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Discipline of Behavioural Health
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One step
at a time

Graded Exposure

Content



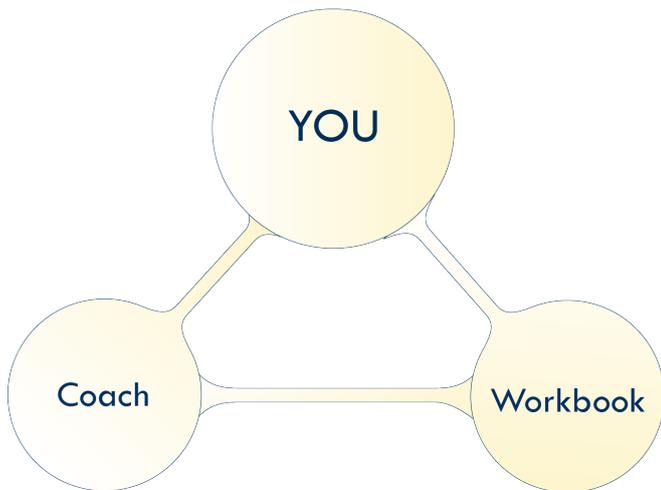
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Congratulations, you have committed to making changes in your life by signing up to this program! You have now met with your coach and received this workbook. The hardest part is seeking help, so you are already well on your way to making changes. This guided self-help program is made up of three major components: *you*, *your coach* and this *workbook*.

The most important component of the program is You. Your coach's role is to guide and support you to use the strategies in this workbook, to make the most of this program.

This workbook contains information, worksheets and resources to guide you through the program. Making any change takes time and persistence. Your willingness to give new challenges a go will be an important factor in seeing the change you want in your life.



*Help yourself with
the right tools and
support....*

4I'S



This workbook is made up of the four sections we call the 4I's:

- **I**nspiration - to help connect you with why you're doing this.
- **I**nformation - to let you know what this is all about.
- **I**mplementation - to direct you how to start.
- **I**nto the future - to show you how to maintain the changes that have been made.



INSPIRATION



Inspiration



When you first met with your coach, you identified the main problem you are currently experiencing. You also talked about how your behaviours, feelings, and thoughts contribute to, and maintain, the problem. Now that you have started, you and your coach will work together to identify goals to work on. Fill out the worksheets in this section of the book based on what you discussed with your coach.

As you work through this program, you will learn more about how anxiety and depression impact on your life. Sometimes it can be difficult to recognise the progress you have made. You might like to come back to the pages in this section as sources of inspiration and motivation to see how far you've come since you started.



Problem statement

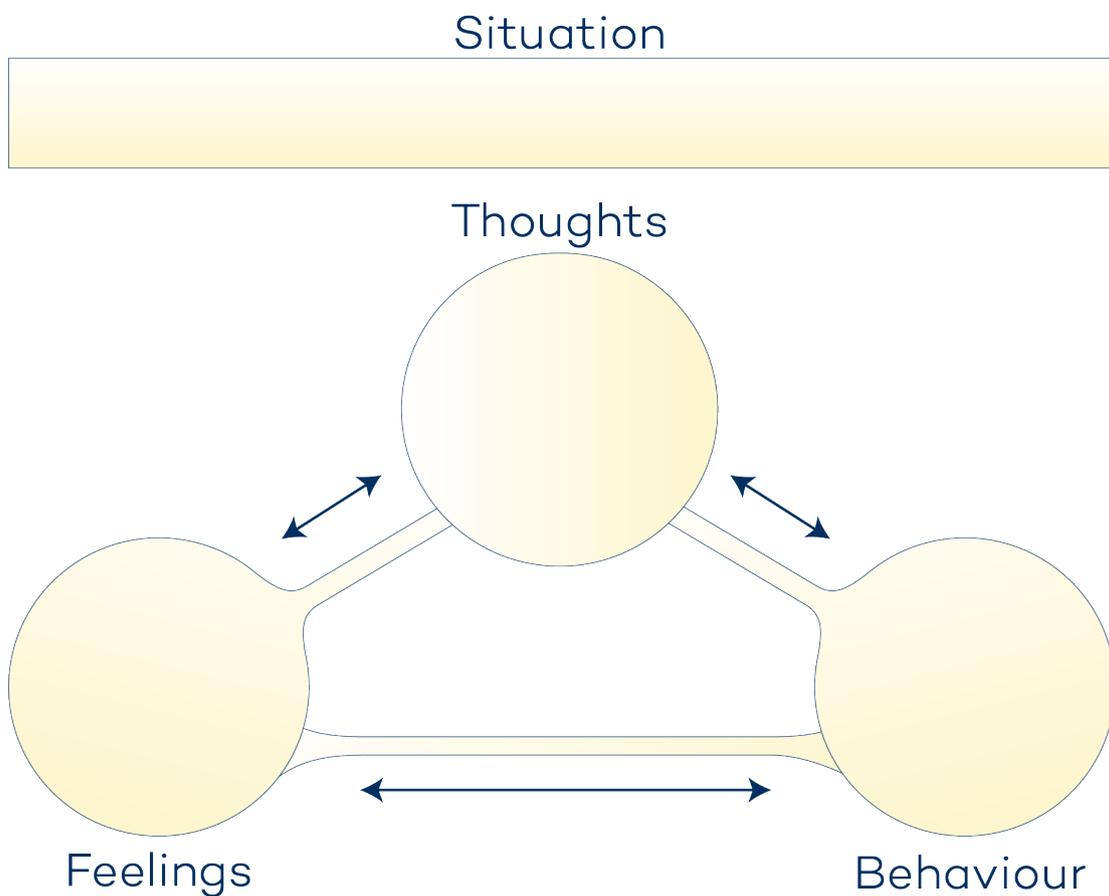
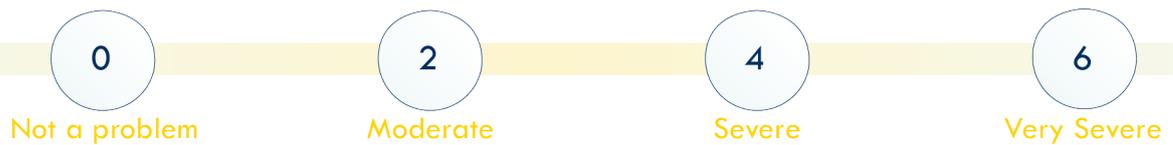
WHEN (trigger)

