

# A SELF-HELP WORKBOOK FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IN SECONDARY SCHOOL EXPERIENCING LOW MOOD



Emotional Wellbeing  
Service

Cardiff and the Vale



Bwrdd Iechyd Prifysgol  
Caerdydd a'r Fro  
Cardiff and Vale  
University Health Board

Resilience  
Project  
Prosiect  
Gwydnwch



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government



Cardiff & Vale of Glamorgan  
INTEGRATED HEALTH  
& SOCIAL CARE PARTNERSHIP  
PARTNERIAETH IECHYD  
& GO'AL CYMDEITHASOL INTEGRDIG  
Caerdydd & Bro Morgannwg

## Using this booklet

Adapted by the Cardiff and Vale University Health Board Resilience Project, from the guided workbook by the Emotional Wellbeing Service (Change Grow Live).

This self-help booklet is designed to give you some ideas of how to improve low mood. It may be useful to do this alongside someone close to you or to share with them some parts of it. It is ok if you feel overwhelmed or can only concentrate for a short length of time; there are breaks added as you go through, but you can add in extra breaks too.

### **There is no right or wrong way, just work at your own pace.**

It is common for people to feel low from time to time and this booklet has been designed to help you develop skills to cope with these feelings. If you have tried these coping strategies and are still finding it very difficult to cope with your low mood or feel your mood has got worse, you should speak with a trusted adult or visit your GP.

If you are over 16 you can take the NHS mood self-assessment to help you know when to seek help from your GP.

A really important thing to remember is that it is good to talk, and support is available if you are finding it hard to cope with low mood, sadness or depression. If it doesn't feel possible for you to speak to friends or family, there are confidential listening and support services listed below.

### **You are not alone.**

[MEICCYMRU](#) - a helpline for support, information and guidance for young people up to 25 years old. **080880 23456**

[CHILDLINE](#) – free helpline, resources, information and guidance for young people. **0800 1111**

[Papyrus](#) – support service for young people having suicidal thoughts. **0800 068 414**

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## Things that matter to me!

When you are feeling low or anxious it can be easy to get caught up in our heads and distracted from what really matters to us. We can sometimes spend less time doing the things that we enjoy or that give us purpose and satisfaction.

Thinking about what matters to us can help remind us what we care about and create a sense of purpose and meaning. Below is an example of things that some people find important. Circle any that stand out for you, you can add your own too!

Being a good friend/girlfriend/boyfriend/son/daughter/family member

Helping others

Being creative

Learning

A hobby or interest

Having fun

Nature/the environment

Animals

Honesty

Being active

Connecting with others

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## Am I Doing What Matters to Me?

Now that you have had a think about what is important to you, let's start by thinking about how you can get more of these things in your life - we want more of the things that give us meaning and purpose!

Top three things that are important to me:

1.

2.

3.

Circle the one you'd like to boost this week, and make a plan!

**What is one small thing you can do this week?**

**When will you do it: (be specific with day and time)**

**What might get in the way? How will you overcome this?** I.e. Might you forget to do it? Could you set a reminder on your phone?

**Is there anyone who could help you?**

## What is low mood?

It is normal to feel a little low from time to time, particularly during stressful times like exams or big changes to your life. For some this may last a couple of hours, others may feel down for a few days or a bit longer. If you have felt down for more than a few weeks, or your low mood is stopping you from doing things you want or need to do (i.e. going out with friends, going to school) you should talk to your GP – just to check out if there is any more support they can offer.

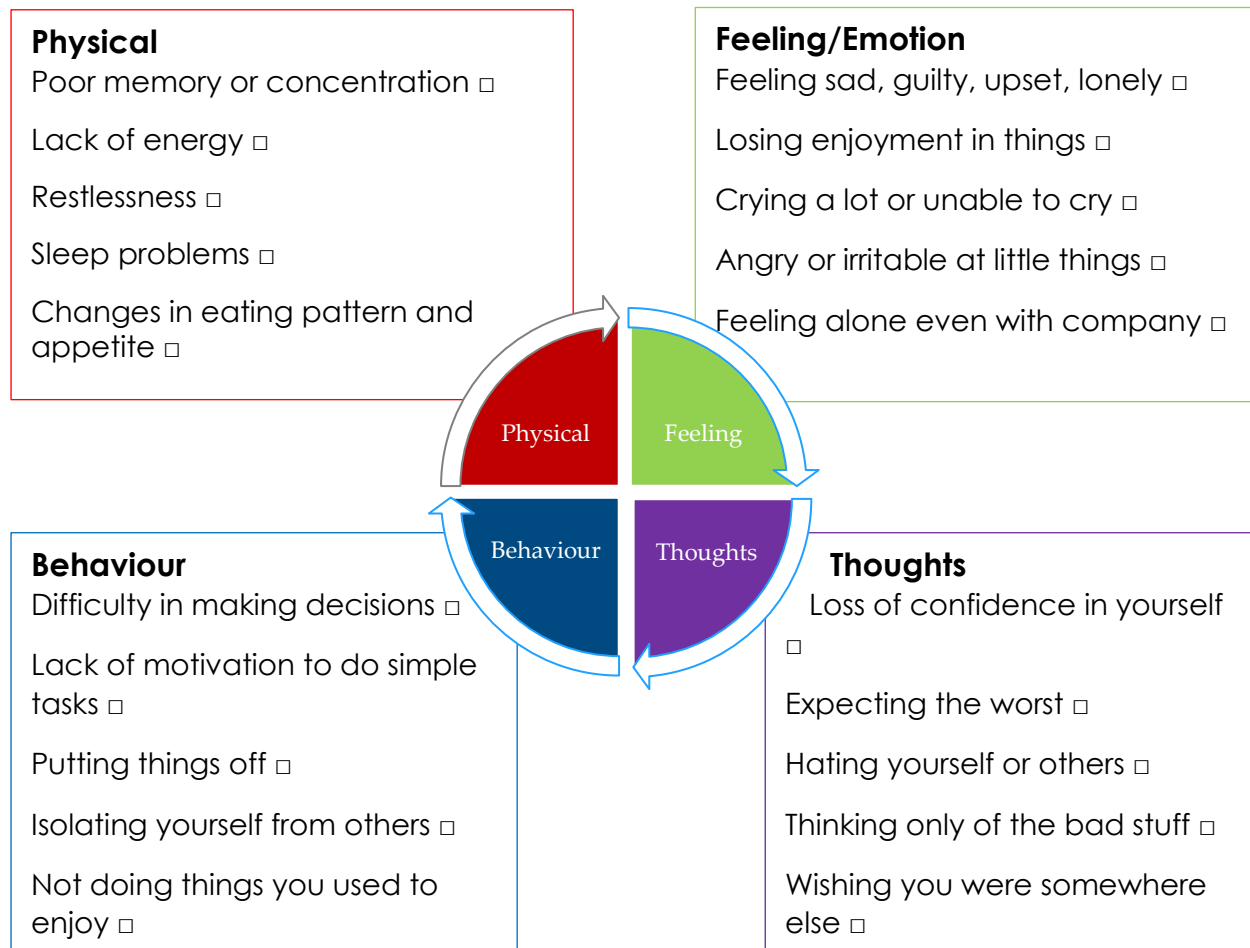
Experiencing low mood can impact on many things. It may change the way your body feels, your emotions, the way you act and the way you think.

