



Stress Management Group Handbook

Developed by Tia Coles and Emily Breeze

Session Outline

Session 1:

This session will be an introduction to Cognitive Behaviour Therapy and stress. We will discuss what anxiety and depression is and the common physical symptoms. We will introduce the 5-areas model and discuss SMART goals.

Session 2:

Here we will learn about the stress bucket and discuss strategies to manage stressors. We will explore the role of behaviours, including avoidance. We will discuss work stress and introduce assertive communication.

Session 3:

During this session we will introduce the vicious cycle of inactivity and identify ways of regaining motivation to help develop a routine and sense of balance in life. We will discuss barriers to motivation and how to overcome these.

Session 4:

During this session, we will introduce worry. We will explore the purpose of worry and identify the link between worry, physical symptoms, behaviour and mood. We will explore some CBT techniques to help manage worry and the use of mindfulness skills.

Session 5:

During this session, we will move onto the role of thoughts. We will explore a number of unhelpful thinking styles that we may experience and identify different ways to challenge thoughts. We will explore the role of sleep and help you to recognise barriers to getting a good night's sleep. We will then introduce different sleep hygiene tips.

Session 6:

Here we will focus on bringing everything together, and how we can maintain the progress we have made so far. We will look at how deal with relapses and how we can stay well.

Client agreement

Client Records and Confidentiality

Anything you tell us is confidential within the Mind in Bexley team. Relevant information about your care will be shared between your allocated therapist/PWP, and your employment advisor, if you are accessing our employment services. If we have concerns about the safety of you or someone else, we may need to inform other agencies, and we will inform you if appropriate.

Digital records are maintained in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018.

Please refer to the Mind in Bexley and East Kent Confidentiality Statement and Privacy Policy for further information.

Reasonable appointments

The service offers most appointments between 9am – 5pm Monday to Friday. We have a small number of evening appointments, but they usually involve a longer waiting time. You are asked where possible to attend the same appointment time each week.

If you reach the top of our treatment waiting list and are unable to accept an appointment within 6 weeks, then you may be asked to re-refer once you can engage in regular treatment sessions. We will prioritise you on our waiting list if you contact us within 6 months of discharge.

If you decline appointments offered on more than 2 occasions you may be discharged from the service.

Attendance at sessions and non-attendance

For therapy to be consistent and effective research suggests it is important to attend regularly.

Please give us at least 24 hours' notice if you are unable to attend your scheduled appointment.

Cancelling with less than 24 hours' notice will be treated as a missed appointment. 2 missed appointments will result in your being discharged from the service.

Please attend on time. Sessions will not be extended if you arrive late and you may not be seen if you arrive more than 15 minutes after your scheduled appointment time.

If you fail to attend your first treatment/therapy appointment and haven't called to cancel or re-arrange, you will be discharged from the service.

We are unable to offer assessments or treatment sessions outside of the UK. Please inform us in advance of any planned absences. Extended breaks exceeding 6 weeks may result in a discontinuation of therapy. You are welcome to re-refer if you wish to engage in the future.

Employment Support

If you are engaging with our employment support service, please refer to their client agreement.

Clients receiving talking therapy from other services or privately

Receiving multiple forms of therapy is unlikely to be beneficial. You may engage in other talking therapy whilst on our waiting list however this needs to be completed before attending any sessions with us. Your case will be reviewed to assess next steps. If on completing therapy elsewhere you no longer require support, please email talkingtherapies@mindinbexley.org.uk.

Clients re-referring recently after being discharged

We encourage clients to put in to practice what they have learnt before re-referring to us. If you are re-referring for a similar problem within 6 months of discharge, you will be offered a review appointment in the first instance to discuss suitability and agree next steps.

Abuse towards staff or other service users

We understand at times that therapy can bring up difficult emotions however, abuse in any form directed towards staff or other service users will not be tolerated. Treatment may end if your behaviour is deemed inappropriate.

Complaints Procedure

We encourage clients to provide both positive and negative feedback. Our complaints procedure is available on our website and making a complaint will not affect the service you receive.

In-session guidance

- If your session is conducted via telephone or video, you will access sessions from a place where you cannot be overheard and can speak freely with your therapist
- You agree to complete our standard questionnaires ahead of your session, if this is not done you will be asked to complete at the start of the session.
- You will not attend under the influence of drugs or alcohol
- You agree to engage in the therapeutic process, including any between session tasks
- Recording and photography is not permitted unless agreed with your therapist
- Unless beneficial to therapy, we do not allow others to attend 1-1 sessions with you

If you are a group participant, please see our 'Psycho-educational group FAQ' or 'treatment group FAQ' pages for more information.

If you are receiving one-to-one therapy remotely, please see our 'preparing for your telephone or video appointment' leaflet.

Consent to the Recording of Sessions

Some sessions may be recorded for training, research or development purposes. Verbal consent will be obtained prior to the start of the session and will only take place with your permission.

I consent to the recording of sessions:

Client's Name :

Client's Signature :

Date:

Welcome to the NHS Bexley Talking Therapies service. Please retain this leaflet as it contains important information.

Attendance

Regular attendance at therapy sessions or in groups is important to get the best out of the sessions. Please tell your therapist or group leader in advance of any planned unavoidable absence. If there is a reason why you cannot attend on the day, please leave a message on 020 8303 8932 (option 1). Messages are being monitored regularly by our administration team.

Taking Care of Yourself

It is particularly important to engage in self-care. Remember to give yourself time and space to make use of the therapy or classes and ensure you are getting enough rest and nourishment. Sometimes during therapy, difficult emotions can come up or events can happen which can cause more distress. Your safety and support are very important to us. If emotions are becoming very overwhelming, it is important that you let someone know how you are feeling. Think about who you could tell (e.g., friends and relatives), to support you.

Emergency and out of hours support is available below:

NHS 111 including Mental Health Support on option 2

Sane Line 0845 767 8000

Samaritans 116 123

Umbrella Crisis Nightline 020 7226 9415, a night-time phone line for anyone with difficulties relating to a mental health problem, open every night from 12:30am – 6am

In the unlikely event that the feelings get worse and if you feel that you are at risk of harming yourself, or others, at any time, please make an urgent telephone appointment with your GP or call 111 for advice.

We have a 'Get Help Now' section on our website which provides crisis information, including details of support lines and the Mind in Bexley Crisis Café which remains open from 6pm – 10pm.

Group rules

- Personal disclosure and insight are welcomed during the group; however, it is important to be mindful that the sessions are structured and at times we may have to move on due to time constraints. This is not to invalidate your experience; it is to ensure that the therapeutic structure and protocol is followed. The groups contain case studies that we are going to use, this also helps with us completing all the items on the agenda in a timely fashion.
- Here at Mind in Bexley, we have a strict policy on confidentiality. We would therefore like to ask that all group members respect each other's privacy, and ensure that we keep everything confidential. Also, we would like to ask that everyone is mindful of each other when out and about in Bexleyheath, and again respect each other's privacy. As group facilitators, we will also respect your privacy, but please note that we may break this confidentiality agreement if we have any immediate concerns about your safety, or the safety of anyone else around you.
- We also ask that we all treat each other with respect, and ensure that we refrain from any offensive language. Furthermore, please respect each other's opinions and beliefs, and act in a non-judgemental manner. Please listen to each other, and allow people space and time if they wish to share their concerns.
- As our therapy groups are held remotely, we understand that whilst you may be in a confidential space to begin with, this could change. For example, another member of the household may unexpectedly come home. At the beginning of the first therapy session, the group facilitators will inform you of a 'safe word' that should be said or typed in the group chat should you no longer be in a confidential space. Should this word be said or typed in the group chat during the session, it will indicate to all others to stop speaking until the group facilitators can ensure confidentiality again.

