

BOOKLET FIVE

Avoidance and the Depression TRAPs

5

Contents

How much are you avoiding?	2-3
Avoiding and spending time in unrewarding ways	4
Keeping busy can also be avoidance	5
Is avoidance a problem?	6-7
Why we avoid	8-9
Examples of avoidance	10-11
What is a depression TRAP?	12
How to spot a TRAP	13-15
TRAP Worksheet examples	16-17
TRAP Worksheets	18-20
Getting back on TRAC	21-23
TRAC Plan Worksheets	24-25
Reviewing progress	26-27

How much are you avoiding?

Sometimes we are very aware of the things we are avoiding - they tend to be 'on our minds'.

Other times, though, perhaps when avoidance has become more of a habit, it can be quite easy to forget about the things we are avoiding.

Here is a list of things that people often avoid or put off doing when they are feeling low:

How much do you avoid or put off	Not at all	Sometimes	Often
Answering the telephone			
Making phone calls to friends or family			
Making business phone calls			
Opening letters			
Opening bills			
Paying bills			
Checking emails or voicemail			
Checking bank statements, finances			
Self-care such as washing clothes and sheets, hair care, bathing			
Preparing and eating proper meals			
Social events with people you know well			
Social events with new people			

How much do you avoid or put off	Not at all	Sometimes	Often
Visiting friends or family			
Going out for the evening or going out for the day			
Mending or fixing things or DIY			
Tasks at work			
Conversations at home or work which might lead to disagreement			
Housework such as cleaning, tidying			
Hobbies such as reading, painting, gardening			
Exercising			
Anything you think might be difficult			
Other			

Do remember that with depression comes tiredness and lack of motivation and loss of confidence. Of course it is harder to do things. This is what happens in depression.

However, if you have noticed some important things here that are not yet part of your Activation Plan you may want to add them to your brainstorm or weekly schedules in BOOKLET THREE.

Avoiding and spending time in unrewarding ways

When we are avoiding something that we don't want to do, we aren't doing nothing; we are doing something else. Quite often that 'something else' is not particularly rewarding or helpful in the longer run. It's possibly just something that temporarily fills the time and maybe blocks out feelings of unease or guilt, etc. Some may be activities which are a bit like salt: great in moderation but not so good in excess.

Here are some common examples:

How much do you do the following	In moderation	Quite a lot	Definitely too much
Sitting thinking trying to find reasons for how you feel			
Thinking about things that have gone wrong in the past			
Watching TV even when there is nothing you really want to watch			
Playing computer games for hours at a time			
Comfort eating			
Surfing the internet aimlessly			
Drinking			
Sitting thinking and analysing your faults			
Daydreaming and fantasising			
Using pornography			
Other			

Being busy can be one way of avoiding!

Of course, doing *anything* can be a way of avoiding something else. You may be spending most of your days doing things that at least on the outside seem quite important, you may be busy, or even very busy. However, it may still be worth looking at whether you might be neglecting (avoiding?) important aspects of your life.

The work you did looking at the balance in your life in BOOK-LET TWO may have given some clues.

How balanced is your life? Is activity in one area crowding out the others?



Is avoidance a problem?

Only if it is affecting your wellbeing.

How might the following affect someone's wellbeing?

Avoiding seeing and speaking to people? (e.g. not phoning friends, making excuses for social events)

.....
.....
.....
.....

Avoiding mentally challenging tasks (e.g. Putting off studying, leaving difficult tasks at work, etc.)

.....
.....
.....
.....

Avoiding physical activity (e.g. spending a lot of time sitting in a chair)

.....
.....
.....
.....

Avoiding rest and relaxation (e.g. working long hours, or staying up late instead of sleeping, etc.)

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.....

