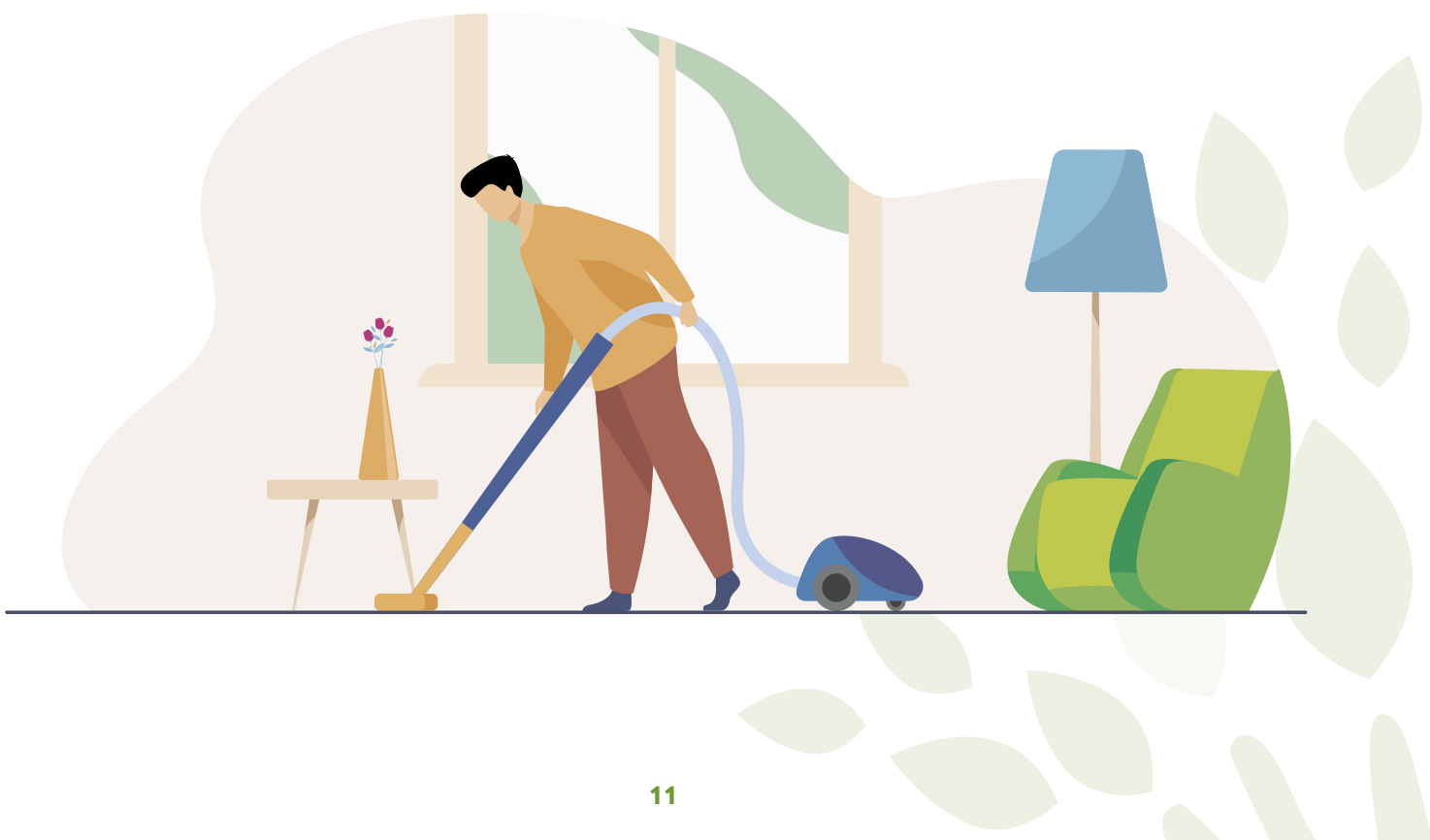
BREAKING TASKS DOWN

Before you move on, revisit the tasks written under the **Most Difficult** column. It may be that each activity can be broken down into a number of smaller tasks to make them more achievable or appear less overwhelming.

For example, maybe you have been thinking about compiling the reference section for your final year or postgraduate thesis, but the sheer thought of it is off-putting.