Session 1

The impact of challenging situations

The impact of challenging situations, such as starting a new job, moving house, etc, may cause us to feel anxious, stressed, worried, sad, lonely, bored or frustrated.

It is important to remember it is OK to feel this way and that everyone reacts differently; for most of us, these difficult feelings will pass.

There are simple things we can do to help take care of our mental health and wellbeing during times of uncertainty. Cognitive Behavioural Therapy can provide us with some simple techniques to help us get through these difficult times.

What is stress?

We all have times when everyday pressures can make us feel stressed and overwhelmed. Stress happens to everyone and can sometimes push us to rise to an occasion. However, stress can sometimes affect you more than you want it to.

- In the past year, 74% of people have felt so stressed they have been overwhelmed or unable to cope
- 32% said they had suicidal thoughts or feelings
- 51% of adults who felt stressed reported feeling depressed and 61% reported feeling anxious.

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy

The Stress Group is based on CBT principles. CBT stands for *Cognitive Behavioural Therapy*.

CBT is based on the idea that how we think (cognitions), how we feel (emotions and physical sensations) and how we act (behaviours) all interact together. Specifically, how our thoughts determine our feelings and our behaviour. Meaning, when a person suffers with psychological distress, the ways in which they interpret situations becomes skewed, which in turn has a negative impact on the actions they take.

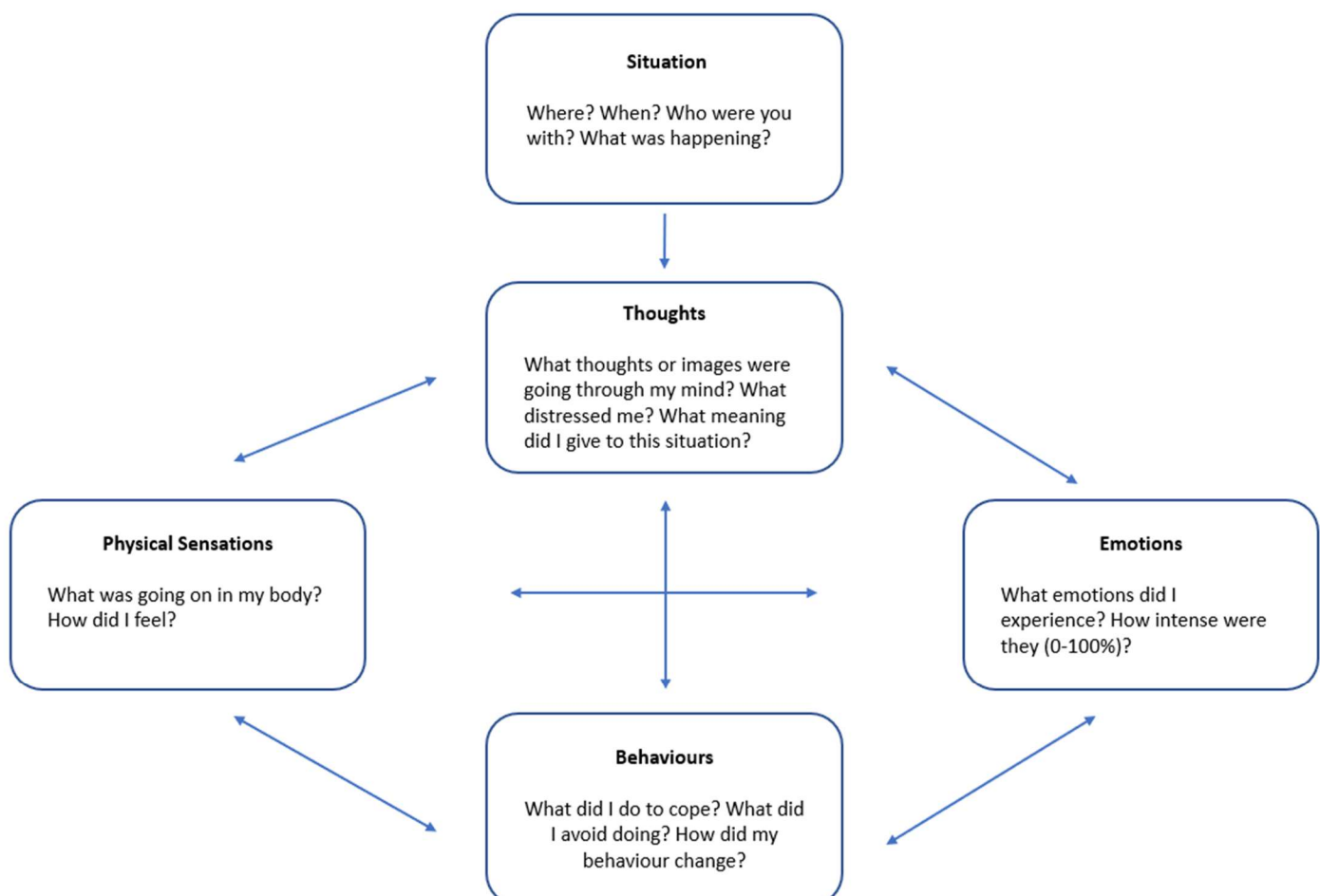
CBT is a structured therapy that focuses on the present moment. We do not dismiss the past and how this may have had an influence on the person we have become, however this is something we cannot change.

CBT aims to help people become more aware of when they are making negative interpretations and of the behavioural patterns which reinforce this distorted thinking. Once we have this awareness, we use CBT techniques and self-help materials to help people to develop alternative ways of thinking and behaving, which aims to reduce their psychological distress.

CBT is made up of 5 specific areas: Situation, thoughts, emotions, physical sensations, and behaviours. These areas can be defined in the following ways:

- **Situations:** The trigger. Situations are neutral. It's the thoughts, behaviours, physical sensations and emotions that make a situation, good or bad, positive or negative, helpful or unhelpful.
- **Thoughts:** These are the statements that you make to yourself in your mind, they act as a dialogue and add context to the situation that you are in, and they are often opinions rather than fact.
- **Emotions:** These can often be described in one word and can be communicated by facial expressions and communicate how you feel in a situation.
- **Physical sensations:** These are the feelings we experience in our body. These feelings are internal, we have no control over these and they involuntary
- **Behaviours:** these are how you decide to behave. You have control over this, it might not seem that you do, but it's the choices that you make in relation to the way you feel and think.

Recognising how we respond and interpret events is one of the most important steps in treatment. Once we can identify our own 5 areas, change can take place. This, however, takes time and practice.



SMART Goals

Facing difficulties or challenging times, can force us to change or revise the goals we have set ourselves. Making changes to our thoughts, and behaviours can be very difficult. One way to increase our motivation for change, is to think about what we want to achieve from therapy. Goal setting can help keep us motivated towards change, and can help us to plan on how we are going to achieve them. When setting ourselves goals, it is important to keep in mind the following three rules:

1. Set yourself no more than three goals to begin with. Setting ourselves too many goals can be overwhelming. Don't forget that we can review our goals regularly and can always add more goals in the future.
2. Focus on short-term goals to begin with. Achieving our goals can help improve our sense of achievement, and increase our confidence. Short-term goals can always be amended once we have achieved them
3. Set positive goals. Focus on what we want to be doing more of, rather than on what we want to stop or reduce doing. For example, setting ourselves a goal of 'weeding the garden for 10 minutes a day', is more helpful than 'stop watching television all day'.

