

Health and Work Conversation Frequently Asked Questions

LDO and work coach support material

The do's and don'ts of the Health and Work Conversation

Do's:

1. Use your work coach version of the HWC booklet during each HWC.
2. Discuss the claimant's responses to About Me and My Values with them.
3. Support the claimant through My 4 Steps through active discussion of each step.
4. Encourage the claimant to come up with their own answers.

Don'ts:

1. Don't deliver the HWC without using your work coach booklet.
 2. Don't just skip discussing the claimant's responses to About Me and My Values.
 3. Don't just accept the claimant's answers to My 4 Steps without making sure each answer follows the guidelines in the work coach booklet.
 4. Don't tell the claimant what you think their answers should be.
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My Values

Q: What is the point of My Values?

A: There are two purposes. Firstly, it is an evidence-based approach that is effective in encouraging people to be more open to challenges. Secondly, if the claimant is happy to discuss their values with you, you can draw on these values during My 4 Steps. For example, if "friends and family" is one of their values, and they struggle to come up with a "Want" (goal) during My 4 Steps, you could specifically ask them if they have any Wants related to friends or family.

Q: Can it be done verbally?

A: Yes. If the claimant would prefer to do it verbally, that's not a

problem. They don't have to write anything down.

Q: Can the claimant **write their answers in another language?**

A: Yes. If the claimant is more comfortable writing in another language, that's fine. They can write in whatever language they are most comfortable with.

Q: Can it be done **via an interpreter?**

A: Yes. The interpreter can translate the instructions, and the claimant can complete the exercise, either by writing or verbally. This is completely flexible and is a matter of what the claimant is most comfortable with. For example, the interpreter could translate the instructions, then the claimant could write their answers in their preferred language, or they could give a verbal response in their preferred language to the interpreter. The claimant can decide whether they want to keep their answers to themselves entirely, or to tell their answers to the interpreter but no one else, or whether they're happy for the interpreter to then translate the answer so that you can listen to it.

Q: Is it OK if the **claimant doesn't share their answers with me?**

A: Yes. Values can be very personal, and some people will not want to share them or to discuss them in detail. By having the opportunity to keep their values private, claimants are more likely to be honest with themselves when reflecting on the values that matter most to them. People benefit from the exercise just by spending time reflecting on their values - it is not necessary to share those values with anyone for the exercise to be effective.

Q: What is **the point of doing My Values if the claimant doesn't share** their answers with me?

A: People benefit from the exercise just by spending time reflecting on their values - it is not necessary to share those values with anyone for the exercise to be effective.

Q: What should I do if the **claimant doesn't want to complete My Values?**

A: Let them know that other people have found it helpful to spend some time thinking about what's important to them, as people don't necessarily get that time in everyday life. However, if they still do not want to do the exercise, that's fine - just move on to My 4 Steps. My Values won't have a positive impact if someone is forced to do it.

Q: What is the **evidence behind My Values?**

A: My Values is based on values affirmation or self-affirmation, an approach that has been the subject of much academic research since its initial impact, in a school setting in the US, was published in 2006. That study found that students who were potentially experiencing a sense of threat at school performed better academically after having completed a values affirmation exercise (Cohen, Garcia, Apfel & Master (2006). Science, 313 (5791), 1307-1310). These researchers followed up with the same group of students and found that those who had completed the values affirmation exercise were still performing better academically 2 years later, despite not having done the exercise again (Cohen, Garcia, Purdie-Vaughns, Apfel & Brzustoski (2009). Science, 324(5925), 400-403). Values affirmation has subsequently been found to have positive effects in a range of settings, including health settings (e.g. Armitage, Harris, Hepton & Napper (2008). Psychology of Addictive Behaviors, 22(1), 88-95). Additional peer-reviewed studies are available by searching academic databases for values affirmation or self-affirmation.

My 4 Steps

Want

Q: The claimant has identified **multiple Wants** in Step 1 - what do I do?

A: Ask them to choose the one that is most important to them and that they would most like to achieve. It can also be helpful to ask them to focus on the next 4 weeks - what is a Want they can achieve in that time period? This might help them focus on a particular Want.

Q: How do I **make sure the claimant picks a Want that is realistic** and within their power to achieve?

A: Sometimes you'll just have to use your judgement. For example, if the claimant says their Want is "to get better", that is something might depend on a lot of factors that are not necessarily within their power to achieve, or it might be the case that there's nothing they can actively do to get better (e.g. if they're waiting for a broken bone to heal).

Q: The claimant has picked a very **big or long-term Want** - what do I do?

