BETWEEN-SESSION PRACTICE

Planning Checklist | A collaborative CBT blueprint for beginner therapists

01 Start with a clear purpose

Between-session practice helps clients test ideas, practise skills and notice patterns in everyday life. Choose tasks collaboratively and link each one to the shared formulation and therapy goal.

The six-step planning pathway

STAGE	THERAPIST CHECK
1 LINK	What specific problem, maintaining process or goal does this task address?
2 CHOOSE	Agree one useful, manageable task; offer options and invite the client's preference.
3 SPECIFY	Define what, where, when, how long and how often. Rehearse it together.
4 ANTICIPATE	Explore barriers, accessibility needs, emotional impact and a smaller fallback.
5 RECORD	Agree what to notice: predictions, observations, feelings, learning or outcomes.
6 REVIEW	Book time next session to explore what happened, including non-completion.

02 Before the client leaves

■ The client can explain why this practice matters. ■ The task is realistic for their week.

■ Instructions are clear and written down if useful. ■ We have agreed how to review learning.

Clinical reminder

A task is not a test of compliance. Non-completion is information about fit, obstacles or the formulation—not failure.

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Choose, personalise and troubleshoot the practice

03 Match the task to the purpose

TARGET	EXAMPLE PRACTICE	WHAT TO NOTICE
Avoidance	Take one agreed step towards a valued activity	Prediction versus what happened
Low mood	Schedule a short, meaningful activity	Mood, mastery or connection before/after
Worry	Try a brief worry postponement experiment	Urge to worry; what changed
Self-criticism	Record a difficult moment and a compassionate alternative	Impact on behaviour and feelings
Social anxiety	Test a specific prediction in a safe, agreed situation	Observations, not just anxiety level

04 Collaborative questions to ask

- “What would make this useful rather than another thing on your list?”
- “What do you predict will happen, and what could you learn?”
- “When exactly might you try it? What could get in the way?”
- “If the full task is too much, what is the smallest worthwhile version?”

05 When the plan is not working

WHAT YOU NOTICE	WHAT TO EXPLORE / ADAPT
“I forgot.”	Link to an existing routine; use an agreed reminder or simpler format.
“It felt overwhelming.”	Review pace, distress, safety and accessibility; shrink or change the task.
“I did not see the point.”	Reconnect to formulation and the client’s own goal; choose a different task.
“I did it but learned nothing.”	Clarify the prediction and observations; review whether the task tested it.

Adapt, do not automatically intensify

Consider risk, trauma history, neurodivergent needs, fatigue, practical constraints and the client’s consent. Exposure tasks require an appropriate formulation and collaborative clinical judgement.

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Ready-to-use practice planner and review

06 Worked example: social anxiety

PLANNING FIELD	EXAMPLE
Shared goal	Contribute more confidently in team discussions.
Prediction	“If I ask one question, colleagues will think I am incompetent.”
Agreed task	Ask one relevant question in a routine team meeting.
When / where	Thursday meeting; prepare one possible question beforehand.
Learning to capture	What I predicted, what actually happened, and any uncertainty.
Fallback	Ask the question in a smaller meeting or discuss barriers next session.

07 Client practice template

PROMPT	NOTES
My goal / why this matters	_____
What I will try	_____
When and where	_____
What I predict	_____
What I will notice	_____
If it becomes difficult	_____
What happened / what I learned	_____

08 Next-session review: five prompts

1. What did you try, or what got in the way? 2. What did you notice?

3. How did this compare with your prediction? 4. What did you learn?

5. What should we keep, change, simplify or practise next?

Quick-reference summary

Purpose → **Choice** → **Specific plan** → **Barriers** → **Observation** → **Collaborative review.** Aim for useful learning, not perfect task completion.