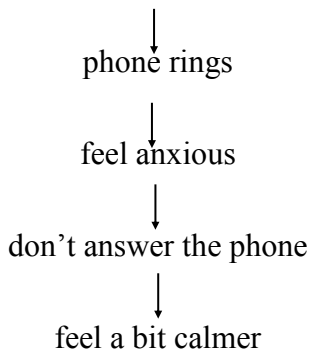
What are the longer term consequences of some of the other types of avoidance listed in the table on page 2?

Understanding why we avoid

Avoidance often begins as a very natural response to distress - we don't want to feel bad and so we avoid doing the things that make us feel that way.

In the short term we may feel relieved, safer, less stressed.

Example: Avoiding answering the phone:



learn from that to do the same next time

Usually we avoid because it feels better in the short term (even though we may know it is likely to cause problems later).

It isn't really so much that we lack motivation to do whatever it is we're avoiding; it's more that we have another agenda that we haven't always recognised. Sometimes, understandably, that

And then our minds don't always help us. They can get very good at coming up with what sound like reasons but may just be excuses.

Are any of these familiar?

Common avoidance thoughts	Not at all	Sometimes	Often
You'll feel more like it tomorrow			
No point in getting yourself stressed/upset/tired			
If you try to do it now you'll only mess it up; better wait until you are sure you can do it properly			
If you can't face it today, do it when you feel better			
If you don't feel up to it, then don't do it; it will only make you feel even worse			
Maybe if you don't do it, it will just go away...			
You shouldn't have to do these things; it's not fair			
It shouldn't be so difficult; there must be something really wrong with you, the most important thing is to figure out what it is - figure it out first, then decide what you can and can't do			
It's probably not important anyway; it's only you that's going to suffer.			

Some of these thoughts can be very persuasive, but don't be taken in! Remember the importance of activating according to your plan, not according to how you feel.

Examples of Avoidance

Louise's Story

Louise had really enjoyed her work and was doing really well at her job. But the financial crisis meant her company had to restructure and a number of her colleagues lost their jobs. Louise's workload doubled as a result and she suddenly found she was struggling to keep up. On Sunday nights Louise would dread the week ahead and began opening (and eventually finishing) a bottle of wine to try and relax. Monday mornings became more and more difficult, and Louise was often late for work. When she arrived at her desk she would spend an hour checking emails and Facebook to put off her tackling ever-growing to-do list, and when she started work she concentrated on the easiest of the jobs she had to do. She felt very guilty about still having her job when others didn't and she dreaded meeting her boss in the corridor in case he asked how she was getting on. Eventually she started taking days off sick because she just couldn't face going in.

Short-term consequences

By checking Facebook and putting off work, she avoided being overwhelmed by what she had to do. She also avoided strong feelings of guilt.

Longer term consequences

However over the longer term the consequences of this avoidance were that Louise fell even further behind with her work and felt even more overwhelmed.

It is easy to understand why Louise would avoid getting on with work. It is also fairly clear that the avoidance is a problem: it is affecting her wellbeing, feeding into the depression.

Examples of Avoidance

Jonathon's Story

Jonathon was engaged to be married, but two months before the wedding his fiancé left him and moved in with another man. Understandably Jonathon was devastated by this, and it had a big impact on his self confidence. Initially his friends were very supportive, encouraging him to go out and meet new people, and one friend in particular, Emma, visited him regularly to watch DVDs and chat. As time went on however Jonathon felt less and less up to going out with his friends. His heart just wasn't in it, and he found it particularly hard whenever he saw happy couples as it just reminded him of how lonely he felt. Eventually he even stopped picking up the phone to Emma. *She'll only lose interest in me, too, he thought, so why bother?* Jonathan spent most evenings at home, remembering the plans he'd made for his wedding and wondering what he had done wrong.

Short-term consequences

Jonathon avoided socialising to try and avoid the painful feelings of loneliness and rejection. He felt safer staying in.

