

Unified Protocol for Transdiagnostic Treatment of Emotional Disorders: Workbook (2 edn)

David H. Barlow, Todd J. Farchione, Shannon Sauer-Zavala, Heather Murray Latin, Kristen K. Ellard, Jacqueline R. Bullis, Kate H. Bentley, Hannah T. Boettcher, and Clair Cassiello-Robbins

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Setting Goals and Maintaining Motivation

Chapter: (p. 29) Setting Goals and Maintaining Motivation

Author(s):

David H. Barlow, Shannon Sauer-Zavala, Todd J. Farchione, Heather Murray Latin, Kristen K. Ellard, Jacqueline R. Bullis, Kate H. Bentley, Hannah T. Boettcher, and Clair Cassiello-Robbins

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Goals



- To identify top problems to focus on during treatment
- To set specific steps you can take to address your top problems during treatment
- To discuss the importance of motivation for success
- To explore costs and benefits of changing and remaining the same

Homework Review



Did you complete your **Anxiety** and **Depression Scales** (and your **Other Emotion** and **Positive Emotion Scales** if you've chosen to complete them) for last week? Did you plot your total scores on the **Progress Record**? If so, well done! You can refer back to these first records as your starting point. In the chapters that follow, you will be introduced to more forms

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to help you practice your skills, so it is good that you are getting in the habit of recording now. If you did not do the record-keeping this past week, think of what may have kept you from recording your experiences and what will help you stick to it. Is there a time each day that you can devote 10 minutes to recording? Can you leave forms somewhere that will remind you to complete them or add a reminder into your calendar to prompt you? Remember, record-keeping enables you to develop a more objective level of self-awareness and will help you to track your progress throughout this program. If you have not completed the monitoring for (p. 30) this past week using the **Anxiety** and **Depression Scales**, we recommend you complete these before continuing.

Key Concepts



We've discussed the importance of monitoring your emotional experiences and progress during treatment. In this chapter, we'll focus on identifying the ways that your emotions are interfering with your life—the top problems you would like to change. We'll also discuss the importance of you finding and maintaining motivation for making these difficult changes. The topics covered in this chapter form the necessary foundation for building a healthier relationship with your emotions (see Figure 4.1). The rest of the skills in this book build upon this groundwork.

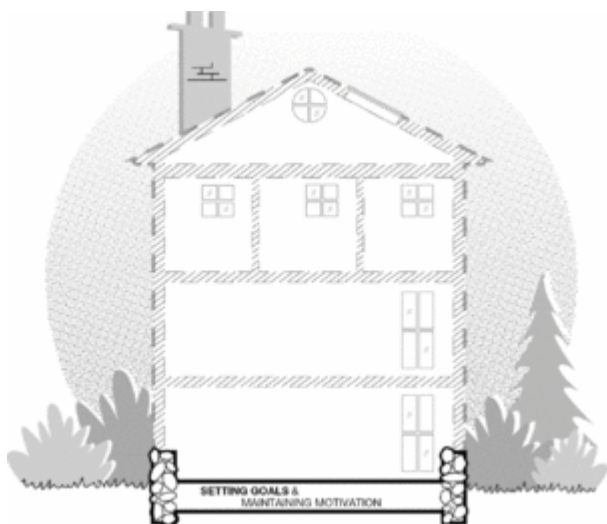


Figure 4.1

(p. 31) Clarifying Problem Areas



The first step in change is becoming clear on the types of problems that you have been experiencing. By having a better understanding of your current problems, you'll know how to focus your efforts in the treatment program. It is important to define your top problem areas in a concrete, measureable way so that you can determine if you are moving toward the change that you are hoping for. It may be helpful to start with the basics: In what ways have your emotions (i.e., feeling sad, anxious, guilty, angry) caused problems in your life? Have you stopped doing things that you use to enjoy? Are there experiences that you are missing out on because you don't want to feel uncomfortable? Sometimes the way that people try to manage their negative emotions leads to even more problems (e.g., drinking to feel more comfortable in social situations, cutting to feel numb, checking locks repeatedly to decrease anxiety). Have

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some of your behaviors become problematic for you? Are your negative emotions impacting your relationships? Answers to some of these questions may help you clarify the top problem areas that you would like to work on. Use the following space provided to identify the ways in which your emotions have been interfering with the life you want to live.

Circle the two top problems you would most like to address with this treatment. Then transfer these problems to the first column on the **Treatment Goals Form** at the end of this chapter. Sometimes people notice that they feel increased distress as they sit down and think about the problems that they have been experiencing. Try not to feel discouraged. By clarifying the problem areas in your life, you are taking a step toward gaining control. Remember, once you've identified your top problems, you will have a much better idea of how to focus your efforts in the treatment.

