



# stresscontrol

Face your fears; be more active; watch what you drink

## Step 7

### Controlling your actions

**Step 7 teaches you three new skills**

Face the fear

Problem solving

Giving up 'Safety Behaviours'

**You will also see how the skills in the other steps are now brought into force.**

## Face the Fear

Many people avoid facing threats as a way of coping. While this may work in the short term, it makes stress worse in the long term. This uses the same 7 step approach as Problem Solving.

## **‘Reality testing’**

If you avoid facing the things that cause you stress, you never find out what would have happened. If you avoid, you never find out if you could have coped. So your stress stays in place. If you face your fear, you can test the reality of your fear. If the thing you fear does not happen or if you cope better than you think, your stress can start to die out. Even if the thing you fear does happen, is it as bad as you thought? The chances are that it will not be. So this section looks at how to face your fear.

### **Step 1: What is the problem to face?**

Work out your list of the things you need to confront. Look back at the things you wrote in the ‘What is stress?’ handout.

### **Step 2: What do I think will happen when I face my fear?**

Use the Safety Behaviour information you will gather in this handout. Try to predict what will happen. Use the ‘Controlling Your Thoughts’ skills. (‘What is the worst thing can that happen?’ is very good for this). Once you have faced the fear, see how good this prediction was.

### **Step 3: Brainstorm**

### **Step 4: Choose the best option**

### **Step 5: Work out a plan**

Use relaxation and controlling your thoughts

### **Step 6: Put it into action: Do it**

### **Step 7: Review**

Did it work? If not, why not? If it did work, you can now face other fears.

Please make use of the ‘Controlling your actions’ forms at the back of the handout.

## **Problem Solving**

This is a good skill to help you deal with any problem in your life.

- You take on problems one at a time.
- You break each problem into seven 'bite-size' stages.
- As you pick up this idea, you gain a greater sense of control in your life.

**You start by saying clearly what the problem is.**

'The dampness in the back room is getting worse'  
'My son has no time for me now'

**These are both good as you have said clearly said what the problem is.**

'This house gets me down'  
'I'm so bad-tempered'

**These are both bad as these do not clearly say what the problem is.**

Let us use the second problem to go through the seven steps.

Sam wants to work on the problem he has with his ten year old son, John. He starts at:

**Stage 1: What is the problem?**

'My son has no time for me now'

**Stage 2: What do I think will happen if I don't solve this problem?**

Sam wrote 'It will be the same as me and my dad. I used to think he was the greatest. I ended up hating him. He was never there to help me when things were bad. I could not share the good times with him either. I believed he thought I was no use. I can't let that happen with my son'

### **Stage 3: Brainstorm**

You try to come up with as many solutions as you can. This is a way to stretch your mind so it does not matter how good or bad they are. The more you think of, the better the chances of finding a good one. So, Sam sits down and writes down these:

#### **Options:**

1. I was the same with dad at his age. Just leave him. He will come round.
2. I'll buy him a TV for his room.
3. I'm so wrapped up in my problems, I've not spent any time with him for ages. We used to do a lot in the past. I could change this.
4. We all eat in front of the TV. We could all sit round the table again and talk.
5. The wife says I'm like a bear with a sore head. I just shout at him all the time. No wonder he steers clear of me.
6. I'll ask my wife if she has any ideas. John talks to her.

### Stage 4: Choose the best option

Sam has to write out the pros and cons for all the options. Then he works out if the option will work.

Option	Pros	Cons	Will it work?
1. <b>Just leave him. He will come round.</b>	I still talk to my dad now.	I still resent my dad for not trying harder with me. I swore when John was born that I would not be like that with him	No. Ditch it
2. <b>Buy him a TV</b>	He wants a TV in his room	You can't buy love	No. Ditch it
3. <b>I could spend more time with him</b>	He loves fishing. We could go to the river on Saturdays. I could pick him up from Cubs on Tuesdays. I could just ask him how his day was - I don't even do that	It sounds good but will I do it?. But if this worked, it would help both of us. If I felt him come round to me, I would feel less of a failure.	Yes. Don't aim too high though. Take it one step at a time
4. <b>Eat our meal at the table</b>	We could all talk. We are like ships in the night just now. It would help keep the family strong	None. This is good	Yes. I know my wife wants to do this
5. <b>Stop shouting all the time</b>	This would be great	I try not to but I can't stop it. So I have to work at it. Use the stuff on controlling my thoughts. Try to relax more. Work out why I get angry.	Maybe. Don't aim too high though
6. <b>Ask my wife</b>	She has just about given up on me as I don't try with John. This would show her I am trying. She might know some good ways to help me with him	None. This is good	Yes. I think she will help me all the way if she feels I am trying





### **Stage 5: Work out a plan**

Sam started with Option 6. He used what his wife told him to help plan Option 3.

My wife asked John if he would like to go fishing. He was really keen and said he missed going with his dad. That lets me get the courage to do it. I'll speak to him after our meal tonight. We will get the rods out to check them. I will meet him from school on Friday and go to the Tackle shop for bait. We can pack up the gear as well. The two of us will do all of this together.

My friend will pick us up first thing. I've told him what I am trying to do and he knows I will find this stressful. But he is good at keeping me calm. He will bring his son and he gets on well with my boy. We will be quiet when we fish so that is less pressure on me. I will not expect it to be perfect but we will do it again the next Saturday I am off if he wants to. I will do the tape to relax in the morning. I will not drink the night before.

### **Step 6: Put it into action**

Do it

### **Step 7: Review**

- Did it work?
- If it did not, why not?
- What did you learn?
- Can you improve it to make it work?
- What is the next problem you can tackle?

