



A Booklet for Low Mood

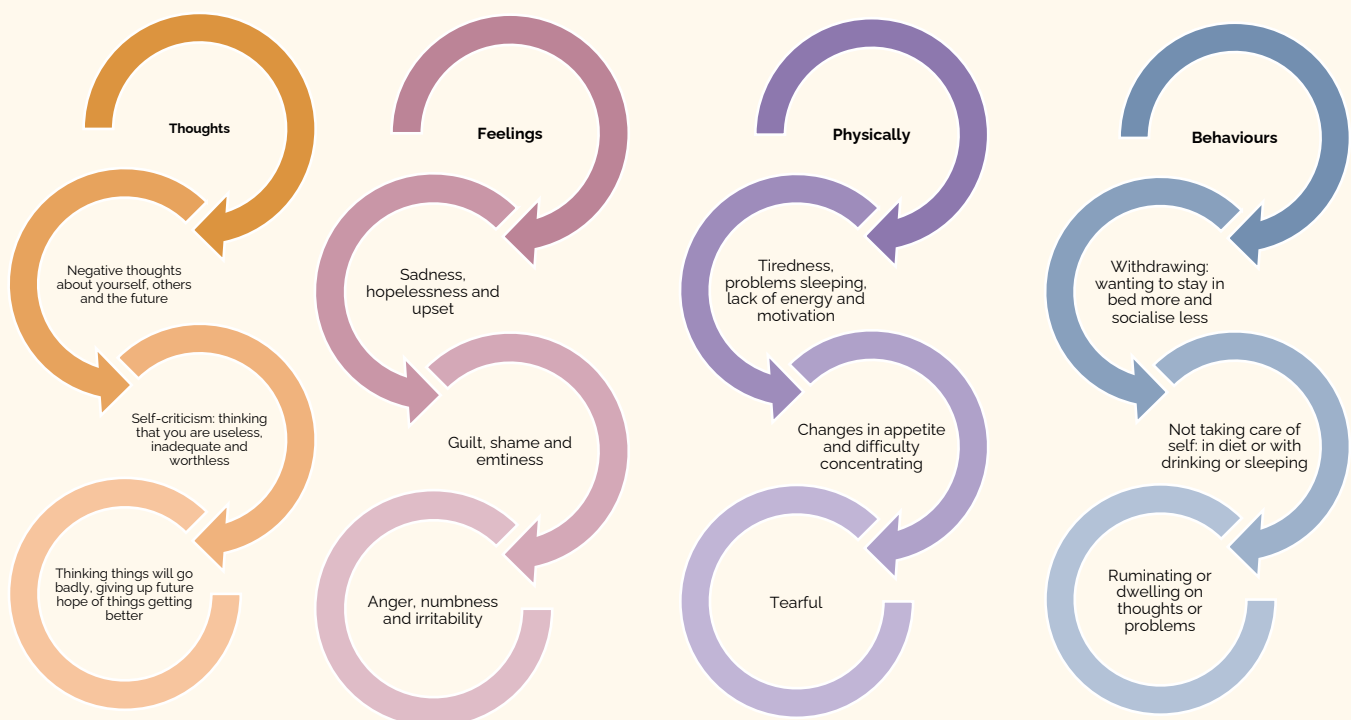
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Feeling Low

Everyone has experienced a time where they have found things difficult and have felt quite low. Sometimes it's obvious why you're feeling low, a big life event may have happened or an ongoing stressor like work or family problems. Other times it may not feel as obvious. This information might help you identify things that could be contributing. What's good is that you can work on improving your mood no matter what is causing you to feel down.

When people feel down they notice various things changing. We can group these into categories. Do you recognise any of the following?



Search 'I had a black dog, his name was depression' on YouTube, The World Health Organisation created this to demonstrate what living with depression can be like.

How would you describe how you're feeling at the moment?

Goals

When we're feeling low something that can be difficult but helpful to start off with is thinking about what you would like to be doing if you didn't feel this way. Having goals in mind can help increase your motivation and sense of achievement. They can give you a direction to look towards. Try to think about where you want to be in the future. Sometimes thinking of things you used to do that you'd like to do again can help.

