

Behavioural Experiments

in Low Intensity CBT

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Paul Farrand**



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Image above: Clinical Training (CEDAR) at the University of Exeter's Streatham Campus. **Image right:** The Sir Henry Wellcome Building for Mood Disorders Research at the University of Exeter.

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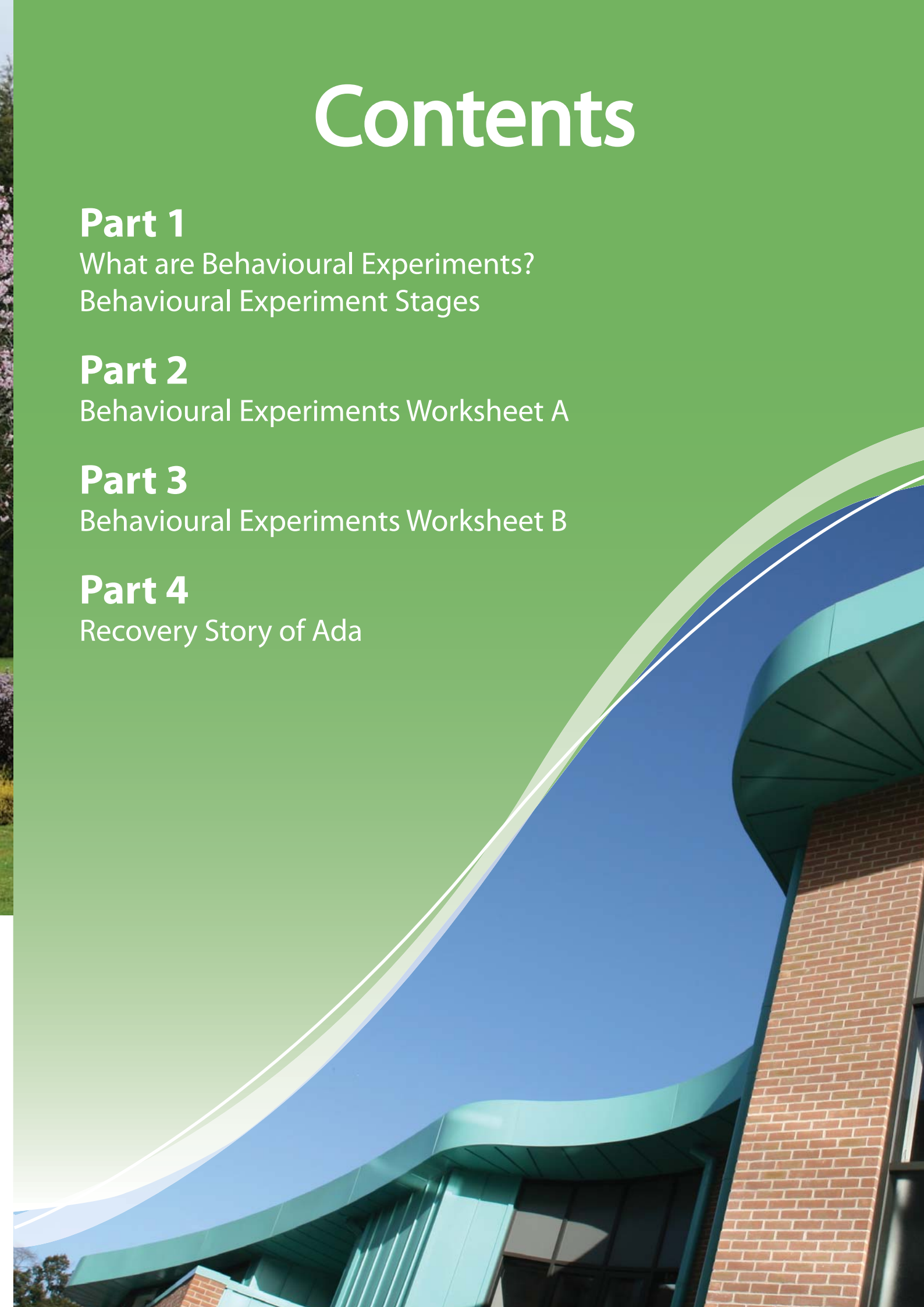
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About the authors



