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Well-Being in ACTion

This workbook is for young people who are having some problems with anxiety or low mood and want things to change.

It can help you put your well-being into action by showing you how to develop really important skills for life: like how to manage thoughts and feelings, build flexibility and resilience to help you cope when things get tough or go wrong, and make thoughtful choices about how to respond based on what you care about.

ILLUSTRATED BY
THEO, 15 years.

Service provided by Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust

Hello. This is the first step in learning how to manage the ups and downs of life so that anxiety and low mood don't get in the way of you being able to live your life in the way that you want to. Here are some things you should know about this workbook:

It's based on research and evidence

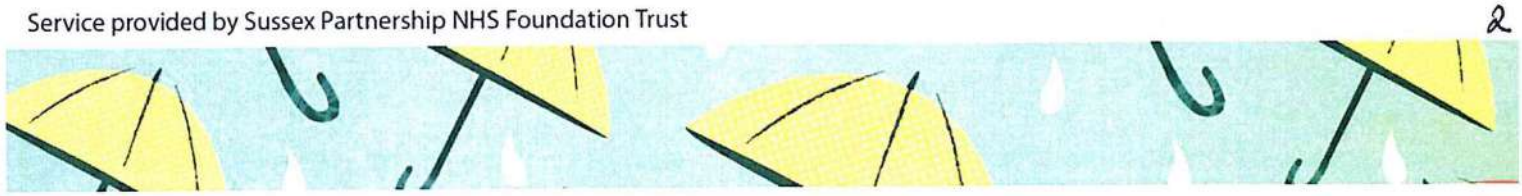
- This workbook is based on Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT). ACT is a form of cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT). ACT aims to help you manage the difficult feelings, thoughts and experiences that happen to us all, and be able do the things that make life more enjoyable and meaningful.
- Almost all psychological problems like low mood, anxiety, addictions, problems with eating or self-image, boil down to the same basic process: we get hooked by unhelpful thoughts and feelings and do less of the things that make life meaningful & worthwhile.
- Research shows that ACT is very effective in helping people overcome problems by becoming more flexible in how they think, feel and behave.

It's practical:

- You will develop and practice skills to use in your every day life. In order to see the changes you want, it is essential to practice and develop these skills.
- The skills of noticing what you are feeling and thinking, unhooking from unhelpful thoughts, and thoughtfully choosing how you respond and behave based on what you care about are key skills in psychological well-being. These are the skills covered in this workbook.

It's focused on the 'here-and-now':

- This workbook focuses on using the skills in your everyday life and how you can make helpful changes.
- Be more able to deal with difficult thoughts and feelings with resilience and flexibility
- Be able to do more of the things that are important and that matter to you.



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Difficult Stuff Happens

Life is often difficult – there is always so much to think about and so much to do.

On top of that, unexpected and unwanted things can happen that makes life even harder. Maybe some of these things have happened to you:

Parents fighting/ divorce

Falling out with friends

Relationships ending

Illness or Injury

Bereavement

Traumatic events

Not doing well in exams

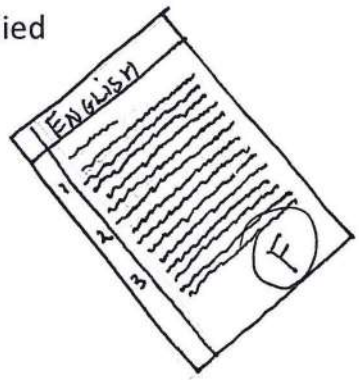
Being bullied

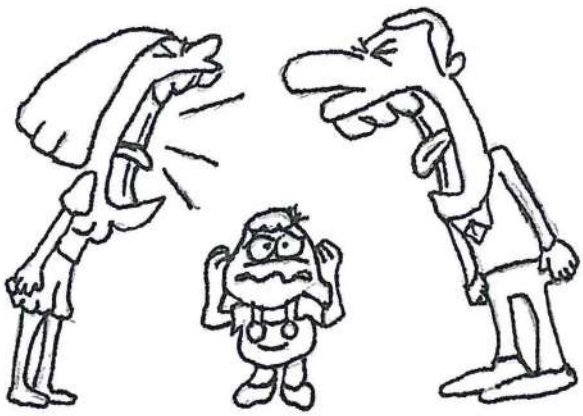
Family member going to prison

Having carer responsibilities

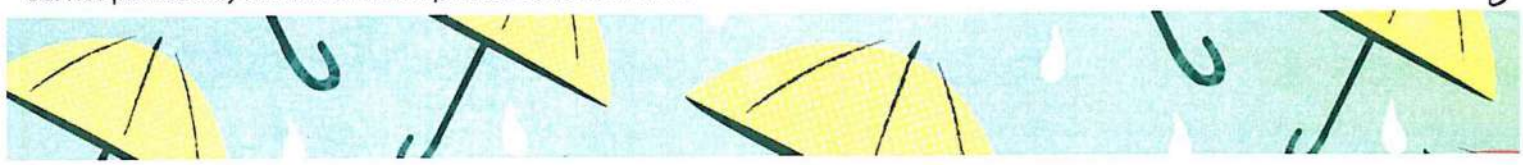
Moving home and starting again

Family member with drug or alcohol problems





Difficult things that happen can be really hard to cope with and can really hurt. Things sometimes happen unexpectedly without warning and it can be hard to adjust, hard to process and we get overwhelming and intense thoughts and feelings. If we're not careful though, these thoughts and feelings can take over our lives and start to impact on our wellbeing, health and everyday life.



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And - we are supposed to be happy, successful, perfect. Aren't we?

In our modern, western society we are all encouraged to succeed, achieve and do well. That's ok on the whole and can be good.

But, when it comes to feelings, we are often told they are not ok to have or that we must feel the opposite of what we actually feel:

When you're sad - people say 'cheer up'

When you're worried - people say 'don't worry'

When you're feeling angry - people say 'calm down'

Wherever we look - especially on social media, people look happy, successful, talk about how great their lives are etc. etc. If we don't feel happy and successful all the time, we think there must be something wrong with us.

