



# COUNSELLING AND PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES BULLETIN

Issue 6

## MESSAGE FROM THE HEAD OF DEPARTMENT

**“Sometimes asking for help is the bravest move you can make.”**  
(Anonymous)

University life offers myriad opportunities for students to gain new experiences including making new friends and living independently to name a few. However, for some students, university life brings its own set of challenges.

Living away from home and managing the stresses of adult life can make students vulnerable to different emotional and mental health struggles. Triggers that may result in the onset of mental health distress for students include study and work pressure, relationship and financial difficulties, homesickness, bullying, and loneliness.

The point to be emphasised here is that you are not alone and that you should not suffer in silence; there is help available both on campus and externally. We, at CAPS, continue to support around 200 of our students on a weekly basis with our individual therapy services both in-person and online, and our numerous initiatives that include, but are not limited to, workshops, support groups, webinars, guest speaker talks, bulletins and social media. Our Instagram and Facebook pages are aimed at helping our wider student community who may be going through mental health difficulties.

However, the first step in accessing help is that you are “willing to ask” – and we are here to listen and help. We, at CAPS, invite you to reach out to us by dropping us an email on [student.counselling@lums.edu.pk](mailto:student.counselling@lums.edu.pk).

Best wishes,  
**Dr. Tahira Haider**

## PROBLEM SOLVING

SABEEN KHAN

Before you start trying to solve a problem, there are a few things you need to consider.

### The Right Set-Up

When you decide to adopt the problem-solving strategy recommended here to deal with problems in your life, you need to give yourself the best chance of doing it well. Consider setting up the activity of problem-solving by doing the following:



### Give yourself some ‘thinking time’:

Problem-solving takes energy and concentration, and isn’t something that can be done on the run. You will need to give it the time and attention it deserves to gain the most benefit. Your ‘thinking time’ as part of worry postponement is a great time to do it.

### One by one:

Make sure you deal with one problem at a time. Don’t try to find solutions to everything all at once, as the quality of your solutions will suffer. To help you with this, stick to your



‘thinking time’ limit. If there is more to be done, you can always revisit it the next day.

### Pen it down:

Finally, make sure you tackle a problem on paper, that is, write it down. Don’t try and solve problems in your head. You will find that things get too cluttered when you try to hold a number of things in your head at one time. Many things will become clearer when putting pen to paper.

### Is There a Problem?

This is something you need to ask yourself before launching into problem-solving. Is there actually a problem that requires solving? Whatever it is you are worrying about ask yourself:

- Is it a real and likely problem I am concerned about?
- Is the problem something happening now?
- Is the problem something I have some control over?

If the problem you are worried about is an unrealistic and unlikely prediction of the future, of which you have little control over,

then although it might appear that the problem is “real”, it is not an actual problem that requires action. In these cases, continue to use postponement and your attention training exercises to assist you in ‘letting go’ of the worry. However, if it is a real problem in the here-and-now that you can do something about, then using problem-solving strategies may be a useful way to deal with the problem.

There are 6 steps to effective problem-solving. Let’s use an example to go through each of these steps.

### Step 1: Identify/Define the Problem

Try to state the problem as clearly as possible. Be objective and specific about the behaviour, situation, timing, and circumstances that make it a problem. Describe the problem in terms of what you can observe rather than subjective feelings.

### Step 2: Generate Possible Solutions/Options

List all the possible solutions. Be creative and forget about the quality of the solutions. If you allow yourself to be creative, you may come up with some options that you would not otherwise have thought of.

#### Preferred Solutions/Options

Now eliminate the less desirable or unreasonable alternatives only after as many possible solutions have

been listed. Then, list the remaining options in order of preference.

### Step 3: Evaluate Alternatives

Evaluate the top three or four plans in terms of their advantages and disadvantages

### Step 4: Decide On A Plan

Decide on one, two, or more of the plans. Specify who will take action, when the plan will be implemented and how the plan will be implemented.

### Step 5: Implement Plan

Implement your plan as specified above.

### Step 6: Evaluate the Outcome

Evaluate how effective the plan was. Decide whether the existing plan needs to be revised, or whether a new plan is needed to better address the problem. If you are not pleased with the outcome, return to Step 2 to select a new option or revise the existing plan, and repeat the remaining steps.

## WHY DO WE BEHAVE THE WAY WE DO IN RELATIONSHIPS?

ANUSHAY KHAN

Why are some people very aloof and unattached in their relationships, while others seem clingy and need constant validation?

According to attachment theory (Ainsworth & Bowlby, 1950s), it is because different people have different attachment styles. A person’s attachment style is their specific way of relating to others in relationships. It is shaped and developed in early childhood in response to our relationships with our earliest caregivers. In essence, our attachment style is the way we respond emotionally to others.