By becoming aware of how low mood affects you, you will be better able to notice when your mood might be slipping. Once you know the warning signs, you can act to boost your mood, stop things getting worse and face life's future challenges with more confidence.

## How low mood impacts you

Here are some ways that low mood might impact you.

**Task:** Tick the ones that match your experience.



## Time to take a break

If you have ticked a lot of the boxes on the previous page, or even just a couple, it may come as a surprise or even be upsetting for you to see it in black and white. Remember that just by looking at this workbook, you have already taken a big step in your journey to take care of yourself and feel better!

You may sometimes feel hopeless and alone or may blame yourself for the things that upset you. It is important to recognise how you are feeling and notice the negative thoughts and feelings as they pop up, so that they don't spin out of control. You will look at how to do this in more detail later in the workbook, but for now we suggest you **take a break**.

Doing the work to boost your mood can be tiring. Taking regular breaks will help you to process what you have learnt, as well as building your ability to relax well. Is there someone you'd like to speak with? A friend you can call or message to have a chat, a family member you could spend some time with, perhaps watch a funny movie together or go for a walk, maybe you have a pet that would love some attention!

Maybe you could work on building up the time you spend doing things that matter to you (page 4). Or there are more ideas on the next page of things you can do right now to boost your mood and take a break.

**Task:** Try a few different things over the next week – there is a diary on page 9 to help you keep track of what feels good.

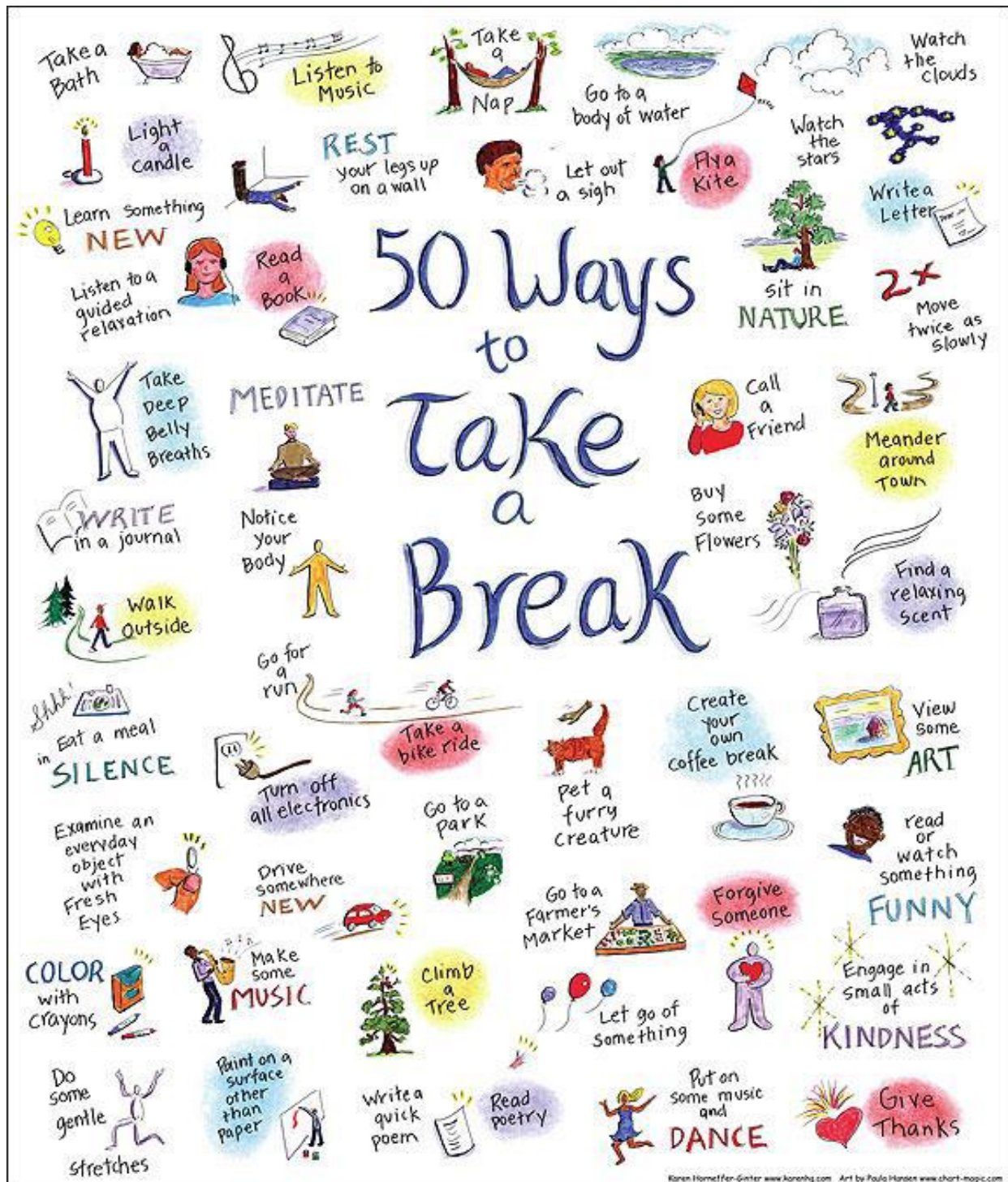


You got this!™



# Coping skill: Distraction

Distraction is a quick and easy way to help lift your mood. Below are a bunch of popular ways to distract yourself and release happy chemicals in your brain.





## Take a break diary

When you try any of the 'Take a Break' activities, you can use this diary to think about which ones helped you the most. Write which activity you tried, your feelings before and after and which ones you would try again.

Putting a number to your feelings can be a helpful way of noticing small changes in mood (0 being not feeling low, 10 being feeling extremely low). Our aim is to move the number lower. There's an extra column for any thoughts you want to write down.