WHAT (behaviour)

BECAUSE I THINK / FEAR THAT (consequences)

WHICH AFFECTS (impacts)

Impact of the problem



Setting goals



Working out at the beginning where you hope to be at the end is useful for identifying clear and meaningful changes. Together with your coach, you will work out some goals so that you are able to determine if what you are doing is making a difference.

Treatment goals should be S.M.A.R.T.



Goal 1

What will I do differently?

Where will I be doing it?

How regularly will I do it?

Currently, I can complete my goal



Anytime



Often



Occasionally



Not at all

Goal 2

What will I do differently?

Where will I be doing it?

How regularly will I do it?

Currently, I can complete my goal



Anytime



Often



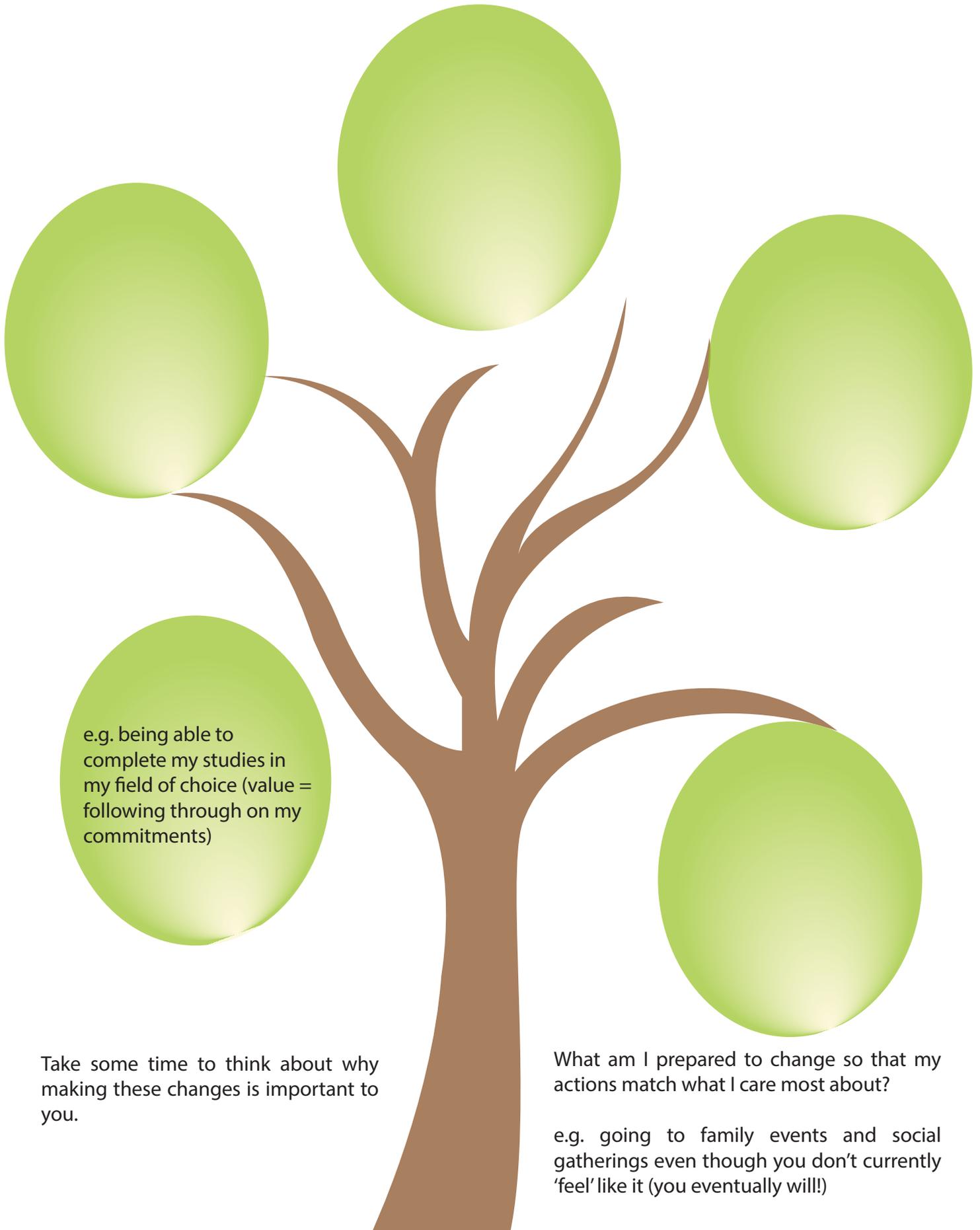
Occasionally



Not at all

Values

Areas in my life that matter the most
and give me reason to change



Take some time to think about why making these changes is important to you.

What am I prepared to change so that my actions match what I care most about?

e.g. going to family events and social gatherings even though you don't currently 'feel' like it (you eventually will!)

