

Case study 2 – Ken Radford

Ken retired from an accountancy job a year ago and since then has become quite depressed. He was probably mildly depressed for the last ten years, but since retiring it has become a lot worse. Ken divorced more than 20 years ago. He is not concerned about his failed marriage and is not particularly interested in finding a new partner.

He is a devoted father but since his sons all live in a different city he hardly ever sees them, and misses them terribly. He is concerned that they will continue to live far away, and that this will mean that he will not be able to see his grandchildren very often when they eventually make an appearance. This makes him feel like he is missing out even more (even though they're not even born yet). He spends a lot of time lying awake at night fretting about this.

Ken stopped going to church when he divorced as many of the people they knew from church at that time were his wife's friends. The divorce is now ancient history and he knows he could go back with no social awkwardness if he wanted to. He has a few good friends but is very tired and feels down all the time, so hardly ever sees them although he misses their company. He spends several hours a day helping his elderly parents, who are in a rest home. They are both very frail and suffer from dementia. Ken knows they will die within the next few years and he is emotionally prepared for their passing, but worries that he will become much more depressed when visiting them is no longer a regular 'purpose' in his life.

Ken used to be a keen chess player. He is quite interested in using the internet more as he likes the idea of video-chatting with his sons and playing chess online, but lacks confidence. Although his sons love him and call him often, his self-confidence has gone down and he feels like a visit would only be burdensome for them. He also worries that navigating airports would be overwhelming (although he used to fly quite a bit).

Over the last ten years he has put on a lot of weight and has stopped exercising because of it. He used to be a hill-walker and would still like to be able to walk to the shops, walk around the local park, and so on. He is a very caring man and would like to use his skills to volunteer somehow. He has worked his whole life and feels 'useless' now that he doesn't have a paid job.

Ken Radford

Need	Where I am now	Score	I'd like to be...	Steps I can take	I'll have got there when...
1 Attention	I give/get some attention from my sons but they live far away so I hardly ever see them. I'd be a burden to them if I visited, I'd get in their way. I see my elderly parents every day to care for them - but they are very frail and cannot support me emotionally.	3	I'd like to be seeing my sons more regularly. I'd like to be spending more time with my cousins and old friends, but caring for my parents takes most of my energy. I am tired all the time.	Now: Try to see one old friend in particular who lives quite near but who also has aging parents and grown up children. Later: When I start feeling better I will start trying to go and visit my boys for a weekend. They always tell me I'm welcome to stay, I need to get past this feeling I'm a burden. It's an example of my black and white thinking. Keep seeing more friends. Future: Regularly visit my sons or fly them down to spend a weekend with me. See my friends regularly.	When I have more energy to get through the day, when I can spend face to face time with friends.
2 Mind/body	I don't exercise because I am overweight and my body feels sore all the time, and I have no energy. I sleep badly.	2	Able to easily walk to the shops and the rest home (only 10 mins away). I always drive now but I'd like to be able to walk short distances. I am only 66 and I used to be a great walker - I used to climb mountains. I'd like to be able to walk happily around the local park without feeling sore. I want to sleep well and feel rested when I wake up.	Start walking to the shops and take the bus home. Build up to walking my short distances such as to my parents. Start eating well so I lose weight and feel better. Listen to my relaxing tapes once a day so I properly calm down, which will help me sleep properly.	When short walks are easier. When my body feels good again all the time from eating and sleeping well.
3 Security	I don't have concerns about this.	10			.
4 Community	I don't feel part of the community at all, and I'm not making a contribution anywhere other than looking after my parents.	4	I used to be involved with the local church before I was divorced and my boys were young, which I did like. I could use my training as an accountant to volunteer at a community organisation. I'd like to feel I am part of a wider community and am giving something to the community. Just seeing my parents everyday is not enough.	Now: I could start attending one church service a week. Later: When I feel like I have started to know people there again, I could see what volunteering I could do there. I remember from 20 years ago there were lots of projects. Future: Join a committee or club and be involved in it.	When I don't feel so lonely anymore.
5 Challenge	I do not challenge myself creatively at all, although I used to really enjoy chess with my friends and sons. When I went hiking as a younger man I enjoyed being in nature.	4	Playing chess again, maybe learning a new hobby, walking again but not up hills.	Now: Start playing chess with a friend who lives nearby. We could do it a few times and see if we enjoy it. I could get my son to show me how to play chess on the internet because then I can play with him. Start walking short distances again. Later: Possibly go to one of those free computing classes with other older people to find out what else I can do on there.	When I enjoy playing chess again or walking and enjoying myself properly.