The reality is that for everyone, the world can be a difficult, scary and frustrating place. So of course we would feel, sad, worried, angry or whatever. Talk about MIXED MESSAGES!

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Emotions

We all have emotions (feelings). Emotions tell us that we care about something. They are our body and brain's way of giving us messages about what is important to us. For example, we may feel angry when someone has treated us badly or feel nervous about taking an exam. Emotions also help us connect and communicate with others. Sometimes emotions can be strong, overwhelming and hard to cope with. Here are just some of the feelings that people can find hard to cope with:

Worry

Sadness

Anger

Shame

Guilt

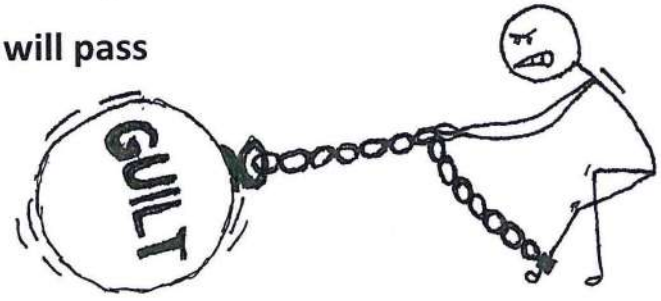
Loneliness

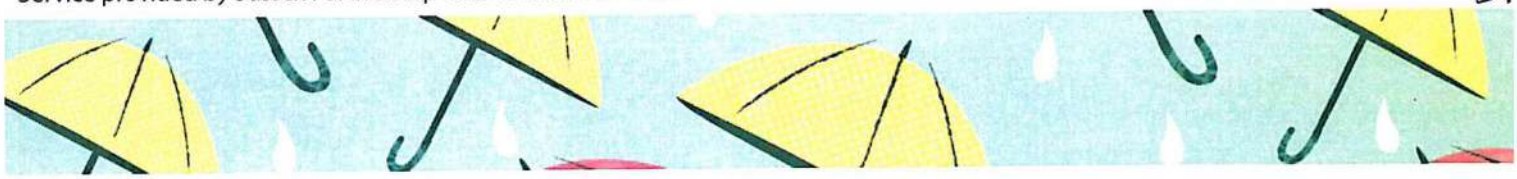
Also, because we're human, we rarely experience one thing at one time. Quite often people experience jumbled up feelings or quickly changing emotions that can be hard to identify and unsettling to experience. For some people when they feel so overloaded by their emotions, they can experience a feeling of numbness or emptiness which can be equally as overwhelming or unsettling.

It's important to remember that when you experience strong feelings that feel hard to cope with, they don't last forever. Feelings change, they come and go. So if you are feeling overwhelmed by your feelings, there are two things to tell yourself:

1) **All feelings are normal and part of being human**

2) **It feels overwhelming now but it will pass**



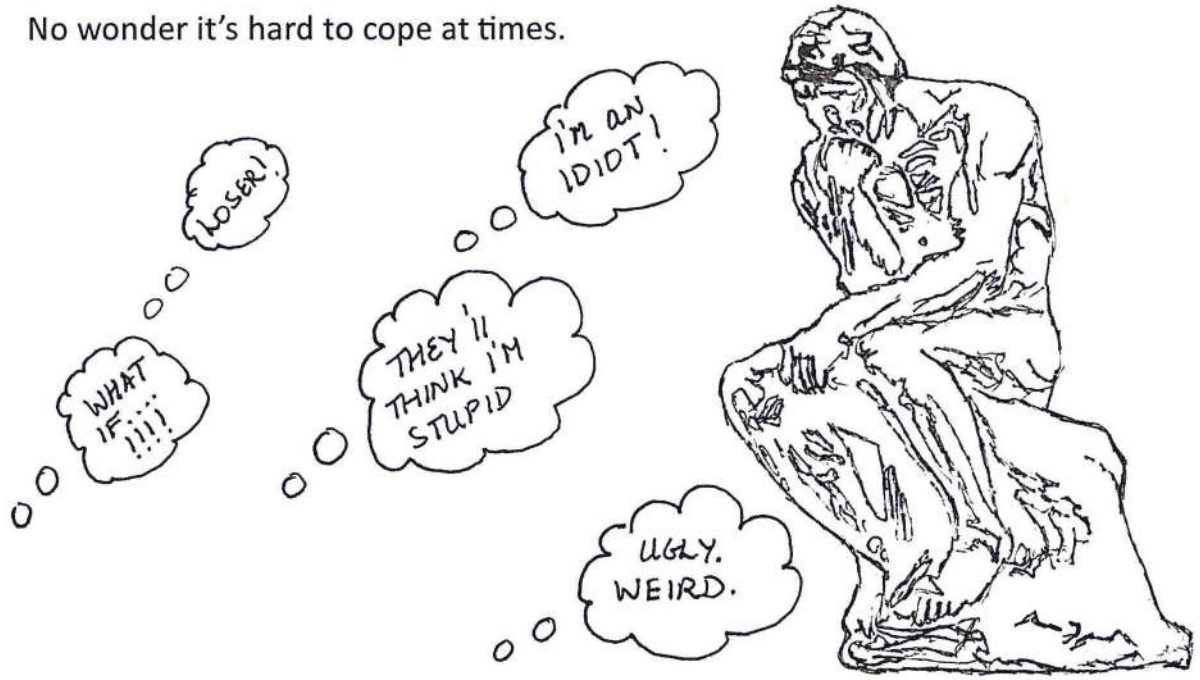


Thoughts

Thoughts, memories, images come and go all the time, our minds pump out thoughts automatically. It is very common to have negative, difficult and painful thoughts and memories. For example, even when we are just chatting to a friend, our thoughts often distract us with self-criticism or negative thoughts about what others think of us. We look at why it is very normal to have thoughts that are often negative on page 8.