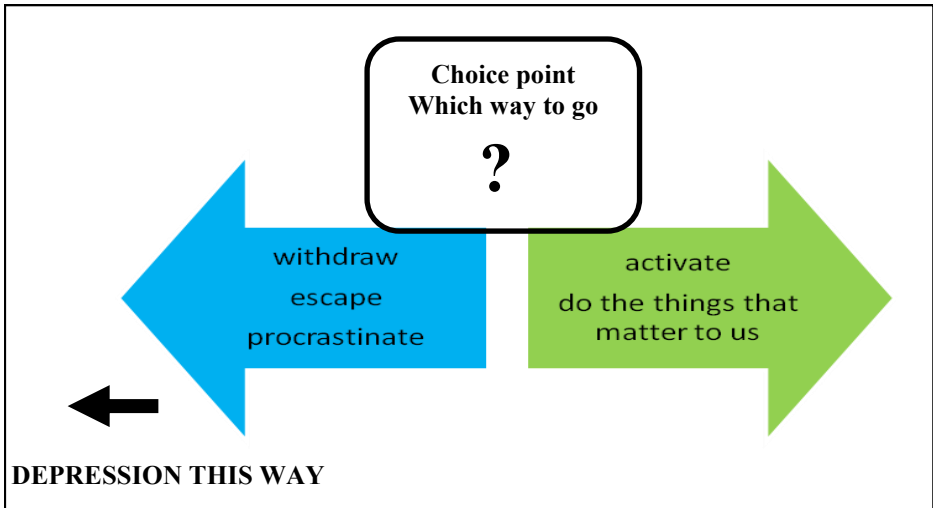
Longer term consequences

By staying at home and dwelling on his problems, Jonathon actually felt worse. He also missed out on the possibility of meeting new people, and over time his friends stopped calling.

Again we can see that in the longer term, Jonathon's avoidance is leading to a less rewarding life which in turn is likely to maintain the depression.

What is a Depression **TRAP?**

Every day we are presented with many opportunities to activate, to do the things that matter to us, to do the things that we enjoy, etc.; *OR* to avoid, withdraw, procrastinate, engage in other ‘depressed behaviours’.



Traps are situations in which we are particularly likely to choose the withdraw, escape, and procrastinate options, which take us in the direction of depression.

How to spot a depression **TRAP**

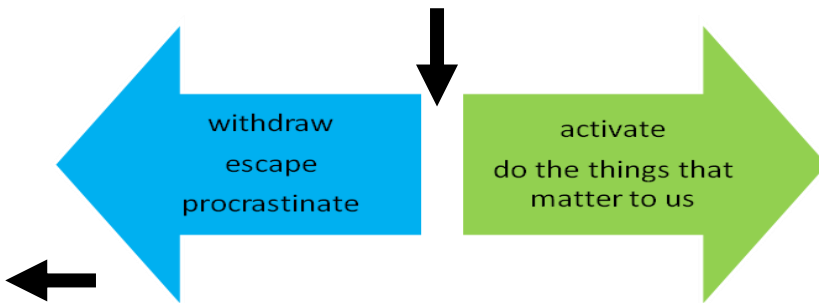
Where are these traps? Of course they can be anywhere but there are some clues. One type of clue is a trigger situation.

The **T** in **TRAP** stands for **Trigger**.

What are the situations that trigger choosing the avoidance option?

Some common Triggers

- A friend or someone you like appears to ignore you
- Finding out you made a mistake at work
- An outing you were looking forward to is cancelled
- Being reminded of a loss
- Working hard, giving a lot, and no one seems to notice
- Being in physical pain