Marie Chellingsworth is Acting PWP taught programmes lead within Clinical Education Development and Research (CEDAR) at the University of Exeter. She is a Senior Fellow of the Institute of Mental Health and a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy (HEA). Her main clinical and research interests are in the area of low intensity cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and educational research into transferring training into practice. She has developed a wide range of written self-help treatments for depression and anxiety and authored a number of books within this area. She has worked nationally with the Department of Health, the British Association of Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapies (BABCP) and British Psychological Society (BPS) in the Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) programme. Marie chairs the national BABCP Low Intensity CBT special interest group. Outside of work Marie enjoys a wide range of live music and walking with her Irish setter Alfie in the Devonshire countryside.



Dr Paul Farrand is a BABCP accredited Cognitive Behavioural Psychotherapist, Director of Psychological Wellbeing Practitioner training within Clinical Education Development and Research (CEDAR) at the University of Exeter and a National Teaching Fellow of the Higher Education Academy (HEA). His main clinical and research interests are in the area of low intensity cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), especially in a self-help format. Based upon his research and clinical practice he has developed a wide range of written self-help treatments for depression and anxiety. He has operated at a national level with the Department of Health education, training and accreditation committees and within the British Association of Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapies. Outside of work Paul enjoys living in Devon and spending time with his family, particularly walks along the seaside, and he is a big fan of 80's music.

Part 1

What are Behavioural Experiments?

Behavioural Experiment Stages

Behavioural experiments are planned activities to test out thoughts in action in everyday situations. They can help you to test the validity of negative thoughts, put new thoughts into action and help towards working on your goals. Behavioural experiments have five stages and can be supported by your Psychological Wellbeing Practitioner.

Behavioural Experiment Stages:

Stage 1

Using **worksheet A** write down the thought you want to test. This may be a thought that you have collected on a thought record sheet, or from a support session. Rate your belief in this thought currently (0-100%) and make a plan for how you are going to test this thought and put it into action. Be specific so you know what you are going to do, when you are going to do it, where you are going to do it and with whom.

Stage 2

Predict what you think will happen when putting your thought into action. Rate how likely you think this is to happen (0-100%). Generate an alternative prediction and rate how likely you think this is to happen, again on a 0-100% scale.

Stage 3

Consider what may get in your way or stop you acting on your plan to do the behavioural experiment. Consider both internal things such as off putting thoughts or motivation and also external things such as a friend calling unannounced or childcare. Plan in advance what you can do to overcome these difficulties.

Stage 4

Carry out your plan. Fill in **worksheet B** as near as possible after the behavioural experiment. Consider what have you learned from the experiment? How can you change your original thought as a result? Rate how strongly you believe this new thought (0-100%). What will you do differently in the future as a result? Do you need to do another behavioural experiment to build on this?

Stage 5

Review how things went in your next support session with your Psychological Wellbeing Practitioner (PWP).

Part 2

Behavioural Experiments Worksheet A

Planning a Behavioural Experiment Worksheet A

Thought to Be Put Into Action		Testing It Out	
What is the thought you want to put into action?		What are you going to do?	
		Where are you going to do it?	
		When are you going to do it?	
		Who is involved?	
How much do you believe this thought? (0-100%)			
Predicting the Worst		What's the Alternative?	
What do you fear is going to happen?		What are alternative predictions?	
How likely do you think this is? (0-100%)		How likely do you think this is? (0-100%)	
What May Stop You?		Clearing the Way	
What things may get in your way?		How will you overcome these?	

Part 3

Behavioural Experiments Worksheet B

Reviewing Your Behavioural Experiment Worksheet B

Reviewing Your Prediction

Write your original prediction below

How much do you believe this thought? (0-100%)

My Learning

How would you change your original thought to account for the new learning?

How much do you believe this thought? (0-100%)

How much do you still believe your original thought? (0-100%)

What Happened?