Activity I tried	How I felt before this activity (0 - 10)	How I feel after this activity (0 - 10)	My thoughts:	I will try this again
<i>Went for a long walk.</i>	<i>6- feel low-sad</i>	<i>4- feel ok</i>	<i>Leaving my bedroom and getting outside helped take my mind off how I was feeling and my negative thoughts.</i>	<i>Yes</i>

## What causes low mood?

There may not be a cause for low mood but the following seem to be quite common reasons;

**Task;** Circle the ones you think may have affected you

- |                              |                             |                         |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------|
| <b>Bullying</b>              | <b>Parents splitting up</b> | <b>Illness</b>          |
| <b>Homework</b>              | <b>Exams</b>                | <b>Lack of exercise</b> |
| <b>Siblings</b>              | <b>Friendship issues</b>    | <b>Sexuality issues</b> |
| <b>Change of environment</b> |                             | <b>Self esteem</b>      |
| <b>Poor sleep</b>            | <b>Social Isolation</b>     | <b>Bereavement</b>      |
| <b>Peer pressure</b>         | <b>Hormones</b>             | <b>Arguments</b>        |
| <b>Pressure from adults</b>  | <b>Toxic relationships</b>  | <b>Social Media</b>     |

**Task;** Pick one thing you think may cause you to experience low mood and reflect on why you think this impacts on you (it doesn't have to be something from the list above)

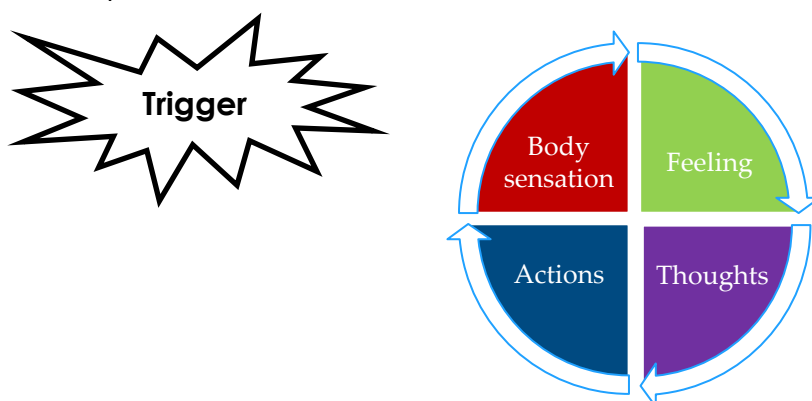


## What keeps low mood going?

When we feel low, we can have a very negative view of ourselves, the world, and the future. This negative outlook can lead us to perhaps not be as active as we might have been before or to say 'no' to socialising with friends. Because you are doing less, your body might start to feel sluggish or tired all the time, which makes us want to go out even less, reinforces the negative thoughts you may have about yourself or your friends and ends up in you feel even more low. This is known as a **“vicious cycle”**, and is based on the fact that...



The vicious cycle also happens with situations that make you feel different emotions, like anger or anxiety, and will be started by the triggers that are unique to you, like the examples on page 9. If you learn to notice the different triggers that get your cycle spinning, and the things that keep it spinning (how your body feels and your thoughts, feelings and actions) you can then learn ways to stop it spinning out of control and reduce the intensity of what you feel.



Avoiding the challenge of addressing low mood is likely to only keep it going. Would you like to feel better? Are you ready to make little changes? Have the belief in your ability to see this through to a better time.

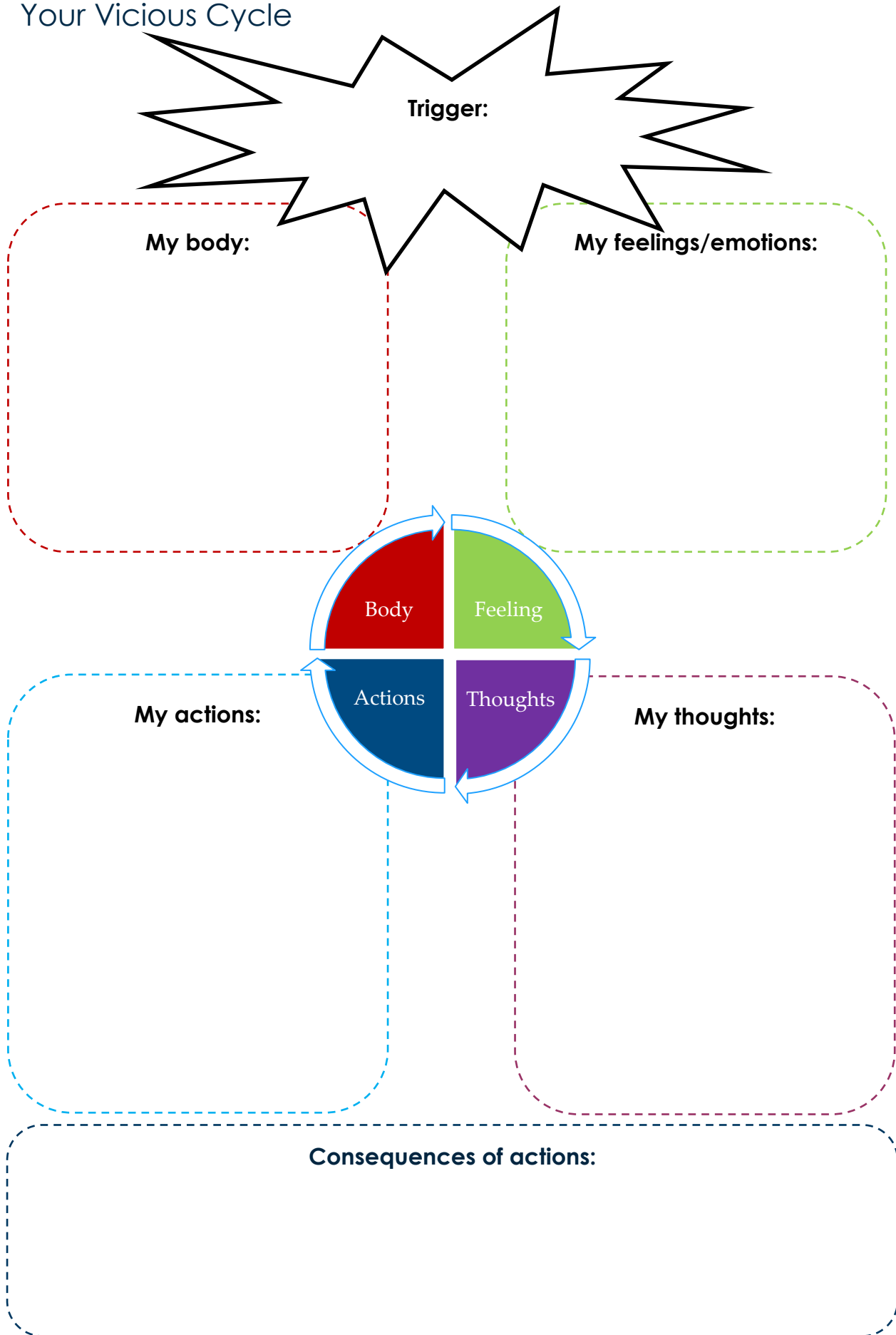
**You can and will feel better with small steps.**

**Task;** Have a look at the example vicious cycle on the next page and then have a go at identifying your own cycle on page 13.