'It has rained all day and we didn't catch a thing. That put a bit of a dampener on things. I spent too much time talking to my mate and not enough to John. I shouted at him for spilling the bait. I should not have done that. He is only a wee boy. It was only bait. These were the bad things. I can learn from this and not make the same mistakes next time.

But, on the plus side, John said he had a good time. He wanted to know if we could do it again. I think he was wary to ask me in case I got angry or something. But I said yes and I told him I had a good time being with him (and so I did).

My wife was pleased but she wants to see signs that I will keep it up. Fair enough. On the whole, I'm pleased with how it went. I've taken a step forward'

It is now a regular trip. Sam still shouts a lot in the house but, at least, he often talks freely and plays with his son. He feels, for the first time in a long time, that he is closer to being the dad he wants to be. This helps his self-esteem. His wife sees him trying and she is coming round to him again. He still uses Problem Solving to keep on top of things.

Please practise using 'Controlling your Actions' forms at the end of this handout.

## Getting rid of Safety Behaviours

Safety behaviours aim to prevent the thing you fear from happening. On the face of it, this seems like a good idea as they could protect you from threat.

## Here are some common things people do under stress:

**In a panic attack:** lean against something to stop yourself from fainting

**Worry:** try to focus your mind on certain thoughts or images to stop your mind spiralling out of control

**Agoraphobia:** walk through the shops with your eyes to the ground to prevent meeting someone you know.

**Jealousy:** Make sure your girlfriend phones you when she gets in from a night out with the girls.

Safety Behaviours are common in **social anxiety**. You put these in place to lower the sense of threat. So you may:

- ❖ work out in great detail what you are going to say before you make a phone call (as you fear making a fool of yourself)
- ❖ wear high necked clothes (as you fear others will see you blush)
- ❖ carry a bottle of water with you to keep you cool (as above)
- ❖ hide your face with your hair (as above)
- ❖ pretend to be writing notes in a meeting (as you fear coming across badly if you have to talk)
- ❖ avoid eye contact (as above)
- ❖ have a range of excuses ready for having a red face - 'it's so hot in here', 'I'm not well' (as you fear others will notice and think badly of you)

Just as when you avoid, these things may help in the short term. In the long term, they may make things worse. Why should this be? Stress, as we have seen, makes you feel under threat. It makes you feel you can't control things as well as you want to. You feel you need something to protect you from the threats that, by now, feel very real to you. And so you build up a range of safety behaviours.

The problem is that safety behaviours then feed the sense of threat. They do this by keeping your confidence low. This happens because they tell you that you **need** to protect yourself, that the threat is real. They seem to be the last line of defence. But if you had not used the safety behaviours:

Would you have fainted if you had not leant against something? - ***you don't know***

Would you have gone mad if you had not controlled your thoughts? - ***you don't know***

What would have happened if you had met someone you know? - ***you don't know***

Would you have messed up the phone call if you had not prepared? - ***you don't know***

This is much the same as ***'reality testing'***. You must see the thing through to the end to see how you would cope. So if you don't lean against something and then don't faint, you will feel more in control as the sense of threat will reduce. (This will then help you control thoughts more easily).

You can get rid of your safety behaviours in 5 steps. As before, this is based on Problem Solving. Practise using the 'Getting rid of Safety Behaviours' forms at the back.

### **Step 1: What are your safety behaviours? What 'props' do you use**

You should write down all the things you do or think to try to stop something bad happening to you. Some people have ready made excuses to use used if they do not cope. Some have a drink before going outside.

You should also think of anything you use to help ('props'), e.g. some people keep a diazepam tablet in their pocket all the time while some wear heavy jumpers to hide sweat marks.

**Step 2: Decide how much they help or hinder you**

Think of this in both the short term and the long term

**Step 3: Predict what would happen if you got rid of the safety behaviour**

Run the scene right to the end. If you did not use the safety behaviours, what would happen? (What is the worst thing that would happen? is very good for this). Have there been times when you did not use them? What happened?

**Step 4: Work out a plan**

**Do it**

Pick the safety behaviour you want to get rid of first. As in Problem Solving, work out your plan to do this. To help you cope, use Relaxation and the Controlling your Thoughts skills.

**Step 5: Review**

How did it go? Was it better or worse than you predicted? Why was this? Do you need to change your plan for the next time?

Keep going until you have got rid of as many of the safety behaviours as you can.

### **Last words**

The aim of Step 7 is to help you challenge your actions and build up your self-confidence. You should now look for ways to combine these skills with the ones you have learned in the previous sessions.

The course now looks at skills to tackle some of the common problems often found in stress. **Step 8** teaches you how to control panic. Even if you have never had a panic attack, you will find these skills very useful in controlling stress. Make sure you pick up this handout at Session 4.

**Controlling your Actions** (use for *Problem Solving* and *Face the Fear*)

Step 1: What is the problem?

Step 2: What do you think will happen (if I don't solve this problem – Problem Solving or If I face the fear?)

Step 3: Brainstorm

Step 4: Choose the best option (see next page)

Step 5: Work out a plan

Step 6: Put it into action

Step 7: Review





**‘Stress Control’:  
 Brainstorm form**

Option	Pros	Cons	Will it work?
1)			
2)			
3)			
4)			
5)			

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## Getting rid of safety behaviours

**Step 1: What are your safety behaviours? What 'props' do you use**

**Step 2: Decide how much they help or hinder you**

**Step 3: Predict what would happen if you got rid of the safety behaviour**

**Step 4: Work out a plan**

**Step 5: Review?**

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