MAKING SPACE

Making space

A practical workbook for everyday stress

Understand your load. Prepare a conversation. Make room for recovery. Choose what comes next.

A flexible four-week structure

Worked examples, guided worksheets and weekly reviews to help you explore small, practical changes at your own pace.

Steven Goldsmith | Blue Oak Counselling 36 pages | Printable PDF edition

A little room to work things out

There may be plenty you're already doing to keep life moving. Work, caring, bills, health appointments and the needs of other people don't disappear because you're tired. This workbook starts with that reality. It invites you to look at your load, choose a change that's within reach and see what happens.

You won't be asked to overhaul your life. You'll work with ordinary examples, prepare conversations, share or reduce demands where possible, and make space for recovery. Some changes may be personal. Others will need practical help, different arrangements or professional support.

What makes this different from the free course

The free course helps you recognise changes and choose an initial next step. This workbook takes the next part further: pressure mapping, capacity planning, boundary scripts, task sharing, recovery planning and four weekly reviews. You don't need to complete the course first.

What you'll have by the end

A clearer picture of what you're carrying; a few words for a difficult conversation; a small set of changes you've actually tried; and a working plan you can revisit. These are useful outputs even if your circumstances remain difficult.

One part of life I'd like to make a little more manageable

This is general psychoeducation and a set of original reflection tools for adults. It isn't a diagnostic assessment, individual therapy or a substitute for medical or mental health care. There's no promised outcome or deadline for feeling better.

Use the workbook your way

The four-week structure is a suggested rhythm, not a treatment schedule. Spend around 15-25 minutes on a worksheet, or use a few minutes at a time. Try one change between reviews. A stage can take longer than a week; you don’t need to catch up or start again.

Stage	Focus	Pages
Start here	Read the orientation and take your starting snapshot	2-5
Week 1	Understand the load and choose one practical change	6-12
Week 2	Prepare a boundary or task-sharing conversation	13-19
Week 3	Make room for recovery and connection	20-26
Week 4	Review, troubleshoot and plan ongoing support	27-32
Keep using	Reusable planning sheets and research notes	33-36

Choose the version that suits you

The printable edition has writing space. The fillable edition lets you type into the pale boxes in a PDF app. Download it first, add a short test note, save a copy and reopen it to check your app keeps the entries. Some browser previews won’t save form responses.

Keep your notes for yourself

Use initials or general descriptions rather than other people’s identifying details. Store the file or printed pages somewhere private. You can choose to bring relevant pages to counselling; you don’t have to send them to Blue Oak.

If writing is tiring, use brief words, dictate into your own private notes or talk an idea through with someone you trust. Skip exercises that don’t fit your needs.

Choice, pace and support

You're in charge of how much you do. Use an ordinary recent situation rather than your most distressing experience. You don't need to describe trauma, prove how badly you're affected or share private experiences to use this workbook.

If an activity starts to feel too much

Stop writing. Look around the room, change position if comfortable or choose something familiar nearby. Contact someone supportive if that would help. You can leave the page unfinished.

If changing a demand isn't safe

Don't use a boundary conversation to confront someone who threatens, controls or harms you. Seek private advice from an appropriate support service. At work, consider the relevant supervisor, health and safety contact, union or professional support route where appropriate.

If symptoms are new or concerning

Seek medical advice for new, severe or unexplained physical symptoms rather than assuming stress is the cause. Persistent distress, disrupted functioning or difficulty coping is also a reason to ask for professional support. You don't need to finish this workbook first.

> ## If urgent help is needed
>
> If you're in immediate danger, can't stay safe or have a medical emergency, call 000 in Australia or go to an emergency department. Outside Australia, use local emergency services. Blue Oak's routine appointments, inboxes and course messages aren't emergency services.

Someone or a service I can contact if I need more support

Counselling can offer a regular space to explore the pressures behind your stress and work on approaches that suit your life. A GP can help consider health concerns and other care options. Asking for support is a practical action, not a failed workbook exercise.

START HERE

Take a starting snapshot

Describe an ordinary recent week. Short observations will be more useful at the end than a broad verdict about how well you're coping. For example, "I answered work messages during dinner on four nights" gives you something concrete to revisit.

What's taking the most time or attention at the moment?