Briefly describe what happened

Doing Things Differently

Based on the new thought what may you do differently in the future?

Looking Forward

Are there any further behavioural experiments that may be helpful?

Part 4

Recovery Story of Ada

Ada's story is about someone who used behavioural experiments, a technique which is aimed at helping to put thoughts into action and to test these out.



Ada was 70 years old and lived on her own.

Ada had been happily married to Brian for just under 50 years, but just over 12 months ago Brian had a heart attack and died. Whilst alive Brian and Ada's relationship was a very traditional one. Ada took a lot of responsibility for the cooking and cleaning and Brian took sole responsibility for organising the payment of bills, the DIY around the house and car maintenance.

Since Brian's death Ada felt she was not able to deal with the many everyday things that Brian used to deal with. Whilst her daughter helps out where she could, living over an hours drive away meant that at times Ada needed to organise things herself. Over time Ada started to feel overwhelmed by the many tasks she had to do and was struggling to keep up.

Ada felt that the growing number of uncompleted tasks was having an impact on her life in the following ways. She wrote on her impact sheet that a big problem was that she needed to ensure the gas bill was paid which was now well overdue. However she felt that she lacked the confidence and knowledge to pay this bill or complete the growing number of other tasks. Feeling unable to complete these tasks was making Ada concerned that she could no longer live on her own. As a consequence of this she now found herself becoming increasingly worried that she would have to move into a care home, a thought that was also beginning to get her down.

With the aid of her Psychological Wellbeing Practitioner Ada decided on the following goals:

Ada's Goals						
Goal number 1				Today's date:		
To pay the overdue gas bill						
I can do this now (circle a number):						
0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Not at all		Occasionally		Often		Anytime
Goal number 2				Today's date:		
To make sure the car is still fit to drive						
I can do this now (circle a number):						
0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Not at all		Occasionally		Often		Anytime
Goal number 3				Today's date:		
To arrange and travel to see my youngest daughter who lives in Sydney, Australia						
I can do this now (circle a number):						
0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Not at all		Occasionally		Often		Anytime

Ada read through some of the techniques in her book and decided that, although not confident, she would like to find out for herself whether she can do the tasks previously done by Brian. She discussed this with her Psychological Wellbeing Practitioner and together they decided to try behavioural experiments.

First of all with the aid of her Psychological Wellbeing Practitioner Ada was helped to identify what it was keeping her back when thinking about doing things. During the assessment the thought 'Brian has gone and I won't be able to manage to do the things he used to do' seemed to be particularly important in stopping Ada attempt a number of tasks. Ada was helped to think about ways she could put this thought into action and test it out.

Behavioural experiments **worksheet A** was used to help support Ada to do this. Ada decided to test out her thought:

'Brian has gone and I won't be able to manage to do the things he used to do.'

She planned to test this thought by having a go at paying the gas bill for which she was now on her final 'overdue' letter. When asked what she feared could happen, Ada predicted that she 'would not be able to cope with all the questions she would be asked, she would get upset and that this would make her very sad'. Ada indicated that she had an 85% belief that this prediction would come true and only had a 10% belief in the alternative prediction that 'she would be able to cope with the demands of these tasks'.

Ada and her Psychological Wellbeing Practitioner then worked together to identify anything that may get in the way of her doing the task.

They discussed the obvious anxiety that she may experience when sitting down to contact the gas supplier but also that such anxiety was perfectly normal under the circumstances. Ada therefore began to feel prepared for these physical feelings. When the Psychological Wellbeing Practitioner asked Ada how she would get started, Ada took some reassurance from the fact that she knew she had seen a contact telephone number on the overdue bills and that phoning this number would be a good start. At the end of the session Ada felt happier. Although she was prepared for the task being difficult, she had a clear plan to help her undertake her behavioural experiment.