DEPRESSION THIS WAY

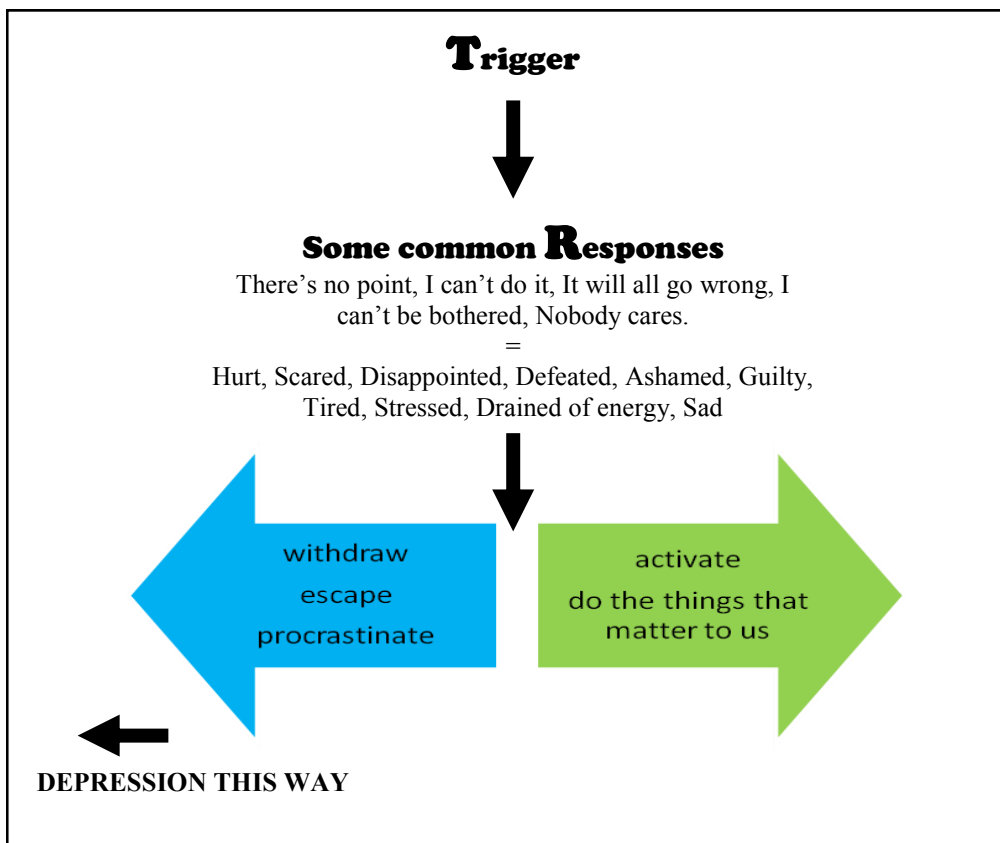
Do you have particular triggers you are aware of?

.....
.....
.....

Another clue is found by observing our own reactions and responses, our own thoughts and feelings.

The **R** in **tRAP** stands for **Response**

By response we mean the thoughts and feelings that show up in response to the trigger.



Your common responses?

.....

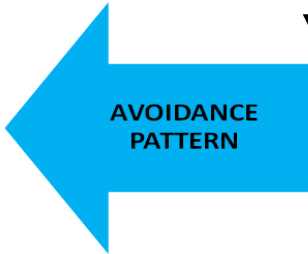
.....

The **AP** in **TRAP** stands for **Avoidance Pattern**

Trigger



Response



common Avoidance Patterns

- Going back to bed
- Withdrawing from other people
- Procrastinating
- Comfort eating, drinking too much
- Escaping through overwork



**SHORT TERM RELIEF?
BUT...**



DEPRESSION THIS WAY

Your common avoidance patterns?

.....
.....
.....

Identifying Your TRAPs

Over the next week, watch out for TRAPs, and when you spot one, make an entry in the sheets on pages 18-21.

First, look at Louise's example and then see if you can complete the example for Jonathon.

TRAP Worksheet: Louise's example

Where & When did you come across this trap?

..... *at work, Monday evening*

T rigger (upsetting event):

... *My boss emailed me for a weekly update*

R esponse (the thoughts and feelings that got triggered):

... *overwhelmed, guilty, scared*

... *thought I can't do it*

A voidance **P** attern: (habit of escaping or withdrawing, etc.)