What have I noticed in sleep, energy, concentration or mood?

Where is this affecting daily life, relationships, caring or work?

What's already helping, even a little?

One everyday sign I'd like to notice more of

Your "sign" might be eating lunch away from the desk, having a conversation without checking messages or making a needed appointment. This isn't a symptom scale and there's no score to interpret.

See what you're carrying

A busy schedule shows only part of the load. There's also the remembering, planning, anticipating and emotional effort around each task. You might spend ten minutes making a call and the rest of the day waiting for news. Both can take capacity.

Some demands are visible. Others sit in the background.

A worked example: Sam's week

Sam works part time and helps an older relative. Their list says "work, groceries, appointment". A closer look adds checking rosters, arranging transport, remembering medication questions and worrying about a bill. Sam's first change isn't a better morning routine. It's asking another family member to take responsibility for arranging the next appointment.

Use the next page to make your own map

List the practical demands, the thinking around them and the resources available. Include paid work, unpaid caring, study, relationships, health and money pressures where relevant. You can leave any category blank.

One demand that other people might not see

Map the whole demand

Choose up to three current demands. For each, name the task and what sits around it. Use concrete examples rather than “everything”. You can repeat this page in a notebook for other areas.

Demand 1: the task, the hidden work, and what makes it difficult

Demand 2: the task, the hidden work, and what makes it difficult

Demand 3: the task, the hidden work, and what makes it difficult

Support or resources I already have, including skills and people

Choose a starting point

Which demand is both significant and possible to influence? Start there. The hardest or most urgent issue may need professional or practical assistance rather than a self-guided exercise.

Plan for the capacity you have

Available hours and available capacity aren’t the same thing. Pain, poor sleep, uncertainty, grief or caring responsibilities can change what a day allows. Planning as though every hour will be your best hour can leave no room for ordinary interruptions.

The optimistic plan	A more workable version
Five tasks after a late shift	One essential task; move or share the others
A full catch-up day	Two short work periods with a realistic stopping point
Rest after everything is done	Protect a modest pause and decide what can wait

Pick a typical day this week. Account for fixed commitments first, including travel and caring. Then ask what you can reasonably add without borrowing every spare moment from rest. You may need to renegotiate the demand, not simply make a tighter timetable.

The fixed commitments on this day

What could limit my capacity, and what could make the day easier?

What will I leave out, move or ask someone to share?

If your basic responsibilities already exceed what you can manage, take that seriously. Counselling and practical services may help you explore options; a planning sheet can’t create resources that aren’t available.

Separate action from responsibility

Some things are yours to decide. Others need agreement, resources or a response from someone else. Sorting them can help you avoid treating every problem as a personal failure.

My next action	Needs a conversation	Needs outside help
Move a non-urgent errand	Ask to change a deadline	Get advice about debt
Prepare questions	Discuss sharing a caring task	Seek medical assessment

Something I can decide or do myself

Something I can influence, and who needs to be involved

Something beyond my control, and the support I could seek

A distinction worth keeping

You might be able to make a request without being responsible for the reply. If the reply is “no”, you can reconsider your options or seek support. It doesn’t mean you made the wrong request.

The next useful action, even if I can’t solve the whole problem

Choose what gets your attention

Use a short list for the next seven days. “Essential” means there’s a meaningful consequence if it isn’t addressed, not simply that it feels uncomfortable to leave unfinished. A task can matter without needing to happen today.

Protect the essentials

Name the few health, safety, caring or practical commitments that need attention. If something urgent needs professional help, act on that rather than completing this page.

Choose what can wait or change

Look for one task that could be delayed, simplified, shared or dropped. Consider the consequence and tell anyone who needs to know.

My essential commitments this week, with real deadlines

One task I can simplify, move, share or leave

What I’ll say, or who I need to contact

Try a “good enough for now” standard

For example, a simple meal may be enough on a difficult evening. Use this for low-risk everyday tasks, not safety-critical work, medication or essential care. The aim is to reduce unnecessary effort, not compromise safety.

Turn an intention into a small action

A useful plan names an action you actually want to take, a cue you're likely to notice and a manageable backup. Research on planning and progress monitoring supports making actions specific and reviewing them. That doesn't guarantee an outcome, especially when circumstances limit your options. [1, 2]

Worked example

Intention: "I need some space after work." Action: "After I put my bag down, I'll take five minutes before opening non-urgent messages." Backup: "If care is needed immediately, I'll ask whether someone can cover a short pause later."