In addition to these 3 rules, it is also a good idea to make our goals SMART:

S	Specific: Try and make your goals as specific as possible. Wherever you can, set dates, times, resources etc. that you will need to achieve them
M	Measurable: Goals should be capable of being measured to allow you to know when you have met them
A	Achievable: Your goals should be just out of reach, but not out of sight. If you cannot achieve your goals, then you have set yourself up to fail.
R	Realistic: Try to set goals that are relevant to your life, and to the things that will help you to get back on track. Think about any obstacles that might get in the way, and how you will overcome these.
T	Time boundaried: Set a time by which you would like to achieve your goals. Initially you should seek to set no more than 3 goals, to help focus your journey.

Session 2

Stress bucket

Everyone can have a different sized bucket.

Common signs of overflow can include: Feeling burnt out, being snappy and irritable, feeling anxious, feeling fatigued, feeling low and tearful.

Unhelpful coping mechanisms are not only behavioural, but can also be cognitive (thoughts)



What does it look like when your bucket overflows?

- Tension
- Irritable, withdrawn
- Sleep issues; sleeping more or less
- Concentration issues/unable to complete tasks
- Procrastination
- Avoidance of people and social situations

What are your unhelpful coping mechanisms?

- Avoidance of people and/or situations
- Impulsive spending/gambling
- Overeating; comfort eating

How do you release water from your bucket? (helpful behaviours/thinking)

- Staying active
- Talking to friends
- Reading

The role of avoidance/procrastination

People often procrastinate because they are averse to the task that they need to perform. For example, if you need to make an important phone call to someone you dislike, you might end up procrastinating instead of getting it done, because they do not want to talk to them.

This happens because, in general, the more people find a certain task unappealing, the more likely they are to want to avoid it, and therefore more likely to procrastinate.

There are many things that can make a person averse to a task that causes them to procrastinate, e.g. they may perceive a task as frustrating, tedious, boring or too hard.

Whilst avoiding people, tasks or situations might help you feel better at the time, it doesn't make your anxiety or stress any better over a longer period.



Overcoming barriers

- One step at a time
- Consider how your thinking might be impacting your behaviour
- Plan incentives
- List the pros and cons of doing the task
- Making an action plan

Work stress

In 2020/2021, there were an estimated 822,000 workers affected by work-related stress, depression or anxiety. This represents 2480 per 100,000 workers.

In the same year, work-related stress, depression or anxiety accounted for 50% of all work-related ill health.

Possible causes of work stress

- Workload
- Lack of support
- Harassment and/or bullying
- Discrimination
- Changes at work
- Role uncertainty
- Lack of control

Assertive communication

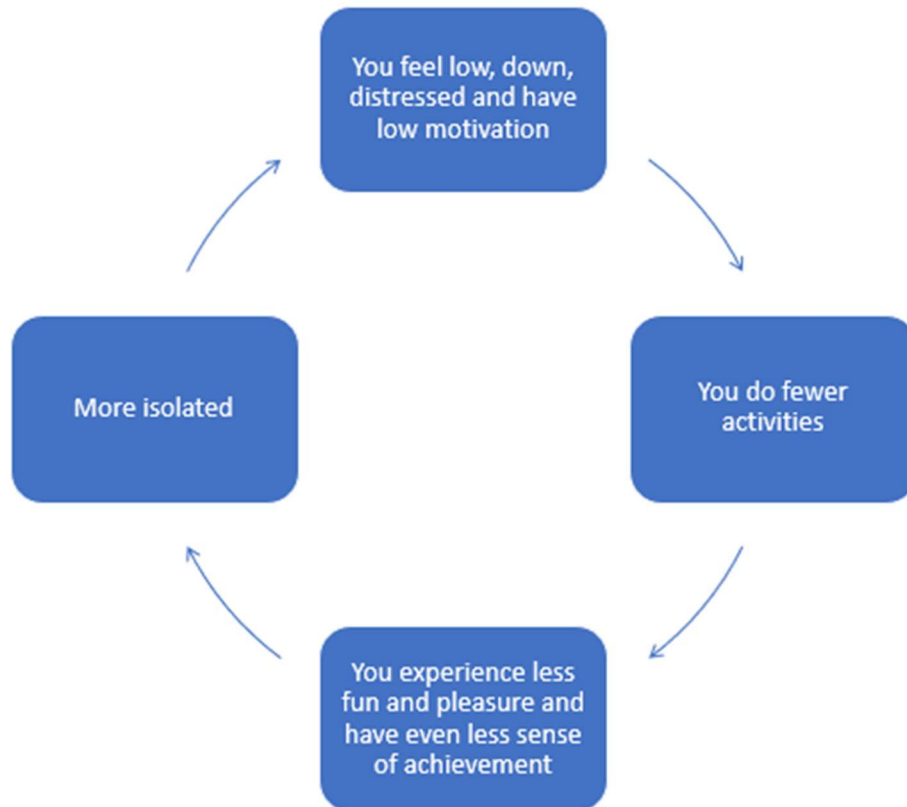
1. Use “I” statements that focus on how you feel in a specific situation. “I” statements help the listener know exactly how you feel and why you feel that way. “I” statements reduce the likelihood that the listener will feel accused, blamed, or defensive. Example: “I feel disrespected when you show up late without calling.”
2. State your needs clearly. Don’t assume the other person knows what you want or how you prefer to see them behave. Don’t make them guess — tell them what you need or how you would like things to be different in the future. Example: “I would like you to call ahead of time when you know that you will be late.”
3. Keep the conversation present-focused. Try to avoid bringing up the past, or using statements such as “you always” or “you never.” Maintaining present-focus allows you to address one need at a time, and can prevent feelings of frustration that may lead to conflict escalation.
4. Practice good non-verbal skills. Speak calmly, stand or sit-up straight, and look the other person in the eye, without glaring.

Managing work stress

- Taking breaks at work
- Taking a walk
- Writing a plan of how to get through your workload/prioritising
- Sharing with colleagues/asking how they manage
- Speaking to a manager
- Finding adaptations
- Taking time off
- Setting boundaries

Session 3

The vicious cycle of inactivity



How do we change our behaviour?

Behavioural Activation

Behavioural activation looks to create a balance of activities in life. It does this by focusing on 3 types of activities: *routine, necessary and pleasurable*.

Routine – this creates a sense of mastery in someone's life. These activities are those that we engage on a daily or weekly basis, for instance the morning routine before going to work and the weekly household chores.

Necessary – these activities are those that we have to do in order to prevent future negative outcomes, for instance dealing with difficult situations that are causing us some level of distress.

