

## Action Plans

1. If an alternative or balanced thought fits your life experiences but still does not seem believable to you, gather more evidence to test and strengthen the alternative or balanced thought, just as Ben did in his phone conversation with his daughter.
  2. If the evidence from your life mostly supports your hot thought, then this means you may have a problem to solve, and an Action Plan can help you discover if and how you can solve the problem.
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Marissa and her therapist spent several sessions determining the reasons why she had become highly suicidal. One of the main reasons Marissa felt so hopeless was that she was convinced she would be fired from her job and would not be able to support herself and her children. She had a life insurance policy and thought it would provide for her children until they could support themselves.

Marissa tested the automatic thought "I will lose my job" on a Thought Record (see Chapters 6-9). Although this thought could not be considered absolutely true until it happened, Marissa had some pretty convincing evidence that losing her job was a real possibility. In the previous month, she had received three warnings from her supervisor — one for chronically arriving at work late in the morning and after lunch, and two for poor work product." In her company, three warnings could be followed by termination of employment.

Marissa felt out of control regarding her job. She was so depressed in the mornings that it was hard to get out of bed, even though she knew it would look bad if she was late again. Once she was at work, Marissa had a hard time concentrating, so she made errors — which brought even more negative attention from her supervisor.

Since Marissa's most distressing thought that she would lose her job had a lot of evidence to support it, she and her therapist constructed an Action Plan to help her solve the problem. They discussed and wrote down a variety of actions Marissa could take to improve her performance and make her job more secure. First, she could tell her supervisor that she was trying to do better and ask for help. This supervisor had complimented Marissa on her work only a few months earlier. Marissa acknowledged that her supervisor might be willing to help if he knew she was trying to do better. Second, Marissa decided she could ask Maggie, a friend in the office whom Marissa trusted, to review her work before Marissa handed it to the supervisor. Finally, Marissa considered a variety of strategies to get herself to work on time even when she was depressed.

Marissa's Action Plan led her to become more hopeful about keeping her job. After a few minutes, however, she began to see problems that might interfere. The biggest problem was that she didn't feel comfortable telling her supervisor she was depressed, because she wasn't sure it was safe. She worried that he might tell other people, and then she would feel ashamed. Her therapist suggested to Marissa that she consider what she would be willing to say to her supervisor that might enlist his help.

Marissa decided to tell her supervisor that she was under a lot of stress, but that she was working hard to straighten things out so that her job performance would not be affected. She thought she could remind her supervisor that her work used to be better, let him know that her current problems were temporary, and assure him that she expected her performance to be better soon. Marissa's therapist suggested she also let her supervisor know that she really wanted to keep her job and appreciated his help in letting her know what she needed to do to maintain the company's quality standards. Marissa's completed Action Plan is shown in Figure 104 on page 122. Marissa's hopelessness and thoughts of suicide decreased after she made the Action Plan and began to follow it. Notice that she took several different steps to improve her job performance. Since her depression was making it difficult for her to function well, she enlisted the help of others for a short time. From her boss, she asked for an appropriate level of help and reminded him of her previous good work. She also asked her friend Maggie for help, and she promised to do something for Maggie in return. These steps helped Marissa begin to feel in control again, so she could see light at the end of the tunnel. Marissa's example shows how to use an Action Plan when the evidence in our lives mostly supports a distressing thought. We can also use Action Plans whenever we identify a problem that needs to be solved.

**GOAL:** *Save my job.*

Actions to take	Time to begin	Possible problems	Strategies to overcome problems	Progress
<p>Talk to my supervisor about stress, prior positive work history, problems only temporary, wanting to keep my job, appreciating his help.</p>	<p>Wednesday after staff meeting.</p>	<p>Supervisor might be too busy to meet.</p>	<p>Ask him ahead of time for 15-minute meeting.</p>	<p>Tuesday – Supervisor agreed to Wednesday meeting.</p>
		<p>Supervisor might say it's too late to save my job.</p>	<p>Remind him of my positive work earlier in the year. Ask him to reconsider and give me 30 days to improve.</p>	<p>Wednesday – Meeting went pretty well. I cried, which I didn't want to do, but he seemed glad I talked to him and assured me I could have a few more weeks to improve my work.</p>
<p>Ask Maggie to review my work.</p>	<p>Tuesday at lunch.</p>	<p>It will burden our friendship.</p>	<p>I can promise to help Maggie out next summer when she goes on vacation. I can water her houseplants for her.</p>	<p>Maggie agreed to help.</p>
<p>Get to work on time. Set alarm on other side of room so I have to get out of bed. Lay out clothes night before, so no decisions to make. Leave 10 minutes early and reward myself with time for cup of coffee at office before I begin.</p>	<p>Tuesday A.M.</p>	<p>I'll go back to bed after alarm goes off.</p>	<p>Make a rule that I have to shower and dress before I "rest a few more minutes."</p>	<p>Tuesday – Arrived on time.  Wednesday – Arrived 5 minutes early.  Thursday – Arrived 8 minutes early and enjoyed my coffee.</p>