Lisa's story



Lisa is an 18-year-old trainee vet nurse living at home with her parents. She has had trouble dealing with the sight of blood since a young age. She has always had a love for animals and wants to care for them as much as she can.

However, Lisa faints at the sight of blood and just the thought of it makes her feel weak in the knees. She tries to avoid anything that she thinks will involve blood, including TV programs or conversations with other students. Lisa worries that she will make a fool of herself if she faints. This is a particular problem for her at work/study, where she will frequently make excuses to avoid being around blood. She prefers not to watch her boyfriend play sport, and when he recently sprained his ankle, she refused to take him to hospital.

Lisa knows her fear of blood is getting worse and she worries about her future in vet nursing. She wants to be able to complete her studies as she would love to be able to help animals in need. She wants to deal with her fear of blood, so she can help family, friends and animals when they are injured.

Lisa found out about the program and made a call. She met with a coach for an assessment, and she found out that what she was experiencing was more common than she realised. With the help of her coach, Lisa was able to identify her problem, put it into a statement, and rate the impact it was having on her life.

Lisa's problem statement

WHEN (trigger)

When I see or think about blood.

WHAT (behaviour)

I feel sick and like I'm going to faint.

BECAUSE I THINK / FEAR THAT (consequences)

I avoid any situation where I might see blood, hear about it, or talk about it.

WHICH AFFECTS (impacts)

This interferes with my study/work and social life.

Impact of the problem

0

Not a problem

2

Moderate

4

Severe

6

Very Severe

The coach then helped Lisa to identify clear goals, to work toward them and to rate the level of difficulty associated with achieving them right now.

Goal 1

What I will do differently?

To be involved in all trainee vet nurse activities.

Where I will be doing it?

At the vet clinic where I am currently training.

How regularly I will do it?

Every time I'm at the vet clinic.

Currently, I can complete my goal

0

Anytime

2

Often

4

Occasionally

6

Not at all

After meeting with her coach, Lisa and her coach spoke weekly by phone for five weeks. Together, Lisa and her coach worked through the *Graded Exposure* workbook, reviewing and re-visiting Lisa's problem statement and goals. The activities and regular contact helped Lisa see that she was making progress towards achieving her goals.

Where is Lisa now?



As part of the graded exposure program, Lisa learnt how to use exposure techniques to confront any challenging situations involving blood.

As Lisa worked her way through the exposure challenges, carrying out each step multiple times, she occasionally experienced anxiety, nausea and feeling out of control. Each time she carried out an exposure challenge, Lisa was able to tolerate these feelings better, got used to them, and she was able to confront situations she never thought she could.

Eventually, Lisa was regularly engaged in all trainee vet nurse activities. She has now finished her traineeship and is working as a vet nurse, assisting with surgeries daily.

The *Implementation* section of this workbook will show you some of the activities Lisa completed to get to where she is now, and will be a space for you to try your own!



INFORMATION



Anxiety and Depression



Anxiety is when you might feel overwhelmed, upset, or worried about things in your life. When this happens what you **Do**, what you **Feel**, and what you **Think** impacts on how you go about your life. For example, you may go out less, avoid seeing friends, or continually take days off work.

When you are anxious;

You might **Do**
Avoid the situation, keep to what's safe....

You might **Feel**
Tense, short of breath....

You might **Think**
I can't escape, I can't handle this....

Depression may be when you feel consistently low for two or more weeks and lose interest in the activities you used to enjoy. When this happens what you **Do**, what you **Feel**, and what you **Think** impacts on how you go about your life. For example, you may stay home more, stop going to work and seeing friends, and stop participating in activities.

When you are depressed;

You might **Do**
Spend more time alone, enjoy things less....

You might **Feel**
Flat, unmotivated, sad....

You might **Think**
It's too much effort, I'm useless....



Understanding anxiety



Helpful anxiety

At one time or another we have all felt anxious about things – having enough money to get by, having enough time to do what you want to do, and about the relationships that are important to you. Feeling anxious and on guard has been hardwired into us so we can respond appropriately to threats in our environment by being alert, aware and prepared.

Take a moment to consider the following situation:

You are at the beach on a hot day, cooling-off in the water. All of a sudden you find yourself further out than expected, struggling to keep your head above the waves. You weren't expecting the water to be this rough and a wave knocks you off balance. At this point you don't know which way is up, and you start panicking. After what feels like a long period of time, you manage to get to the surface, catch your breath, and make your way back to the beach.

In a situation like this, you may have felt your heart racing, short of breath, the tensing of your muscles, and increased alertness. Anxiety served a critical purpose in this situation - it prepared you physically and mentally to respond to a dangerous situation.

Unhelpful anxiety

While anxiety is designed to help us respond to threats, it becomes unhelpful when it is triggered off in situations that we feel are threatening, but aren't actually as harmful or dangerous to us as we think. When this happens we tend to be caught in a cycle of panic, escape and avoidance of the situations, objects or people that trigger the anxiety.

Take a moment to consider the following situation:

You can't find your wallet/purse. Immediately, you start to panic thinking that someone has stolen it and is now emptying your bank accounts. Your thoughts are all over the place, your heart is pounding, and you become short of breath. You start to think the worst - that you won't be able to pay bills, that you'll have a huge debt, and that someone is stealing your identity. This panic then prevents you from thinking rationally and looking for your wallet. After 10 minutes, you see your wallet on the floor under where you usually keep it.

In this situation, anxiety was not helpful. The panic that you experienced prevented you from searching for your wallet/purse.



