

STOP OR REDUCE!



Chapter 2: How to Reduce or Stop and the Possible Thinking Traps

You May Encounter

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How to Reduce or Stop and Possible Thinking Traps



This chapter has been written to support you reducing your substance use or stopping it totally. Making changes can include stopping completely, making gradual reductions or accessing treatment (depending what substance you are using), discuss the options with your family, friends and key worker. Changing your use can be difficult, but there are a number of things you can do to help yourself during these changes. Like everything, making changes is very personal and you have probably got a number of ideas or things that will be helpful for you when undergoing making changes. This is just a guide and doesn't cover everything so it is important you discuss your personal plans with your key worker or people around you.

IMPORTANT: DO NOT self medicate or substitute! This can be dangerous, have side-effects and cause further complications or difficulties. Discuss with your key worker or doctor for further information.

Let's start with getting a few things in order...



Organising a safe environment before you start

Making changes can be difficult if there are people around you who are still using, although not impossible, you will be making it extremely difficult for yourself.

Definition of Safe Place: a safe place is somewhere there won't be any drugs around you and where you are not going to be hassled by people.

Examples of a safe place could be friends or relatives house where you are unable to access any substances and can't be found or just staying put in your own home and telling people your aims, changing your number, deleting dealers numbers and ensuring you either have no drugs in the house or enough for your planned reduction.

Where is your Safe place?

What do you need to do to make it a safe place?



Organising Support

Having supportive people around you is an important aspect of making changes. Identify people who are going to be available and supportive of you. This can include your key worker, doctor, and health worker etc, people close to you or even support groups such as NA (Narcotics Anonymous) or other self help groups in your area. You can find these on the internet, yellow pages or have a chat with your key worker.

Supportive people: people who will be supportive, spend time with you, and help you get through difficult moments. Supportive people will respect your decisions to make changes.

Fill out the below table with a support plan of people that are the right people to have around you. Before you start, make a list of these people in the work sheet on the following page. Avoid adding people who are going to make things difficult for you such as dealers or you feel you wouldn't want around you.

Once you have made this list, explain to the people on the list...

- ❖ What is going on (plan, Goals etc)
- ❖ How you are going to be feeling
- ❖ What they can do to support you

If they don't know what is happening or how you think they can help you it may be difficult for them to help you. They may benefit from some support for themselves; your key worker can provide you or your supportive people with contact details for support services.

Keep in touch with all the people on your list, they will be there for you to discuss how you are feeling, stop you from feeling isolated, lonely and bored. It may be helpful for them to temporarily screen phone calls until you feel ready to do so yourself.

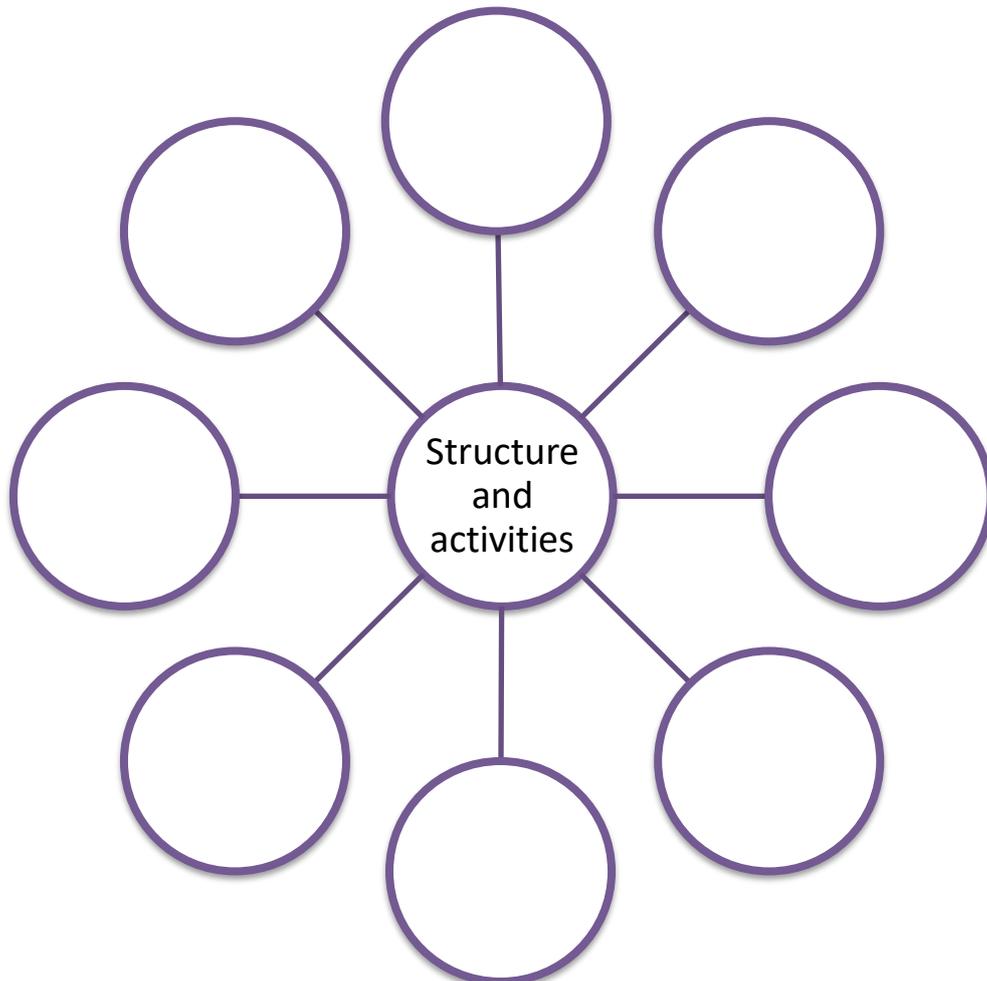
Social Network Support Plan

The Problem I have	Who might be able to help?	What could they Do?	Contact details



Structure your day

Making changes to your use can be easier if you take it once day at a time and focus on activities which you enjoy. For the first few days of making changes, you may feel like not doing anything, but this will start to reduce so it may be helpful to start thinking about what you want to do with your day. Having a plan or a routine may have the benefit of helping your sleep pattern, eating and managing moods and cravings. Fill the below work sheet in with ideas of activities.



Reducing Plan and Tips

If you have decided to take the reduction plan route, below are some tips that you may find useful

1. Set yourself limits, decide beforehand how much you are going to reduce by and set yourself a reduction plan to get to your goal (this can be done with your key worker)
2. Take it slowly – pace yourself at the right speed for you. Don't rush for other people; this can make you feel out of control.
3. Keep occupied, the same four walls can amplify boredom, frustration and isolation
4. Avoid users, don't allow yourself to be led into situations you don't want to be in or for you to be exposed to intense triggers
5. Be wary of how much money you carry on you – this could be a huge trigger
6. Reward yourself along the way with treats that are not drugs! Something that you are going to enjoy and recognise all the little goals you are making on the path to your ultimate goal.

Stopping at once/going cold Turkey

This would depend very much on what the substance is you are using and would apply to use of substances such as cannabis, amphetamine and involves a lot of the above principles. Talk to your key worker about other chapters in this manual which may be helpful about working out a plan.

If you are on a prescribed substitute medication such as methadone you will need a reduction plan or detoxification to come off this safely. Again your key worker can discuss this with you.