Below are the four main adult attachment styles (and how they are formed):

**1) Secure attachment:** the ability to form secure loving relationships with others, not being afraid of intimacy and not feeling panicked when one’s partner needs time or space away from them; the ability to depend on oneself first and foremost in any relationship (formed when the earliest caregivers,



usually mothers, are responsive and attuned to their child’s needs).

**2) Anxious attachment:** marked by a deep fear of abandonment; often worrying that one’s partner will leave them; always needing external validation, e.g. getting anxious when one’s partner does not text back fast enough (formed when caregivers are inconsistent and unpredictable with their affections; sometimes being overly involved and intermittently withdrawn).

**3) Avoidant attachment:** having trouble getting close to people or trusting others in relationships; preferring not to rely on one’s partner and staying emotionally unavailable (formed when caregivers are not responsive and are often dismissive and distant).

**4) Fearful-avoidant (AKA disorganised) attachment:** difficulty in regulating emotions (seemingly running “hot and cold”) in relationships, high levels of risk-taking, impulsive and unpredictable behaviour (formed when the caregiver is frightening or traumatising, leading the child to feel a deep sense of fear and a lack of trust in others, despite wanting close connections; often there is confusion about what a healthy relationship looks like).

The latter three are all considered forms of insecure attachment.

It should also be noted that significant relationships throughout one’s life also shape the attachment style, for instance, a person can have a secure attachment during childhood, but betrayal and infidelity in adulthood can lead to an insecure attachment.

The good news is that it is possible for a person to change their attachment style. However, it takes a lot of insight, awareness, patience, and intention. Some steps that can make this process easier include (Gonsalves, 2021):

**a) Identifying your relationship patterns:** Start by thinking about your relationship with your parents as a child. You can ask yourself questions like: ‘how were they towards me and how did I respond to them?’, ‘To whom did I go to for comfort when I had a problem?’ And remain aware of any similar patterns that arise while choosing romantic partners.



**b) Work on your self-esteem:** Learn to embrace, value, and care for yourself first. You can start with self-tolerance and self-neutrality. Instead of jumping to “I’m beautiful and valuable” (which you are!), you can use statements such as “I’m a person and everyone deserves to be valued,” to start off.

**c) Get in touch with your real needs:** Be aware of what your needs and desires are in relationships. Learn to be assertive and set boundaries. Honour what you feel and express your needs in words without manipulation and hidden meanings. Securely attached people are often direct and appropriately confrontational to create healthy and meaningful relationships.

**d) Don’t be afraid to seek therapy:** This will help you to dive into your attachment style, past wounds, identify values and establish appropriate boundaries.

## LETTER TO YOUR FUTURE SELF

NIDA ZAFAR

Often during the decision-making process, individuals are making tradeoffs between their present as well as future selves. Frequently these tradeoffs impact the individual as thoughts about the future affect present decisions leading to delayed consequences. These thoughts not only originate in big problems but are also part of the small every day decisions like whether you should spend the money or save it, and eat the dessert or control your diet. These choices would lead to better results if we were to understand our future selves. Individuals often tend to think about their future self as if that’s someone else, leading to us disassociating with the life of the future self.

So to make better choices with short term as well as long term benefits, it is crucial to empathise with and



own our future self. Some ways to accomplish this goal are as follows:

**Psychological Continuity:** Psychological Continuity refers to the perception of connectedness between our two selves. This can be maintained when we continue with our core identities such as values, principles, and life goals for the present selves onto the future self. The more you identify with your future self, the more you are able to make healthier choices for it.

**Imagination:** It is important that you can create a realistic image of yourself in the future. The image not only helps you make more concrete and healthy choices but also is a sign of emotional maturity to be

able to see yourself in the future. Sit with yourself and construct where you want to be in the future and visualise this future. Another way to help yourself imagine the future is to spend some time with people from older generations like your parents and grandparents.

**Small Steps:** Take small steps for your future self each day. This way the sacrifices for your future self are less burdensome. For instance, you could save Rs50 everyday instead of Rs1,500 every month. This also helps us stay connected with the future in our daily lives.

## SOCIAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS

AFRAH ARSHAD

Social communication skills are used to communicate with others daily in a variety of ways including verbal (spoken language), nonverbal (body language, facial expressions, and eye contact), written, and visual. Any time you interact with another person, you're using social skills in some way. Communication in this area includes interaction with peers, family members, providers, and educators.

Social communication skills are needed for language expression and comprehension in both spoken and written modalities. Spoken and written language skills allow for effective communication in a variety of social contexts and for a variety of purposes. Understanding and improving your social skills can benefit you in every area of life.