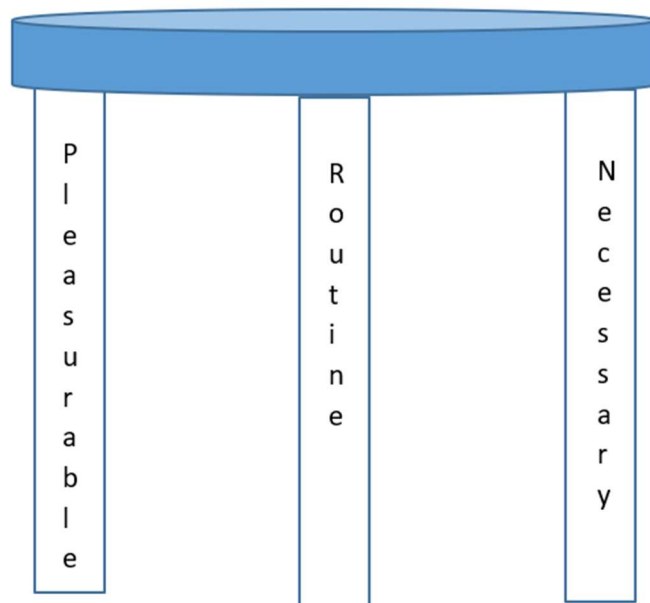
Pleasurable – these are activities that we do for enjoyment and may be with people or on our own. With this, we are able to reduce stress, increase helpful emotions and counter-balance unhelpful emotions.

With a balance of these activities, we are able to create a baseline to improve our mood.

The three-legged stool

Think of a three-legged stool. A stool is stable and secure when weight is put on it, however if a leg is taken away the stool will wobble and eventually fall on the floor. If the same weight is put on but 2 legs are taken away it will wobble and hit the floor even more.

Think of the three activities of *routine*, *pleasurable* and *necessary* as the three legs on the stool. The weight of someone sitting on the stool is the stress and pressure of daily life. If all the legs are in place, then the stool remains balanced and takes the pressure, but if any of the legs are removed the stool will wobble and eventually hit the floor.



It is also important to make sure that all the legs are balanced correctly, as if one leg is smaller than the others it will lead to wobbling and lack stability, increasing the risk of falling over. This means that there needs to be a balance of the *routine*, *necessary* and *pleasurable* activities in a person's week.

How do we make changes to our behaviour?

Step 1: List a number of activities that you would like to start doing or have stopped doing, and put them into relevant categories.

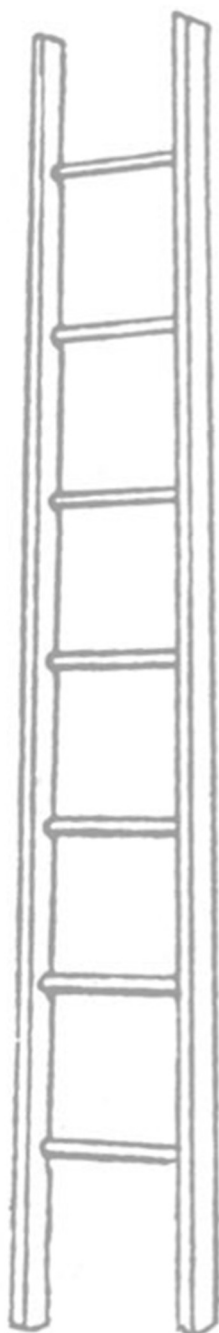
Routine: Such as, self-care, exercise, household chores, waking up, going to bed, showering, brushing teeth, eating regular meals

Necessary: Such as, paying bills, collecting medication, booking GP appointments, dentist appointments, going for a walk

Pleasurable: Such as, gaming, exercise, yoga, reading, crochet, sewing, knitting, watching TV, watching films, seeing family and friends

Step 2: When starting to become more active, we want to keep you motivated and engaged with the process. For this reason, the next important step is to list the activities from easiest to hardest. If we set ourselves a goal that it just too difficult to achieve at this point in time, this can lead to feelings of disappointment when we are not able to do what we had planned.

So, as we plan our activities, we want to start with the easiest first and gradually make our way through to the hardest.



Hardest

Easiest

Step 3: Make a plan

Plan what you want to do and allocate times to do them. write these down on a weekly activity sheet, think about what you want to do, when, where and who with.

Be mindful of any obstacles that might get in the way of doing this. Make sure you write it down, if you do you are more likely to do the activity, think of it as a contract with yourself.

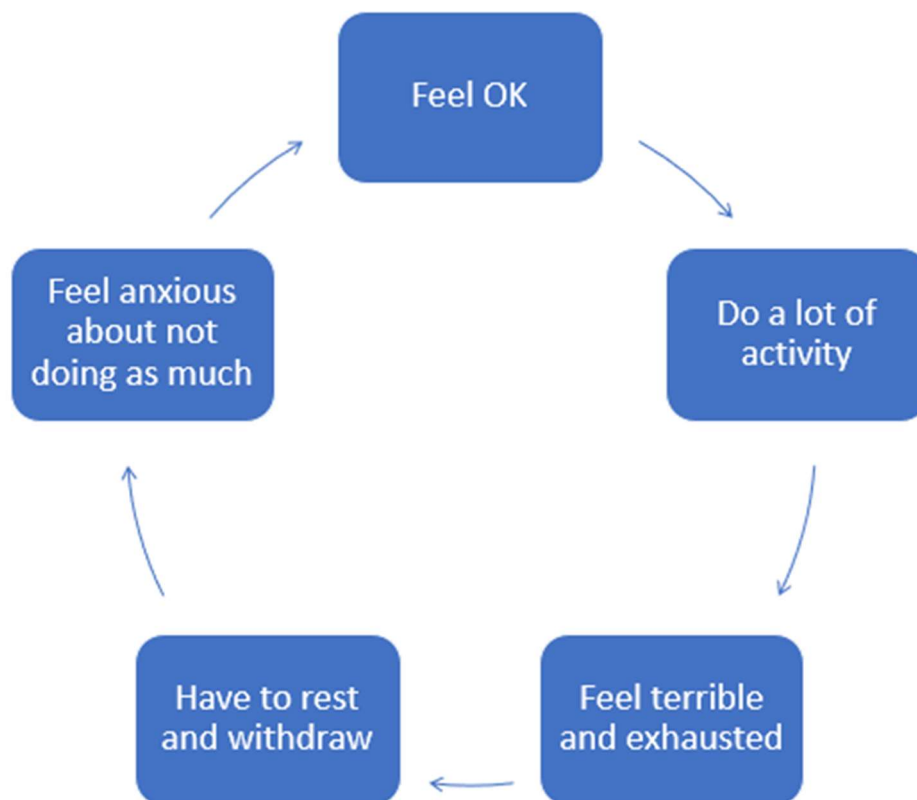
When doing the activity, you might not feel like doing it, that's normal and is a response to the depression.

But remember, it is important to *follow the plan and not the mood*.

Remember: Sometimes you will end up not carrying out an activity you previously scheduled for yourself. This happens, things might get in the way! However, this may lead you to fall into a pattern of not doing other activities you have scheduled, because you might feel like you have failed. If this happens, it is OK. Be compassionate with yourself and make sure you complete the next activity and continue with the plan.

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Morning							
Morning							
Midday							
Afternoon							
Afternoon							
Evening							
Evening							

The cycle of boom and bust



Managing barriers

Once we know how to do something, the brain can *switch off* and we will do that activity automatically. A good example of this is driving. If we always drive the same route to and from work, we tend to drive automatically without really being aware of our surroundings. We might get to a certain part of our journey, and wonder whether we passed a certain landmark already? This is something we often refer to as being on 'auto-pilot'. When on auto-pilot we are less likely to be in the present moment, and we are more likely to think of those things that are troubling us.