The Blame Game and Thinking/mind traps

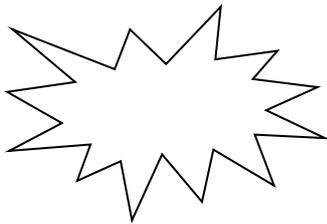
Taking control and ownership

Substance misuse problems are often related to current or past problems in life and can be used as a way to block out memories or feelings. If you have experienced events such as problems in your family, relationship breakdown or job loss it can be natural to want to blame others for your substance use and it may be tempting to say “I’m using because my partner left me”

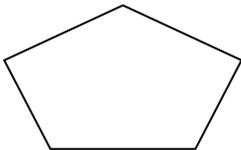
However, the problem is yours, not theirs, making you the only person who can start to put things right. One of the key aspects of overcoming substance use is to accept **you** are responsible for **your** recovery (www.get.gg, 2012).

Though your supportive people can be a huge support they can’t do it for you. You can take charge and control and make the necessary changes. The following chapter is going to help you identify how possible blame and mind traps can interfere with recovery.

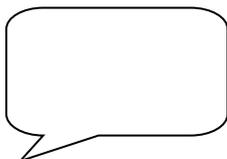
Read through the explanations on the following page of each of the traps and try filling out the trap below with your own personal example, the impacts and how **you** can challenge this mind trap. Below is a key for the trap exercise.



= Feelings, write how you felt, when in this trap



= What was the impact of thinking in this way?

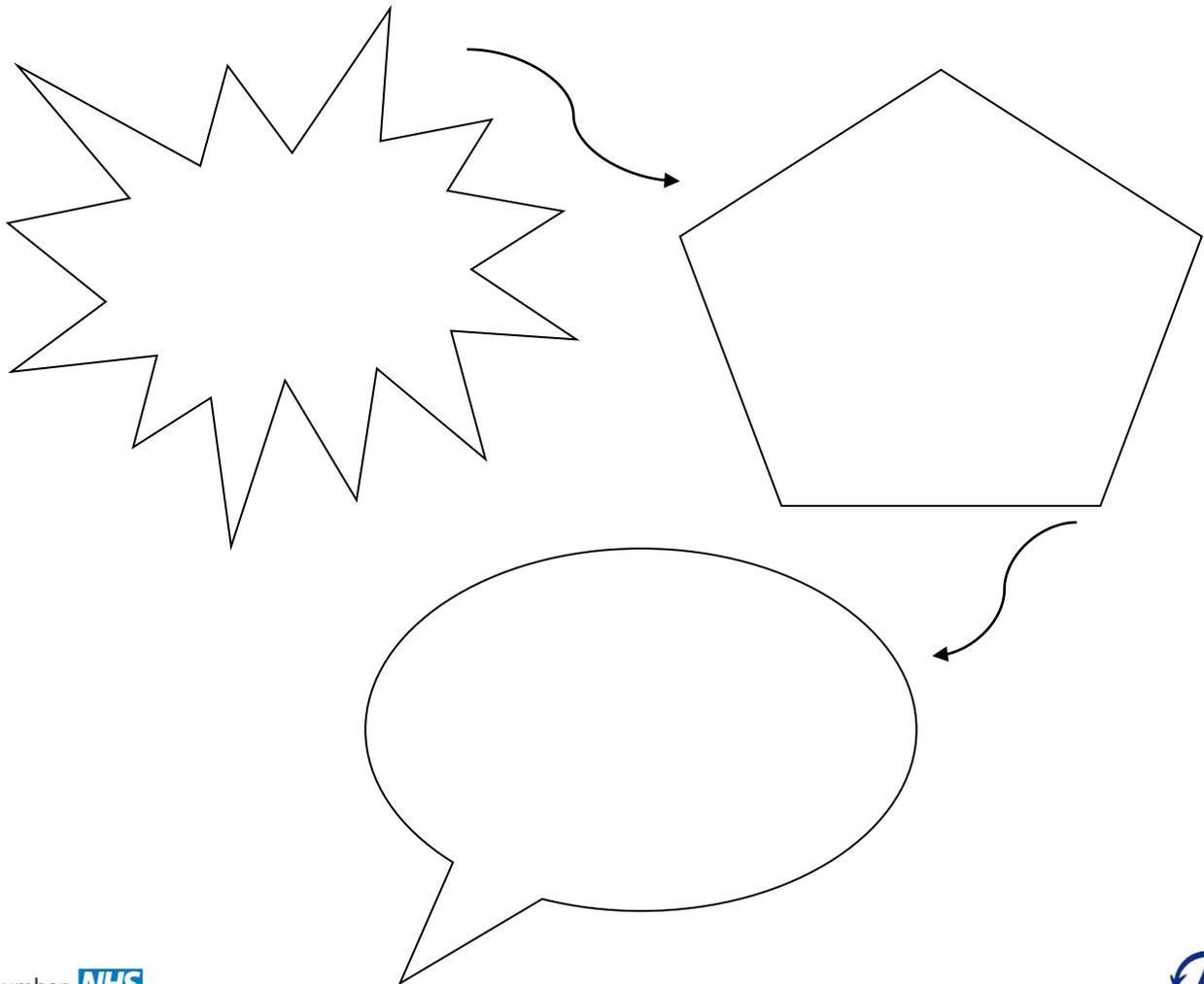


= How could you challenge this?

[A Guide to Mind Traps \(NTA, 2010\)](#)

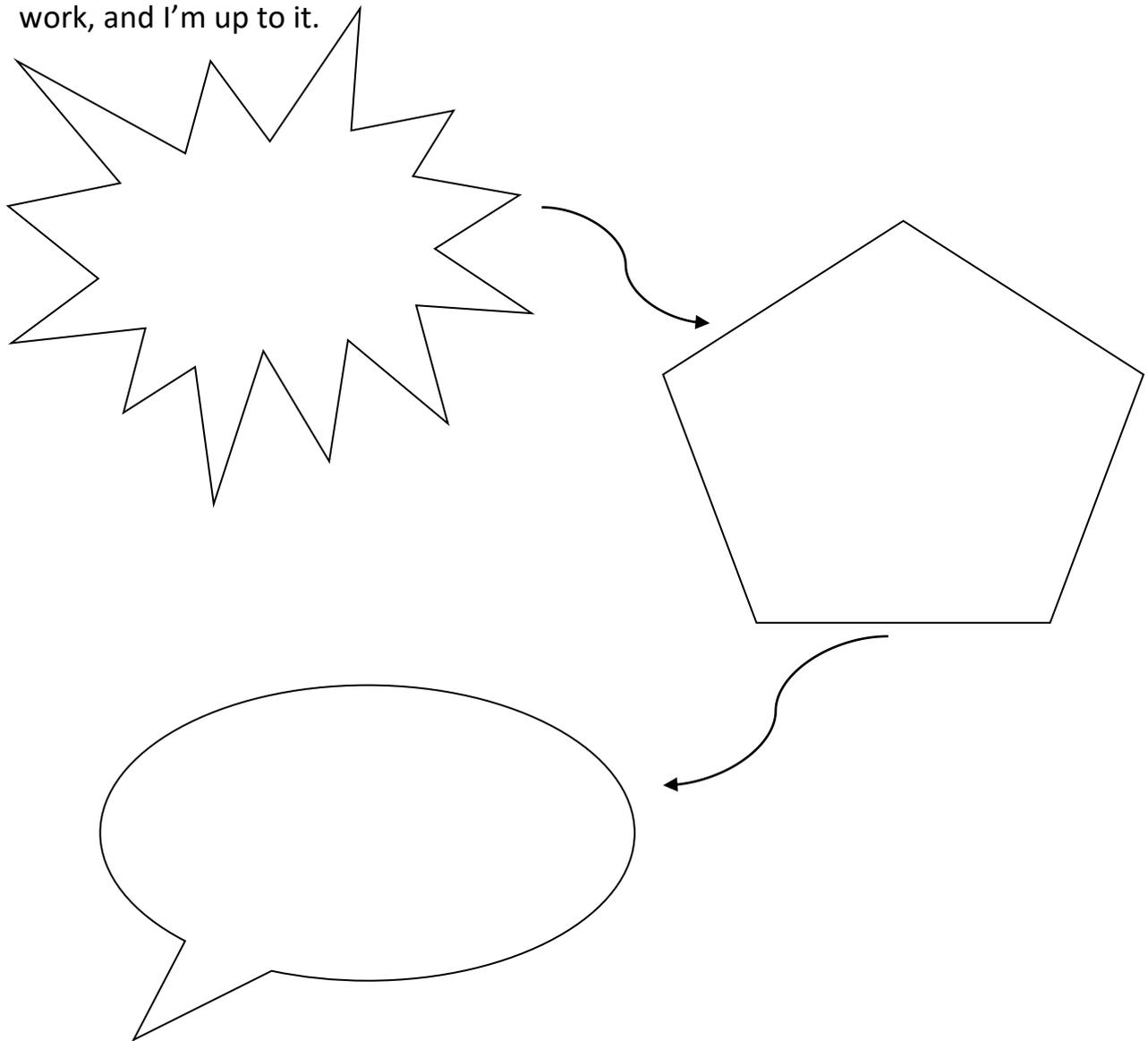
The blame trap: we get caught in the blame trap when we refuse to take responsibility for our decisions and our actions. Instead we try to make others responsible. The thoughts sound like: “he’s making me mad”, “she made me do it”, “it’s not my fault I slipped up, he’s the one who brought the dope home” and “it’s your fault things are not working out”.