Ken Radford - continued

Need	Where I am now	Score	I'd like to be...	Steps I can take	I'll have got there when...
6 Intimacy	Not very intimate with anyone. I'm worried that when my sons have children they will be too far away for me to spend time with my grandchildren. I am not especially close to my parents now and as they are so ill I don't want them to worry about me.	5	Enjoying time with my friends, seeing my sons regularly. I'd like to feel the future will not get even bleaker.	Now: See my sons for a weekend so I can prove to myself that taking the plane etc is not too hard and see that they really are happy to see me. Start seeing my old friend for chess. Later: Arrange to do something with my old colleagues from work as some of them have also just recently retired. Talk candidly to my friend who also has elderly parents about how hard I find it as I know he won't judge me.	When I have moments where I feel connected to people again.
7 Control	I don't feel very in control of my life because I know when my parents die (which will be soon) I will be even more depressed as I won't have something to do everyday and I will be even lonelier. Although they are not the same as they used to be, I will miss them terribly.	3	I'd like to have a positive retirement, where I enjoy time with my family and have a fun life.	Now: I need to do my relaxation exercises so that I can calm down and stop worrying about the future so much. I do realise that a lot of my 'sickness' like feeling aches and pains and poor sleeping is from depression and from becoming overweight and both of those things can be temporary.	When I feel like I have control over my own life, and act like I do.
8 Status	I don't feel I have much of a sense of status. I used to at work, and as a parent, but now I'm retired and my boys are grown, I don't any more.	4	I'd like to feel like a needed father again. I'd like to feel like I'm needed for something. I feel bad that I'm not working any more and helping the community - this is the first time I've not worked since I was a teenager.	Now: Stop my black and white thinking that my sons don't need me, as they do often call me and ask for advice on things like work. Later: Look into volunteering options at the church to give back to the community. Tell myself that unpaid work is still valuable. Future: Reflect on how I am helping people through this volunteer work and being a parent. Realise that when I have proved to myself I can visit my sons I'll feel better about one day being a grandfather.	When I don't feel so useless and like I'm draining from society anymore.
9 Meaning	I feel useless now. Before I retired I felt my purpose was my work and when my boys were growing up my purpose was being a parent, but now I feel I have almost no purpose other than looking after my parents.	1	I'd like to have things to look forward to, instead of just caring everyday and being tired and sick all the time.	Generally start building a life outside of my parents with church involvement, chess games, seeing friends, visiting my family. This is what I'm missing.	When the future seems bright instead of even worse than today.

Mark's commentary on Ken's situation

It would be easy to assume that Ken – 'deep down' – really does want a partner, but it's often a mistake to make this kind of assumption. The need for intimacy does vary from person to person, and it can be met through friendships and family connections, not just through romantic partnerships. If he says it is not a priority for him, then we should take him at his word.

But it seems clear that many of Ken's primal emotional needs remain unfulfilled, and this is likely what precipitated his current depression. His need for safety and security has been thwarted by his fear and worry that he'll lose his purpose for being once his frail parents pass away. We'd need to help him build his life in such a way that he feels more connected to his other family members and wider community, and also feels useful and valuable. It's telling that he became more depressed after he retired. It really seems that he needs to feel useful again, not a 'burden'. He's lost – or shall we say 'misplaced' – the confidence he once had in traveling, and we could usefully talk with him about what steps are needed to travel successfully and comfortably. We might even have him mentally rehearse, while he is relaxed, travelling successfully and happily, as well as negotiating the internet technology to communicate more with his sons. Family is important to Ken, and this should be encouraged.

His idea to volunteer his accountancy skills for his local church and generally get involved in community again, connecting up to people and feeling needed, is an excellent one and we should encourage this. We can help break down into manageable steps exactly what he needs to do to make it happen. He needs to start walking again as he 'used to climb mountains'. Walking instead of driving the 10 minutes to his parents' rest home is another great idea. We could also talk about him metaphorically as 'the man who knows how to climb mountains', and use this as a way of contributing to his sense of identity in a positive way. Ken has all the steps in place to build a satisfying and non-depressive life. He needs support and it would also be wise to ensure he is looking after his physical health, eating properly and sleeping well.