Present moment focus is the exact opposite to auto-pilot. The aim of present moment focus is to be more aware of our thoughts, feelings, and body sensations, but to not engage with them. Instead, we accept that we have these thoughts and feelings, without judging ourselves or evaluating them further, and choose to pay attention to something else.

The 5-minute rule

People often report that *starting* a task is the most difficult part. The idea of having to carry out long or tedious tasks can impact your motivation, and lead to procrastination. To help with this, you can use the '5 Minute Rule'. It encourages you to set a goal of doing whatever you have planned, but only for 5 minutes. That's it, that is your task.

If after 5 minutes you find that the task is so horrible you have to stop, you are free to do so, as your goal was to do it for 5 minutes only. However, most people find that after 5 minutes, it becomes easier to continue until the task is done. And even if that is not the case, you have completed the activity for 5 minutes, which is already a step forward!

Break it down

Sometimes we may set tasks for ourselves that end up being too overwhelming, which can cause us to lose motivation and procrastinate. One way to avoid this is to break down large tasks into small, more manageable activities. For example, 'Cleaning the bedroom' can be quite a large task and require a lot of time/energy! It can be helpful to break this down into: 'changing the bedsheets', 'hoovering the bedroom', 'cleaning the mirror', 'folding laundry' etc. You can spread these tasks over the course of a few days, so that getting the larger task done (i.e. cleaning the bedroom) will ultimately take less energy!

Make it flexible

Your plan is a guide and is there to help you, not to rule your life! Let's say something unexpectedly happens to throw you off schedule - a friend drops by unexpectedly, or it starts to rain. You may feel that your efforts to plan your day have been wasted: unless you can stick to your plan, you might as well not bother. Instead, try to cope with the unexpected by accepting the disruption and thinking of alternative activities you could do. And if you miss an activity don't feel obliged to 'catch up', simply move onto the next one!

Follow the plan, not the mood

It is common for people to wait for motivation to come before they engage in activities. However, energy and motivation can come from activity! Throughout the week, you may not feel like completing a task that you have set for yourself. However, in order to see positive changes, it is important to *'follow the plan not the mood'*.

Not experiencing positive emotions

Sometimes people attempt to engage in activities they previously enjoyed, and find that these do not give them as much enjoyment as before. This is extremely common and is due to the nature of depression, and the effect it can have on our brain. It is important to acknowledge this difficulty as a common experience, and to keep engaging in activities, making sure to choose ones that we believe can –or used to– bring us enjoyment and a sense of achievement.

The jump-starting a car metaphor

Becoming more active when we are feeling low is a bit like trying to jump-start a car that has broken down. The car is stationary, the engine won't start, and we are stuck. The first step is to try to get the car rolling on its wheels by pushing. This is extremely difficult at first as the car is heavy. With an almighty push, we only have a little movement. However, once we have momentum, the car becomes much easier to push. We can then expend less energy pushing the car faster and faster until we try to fire up the engine. Then the car is back up and running.

Session 4

What is worry?

Worry is a normal process we all experience and often involves spending time thinking about potential problems that may happen in the future.

We usually try to problem solve situations that might arise or try to prevent something from happening. Worry can sometimes be helpful and cause us to act appropriately, such as if we are worrying about an exam, it can cause us to revise a bit more and help us achieve our goals.

It can become a problem, however, when we worry about things that are out of our control or worries become frequent and take over a larger part of our day.

Worrying can cause us to feel anxious and become caught in a vicious cycle of anxiety when we worry excessively which can then interfere with our ability to do everyday things.

Vicious cycle of worry



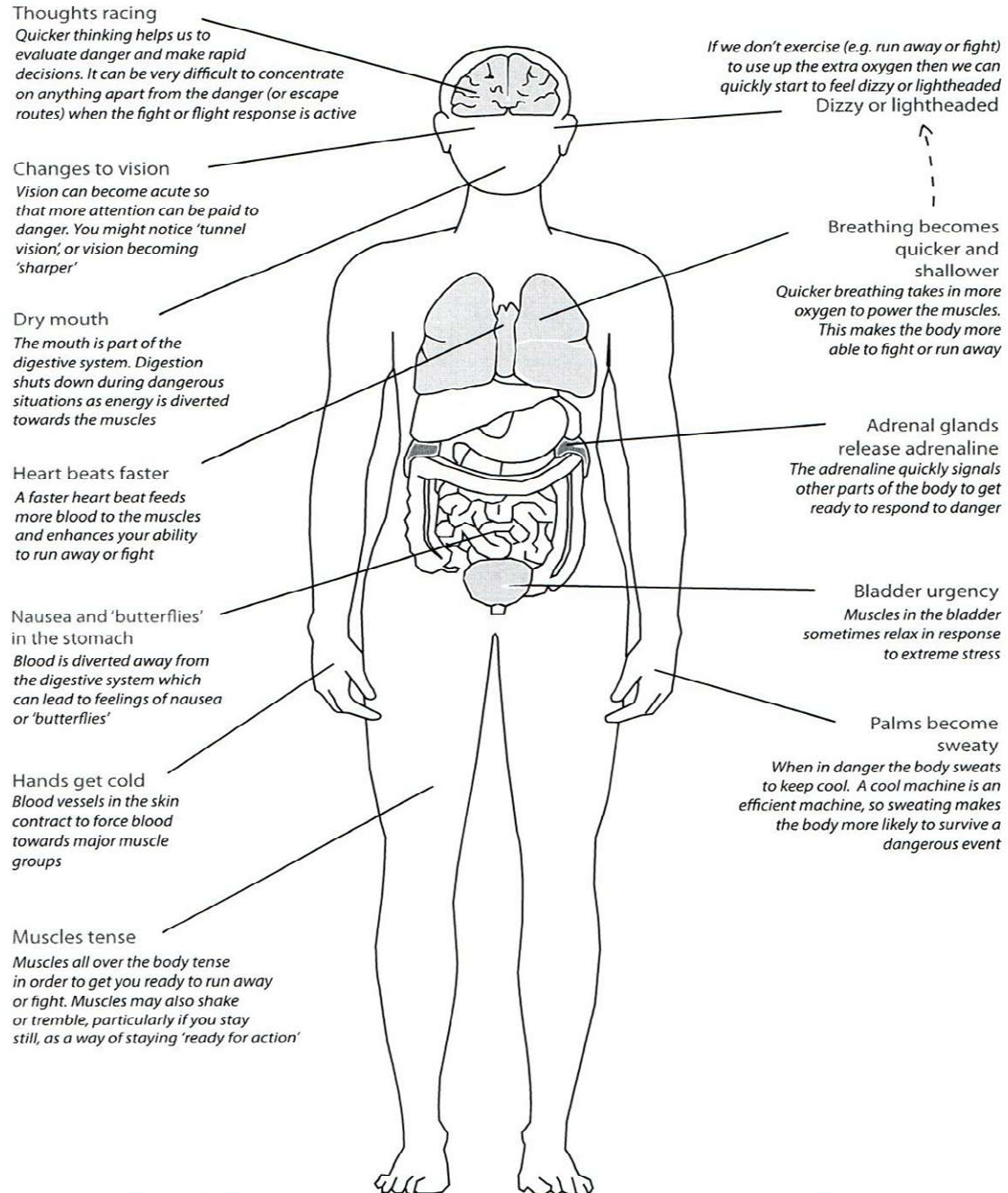
The Fight or Flight Response

When we feel anxious our bodies undergo a range of different physical sensations. Our mind informs us that there is a *perceived threat* and our body responds. This response is completely normal and the physical reaction is termed *the fight or flight response*. This response can be traced back to our evolutionary past, as we all need anxiety to survive. This response enables us to either *fight or flight*, meaning we either run away from danger or challenge it directly.