The fight, flight, or freeze response



Consider the situation at the beach - in this situation you responded with the *flight* response – this prepared you to take action to do what you needed to do. In a different situation where you sense danger or threat you may respond by *fighting* back. Sometimes, however, the danger or threat may seem so overwhelming that your brain and body have neither the time nor strength to respond – in this case you may *freeze* and not respond at all. These responses are all part of the way in which we protect and keep ourselves safe.



Escape and avoidance



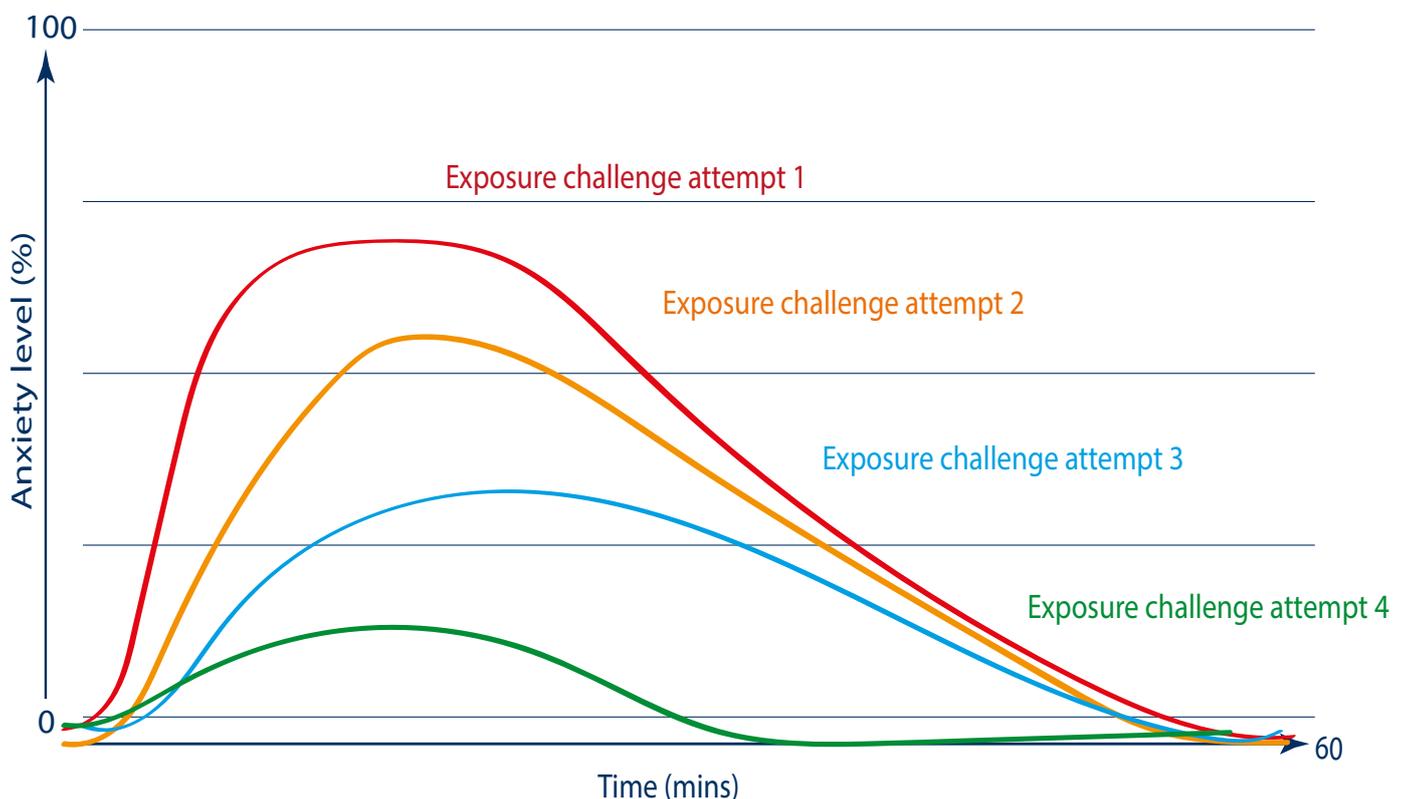
When you are faced with a situation, object or place you fear, you become anxious because you perceive a threat. Your anxiety gets to a point where you feel as though you are unable to cope. To reduce your feelings of anxiety, you leave the situation. If this occurs a number of times, you learn that escaping from feared situations/objects/places is a way to manage your anxiety.

As facing the situation becomes more difficult, you may find that you are avoiding the situation, object, or place, entirely. You develop a learned *escape* or *avoidance* response that becomes reinforced over time and harder to break. While it may work in the short-term, in the long-term responding in this way can have a serious impact on your life.

Habituation



Habituation occurs when you confront a feared situation, object, or place, stay there for long enough, and find that the anxiety reduces on its own. The habituation process takes time, and although you experience short-term discomfort, it will bring about long-term benefits as you continue to face up to anxiety provoking situations. On average, it takes 30-45 minutes to experience less anxiety. The more you engage in exposure the easier it will become to do the things that matter to you. The graph below shows how facing a situation, object, or place that makes you anxious, over-and-over again, will ultimately lead to less anxiety.



Graded exposure



Graded exposure is one of the most effective ways of overcoming anxiety by helping you face situations, objects or places that you have been avoiding, in a gradual way. Through this program you will learn to overcome anxiety, without escaping or avoiding it.



Principles of graded exposure

Graded

People learn better when they tackle things in stages. When you start your exposure challenges, it is important that you experience enough anxiety to be uncomfortable, but not so much that you can't manage. As challenges are overcome, you learn that you can face up to more than you thought was possible.

Focused

It is important to pay attention to your thoughts and feelings without distraction. Focusing on what happens within you when you are facing the situation, object, or place that makes you anxious is important.