Thoughts that are strong and negative also seem real or true, and we may believe them. When that happens we can get stuck in a pattern of thinking that makes us feel worse and we avoid or stop doing things and life gets smaller and less enjoyable. We also try to stop having these difficult or painful thoughts and feelings, but that's really hard because when you try not to think about something, you think about it even more. For 1 minute, try not to think about a blue sheep. What happened? Even if you managed not to think about a blue sheep, you probably had to concentrate really hard on something else.

No wonder it's hard to cope at times.



Coping or Not Coping?

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You've probably tried different ways to stop having painful or difficult thoughts and feelings.

Circle all the things you have tried:

Distracting yourself on social media

Sleeping a lot

Over– exercising

Drinking alcohol

Smoking

Eating comfort food OR not eating enough

Pretending everything is OK—putting on a 'mask'

Isolating yourself– not seeing friends or responding to messages

Watching TV/ films/ YouTube

Gaming

Going out as much as possible

Taking drugs

Self-Harm

Distracting yourself some other ways

Anything else?

_____

Humans are really good at coming up with what looks like solutions to problems, but some of these ways of coping are unhelpful. Some of them can make things worse or take us away from doing the things that matter and are important to us.

Looking at the coping strategies you have circled, what is the impact? *E.g. On Health? Achievements? Time? School? Relationships with family and friends?*

_____

_____

_____

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Why are our thoughts often negative?... Evolution!

Our brains are adapted for survival - to look for danger and threat

Our minds have not changed for thousands of years. We have the same mind and brain structure today that earlier humans had in the Stone Age when people lived in caves and faced many more real threats to survival than we do now.

Back in the Stone Age, staying alive was much harder so our minds helped us stay alert to all sorts of dangers so we could act on them and survive. It works on a 'better safe than sorry' principle - Thinking that a large brown shape in the grass was a lion was safer than thinking it was a rock, even if it was a rock, because then you could stay safe if you had the chance. If you kept out of danger, you survived and reproduced and passed on your 'how to stay alert and alive' genes.

We don't have as many dangers to be alert to as our ancestors did and we certainly don't need to worry about getting eaten by a sabre-toothed tiger anymore, but our mind hasn't caught up with that. Better to be safe than sorry!

Living in groups

Living in groups was also an important way to stay safe and protected. You were much more likely to be eaten by a tiger if you were out wandering around by yourself! So as well as having thoughts about threat and danger, we are often filled with worrying thoughts about fitting in with the group, belonging, being disliked and rejected. For teenagers this is even more likely to happen as adolescence is a time of separating from your immediate family and finding and starting your own 'tribe'. Just like in the Stone Age, belonging to a group and being accepted are vital for our well-being and protection. Feeling lonely can be helpful because it makes us want to connect and feel secure. But if we can't or don't feel able to, loneliness can lead to very low mood and disconnection.

So, negative thoughts are normal and have helped humans to survive.

You are only here, reading this booklet today because all of your many, many thousands of ancestors made no fatal mistakes before having children.

Our Stone Age mind is not always good at coping with the modern world. It finds lots of dangers and threat; and lots of reasons to feel 'not good enough' and be rejected. So our Stone Age minds are often in threat mode leaving us feeling anxious, stressed and low!

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0BF1hJaNtms This video animation explains it as well.

The Teenage Brain (the science bit!)

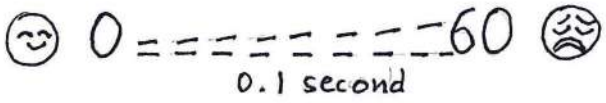
Brains are still developing until around age 25, and so part of your brain is still 'Under Construction!' The brain develops from back to front, which is also how the brain has evolved over time.

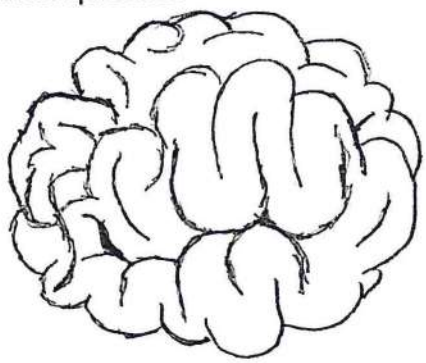
The reflex and automatic bodily processes are located in the base of the brain. The emotion and threat system is located in the middle of your brain, in the 'limbic system'.

The last part to fully develop is the frontal cortex - the bit behind your forehead. This part of the brain is involved in reasoning, planning, problem solving, making decisions, thinking rationally, managing emotions and urges among others.

Teenagers often:

- Feel emotions more strongly
- React to emotions more impulsively
- Make decisions quickly
- Not worry too much about long term consequences





So, not only is there the difficult stuff that happens in life and the negative thoughts and unpleasant feelings, AND your brain isn't quite ready to cope with it all in the best way.

The good news is that despite all this, there are ways of coping and managing that you can learn and practice, which will help you now and for the future.

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What matters to you?

When so much is going on, you may be feeling low, anxious and it's easy to get caught up in our heads and lose sight of what really matters. We end up spending less and less time doing the things that make us happy and give us satisfaction and purpose. Humans need purpose - it's an important part of well-being.

The things we **care about and value** help us develop purpose and meaning. Circle the things below that are important to you, and add your own...