Breaking goal setting down is proven to help create goals that people are more likely to stick to. It can also make thinking about goals feel less overwhelming. We call this method of goal setting SMART goals.

Tip: small goals are more achievable to start with

Specific: Try to be as specific as possible including dates, times and what exactly you want to achieve

e.g. *'I want to exercise more' -> 'I want to jog twice a week'*

Measurable: Making a goal measurable means you can track your progress

e.g. *'twice a week' is a way to measure progress*

Achievable: Is this a realistic goal in the short term? Is it possible to achieve in the next month? If not, think about breaking it down

e.g. *'I want to run a marathon' -> 'I want to jog non-stop for 30 minutes'*

Relevant: Make sure the goal you have chosen is in line with what you want to address. Will achieving the goal make a difference to you now?

e.g. *'is jogging something that makes me feel good? Or do I prefer yoga?'*

Time Specific: Try to set a time frame of when you want to achieve this goal by

e.g. *'in a month's time I want to be jogging twice a week'*

Write down your goals here using the above tips:

1.

2.

3.

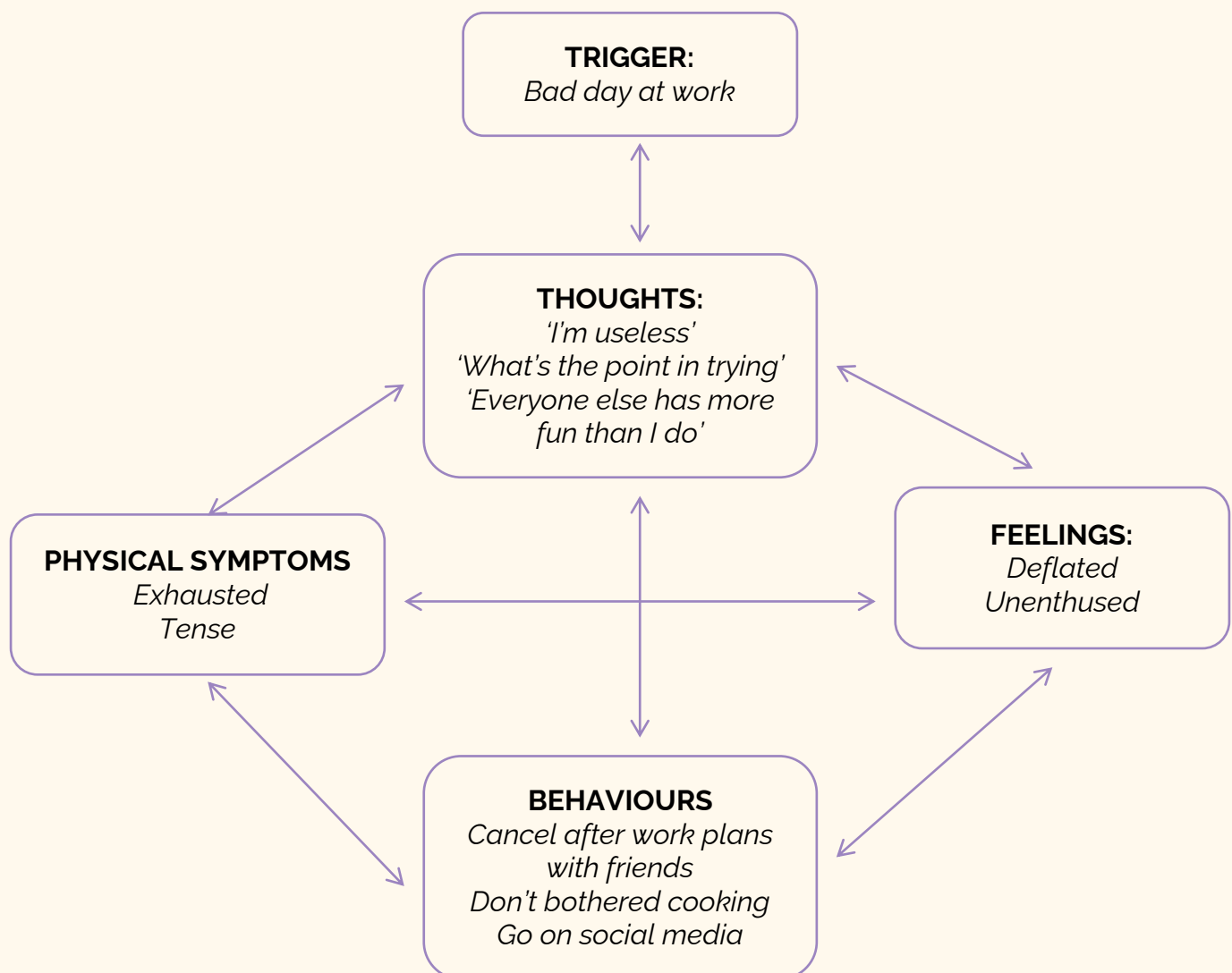
The Cycle

Changes in our mood can fall into 4 main categories: thoughts, feelings, physical symptoms and behaviours. These changes can all feed in to one another to make the problem feel worse.

For example, if we start to feel low we might start doing less socially. Being less active socially or avoiding things might make us feel better in the short term. In the long term it can make us feel worse. Avoiding social plans may lead to feeling isolated. This can trigger negative thinking patterns that others don't like us. This can then feed back into not wanting to attend social plans. The cycle continues. This cycle can work in many ways, for example at work: tasks feel overwhelming so you avoid them, this results in build up and more overwhelm, triggering negative thoughts that you aren't good enough at your job.

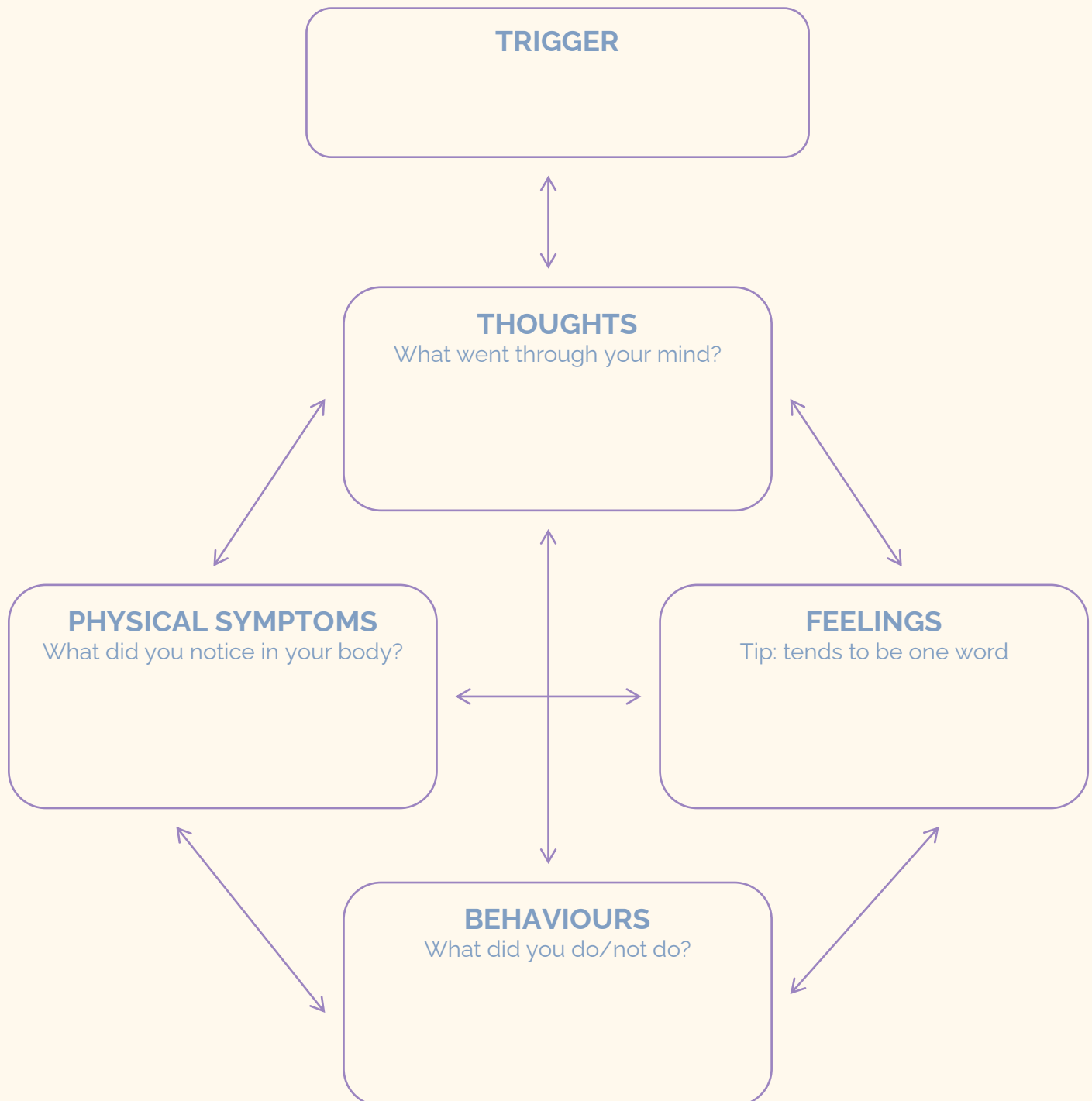
Learning: short-term relief -> might feel better in the short term but in the long run it's only continuing the cycle of low mood.