Challenge with: I am responsible for my feelings and my actions. Blaming others keeps me from having to look at my part. I may have an emotional reaction to someone’s behaviour, but I am responsible for how I respond. Others may ask me to do things, or offer me opportunities, but no one is responsible for my decisions except me.



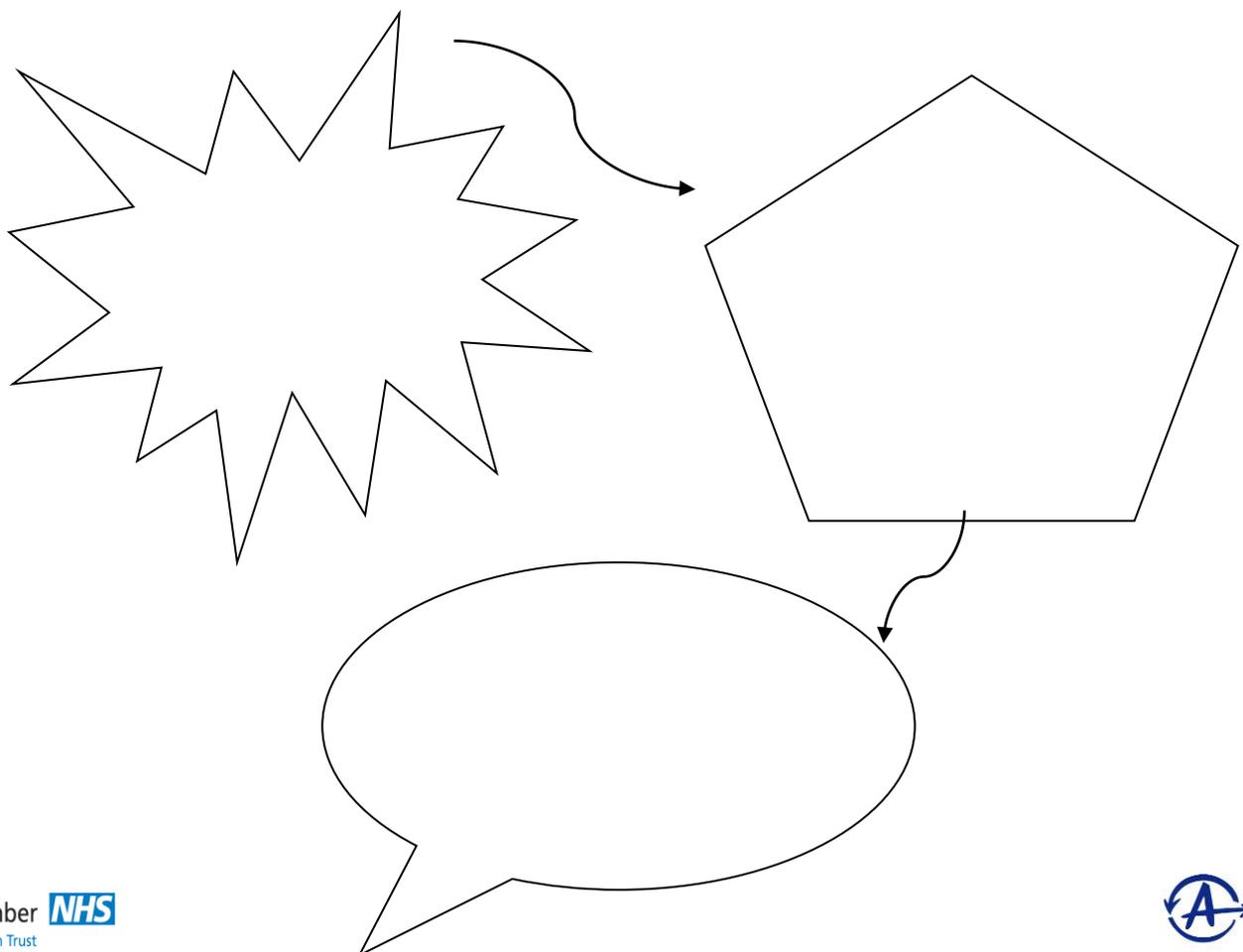
The helpless trap: we get caught in the helpless trap when we think and act like we are victims of circumstance and there's nothing we can do to solve our problems. The thoughts sound like: "I can't handle this hassle", "there's nothing I can do about all my problems" and "I'll never be able to get out of this mess."

Challenge with: I am capable. I can handle this. I can figure out what will work. There is no good reason why I can't manage this situation, even if it is frightening and difficult. The solution will take time, effort, patience and hard work, and I'm up to it.