Ada decided that she would contact the gas suppliers the very next morning. She got her behavioural experiment worksheets and gas bill and sat by the telephone. Although feeling very anxious and having significant doubts she decided to go ahead and phone the number on the bill. Ada's anxiety soon disappeared after talking to Jenny, the gas suppliers call centre worker. Jenny soon put Ada at ease and helped Ada to pay the bill over the telephone and start the process to set up a direct debit. This was all very easy and Ada was especially pleased that Jenny also discussed various discounts that may be available now that Ada was on her own and had a limited income. At the end of the telephone call Ada felt happy with herself, not only managing to pay the bill, but starting to set up a direct debit and possibly even saving some money.

Ada decided to complete behavioural experiments **worksheet B** straight away and was surprised to see how much she learned. On the basis of the behavioural experiment she was able to change her original thought to 'Although Brian has gone I am able to do some things myself that he used to do'. The following week Ada completed behavioural experiments **worksheet B** over the telephone with her Psychological Wellbeing Practitioner.

Although feeling more confident in doing new things Ada was only able to rate belief in her new thought as 50%. Ada and her Psychological Wellbeing Practitioner therefore decided that it may be worthwhile to complete another related behavioural experiment to continue to test her new thought:

'Although Brian has gone I am able to do some things myself that he used to do'.

Ada and her Psychological Wellbeing Practitioner decided upon a new behavioural experiment to test this thought further. Following this second behavioural experiment Ada's confidence in doing the things previously done by Brian began to increase. Although she sometimes still found things difficult to do she now felt much better able to cope without Brian, although obviously she would always miss him.



Behavioural Experiments

Worksheet A

Planning a Behavioural Experiment Worksheet A

Thought to Be Put Into Action		Testing It Out	
What is the thought you want to put into action?		What are you going to do?	
Brian has gone and I won't be able to manage to do the things he used to do		I am going to phone the gas people and try to pay my overdue gas bill.	
		Where are you going to do it?	By the telephone in my kitchen
		When are you going to do it?	9.30am tomorrow morning (Tuesday 11th March)
How much do you believe this thought? (0-100%)	90%	Who is involved?	Just me and the gas person on the telephone
Predicting the Worst		What's the Alternative?	
What do you fear is going to happen?		What are alternative predictions?	
I will not be able to cope with all the questions I will be asked, I will get upset and have to end the call and this would make me very sad.		I will be able to cope with the questions and manage to pay the gas bill.	
How likely do you think this is? (0-100%)	85%	How likely do you think this is? (0-100%)	10%
What May Stop You?		Clearing the Way	
What things may get in your way?		How will you overcome these?	
I know I will get very scared having to do this and wonder if I will be able to make the call at all. I am not sure if I know what number to call.		Although I know I will feel scared, this feeling cannot hurt me and I will say this to myself. I will make sure I have the last gas bill to hand as I know the number was on this.	

Behavioural Experiments

Worksheet B

Reviewing Your Behavioural Experiment Worksheet B

Reviewing Your Prediction		What Happened?
Write your original prediction below		Briefly describe what happened
<p>I will not be able to cope with all the questions I will be asked, I will get upset and have to end the call and this would make me very sad.</p>		<p>I phoned up the gas people and spoke to Jenny who immediately made me feel easier. She took her time and helped me to pay my bill over the telephone. She also talked me through setting up a direct debit so all this will be taken care of in the future. She also mentioned she may be able to save me some money on my bills and would send information. I felt much happier afterwards.</p>
How much do you believe this thought? (0-100%)	85%	
My Learning		Doing Things Differently
How would you change your original thought to account for the new learning?		Based on the new thought what may you do differently in the future?
<p>Although Brian has gone I am able to do some things myself that he used to do.</p>		
How much do you believe this thought? (0-100%)	50%	
How much do you still believe your original thought? (0-100%)	50%	<p>I will have more confidence in at least trying to do things that Brian used to do, if I become scared I will say to myself that the way I feel cannot hurt me, and that there are people out there to help.</p>
Looking Forward		
Are there any further behavioural experiments that may be helpful?		
<p>I think I need to do a few more of the things that Brian used to do to get even more confidence. Maybe getting in touch with the car mechanic to make sure the car is still fine to use.</p>		





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