

Distress Management Plan (D-MaP): Guidance Notes

Overview

The Distress Management Plan (D-MaP) is a resource to help someone experiencing distress begin to explore and make sense of their distress. The D-MaP will help the person identify what led to their distress, problem-solve key issues, and identify strategies to manage their distress.

These guidance notes will help you understand the D-MaP so that you feel prepared to introduce the D-MaP to someone in distress.

The D-MaP has three parts:

Part A: Current distress, concerns, and strengths

Part B: Problem solving and action planning

Part C: Strategies to manage and cope with distress

Who is the D-MaP for?

The D-MaP is for anyone experiencing distress.

It is designed to be as straightforward and intuitive to use, so it is accessible to all.

The D-MaP can be an invaluable self-management tool and can bring many benefits, so it is recommended you introduce the resource to anyone you respond to who is experiencing distress.

How can the D-MaP help a person experiencing distress?

The D-MaP focuses attention on different areas which can help a person to manage their distress. It breaks down some of the challenging or tricky parts of this process into manageable chunks so that it is less overwhelming.

Working through each part of the D-MaP will help a person to:

- begin to understand more about their distress and experiences
- identify triggers or warning signs
- pinpoint what key issues are contributing to distress
- identify what coping strategies work well and less well for them
- identify personally relevant solutions and actions.
- manage distress right now
- reduce the likelihood of distress in the future

It is important the person knows they own and are responsible for their D-MaP. It is their plan, and it will be developed by them to suit them.

How is it used?

The D-Map can be used to keep on top of important issues relevant to the person and their distress. It is also used to record any actions or plans the person decides upon.

The D-MaP is entirely person-centred. Therefore, there is no fixed way of developing it. Each D-MaP will be different and relevant only to that person's distress.

There are three parts which helps to keep the process simple and easy to follow. Some people may want to focus on different parts, and everyone will develop it at different paces.

What is my role in the D-MaP?

The D-MaP is designed to be straightforward, and it requires minimal guidance to use.

You may introduce the D-MaP to someone experiencing distress. The person may want to discuss it with you initially and then work on it themselves.

However, if it is within your role to do so, you may want to help the person develop the D-MaP. There is an annotated example of a D-MaP below which provides some tips for helping someone fill it in.

Some people may need more assistance than others. For example, if they have difficulty with reading and writing or are very distressed when you see them.

Whether you are introducing the D-MaP or taking an active role in helping to complete it please remember, it is key to take person-centred, collaborative, and compassionate approach.

Introducing the D-MaP

When introducing the D-MaP it is important to explain what it is and emphasise why it may be helpful.

Make it clear to the person in distress that this is their D-MaP. It is not simply a form to fill in. It is a resource developed by them to understand their distress and identify personally relevant solutions to manage their distress.

You can remind people that once they complete their D-MaP they can keep a copy and can add or change parts. They may want to review their D-MaP in the future as their experiences and plans change, or they may want to use it to track any progress towards their desired goals.

After introducing the D-MaP, and if it is within your role to do so, let the person know that you can help them to develop and use it.

Using tools and handouts to help with the D-MaP

The handouts and tools you can access through the Recognising and Responding to Distress module can be used to help develop parts of the D-MaP.

Sharing information with other relevant services or individuals

Some individuals may find it helpful to involve other services or people when developing or using their D-MaP, such as a parent, partner, or support service. Others may feel it would be helpful to share a copy of their completed D-MaP with those in their support network.

It is important to remember that individuals you are engaging with have not given consent **for you** to share information (including their D-MaP) with other individuals or services in their life.

However, you may feel it is appropriate to let the person know that they can share their D-MaP themselves if they think this would be helpful. At each stage of responding to someone in distress, the individual should be fully informed to enable them to make the best decision they can about whether they would like to involve others in their D-MaP.

Next steps...

You may want to try role playing introducing the D-MaP to a colleague. If it is within your role, you can practice helping a colleague develop the D-MaP too.

Role-playing is a good way of practicing, and it can help you feel more comfortable when it comes to a real interaction.

You can access a blank copy of the D-MaP on the dbi.scot website. You may want to print some copies to have easily to hand for when you are responding to someone in distress.

My Distress Management Plan (D-MaP)

This page introduces the D-MaP and reminds the person it is their plan, and they have ownership of it. When introducing the D-MaP you can use this page to remind the person of the benefits of using a D-MaP. Draw the person's attention to how to make the most of their D-MaP.

This is your Distress Management Plan. It belongs to you.

NAME

John

DATE

The Distress Management Plan is a resource to help you begin to explore and make sense of your distress. Using it can help you identify the reasons for your distress, problem-solve some of the issues that have contributed to your distress and identify ways of helping you to manage your distress now and in the longer term.

To make the most of your Distress Management Plan you may wish to:

- ✓ use the D-MaP on your own or ask someone else to look at it with you
- ✓ keep your D-MaP in a safe place where you can easily access it when you want to. Some people like to have a printed copy. Others prefer to have a copy available on their phone, computer, or tablet
- ✓ share it with someone who supports you, such as a friend, parent, partner, or support service.
- ✓ update it or make changes in future

My Distress Management Plan (D-MaP)

PART A: What led to me feeling distressed?

Part A addresses the person's current experience of distress. You can use some of the empathetic engagement skills learned in the Recognising and Responding to Distress module to help the person understand some of the issues and experiences that led to their distress.

What things led to me feeling distressed recently?

My Emotions

I feel hopeless

Family or Relationships

I have been arguing with my wife

Other concerns...

I drink too much alcohol

D-MaP tip: Thinking about different issues that play a role in the person's distress can help the person understand more about their own personal experience of distress. It may also help them to identify some of their triggers or warning signs and possible solutions.