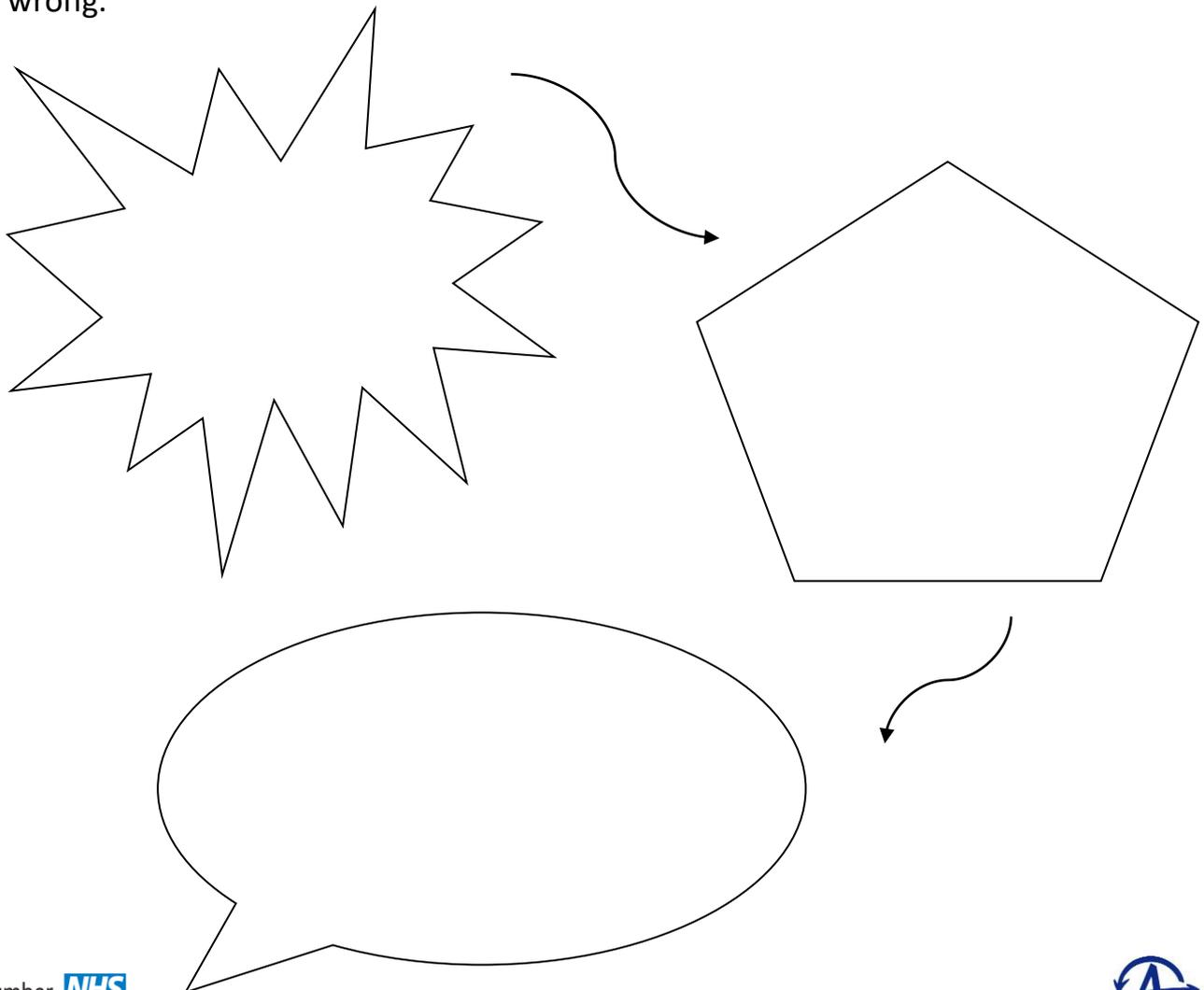
The catastrophe trap: we get caught in the catastrophe trap when we exaggerate even our smallest troubles, turning them into major crises. In another version of this trap, we convince ourselves that everything we attempt will be doomed to failure or catastrophe. The thoughts sound like: “I can’t cope with this, it’s just too awful!”, “I’ll never get over this”, “there’s no way I can change, so why bother”, “even if I apply for the job, I probably won’t get it” and “I don’t see why I should stay in treatment, I’ll probably not make it.”

Challenge with: what has happened is unfortunate (or annoying, irritating, unpleasant or frustrating), but it is not the end of the world. I don’t like it, but I can handle it. I know this will pass with time. On a scale of one to ten, how large is this problem, really? What are my options for handling this problem? Just because I’ve been disappointed in the past doesn’t mean I can never succeed. If I don’t at least try, I’ll never know what could have been.



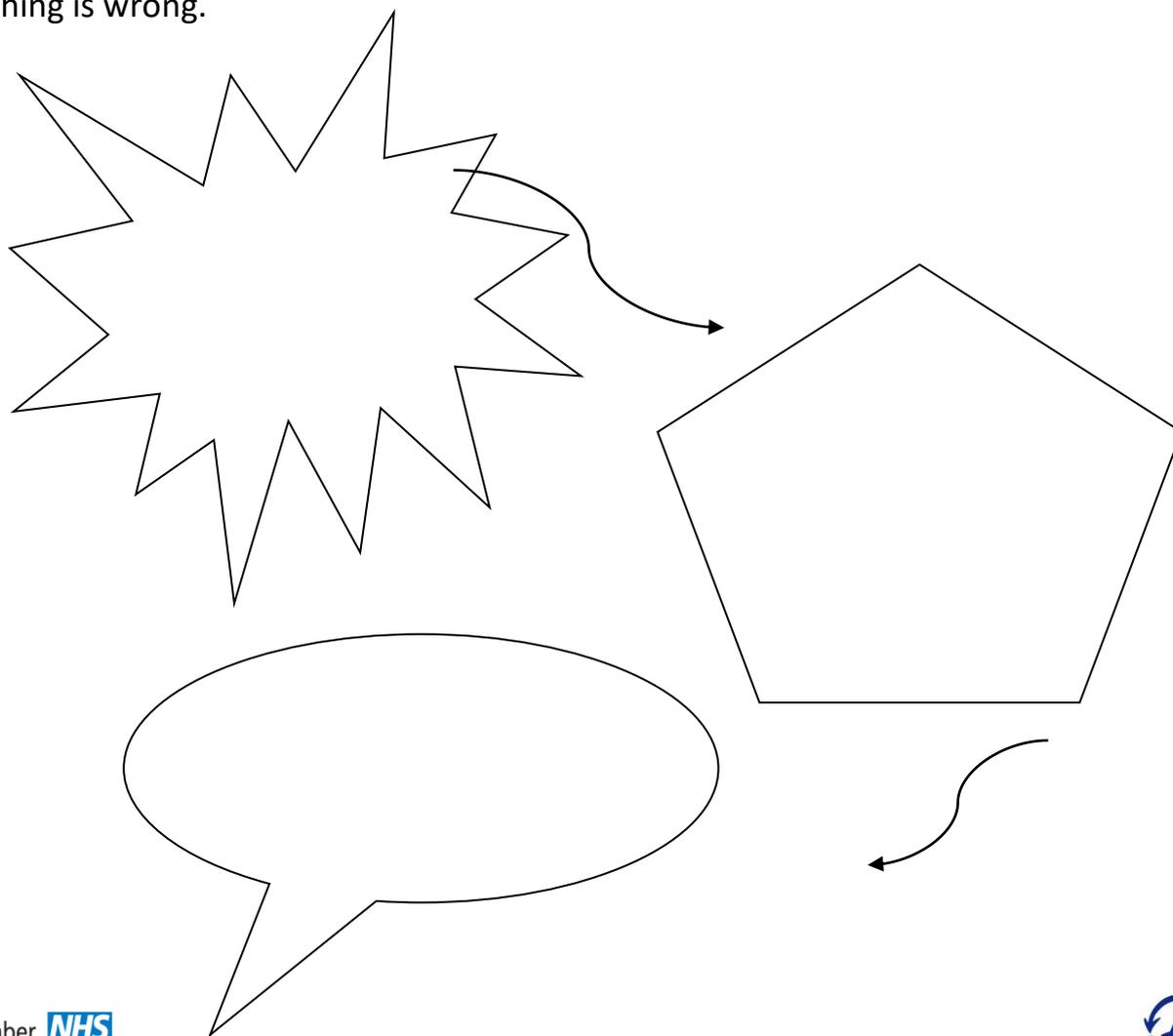
The guilt trap: we get caught in the guilt trap when we have thoughts that are unfairly harsh and critical about ourselves. We may think we are responsible for external events or for other people's feelings and actions. Or we may think anything we do that is short of perfection makes us a bad person. The thoughts sound like: "I should have done a better job", "if I were a better person I'd call my mother more often", "it's my fault my husband is so unhappy" and "I'm so stupid! I should have remembered my appointment".