... *put off answering, checked Facebook*

Immediate consequences:

... *was able to put it out of my mind, didn't feel so scared*

Longer term consequences

... *Got more behind with work, felt even more guilty*

Look back at Jonathon’s story on page 11 and see if you can add likely responses, avoidance pattern, and short and longer term consequences in the example below:

TRAP Worksheet: Jonathon’s example

Where & When did you come across this trap?

..... *at home, Friday evening*

T rigger (upsetting event):

..*Friend texts me inviting me out with the lads*

R esponse (the thoughts and feelings that got triggered):

.....
.....
.....

A voidance **P** attern: (habit of escaping or withdrawing, etc.)

.....
.....

Immediate consequences:

.....
.....

Longer term consequences

.....
.....
.....

TRAP Worksheet

Have a go with some of your own examples.

Where & When did you come across this trap?

.....
.....

Tigger (upsetting event):

.....
.....

Response (the thoughts and feelings that got triggered):

.....
.....

Avoidance **P**attern: (habit of escaping or withdrawing, etc.)

.....
.....

Immediate consequences:

.....
.....

Longer term consequences:

.....
.....

TRAP Worksheet

Where & When did you come across this trap?

.....
.....

T rigger (upsetting event):

.....
.....

R esponse (the thoughts and feelings that got triggered):

.....
.....

A voidance **P** attern: (habit of escaping or withdrawing, etc.)

.....
.....

Immediate consequences:

.....
.....

Longer term consequences:

.....
.....

TRAP Worksheet

Where & When did you come across this trap?

.....
.....

T rigger (upsetting event):

.....
.....

R esponse (the thoughts and feelings that got triggered):

.....
.....

A voidance **P** attern: (habit of escaping or withdrawing, etc.)

.....
.....

Immediate consequences:

.....
.....

Longer term consequences:

.....
.....

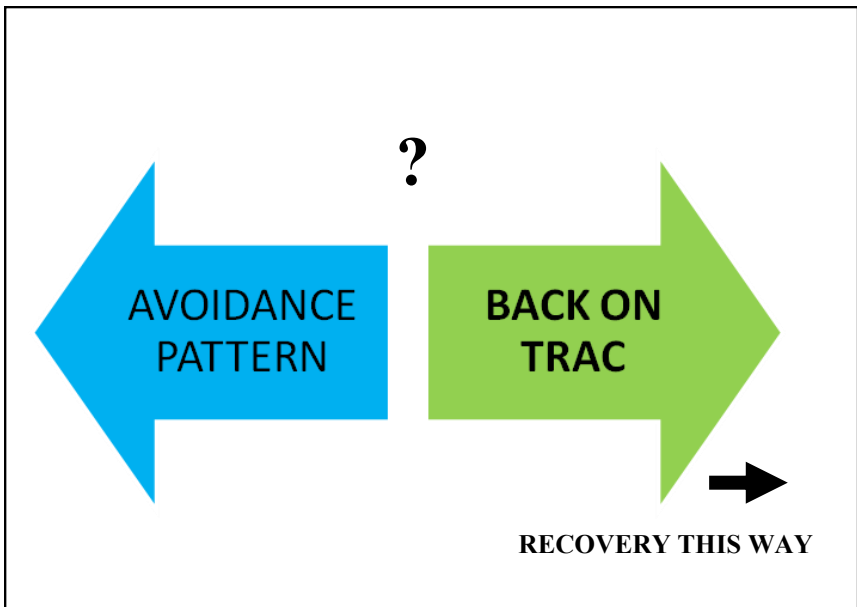
Getting back on **TRAC**

Becoming aware of our TRAP patterns is the first step towards changing them (and indeed, sometimes the awareness is all that it takes). The next step is to get back on TRAC. Again the word suggests a direction as well as spelling out the stages:

Trigger

Response

Alternative **C**oping



Getting back on TRAC

What is Alternative Coping?

The triggers are the same. The responses are the same. That is because both are normal parts of every day life.