This is known as a 'vicious cycle'



Your turn

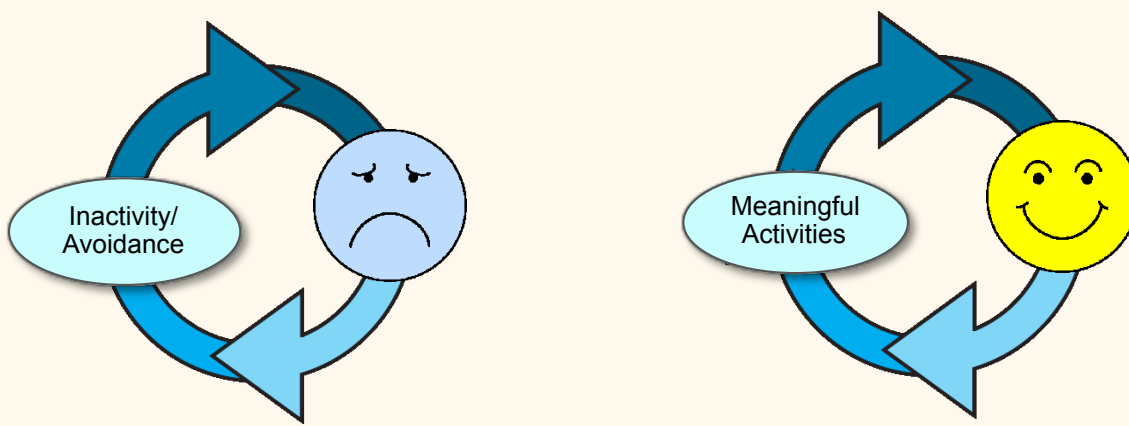
Try to think of a time you felt low recently and map it out below. Starting with the trigger: what was the situation? Then go from there with the first thing you noticed: a shift in your feelings or a negative thought?



Behavioural Activation

Behavioural Activation is a type of therapy used to help people who are feeling low. The aim is to help you achieve a balanced lifestyle by encouraging you to do more of what is important to you.

Hopefully now you have an idea of how our low mood can be maintained through our own behaviours. We tend to find that there are certain things we are avoiding and because of this we don't get back positive reinforcement: we miss out on the good stuff.



Behavioural Activation looks at breaking your cycle by changing how you act.

The Outside-In-Approach

The Outside-In-Approach explains how planning activities is helpful. It means that if you plan an activity and follow through with it ('outside') you will notice an impact on your mood ('inside'). It teaches you how doing things even when you don't feel like it can have a big impact on how you feel. The opposite to this would be acting how we feel all the time. For example, if you didn't feel like doing something, just not doing it. Acting how we feel when you feel low can send you into a downwards spiral. The focus needs to be on acting how you want to feel. Do you notice that you sometimes wait to feel better before doing things?

An example of Outside-In-Approach

It's Saturday afternoon and Tom is sitting on the sofa at home. He feels tired and a bit headachy and has spent the last few hours scrolling through social media and watching TV. He woke up feeling low, and the feeling hasn't shifted. Tom made plans last week to go and see a couple of friends this afternoon. They're meeting in an hour, and he needs to start getting ready.