We may find that this response is helpful, however, it can be exaggerated or problematic when we have this response in the absence of a real physical threat.

Fight Or Flight Response

When faced with a life-threatening danger it often makes sense to run away or, if that is not possible, to fight. The *fight or flight response* is an *automatic* survival mechanism which prepares the body to take these actions. All of the body sensations produced are happening for good reasons – to prepare your body to run away or fight – but may be experienced as uncomfortable when you do not know why they are happening.



Types of worries

Our worries can be broken down into two types:

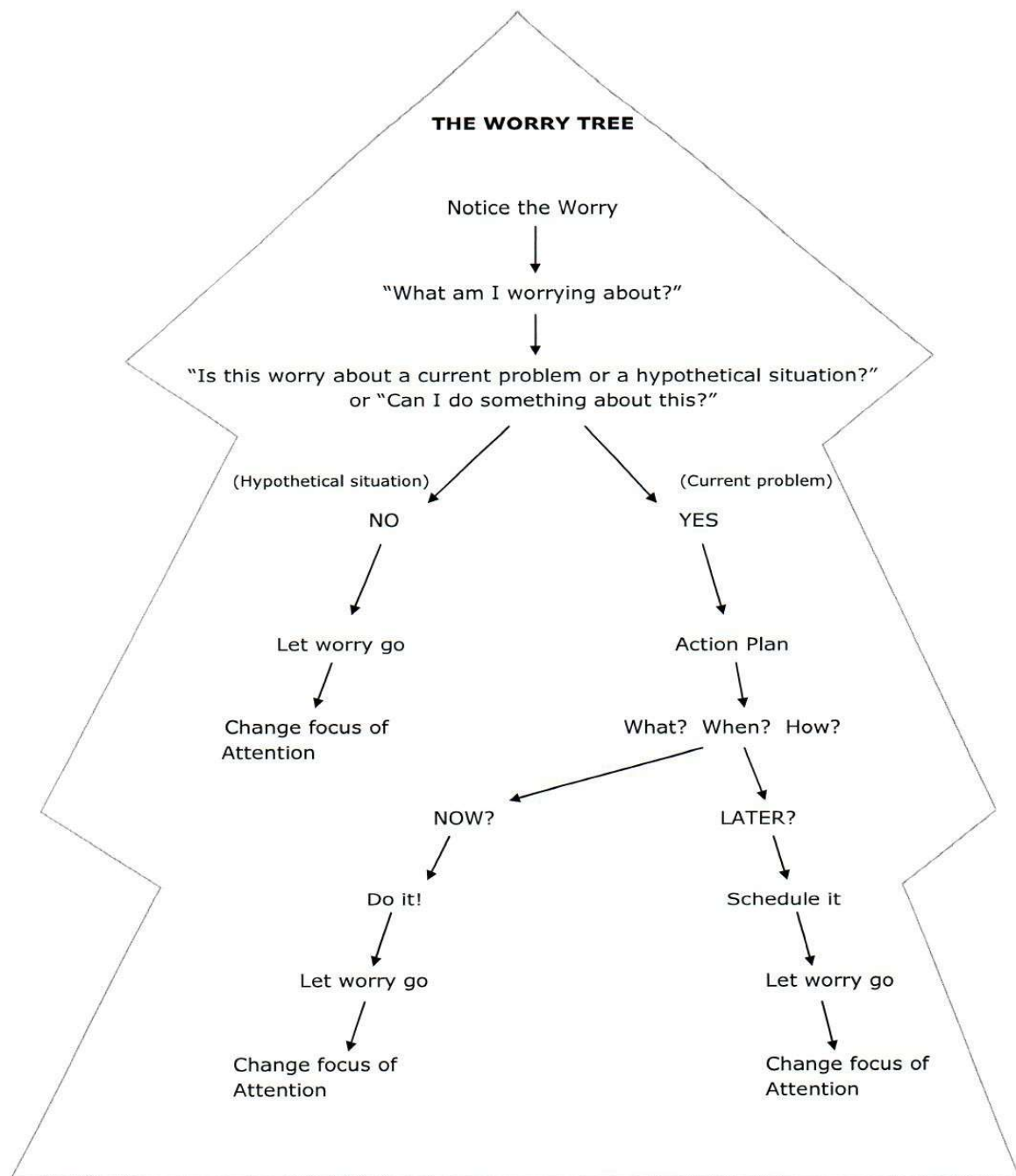
Practical worries: These are worries that are often affecting you now, and are those which have a practical solution. For example, needing time off work, or if there is a strange rattling noise in the car.

Hypothetical worries: These worries are often about things that may be well in the future and may not have a solution. For example, what if the bus is late? What if there is an accident on the way to work?

Difficulties tend to arise when we are trying to deal with all of our worries in the same way. When this happens, our worries can start to feel overwhelming, and we may get caught in the vicious cycle. This can get in the way of us taking appropriate action to sort out our practical worries, and we may start putting things off.

To help us to classify our worries into practical and hypothetical, we can use the Worry Tree.

The worry tree



Worry Time

Remember, worrying can distract our attention away from the present moment, and it can keep us in a vicious cycle of worry. This can then prevent us from enjoying what we are currently doing, can inhibit our productivity, and can impact on our time with family and friends. Worry time is a certain part of the day which we dedicate to our worries. This is usually a less important time of the day.

Worry time is allowing ourselves the space and time to worry, but we are choosing when to do it. Worry time allows us to have more control over our worries during the day, and can allow us more time and effort for more important tasks.

Worry time helps us to reduce the amount of time we spend on our worries, and will free up more time for other, more important, activities. Also remember that worry time is a way of us regaining control over our worries. See the handout below for more information on how to practice worry time.

1. *Plan your worry time*

Each day, plan a time for yourself to worry in. Consider how long you will worry for; at first you may want to set aside a longer period of time, but you can always review this over time. You may find that you wish to shorten this period as you get more practiced with worry time.

It does not matter what time of day you choose, but remember that it must be used for your worries only. Therefore, try and find a time where you will not be distracted or interrupted. Perhaps think of a less important time of your day, like early evening before dinner or after the children have gone to bed. However, ensure worry time is not too close to bedtime, as you will need time to relax and unwind before trying to sleep.

2. *Write down your worries*

When you notice you are worrying outside of your planned worry time, write them down in your worry diary, noting whether they are practical or hypothetical worries. If the worry is hypothetical, try not to judge yourself or evaluate it further, but remind yourself that you can worry about this later during your worry time. If you worry a lot at night when trying to get to sleep, you may find it helpful to keep a worry diary by your bed to write them down then.

3. *Refocus on the present moment*

Once you have written your worry down, refocus on the present moment. This means paying attention to what is going on around you and the task at hand. You may find it helpful to start a new activity, and really pay attention to it using your senses. For example, if you are walking, take note of the sights around you, the smells in the air, and how the ground feels under your feet. If you get more worries, just repeat this process, ensuring that we are writing them down and refocusing back to the present moment. If you notice that the same worry returns, that is ok, just write them down and focus back onto the present.