## The Vicious Cycle



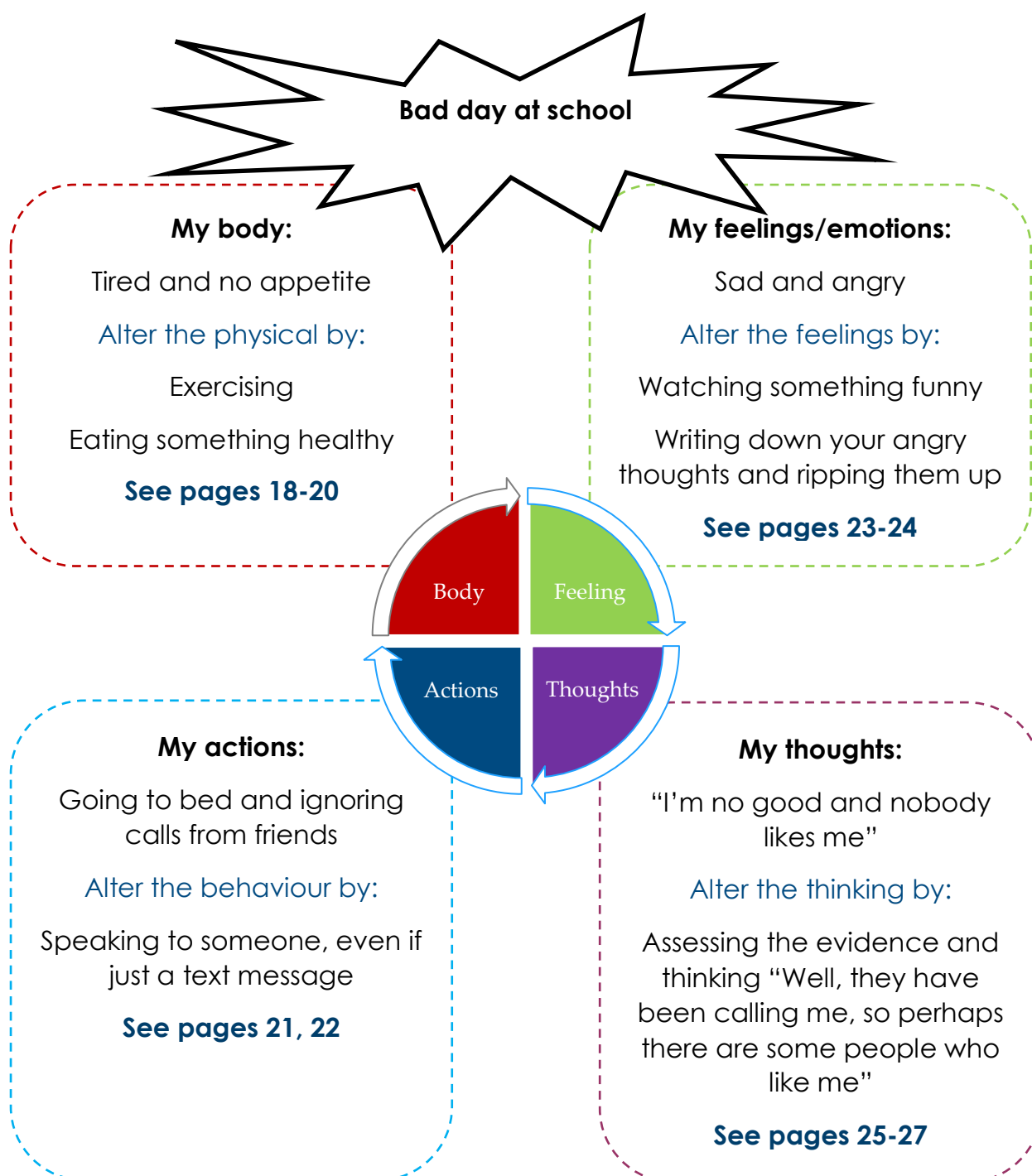
# Your Vicious Cycle



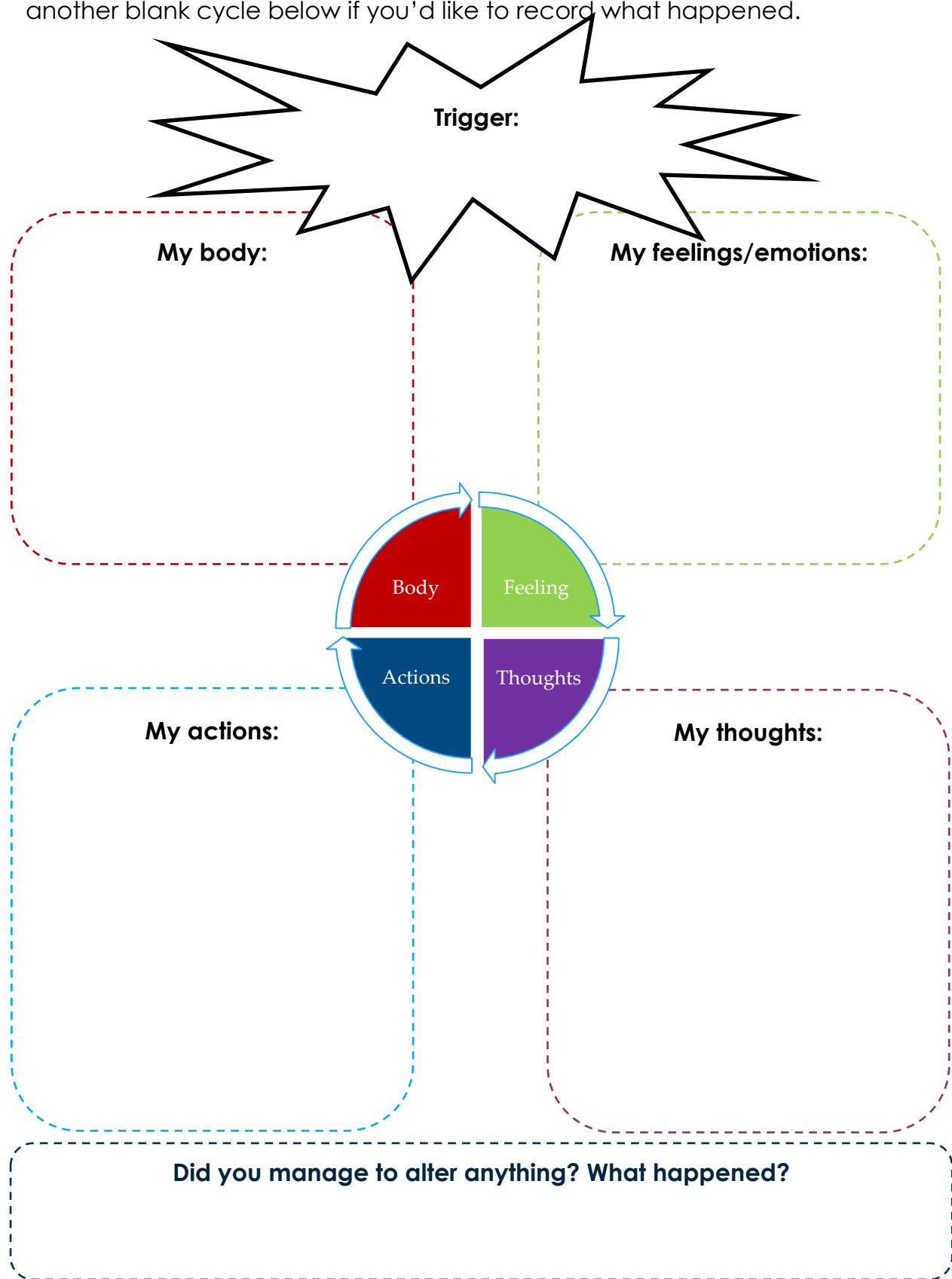
## How do you break the cycle?

