

Reimagining help

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Managing setbacks

Why is this important?

People's behaviour change journeys are rarely linear, and most will experience large and small setbacks along the way. Organisations that recognise this and support people to anticipate and plan for setbacks will encourage long-term success.

What do we mean by managing setbacks?

Everyone experiences setbacks as they change their behaviour. The triggers for this may be changes in life circumstances that are out of a person's control - for example, a new diagnosis, redundancy, housing difficulties or they could be related to normal variations in motivation (e.g. boredom with healthy eating routines). Setbacks will be experienced in many different ways by different people, including decline in mental health, reduction in social contact and increase in alcohol or substance use. Setbacks themselves are not necessarily a problem: it is how people and their supporters react to the setback that makes the difference to the impact they have.

We tend to go through life reacting to problems as they crop up rather than taking time to plan ahead. But in many cases setbacks can be planned for and managed by drawing on people's strengths and their experience of navigating previous difficulties. Making space to plan ahead can help people to feel more prepared for difficult times. When developing plans for possible setbacks, people should be supported to reflect on: the signs that things are getting worse; the strategies and resources that have helped them to manage in the past; and the support of others (family, friends, professionals, community services etc. - see [Social connections](#)). Supporting people to think about how they might foresee setbacks (e.g. identifying a gradual decline in mood or reduction in physical activity - see [Tracking change](#)) can help them to put support and strategies in place before things get worse.



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What is the behaviour change theory and evidence?

Managing setbacks:

- Increases **capability** for sustained behaviour change as people learn how to identify possible setbacks and get back on track as well as how to avoid or manage situations which may trigger a setback
- Increases **motivation** for behaviour change as people will become more confident that they can respond constructively to new challenges in their lives

Examples

- Personalised setback plans that are developed and shared with practitioners and can be easily accessed and adapted when people are going through difficult times.
- Helplines or drop-in sessions that can respond to people's setbacks in a timely way and do not require advance notice - for example, walk-in support groups for people experiencing grief.
- Open drop-in coaching sessions for general support and motivation that can be accessed whenever people need them.



Generate ideas

Using the information above, start to brainstorm ideas to try out in your organisation or community. Think about how to co-design ideas with other practitioners and people in the local community who could benefit from Good Help.



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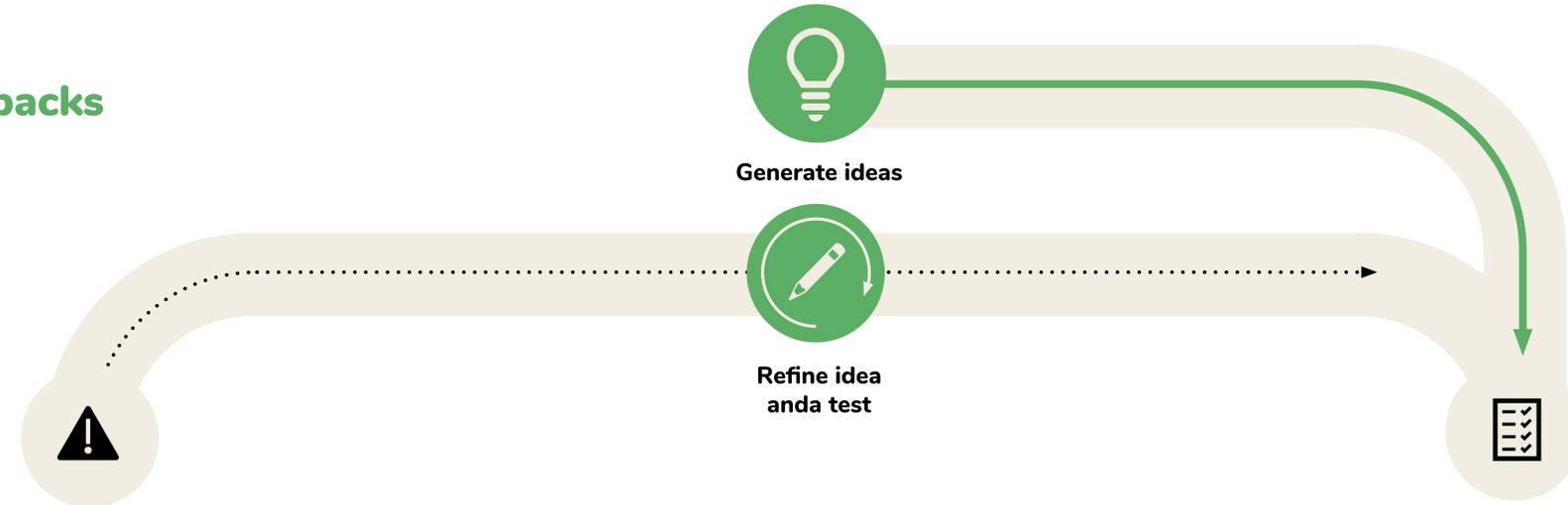
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Common pitfalls

- Spending time developing a setback plan with people and then never returning to it! This might occur because the person is in contact with different services or sources of support and it isn't clear who can access the plan or who can provide support when it is needed.

Check in with the evidence

1. How will your idea convey that setbacks are a normal part of the process of change and to be expected?
2. How does your idea help people prepare in advance of setbacks by drawing on their personal strengths and wider support networks?
3. How does your idea help people put their plan into practice when a setback occurs? Can the plan be accessed easily by those who need to see it?
4. How does your idea cater for different types of setbacks, from minor to significant?

Use these questions to assess whether your idea includes the core components of this characteristic.



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