



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

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Previous Edition (1 ed.)

Publisher: Oxford University Press
Print ISBN-13: 9780190686017
DOI: 10.1093/med-psych/
9780190686017.001.0001

Print Publication Date: Nov 2017
Published online: Jan 2018

Learning to Record Your Experiences

Chapter: (p. 17) Learning to Record Your Experiences

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DOI: 10.1093/med-psych/9780190686017.003.0003

Goals



- To learn the importance of record-keeping
- To introduce you to questionnaires you'll be using to monitor your emotions
- To learn how to track your progress throughout this treatment

Key Concepts



In this chapter, we will help you to understand the importance of monitoring and recording your experience. For the rest of this program, you will be asked to keep track of your efforts practicing each skill using homework forms at the end of each chapter. We will also ask you to monitor the emotions you're experiencing week by week. Keeping ongoing records of

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your experiences will help you understand how changing your relationship with your emotions corresponds to the gains you're making in treatment.

Why Take the Time to Record?



There are many reasons why it is important to keep records of your experiences on a regular basis. First, intense anxiety, sadness, or other uncomfortable emotions typically feel overwhelming. Learning to be an observer (p. 18) of your own emotions is a first step toward understanding these experiences and feeling more in control. Throughout this treatment, you will be learning specific skills that will help you respond to your emotions in more helpful ways. Given that everyone has unique experiences, recording your personal examples will also help you figure out how to best apply the treatment strategies to meet your individual needs. As you practice applying your new skills, ongoing monitoring will highlight the impact they are having on your emotional experiences. You'll be able to answer the question, "How is this new strategy helping?" Finally, monitoring your overall progress during the treatment will help you track the gains you are making.

Becoming an Objective Observer



A systematic approach to monitoring your experiences provides much more accurate information than simply asking yourself, "How have I been feeling lately?" If you were asked to describe the past week, you may judge it to have been very bad even though you felt relatively good at some points. Or you might evaluate how you felt over the entire week on the basis of how you felt over just the past couple of days. Focusing on your negative emotions makes it easy to forget about the times you didn't feel that way. Not only that, these negative judgments about how you've been doing in general may be contributing to your ongoing feelings of anxiety, sadness, or other distressing emotions. Keeping records of your emotional experiences helps you to recognize that your mood fluctuates. Through this process, you will begin to get a more realistic picture of what is really going on for you, enabling you to feel more in control.

Sometimes people are concerned that continually recording how they're feeling will make them feel even worse. It is important to realize, however, that the way you observe your experiences matters. For example, *subjective monitoring* means focusing on how bad you feel, how much your emotions are interfering in your life, and how helpless you feel to control them.

In contrast, we'll be asking you to engage in *objective monitoring*, which involves observing your emotions in a more "scientific" way. In this program, you will learn to record things such as how many times over the course of the week you felt a certain way, what was happening right before you felt distressed, and how you responded (what you were thinking, (p. 19) doing, and feeling). In other words, you will be recording just the facts and evidence, not your judgments or evaluations of how good or bad the experience may have been for you.

At first, it may be difficult to switch from subjective to objective monitoring. As you start to use the record forms included in this workbook, you may even notice an increase in your distress because you are focusing on your emotions in the old, subjective way. However, with practice, you will begin to find switching into the objective mode easier and easier.

What Do You Record?



As you go through each chapter in this book, you will be introduced to specific record forms that have been developed to help you practice each new skill. In addition, there are four forms that you will use throughout the entire program. The first two forms will allow you to objectively record how often you experienced the general anxiety and depression common to all

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emotional disorders over the past week, as well as how much these feelings interfered in your daily life. These forms are called the Overall Anxiety Severity and Interference Scale¹ (**Anxiety Scale**) and the Overall Depression Severity and Interference Scale² (**Depression Scale**). We will ask you to complete these two measures every week for the duration of your program. Tracking your scores on the Anxiety Scale and Depression Scale from week to week will be the main way you evaluate your progress.

In addition, we have included two other forms that you may find useful for tracking your progress in treatment. First, if another emotion (beyond anxiety and depression) has been significantly overwhelming or interfering for you (e.g., anger, shame, jealousy), you can track it using the Other Emotion Severity and Impairment Scale (**Other Emotion Scale**). Additionally, if it has been difficult to experience positive emotions (e.g., joy, excitement), we encourage you to use the Overall Positive Emotion (p. 20) Scale (**Positive Emotion Scale**) to help you recall times when you experienced positive emotions over the past week.