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

Being creative

Helping others

Accepting myself just the way I am

Belonging, being part of something or a group

Spirituality / religion / faith

Learning

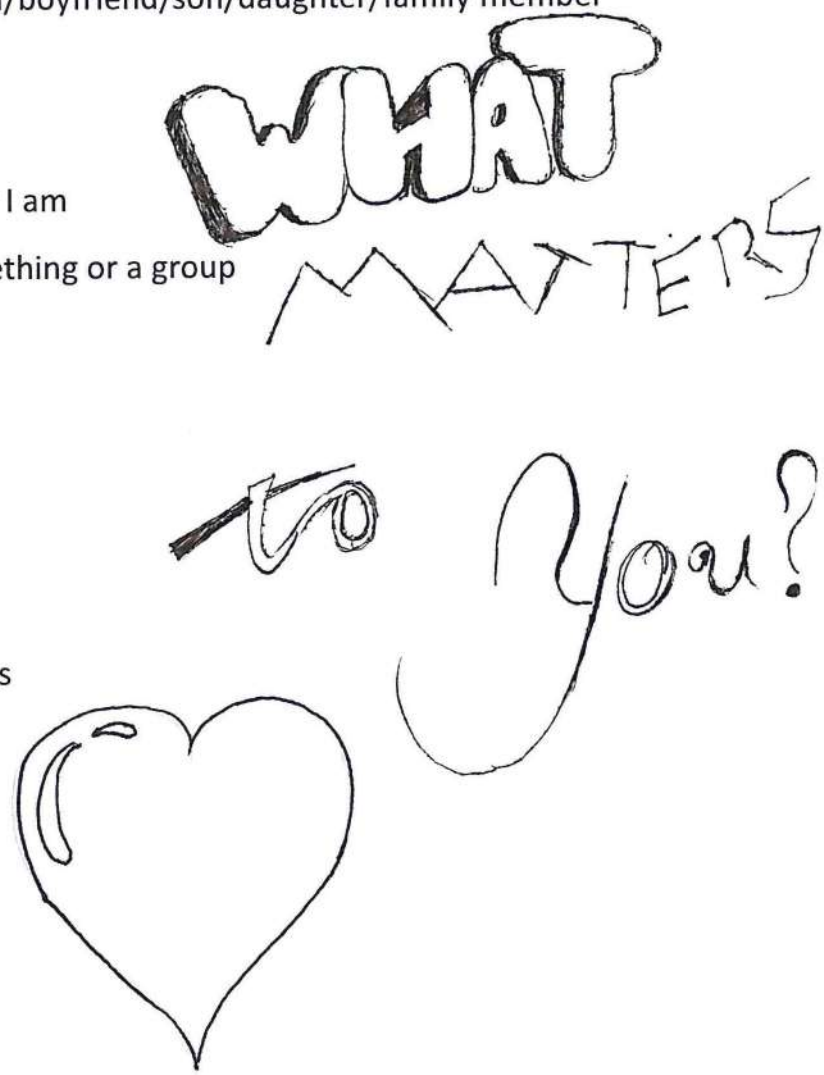
Being healthy

Having hobbies and interests

Having fun

Achieving my goals/ ambitions

Others?

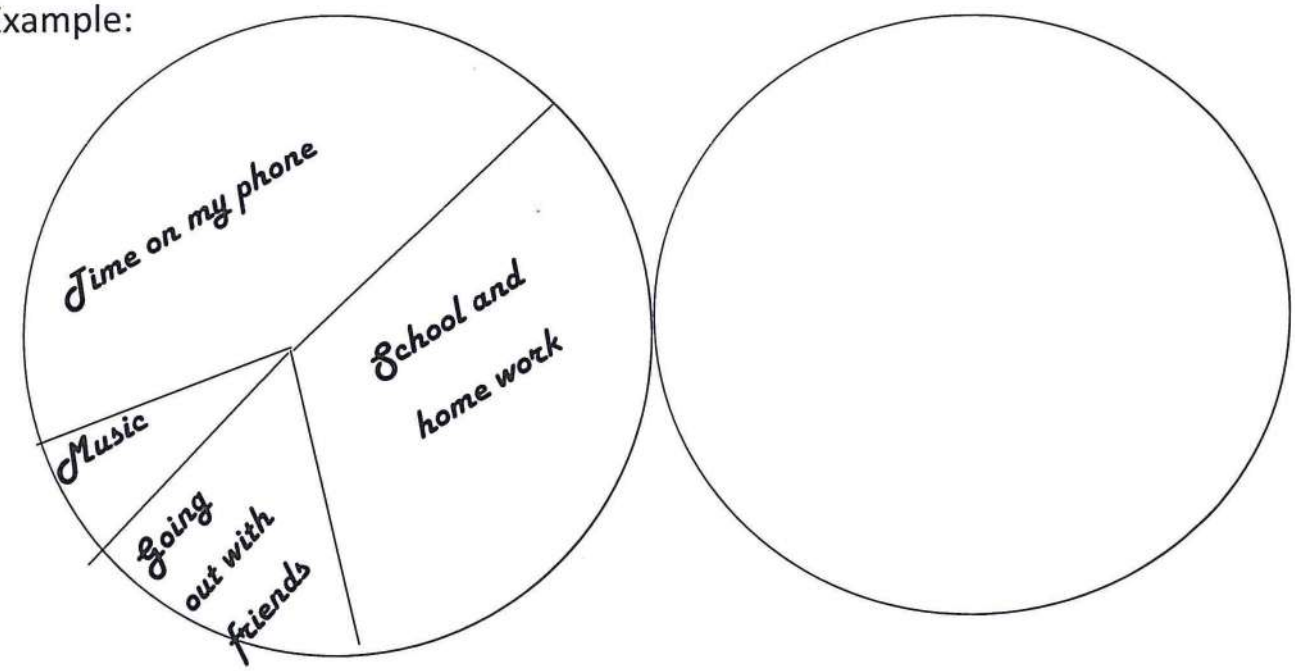


Getting the balance right

Use the blank circle below to make a pie chart of how you roughly spend your time. Are all the important things you identified on the page before in your pie chart?

Does the balance of how your spend your time and what is important to you seem ok?

Example:

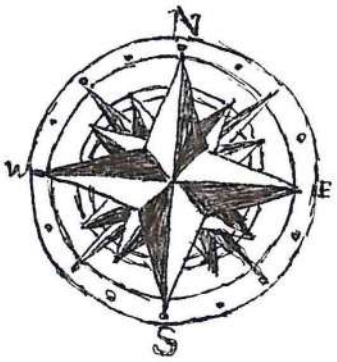


If the balance doesn't seem right, what changes will you make to do more of the things that are meaningful and important to you?