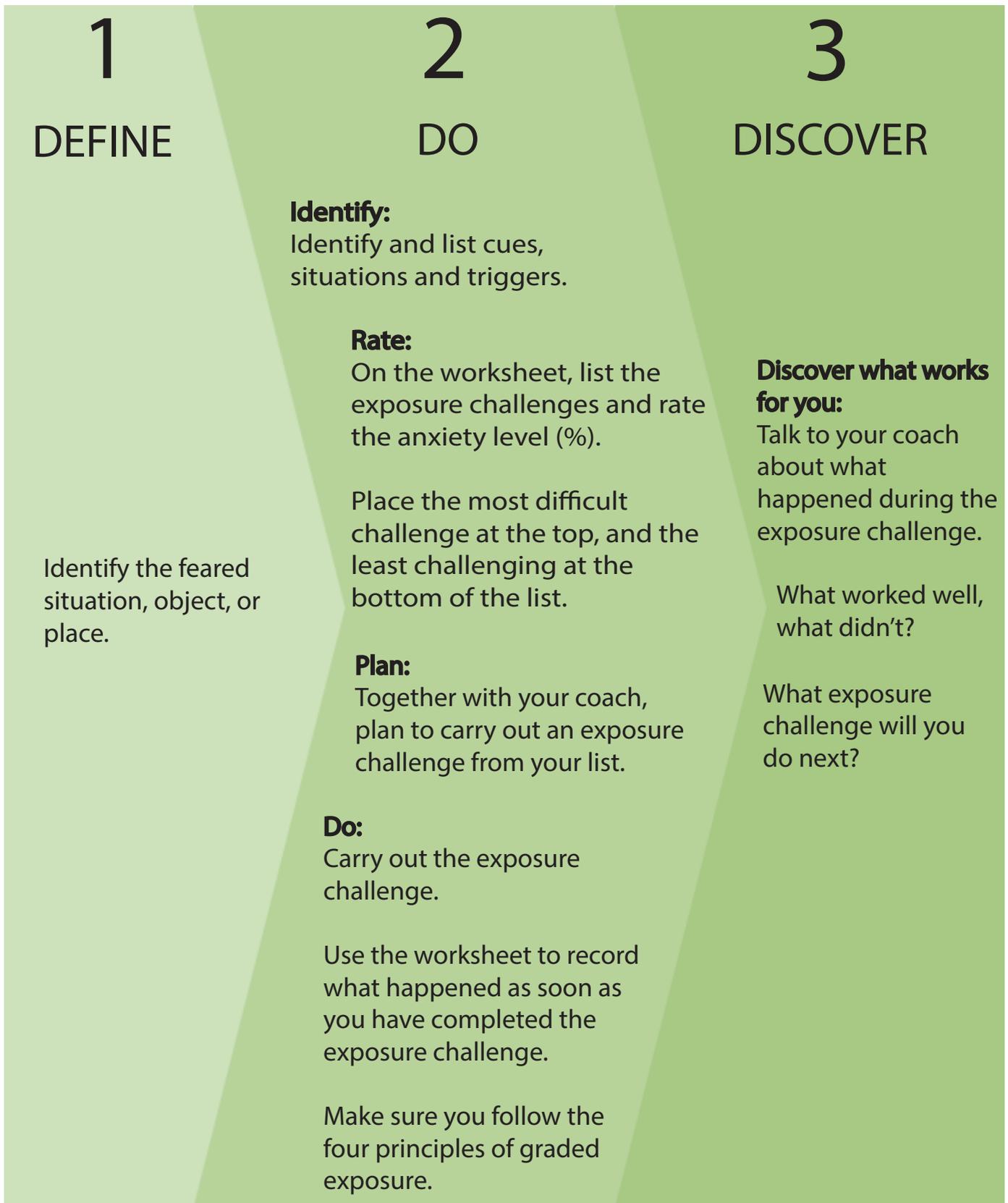
Prolonged

An essential aspect of graded exposure is to remain in a situation for long enough so that over time your anxiety will eventually reduce on its own.

Repeated

People get better at things the more they do them, which means that repeated exposure to challenging situations will ultimately lead to less or no anxiety.

A guide for using graded exposure in your own life



Take away



While anxiety is designed to help us respond to threats, it becomes unhelpful when it is triggered off in situations that we feel are threatening, but aren't actually as harmful or dangerous to us as we think.

Escape and avoidance is a learnt behaviour that provides short-term relief from anxiety, but negatively impacts your life in the long-term.

Graded exposure helps people overcome anxiety, using the four principles - graded, focused, prolonged, and repeated.

Facing your fears is challenging – it takes time, practice and courage. With the support of your coach and this workbook, you are on your way to achieving your goals.



Practice makes permanent.