(p. 32) Setting Manageable Goals



Now that you've identified how your emotions are interfering in your life, let's think about what you would like to change. In other words, what are your goals related to each problem area you've identified? What do you hope will be different four months from now? Research has shown that setting specific, concrete, and manageable goals greatly improves our chances of successfully changing. So, instead of saying something general like, "I want to be less anxious," you might say something more specific, such as, "I want to be able to take public transportation, ride elevators, and drive over bridges." With the latter goals, it is much easier to evaluate whether you've achieved them. Go ahead and write down your goals associated with each top problem in the second column of the **Treatment Goals Form**.

The next step is to think about specific behaviors that you can do to move you toward reaching your overall goals. It can sometimes be really overwhelming to imagine going from Point A (how you're living now) to Point B (how you'd like to be). For this reason, we want to break down our larger goals into more manageable steps. For example, if your long-term goal is to make friends, you might start looking into group classes, community events, or social activities that you could participate in. The next step may be to actually attend the activity, even if you don't know anyone. Additional steps could include attending the event regularly, having extended conversations with an acquaintance, and ultimately asking for contact information from this acquaintance in order to make plans.

Now take some time to fill out the rest of the **Treatment Goals Form** on your own. Sometimes it can be difficult to complete this worksheet, as it might *feel like* the steps necessary to meet your goal are not manageable. When completing this part of the form, start with a step that seems doable, even if you have to push yourself a little bit. As you start to generate additional steps, try not to get hung up on whether you can accomplish them *right now*. Instead, ask yourself whether the steps you are writing down are specific behaviors that can be completed in a limited time period. Also, remember that you will be learning new skills as you go through treatment that will help you move forward with these steps. So, even if a step toward you goal seems impossible now, it may not feel that way in a few weeks. It is also okay if you have a hard time identifying all the specific steps to take for each of your goals. Your therapist or a trusted friend

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may be able to help you come up with more ideas. You can make (p. 33) copies of the **Treatment Goals Form** if you'd like to set goals for more than two problem areas. A completed example of the **Treatment Goals Form** can be viewed in Appendix B on p. 166.

Tracking Changes in Top Problem Areas



Just as it is important to record the changes in your emotional experiences, it is important to keep track of changes in your problem areas. By keeping track of the steps you are taking to make changes in your problem areas, you'll have a better, *more objective* understanding of your treatment gains. You will also have a better idea of what you will need to continue to work on to reach your goals. At several points throughout this treatment we will ask you to reflect on the progress you've made on the goals you identified.

Motivation



Now that you've identified your top problem areas and your goals to address them, let's think about what you'll need to successfully change. First and foremost, the more you engage with this treatment, the more progress you will make. Second, the more motivated and committed you are to changing, the more likely you are to stay engaged in the treatment procedures.

It is important to keep in mind that motivation is not fixed—it changes over time. Some days your motivation will be high and you'll feel ready to face the practice exercises laid out in this workbook. However, other days it might be more difficult to get yourself to complete your homework. External factors like increased stress at work or school, feeling particularly tired or sick, or having more to do than usual can all reduce your motivation for engaging in the treatment procedures. Additionally, we'll be asking you to approach your emotions instead of trying to push them away; this may actually make you feel your emotions more strongly before you start to feel better. At some points, you might even feel like it is not worth the time and effort to make some of these difficult changes. This is completely normal! Recognizing that many factors can affect your motivation and allowing yourself to occasionally have doubts is important. Remember, it is all part of the change process. During times of lower (p. 34) motivation, it can be helpful to revisit the reasons why you set out to make these changes in the first place.

If low motivation is a consistent problem for you, as is often the case for people with depression, it can be helpful to brainstorm ways of getting yourself to start working on this treatment even though you may not feel up to it. This might include talking to your therapist or a friend or family member about your goals so that they can help keep you accountable. It could also include setting specific times where, regardless of whether you're motivated, you make a deal with yourself to work on therapy homework while learning to tolerate the feelings of low motivation. Often people make the mistake of "waiting for the motivation to arrive" before making changes. However, when you "get the ball rolling" and start moving toward your goals, motivation often improves and makes it easier to keep going.

Decisional Balance Exercise



Very often, the reasons people have for making changes in their lives are fairly obvious (e.g., "I can't keep living this way"), which leads them to conclude that they're 100% ready to move forward with all that this program asks of them. Of course, it is very important to use your top problems and goals as a motivator. That said, it is also necessary to identify potential barriers (e.g., "change can be quite difficult and time consuming") so that you can be proactive in overcoming them. We use the **Decisional Balance Form** at the end of this chapter

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to explore all the pros and cons you can think of *both* for changing (or engaging with this treatment) and for staying the same. A completed sample of the form is shown in Appendix B on p. 167. It can be helpful to think about the ways your current state is working for you—even though it may be difficult to admit these reasons to yourself. For example, even though you may have identified perfectionistic behaviors such as triple-checking all your emails before sending them as contributing to your distress, it may be difficult to let go of them if you think you will not perform as well at work or school. It is important to be honest with yourself and recognize *all* the reasons for and against both changing and staying the same.