Keeping a record of changes in your emotional experiences is an important way to help keep yourself moving forward, especially during those times when you might feel frustrated or discouraged. Use the information gathered from the Anxiety and Depression Scales (as well as the Other Emotion and Positive Emotion Scales if you're using them) to chart your progress week by week on the **Progress Record**. The **Progress Record** is designed to summarize your improvement so that you can easily view changes over the course of the entire program. A blank copy of the **Progress Record** is provided at the end of this chapter. On the bottom of the scale, you will see one number for each week you use this program. Use the numbers on the left side of the scale to plot your total score on the Anxiety, Depression, Other Emotion, and Positive Emotions Scales for each week. You may want to use a different colored pen for each scale or different shape to plot the score for each scale in order to tell the scales apart. If you are working through this program with a therapist, you might be asked to complete these scales at the start of each session, along with graphing your progress from week to week on the **Progress Record**.

See Appendix B (p. 165) for an example of how a **Progress Record** might look. Generally speaking, we expect that you will experience a *decrease* in anxiety, depression, and other emotional distress as you begin to practice the skills included in this treatment. In contrast, you will likely experience an *increase* in positive emotions as you tackle the problem areas in your life. Also, notice that progress does not occur in a straight line, but instead there are some peaks and valleys along the way. This is typical for most people, and you may find a similar pattern emerges for your own progress. Oftentimes, people notice a spike in their anxiety and depression during times of increased stress. Additionally, people sometimes notice an increase in their distress as they start making meaningful and hard changes in their lives. In these cases, the increase in distress is a marker of really challenging oneself. If you find your own experience seems to be worse one week than it was the week before, challenge yourself to keep going. The goal of the treatment program is to have fewer of these “spikes” in distress. When they do occur, with practice, you'll be able to respond differently to them so that your emotional experiences are less intense and don't last as long.

(p. 21) Summary



We cannot emphasize enough the importance of record-keeping. Remember, there is a difference between *subjective* monitoring—focusing on how bad you feel—and *objective* monitoring—looking at the features of your experience in a more “scientific” way. Completing the **Anxiety** and **Depression Scales** (as well as the **Other Emotion** and **Positive Emotions Scales**) and **Progress Record** weekly will help keep you keep your progress in perspective. At

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first, you may have to push yourself to complete these records, but it will become easier, and even rewarding, as you continue. These records not only serve to give yourself feedback, but are also very helpful to your mental health professional, if you are seeing one.

In the next chapter, we will present two more important concepts that will help prepare you to start this treatment program—setting your treatment goals and maintaining your motivation to engage in treatment.

Homework



■ Begin to monitor your weekly experiences using the **Anxiety** and **Depression Scales**. Use these forms to get into the habit of objectively recording how often you experienced anxiety and depression over the past week, as well as how much these feelings interfered in your daily life. It may be helpful to photocopy these forms so that you have a fresh copy to complete each week. Alternatively, blank versions of these forms are available below.

■ Optional—monitor your weekly experiences using the **Other Emotion** and **Positive Emotions Scales**. Use these forms to objectively rate how often you experienced the emotion you selected as most relevant to you (e.g., anger, shame), as well as how often you experienced positive emotions over the past week.

■ Use the **Progress Record** to begin charting your progress through the program, recording the total scores from the **Anxiety** and **Depression Scales** (as well as **Other Emotion** and **Positive Emotions Scales**) week by week.

(p. 22) Self-Assessment Quiz



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

1. Record-keeping helps you have a better understanding of your emotional experience.
T F

2. Objective monitoring and record-keeping means focusing on how bad you feel.
T F

3. You should be able to easily switch from subjective to objective monitoring without practicing it, and if you can't you must be doing it wrong.
T F

4. Objective monitoring and record-keeping help give you more accurate information about your experiences; for example, allowing you to see there may actually have been some good moments in a week you judged as all bad.
T F

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(p. 28)

Notes:

1 Norman, S. B., Cissell, S. H., Means-Christensen, A. J., & Stein, M. B. (2006). Development and validation of an overall severity and impairment scale (OASIS). *Depression and Anxiety*, 23, 245–249.

2 Bentley, K. H., Gallagher, M. W., Carl, J. R., & Barlow, D. H. (2014). Development and validation of the overall depression severity and impairment scale. *Psychological Assessment*, 26, 815–830.