Practical

(for example housing, money...)

I have money worries

Physical

(for example pain, illness...)

I live with chronic pain

D-MaP tip: Encourage the person to fill in the boxes that are relevant to them. They don't need to fill in every box and they can add more than one issue to each box if they need to. Remember this is a person-centred plan so everyone will have a different way of filling it in that is suited to them.

My Distress Management Plan (D-MaP)

PART A: What led to me feeling distressed?

This part of the D-MaP encourages the person to think of different assets and strengths they have available to them.

What has helped me in the past to manage in similar circumstances?

Family, friends, support services

I talk to my sister about how I am feeling

I regularly attend a chronic pain support group

Other...

I write down a budget to help me manage my money for the week

Activities

I enjoy playing video games

Coping Strategies

I use a mobile app to listen to mindfulness meditation

D-MaP tip: Try to encourage the person to avoid coping behaviours that are unhelpful and could make circumstances worse, such as gambling or drinking alcohol.

D-MaP tip: If someone has never experienced similar circumstances before, then you can encourage them to consider how they have managed with other challenges in the past. Could these strategies help now?

D-MaP tip: Strategies can be big or small and can range from taking part in a hobby they enjoy to receiving care or support from professional services. Take a compassionate approach and remember what helps one person may not help someone else.

My Distress Management Plan (D-MaP)

PART A: What led to me feeling distressed?

Background information

When I have bad physical pain, I drink alcohol to cope. When I am drunk, my emotions overwhelm me. I worry about money, and I start to argue with my wife. I feel hopeless so stop attending my support group.

D-MaP tip: Writing down background information helps to understand the whole picture. In certain cases, the cause of distress may not be obvious. Considering background information could help to unpick the issues and contributing factors.

D-MaP tip: What care or support services is the person engaged in? Could this service help now or in the future?

Please rate the number (0-10) distress you are currently experiencing.

Please put the number in the box.

0 = No distress
10 = Extreme distress

Have you felt suicidal or harmed yourself recently?

Yes / No / Unsure

Do you receive care or support from any service?

I attend a chronic pain peer support group

D-MaP tip: Rating current distress (0-10) is a good entry point for discussion. Make it clear you are not trying to reduce the person's distress to a number but rating distress in this way can be useful to think about how their distress may change over time

D-MaP tip: It is important to ask about suicide/self-harm. You can refer back to the Recognising and Responding to Distress module Handout: Identifying & Exploring Distress to help you introduce this discussion. If the person is experiencing thoughts about suicide or self-harm, it may be appropriate to assist in developing a safety plan. A safety plan and guidance notes are available as part of Recognising and Responding to Distress practical tools accessible via the dbi.scot website

My Distress Management Plan (D-MaP)

PART B: What I can do to help prevent me from feeling distressed?

Part B covers problem-solving and planning activities to make changes that will reduce the likelihood of experiencing distress now and in the future

Problems and challenges

What are the main things in my life that add to my distress?

D-MaP tip: Try to focus the person's attention on key issues, obstacles, and challenges in their life

- When my chronic pain is bad, I start to drink alcohol
- I hate arguing with my wife
- I am worried about the cost-of-living

Solutions

How to improve things...

D-MaP tip: Ask the person to consider solutions that are directly relevant to their key problems and challenges

- ~~If I win the lottery all my problems would be solved~~
- If I reduce my alcohol intake, my emotions will not feel so overwhelming. I will be less likely to argue with my wife and I will save money.
- Regularly attending my support group will help me cope with my chronic pain

D-MaP tip: Try to encourage the person to think of solutions that are realistic. Solutions such as the first example are not helpful and, for most people, unachievable

My Distress Management Plan (D-MaP)

PART B: What I can do to help prevent me from feeling distressed?

D-Map tip: Ask the person to consider realistic changes or actions that could help to reduce/manage distress? If it is too challenging, can it be simplified?

D-MaP tip: Is their overall goal relevant to their key problems and challenges?

ACTION PLAN

My overall goal is:

Reduce my alcohol intake

What will I do?

I will buy less alcohol as part of my weekly shop

I will attend my support group which will help me better manage my pain

How will I do it?

I will ask my sister to drive me to my chronic pain support group

I will play video games and listen to my mindfulness meditation instead of going to the pub

I will budget for less alcohol in my shopping list

D-MaP tip: Try to encourage the person to make their plan as specific and detailed as possible.

Where will I do it?

I will do it at home, and the supermarket

When will I do it?

On a Sunday morning and a Tuesday evening

D-MaP tip: Ask the person if they have time in their schedule to work towards this goal? What day of the week will they do it? What time?

D-MaP tip: People are often at different stages of readiness to make a change. It is important to ask whether the person is feeling motivated, and confident that the actions they have set out are achievable. If they are not, try to encourage the person to break the goal down into smaller more manageable chunks.

D-MaP tip: Is the goal measurable? You can ask the person how they are going to keep track of progress. For example, some people like to assign checkpoints they can come back to over time

My Distress Management Plan (D-MaP)

PART C: What I can do when I am beginning to feel distressed...

Part C helps the person to consider and recognise early warning signs and have relevant coping and support options worked out in advance.

Triggers

What things lead me to become distressed?

Worrying about money

Chronic pain

Arguing with my wife

Support

If I feel like I need support, I can speak to or contact...

my sister

my chronic pain
peer support group

Breathing Space

Warning Signs

What do I think about? How am I feeling? How am I behaving?

I start to drink too
much alcohol

Coping Plans

What will I do if I think that I might become distressed? (If X, then I will Y)

If I start to feel my pain
getting worse, I will engage
in my mindfulness
meditation

D-MaP tip: Ideally, these would be things that are easily accessible regardless of location or time of day.