The rest of this workbook is filled with ways to help you change each part of the vicious cycle to get it spinning in a positive direction, turning it into a **virtuous cycle** that makes you feel better and better! Below is the same example from page 11, with a few ideas of how each area could be changed, and links to the pages where you can learn to do this for yourself.

**Task:** Go back to your vicious cycle. Is there one thing that you could alter now? There's another blank cycle on the next page

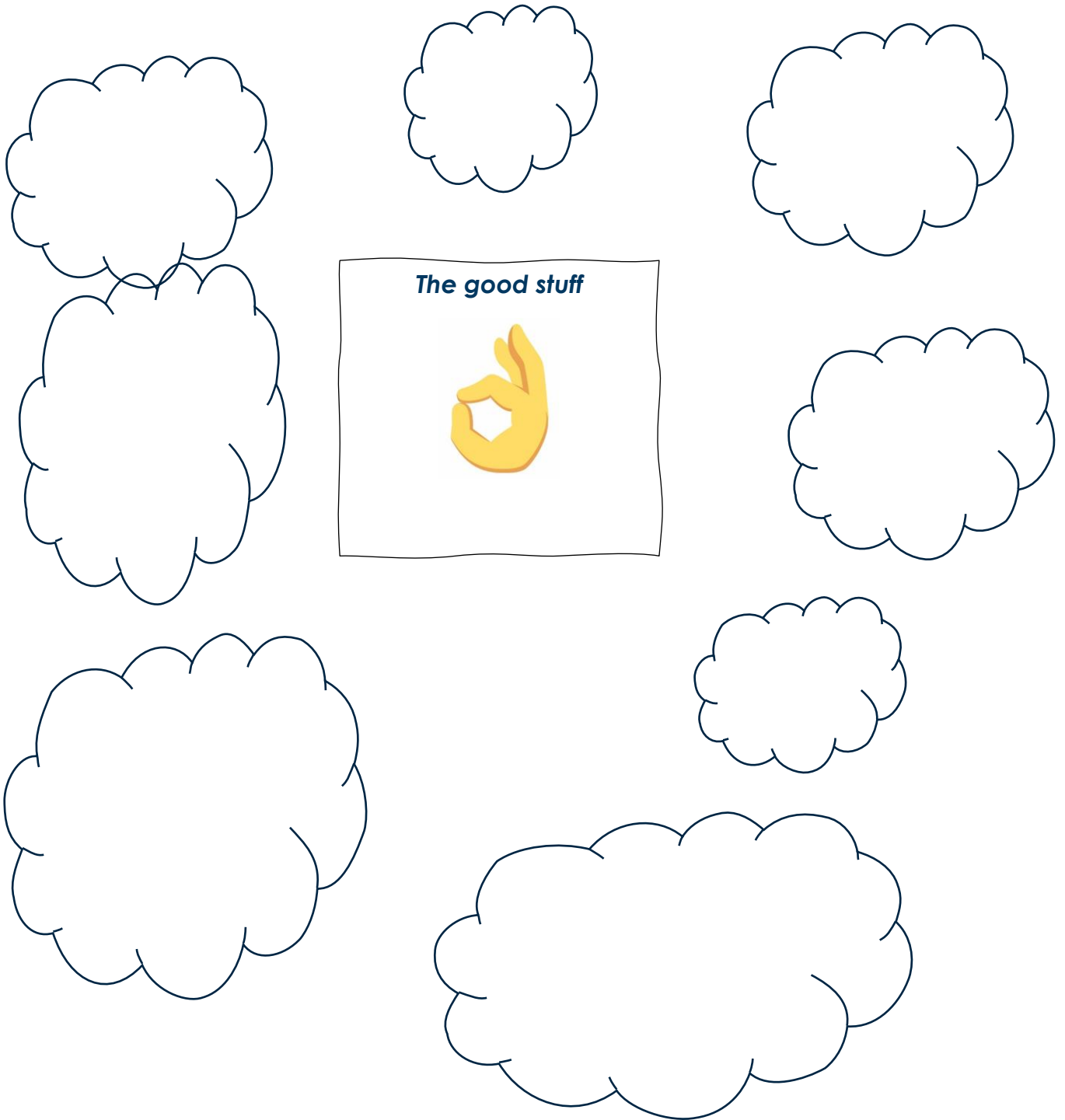


Here is a good place to **take a break**. Use the next week to notice when you are trapped in a vicious cycle and try to think if there is one small thing you could change, like in the example on the last page. Try one of the take a break activities from page 8 if you can't think of anything else. There's another blank cycle below if you'd like to record what happened.





Welcome back! Before we get onto the mood busting, use this space to jot down **what is going OK at the moment**. If you're struggling to think, have a go at the mindful colouring on the next page. Mindfulness exercises help reduce stress and improve mood. You may find ideas pop into your head while you're colouring as it helps you to relax.





## Improving the physical (looking after your body)

Being low in mood can make us feel very sluggish and generally lacking in energy. Here are a few tips to improve how your body is feeling.



Having a good daily routine of diet, sleep and exercise can allow you to:-

- build on good habits
- increase efficiency
- increase motivation
- build momentum
- help better yourself

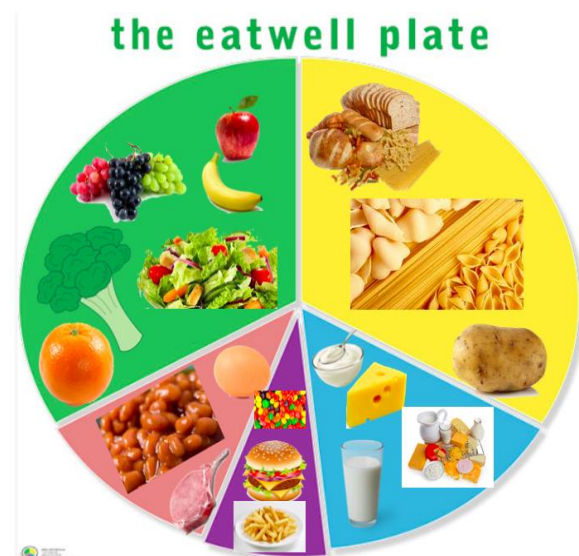
### Mood and food...

The eatwell plate helps us to see what proportions of different food we should be eating.

#### Is this what your diet looks like?

Too much caffeine, energy drinks and processed fats (purple section) can result in us feeling sluggish, which will lower mood over time.