Let's first take a closer look at the benefits of changing. This is often the easiest box on the **Decisional Balance Form** to complete because most (p. 35) people have given this quite a bit of thought before starting the treatment. Common benefits that people write down range from global benefits, such as "I'll be able to live my life fully again" to more specific pros like "I'll be able to fly to my niece's wedding." Many of the benefits you have identified probably match your treatment goals.

It is just as important, however, to consider the costs of changing so that you have realistic expectations of barriers that may come up for you. Many people note that "change will take a lot of time," and "it will be hard work." It is true that this treatment will take a lot of effort and will ask you to respond to your emotions in new ways that might feel uncomfortable at first. Another common reason that people cite as a possible cost of participating in this program is the fear that if treatment doesn't work, they will somehow be worse off than before. This belief may prevent you from putting forth your best effort in treatment—and then, if it doesn't work, you can blame your lack of effort instead of taking it as evidence that there is something wrong with you. Of course, everyone progresses at different rates, but no matter what, it is very likely that you'll be better off than when you started. You will have a better understanding of how emotions become problematic, and you will have a strong set of skills to help break this cycle. Additionally, people who experience a great deal of guilt may sometimes feel as though they don't deserve to use skills to improve their lives.

Now let's explore some benefits of staying the same. People often note that "it will be easier" to stay the same. Indeed, it certainly might seem like it would be a lot less effort to refrain from engaging in this treatment. You wouldn't have to spend time reading this workbook, and you wouldn't be filling out these forms. However, think about how much time and effort it takes to avoid your uncomfortable emotions. It might feel easier because it is what you are used to doing, but it takes a lot of time and energy to continue avoiding your emotions. Finally, let's discuss cons for staying the same. The most common reason people place in this box is that they will continue to struggle with their feelings and continue to be limited in their daily lives.

Take a few minutes to fill out the **Decisional Balance Form** with your own pros and cons before continuing. Once you've finished, consider whether the pros of changing/costs of staying the same outweigh the costs of changing/pros of staying the same. Are the goals you're striving (p. 36) for worth the time and effort this treatment requires? Is it worth it to feel negative emotions more strongly as you learn new ways of coping that will bring you closer to your goals? Is the possibility of a better life worth the uncertainty of whether this treatment will work? Of course, the answers to these questions may not be black and white; however, if you lean toward changing, you are in a great position to begin this treatment.

Also, keep in mind that your motivation is going to change (both increase and decrease) over the course of treatment. This is normal and *does not* mean that you are "failing" or that the treatment is not working. In fact, cultivating the ability to take steps forward—even during periods of low motivation—is key to making lasting changes in your life, particularly for people

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with depression. You can pull out the **Decisional Balance Form** if you notice that you are feeling less motivated to engage with the exercises in this treatment. Reviewing this form can remind you of your overarching goals and how the skills you are practicing fit into the bigger picture. You might even consider taking a picture of the form with your phone, so that your reasons for changing are always at your fingertips. Remember, decreases in motivation are only temporary, and they will pass.

Summary



Clarifying the problem areas that you would like to address in treatment is an important first step in making changes in your life. Setting concrete steps you can take toward these changes (**Treatment Goals Form**) will help this process feel less overwhelming. Additionally, since you are setting out to make some important changes in your life, thinking about your reasons for changing will keep motivation high. Considering costs of changing will give you an idea of barriers that might get in the way of successfully completing the treatment program. Remember, motivation is not fixed, and your own motivation will change (both increase and decrease) as you progress through this program. This is a natural and normal part of the behavior change process. Revisiting the reasons for and against both changing and staying the same (**Decisional Balance Form**) can be helpful in reminding you how any one skill fits into the bigger picture of achieving your important goals.

(p. 37) Homework



- If you haven't already done so, complete your **Treatment Goals Form** and **Decisional Balance Form**. If you require additional space, consider making photocopies of these forms or visit Appendix: Forms and Worksheets for downloadable versions.
- Continue monitoring your weekly experiences using the **Anxiety** and **Depression Scales** (as well as the **Other Emotion** and **Positive Emotions Scales**, if you're using them).
- Remember to use the **Progress Record** to record the total scores from the **Anxiety** and **Depression Scales** (as well as **Other Emotion** and **Positive Emotions Scales**).

Self-Assessment Quiz



Answer each of the following by circling true (T) or false (F). Answers can be found in Appendix A.

1. Setting goals is more effective when they are concrete.
T F
2. Once you start this program, your motivation will remain as strong as it is now.
T F
3. Feeling both that you want to change and that you might not be ready to change is a natural part of the process of any behavior change.
T F
4. Having doubts about your ability to change means you will fail.
T F

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