➔ Inside-out approach:

Because Tom feels tired and low, he decides to text his friends to cancel seeing them. Instead, he stays at home and spends the afternoon on his phone with the TV on in the background.

➔ Outside-in approach:

Tom doesn't feel like going out right now and getting ready feels like a real effort. But he trusts that if he does get up, get ready, and go out to see his friends, it's the best chance of shifting how he is feeling. He also knows he will sleep better having had some fresh air and exercise, which is likely to make him feel better tomorrow.

Which do you think Tom is going to feel better doing?

It can be difficult to make the choice to push yourself in the moment, but long term the Outside-In-Approach will benefit your mood.

Remember: It is always worth a try in shifting your mood, if it doesn't work you haven't lost much and you can still learn from it.

Follow the plan, not your mood

If you don't think this applies to you, maybe you are still doing lots, keep reading the next section which may explain why despite doing more you're still feeling overwhelmed. Balance is key.

What have you taken away from this?

Baseline Activity Diary

The first step is to look at how your mood impacts your lifestyle. We can do this by monitoring your activity and mood. In the blank diary on the next page write down what activities you do throughout the day, however small they are. An 'activity' includes anything you are doing in that moment even if it's lying in bed scrolling on your phone. Next to the activity rate your mood out of 10 where 10 is really good and 0 is really bad.

This is called Activity Monitoring. See an example below:

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Morning	9am: Woke up late. Got dressed Mood: 1/10 9-12:30. Worked from home 2/10	7:30am: Woke up, brush teeth, shower & get dressed. 4/10 8:15 – commute with music 5/10 9-12:30 Work 4/10	8am: Woke up, brushed teeth, shower, dressed, breakfast 4/10 9-12:30: Work 4/10	7:50am: Woke late 2/10 8:15: commute 1/10 9-12:30: Work 5/10	8am: Wake up, brush teeth, shower & get dressed. 6/10 8:30 – breakfast and work from home 6/10	10am: In bed. Social media 2/10	10am. Wake up. 3/10 9-1pm. Coffee on the sofa, watching TV, using phone. 3/10
Afternoon	12:30: Lunch 4/10 1-3. Work 2/10 3-3:15. Break. Coffee + scrolled on phone. 2/10 3:15-5. Work 3/10	12:3-1. Lunch with colleagues. 7/10 1-3. Work 5/10 3-3:15. Break with colleagues 7/10 3:15-5. Work 6/10	12:3-1. Lunch 5/10 1-3. Work 3/10 3-3:15. Break. Went for a walk 6/10 3:15-5. Work, more productive 5/10	12:3-1: Lunch with colleagues 7/10 Work 6/10	12:3-1. Lunch 5/10 1-3. Work 4/10 3-3:15. Break. Coffee + scrolled on phone. 4/10 3:15-5. Work 4/10	12-2:30. Lunch with sister. 6/10 2:30-5. Home, laundry, cleaning 5/10	1-2pm. Snack 2/10. 2-5 pm. TV & social media. 2/10 5-6. Food shop 5/10
Evening	5-7:30. Tv + social media. 3/10 7:30-9: snack 3/10 Just watched TV and slept, didn't feel great	6-7. Walk listening to music. 6/10 7pm onwards: Cook + eat dinner, used phone, got ready for bed 6/10 11: Sleep	7pm: Friend came over for dinner. 8/10 12:30. Bed	5-7: After work drinks. 9/10 7-7:45: Commute, snack on commute back 7/10 8:30-9:30. Read a book. 7/10 11: Bed	TV and snacks all evening 3/10 12: Slept	Just cooked and didn't do much, can't remember my mood rating but not great Sat eve, was tired and felt like everyone else was doing something but me	6-8. Cook & eat dinner. 4/10 8-11. Get into bed, read a book & use my phone. 3/10 12: Sleep

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Morning							
Afternoon							
Evening							

Reflection

Now you've completed your activity monitor let's reflect on what you've learnt

Looking back on your week consider the following:

What made me feel good?

What made me feel bad?

