Keeping Well After Navigating Life Changes

THE TALKING THERAPIES UK SELF-HELP SERIES



Keeping Well After Navigating Life Changes

Staying on Track and Preventing Relapse

A self-help workbook · 6 modules · about 6 weeks

TALKING THERAPIES UK

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First edition, 2026.

This workbook accompanies the Keeping Well After Navigating Life Changes programme on the Talking Therapies UK self-help platform. Its text is drawn from the programme and is kept current with it: whenever the programme changes, the workbook is set again.

Revision 4. This printing was set on 6 November 2026 from the programme as it stood that day.

A note on using this workbook. It offers self-help based on established psychological approaches for difficulties of mild to moderate severity. It is not a substitute for assessment or treatment by a qualified professional and is not designed for use in a crisis. The examples in it are fictional; no real person appears in them. If you are worried about your safety, or your difficulties are getting worse, the page headed “When self-help is not enough” says where to turn.

Set in Poppins and Roboto, the Talking Therapies UK typefaces.

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How to use this workbook

This guided self-help programme helps people consolidate the gains made during the Navigating Life Changes intervention and stay well in the longer term. It draws on Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy and problem-solving approaches, all of which are recommended by NICE for adjustment difficulties. The content is designed for step-2 level support, offering practical tools that can be used independently with brief therapist guidance. By the end of the programme you will have a personalised plan for maintaining wellbeing and managing setbacks.

This workbook is the written form of the Keeping Well After Navigating Life Changes programme on the Talking Therapies UK self-help platform. It follows the programme module by module: each part of the book is one module, and each chapter is one piece of the module's teaching, set in the order the programme presents it.

Read the chapters of a part in order, then turn to the worksheets that follow them. The worksheets are the part of the work that changes things, so give them the time they ask for and come back to them as the weeks go on. You may copy or print the worksheets for your own use, as often as you need.

Most people work through one module a week, which takes the whole programme about 6 weeks. Go at the pace that suits you: a module done properly is worth more than two done quickly.

The check-in questionnaires let you see how things are changing. Complete each one when you reach it, note the date and your total, and compare it with the last.

When self-help is not enough

- If you are in danger now, or have seriously harmed yourself, call 999 or go to your nearest accident and emergency department.
- If you need help urgently but it is not an emergency, call NHS 111 or contact your GP surgery.
- Samaritans are there day and night, every day of the year: call 116 123 free from any phone.
- If you would rather not talk, text SHOUT to 85258 for free, confidential support at any hour.
- If your difficulties are getting worse as you work through this book, or you find yourself thinking about ending your life, stop and speak to your GP or a mental health professional. A workbook can be a good start, and some difficulties need more help than a book can give.

What this workbook will help you to do

- You will learn how normal life changes can trigger emotional and behavioural responses. You will be able to differentiate between typical adjustment reactions and signs that may need extra support. This foundation prepares you for the skills that follow.
- You will be introduced to the thought-feeling-behaviour cycle and practice identifying automatic thoughts that fuel distress. You will gain confidence in recording these patterns using simple worksheets. This awareness is the first step to change.

- You will learn a five-stage problem-solving model that can be applied to any current difficulty. You will practise generating realistic solutions, weighing pros and cons, and planning concrete actions. The aim is to increase your sense of control and effectiveness.
- You will explore the role of self-criticism in maintaining distress and learn simple self-compassion exercises. You will also be introduced to acceptance strategies that help you stay present with uncomfortable feelings without avoidance. These skills support emotional resilience.
- You will identify key areas such as sleep, activity, nutrition and social connection that influence mood. You will create a realistic weekly routine and a plan for nurturing supportive relationships. Consistent habits reinforce the therapeutic gains you have made.
- You will develop a personalised relapse-prevention plan that flags early warning signs and outlines coping actions. You will also learn how to review progress regularly and adjust the plan as needed. This final module equips you to maintain wellbeing long after the programme ends.

PART 1

Understanding Change and Emotional Reactions

Why life transitions feel challenging

CHAPTER 1

Welcome to Your Wellbeing Journey

Welcome to Keeping Well After Navigating Life Changes. This guided self-help programme is designed to help you consolidate the progress you have already made and build a lasting foundation for your mental health. As you move from the initial Navigating Life Changes intervention, the focus here shifts to maintenance and resilience. We will use evidence-based approaches, including Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), and problem-solving techniques, all of which are recommended by NICE for managing adjustment difficulties. This step-2 level support is tailored for independent use, with brief therapist guidance available when needed. By the end of this six-module programme, you will have a personalised plan to maintain your wellbeing and manage future setbacks effectively.