- Rather than thinking about this as a single **Most Difficult** activity, think about ways to break the activity down. For example, you may:
 - Want to see if there is software available to help you do this.
 - Need to learn how to use it.
 - Begin to type references into the software.
 - This itself may seem overwhelming, so break it down further, maybe schedule for an hour a day.

With any of these activities you could keep going until you had broken it down into a number of separate smaller tasks you felt you could manage. Then you could reconsider each task and add it to the **Least Difficult** or **Medium Difficult** columns.



STEP 4: PLAN NEW ACTIVITIES TO CREATE A NEW STRUCTURE FOR YOURSELF

The final Step is to select activities listed in the **Least Difficult** column and begin to rebuild a new structure for yourself. The number of activities to include can only be decided by you. No matter how many you start with in the week, you may begin to think you can achieve more. In this case great, just add them into your structure as you work through it.

Important

Although you should try to start off with activities listed as **Least Difficult**, have a look at those rated as *Necessary*. Even if these are all listed as **Most Difficult**, they may still need to be prioritised to avoid unwanted consequences. Going back over the techniques in Step 2 or breaking the activity down into smaller of tasks may help. Or to avoid any unhelpful consequences, also consider other types of support, maybe asking friends or family, or of course by contacting your Personal Tutor or other relevant support services at the University.

Now Build a New Structure for Yourself.

- Choose activities identified as **Least Difficult** or *Necessary* that soon need to be done.
- Use these activities to create a new structure for yourself to stick to during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Write each **Least Difficult** or *Necessary* activity you need to do into **WORKSHEET C** identifying the day and time (Morning, Afternoon, Evening) you think best to engage with it.
 - When adding new activities, it can really help if you are as specific as possible by providing detail on:
 - ‘What’ you are going to do: i.e. ‘Start essay assignment for EBE3425’
 - ‘Where’ you are going to do it: i.e. ‘Kitchen table’
 - ‘Who’ you are going to do it with: ‘On my own’
 - Use Worksheet C on the web site If you want to capture more activities.
- As far as possible try to plan to do different types of activities across each day.
- Try to spread activities equally across the week.
 - Avoid overloading yourself on a few specific days whilst leaving other days with no activities.
- At times it’s OK not to have any activities planned.

WORKSHEET D: BUILDING YOUR NEW SCHEDULE

Use the blank 'My Starting Point Schedule' to record what you're currently doing during the week. Start today and record over the next 7 days. There are two boxes each for the morning, afternoon and evening so just try to include the main two things you have done for each.

My Starting Point Schedule		Day 1	Day 2	Day 3
Morning	What			
	Where			
	Who			
	What			
	Where			
	Who			
Afternoon	What			
	Where			
	Who			
	What			
	Where			
	Who			
Evening	What			
	Where			
	Who			
	What			
	Where			
	Who			
Comments				



At the end of each day have a look at your schedule and write any comments you have in the comments box. Think about what you've been up to, and note if there were times when you felt better or worse.

It can really help later on if you are able to provide some detail about:

'What' you are doing – i.e. 'watching television'

'Where' you are doing it – i.e. 'lounge'

'Who' you were with – i.e. 'on my own'

Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7

STEP 5: GIVE IT A GO!

When you've managed to complete **WORKSHEET D** for the next week, it's time to start using it to put structure back into your life.

As you work through each day, write comments about how that day's activity went in the Comments Box. In the event you've struggled with anything, catching information at the end of each day may help you recognise the difficulties you've had and direct you back to the appropriate Step to work through again.

Otherwise, remember you are not on your own!



AUTHOR

Professor Paul Farrand is Director of the Low-Intensity Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (LICBT) portfolio within Clinical Education, Development and Research (CEDAR); Psychology at the University of Exeter. His main clinical and research interests are in LICBT, especially in a written self-help format and has developed a wide range of written CBT self-help interventions for depression and anxiety. He sits on the Expert Advisory Group for the Department of Health Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) programme, national level committees developing a broader psychological therapies workforce and at an international level concerning worldwide developments in LICBT. Clinically, he has been Psychological Lead attached to Head and Neck specialties for over 20 years and Academic Lead for the University of Exeter Wellbeing Service.

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