From concerns to a shared problem list

01 Start with the person's own words

Ask: "What has been difficult lately?" "What would you most like to be different?"

Listen for situations, thoughts, feelings, body sensations, actions and effects on daily life.

02 Turn broad concerns into specific problems

Describe what happens, when, how often and what it gets in the way of.

Example: "Anxiety" becomes "I avoid team meetings and spend hours worrying beforehand."

03 Build and agree the problem list

Include difficulties that matter to the person; group overlapping items without losing their meaning.

Check: "Have I understood this correctly? Is anything important missing?"

04 Prioritise together

Consider distress, impact, urgency, readiness and what may be achievable in therapy.

Ask which one or two problems to work on first. Revisit priorities as understanding changes.

EXAMPLE / PROBLEM LIST

1. Avoids speaking in meetings. 2. Replays conversations for hours. 3. Withdraws from friends after demanding days.

A problem list is a shared working summary, not a diagnosis or a fixed label.

Translate problems into therapy goals

05 Choose a meaningful direction

Ask: "If therapy were useful, what would you notice yourself doing differently?"

Focus on actions and participation, not a promise to eliminate every uncomfortable feeling.

06 Make the goal observable

Specify the situation, behaviour and realistic frequency or duration.

Instead of "feel confident", try "contribute one point in the weekly meeting".

07 Agree a starting point and a review point

Record what happens now and how progress will be noticed.

Example baseline: speaks in 0 of 4 meetings; initial target: speak in 2 of 4 meetings.

08 Link each goal to a problem

Problem: avoiding meetings -> Goal: attend and contribute to meetings.

Problem: withdrawing socially -> Goal: plan one manageable social contact each week.

GOAL QUALITY CHECK

- [ ] Meaningful to the person
- [ ] Realistic and flexible
- [ ] Agreed together and reviewable
- [ ] Specific enough to notice
- [ ] Linked to a listed problem

Use, review and adapt the plan

09 Create a practical next step

Agree a small task or experiment relevant to the chosen goal.

Example: prepare one question before the next meeting; note what happened afterwards.

10 Review progress collaboratively

Compare with the baseline, discuss barriers and check whether the goal still matters.

If the task is too hard, adjust the step rather than treating difficulty as failure.

WORKED EXAMPLE / PROBLEM TO GOAL

PROBLEM	Avoids team meetings because of anticipated judgement.
IMPACT	Misses opportunities to share ideas.
GOAL	Contribute one point in two of the next four meetings.
FIRST STEP	Prepare one sentence and practise saying it aloud.
REVIEW	Record attendance, contributions and learning.

FINAL QUICK REFERENCE

Listen -> Specify -> Agree the problem list

Prioritise -> Define observable goals

Set baseline -> Choose a small step -> Review

Clinical note: adapt the process to the person, their communication needs and any risk or safeguarding concerns. Follow local clinical procedures where indicated.