The demand I'm trying to change, and why it matters to me

When this cue happens, I'll take this small action

What I need to arrange first, including anyone else's agreement

If the first option isn't available, my backup is

The everyday sign I'll look for, and my review date

Try one change. You don't need to fill a habit tracker, maintain a streak or make the action bigger each day. If it becomes another burden, reduce it.

What did the first change show you?

Use this after you've had a chance to try the action. Compare the plan with what actually happened. "I couldn't try it because the roster changed" is useful information about the conditions you're working with.

What did I try, and what actually happened?

Did the demand become easier, stay the same or become harder? How?

What got in the way: the size of the action, the setting or something else?

What will I keep, adapt or stop?

Before you move on

Choose one observation to carry into Week 2. You're looking for a conversation, shared task or boundary that could change the load. If things are worsening or you need help now, bring support forward instead.

A weekly review is an organisational tool, not a clinical measure. Keep it brief if detailed monitoring increases worry.

Make the limit clear

A boundary explains what you can offer, what you can’t and what needs a different arrangement. It can be a small, specific limit rather than a large announcement about your life.

A workable conversation can include the task, the limit and a request.

A worked example: Alex’s evenings

Alex keeps accepting last-minute requests from a friend. They want to stay connected, but the visits leave no time to prepare for the next day. Alex chooses a clear offer: “I’d like to catch up. I can do Saturday afternoon, but I can’t manage a visit tonight.” They don’t need to prove the friend’s request was unreasonable.

Choose a situation that’s safe enough to practise

Start with a lower-stakes request where a clear limit is appropriate. If the relationship involves intimidation, coercion or violence, prioritise confidential professional support rather than rehearsing a confrontation.

A small limit that could make this week more manageable

Find words you can actually use

You don’t need to sound forceful or deliver a perfect script. Use a short statement, a clear limit and a realistic next option if you want to offer one. Avoid a long explanation you feel you have to defend.

Situation	Words you could adapt
A new task at work	“I can take this on if we move another deadline. Which task should come first?”
A repeated request	“I can help for half an hour. I won’t be able to stay longer.”
An overloaded evening	“I’m at capacity tonight. Can we choose a time to discuss this tomorrow?”
Unclear expectations	“Before I agree, can we clarify what’s needed and by when?”

The other person may be disappointed or need time to respond. You can acknowledge that without immediately withdrawing the limit. At work or in caring arrangements, there may also be duties or practical constraints to discuss.

My short statement: what’s happening and what I can offer

My limit, and any alternative I’m genuinely able to offer

If I feel pressured to answer immediately, I can say

These are examples to adapt, not rules for every relationship or workplace. Counselling can help you explore why certain conversations feel difficult and choose an approach that fits the situation.

Prepare one conversation

Choose a time and setting where a brief conversation is possible. Decide what you're asking for before you begin. Keep the focus on an observable situation and a practical request, rather than judging the other person's character.

Who I need to speak with, and what I'd like us to agree on

The facts I want to describe, without blame or mind-reading

The request I'll make, including when or how often

An option I could negotiate, and a limit I need to keep

If we don't reach agreement, the next safe step I can take

Rehearse the first sentence

Read it once out loud or to someone you trust. If it sounds unlike you, make it simpler. You can also write the request down and refer to it during the conversation.

Agree who owns the whole task

“Help more” can be hard to act on. A more useful agreement names the task, who will notice it needs doing, who will arrange it, what “done” means and when you’ll check the arrangement. Sharing only the final action can leave the planning with the same person.

Worked example

Instead of “Can you help with appointments?”, try: “Could you take responsibility for arranging next month’s appointment, checking transport and letting us know the time? Let’s check in on Sunday if anything’s unclear.”

The task and the hidden planning or follow-up around it

Who I could ask, and what responsibility I’m asking them to take

What needs to be agreed about timing, information or essential standards

How we’ll review the arrangement without me checking every step

You may need a paid service, a community resource or a different arrangement if no one can share the task. Be realistic about cost and availability. Don’t transfer responsibilities that require particular skills or consent without checking what’s appropriate.