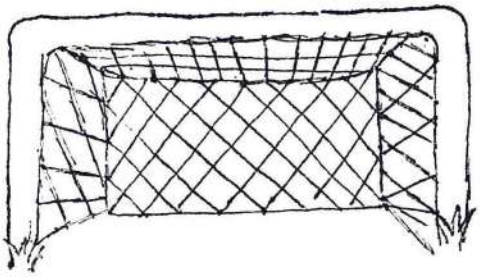
Do more of what matters

Values don't mean much if you don't bring them alive in how you act and behave!

You can never achieve a value, you can only move towards it by your actions and behaviour. Values are like directions on a compass, you can't get to West and say, 'Here I am at west, there is no more west to discover'.



Values are guides to how you want to be as a person in the world, what you want to do and what you want to stand for in life.



GOALS - Turning Values into Actions:

Goals that are related to values should be achievable. Goals that are clear and specific will help you achieve wanted changes. Make sure that goals are specific and describe what you WILL do e.g I will put my hand up and ask a question in class when I'm not sure (even though I feel nervous and worry what others may think of me, because I value learning and achieving). Rather than describing what you won't do or don't want, e.g my goal is to not feel anxious anymore.

Do more of what matters

GOALS are important to help keep you moving in the direction of your values. Just taking small steps will help you to get closer to doing what matters, which will improve your wellbeing. Look back to Page 11 and write your top 3 values here:

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

Think of one thing you could do this week that would help you take a step towards acting in line with your values.

My value (thing I care about): _____

My goal is: _____

The action I will take towards this is: _____

Example:

My value is: Being a good friend

My goal is: Seeing my friends more often

The action I will take is: Messaging my friends asking to meet up

TRACKing: It is important to track any new behaviour to see if it worked. After doing your goal, review it: How did you feel afterwards? Did it work in the short term? Long term? Will you do it again? Is there anything you need to change for next time?

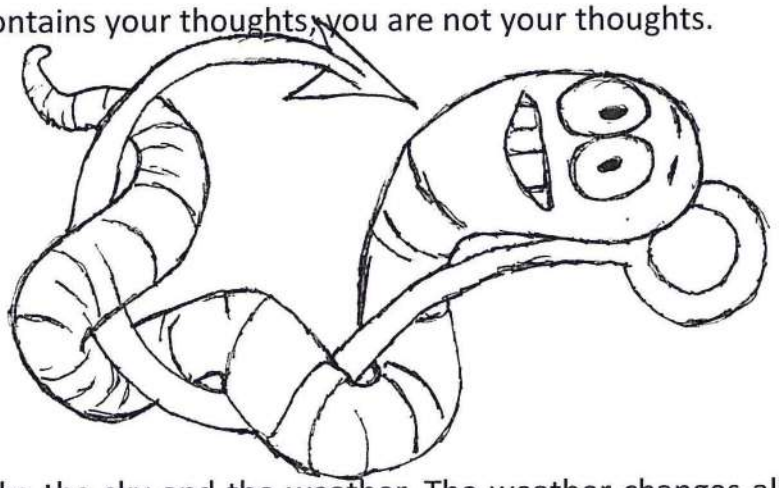
'Unhooking' from Unhelpful Thoughts

Doing the things that we care about us seems simple, but sometimes we get bombarded by self-critical, negative and unhelpful thoughts. These thoughts can make doing the things that matter to us harder, they can keep us feeling stuck and stop us achieving our goals or living life as we would like.

Remember your Stone Age mind is looking for risk and danger everywhere! No matter how much you try or might want to, you cannot stop or get rid of thoughts. Sometimes when they are strong and negative they hook us and we get caught up in them. There are things you can do to 'unhook' and give these thoughts less influence and control over your life. They might seem a bit unusual but with practice you can learn to unhook from your unhelpful thoughts.

So how do I unhook from my thoughts? Here are some ways...

- First, learn to NOTICE your thoughts as they appear in words, images, or memories in your mind.
- Your mind contains your thoughts, you are not your thoughts.



- Think of it like the sky and the weather. The weather changes all the time: sometimes sunny, sometimes rainy, windy, foggy, snowy, but the sky stays the same. You are like the sky and your thoughts are like the weather.

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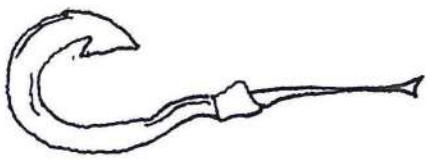
'Unhooking' from Unhelpful Thoughts

- When you notice unhelpful thoughts, remind yourself; a thought is just a thought, it doesn't mean that it is true or that I have to act on it.
- Turn the whole thought into one word that sums it up, e.g 'stupid', 'unlikable', 'unwell'. Say this word really fast, out loud, over and over and over again for 30 seconds exactly (the timing is important). Notice how it changes and loses meaning. Thoughts are words; they don't have power over what you do, unless you allow them to.
- Remember your brain is trying to keep you safe, say 'Thank you' to your mind and then decide whether you need to pay attention to the thought or let it go.

- Add the phrase 'I'm having the thought that...*insert thought here*'; this way you'll be able to take a step back from the thought, and see if it is helpful.

- You can decide whether your thoughts are helpful or unhelpful. Ask yourself - 'Is this thought taking me towards what matters to me?' (helpful) 'or away from what matters to me?' (unhelpful).
- Choose how you respond.



Leaves on a stream

This is an activity to help you notice thoughts and let them go.

Sit in a comfy position and picture yourself setting next to a gently flowing stream. The stream has leaves floating along on the surface of the water.

When a thought comes into your mind, notice it, imagine placing it on a leaf and letting it float by. Do this with each thought that pops into your mind.