What did you notice about the relationship between mood and activity?

What would I like to see change in this week?

Balance

Increasing the things you do is important, but ensuring you have a variety and balance is also crucial. If you are putting a lot of time and energy into one area of your life and neglecting others, this could lead to feeling overwhelmed. Think about activities in terms of these 3 categories:

- **Routine:** things that are done most days which make our lives comfortable.
E.g. washing, housework, preparing food, cleaning, having a shower.
- **Pleasurable:** things that give us a sense of achievement or connectedness to others when we do them. They often improve our quality of life.
E.g. seeing friends, hobbies, gardening, sports, going to the park – these are likely to be very personal to you.
- **Necessary:** Things that we really do need to do. Often, the longer we leave them the more stressed we feel and the worse the consequences are.
E.g. paying bills, applying for jobs, booking medical appointments, arranging childcare.

Imagine a 3-legged little wooden stool. Each leg is one of these categories. The more you do in one of the areas the more that leg of the stool grows. Imagine if you're going out all the time doing loads of social things (pleasure) but you're neglecting your sleep and diet (necessary) and your house is a mess and you have no clean clothes (routine). The stool is going to be completely lopsided. This is just like your mood. You'll feel all wobbly and unsteady. You'll feel less able to cope with things generally. Imagine trying to rest something on that stool? It would fall off. Just like how you'd feel trying to take on any more tasks in your week.

Go back and take a look at your Activity Monitoring sheet – what does your balance look like?

Your activities

It's helpful to think of as many activities you can, things you used to do, currently do or would like to start doing. Think about what others do for inspiration or small things that are meaningful to you like a morning walk or podcast. We spend very little time thinking about activities in this way so it's a great exercise to get your brain used to thinking about how your week looks. Activities will likely fit into more than one category (like sleep may be part of your routine but also necessary), don't worry about that, just put it in whichever feels best for you.

Routine (e.g., cooking, walking the dog, food shopping)

Pleasurable (e.g., cinema, reading, friends, arts & crafts, films)

Necessary (e.g., paying bills, taking children to nursery)

Planning

We discussed how important that Outside-In approach is and the phrase 'follow the plan, not your mood'. These principles don't work without a plan in place. Once a plan is in place we are much more likely to follow the activities through: whether this be generally doing more or achieving more of a balanced lifestyle.

When planning start by filling in all the things you have committed to and already do such as working hours, appointments or meals planned. This will show you the time you have free outside of these things. Then you can plan other activities around these to achieve a balance.

Tips for Planning

Write everything down

Write things down even if they're small, prompts like 'do washing' can be really helpful so smaller tasks don't build up.

Be specific

You are more likely to do an activity if you have decided exactly *what, when, where and with who* you are going to do that activity. E.g. you say to a friend 'let's go to the cinema next week' and leave it vs. 'let's go and see X on Thursday at 7pm' -> which one are you more likely to do?

Do the basics

When starting to schedule, it's important to plan in meals, sleep routine and some exercise because these things are so important in stabilising our mood.

Pace yourself

Start small, give yourself space in your diary to relax, time for self-care. Planning in 'time to chill or watch tv' is an activity that is important in balancing everything.

Break the task down

If something feels overwhelming or you are struggling to achieve it, how can you break it down? Maybe schedule small bits of it throughout the week?

Check

When you look at your plan does it feel achievable? The biggest mistake people make is planning too much then feeling defeated when they can't do it all. Only plan a few things. Imagine someone wants to run a marathon after breaking their ankle, how would they go about their training? Would they start trying to run the whole thing? What would happen if they did?

Reward yourself

Try to acknowledge when you have completed something. Some people find it helpful to 'check off' activities that they've done and think about how it made them feel. It isn't easy at first so help build yourself up by acknowledging small wins.

Plan your week

	Monday		Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Morning								
Afternoon								
Evening								

Review

As you go through your plan try to make notes of how you're feeling. Either writing this down or a rating out of 10 like when you did the activity monitoring originally. At the end of the week you can look back and analyse what went well and what didn't go so well. This gives you important information before you create your plan for the following week.

It can be strange getting used to setting a plan, especially if you have never previously kept a diary for the week. It's not something you necessarily have to do forever, although many do continue, but when you're feeling down it is something that is very important to continue doing. It's also helpful to reflect on if you feel you haven't achieved much that week.