The purpose is a clearer agreement. It isn’t to assign blame or insist every household or caring situation should work in the same way.

Separate the event from the story

Under pressure, a thought can feel like a fact: “If I ask for help, they’ll think I’m incapable.” It may help to describe what you know, what you’re predicting and what you could ask or check. You don’t need to replace every difficult thought with a positive one.

Worked example

Event: a colleague hasn’t replied. Story: “They’re annoyed with me.” Other possibilities: they’re busy, away or deciding. Useful next action: check the agreed deadline and send one clear follow-up if needed.

The ordinary situation, using only what I observed

The interpretation or prediction my mind added

What’s known, what’s uncertain and another plausible explanation

One fairer sentence, or a practical question I can check

This page isn’t an invitation to dismiss real mistreatment or argue yourself out of a valid concern. If the facts point to a problem, support and practical action may be needed. If examining thoughts becomes repetitive or distressing, stop and discuss it with a professional.

A small conversation experiment

Choose one request or limit from the previous pages. An experiment means trying an approach and learning from the response. It doesn’t mean testing whether you can control another person.

My request or boundary, in one or two sentences

When and where I’ll raise it, and what preparation I need

What I predict will happen

What I’ll actually look for: an agreement, a clearer answer or another next step

My backup if the conversation can’t happen or isn’t productive

Choose the smallest useful version

You might ask one clarifying question before accepting a task, or arrange a ten-minute conversation about one shared responsibility. It doesn’t need to become a discussion about every unresolved issue.

Where there’s a power imbalance or uncertainty about your rights and duties, seek appropriate advice. This workbook provides conversation prompts, not employment, financial or legal advice.

What happened when you asked?

Revisit your prediction from the previous page. Notice the response, your own experience and any change in the practical load. A difficult response can tell you something about the situation; it doesn't establish that your needs were unreasonable.

What did I say or ask, and what response did I receive?

What was different from my prediction?

What changed in the task or arrangement, if anything?

What do I need now: another conversation, a different approach or support?

Carry one learning forward

Choose something useful for Week 3. For example: "I need a clearer handover before I can take a break", or "A short request was easier to make than a long explanation."

If the conversation raised distress or highlighted an unsafe situation, step away from the exercise and seek appropriate support. You don't need to keep practising the same approach.

Rest doesn’t have to look one way

Recovery can include quiet, enjoyment, a sense of choice or time with something different from the day’s demands. Work research distinguishes experiences such as switching off mentally, relaxation, learning or mastery, and control over leisure time. These ideas offer options, not a checklist everyone must complete. [3]

Choose something accessible that fits the time and energy you have.

After a day of decisions, another demanding activity may not feel restorative. On another day, a small creative task or gentle movement may be welcome. Notice what the activity asks of you as well as what you hope it will offer.

A small break has limits

Research on micro-breaks found modest average benefits for energy and fatigue, but no clear overall performance benefit. A short pause isn’t a replacement for adequate rest, manageable demands or support. There’s no proven ideal break schedule for everyone. [4]

What I most need a break from at the moment

Build a realistic recovery menu

Think of options you can access without much preparation or spending. Include one that suits a low-energy day and one that feels enjoyable. You don’t need to earn a pause by finishing everything first.

If I have…	Examples to adapt
A minute or two	Look outside; sit quietly; stretch comfortably; step away from a screen
A little longer	Listen to a familiar song; take a short accessible walk; read a few pages
Some protected time	A hobby; a conversation; a gentle activity; time alone if that’s what you need

A low-effort option I can use on a difficult day

An enjoyable or absorbing option I’d like to make room for

What needs arranging so a pause is actually possible?

Check the fit afterwards

Ask whether the option was helpful, neutral or unhelpful. You can change it. Something labelled “self-care” may still feel like another job if it costs energy, money or planning you don’t have.

Create a transition between roles

Moving from work, study or caring into the next part of the day can happen before your attention has caught up. Try a short, repeatable transition that makes the handover clear. It needn't be a perfect evening routine.

Close what can be closed

Note the next step for an unfinished task, rather than trying to hold it in your head. Follow any actual handover or on-call responsibilities.