A: You need to help the claimant break down the Want into something smaller and more manageable. It's fine for them to have a very big goal for their Want, but that might be unlikely to be reached by doing My 4 Steps once and just having a single Obstacle and a single Plan. Ask them to think of one thing they could do in the next 4 weeks that would

put them on the way to achieving their big Want/goal. Use that smaller 4-week Want for My 4 Steps. The same goes for longer term Wants - they might be able to come up with a single Obstacle that will come up on their way to achieving that Want, but longer term Wants are more likely to involve multiple Obstacles. So again, ask them what is something that they could do in the next 4 weeks that would put them on the way to achieving that longer-term Want, then use the shorter 4-week Want for My 4 Steps.

Q: What do I do if the claimant **can't think of a Want?**

A: Remind the claimant that the Want can be something small - it doesn't have to be big. Go through their About Me and My Values and ask them if there's anything they would like to achieve related to their answers there (e.g. if they've chosen "relationships with friends and family" as a value in My Values, ask them if there's anything they'd like to achieve related to their friends and family). If they still can't think of anything, ask them if there's anything they wanted to do in the past week or two that they didn't do - would this be a Want they'd like to achieve? If necessary, you can also try giving them examples of Wants you've heard from other people.

Outcome

Q: What if, when asked to think about the Outcome, **the claimant doesn't say anything positive?**

A: If they're not positive about achieving their Want, then it's possibly not a Want they are truly interested in achieving. Ask them if it's a Want they genuinely care about. If it seems it isn't, ask them to choose a different Want, one that they do genuinely care about. Remind them that it can be a small Want if they'd like.

Obstacle

Q: The claimant has **multiple Obstacles** - what do I do?

A: Ask them which Obstacle is most likely to hold them back from achieving their Want and to focus on working with that one. They can come up with a Plan for dealing with that Obstacle and try it out, and if another Obstacle comes up, they can then consider coming up with another Plan for that. But to start with, they should just focus on the single main Obstacle that is most likely to hold them back from achieving their Want.

Q: What if, **when the Obstacle comes up, it turns out to not be the best time to carry out the Plan?**

A: This is frequently the case for Wants related to things like time management, where planning needs to be done in advance. For example, if the Want is to get up on time and the Obstacle is that the person is too tired in the morning, then it might be more effective to plan to get to bed earlier rather than to wake up and get out of bed on time. The Obstacle might have originally been “I’m too tired to get up” but then it shifts backwards in time and becomes “I don’t start getting ready for bed early enough”.

Q: What if the claimant says their **Obstacle is “always there”** or “never goes away”, like when they say their Obstacle is “being disorganised” and they feel like that’s just something they always are?

A: Ask them to think about the next time that their Obstacle will specifically put them at risk of not achieving their Want. For example, if their Want is to phone their sister but their Obstacle is that they’re disorganised (which is an ongoing thing that could related to a lot of areas of their life), ask them to think about the next time when they could try to achieve their Want but being disorganised might stop them. That’s the moment when being disorganised becomes an Obstacle to achieving their Want, and they should think of a Plan they can put into action at that point.

Q: How do I know if an **Obstacle is internal or external?**

A: Think about whether the Obstacle is a feeling, belief, attitude, or habit the claimant has - that is likely to be an internal Obstacle. Sometimes it’s difficult to tell whether a particular Obstacle is internal or external. For example, if someone says their Obstacle is that they “don’t have enough time” to achieve their Want, this could be internal (for example, because of their habits or because they forget to plan, they aren’t organised enough to make time in the day) or it could be external (for example, they genuinely have so much going on in their lives - maybe multiple care responsibilities - that it is not realistic that they could find the time to achieve their Want). You need to explore this with the claimant so that you get a sense of whether they could realistically overcome their Obstacle.

Q: What if, when asked to think about the Obstacle, **the claimant can only identify external obstacles?**

A: My 4 Steps is not appropriate for dealing with external obstacles, so it may be necessary to choose a different Want, one that has an internal obstacle.

Plan

Q: The claimant has thought of **multiple Plans** - what do I do?

A: Ask them to choose the one they think would be most effective. Get them to imagine their Obstacle coming up and them carrying out their Plan immediately - which Plan seems like it would be most effective? If they still struggle, ask them to choose one and try it the next time their Obstacle comes up, and if it is not effective, they can subsequently try a different Plan.

Q: What if the claimant **can't think of a Plan** to overcome their Obstacle?

A: Ask them to visualise their Obstacle coming up and to try to imagine something that would help them at that point in time. If this doesn't help, remind them of some different things that other people find helpful – asking someone else for help, setting an alarm or reminder, telling themselves a reassuring message, reminding themselves of why they care about achieving their Want.

Other

Q: What do I do if a **claimant brings along someone else** (e.g. a relative)? How do I make sure they don't interfere too much with the claimant coming up with their own Want?