4. *Worry time*

Once it is time for worry time, open up your list from the day. Choose the worry that you would like to start with, and allow yourself that time to worry about it. For each worry that you have chosen, consider how you felt when you wrote it down, and compare this to how you feel about it now. Has the thing that you were worrying about happened? How did you deal with it if it did

happen? Spend some time reflecting on these worries, and think about what you would have missed out on if you had worried about during the day.

Remember to end worry time after your allocated time. Keep a timer to hand or an alarm clock to remind yourself.

Grounding techniques

5 things you can see

4 things you can feel

3 things you can hear

2 things you can smell

1 things you can taste

Mindful activity

To engage in an activity and to be mindful of our surroundings, we need to listen to our senses.

These details would usually be 'filtered out' by our brain so what we need to do is to bring them to the forefront of our attention. The more we practice, the more we will notice our thoughts and feelings trying to intrude and steal our attention away.

Is it normal for thoughts and feelings to enter our awareness and it is common for our mind to wander. With mindful activity, we do not berate ourselves for having these thoughts or feelings, we are gently noticing them and then bringing our attention back to the present moment. As with everything, this is a skill that requires practice. Do not be discouraged if you find this difficult at first.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR) – A relaxation technique

Make sure that you are sitting comfortably, relax your arms by your sides and uncross your legs. Allow your attention to focus on your body. During this exercise we will be relaxing different muscle groups, by tensing each muscle for about 5 seconds, before relaxing and releasing the tension. The exercise should not be painful at any point, so if you notice any pain, omit that muscle group. We should not be straining any muscles and we should not experience any cramps.

Start by bringing your attention to your breathing. Focus on your breath as you continue to breathe in and out... allow this to relax you. Then start focusing on individual muscle groups within the body.

Recommended sequence:

Right hand and arm – clench one hand tightly for a few seconds as you breathe in, then relax as you breathe out. Bend an elbow and tense all the muscles in the arm as you breathe in, then relax as you breathe out.

Left hand and arm – repeat as above.

Right leg – tense the leg by lifting the knee slightly, then relax.

Left leg – repeat as above.

Stomach and chest – tense the stomach muscles as tightly as possible, and then relax. Take a deep breath in and hold it for a few seconds, and then go back to normal breathing.

Back muscles – pull the shoulders back as you breathe in, relaxing and bringing them back down as you breathe out.

Neck and throat – slowly roll your neck from side to side.

Face – frown as hard as you can for a few seconds, then relax. Raise your eyebrows as high as you can, then relax. Clench your jaw for a few seconds, then relax.

Problem solving

Problem solving is an evidence-based intervention that helps us to distance ourselves from difficult problems. It can allow us time and space to think about the different types of practical solutions that may be available. Problem solving has 7 stages, which can be found in the following handout.

Step 1: Identify the problem

- Identify what it is that you are worrying about (try to be as precise as possible).
- Choose a practical worry that you want to get sorted or one you absolutely need to address.
- If your practical worry is large, break it down and treat each part separately.

Step 2: Identify the solutions

- Try and identify as many solutions as possible. At this stage, nothing should be rejected no matter how ridiculous some solutions may seem.
- Ensure you write all of these ideas down, as we may forget or lose track of some really good options. Use table A to help with this.

Step 3: Analyse the strengths and weaknesses

- For each of the solutions identified in step 2, analyse their strengths and weaknesses.
- Use table A to help with this

Step 4: Select a solution

- Based on the analysis of strengths and weaknesses, choose a solution

Step 5: Plan implementation

- The solution may require planning. Think of the 4Ws: what do I need; where do I need to go; when will I do it; who can help me.

Step 6: Implement

- Put the plan into action.

Step 7: Review

- How well did the plan work? If the plan worked well, you can continue to apply it.
- If not, the advantage of problem solving is that there are still other options available.
- If the plan did not work, go back to step 5 and select a new solution. You can then repeat stages 6 and 7 with the new solution.

Strengths and Weaknesses Analysis			
What are the strengths and weaknesses for each solution? For each solution considered write these below			
Solution	Strengths	Weaknesses	Choice Yes/no/maybe

Session 5

Negative thoughts

It has been estimated that we have anywhere from 25,000 to 50,000 thoughts a day, and people generate thoughts so automatically they are unaware that it is happening.

When we are feeling low or anxious, our thoughts tend to be negative and biased. However, people tend to accept their thoughts 'facts' and 'truths', as opposed to 'opinions'.

One of the most powerful actions you can take in combating our negative thoughts is to notice and acknowledge the impact that they have on our mood, and make a conscious choice to challenge and change the way we think. Often enough we can't control how we feel, but we can choose to control how we think. There's an active choice you can take—if you are aware that changing your thinking is important for your wellbeing.

The thought train

People get in to a habit of thinking negatively much like they get in to the morning routine when heading to work. We wake up in the morning at a certain time, we get dressed, have breakfast and a coffee, leave the house at 7:17 every morning and walk down to the station to get the 7:25 train every morning. There are lots of different trains that run through the station but we always get on the 7:25 train. We don't pay attention to the other trains coming in and out as we know that the 7:25 is coming along and we are used to that train.

We have thoughts come in and out of our mind all day every day, thousands of them, some helpful, some bad, some negative, some positive, some completely neutral, some important and others not.

However much like our morning routine we have got in to a pattern of listening to those negative thoughts, we don't pay any attention to those other thoughts coming in much like the train, because we always end up on the same train the same pattern of thought. However, what would happened if we were to jump on a different train, a different thought? This metaphor is to encourage you to think about getting on a train – or engaging with a negative thought – as a conscious choice we are making.

It is possible to take action and to change patterns of thinking on your own. The first step is to understand the types of thinking and patterns that we fall in to.

Unhelpful thinking traps

Over time we tend to get into the habit of falling into unhelpful thinking traps. There is often a pattern to these traps meaning that they often seem like an automatic habit. In order to challenge our thoughts, we first need to understand the way we think, as being able to do this allows us to recognize patterns and gives us the ability to take a step back and really consider what we are doing.

Read the list of thinking traps below and thinking about when you might have used them. It is likely that you will relate to some more than others, but some might seem very familiar. Once we can identify our unhelpful thinking traps, we can then respond to them more helpfully, telling ourselves that “this is a thinking trap (i.e. Mind Reading) and I can let go of this habit”.

<i>Mental Filter</i> Noticing only what the filter allows us to notice, and dismissing anything else. Like looking through 'gloomy specs', only catching the negative stuff, while anything more positive or realistic is ignored or dismissed. Am I only noticing the bad stuff? Am I filtering out the positives? Am I wearing those 'gloomy specs'? What would be more realistic? What am I ignoring?	<i>Mind-Reading</i> Assuming we know what others are thinking (usually about us). Am I assuming I know what others are thinking? What's the evidence? Those are my own thoughts, not theirs. Is there another, more balanced way of looking at it?
<i>Prediction</i> Believing we know what's going to happen in the future Am I thinking that I can predict the future? How likely is it that that might really happen?	<i>Compare and despair</i> Seeing only the good and positive aspects in others, and comparing ourselves negatively against them. Am I doing that 'compare and despair' thing? What would be a more balanced and helpful way of looking at it?
<i>Critical self</i> Putting ourselves down, self-criticism, blaming ourselves for events or situations that are not totally our responsibility. There I go, that internal bully's at it again. Would most people who really know me say that about me? Is this something that I am totally responsible for?	<i>Shoulds and musts</i> Thinking or saying 'I should' (or shouldn't) and 'I must' puts pressure on ourselves, and sets up unrealistic expectations. Am I putting more pressure on myself, setting up expectations of myself that are almost impossible? What would be more realistic?
<i>Catastrophising</i> Imagining and believing that the worst possible thing will happen. Thinking that the worst possible thing will definitely happen isn't really helpful right now. What's most likely to happen?	<i>Emotional reasoning</i> I feel bad so it must be bad! I feel anxious so I must be in danger Just because it feels bad, it doesn't necessarily mean it is bad. My feelings are just a reaction to my thoughts.

