

Planning & Scheduling Activity

Depression is most often characterised by low energy levels, lowered motivation, negative thoughts e.g. *talking yourself out of doing things*, and lowered self-esteem. As a result, the depressed person will often give up potentially satisfying or meaningful activities, and become less and less active. However, it is well known that both exercise and constructive, stimulating activity is energising and mood enhancing.

Planning and scheduling activity involves devising a timetable of activity for each day. This can be done in various ways: it can be a very detailed plan of what to do throughout each day; or, it can just mention particular goals to be achieved – *for example*, going swimming twice each week.

This exercise is most often helpful when it is clear that the person has stopped doing things or, for some reason, is putting off or avoiding things that may prove beneficial or satisfying – *for example*: the depressed person who avoids conversation or interaction with others because they think that they will not enjoy it. It may also be useful in helping to turn general goals, such as ‘I want to socialise more’, into a more specific plan of action.

Planning and scheduling activity is not always quite as easy as it may first seem. To gain the most from this exercise, consider the following:

- Care needs to be taken to ensure that activities that are planned on the schedule are realistic and achievable. Planning to complete a really demanding activity may raise anxiety levels too far, making it unlikely that the activity will be achieved.
- It is important not to attempt doing so much that the plan becomes unachievable.
- When planning activities, it is important to be as detailed as possible – be clear about: what, where, when, and with whom. This will help in being very clear and specific about what is to be done, and help to consider and plan for any obstacles that may arise.
- Writing out the plan / schedule will provide a reminder about what is to be done, and often helps in committing time and effort to achieving the plan. A simple activity planning record can be used – *as shown on the following page*.
- It is important to look back at the plan in seeing what has been achieved, and then planning the next activities.

Some benefits of structured activity are:

- feeling better and being distracted from problems and unhelpful thoughts
- giving a sense of purpose and control
- feeling less sluggish and more energetic – inactivity increases feelings of apathy
- increasing motivation to do more and increasing ability to think more clearly
- increasing sense of achievement and pleasure

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PSI Resources: brief description of key interventions

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