**Benefits of social skills:** There are several advantages of having well-developed social skills for both your personal and professional relationships. With solid social skills, you increase your chances to:

- Communicate your needs and wants clearly and effectively
- Have better—and potentially more—relationships
- Navigate tricky social situations
- Be considered for career opportunities
- Feel happier

**Advantages to your career:** Developing your social skills benefits your career. Social skills allow you the opportunity to:

- Gain ideas, information, techniques and perspectives from people with different areas of expertise
- Provide your own perspective for the benefit of others
- Accomplish tasks and collaborate with others towards shared goals



- Provide mutual support for difficult or hard-to-navigate situations
- Expand your network to learn about and pursue new opportunities
- Get personalised feedback and referrals

### Essential Social Communication Skills:

#### Effective communication

The ability to communicate effectively with others is a core social skill. If you have strong communication skills, you'll be able to share your thoughts and ideas clearly with others. Effective communicators make good leaders because they can explain projects and goals in an easy to understand way.



### Active listening

Active listening is the ability to pay close attention to a person who is communicating with you. Active listeners are typically well-regarded due to the attention and respect they offer others. You can increase your listening skills by focusing on the speaker, avoiding distractions, and waiting to prepare your response only after the other person is finished rather than while they are speaking.

### Empathy

Empathy is the ability to understand and identify with the feelings of another person. If you have empathy, others will be more likely to confide in you. Being more empathetic takes a conscious effort to carefully consider how others feel. If you strengthen your empathy and rapport with others, you can build stronger, more respectful and open relationships.

### Relationship management

Relationship management is the ability to maintain healthy relationships and build key connections. These skills help to nurture the relationship between your organisation and a specific set of clients. This social skill allows professional relationships to flourish and all parties involved can benefit.

### Respect

A key aspect of respect is knowing when and how to initiate communication and respond. In a team or group setting, allowing others to speak without interruption is a necessary communication skill that shows respect. Respectfully communicating can also mean using your time with someone else wisely—staying on topic, asking clear questions and responding fully to any questions you've been asked.

## STILLNESS IS THE KEY

BUSHRA AKRAM

Slowness and stillness is a great help to your mind in making fruitful decisions. It helps you live in the present, preventing you from straying into the past or future. It is also beneficial in helping one to cut down mental distractions.



One way to pursue stillness is journaling, about which Ryan Holiday said, "This is what the best journals look like. They aren't for the reader. They are for the writer. To slow the mind down. To wage peace with oneself."

Regardless of the time, place and medium, journaling is important. It distances you from the problem and helps you to reflect on it.



Staying in the present is a gateway to build confidence. This is a secret to deliver presentations, speech or to interact with the audience confidently. You neither have to worry about the future nor force yourself to achieve

a successful outcome – you only have to stay in the present and deliver your work at hand.

Similarly, those who learn to approach stillness and slow their minds learn to manage their anger as they take time to respond to anyone's arrogance. In this fast-paced world where we are constantly bombarded by content through the media, everyone wants to achieve more wealth, degrees, or other goals

and associated happiness with it. However, being still and slow gives one the power to develop associations with one's internal space where actual happiness resides.

Moreover, it is important to acknowledge that life is not simply about overworking oneself to the point of sleep deprivation.

Taking rest and having naps helps you carry out your tasks more effectively. Nonetheless, be aware of the phenomenon of escapism in which people opt for drugs to numb their pain or help them cope – such behaviour calls for immediate change.



# FALSE MEMORIES

MAHA IFTIKHAR

The field of Psychology has always been interested in studying the formation of memories. When we study cognition, memory is one of the most important parts. It carries a lot of importance because it is involved in almost every aspect of cognition including attention, decision making, perception, and problem solving.

False memories are misinterpreted recollection of events or, strictly speaking, recollection of an event that never happened in the first place. It could be an entirely imaginary fabrication rooted in little truth. However, false memories are obscured from simple errors in recollection. Individuals often have this subjective feeling that they are experiencing a genuine recollection, loaded with sensory details, often expressed with emotions and confidence, even though the event never happened.

Some interesting examples are:

- Falsely remembering that you had submitted an assignment but, you did not.
- Believing that you locked your car before leaving the parking lot.
- Incorrectly remembering that you replied to your friend's text, only to find out later that you did not.

The question here is: what causes false memories? Research has told us that it could be because of retroactive interference which is described as a distortion of the memory of an actual event by the new information. These distortions can be seen in daily life too as they can be generated by leading questions or photographs that can create the strong impression that an individual has experienced a specific event. An example of this could be of an adult

who may believe that they had visited a place as a child after seeing a picture of that place.

Moreover, when an eyewitness of an event is questioned immediately after the event, the memorial representation of what just happened could be altered significantly. Leading questions are asked in a way to suggest an expected answer. However, research has told us that sleep deprivation also markedly impairs the retrieval of stored recollections.