Challenge with: I am a human being. Human beings make mistakes and are not perfect. I am not obligated to be perfect, only to do the best I can. I will not call myself harsh, critical names, instead I will say "I'm imperfect and I make mistakes, just like everyone else. I am not responsible for everything that goes wrong."



The all or nothing trap: we get caught in the all or nothing trap when we overreact to people or events by assuming they are totally one way the other. We label things as good-bad, black-white, yes-no, success-failure and either-or, and ignore the full range of possibilities in-between. The thoughts sound like: “he’s always late”, “she never can get it right”, “I’m always in a hurry” and “the whole dinner is ruined because I burned the rolls!”

Challenge with: am I being honest? Am I being fair? Am I overreacting? I know he often is late, but that’s different than always. I know she sometimes makes mistakes, but that’s different than never getting it right. Am I really always in a hurry? Just because one thing is not quite right, that doesn’t mean the whole thing is wrong.



Review these steps for challenging mind traps:

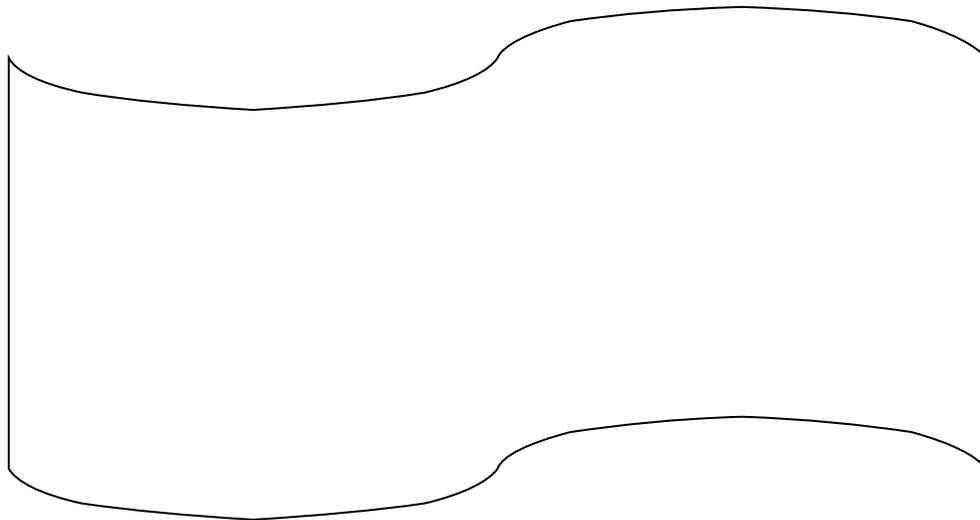
1. Realise that some of your negative or uncomfortable feelings and emotional states are caused by how and what you think
2. Recognise and keep track of what you are thinking and how you are feeling
3. If your thoughts sound like mind traps, challenge them. Remember, it's possible to get caught up in more than one mind trap at a time
4. Challenge your thoughts by disputing them. Learn to talk back to the little voice inside your head. You'll find suggestions on your handout
5. Talk it out! Share your thoughts and feelings with someone you can trust and who supports your recovery, such as your key worker, AA or NA sponsor, partner, close friend or family member.

Ways of Thinking (WOT) to avoid! (NTA, 2010)

Often the ways of thinking can contribute to us feeling stuck. Much like the above exercise, read the following statements and try to remember the last time you got caught in one of these ways of thinking (WOT) traps and complete the example bubble. Having an increased awareness of these traps will help you identify them if they ever come up in the future and as a consequence take charge and control of the situation.

“But...everybody was doing it.”

Rationalisation is what we do when we try to excuse ourselves from full responsibility for our actions. We think of explanations that seem to fit or that seem to logically explain our decisions or behaviours. We look at the outcome of our actions or at a conclusion we have reached, then we pull evidence out of the air that we think will explain everything while allowing us to “look good” in the eyes of others. We often use rationalisation as an attempt to justify our bad behaviour.



“It was Fred’s idea...”

Blaming begins with an error in how we think about things that happen in the world and things that happen involving other people. We try to convince ourselves that all bad events are caused by somebody or that somebody intentionally set out to cause the bad event that has caused us a problem. This makes us want to point the finger instead of finding a solution. By blaming someone else, we don’t have to consider our own actions or responsibility. Let’s face it, blaming others often is a backhanded way of trying to excuse our own behaviour.



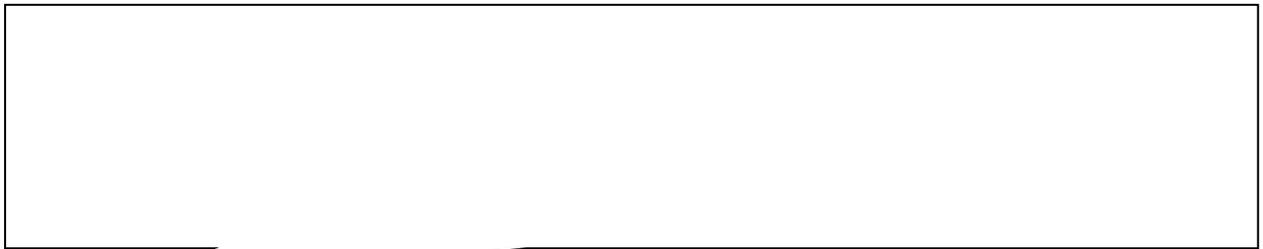
“I just don’t understand...”

Confusion – when we don’t want to face a situation, we may think that if we appear puzzled and confused to others, they will let us off the hook. For example, we may say we just don’t understand the question or an assignment, then not pay attention when someone tries to help us out. This way of thinking allows us to pretend to be confused about assignments, rules, requirements, expectations or facts. If we are confused, then we think we can avoid meeting our obligations or taking responsibility for ourselves. We may also use confusion when we want to avoid taking full responsibility for things we did in the past. For example, someone claims to not remember or to be confused about how drugs came to be in their possession



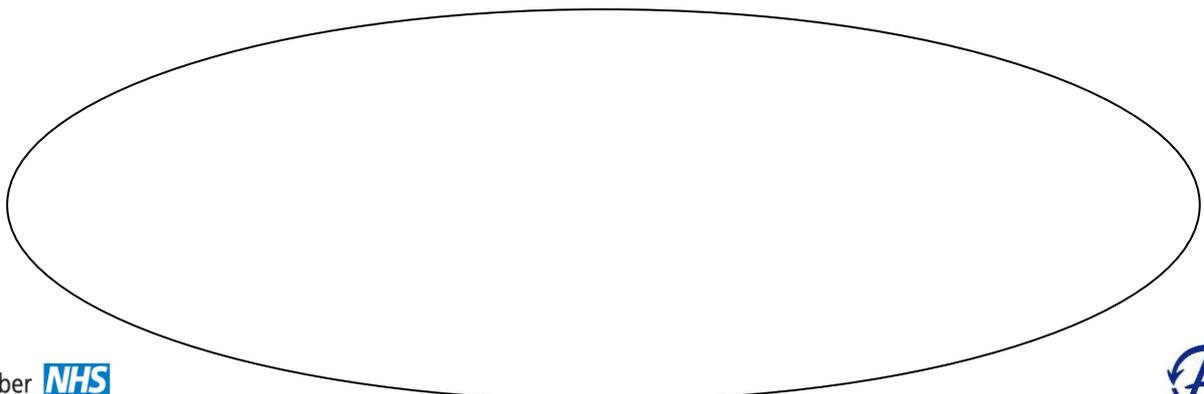
“He did that just to piss me off...”