If you've been struggling with your plan you may relate to some of the following:

Not feeling as though you are enjoying the activity:

You might not enjoy everything all of the time. Things may still feel overwhelming or you may feel little pleasure or a bit numb when doing things at first. Don't give up. This is very common. Behavioural Activation is like taking medicine a doctor prescribes for an infection. At first you may not notice the difference, but if you keep taking it as prescribed changes will happen. Your body will start to uptake more serotonin from activities and as it does this you will feel more joy in things. So keep creating and following the plan as best you can. There are also some activities that you may never enjoy that much (cleaning and laundry!) but avoiding these things would make you feel worse living in a dirty space or not having fresh clothes to wear in the future. Doing them now benefits your future self.

Not enough time:

Break the task down into smaller chunks you can find time for and prioritise. What is it that you will get the most sense of pleasure and achievement from? What needs to be done?

Something else came up:

This can be hard at first; you may feel defeated if things get in your way. It's normal for plans to change so try to practise re-planning the activity or writing it as something you want to try the following week.

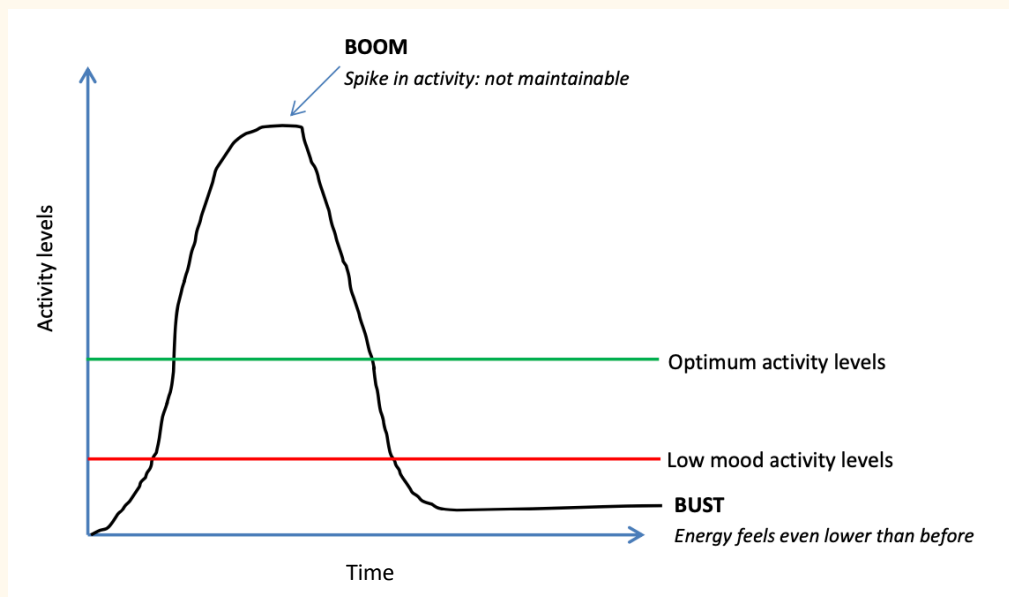
Struggling to do the activity - "I don't feel like doing it"

Firstly: remember the Outside-In approach. Follow the plan not your mood. Remind yourself why you're doing this.

Secondly, welcome to the 5-minute rule: try doing the first 5 minutes of whatever you have planned. Going on a walk? Ok put on your shoes and get your stuff together, leave the house. Once 5 minutes is up you can stop if you still really don't feel like it, go back home. By doing this you can determine whether it was your motivation you were struggling with or whether you really do need a rest.

Boom and Bust

So far we have spoken about the benefits of increasing activity. This may lead you to think that the best tactic is to always ignore fatigue and battle on, with the idea that the more activity you do the better you'll feel. It is important not to exhaust yourself, especially on days where you may be feeling good. If you overexert yourself on these days and ignore signs of fatigue you will 'boom'. This can be, for example, overdoing social plans or working too much. After a while you will inevitably crash and need rest to recover. This is the 'Bust' phase. Sadly, as you enter an extended spell of inactivity you can feel worse, so we aim to avoid this.