More veg and protein help give us energy that lasts for a longer time. Also, dark chocolate, spinach, bananas, turkey, fish, oats and nuts boost a happy chemical (Serotonin) in our brain which is great!



**Task: How could you reduce the purple section and increase the veggies and water in your diet?**

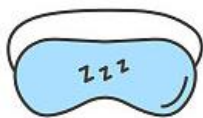
## Boosting sleep...

**Task: Tick what you already do so that you know what is left to try**

- Use bed only for sleep; not gaming, TV or any other hobbies
- Decorating your room to your own taste and keeping it clean and tidy will improve sleep as you'll feel more relaxed
- Make sure you feel comfortable in your bed meaning that you are happy with your mattress, duvet and pillows
- Have your room quiet- turn off any fans or TV'S as this can be a distraction when trying to sleep



- Try to have your room temperature between 18 – 19 degrees Celsius



- Closing blinds or drawing the curtains. If light is still getting through, try wearing an eye mask or purchasing blackout blinds.
  - Dim lights an hour before bed so your brain can register that it is getting close to bedtime. This is especially true for blue light (from TV, Phone, gaming etc.) as it messes with the brain's understanding of night time.
- Don't stay in bed fretting about not sleeping. If you are not asleep within 30minutes, get out of bed and do something calming such as reading a book, sitting on the floor listening to music, doing some colouring. You should not play computer games or watch TV. Try again after 20minutes.
- Get up at same time each day – even if you didn't get much sleep the night before
- Start your day in sunlight – this helps your brain regulate sleep/wake cycles. Even 5 minutes in front of a sun-facing window can help
- Keep regular mealtimes to help bring routine to your day, the most important of these is breakfast. Why not combine the last three tips and set a goal to have your breakfast in a sunny spot at the same time each day!
- Avoid naps during the day – they won't help get a good night of sleep
- Avoid sugary snacks and drinks, as well as caffeine after 3.30pm, nicotine and alcohol



- Don't engage with your thoughts. Keep a notepad by your bed to write down any thoughts that are keeping you awake. There's more tips to manage worrying thoughts on page 25/26/27
  - Get some exercise. More on this on next page...



## Moving more...

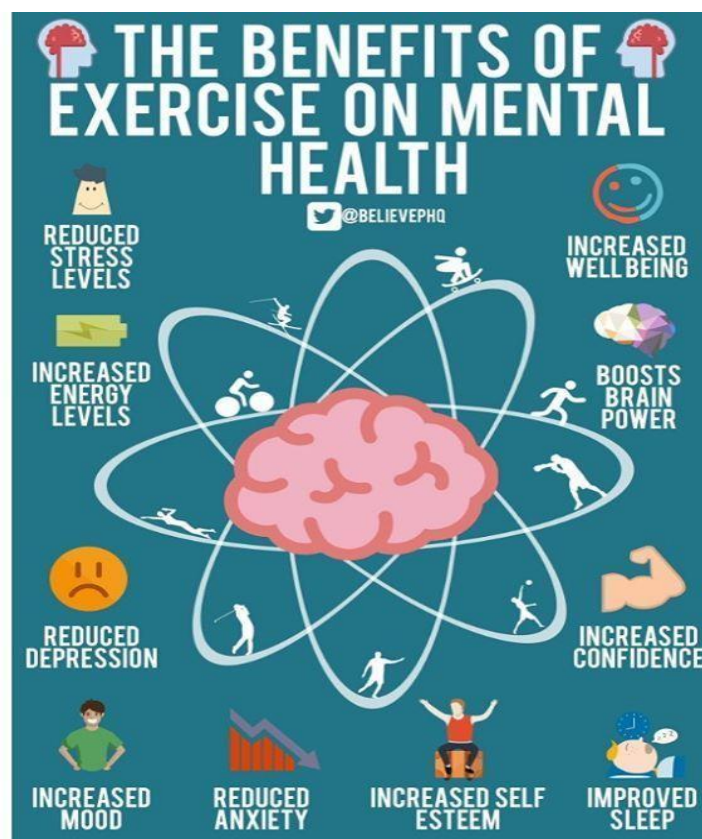
30 minutes of exercise a day is enough to maintain a healthy lifestyle both physically and mentally.

Exercise is the simplest way to encourage endorphins to be released in your brain, which are responsible for feelings of euphoria and pleasure. Short bursts of exercise can really lift your mood.

**What exercise have you tried before?**

**What exercise would you be willing to try?**

It can be anything from taking a walk around the park to something more skilled like playing a sport. Here's some ideas...



Now is a good time to **take a break**. Use the next week think about how you can boost your sleep, eat plenty of the good stuff and move more. We promise you that if you can make improvements in just one of these areas, you will be well on track to improving your mood. Don't forget keep noticing those vicious cycles that pop up and maybe try out a couple more of the distraction techniques.

## Positive actions

When we feel low, we often don't feel like doing anything...which may cause us to miss out, leaving us feeling even lower. By starting a daily routine, adding in things that are fun as well as the things we *have* to do, there is usually an improvement in mood. Think of it as adding in little moments of joy or accomplishment to appear in your day. There is a 'positive moments' planner on page 21 to help you prepare.

When thinking about what to add into your positive moment's planner, you should think about:

- **Connecting with others:** this could be family, friends, neighbours, consider times you have really enjoyed and valued spending time with others
- **Physical activity:** think about times you may have had fun being active, this may have been a walk with a friend/family member
- **Helping others:** helping others can help us feel good and improve our wellbeing. This could include taking care of animals, giving a compliment, helping someone with a problem.
- **Caring for yourself:** Taking time for ourselves is important and often last on our list! Being kind to ourselves after a hard day is caring for ourselves, this may look like treating ourselves to a fun activity, eating well or getting enough sleep!
- **Being in the moment:** embracing moments through using your five senses with curiosity and openness. Paying attention to nature, listening to music, being mindful when eating experiencing the flavours are all ideas you could try.
- **Learning or challenging yourself:** consider challenging activities you might find enjoyable or important to you to try or learn.

If you are feeling very low, you may not enjoy much or want to do anything at all - remember your vicious circle, avoiding doing things you enjoy will keep your low mood going. It can help to think about things you have previously enjoyed or set yourself a challenge to try something new. As always, keep it to small steps.

## Positive moments planner

**Task:** Use the planner below to make sure you set times to seek those feel-good activities

You are aiming to have at least one or two small things a day that will boost those. Spend a moment after completing the activity to think about how you feel. Do you feel connected? More peaceful? Accomplished? As you begin to notice the patterns between what you do and how you feel, you will soon see the difference that the small things can make. You might like to keep this planner as notes on your phone!

Over the next week I would like to .....

I am going to do this by.....

Doing this has made me feel.....

Now is a good time to **take a break**. Use the next week to increase the positive moments in your day. Don't forget that eating well, improving sleep and moving more are all positive actions too.