Albert Einstein

IMPLEMENTATION



Making change

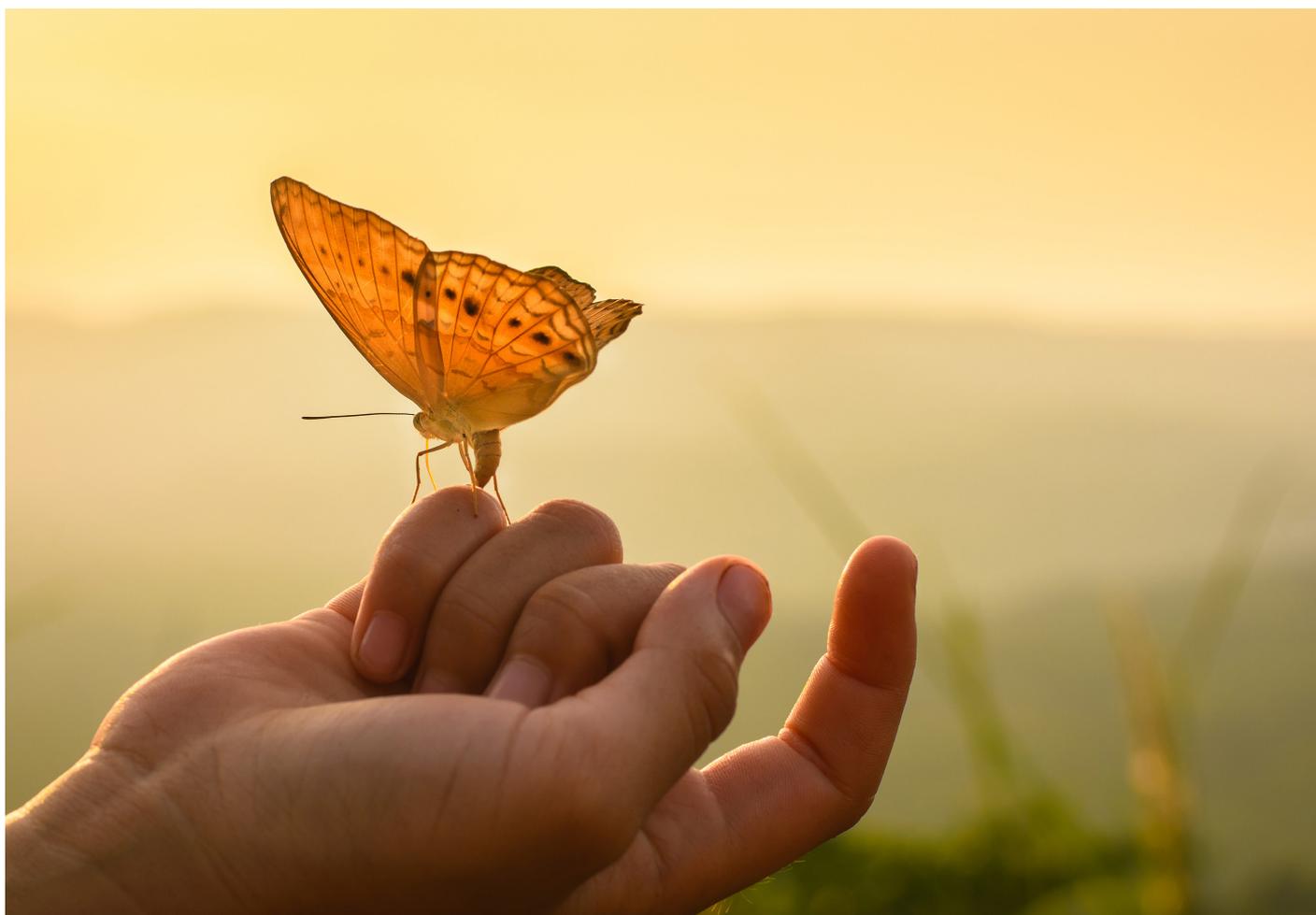


Now that you have identified sources of **I**nspiration to complete this program, and have learnt valuable **I**nformation about how to make positive changes in your life through Graded Exposure, it is time to **I**mplement some strategies.

This section involves completing three activities:

- (1) Defining your Exposure Challenges
- (2) Completing your Graded Exposure Worksheets
- (3) Using your Exposure Challenges Record

First, you will see how Lisa completed some of these activities during her program. With the guidance of your coach, you will then have the opportunity to start implementing them yourself!



Lisa's exposure challenges



Together with her coach, Lisa listed her different exposure challenges. She then planned a time to carry out the first exposure challenge (e.g. the anxiety trigger which causes the least distress). Before carrying out the challenge she took some time to fill out the 'Before' section on her Graded Exposure worksheet (see next page), and continued filling it out during the exposure challenge.

Anxiety trigger	Level of anxiety (%)
1. <i>Prick my finger to produce blood</i> <i>Assist in a 30 minute surgery at the vet clinic</i>	100%
2. <i>Hold a vial of blood</i> <i>Watch online video showing vet surgery</i>	90%
3. <i>Watch a video of someone giving blood</i>	75%
4. <i>Look at a colour photo of a surgical procedure</i>	50%
5. <i>Look at a black and white photo of a surgical procedure</i> <i>Look at surgical equipment</i>	40%

Lisa's graded exposure worksheet



Describe the exposure challenge you plan to carry out:

Look at a black and white photo of a surgical procedure.

	Doing	Feeling	Thinking	Level of anxiety (%)
Before	<i>I am fidgeting a lot.</i>	<i>I feel nauseous and tense.</i>	<i>How am I going to react to the photo? This is hard.</i>	25%
During	<i>My hands were shaking, I was breathing fast.</i>	<i>Nervous. My heart was beating quite fast and I felt tense. My palms were sweaty.</i>	<i>During the exposure challenge I was thinking that I could make out some parts that looked like blood and I could see that the procedure was of someone having stitches. I could see the cut and instruments with what looked like dried blood. I was thinking about focusing on the picture and not looking away.</i>	40%
Now	<i>I am breathing normally. Sitting calmly.</i>	<i>I am now thinking that I can do the challenge again and I am ready to tackle the next exposure challenge - the colour photo of a surgical procedure.</i>	<i>At the moment I am feeling relieved. I noticed that my heart rate began to slow down after about 20 mins and I was able to breathe normally. I kept looking at the picture for another 10 mins and was no longer grossed out by the picture. I actually feel pretty proud of myself and a bit surprised about how I was able to manage the exposure challenge. I also feel hopeful.</i>	70%

In doing this exposure challenge, I have learnt that:

I can get used to seeing pictures with blood in them if I am exposed to them for long enough. I won't always feel like I'm going to faint. The longer I spend exposed to the blood, the less intense my feelings of anxiety become.