The goal is to manage your energy so that you reach a place of steadiness and balance.

Can you see this happening in your life?
What do you need to watch out for?
How can you avoid this?

Rumination

What we tend to see is after focusing on improving behaviours we see a natural shift in the positivity of thoughts. People start to feel better about themselves and are kinder to themselves. This is because they have broken the vicious cycle spoken about at the beginning. However, this isn't always the case. Some thoughts are more ingrained and it can be helpful to do some extra work challenging these. We have another booklet to help specifically with just this.

It is helpful to know about a certain kind of thinking pattern which lots of people experience when feeling low: **rumination**. Rumination is when we dwell on difficulties from our past. It can lead to become preoccupied for considerable amounts of time that can lead to very negative thinking and become quite distressing. To some extent everyone dwells on problems, and sometimes it doesn't last long and can lead to resolution. There is a difference between this kind of thinking vs. dwelling on something and becoming very upset and reaching no answer to the problem. Unhelpful rumination tends to focus on causes and consequences rather than solutions. When rumination takes up considerable time we consider it to be a behaviour: the behaviour of going over and over the same thoughts.

Take this example: Imagine two people see an old woman trip on a rug.

Person A repeatedly asks themselves 'How did this happen?' 'If only I had been there she might not have tripped' 'Why did I let this happen?' 'What's wrong with me?' These thoughts may naturally pop into our mind but Person A has started to dwell on them so they persist and become stuck, with little or no problem-solving and critical to self.

Person B thinks 'How did this happen?' 'What can I do to help?' 'What does she need right now?' 'How can I change the rug to stop this happening again?' This approach tries to understand what has happened and problem solve.

Do you relate to either Person A or Person B's thinking?

In your diary can you see times you may ruminate?

Switching off from Rumination

Five Minute Rule

If you find yourself ruminating for more than five minutes, it can be useful to ask yourself the following four questions. By going through these specific questions you can really understand whether rumination is helping you or not. Try using a pen and paper to write out your answers rather than just answering them in your head. Doing this helps create a distance from the thoughts as you focus on writing.

Have I made any progress towards solving the problem?

Do I understand something about the problem or my feelings towards it that I didn't understand before?

Do I feel less critical about myself than before I started thinking about it?

What could I do now instead that could help my mood?

Goal Review

Once you have been practising creating a plan, following it and reflecting on your mood for a few weeks review progress towards your goals. Keep checking in with yourself in terms of how you are progressing towards them. We recommend you do this every week or two to ensure you are moving in the right direction. Goals keep us accountable.

Is what you're doing working towards your goals?

Is there anything you need to change to achieve your goals?

Is there any further support you need right now?

Staying Well Plan

To feel better and stay well, it is important to continue looking after your mental health just as you would your physical health, using what you have learnt far. When you notice you are feeling better it is helpful to acknowledge what you have done that has led to improvements in order to help stay well in future.

Remember, everyone's mood fluctuates. This is normal. There is a difference between mood fluctuating and potentially relapsing into feeling low again.

A lapse is a brief return to feeling low which might be very understandable in a variety of different situations (e.g. something goes wrong at work, difficulty in relationships). During these times we can experience the symptoms of low mood. As we have said, everyone has these moments and they are usually temporary. It can be easy in these moments to dwell on failures or be unkind to yourself - but don't give up on the strategies you have learnt and try to be compassionate to yourself.

A relapse is when negative thinking and ways of behaving that you have previously tackled start to spiral and make you feel considerably worse. These periods tend to impact your every day life and last for longer. During these times you will likely feel unable to apply the strategies you have learnt, so the aim is to identify signs of a relapse early on.

On the final page are some questions to help guide you in summarising your learning from this booklet. We recommend you keep this booklet somewhere safe to refer to in the future if you need to. We advise you keep checking in with how you are feeling and how your weekly balance of activities is moving forwards.

What were you struggling with at the beginning?

What strategies have you learnt that have helped?

How will you continue to make progress and continue to build on what you've achieved so far?

What will you first notice if you start to feel low again? Your 'warning signs' (think about the thoughts, feelings, physical symptoms and behaviours at the beginning)

What will you do if you notice a relapse?