Assuming – making assumptions about other people’s thoughts, feelings, or motives is a way of thinking that allows us to justify our resentments, insecurities, and paranoia. Rather than checking out the facts by asking others about their feelings or intentions, we go with our own assumptions, which are usually negative and blaming. The payoff is that we can righteously overreact or behave badly without being bothered by the truth of a situation. We use assumptions to justify our behaviour and to avoid taking responsibility for jumping to conclusions.



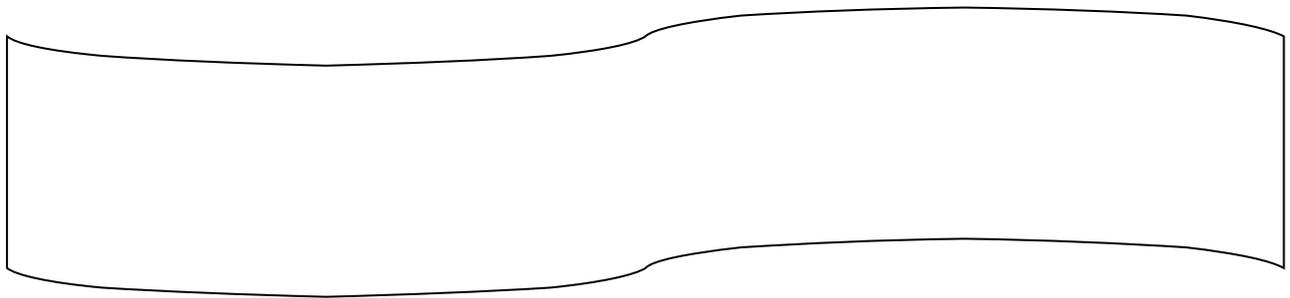
“It was just one drink ...”

Minimising can be summarised as “trying to make a molehill out of a mountain.” When we minimise, we attempt to make others believe that what was, in fact, a pretty big screw-up was really no big deal. Usually, the words “just” and “only” will be part of our attempts to minimise our actions. When we minimise, we are usually attempting to avoid or reduce the consequences of our behaviour. The payoff is that if we believe our own minimising, then we don’t have to feel remorse or make amends for our actions.



“I should be given another chance...”

Entitlement allows us to feel that we are somehow “better than” or more deserving of special treatment than someone else. In other words, we allow ourselves to believe that the rules just don’t apply to us because we are unique and therefore entitled to special consideration. We may further believe that everything should be made easy for us and we should not have to make any effort toward our goals. Most of all, when our thinking involves entitlement, we believe that we should not have to pay the consequences for our mistakes, poor decisions, or lack of effort.



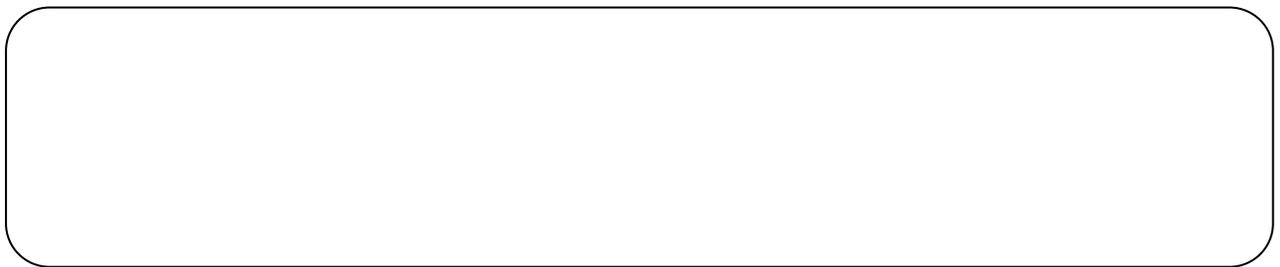
“I was completely sober...”

Lying is the one way of thinking that doesn’t require a lot of definition for most of us – we all know what lying is. We use lying to distort the truth or to confuse or make fools of other people. Sometimes we lie because we fear the consequences of the truth. A lie of commission is when we make up a falsehood on purpose – a regular old lie. A lie of omission is when we tell part of the truth, but leave out important details (for example, telling your partner that you attended your drug team appointment, but leaving out the part that you didn’t actually wait to see your drug worker). Interestingly, many people refuse to believe that this second type of lie really is a form of lying.



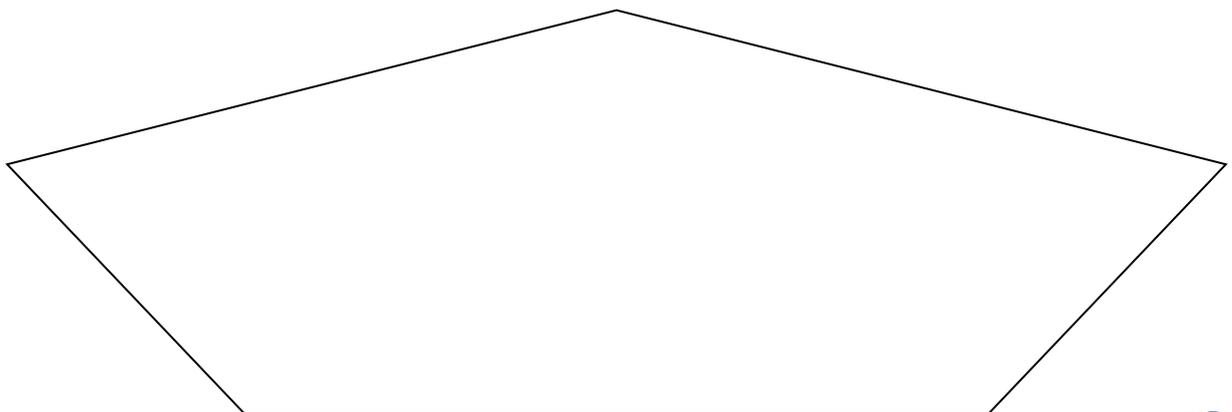
“Poor, poor me...”

Victim stance – sometimes we think we can fool or control others by getting them to feel sorry for us. When we use this way of thinking, we attempt to present ourselves as the true victim of a situation so that others will see us as powerless and not responsible for our own behaviour. The payoff is that if we can trick others into seeing us as some kind of victim of circumstance, we don’t have to be accountable or responsible for our behaviour or choices. In this way, the problems that we usually end up causing for ourselves can be blamed on our past, our family, the system, or on the cruel, hard world.



“I don’t need this stupid group, I already know this stuff.”

Grandiosity is the belief that we are superior to others, that we should never be questioned or challenged, and that we are right about everything (which means everyone else is wrong). No one can teach us anything because we believe we are smarter, better, more capable, or more “in the know” than other people, even if the facts don’t support it. We think that our lives, experiences, knowledge, needs, problems, concerns, and opinions are the only ones that really matter.