Exposure challenges



Anxiety trigger	Level of anxiety (%)
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	

Graded exposure worksheets

Describe the exposure challenge you plan to carry out:

	Doing	Feeling	Thinking	Level of anxiety (%)
Before				
During				
Now				

In doing this exposure challenge, I have learnt that:



Describe the exposure challenge you plan to carry out:

	Doing	Feeling	Thinking	Level of anxiety (%)
Before				
During				
Now				

In doing this exposure challenge, I have learnt that:

Graded exposure worksheets

Describe the exposure challenge you plan to carry out:

	Doing	Feeling	Thinking	Level of anxiety (%)
Before				
During				
Now				

In doing this exposure challenge, I have learnt that:



Describe the exposure challenge you plan to carry out:

	Doing	Feeling	Thinking	Level of anxiety (%)
Before				
During				
Now				

In doing this exposure challenge, I have learnt that:

Graded exposure worksheets

Describe the exposure challenge you plan to carry out:

	Doing	Feeling	Thinking	Level of anxiety (%)
Before				
During				
Now				

In doing this exposure challenge, I have learnt that:



Describe the exposure challenge you plan to carry out:

	Doing	Feeling	Thinking	Level of anxiety (%)
Before				
During				
Now				

In doing this exposure challenge, I have learnt that:

Exposure challenges



Anxiety trigger	Level of anxiety (%)
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	

INTO THE FUTURE



Relapse prevention

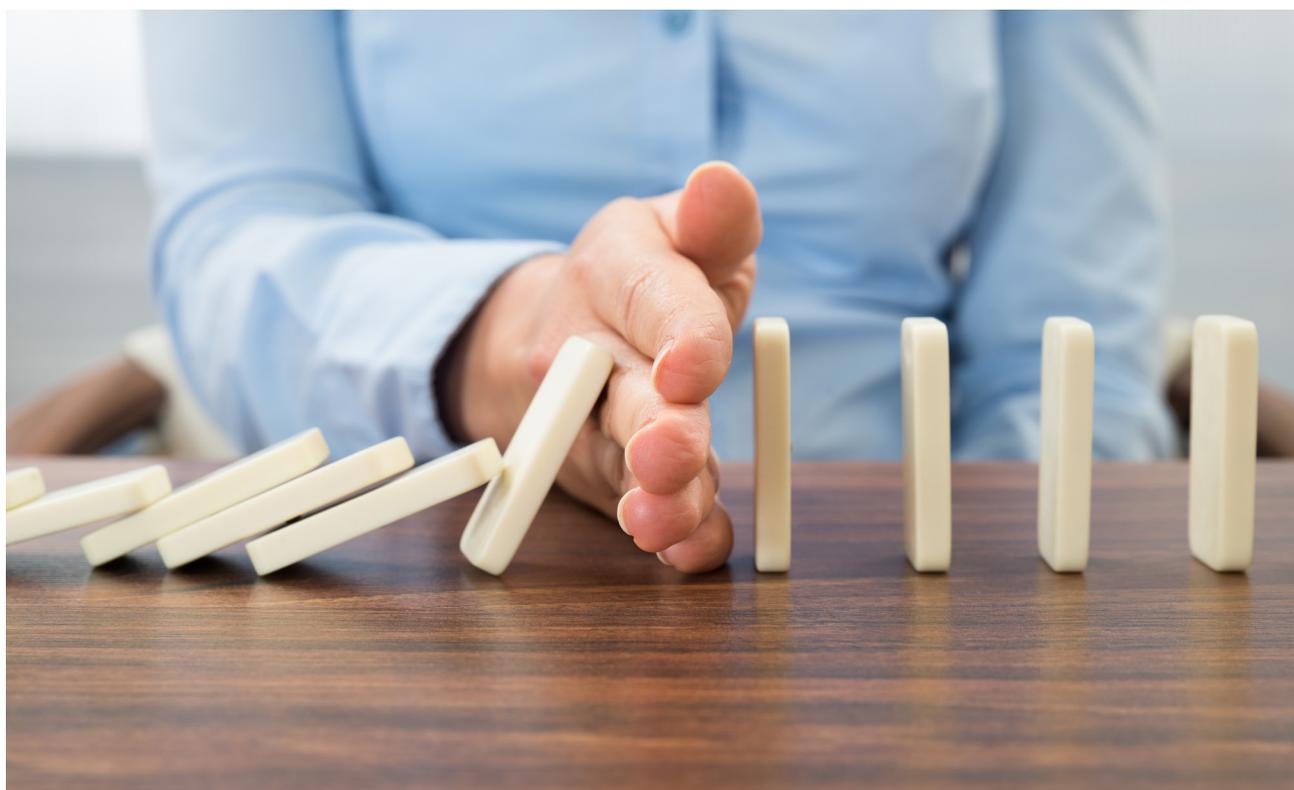


Throughout this program you have been provided with information and an opportunity to apply skills. You have been encouraged to learn more about yourself, and in particular, how the interactions between what you do, feel and think, impacts on you. At this point, we hope you have made some important changes to your life.

Having experienced anxiety or depression can increase the likelihood of experiencing them again in the future. If you notice changes to what you are doing, how you are feeling, and what you are thinking, that last anywhere from a few days to a week, you may be experiencing a *setback* – this is common. A setback is when unhelpful behaviours, feelings or thoughts become more frequent. Responding to a setback by using the techniques you have learnt throughout this program can get you back on track.