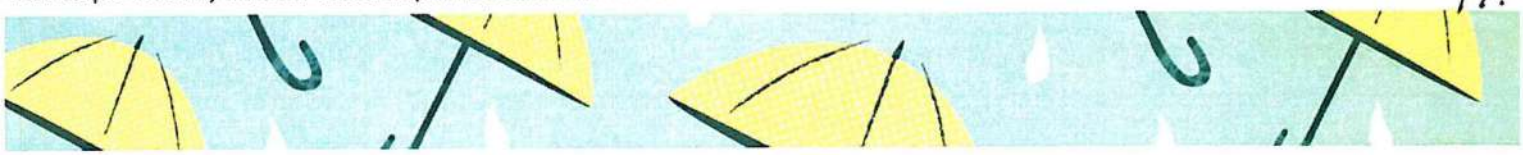
Let the stream flow, don't try to rush it along, just let it go at its own pace.

If a leaf gets stuck, let it hang around until it's ready to float by.

Your mind might get caught up following a thought or you might become distracted. That's ok, when you notice that your mind has wandered, just come back to the picture in your mind of sitting by the stream watching the leaves with your thoughts on float by.

Other things you can picture instead of leaves on a stream:

- Putting thoughts on clouds that drift away
- Putting thoughts on a steady moving conveyer belt and watching them pass by
- Putting thoughts on cars going past
- Here are some more ideas https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-gq_pittCMU



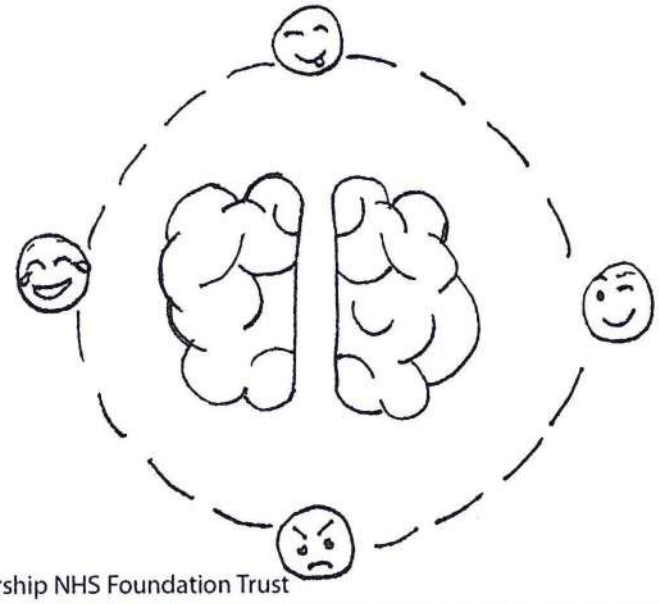
Notice Now

You might have found the 'Leaves on the Stream' exercise tricky because your mind wandered - that's normal. Our minds spend a lot of time either thinking and worrying about the future (what if?!) or thinking about what's happened in the past. They jump all over the place, filling our minds and making it hard to concentrate on the present moment.

We can't change what has already happened or control everything that might happen, but we spend a lot of time thinking about the past and worrying about the future, which can make us feel anxious or low.

Noticing now means bringing your attention to this exact moment - **right here, right now.** Learning to pay attention and focus fully on what we are doing, where we are, who we are with right now, using your senses in this moment can help you get out of your mind and into your life.

Being able to focus your attention and your senses on the here and now, being able to unhook from thoughts about the past and future, will give you more focus on doing the things that matter and help train your mind to notice your thoughts before responding.



Have a go at being in the here and now

Just like brain training games, our minds need practice at being in the here and now. Doing these exercises can help train your brain. Watch out though...your mind is like a puppy, it will keep wanting to run away from the present, and it will be really distractible! This is normal; this is what minds do. Your job is simply to notice when it wanders off, and gently bring it back to the exercise.

Try this simple exercise to bring your attention back to the here and now and 'come to your senses':

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Wherever you are right now, notice and identify;