Mark the change

Put away work materials, change clothes, wash your hands or sit somewhere different. Choose a cue that fits your circumstances.

Name what comes next

Ask what the next part of the day needs. If someone else is depending on you, discuss what can be covered and when a pause might be possible.

The roles I'm moving between, and what usually carries over

My closing action and transition cue

My realistic plan for interruptions, caring or on-call duties

You don't need to force thoughts about work or caring out of your mind. The aim is an arrangement that gives attention somewhere else to go, while respecting responsibilities that genuinely remain.

Protect some room for rest

This page looks at the conditions around rest, rather than prescribing how you should sleep. Consider late tasks, messages, noise, caring responsibilities or worries that leave little space to unwind. Some conditions can be adjusted; others need shared arrangements or professional advice.

Worked example

Casey scrolls through work messages in bed because they're worried about missing a change. They check the actual contact expectations with their supervisor and agree on a separate route for urgent issues. The useful change is a clearer arrangement, not more pressure to "sleep properly".

What most often interrupts or delays rest?

One condition I could change, clarify or ask someone to help with

A simple way to note a task or worry for a suitable time tomorrow

What support would I seek if sleep or fatigue keeps affecting daily life?

Persistent sleep problems, marked daytime sleepiness or concerning symptoms deserve a conversation with a GP or qualified health professional. Don't drive or do safety-critical tasks when you're too sleepy to do so safely. This workbook doesn't provide treatment for insomnia or other sleep conditions.

Ask for the kind of help you need

A person may be willing to help and still be unsure what to offer. A specific request can make the conversation clearer: listening, practical assistance, company or help finding a service. You can say what would be useful without explaining every private detail.

What I need	A possible request
Someone to listen	“Could you listen for ten minutes? I’m not looking for solutions just yet.”
Practical help	“Could you handle dinner on Thursday so I can attend an appointment?”
Company	“Would you be up for a short walk or a cup of tea this week?”
Help with a next step	“Could you sit with me while I make this call?”

Someone I could approach, and what they’re realistically able to offer

My specific request, including a time or task

If that person isn’t available, another person or service I can try

Support doesn’t need to come from one place

Friends, family, colleagues, community services and professionals can offer different kinds of support. Counselling can provide a consistent space when the concerns need more time or privacy than an everyday conversation allows.

Protect one recovery opportunity

Choose one option from your recovery menu. Keep it small enough to try in the week you actually have. If you need someone else’s agreement or cover, arrange that first rather than relying on an interruption-free day.

The option I’ll try, and what I hope it will make room for

The cue or time I’ll use, including how often is realistic

What I need to put in place or ask someone to cover

My smaller backup if the day changes

What I’ll notice afterwards, without turning it into a test

An optional pause while you plan

You could look at an ordinary object in the room or take a few gentle, unforced breaths if that’s comfortable. Don’t hold your breath or push for a sensation. Stop if you feel dizzy or more distressed. Direct evidence for grounding is limited, and breathing findings vary. [5-7]

Did the pause fit your life?

A recovery opportunity may be useful without making you feel instantly relaxed. Notice whether you could access it, what it was like and whether the arrangement was realistic. Don’t make the activity larger simply because you managed it once.

What did I try, and how easy was it to make space for it?

What felt helpful, neutral or unhelpful?

Did anything about the demands or handover need to change?

What will I keep, replace or make smaller?

A useful result might be…

“I prefer quiet to another app”, “I need practical cover before I can stop”, or “A walk felt good, but the timing didn’t work”. Each gives you a more informed next step.

If you’re finding it hard to recover at all, or distress is persisting or worsening, discuss that with a GP or mental health professional. More coping activities aren’t always the answer.

Look for useful change

Return to your starting snapshot on page 5. Compare ordinary examples from then and now. Research on goal monitoring supports reviewing concrete actions, but these worksheets aren't a validated measure of stress or recovery. They can't tell you whether you have a condition. [1]

Starting observation	A useful comparison
"I checked messages at dinner most nights."	"How often did that happen this week?"
"I arranged every appointment myself."	"Who is now responsible for arranging the next one?"
"I kept putting off asking for help."	"Did I contact someone, or what stopped me?"

