

## QC55 Formulation and Intervention Planning

### Narration

#### NARRATOR

Now that Tom has been able to collect all this information from Ken in the assessment interview, let's take a closer look to see how it all fits together. When we're talking about the five P's, would usually set them out in this order. However, to make everything more clear on the screen, we will rearrange them to look like this.

The presenting issues are those that the rest of the formulation is trying to explain. In order to stop things getting too complicated, it's best to keep these punchy and short. The presenting problems that Ken describes are his low moods and his worry about the future. The rest of the formulation that we're about to look at aims to explain why Ken is experiencing these presenting issues at this time.

Predisposing factors are those that set the scene for Ken to experience the presenting problems he has described. When he was discussing his experience of failing subjects at university, Ken mentioned that he felt he lacked the ability to organise himself and get motivated. This appears to have contributed significantly to his difficulties at uni. He also discussed the move from Japan. This seemed to impact him in two important ways. The first being that he developed a sense of indebtedness to his parents for the sacrifice they made to create a better life for him.

The second impact is his experience of having a bi-cultural identity due to spending half of his life in Japan and half in Australia. This bi-cultural identity does not cause Ken's presenting problems, but it does make him more vulnerable to developing them. Ken's comments in the interview also suggest he may have a preference to keep his difficulties to himself, as opposed to sharing these with friends and family. These factors may make him more vulnerable to developing low mood and worry in ways that we will further explore in a moment.

Now let's turn our attention to those factors that appeared to trigger the presenting problems for Ken. Based on Ken's comments, the event that triggered the initial onset of his low mood and worry was the transition from high school to university. In particular, his experience of failing subjects at uni appeared to cause his first episodes of low mood and worry. This is the distal precipitant. Importantly, the difficulties that Ken described around self organisation and self motivation made him extremely vulnerable to experiencing failure at university, as this is a much less structured environment than high school.

Proximal precipitants are those that reliably trigger presenting issues currently. Ken talks a lot about making social comparisons and this appears to reliably trigger low mood for him. Based on the interview, we can make the clinical inference that Ken's mood symptoms are also reliably triggered when he perceives that he has failed a specific task.

Now let's have a look at the perpetuating factors. It is in this section that we start to see many of the cycles emerge that play a significant role in the mood symptoms and experiences. When considering perpetuating factors, it is particularly important to understand the relationships between all the other factors in the formulation. Let's start with core beliefs. Several times throughout the interview, Ken can states that he believes that failure is not an option for him. This core belief stems directly from a sense of indebtedness to his parents. Specifically, he stated that his parents have sacrificed a lot for him in their move from Japan. And therefore, he feels that he must not fail because this would be a disservice to that sacrifice.

This is in direct conflict with Ken's second core belief that he is failing in all aspects of his life. Several experiences reinforced this belief for him. Firstly, his experience of failing subjects at university and ultimately un-enrolling appears to have initially established his belief that he is a failure. Since this time, whenever Ken compares himself to his peers, he inevitably judges himself as being inferior, which also reinforces his core belief. Over time, Ken appears to have become overly focused on evaluating his own performance. Now whenever he believes he has failed any task, this reinforces his core belief that he is a failure.

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In this way, Ken's precipitating factors appear to trigger his low mood and worry by activating his negative core beliefs. The experience of having the conflicting core beliefs, failure is not an option and I am failing, is likely the source of a lot of Ken's distress. Ken also describes the sense of feeling stuck and lost. This could potentially be its own core belief. Although Ken does not say this directly, it is possible that his experience of having a bi-cultural identity may contribute to his sense that he is different from his peers or that he is lost. This is a hypothesis that Tom would need to check out with Ken over time in order to determine whether it is an accurate and useful part of his formulation.

Taken together, all of Ken's core beliefs, failure is not an option, I am failing, and I am stuck with lost, lead to a sense of embarrassment and shame for him. This, in itself, is a distressing experience. However, it also has other important effects. Specifically, it is likely to cause Ken to ruminate on the core beliefs which cause a sense of embarrassment and shame. This process of rumination reinforces the core beliefs through a process of mental repetition.

It seems that, over time, Ken's sense of embarrassment and shame have worn down his mood to the point where he has stopped taking care of himself. He has not been eating or sleeping well, which has caused his energy and motivation to drop. Importantly, Ken's experience of intense embarrassment and shame as well as his lack of energy has led him to avoid participating in several important areas of his life. Firstly, he describes avoiding his friends because he feels that they are doing better than him. Interacting with his friends also prompts him to engage in social comparisons which reinforce his beliefs about failure. This motivates him not to see his friends.

**NARRATOR**

Ken also describes avoiding his family. Being around his family also aggravates his sense of embarrassment and shame due to the fact that he feels like he's failing them, even though failure should not be an option for him. Ken's preference for privacy also makes him vulnerable to coping through avoidance, as disclosing difficulties and asking for help are uncomfortable for him. In this way, the predisposing factor of preference for privacy sets the scene for his avoidance to become a significant perpetuating factor. Ken's avoidance of friends and family alienates him from his social support, which also likely contributes to his sense of feeling stuck and lost. This, in turn, reinforces that core belief.

Moving back to the other domains of avoidance for Ken, he also describes missing shifts at work. This may be a result of the fact that he has been making mistakes at work which activates his sense of failure. His decrease in self care and subsequent low energy have also likely played an important causal role here. Ken has also ceased his attendance at university due to his declining grades.

In addition to this, he also describes locking himself in his room. This is a form of avoidance of all stimuli in the outside world and represents a form of shutting down and self-protection that Ken engages in. These forms of avoidance likely make Ken feel better in the short term by reducing his exposure to social comparisons and perceptions of failing tasks, both of which precipitate his low mood and worry. However, his avoidance also has the long-term effect of providing increasing evidence of actual failure, especially in relation to meeting his developmental milestones such as obtaining a degree, starting a career, and moving out of his parents' home. This is a very powerful reinforcement for all of his core beliefs.

As Ken's subjective evidence of his own failure increases, he appears to engage in further social comparisons, possibly in an attempt to determine the gravity of his situation. In addition, he appears to become increasingly likely to assess his own performance on any task as indicating failure. In this way, the end result of the links between his perpetuating factors are precipitating factors and these begin the cycle anew.

This self-perpetuating cycle explains why Ken's presenting problems have not resolved on their own. Amongst all the difficulties that Ken describes and the cycles that we have just explored, he also has a range of very important protective factors or strengths that are available to him and that he has experience of utilising in the past. In particular, Ken describes being very successful and happy at high school. He had the skills to build and maintain a strong social circle during this time. And he performed very well academically.

Going back a little bit further, Ken also demonstrated a strong ability to be adaptable when he came to Australia from Japan. He faced struggles with the culture and language. However, despite these challenges, he was able to make the transition well.

<b>NARRATOR</b>	<p>He also describes having caring family and friends who have been trying to contact and support him, despite the fact that he seems to have been isolating himself. In addition, he describes being previously successful in his workplace, even receiving praise from his managers for his performance and attention to detail.</p> <p>Although it's not directly discussed by Ken in the session, it is easy to see that, despite his struggles, he has a very real desire to be well. Also, Ken has been very open in the session, talking candidly about his sense of embarrassment and shame, even though this would have been very difficult for him. His openness is even more impressive in light of the fact that he has a strong preference for privacy that likely makes him reluctant to talk about sensitive material. These are important strengths that both Tom and Ken draw on throughout his recovery journey.</p>
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