False memory syndrome is a condition in which an individual's relationships and identity are impacted by factually inaccurate recollections which are, nonetheless, heartily believed. This condition may result from the controversial recovered memory therapy which uses different strategies such as guided imagery, hypnosis, and sedative-hypnotic drugs to help clients recover their forgotten memories which are presumably buried in their subconscious mind.

To conclude, while it may be difficult, everyone has some false memories. It is accurate to say that our memories are not as reliable as we think they are. False memories can easily be formed, even among those who are likely to have good memories otherwise.



# MALADAPTIVE BEHAVIOURS

ADAM KURESHI

Adaptive behaviours involve making conscious and effortful decisions to solve problems or mitigate unwanted outcomes. These may include doing things we do not want to or finding ways around a problem to adjust to the circumstances. On the other hand, maladaptive behaviours hinder us from adapting to challenging life circumstances. They usually result from major life upheavals i.e., illness and/or trauma. Moreover, they may be assimilated from our environment at an early age.

These behaviours can be non-conductive for us and cause many dysfunctions in various domains of life (i.e., social, occupational, health, etc.). One could say that maladaptive behaviours arise as life expectations



are thwarted. Furthermore, setbacks in life may lead to decisions that may seem fruitful in the short run yet have drastic long-term consequences resulting in a great deal of emotional distress. Common types of maladaptive behaviours include avoidance, withdrawal, passive-aggressiveness, self-harm, anger, substance use, and maladaptive daydreaming.

Avoidance and withdrawal involve adopting behavioural patterns that actively avoid unpleasant or uncomfortable situations - especially where individuals may not have control. Though sometimes leaving a situation may have the best possible outcome. However, on becoming a habit it may be warranted as maladaptive. As they may take away any chance of learning to deal with the problem in the future. Individuals with social anxiety may feel extremely uncomfortable in public interactions thus making themselves scarce to avoid discomfort. However, this only makes their condition worse as their brain interprets it as an optimal strategy and does nothing to improve their coping skills.

Another maladaptive coping strategy is passive aggression where individuals tend to express their displeasure indirectly. This usually results in a lot of confusion as people may say one thing and mean another. Suppose you are cross at a friend and instead of talking to or confronting them you behave in ways that may suggest otherwise. These behaviours may lead to secondary or displaced behaviours while the primary issue remains unresolved; for instance, unrelated complaining or externalised aggression at others or inanimate objects.

Furthermore, behaviours such as cutting, scratching, or burning the skin; picking scabs/wounds; hair pulling (eyebrows or eyelashes); self-hitting; refusal to take medications all fall in the category of self-harm. They may provide short-term relief but overall exacerbate the problem and may even prove to be detrimental to one's health eventually. Similarly, anger is a normal emotion to have and can be utilised constructively to preserve boundaries for yourself or your loved ones. However, uncontrolled anger may take the shape of outbursts and make things worse. Contrary to what some may believe, uncontrolled anger interferes with communication and can leave you feeling alienated. Think of a child throwing a tantrum as they try to communicate their needs to an adult. Fortunately, they soon grow out of this behaviour to find more effective ways of communicating as they learn that tantrums do not convey a clear message.

Alcohol and drug abuse (prescribed or non-prescribed) are forms of avoidance behaviours that may help ease distress in the short term. However, this form of escape can lead to other conditions such as addiction - which creates another set of problems. Additionally, sexually maladaptive behaviours can be detrimental and include engaging in unprotected sexual activity, putting oneself in unsafe circumstances, doing things you do not want to, and even sexual aggression. Interestingly enough, daydreaming is considered a healthy pastime that can free your mind and help in problem-solving - yet it becomes maladaptive if we extensively start engaging in fantasy.

Primarily, when we think of the reasons behind maladaptive behaviours, research suggests that these stem from life patterns that may include non-conducive circumstances or health issues that may have hampered one from learning or acquiring adequate adaptive/coping skills. Additionally, evidence suggests that trauma and sexual abuse in childhood are correlated to a great degree with self-harm, substance abuse, and unsafe sexual behaviours. Moreover, genetics and developmental factors may also have a modest role in the formation of maladaptive behaviours. Individuals with anxiety or fear may be prone to developing avoidance behaviours, which in the long run, decreases the threshold for future distress tolerance.

Fortunately, maladaptive behaviours can be changed to make way for more productive ones. Knowledge of these maladaptive behaviours

is the first part of the task. This can enable us to become more aware and recognise these patterns before venturing on the path to recovery. Once we become mindful of these behaviors, we can be in a more ready state to begin the journey for conscious

**HELPFUL**

change, to supplant these behaviours with more adaptive ones. However, it may take some time and practice, along with the possible chance of uncovering underlying psychological conditions (that may require professional help i.e., therapy or counseling). Consistency is key, and keeping an open mind about actively seeking help will prove beneficial as well.

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