SMART Therapy Goals

A collaborative CBT prompt sheet | From a broad concern to a workable, reviewable goal

01 Start with what matters to the person

Ask: “What would you like to be different in daily life?” “What would you be doing more of if therapy helped?” Focus on meaningful changes rather than simply eliminating all uncomfortable feelings.

02 Build a SMART goal

Element	Prompt	Example
Specific	What exactly would I do differently?	Speak up once in a team meeting
Measurable	How will we notice progress?	Count meetings where I contribute
Achievable	Is the step manageable at present?	Begin with one prepared comment
Relevant	Why does this matter to me?	Participate at work with more confidence
Time-bound	When will we review it?	Review after four weeks

03 Move from vague to observable

Broad wish	More useful goal
“Stop being anxious”	“Attend one social activity each fortnight, even with some anxiety.”
“Feel confident”	“Share one opinion in a weekly meeting for four weeks.”
“Be less depressed”	“Take a ten-minute walk on three days each week.”

Examples are illustrations, not prescribed targets. Agree the wording and pace together.

Create your own SMART goal

04 Describe the starting point

Current difficulty / situation: _____

What I am avoiding, missing or finding hard: _____

Why changing this matters to me: _____

05 Draft and refine

SMART check	My answer
S Specific: what will I do?	_____
M Measurable: how often / how much?	_____
A Achievable: what makes it manageable?	_____
R Relevant: what value or priority does it serve?	_____
T Time-bound: review date or period?	_____

06 Write the agreed goal

“Over the next _____, I will _____

_____”

07 Plan the first small experiment

Action	When / where	What might get in the way?	Helpful response
1. _____	_____	_____	_____
2. _____	_____	_____	_____

Quick tip: A goal is a direction for practice, not a test of worth. Adjust the step if it is too demanding.

Review, troubleshoot, adjust

08 Check progress collaboratively

Review prompt	Notes
What did I try since the last session?	_____
What happened? What did I learn?	_____
How close am I to my agreed goal? (0–10)	_____ / 10
What helped or made it harder?	_____
What is one next manageable step?	_____

09 If the goal is not working

Notice	Try together
Too broad or hard to measure	Specify a behaviour, context and frequency.
Too ambitious for now	Scale down to a smaller practice step.
Not meaningful to the person	Reconnect with their priorities and values.
External barriers or limited control	Separate controllable actions from circumstances.
Progress stalls	Review obstacles, learning and formulation; revise collaboratively.

10 Final goal-quality checklist

■ Written in the person's own words ■ Linked to a meaningful problem

■ Observable enough to review ■ Manageable first action identified

■ Review point agreed ■ Flexible if circumstances change

At-a-glance blueprint

Explore the concern → Define meaningful change → Make it SMART → Choose a small action → Review and revise.

For education and collaborative planning; adapt to individual needs, clinical formulation and service procedures.