This first module, Understanding Change and Emotional Reactions, sets the stage for everything that follows. Life transitions—whether they involve relationships, work, health, or personal growth—often feel challenging because they disrupt our sense of stability. In the coming sections, we will explore why these transitions trigger specific emotional and behavioural responses. You will learn to recognise the normal physiological and cognitive patterns that arise during adjustment. Crucially, you will also learn to differentiate between typical adjustment reactions and signs that may indicate a need for extra professional support. This distinction is vital for self-advocacy and timely help-seeking.

As you work through this module, please approach the material with curiosity and self-compassion. Change is a natural part of life, and your reactions to it are valid. The skills you develop here will form the bedrock for the practical tools introduced in later modules. Take your time with each section, and remember that this is a process, not a race. Your journey towards sustained wellbeing begins with understanding the landscape of change and your place within it. Let’s begin by exploring the underlying reasons why life transitions can feel so demanding, both emotionally and physically.

CHAPTER 2

The Physiology of Transition: Why Your Body Reacts to Change

It is common to feel that you should have 'moved on' by now, especially if you have already completed a period of active support or therapy. However, understanding why life transitions feel so physically and emotionally demanding is the first step in managing them effectively. When we face significant change—whether it is a job loss, a relationship ending, a move, or a health diagnosis—our brains do not process these events as simple administrative updates. Instead, they often interpret them as threats to our safety, identity, or social standing. This triggers a physiological stress response that is deeply rooted in our evolutionary history.

When the brain perceives a threat, the amygdala (the brain's alarm system) activates the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis. This results in the release of stress hormones, primarily cortisol and adrenaline. In the short term, this is useful: it sharpens your focus, increases your heart rate, and prepares your muscles for action. This is the classic 'fight, flight, or freeze' response. However, when the 'threat' is a prolonged life transition rather than an immediate physical danger, this system can remain activated for weeks or months. This state of chronic low-grade arousal is what often underlies the feelings of anxiety, irritability, and exhaustion that accompany adjustment difficulties. Your body is essentially stuck in a state of high alert, waiting for the danger to pass, even when the danger is abstract or ongoing.

This physiological state has direct implications for your behaviour and cognition. When cortisol levels are elevated, the prefrontal cortex—the part of the brain responsible for complex planning, decision-making, and emotional regulation—can become less efficient. This is why you might find it harder to concentrate, make decisions, or sleep during periods of change. It is not a failure of willpower or character; it is a biological response to perceived instability. Recognising this helps to reduce self-blame. You are not 'weak' for struggling; you are human, and your nervous system is doing its best to keep you safe in an uncertain environment.

Consider Sarah, who was made redundant from a role she had held for ten years. In the first few weeks, she reported feeling a constant tightness in her chest and an inability to sit still. She described feeling 'wired' at night, even when she was tired. Initially, Sarah interpreted this as a personal failure, believing she should be calmer because she had a savings fund. However, upon exploring this with her therapist, she realised that her body was reacting to the loss of routine and identity as if it were a physical threat. Her nervous system was in 'flight' mode, preparing her to run from a danger that did not exist in the physical world but was very real in her psychological landscape. Once she understood this physiological mechanism, she was able to approach her symptoms with curiosity rather than judgment, which reduced her overall distress.

Understanding this biological baseline is crucial because it sets the stage for the skills you will learn in later modules. If you know that your body is under stress, you can begin to use calming techniques not as a luxury, but as a necessary maintenance tool for your nervous system. It also helps to explain why 'thinking positively' alone is often insufficient. You cannot simply think your way out of a physiological stress response; you need to engage the body's relaxation response to

counterbalance the stress response. This dual approach—understanding the biology and applying practical regulation tools—is central to the Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) frameworks used in this programme.

A NOTE

Key Concept: The Stress Response is Normal Feeling anxious, irritable, or physically tense during a life change is a normal physiological reaction. It indicates that your brain is actively processing a significant shift in your environment. This response is not a sign of pathology but of adaptation. Acknowledging this biological reality can help reduce the secondary stress of worrying about your own reactions.

As you move through this module, keep in mind that your body is an ally, not an enemy. It is trying to protect you. The goal is not to eliminate these feelings, but to understand them and learn how to manage their intensity so that they do not hijack your daily functioning. By the end of this module, you will have a clearer map of how your body and mind interact during change, which will provide a solid foundation for the cognitive and behavioural strategies that follow.