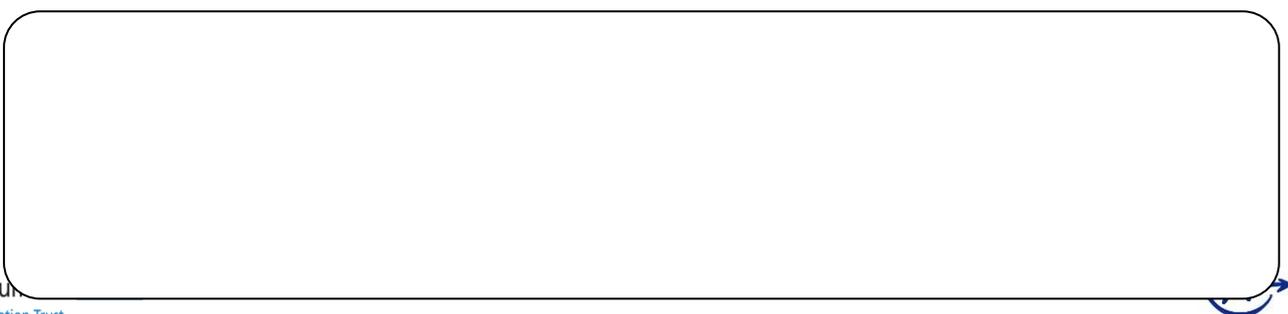
“That’s an interesting question, but the real issue is...”

Sidetracking is another way to describe this thinking pattern. We use it to control the conversation, change the subject, and shift the focus away from a topic that makes us uncomfortable. When we use sidetracking, we are trying to distract people from the real issue being discussed. We think that by throwing people off the subject, we can avoid being confronted by the facts of our behaviour. Here’s a classic example: “Why did you start dealing drugs?” Response: “Well, the drug laws are stupid. People in Amsterdam can smoke cannabis whenever they want. This country needs to get real and change its laws.” See how it works? We are asked an important question that we really should consider and instead of staying focused, we lead the other person on a verbal wild goose chase.



“This is so boring!”

Boredom is used as a thinking pattern when we want to give ourselves permission to not stay focused, to avoid participation or study, or to avoid taking responsibility for our own learning. It involves the belief that if we label something as “boring”, “stupid” or “lame”, we don’t have to deal with it. Instead, we can complain, whine, act out, waste time, and otherwise try to control the situation, while at the same time hide from issues and problems we need to address. When we label something as boring, we are actually trying to blame someone else (the teacher, the group leader, the treatment service) for our own resistance to learn something new.



'Improving our WOT' - Developing new thinking habits (NTA, 2010)

Practice open thinking

Be open to ideas, views and perceptions of others. If you react defensively or in anger when you hear or read something that challenges your beliefs, you may overlook an idea that could help you. Practice acceptance of positive criticism. When you listen with interest at the ideas of others, you may learn something.

Accept personal responsibility versus taking a victim stance

Accepting responsibility for your thoughts and actions. If you own up to your mistakes in thinking and behaviours rather than dodging them – for example, by saying you were falsely accused and victimised or trying to lay them off on someone else – you can grow. Once you are able to do this you are on the road toward changing your life for the better and becoming a responsible adult.

Develop a realistic rather than a grandiose self-view

You know you have made mistakes. If you admit them, analyse why you made them, and learn the lessons they offer, you improve your chances not to repeat them. You recognise that mistakes do not make you worthless. When you take actions to prevent repeating mistakes, you grow.

Analyse your performance rather than blaming problems on others

Learn to actively examine your performance in working toward the goals you set for yourself. Your emphasis on making yourself accountable for diligently working toward your goals helps you to advance in your willingness to be responsible in your efforts.

Consider consequences rather than thinking you can control them

Some people see “normal” jobs as boring and want excitement in their lives.

Sometimes people who think this way find crime and drugs exciting. When you catch yourself thinking about drinking or taking drugs, about criminal activities, or doing things that would hurt others, or yourself, you need to stop and get a picture in your mind of the consequences suffered by yourself and others in the past.

Face up to fear rather than cutting your fears off

Everyone fears something. False bravado in the face of fears doesn't remove them, it only limits the ways you feel you can respond. You can learn to identify and face fears. You can analyse fears, eliminating irrational ones. Addressing fears puts them in proper perspective and in many cases eliminates the fear as having no truth in fact.

Let go rather than needing to control

Recognise that you do not need total power and control over every event and every person. Stop trying to “con” or force others into doing what you want. Twelve step groups often utilise the serenity prayer to remind themselves of this: “God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.”

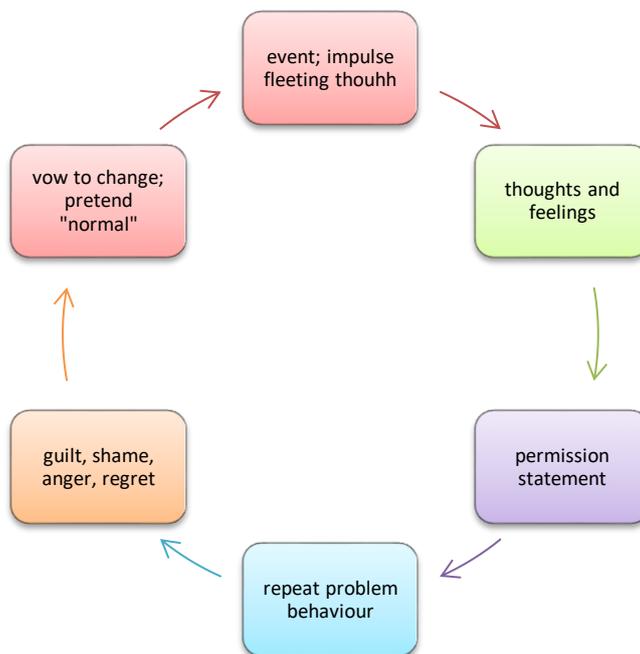
(all taken from NTA, Routes to recovery part 2, 2010)

Thinking and Behaviour Cycles

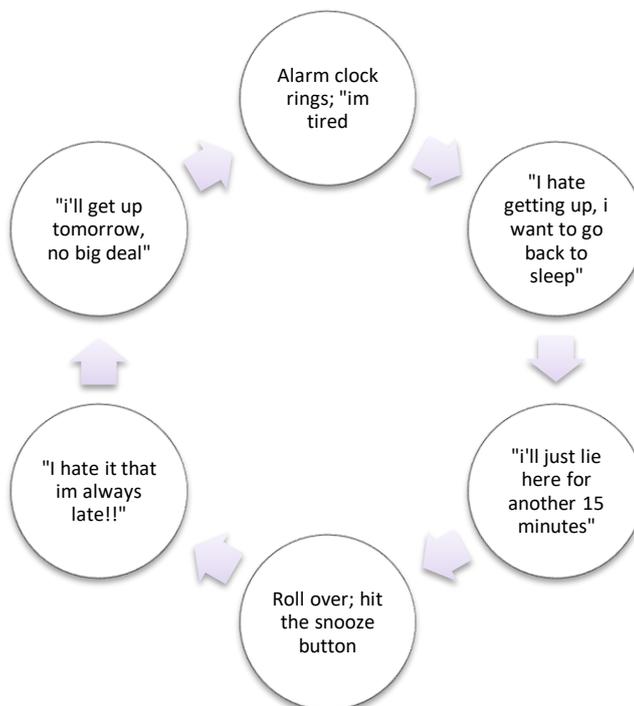
Most cycles or habitual patterns of behaviour such as substance use, work in the same way. They usually begin with an event, impulse or fleeting thought. Instead of choosing to ignore or override these initial thoughts and impulses, we give it some more mental attention, inviting thoughts and feelings that influence the decision about what to do. At some point in this thinking, we give ourselves a permission statement that helps us justify the problem behaviour. We then repeat the problem behaviour. Afterwards, however, we usually feel really bad about stepping back into the cycle (guilt, shame, anger, regret). We then tell ourselves that it won't ever happen again, or that we will change next time (vow to change). Or we try to fool ourselves and others by acting like nothing ever happened ("pretend normal"). However, we remain at risk for jumping right back into the cycle of problem behaviour in the future.

