Activity return plan

Choose a feasible step towards something meaningful. Keep relevant healthcare advice and practical support.

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

Activity and why it matters to me

e.g. Gardening; time outdoors matters to me.

First step / smaller version

e.g. Water one plant; a smaller option is preparing the watering can.

When, where / support / health advice

e.g. Saturday morning with agreed support; keep relevant health advice.

Prediction / likely obstacle

e.g. A reminder may make it difficult to stay present.

How I will respond and adapt

e.g. Use the agreed present-moment plan; pause and seek support if needed.

What I did and what I noticed

e.g. Watered one plant and noticed the garden.

Learning / next step

e.g. A small step was possible; discuss the next step in therapy.

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Using this resource

Activity return plan

What this helps with

Trauma can take time and attention away from relationships, interests and ordinary routines. Rebuilding life means making space for those things again in manageable ways. It can happen alongside appropriate trauma-focused treatment and does not require you to wait until every symptom has gone. Choose something relevant to your current circumstances. This is not a hidden exposure task: if the activity strongly triggers trauma memories, plan it with your therapist first.

How to use it

1. Name one part of life you miss or would like to develop now.
2. Choose a small action that is achievable with current energy and circumstances.
3. Plan when, where and what support or adaptation you need.
4. Try the action without demanding that you enjoy it or feel completely calm.
5. Review participation, connection and any difficulties; adapt the next step.

A fictional worked example

Zara used to cook with her sister but had stopped arranging evenings together. She wanted some ordinary company without having to discuss the trauma. Her first step was making a simple lunch at home while her sister visited for half an hour. She told her sister that conversation about everyday things would help. Zara felt distracted at times and the meal was not especially enjoyable, but she noticed a few moments of connection. Her review recorded that she had done something she valued. They planned another brief visit rather than increasing the task because she felt she ought to be further ahead.

Keep in mind

Choose activities with ordinary safety and your current health needs in mind. If an activity involves a strong trauma reminder or substantial dissociation, agree it in therapy first. Practical barriers may need support or adjustment, not more effort from you.

Sources and attribution

Oxford Centre for Anxiety Disorders and Trauma. PTSD therapy materials: clinical guidance on trigger discrimination and rebuilding life.

Thew, G. R., Wild, J., & Ehlers, A. (2023). Early intervention in post-traumatic stress disorder without exposure to trauma memories using internet-delivered cognitive therapy: A pilot case series. British Journal of Clinical Psychology, 62(2), 459-470.

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