CBT practice plan

Agree a task with a clear purpose. An incomplete attempt can still provide useful information.

Editable PDF: replace or delete the fictional examples. Blank PDF: print and write. Guidance follows.

AGREE AND PREPARE

The task and what I hope to learn

e.g. Try one agreed step and see what I learn.

What, when, where and any support

e.g. After lunch on Wednesday; use the plan from my session.

A smaller version if needed

e.g. Try the first part with agreed support.

AFTER THE ATTEMPT

What I tried and what I noticed

e.g. I tried it and noticed anxiety rose before easing.

What helped / what got in the way

e.g. A reminder helped; being tired made it harder.

Questions / changes for next session

e.g. Discuss a smaller step and a better time.

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Using this resource

CBT practice plan

What this helps with

Between-session practice connects a therapy conversation with everyday life. It works best when you know why you are trying something and what to notice. This sheet records an agreed task, a realistic opportunity and what happened. An unfinished attempt can reveal an unclear instruction, an obstacle or a step that was too large. You can bring that information back to therapy. Practice is collaborative learning, not a test of commitment or a requirement to get everything right.

How to use it

1. Write the purpose of the task in one sentence with your therapist.
2. Describe exactly what you will try and what you will record.
3. Choose a realistic opportunity and a smaller option if circumstances change.
4. Note what happened soon afterwards, without needing a detailed diary.
5. Bring successes, surprises and difficulties to the next review; agree an adjustment.

A fictional worked example

During a session, Priya agrees to notice when she asks her partner to check an ordinary email. The purpose is to understand the reassurance pattern before changing it. She plans a brief note after one email on three days. On the first day she remembers; on the second she is too busy; on the third she notices the urge only afterwards. This gives useful information about when checking happens and how easy the task is to remember. At the next session they simplify it to one entry after work and discuss the fear behind asking. Missing a day becomes part of the review.

Keep in mind

Follow the plan agreed for your own circumstances. Do not increase intensity or add new exposure tasks simply to fill the record. If an exercise feels unsafe or significantly destabilising, pause and discuss it with your therapist or appropriate support.

Sources and attribution

Roth, A. D., & Pilling, S. (2007). The competences required to deliver effective CBT for people with depression and anxiety disorders. UCL competence framework.

Bennett-Levy, J., et al. (Eds.). (2004). Oxford guide to behavioural experiments in cognitive therapy. Oxford University Press.

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