Cycles are driven by many of the overriding thinking patterns that were discussed in the previous session. In drawing a picture of a cycle, we use the arrows to represent the mind traps and WOTs that push people to follow an impulse and end up repeating problem behaviour. For instance, things like minimising, justifying,

blaming, entitlement, playing helpless.



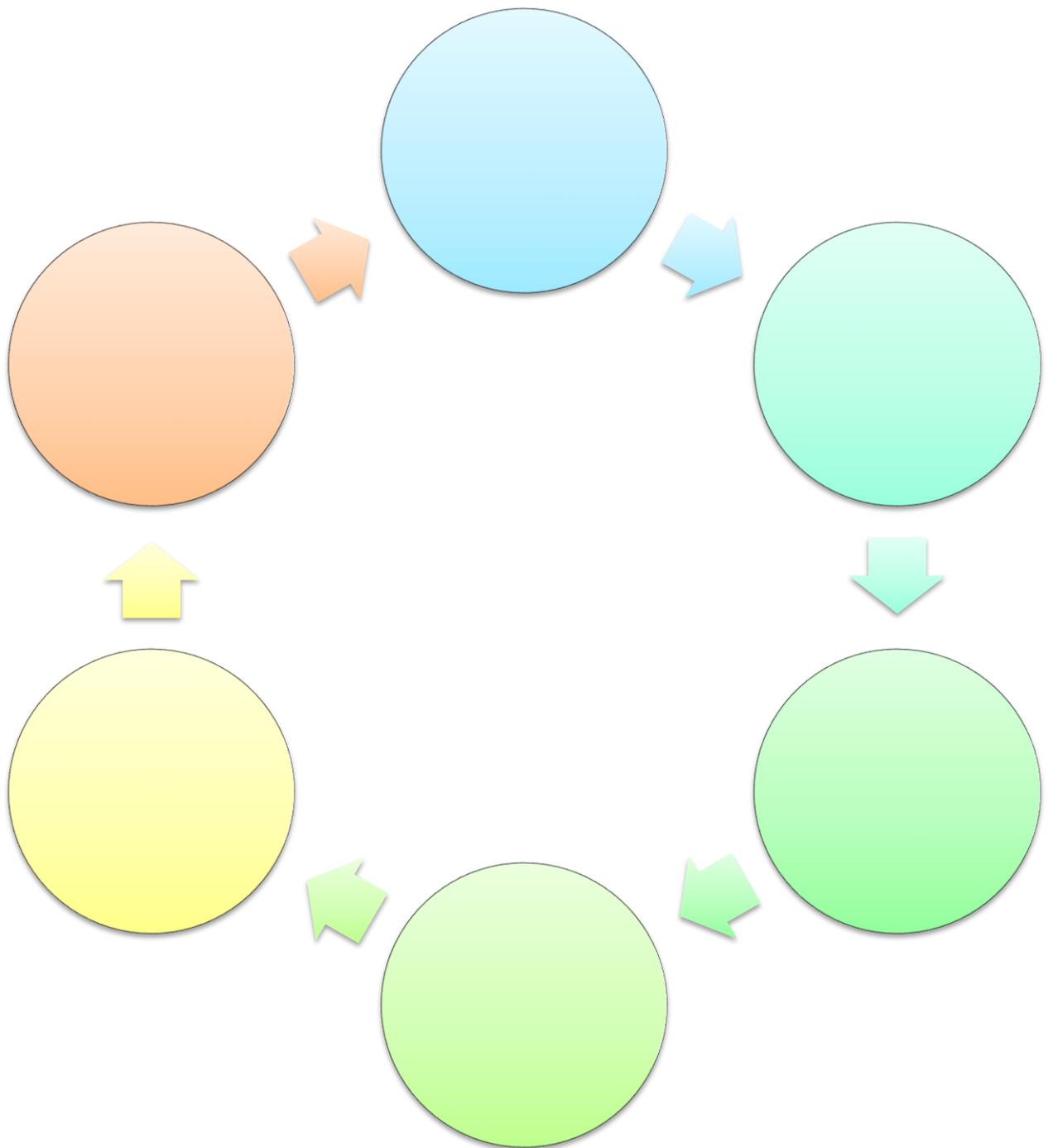
An example of this is below...



In my example, the whole thing looks something like this. The alarm rings and I have an impulse to stay in bed. A sleepy little thinking pattern voice tells me, "I shouldn't have to get up when I feel so tired" (entitlement). This helps me focus mental

attention and begin to develop strong feelings/thoughts toward the impulse to stay in bed. Another thinking pattern is, “it’s just not fair” (victim stance), moves me toward a permission statement, “I’ll just give myself another 15 minutes.” And yet another thinking pattern, “it’s just 15 minutes” (minimising), allows me to hit the snooze button. Later, as reality sets in and I realise I did the very thing I was trying to stop doing, thinking patterns help fuel the bad feelings I now have about myself, “I’m a loser” (helpless), “I can’t do anything right” (all-or-nothing). Of course, these bad feeling also keep other thinking patterns active; minimising, justifying and so on. Guilt helps fuel all the mental promises I make to myself to not do it again, to change, to reform. I tell myself I’ll stop oversleeping and that it is “no big deal” (lying, minimising). However, since I was “in the dark,” in the sense that I was not aware of the way my cycle operated, I had no real plan beyond mental promises to change the problem behaviour, so I was at risk for it to happen again and again.

Have a go at your own...



Can you recognise any WOT's or Mind Traps that may have contributed to this cycle?

Have a look at your previous WOT and Mind Trap work sheets and see if there are any links.

Has there ever been a time when, despite the same activating event or impulse, you didn't cycle through? In other words, a time when you interrupted the cycle, didn't repeat the problem behaviour?

If yes...

What did you do to stop the thoughts and not give a "permission statement?"

How did you make yourself do that?

How might you make yourself do it more often?

If no...

what would be the best way to interrupt one of your cycles, once the impulse has happened?

How might you make yourself do that?

What else might help you interrupt a cycle?

Every time you are aware of impulses or thinking patterns that are involved in your cycle, you make a commitment to mentally turn your thoughts away. This will involve saying “stop!” loudly to yourself, once you are aware of the thought, and then replacing it with an appropriate thought. This technique improves awareness. Therefore, the key to breaking behaviour cycles involves awareness, honesty, and motivation to change. It can be difficult and challenging to change. The payoff is self-control and pride. By learning to break an unwanted or unhealthy behaviour cycle, we place ourselves fully in control, and can enjoy the self-respect that comes from being responsible for our own actions and lives.

(NTA, 2010)