

# THE THINGS YOU DO THAT MESS YOU UP

AND HOW TO STOP  
DOING THEM

By Dr. Chris Williams



Canadian Mental  
Health Association  
*Mental health for all*

LIVING LIFE  
TO THE FULL

HIDING  
AWAY

Not eating

Binge  
drinking

Doing  
drugs

EATING  
FOR  
COMFORT

Lashing out  
at people

COMPLAINING

Shoplifting

Self harming

TAKING  
DANGEROUS  
RISKS

Gossiping

seeking reassurance all the time

# If it makes me feel better, why should I stop?

“Just leave me alone” or “What I need now is chocolate!” We’ve all said it, and most of the time it’s not a problem at all.

But when you’re feeling down, the things that get you through can also become the things that mess you up.

One bar of chocolate becomes a comfort eating habit. One scratch becomes a cycle of risky self-harm. One question “Are you still my friend?” becomes a constant need for reassurance.

And instead of getting better, you get worse.



But this doesn’t need to happen! Turn the page and you’ll be taking the first step towards getting in control of the things you do.

**YOU'RE  
ON  
YOUR  
WAY!**

Do Not Reproduce

# The first step is the most important

And you just took it. You made the decision to stop letting unhelpful behaviours mess up your life.

Now, we're going to help you work out what you're doing too much of, and then show you how the 4C Strategy can help you to stop or cut down.

How do you know when something is messing you up?



**Turn over**

**IT'S NOT  
WHAT  
YOU DO,  
IT'S HOW  
MUCH  
YOU DO IT**

We're not trying to be the fun police. There's nothing wrong with chocolate, spending some time alone or a bit of retail therapy.

But when you're feeling low, you can start to lean on these things, using them to help get you through a bad time.

Other, not so obvious behaviours can also be 'props'. Like lashing out at other people—physically or just by shouting. Cutting yourself. Hiding away from the world.

Trouble is, too much of this kind of stuff makes you worse, not better. You get into a kind of vicious cycle, doing something that seems to help for a bit, but finding that it actually makes life worse in the long run.



Turn the page and check whether you're doing too much of something.

## Eating for comfort

Eating chocolate, etc. occasionally

Eating a little when you feel upset

## Complaining

You say clearly what you feel and need

You moan a lot that "It's not fair"

## Lashing out at people

You're sometimes rude when frustrated

You blurt out hurtful things without even thinking

## Gossiping

You tell others good news about your friends

You discuss good news told to you in private

## Shoplifting

Your friends say they shoplift and you don't tell them it's wrong

You are with friends when they steal and don't say anything

## Hiding away

You tend to be quiet in conversations

You avoid spending time with people

Eating a lot when you feel upset	Binge-eating on food when you're upset	Binge-eating and making yourself sick when you're upset
You get really upset if you don't get your own way	You get really worked up and upset others too	You are so upset you don't get on with things and fall out with everyone
You often hurt people you don't like	You lash out at people you love when you feel frustrated	You get into fights often—hurting people and being injured yourself
You love to discuss people's private secrets	You get a reputation as someone who can't be trusted	No one trusts you and you feel lonely
You steal something small and say "it's no big deal"	You steal more expensive things more and more often	Your shoplifting continues and you start to steal in other ways too
You go out of your way to avoid talking to other people	You lose confidence and find it hard even knowing where to start a conversation	You stay in all the time feeling anxious, panicky and depressed

Want to stop or cut down? **Turn over!**

**OK. SO YOU  
NEED TO  
WORK ON  
SOMETHING**

# Here's how ...

First, don't beat yourself up. Most people get into a cycle of doing unhelpful things when they're feeling down.

The fact that you're reading this means you're on the way to fixing it.

All you have to do is choose one problem behaviour to work on, and follow our 4C Strategy to get control.



**4C Strategy this way**

# 1. Chunk

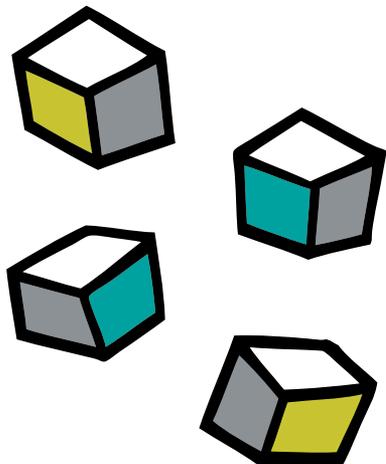
## Break the problem into **C**hunks

It's hard to stop doing something all at once, especially if you've been doing it for ages, so break it into easy chunks.

