



What's the best thing to do when...

Relevant to: Depression: Anxiety: Irritability/Anger: General emotional control:

In a range of situations, from severe to trivial, this is a terrific question to ask - and to act on.

In this section we look at a very powerful question. Namely, what is the best thing to do when a particular thing happens? This is a much more important question than at first sight seems. Those who know relatively little about psychology tend to ask: 'Why do I think this way?' or 'What is it in my background that has led me to be like this?' or other similar questions that don't really lead to a productive answer. The question 'What is the best thing to do when....' on the other hand, utilises all the benefits of behavioural psychology to the full. If you ask this question, and answer it well, then you will be doing yourself a great service.



For example...

'What's the best thing to do if I'm in a supermarket queue and can hardly bear to wait? Your answers might include:

- (a) Leave my shopping trolley and run out.
- (b) Look around me, engross myself in things I can see and what people are doing.
- (c) Go to another queue, and then maybe another one, hoping they might be quicker than mine.

Again, you can see the power of your choice.

Another example...

might be where you ask yourself the question: 'What is the best thing to do when I have to walk into a room full of people I hardly know, and I feel like not doing this?' Your answers might include:

- (a) Deciding not to go into the room, after all if you don't want to go in why should you?
- (b) Realising that everybody in the room is a perfectly good human being, and therefore to walk in as though you are pleased to be there, and walk straight up to anybody that is on their own or any group that looks as though it would accept a new member, and join in.
- (c) Grit your teeth and get on with it, just walk in and do whatever has to be done.

Again, which option you choose will clearly have a big result for you.



Or another question...

you might ask is: 'What is the best thing to do when I feel as though I simply can't stand the emotional turmoil I am feeling right at this moment?' Your answers might include:

- (a) I could drink myself silly.
- (b) Phone somebody up, in particular phone up one of three people who always have good advice to give and always seem to understand the situation.
- (c) Go on the internet, get into your favourite chat room, and get talking about things.
- (d) I could text a couple of people.

Again, how you choose to answer this question and how you choose to act on your answer will have huge benefits.

Or another is...

you might ask yourself: What is the best thing to do when I wake up in the morning and I feel life has no point to it; I feel that it is impossible to get out of bed and there is nothing worthwhile doing even if I did so. Your answers might include:

- (a) Lie in bed, reflecting upon the nature of life, the nature of human suffering, and why on earth one would wish to interact with life anyway.
- (b) Realise that maybe your current state is due to overwork, and therefore to lie and rest in bed completely - free, relaxed, enjoying the experience.
- (c) Make yourself get out of bed, have some breakfast, and plan your day with things you consider worthwhile.

Clearly, which option you choose will have huge ramifications for you.

These examples illustrate that "What's the best thing to do when ..." is a key question to ask. So when should you ask it? Answer: Whenever you feel in distress. It doesn't matter whether that distress is 'depression', panic, worry, or anything else. Whenever you feel your distress levels rise, this is a very good question to ask. If you can produce a good answer and, moreover, act on the answer, then you will have done yourself a terrific service. Furthermore, you don't have to be very distressed to ask it - it's always an excellent question.

In session...

Decide what the best answers are to the four questions above. Your tutor may have already done this with you but, if not, do it now. If you want to make notes, here is some space.

Project...

The obvious project following on from this input is to ask yourself the key 'What is the best thing to do when...' question at key moments in the next week. If you can ask the question, produce good answers, and, above all, act on those answers, then you will be doing yourself a massive service. If you want to make notes, here is some space:

TIP: The best answers are ones you can actually do. There is no virtue in producing massively ambitious things you might do, if you know deep down that you never will!