My original everyday sign, and what I observe now

Something that became more manageable, if anything

Something that hasn't changed, or has become harder

Keep the context in view

A quieter week, a new health problem or a change in caring demands can affect the comparison. Don't assume the workbook caused every improvement or that a hard week means you've gone backwards.

When the week doesn’t go to plan

A plan can fail to fit the circumstances. Before deciding you need more discipline, ask what made the action difficult. Match the next step to the obstacle rather than automatically trying harder.

What got in the way?	A possible adjustment
The action was too large	Reduce it to one short step or one conversation
I couldn’t control the timing	Use a different cue or arrange help before trying again
The demand hasn’t changed	Revisit the task, expectations or practical support
The activity increased distress	Stop it and discuss alternatives with a professional
My circumstances changed	Revise the plan instead of trying to catch up

What made the plan difficult this time?

The adjustment that best fits that obstacle

The smallest next step, or the support I’ll seek instead

If the obstacle is a serious health, safety, relationship or financial concern, a specialist support route may be more useful than another worksheet. You’re allowed to move straight to that.

Make room for another person

You don’t need to wait for a crisis, collect perfect notes or exhaust every self-help option before asking for support. A persistent pattern, worsening distress or an effect on daily functioning is enough to start a conversation.

Your observations can be a starting point for a collaborative conversation.

Choose the route that fits the concern

A GP can assess health concerns and discuss care options. A counsellor or other appropriate mental health professional can help you explore pressures, relationships and ways of responding. Practical or specialist services may be needed for issues such as debt, unsafe relationships or workplace conditions.

How counselling can build on this workbook

You can bring one page or simply describe what you tried. Together, you can consider what sits behind the pattern, adapt strategies and review them over time. The workbook can support those conversations; it doesn’t replace them.

If you’re in immediate danger, can’t stay safe or have a medical emergency, call 000 in Australia or go to an emergency department. Outside Australia, use local emergency services. Blue Oak’s routine appointments, inboxes and course messages aren’t emergency services.

At Blue Oak, you can ask about a free 15-minute suitability call to discuss whether the service fits your needs. This isn’t counselling or an emergency appointment. Visit blueoakcounselling.au for current service and booking information.

Prepare for a support conversation

Use only the information you want to bring. A simple description of the change, its impact and what you're asking for can help you begin. You don't need to diagnose yourself or explain every cause.

What's been happening, and roughly how long it's been going on

The impact on sleep, health, relationships, caring, study or work

What I've tried, and what was helpful or unhelpful

What I'd like help understanding or changing

Who I'll contact, when, and a backup if that route isn't available

Seek help sooner if your safety or functioning changes. Don't wait to complete these notes, meet a threshold on a score or reach your planned review date.

Decide what you'll carry forward

You don't need a complete solution to leave with something useful. Choose what's worth keeping, what needs changing and what would be better supported by another person. The aim is a workable next stage, not graduation from needing help.

One thing I understand more clearly about my load

One action or arrangement that's worth keeping

One thing I'll stop or change because it isn't helping

A concern I'll take to a professional or practical support service

My next review date, and what would bring that review forward

Before you turn the page

Use your answers to make the one-page working plan that follows. Keep it simple enough to find and understand on a difficult day. You can update it whenever your circumstances change.

Keep the next steps easy to find

Bring together the actions and arrangements that fit your life now. This is a living plan. It isn't a commitment to manage everything alone or keep doing an approach that no longer helps.

My main pressure, and the practical change I'm working on

My boundary or shared-task agreement

My recovery opportunity, including the backup version

Who I can ask for practical or professional support, and my next contact

My early signs that the plan needs changing or more support

My review date and next small action

For immediate danger or a medical emergency in Australia, call 000 or attend an emergency department. Keep any personalised safety or care plan from your treating professional alongside this workbook.

A weekly check-in you can reuse

Use this page again in a fresh copy or notebook. A short weekly check-in is enough; you don’t need to record every feeling or task. Review the demand as well as how you responded to it.

Week beginning / What’s different about this week?

The essentials I need to protect

One demand I’ll move, simplify, share or discuss

One recovery or connection opportunity I’ll arrange

At the end of the week: what happened, and what will I change?

If detailed tracking increases worry, shorten it to one sentence or discuss another approach with a professional. The worksheet is meant to serve you.

