

Building up your story of relationship difficulty

Think about the ways in which you find relationships difficult. For example, are there specific problems that frequently trouble you, such as not knowing what to say when you meet someone for the first time, or do you find relationships difficult in a variety of different ways that regularly interferes with day-to-day life?

Exercise 20.1: Isolation and depression: how closely are they connected?

- Copy the diagram below into your notebook and mark on the line how often you found relationships difficult *before you became depressed*.
- Then mark on the line how difficult you find relationships *now*.

Occasional	Regular	Repeated	Regular
specific	specific	general	serious
difficulties	difficulties	difficulties	difficulties



The gap between the two marks will give you a measure of how much more difficult depression has made making and holding on to relationships. A bigger gap reveals a greater impact. If your pre-depression mark already sits towards the right-hand side of the line, this suggests a sensitivity around relationships that cannot be entirely explained by depression,

and which will benefit from specific and focused attention. If your pre-depression mark sits towards the left-hand side of the line, it will be useful to combine ideas from the chapters on other focal areas (chapters 14, 16 and 18) with the information that follows.

It is important to continue to monitor the links between your depression and feeling isolated. Rate your depressive symptoms each week (using the table in appendix 1) and think about whether any change in your symptoms is related to being isolated (using the table in appendix 3). Try to find two or three examples each week when symptoms and feelings of isolation overlap to think about in more detail.

There are, of course, many types of relationships, including those with family, friends, romantic partners, work colleagues, customers, casual social companions, etc. It is helpful to clarify whether all types of relationship are equally challenging for you, or if some have been easier to manage than others. Focusing on isolation doesn't mean assuming that all relationships are equally problematic, and it can be very useful to highlight the pockets of success where you do manage better that exist alongside the recurrent difficulties.