If your mental health declines for longer than that, then you may be experiencing a *relapse*. Relapse is when you return to the previous behaviours, feelings and thoughts which caused the anxiety or depression in the first place, and are causing significant disruption to your life.

Relapse is not inevitable and does not happen without warning signs. The techniques you have learnt throughout this program can help you avoid or reduce the severity of relapse. Your confidence will grow as you continue to apply the techniques that you have put into practice. Supported by NETTS and your Relapse Prevention Plan (see next pages) you will have a clear plan to respond to any setback and get back on track.



NETTS:

New skills and knowledge, Exploring opportunities, Traps and Triggers, Solutions



New knowledge and skills you have learnt



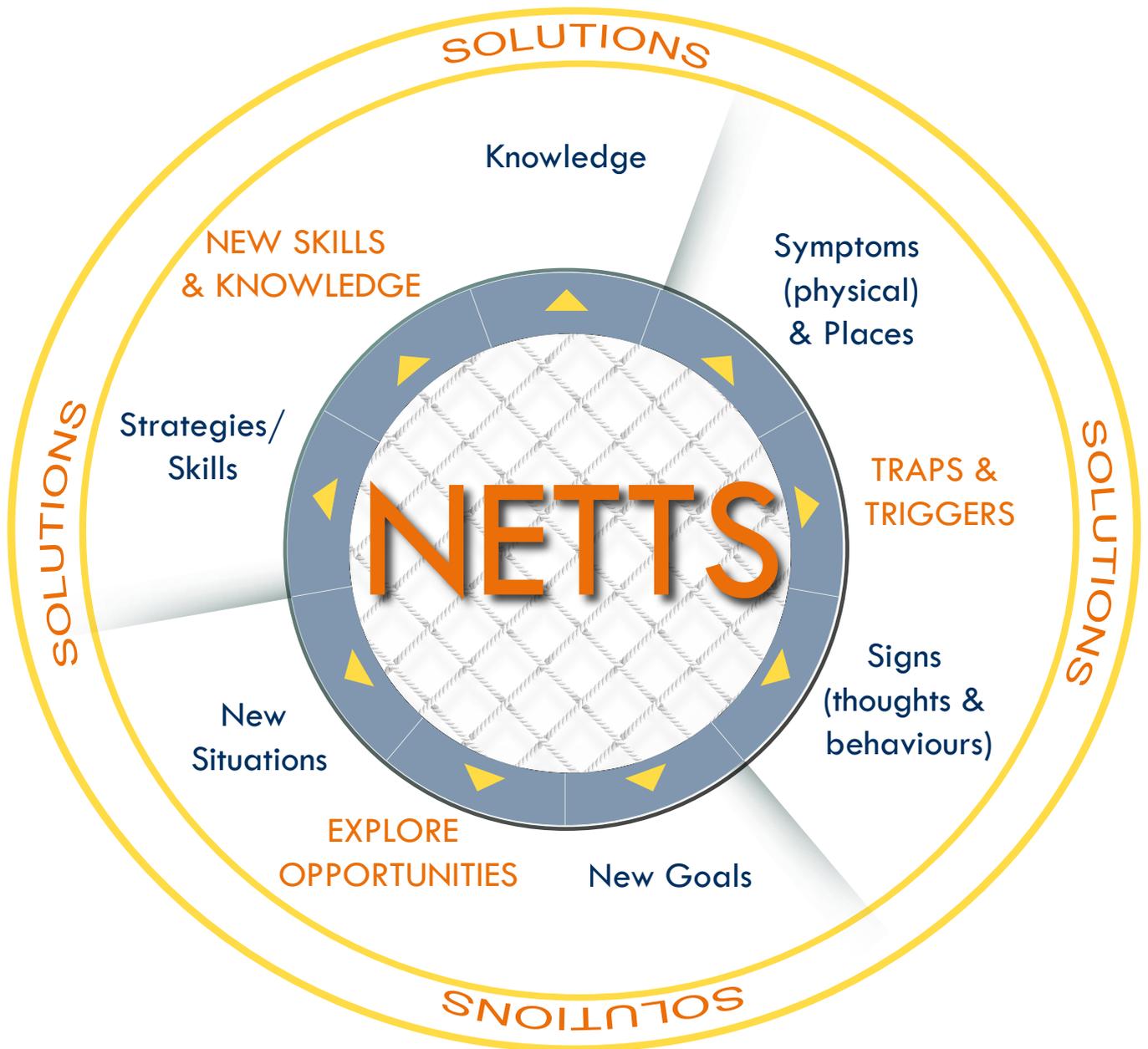
Exploring how these skills and knowledge can be applied to other areas/situations in your life



Traps and Triggers that can disrupt your recovery



Solutions for when you feel you may be experiencing a setback or relapse



Relapse prevention plan



Refer to the worksheet below to develop your RPP with the help of NETTS

New knowledge and skills I have learnt

What I have learnt about the problem:

What I have learnt about what works:

Exploring opportunities

How can I use this further in other parts of my life:

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.

Traps and Triggers

What early warning signs, thoughts, and feelings I need to be aware of:

People and places that can disrupt my recovery:

Solutions

What's next?

People and/or services I will contact if I need some additional support:

When will I schedule my routine 'Wellbeing Check-in' day and time?

- Developing your RPP is something that you will do together with your coach as part of this program.
- We recommend that you keep this resource and refer to it as you need.
- It may also be helpful for you to choose a routine 'Wellbeing Check-in' day and time every few weeks to review your progress (e.g., by re-rating your initial problem statement and goals you recorded in the INSPIRATION section of this workbook and adding in and rating any new goals that you have developed).





This guided self-help workbook is designed as an essential resource in the delivery of Low Intensity Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (LiCBT).