## Improving how you feel (emotions)

We have already looked at distraction as a way of changing how you are feeling on page 7. A **soothe box** is another way of helping to cope with how you are feeling, by using your senses (sight, smell, touch, taste, hear).

When we are feeling low, we are often troubled by memories or negative thoughts about previous events that are keeping us trapped in the past. A soothe box is a way of helping us to be in the present moment – doing something nice for ourselves or enjoying positive and happy memories.

Soothe boxes are personal, everyone's will look different. Some people like to have a big box at home and a small pencil case size box they can take around with them.

**Task:** Below are some examples of things you could include in a soothe box. Circle the things you are going to put in yours, or add some of your own ideas.

**Visual** – Photographs of happy times, places, people who make you happy. Or it could be pictures of places you want to visit. You could put in a colouring book and pens or a sketchpad. Or you could jot down on a piece of paper to go and look at something that brings you joy.

**Touch** – You may add a fluffy toy, a stress ball, some play - dough, Lego or some hand cream. Squishies are a popular choice or you may jot down on a piece of paper to go and pet your pet. Maybe wrapping yourself in a blanket could be an option for you.



**Smell** – Smelly candles, squishies, hand cream, incense, nail polish, a card with your favourite perfume or aftershave sprayed on it. You may even have a note to tell yourself to go and have a cuppa and smell that or anything drink/food related.



**Taste** – A packet of your favourite sweets, lip balm, chocolate or again a note telling you to go and have a giant mug of your favourite drink. How about a hot chocolate sachet?



**Hear** – Keep a list of all the songs that make you happy as a guide to tell you to go and play those songs. Or if you prefer, have a note to yourself to go and listen to some nature sounds whether it's on YouTube or out in the fresh air.

## Positive Emotions

A lot of attention can be paid to negative emotions, and quite rightly as they can feel overwhelming and can prevent us from experiencing positive emotions or doing what is important to us. In the picture below are ten common positive emotions.



Representative positive emotions (Fredrickson, 2013) Source: Marianna Poosvan

Research has shown that positive emotions are good for us; they can help build resilience and also reduce stress. If we could experience just three of these positive emotions each day, we can improve our happiness and wellbeing over time!

Here are some examples of how you can achieve this:

**Serenity:** this is the feeling of calmness and peacefulness, where your mind is not flooded with worries. This can come from meditation, going for a walk in nature or sitting somewhere quiet and soothing.

**Interest:** think about activities that spark your curiosity, engages and fascinates you, this may be exploring new outdoor areas or creating recipes.

**Gratitude:** this is one of the strongest links to happiness; being grateful and focusing on what you do have rather than do not have! Are you thankful that the sun is shining and you can go for a walk? Try writing down at least one thing that has been good, or that you are grateful for, at the end of each day.

**Take a break** here. Think about how you will boost your positive emotions and then use the next week to put your plan into action. Perhaps you could encourage a friend or family member to join in with you – everyone could use more positive feelings in their life!

# Unhooking from your thoughts

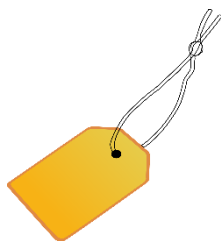
Thoughts are temporary automatic events, responding to what is going on around you, based on all your knowledge and past experiences. They may be positive, negative or neutral.

There may be times when you become so hooked by negative thoughts, it feels as though you are your thoughts, that the thoughts are your reality. At these times, it can be difficult to pay attention to anything else.

When you are hooked in this way, there are strategies that can help to unhook and recognise that, in fact, **you are not your thoughts!**

It takes practice to be able to step back and unhook from strong thoughts, especially if they have been around a while. Here are some ideas to help...

## 1. Label it



Is it a day-dream? Some planning? A worry? Is it a bully thought, saying negative things about you?

Labelling the thought with just one or two words helps remove yourself from the content of the thought, meaning you are less likely to become hooked and stuck with the thought going around and around your mind.

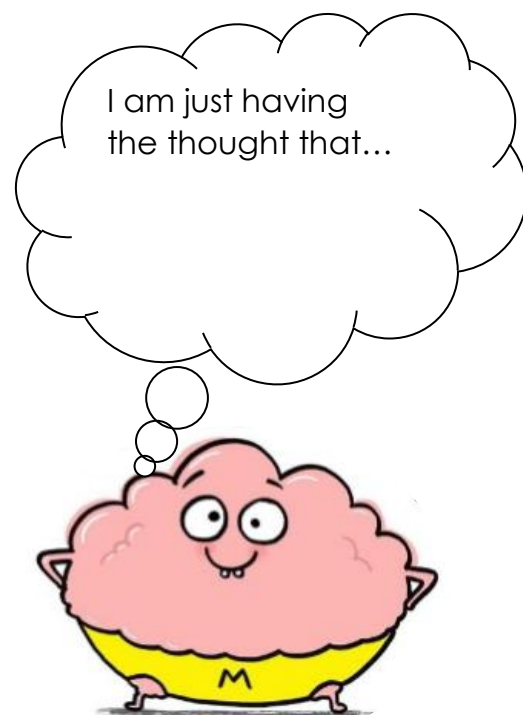
## 2. Preface it

By prefacing a thought with "I am just having the thought that..." some of the power the thought had is removed and reinforces the idea that thoughts are not facts, they are just things that the mind does!

"This is going to be terrible" becomes  
"*I'm just having the thought that* this is going to be terrible"

"Nothing ever goes right" becomes  
"*I'm just having the thought that* nothing ever goes right"

**Task:** Finish what your mind is saying in the bubble>>>



### 3. Imagine it

It might be nice to take break from reading and watch this video which can help you to notice your thoughts and then watch as you let them go! The aim of this activity is to help you learn that your thoughts are like leaves on a stream; always moving on, thoughts will come and go, even worry or sad thoughts.

[Leaves on a Stream](#)

#### Thought Diary

Thought diaries can be a useful way of noticing patterns of unhelpful or negative thoughts. Once you notice them, you can use the unhooking tactics to put the thought to one side and be able to continue with your day. This also stops your vicious cycle from spinning out of control.

If you notice a pattern in the time of day you are having unhelpful thoughts, you could use your 'positive actions' planner to set up something nice to do at this time each day to help disrupt the vicious cycle.

On the next page is an example template that you can use, but you may decide an actual diary or notebook is better for you – whatever works for you is what will work best.

**Take a break** here and spend the next week practicing noticing and defusing from your thoughts. Keep up with your positive actions and emotions too. You are doing really well – only a couple more skills to learn!

## Template Thought Diary

Day and am/pm/eve	Situation	Unhelpful Thought	De-fusion: Label it	De-fusion: Preface it	De-fusion: Imagine it	<b>Comments</b> (Were you able to distance from the thought? Did you try something else? What did you do after? Did you take any action?)
<b>Monday eve</b>	In my bedroom, I know I should get some exercise but don't want to go.	I am useless and lazy, I can't even go for a walk	Bully	√		When I labelled it, I could see I was being mean to myself. I decided to ask a friend if they wanted to go for a walk tomorrow. Then I made a cup of tea!