On a difficult day

Use this brief plan when you don’t have much room to think. You can print this page separately or keep it near your other notes. If you’re not safe or symptoms need urgent assessment, seek help first.

1. Make the next few minutes simpler

Pause a non-essential task if possible. Choose a familiar external detail to look at or a comfortable place to sit. You don’t need to force yourself to feel calm.

One low-effort option that usually suits me

2. Reduce one demand

Ask what genuinely needs attention now and what can wait, change or be shared. Don’t use this to postpone urgent health or safety care.

One task I can simplify, or a specific request I can make

3. Connect with support

Use the contact or service you’ve chosen. A brief message is enough to begin: “I’m finding things difficult today. Could you help with ____?”

My contact or support route, and a backup

If urgent help is needed

If you’re in immediate danger, can’t stay safe or have a medical emergency, call 000 in Australia or go to an emergency department. Outside Australia, use local emergency services. Blue Oak’s routine appointments, inboxes and course messages aren’t emergency services.

What sits behind the activities

The worksheets, examples and four-week structure are original Blue Oak resources. They haven’t been tested as a treatment programme. The sources below inform selected ideas about planning, recovery and coping. Findings from workplace or research settings don’t automatically apply to every person or situation.

Planning and reviewing

[1] Harkin, B., Webb, T. L., Chang, B. P. I., Prestwich, A., Conner, M., Kellar, I., Benn, Y., & Sheeran, P. (2016). Does monitoring goal progress promote goal attainment? A meta-analysis of the experimental evidence. Psychological Bulletin, 142(2), 198-229. https://doi.org/10.1037/bul0000025

This review supports reviewing progress towards chosen goals. Our weekly sheets aren’t clinical scales, and recording more isn’t necessarily more useful for an individual.

[2] Sheeran, P., Webb, T. L., & Gollwitzer, P. M. (2005). The interplay between goal intentions and implementation intentions. Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 31(1), 87-98. https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167204271308

Specific cue-and-action plans are one planning option. These studies concerned goal-directed behaviour, not proof that this workbook treats stress.

Recovery and breaks

[3] Sonnentag, S., & Fritz, C. (2007). The Recovery Experience Questionnaire: Development and validation of a measure for assessing recuperation and unwinding from work. Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, 12(3), 204-221. https://doi.org/10.1037/1076-8998.12.3.204

This study distinguishes recovery experiences in a work context. We draw on the broad ideas; we don’t reproduce or score the questionnaire.

[4] Albulescu, P., Macsinga, I., Rusu, A., Sulea, C., Bodnaru, A., & Tulbure, B. T. (2022). “Give me a break!” A systematic review and meta-analysis on the efficacy of micro-breaks for increasing well-being and performance. PLOS ONE, 17(8), e0272460. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0272460

The average benefits for energy and fatigue were modest. The review doesn’t establish an ideal schedule or make short breaks a substitute for adequate rest.

Keep the evidence in perspective

Brief coping options

[5] Hammond, J., & Brown, W. J. (2025, first published online). Building an operational definition of grounding. Trauma, Violence, & Abuse. https://doi.org/10.1177/15248380251343189

Direct efficacy research on grounding is limited. The brief orientation option in this workbook is a choice, not a guaranteed way to reduce distress.

[6] Fincham, G. W., Strauss, C., Montero-Marin, J., & Cavanagh, K. (2023). Effect of breathwork on stress and mental health: A meta-analysis of randomised-controlled trials. Scientific Reports, 13, 432. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-022-27247-y

[7] Fincham, G. W., Strauss, C., & Cavanagh, K. (2023). Effect of coherent breathing on mental health and wellbeing: A randomised placebo-controlled trial. Scientific Reports, 13, 22141. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-023-49279-8

Breathing research is mixed. A review found potential benefits with limitations; a later trial didn’t find coherent breathing superior to an active breathing comparison. No fixed breathing pace is prescribed here.

About this workbook

Making space: A practical workbook for everyday stress. Written for Blue Oak Counselling by Steven Goldsmith. First edition, 24 October 2026. General psychoeducation for adults, with illustrated examples and original practical worksheets.

Counselling can provide ongoing support alongside the work you’ve begun here. To explore Blue Oak’s services, current fees or a free suitability call, visit www.blueoakcounselling.au.

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