What we are looking to change is what happens next; that is, turning the (often passive) avoidance pattern into an active, chosen response, or means of alternative coping. It isn't about getting rid of or ignoring painful feelings, rather it is about facing them in a new and more engaged way.

Choosing Alternative Coping behaviours

- What is in my best interests long term (reduce problems, increase sources of wellbeing, keep life in balance)?
- What way of behaving would be most in line with my values in this situation?
- What opportunities does this situation offer to me?

Making a TRAC plan

It is always easier to do this for someone else than for ourselves. You could start by making a TRAC PLAN for Louise. What do you think she could do that would serve her better than avoidance?

Then pick two of your own common TRAPS and complete the TRAC plans on pages 24-25

TRAC plan for Louise's example

Where & When are you likely to across this trap?

.....*At work, any time*

T rigger (what is likely to happen that will throw you off course?):

.....
.....

R esponse (the thoughts and feelings that are likely to be triggered):

.....
.....

A lternative **C** oping: (what you could do instead of avoiding)

.....
.....

Likely immediate consequences:

.....
.....

Likely longer term consequences

.....
.....

TRAC Plan for Trap One

Where & When are you likely to across this trap?

.....
.....

Trigger (what is likely to happen that will throw you off course?):

.....
.....

Response (the thoughts and feelings that are likely to be triggered):

.....
.....

Alternative **C**oping: (what you could do instead of avoiding)

.....
.....

Likely immediate consequences:

.....
.....

Likely longer term consequences

.....
.....

TRAC Plan for Trap Two

Where & When are you likely to across this trap?

.....
.....

Tigger (what is likely to happen that will throw you off course?):

.....
.....

Response (the thoughts and feelings that are likely to be triggered):

.....
.....

Alternative **C**oping: (what you could do instead of avoiding)

.....
.....

Likely immediate consequences:

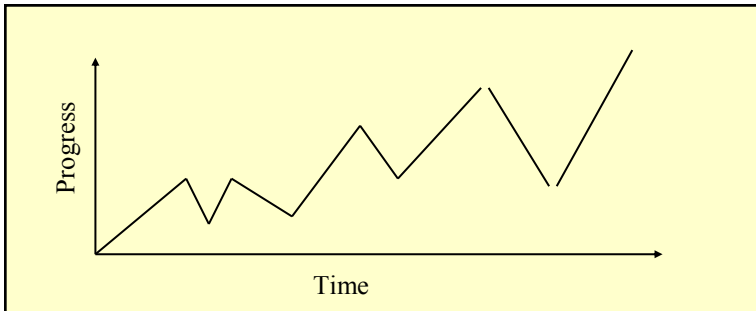
.....
.....

Likely longer term consequences

.....
.....

Reviewing your progress

- Most people learn and make changes best from a balance of trying things out and reflecting on experience.
- Usually there will be some ups and downs along the way:



- From the 'ups' we can learn something about what works, about helpful Alternative Coping, about what gets us back on TRAC.

What have you learnt about what works?

- From the ‘downs’ may come even more important learning. By observing closely the triggers, responses, and behaviour patterns associated with setbacks we can discover more about what is getting us stuck.

What have you learnt about from your ‘downs’?

- Sometimes, our progress is hindered by problems we may need to tackle.

Make a note here of sticking points or any problems you might want to work on in BOOKLET SIX, Problem Solving.

BEHAVIOURAL ACTIVATION FOR DEPRESSION

LIST OF BOOKLETS

1. Introduction to BA for Depression
2. Monitoring activity and mood
3. Roadmap: The Activation Plan
4. Finding direction: values, flow and strengths
- 5. Avoidance and the depression TRAPS**
6. Problem solving
7. Thinking habits
8. Next steps

We hope you have found this booklet helpful. We welcome your feedback.

You can give comments to your therapist or by emailing us at slm-tr.SPTS@nhs.net or writing to us at Talking Therapies Southwark, Middle House, Maudsley Hospital, London SE5 8AZ.

www.slam-iapt.nhs.uk