## Looking at things differently

Hopefully over the last week you have improved in being able to notice when you have been hooked to a negative thought. You may even have been able to use some of the strategies to begin unhooking with your thoughts so that you can see things more clearly and can get on with what you need or want to do.

Here are three more strategies that can really help to re-frame your thoughts, they all work best when you set regular times to practice them. Why don't you share the ideas with a friend or family member so they can help you remember what to do when you are too 'fused' to be able to see clearly?

## Radical Acceptance

Accepting that you can't change everything, but you can change the way you respond – will your cycle be vicious or virtuous? Instead of dwelling on things beyond your control, try to focus on the stuff that you can do that will help turn your vicious cycle into a virtuous one;

- Look after your body (eat, sleep, exercise)
- Increase activity (get those happy hormones flowing)
- Change how we feel in the moment (distraction, self soothe, positive emotion exercises)

## Example

You are feeling down because you think you are going to fail your exams.

**Out of your control:** Having to take the exams. When the exams happen. The weather on the day of exam. The mark once you have submitted your work.

**In your control:** Taking time to revise, asking teachers for help, eating well to feed the brain, taking measures to improve sleep to help feel refreshed.

Radical acceptance is being able to say *"I don't want to do the exams, but as I don't have control over that, I will control how I approach them. I will do all that is in my control to do well, and that is good enough."*

There is no need to spend time and energy on what you can't control. Keep that energy for what you can control.



**Task:** Have a think about something that is getting you down.

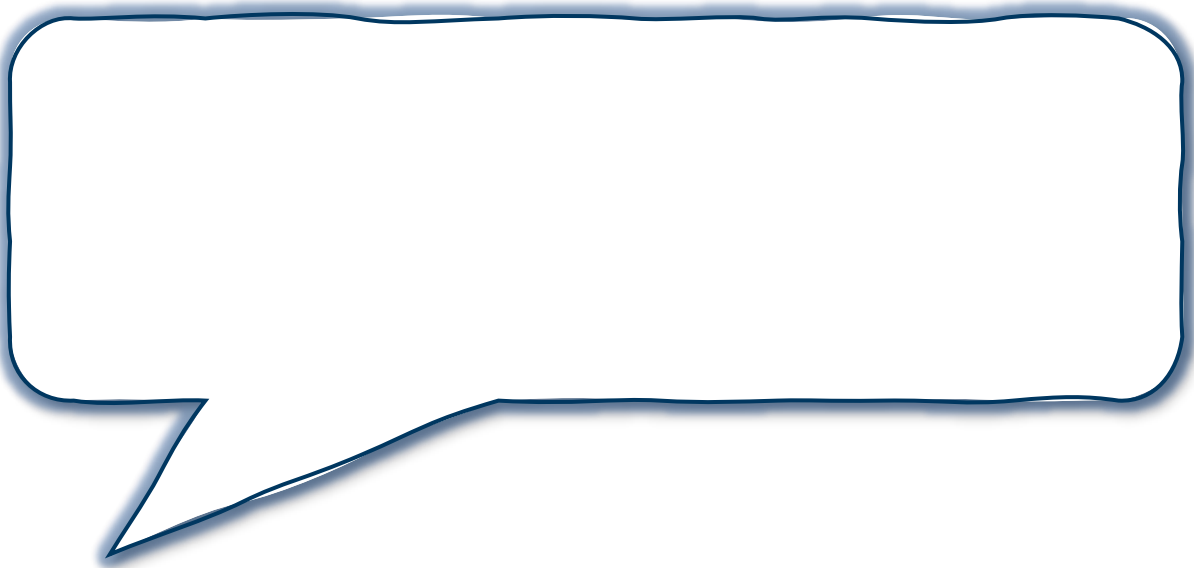
What about this situation is in your control? What is out of your control? Be as specific as you can – have a look at the example and diagram on page 27 if you get stuck.

**THE SITUATION:**

WHAT IS IN YOUR CONTROL?	WHAT IS OUT OF YOUR CONTROL?

What might radical acceptance look like in this situation?

**Task:** Fill in the speech bubble with your radical acceptance statement.





## Positive self-talk

Do you beat yourself up? Or think the worst about yourself? Say things about yourself that you'd never say to a friend? This way of talking about yourself is sure to get you into a low mood. One way you can help change this is to increase your **positive self-talk**.

**Task:** Take a minute to think about your positive qualities.

This can be personality traits, talents, anything you feel OK at, achievements, anything – as long as it is positive. If you get stuck, highlight the examples below that apply to you, or ask a friend or family member to help you.

I am kind

I can cheer up my friends

I am friendly

I am loyal

I am honest

I am a good listener

I am fun

I am good at sports

I am able to stay calm

I am helpful

I can play an instrument

I can talk to new people

I am able to speak in front of the class

I am good at \_\_\_\_\_

I work hard

I can \_\_\_\_\_

I am \_\_\_\_\_

## Review

Well done – you have come to the end! Hopefully you have found one or two things that have already started to help. Don't worry if you are not feeling your best self just yet though – it may take a little time, but if you keep using the skills in this book, you will get there.

**Task:** Sometimes it can be really easy to think about how far you have to go, rather than thinking about how far you have come. Use the spaces below and on the next page to acknowledge and celebrate your achievements!

**Reflect on things that matter to you:**  
has this changed since you began this workbook? (pg. 4)

**Distractions** that help me when I am feeling low and I know help change my mood (pg. 7 & 8)

**How I can break my vicious cycle**  
(pg.13)

Body:

Feelings:

Actions:

Thoughts:

**Things that are going well for me** (pg.15)

**Looking after my body, my top tips:**  
(pg.18-20)

Sleep:

Eating:

Exercise:

**Positive emotions I have  
experienced by doing  
things I enjoy** (pg.21)

**My positive self-talk** (pg.29)

**What I find useful to unhook  
from my unhelpful thoughts**  
(pg. 26)

**Things that are within my control**  
(pg.28)

## Additional support

Some helpful places to go online:

**Emotional Wellbeing Service**  
Cardiff and the Vale

**THE MIX**

**ChildLine**  
0800 1111

**meic**

**Beat**  
Eating disorders

**selfharm** UK

**kooth**

**family lives**

**Mind HUB**

**Anxiety UK**  
1970-2020 Helping you for over 50 years

**YOUNGMINDS**

**PAPYRUS**  
PREVENTION OF YOUNG SUICIDE

**DrugWise**

**Some mindfulness apps we like:**

**Calm** < Calm  
Headspace >

**HEADSPACE**

**StopBreatheThink**

**Smiling mind** >

**Some other apps we like:**

**COMBINED MINDS**  
Combined Minds to help friends and family support a young person's mental health

**Clear fear** to help with anxiety management

**CLEAR FEAR**

Please contact your GP to make an appointment if you feel your low mood is getting worse. GPs can be contacted out of hours also.