Let's say you feel you never see your friends outside of school. You could break the week into bits and make an effort to see them on Mondays, for example.

If you think you are spending too much time alone you could try watching TV with your family a couple of nights a week instead of sitting in your room. Why not phone your friends and have a conversation rather than texting? Or if you feel you're on social media or using apps too much, you could start by not checking it for an afternoon or a day.

Most problems can be chopped up like this, and you're much more likely to succeed when you do things bit by bit.



## 2. Consider

# Brainstorm ways to do the first piece

Grab a piece of paper and write down all the things you could do to work on the first bit of the problem.

To start seeing more of your friends, you could join an after school club that is held every Monday.

Spending too much time watching TV? You could get out one of those board games you like to play at vacation time as a family. Or ask a family member to play a sport with you. Or choose to chat about people's days as you eat in the evening.

Trying to cut down social media or apps? Leave your phone in another room. Or put it on silent for part of the day. Switch it off at a certain time in the evening.

The trick with brainstorming is to let your mind go, and write everything down—the weird things as well as the sensible ones.



Go to the movies  
Join a club  
Buy a book

Turn over for the last Cs

## 3. Choose

# Choose an idea and make a plan to do it

Look at your brainstorm ideas and pick one that looks do-able.

Now take another piece of paper and write down, step by step, how to actually **do** it.

Make the steps as small as you like: Get up. Get dressed. Walk to front door. Open door ... and so on.

OR

To see friends after school more: text a friend, look at activities you could do together, sign up for an after school club, invite someone to your new favourite coffee shop ... like that.

OR

For using social media less: leave your phone in the other room, forget your phone on purpose one day when you go to school, set your phone and computer up to block some social media sites.

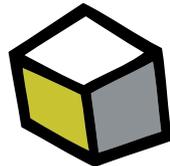
Make sure that the steps are small, straightforward and seem like things you could really do.

### What if something gets in the way?

As soon as you've written your plan, think about what could stop it happening. Is there anything that might trip you up? Could someone else be unhelpful at any stage?

When you know what could block your progress, make a mini-plan for getting round the block.

This way, you'll be ready for whatever happens!



## 4. Check

# Check the plan and put it into action

This is it! You've written down all the steps, now you need to check that they're do-able. Use the 5-tick test:

### Is it realistic?

You're not planning to run a marathon are you?

### Are you aiming at just one thing?

Don't try and do more than one item on your list. You can always pick another when you've sorted out the first one.

### Is it slow?

There's no need to rush at things. Your plan can take as long as you like, so long as you stick to it, step by step.

### Is it easy?

Make your steps small and easy and you'll be more likely to do them.

### Are you ready to unblock it?

Have you thought about what could go wrong and how to deal with it?

**Five checkmarks?** ✓✓✓✓✓

## Then go for it!

**NOW  
IT'S  
YOUR  
TURN!**

# Just take it step by step

Even a problem that seems huge can be tackled with the 4C Strategy. The secret is breaking everything down into small, manageable pieces.

When you're making your plan, be sure that the steps are small and do-able.

When you're doing your plan, take it step by step and if things get scary in the middle, give yourself a rest or a breather.

Then get back on track, taking one small step at a time until you've put your plan into action.

Be steady and determined, use the 4C Strategy and you **will** be able to stop doing the things that mess you up!

GO for it!

# WHERE TO GET MORE ADVICE AND SUPPORT

You might find you need more resources than this booklet can give.

Try contacting your local branch of the Canadian Mental Health Association. See [www.cmha.ca](http://www.cmha.ca)

You can also contact Kids Help Phone if you would like to talk to someone over the phone or online right away. See [www.kidshelpphone.ca](http://www.kidshelpphone.ca)

# Look out for these other resources



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**Canadian Mental  
Health Association**  
*Mental health for all*

The Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA) is the most established, most extensive community mental health organization in Canada. CMHA provides advocacy and resources that help to prevent mental health problems and illnesses, support recovery and resilience, and enable all Canadians to flourish and thrive. The CMHA network includes more than 11,000 volunteers and staff in over 330 communities across Canada.

### **About the author**

Dr. Chris Williams is a medical doctor and psychiatrist who also has a First Class Honours degree in Psychology. He is a widely recognized teacher and researcher in the area of cognitive-behavioural therapy self-help and works as a professor of psychiatry at the University of Glasgow, Scotland, UK.

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