<i>Mountains and molehills</i> Exaggerating the risk of danger, or the negatives. Minimising the odds of how things are most likely to turn out, or minimising positives. Am I exaggerating the risk of danger, and minimising the evidence that it's most likely to be okay? How would someone else see it?	<i>Evaluations / Judgements</i> Making judgements about events, ourselves, others, or the world, rather than describing what we actually see and have evidence for. I'm making an evaluation about the situation or person. It's how I make sense of the world, but that doesn't mean my judgements are always right or helpful. Is there another perspective?
<i>Black and white/ all or nothing thinking</i> Believing that something or someone can be only good or bad, right or wrong, rather than anything in-between or 'shades of grey' Things aren't either totally white or totally black – there are shades of grey. Where is this on the spectrum?	<i>Memories</i> Current situations and events can trigger upsetting memories, leading us to believe that the danger is here and now, rather than in the past, causing us distress right now This is just a reminder of the past. That was then, and this is now. Even though this memory makes me feel upset, it's not actually happening again right now.

The STOPP technique

STOP

Just pause for a moment

Take a breath

Take a deep breath. Notice your breathing as you breathe in and out; in through the nose, out through the mouth.

Observe

- What thoughts are going through your mind right now?
- What are you reacting to?
- What sensations do you notice in your body?

Pull back – put in some perspective

- Do not believe everything you think!
- What is the bigger picture?
- What is another way of looking at this situation?
- What advice would I give a friend?
- What would a good friend say to me right now?
- Is this thought a fact or an opinion?
- What is a more reasonable explanation?
- How important is this? How important will it be in 6 months' time?
- It will pass

Proceed

- What is the best thing to do right now?
- What is important to me?
- What is the most helpful thing for me, for others, for the situation?
- Do what will be effective and appropriate

Thought challenging

When we challenge thoughts, it is important to remember that we cannot challenge the following:

- Statements of fact
- Questions
- Thoughts that are not specific, but are general and/or global

Looking after sleep

At times of increased stress and anxiety, you are likely to experience an unwelcome effect on your sleep. For most people, sleep difficulties are temporary and will pass with time. However, sleep disruption can last longer for some people and can start to affect important life areas including work, physical health and relationships.

Tips for sleeping well

- Going to bed at the same time each day
- Stop drinking caffeine after 4/5pm
- Getting up at the same time every morning
- Reducing the amount of time spend on electronic devices 2 hours before bed
- If not asleep in 20 minutes, getting up and doing something relaxing
- 15-minute rule
- Avoid naps
- No clock watching

Sleep diary

To get a good indication of how you are currently sleeping, you should complete your own sleep diary for a week. The more accurate you can be, the more useful the diary will be. Your first entries will provide you with a starting point. This will allow you to track your progress as you find new ways to improve your sleep.

Reminder: it is best to record the details of your previous night's sleep each morning, when they are still fresh in your memory. You could do this at the same time every day, so that it becomes a habit.

Session 6

Relapse prevention

Well done for all of the hard work you have put in throughout the course! Hopefully you will have learnt different skills that you can continue to implement in the future. We also hope that you have started to make progress towards the goals you originally set.

The next step is to keep the progress going, and to think about how you will continue to stay well. Difficulties will come up in the future, but now you have your own toolkit to help deal with these obstacles. Remember that the skills we have learnt should be practiced regularly, even when we are feeling well. These are new skills, and will require regular practice and fine-tuning.

It is common to feel anxious about ending treatment and to have concerns about stress returning after the group ends. Even though you have been coming along to the group, it was your individual effort at home which has helped you to feel better. Don't forget that it is the work you have done in between sessions that helped you to make progress!

Relapse vs lapse

It is very common for people to worry about becoming unwell again, and fear that their symptoms will return. This anxiety can cause us to watch out for any signs of stress. When we notice these signs, we are more likely to react negatively to them, and misinterpret them as a sign that things are slipping back. Always remember that it is normal for our mood to fluctuate regularly, and that we should expect that this will happen at times. A lapse does not necessarily mean that we have relapsed.

Lapse: A lapse is a brief return to feeling anxious or down, or changes in our behaviour as a result. A lapse in how we feel or what we do is normal. As long as we don't let it maintain itself in a vicious cycle, and we put back into practice the techniques we have learnt, we can get back on track. A lapse can become a relapse if you allow it to take control due to seeing it as a sign of failure. The key thing is to see a lapse for what it is, just a temporary thing and not let it make you give up. Continuing to do and act against any off-putting thoughts and continuing to do things despite feeling like avoiding them can help a lapse not turn into a relapse. Don't give up.

Relapse: A relapse is when negative thinking and unhelpful behaviours creep back over a longer period, and things start to spiral again making you feel worse. Often when a relapse occurs it is easy to think of it as a total setback, rather than the fact you have the skills and techniques that helped before to help again. The key thing is to notice early warning signs of the symptoms. If these are starting to impact you again, you can work your way out of it using the strategies that helped previously.

Making a staying well plan

It is important to consolidate what you have learned over the past five weeks and to create your own *staying well plan* which you can use in the weeks and months ahead.

1. What difficulties did I ask for help with? What things did I want to work on?

2. What was keeping the problem going? (behaviours, thoughts, difficult situations/life events)

3. What progress have I made towards my goals?

4. What ideas and tools have I learned which have helped me?

5. What are the positive consequences of these improvements on different areas of my life?
(work life, home, family life, friendships, social life, hobbies and interests)

6. What obstacles might lead to a setback, make it harder for me to stay well? (stressful life events/situations, motivation, negative thinking)

7. My early warning signs: what would I notice first if I started to have difficulties again?
(changes in my thoughts, changes in my behaviour, changes in my emotions, or how I feel physically)

8. What can I do to start using the strategies that I have learned to help me feel better again?

9. How can I build on what I have achieved? What further goals could I set up to keep me well?

Scheduling a review time

Once we have completed a course of therapy, and completed our staying well plan, it is important that we regularly check in on ourselves. This can help us to monitor our progress, and check for any signs that we are slipping back into old habits.

Having a regular review slot with ourselves can be a really helpful way of monitoring our progress, and can help us to catch any warning signs early on. We would always recommend keeping to a regular weekly timeslot to help you to keep on track, for example, every Friday at 7pm.

During this review, check in on how your mood has been, and whether it has been a good week. Use the template below as an example of what you can include in this review.

Even if you are feeling well, still continue with your review. This way we can learn from things that went well, and can use this again in the future. Think about how you made it a good week, and how you dealt with difficult moments. Consider how you have used the techniques during the week, and how this may have helped make it a good week.

Although it can be difficult to do, it is important to reflect on things that have not gone so well. When doing reflecting on difficulties, remember to always be compassionate towards yourself. Use the setback as a learning experience, think about what you could have done differently or how you would manage this again in the future.

Remember that it is common to have setbacks, the important thing to do is recover from it. Use your staying well plan that you created earlier to help you to build an action plan to get back on track.