A: This may be a challenging situation. Explain to the relative that the important thing about My 4 Steps is that the person doing the exercise has to provide their own answers - that is what's most effective in helping people achieve their Want. If the relative still interferes and you feel like the answers to My 4 Steps are not genuinely the claimant's own, still go through the exercise - that way, the claimant can still learn how it works. At the end of the HWC, remind the claimant that there are extra copies of My 4 Steps in their booklet that they can use at home if they want to try My 4 Steps again.

Q: What is an **if-then statement** and how does it work?

A: It follows the format "IF this Obstacle happens THEN this is the Plan I'll carry out". This ties together the Obstacle and Plan into a statement that is simple and easy to remember and allows a person to know exactly what their Obstacle is and what they're going to do when their Obstacle comes up.

Q: What if the **if-then statement doesn't make grammatical sense**?

A: Sometimes the Obstacle wording and/or Plan wording need to be

changed slightly so that when they're put into the if-then statement, it makes a sentence that makes sense. That's fine.

Q: Can you have **multiple My 4 Steps** on the go at the same time? (e.g. I want to eat more healthily, so I have a My 4 Steps for that, and I also want to get to bed on time, so I have a My 4 Steps for that, and I also want to get around to phoning my sister, so I have a My 4 Steps for that, etc.)

A: That's fine. The only limit on how many My 4 Steps you can have on the go at the same time is when it starts to become difficult to remember them because there are too many. Remember that part of the benefit of My 4 Steps is in tying the Obstacle and Plan together to make an if-then statement that's easy to remember, so that the moment your Obstacle comes up, you know to put your Plan into action. However, if you have too many if-then statements to remember, you might start to forget them and then they won't be effective. If a claimant is keen to use My 4 Steps at home, you could recommend that they only have one or two on the go to start with, until they get more familiar with the exercise. When they start to feel a bit more confident and familiar with My 4 Steps, they could increase that number to three or four. More than that might start to get difficult to remember, but it varies from person to person. Everyone who uses My 4 Steps is free to explore the best way to use it for themselves.

Q: How to do visualisation with a claimant who has **autism spectrum disorder** and who might find visualisation challenging?

A: For the **Outcome step**, you can ask the claimant: "What would you be able to do if you achieved your Want?" (focusing on practical outcomes). For the **Obstacle step**, the work coach could ask the claimant: "If someone took a photo of you at the moment your Obstacle comes up, what would it look like? What would be happening in the photo?"

Q: What is the **evidence behind My 4 Steps**?

A: My 4 Steps is based on mental contrasting with implementation intentions (MCII). Both mental contrasting and implementation intentions have been the subject of many academic research studies (for example, the impact of implementation intentions has been assessed by meta-analysis, which looked at 94 independent tests of the approach (Gollwitzer & Sheeran (2006). *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology*, 38, 69-119)). However, they have also been studied as an integrated approach as MCII to helping people move towards their goals. For example, MCII is effective in helping people with mild to moderate

depression to achieve their goals (Fritzsche et al. (2016), Cognitive Therapy & Research, 40(4), 557-564), in helping people to reduce unhealthy snacking (Adriaanse et al. (2010). European Journal of Social Psychology, 40(7), 1277-1293), and in helping people to improve their time management (Oettingen, Kappes, Guttentag & Gollwitzer (2015). European Journal of Social Psychology, 45(2), 218-229). Additional peer-reviewed studies are available by searching academic databases for mental contrasting with implementation intentions.

General and process related questions

Q: Will the claimant be instructed to arrive 10 minutes before the start of the HWC appointment to allow the 'About Me' part of the booklet to be completed?

A: The invitation letter will include a reminder on page 1 to advise the claimant to arrive 10 mins prior to their appointment time. There is also a section on page 2 of the letter explaining that the claimant will be asked to fill in a short questionnaire about the things that matter to them.

Q: Is there an example telephone script that SDS colleagues can use when they are making the initial call to the claimant to introduce/book the HWC?

A: Yes there is an example call script in the Service Delivery Support (SDS) e-learning package. There is also guidance on the booking process which can be found on the ESA for Jobcentres section of national guidance.

Q: Is there a requirement for face-to-face follow up appointments to be conducted for HWCs?

A: Work Coaches can use their discretion to determine if they think the claimant will benefit from a follow up appointment. It is important to remember that the follow up appointment is not mandatory and any actions agreed at the initial HWC are voluntary. No sanction can be applied for failing to complete agreed actions/steps during the initial My 4 Steps exercise.

Q: Do we also conduct the HWC with people who may still be employed?

A: Yes, the tools used in the HWC (My 4 Steps in particular) can help anyone, regardless of whether they are in work or not.