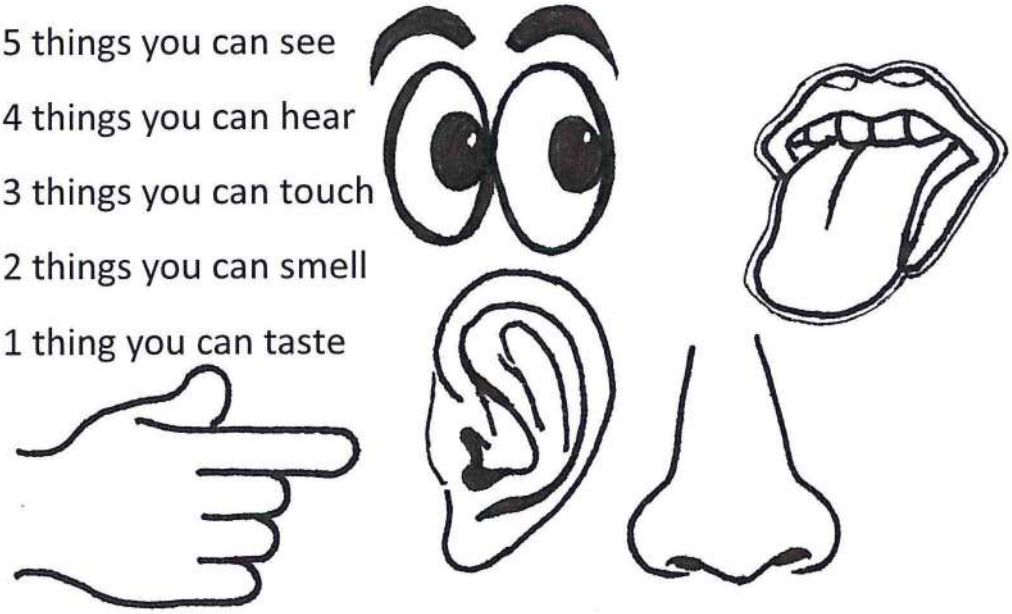
5 things you can see

4 things you can hear

3 things you can touch

2 things you can smell

1 thing you can taste



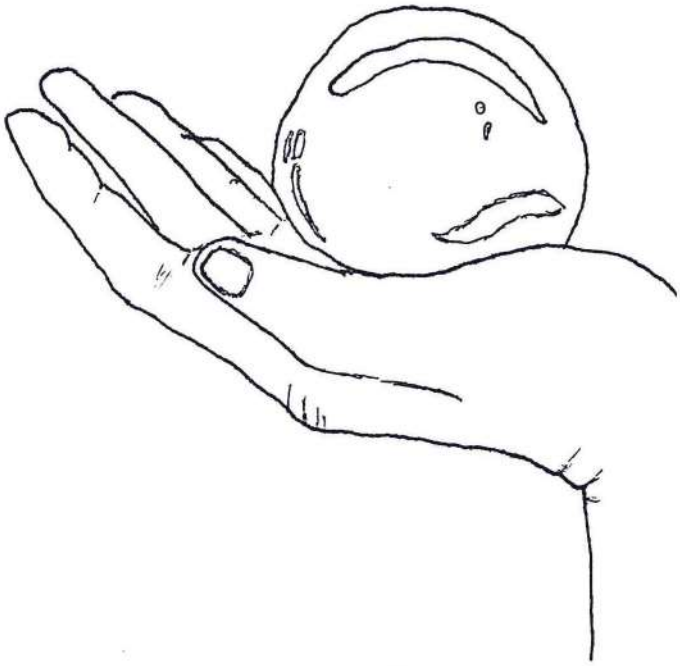
Here's a short film clip of how to do this exercise;

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rGpZ_r3c1PU&feature=youtu.be

Feelings

We often want only to have 'good' feelings like happiness, excitement and love. When we have 'bad' feelings it is unpleasant and we try not to feel them. But feelings are not 'good' or 'bad', they are feelings. We need the unpleasant ones as much as the nice ones, because they show us what we care about. Anger at injustice? - we care about fairness, jealousy? - we care about close attachment, anxiety about what others think of us? - we care about belonging.

Trying to push feelings away is like trying to hold a beach ball under water. Imagine you were at the seaside with some friends playing in the sea and you had a beach ball you didn't want anyone to see. You hold it under the water, which takes a lot of effort and concentration and means you can't relax and enjoy playing. If you lose concentration and your hand slips, the beach ball bursts up and out of the water.



Imagine instead that you allowed the beach ball to bob along beside you. You can now relax and enjoy the play without the effort of trying to hide it.

How to noticing and allow feelings

When your body has a feeling or sensation, you can learn to receive it as a message that you can open and read instead of blocking or switching off.

Steps to noticing and allowing feelings:

1. Become **AWARE** that there is a sensation in your body and where it is.
2. **NAME** the sensation - common ones include, wobbly legs, butterflies in your tummy, heart racing, tight chest, clenched fists, tension in shoulders, dry mouth, lump in throat, heavy heart, feeling sick.
3. If the sensation is connected to a feeling, **DESCRIBE** the feeling e.g frustration, anger, fear, nervous, anxious, sadness, loneliness. Understanding what you are feeling will be connected to the situation that has caused the feeling.
4. Allow the feeling to be in your body, breath into it, lean it to it, make room for it, accept it is there and will go by itself. Notice any thoughts that make it stronger and let them go too.

Be like a bendy tree on a windy day. If you try to resist the strong wind and be rigid and stiff, it will take more effort and be much harder.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lGByhBb7s4s Here is more about this.

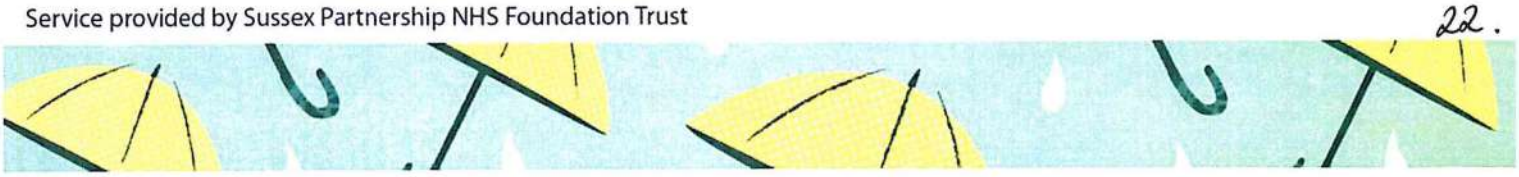
RECAP

So far we have covered:

- Life is full of ups and downs and difficult stuff happens
- We all have negative and self-critical thoughts as our mind tries to protect us and keep us safe from danger that it constantly looks out for
- We are led to believe we must be happy and successful and if we are not, then there must be something wrong with us
- Emotions can be strong and overwhelming
- Whilst this can be tough, you can cope with flexibility and resilience and choose how you respond

The skills:

1) Understand what matters to you; set yourself goals in line with these values, do them and track how it goes.
2) When difficult or self-critical thoughts show up, notice and unhook from them. Your mind is trying to protect you, but you don't have to believe everything it says. You are not your thoughts and they don't have to control what you do. Decide whether the thought is helpful and choose how you respond.
3) When uncomfortable and unpleasant feelings show up, become aware of them, name the sensation, describe the emotion if there is one. Make room for it and allow it to be there.
4) Practice being in the here and now; focus on your full experience of the present moment.



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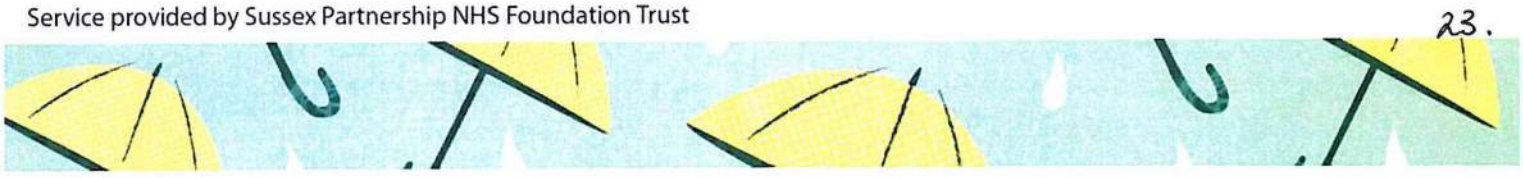
Practice

Just like learning a new instrument or playing sport, it takes practice to be effective. All four skills are important. Try to practice one of the four skills every day for a week and write down what you notice.

	Which skill did I practice? Values and goals. Unhooking from thoughts. Noticing and allowing feelings. Focus on the present moment.	What did I notice about my thoughts? Did your mind wander off? Were you able to bring your attention back to the exercise?
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		
Saturday		
Sunday		

The hardest thing about doing something new is remembering to do it. How will you remember to do these exercises?

_____



Other Things That Help

Self Care

This means looking after yourself; physically and emotionally. Regular acts of self-care can help our mental and physical resilience and ability to cope.

Often we put ourselves last and don't make time for self-care as we don't see how important they are compared to other things we have to do. We might have thoughts that these things are 'selfish' or 'indulgent'. However, if you don't prioritise looking after yourself then coping with tough times, managing strong feelings and critical thoughts will be so much harder to do. If you are serious about wanting to feel better, there are some very simple steps you can do which will make a big difference in how you cope and manage:

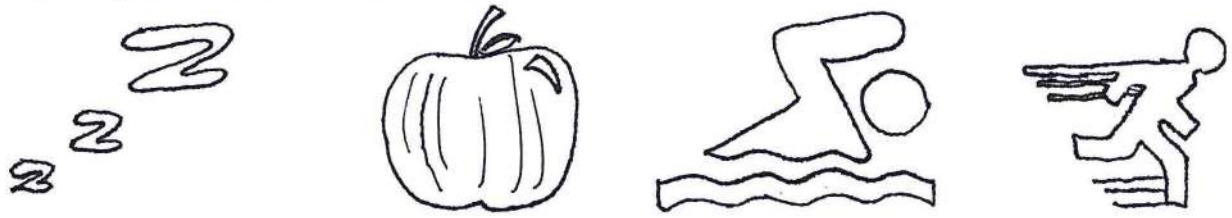
1) Sleep. Getting enough sleep is crucial. Sleep tips can be found on our website here: https://hampshirecamhs.nhs.uk/help/young-people/sleep/

2) Eating well. This means having breakfast, lunch, dinner and snacks. Your mind and body need fuel so make sure you eat and drink regularly

3) Pace yourself. Make sure you have downtime and rest as well as doing all the things you need to do (e.g., school work)

4) Have hobbies and interests. This is a great way of connecting with people, doing something you enjoy and learning new skills. Spending time on your phone does not count as a hobby!

5) Most importantly; **ask for help**. If you are struggling, let someone know you are finding things tough. There is lots of information, resources, helplines and websites including crisis help on our website: Www.hampshirecamhs.nhs.uk



Being Kind to Yourself

As we've seen, it's normal to have thoughts that are self-critical and self-blaming.

This can have a big impact on our self-esteem, confidence and motivation to do anything.

As well as learning to unhook from these thoughts, here are three effective ways to be kind to yourself and start building your confidence:

1) Make a list of your positive qualities, traits, characteristics, strengths, passions, interests. It's important that you recognise and appreciate the positive aspects of yourself. This takes practice so try to identify something positive everyday.

2) Ask yourself- "What would I say to my best friend if they were in this situa tion?" Chances are, you'd be kind and compassionate rather than critical, mean and blaming. The kind words you'd say to a friend, try to apply them to yourself

3) Keep a note (on your phone, in a diary, on scraps of paper in a glass jar!) of positive things that happen; things you have enjoyed, things you have achieved, things that have made you laugh or feel good. When you are having a tough time, you can read these as a reminder of the messages in this work book; tough times, strong emotions, critical thoughts won't last forever.

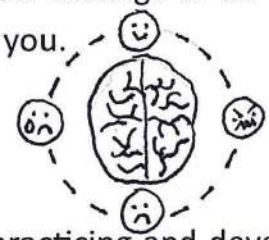
Take Away Messages

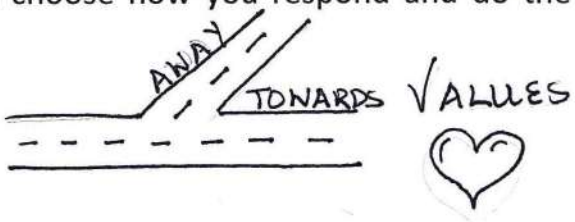
Almost all psychological problems boil down to the same basic process: we get hooked by unhelpful thoughts and feelings and do less of the things that we care about, which makes us feel even worse.

Thoughts and feelings have useful functions and have helped us to survive and be successful as a species. Our minds have adapted to look for threat and danger. Our mind is busy looking for threat and will find it in self-critical and negative thoughts to try to keep you safe . You are not your thoughts and you don't have to believe them or do what they say.

Trying to get rid of unpleasant or unwanted feelings or negative and critical thoughts is impossible and unhelpful. What would life be like if you didn't feel sad when someone you loved were upset, or you never worried about doing well at something that was important to you?

Throughout this workbook, we hope you have learned that you don't need to control, get rid of, or avoid your thoughts and feelings. Instead, you can unhook from unhelpful thoughts, allow feelings to be there, choose how you respond and do the things that matter to you.





Remember to keep practicing and developing these skills so that being flexible and resilient becomes a way of life.

If you want more information, advice or ideas on how to cope visit our website;

Www.hampshirecamhs.nhs.uk

There is a "Things that might help" section that has instructional videos of how to do different coping techniques.