

CREATING SAFETY

A trauma information and self-help
course for survivors of sexual violence

Week 4 Positive Coping

NOTTS
SVS
SERVICES

LISTEN
BELIEVE
SUPPORT

Week 4

Positive Coping

This week introduces the idea that it might be difficult to use positive coping skills when we have experienced sexual violence.

It gives a range of positive coping skills and asks us to begin to use a few of them or recognise those we already use.

It continues the idea of self-compassion in daily life, and has an exercise in which we identify how we care for ourselves and what we might need when we are struggling.

This week ends with an exercise to draw or write, identifying what makes us feel worse and what makes us feel better.

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Why is Positive Coping Difficult?

Sometimes when we have experienced trauma and sexual violence it can mean that we are prone to choosing ways of coping that might not keep us safe or that make us feel worse. This might be because we have got used to feeling bad and in a way it is safe; it might be because we feel helpless as a result of what has happened and don't feel able to take positive steps; it might be because after what we have been told and how we have been treated we don't believe we deserve to feel better; it might be that we are faced with a lot of problems and feel overwhelmed; or it might be because we have never been shown how to cope in a positive way. Habit can also be a powerful thing and can be hard to change.

Looking at all these reasons we can see it is very understandable that we sometimes choose ways of coping that might not help us or keep us safe. Beginning to change this doesn't have to be about taking any huge steps. It can be more about making many very small different choices each day.

Have a look at these positive ways of coping and see if you can do one or two of them today. Perhaps you already do some of them - in which case really recognise that. Notice each time you choose a positive coping strategy and celebrate it.

You could print these pages out and carry them around with you or display it at home.

SAFE COPING SKILLS: **Ask for help** – Reach out to someone safe. **Inspire yourself** – carry around something positive (e.g. a poem or story that speaks to you.) **Look after your physical self** – eat well, sleep, exercise. **Identify the belief and replace it** – eg I don't deserve to be happy, it was my fault becomes I deserve to be cared for, it wasn't my fault. **Get organised** – lists can help make you feel more in control. **Leave a dangerous situation** – choose to be safe in this moment. **Create a schedule** – structure in your day can help keep you connected with the world. **Recognise your triggers** – think of solutions for them before they happen. **Pay attention to your needs** – try not to neglect yourself. **Practise grounding techniques** – breathe deeply, focus on your surroundings. **List your options** – In any situation, you have choices. **Set goals** - think of attainable goals (small steps), set deadlines to achieve them and reward yourself when you do. **Be committed to your own recovery** – make a pact with yourself to do what it takes to heal. **Set yourself a mantra** – i.e. 'I am not to blame' – repeat this when you're having doubts. **Focus on the present** - if the past or future are too overwhelming think about how you can feel better *now*. **Create Meaning** – think about what values you want to live by and take small steps in that direction. **Accept support** – tell people you trust what it is you need from them. **Do the best you can with what you have** – make the most of available opportunities however small. **Realise it takes time to heal** – keep moving forwards in tiny steps. **Focus on healing** – concentrate on how you want to feel and how to get there. **Pace yourself** – go slower if you feel overwhelmed or go faster if you're stuck in a rut. **Set boundaries** – it's OK to say no to protect yourself. **Compassion** – listen to yourself with respect and care. **Visualise** – think of a place where you feel safe and content, imagine yourself there. **Take time for you** – do something you enjoy (such as watch a film, listen to music or go for a walk).

Talk yourself through it – sometimes self-talk can help in difficult or stressful situations. **Praise yourself** - write down things you like about yourself and refer to these when you're struggling. **Note your control**- think of aspects of your life that you have control over (eg. How you dress / friendships). **Consider your options** – think about the choices you have for your situation. **Reframe your thoughts** – try and think in a way that makes you feel better. **Look out for danger signs** – recognise a problem before it becomes too big to deal with - notice red flags. **Imagine** - Create a mental picture that helps you feel different (a friendly animal, a peaceful boat ride, a cosy sofa). **Notice the turning point** - in slow motion notice the exact moment your thoughts turned negative. **Make plans** – try something to keep yourself occupied. **Stay safe** – do whatever you need to do to put your safety above all. **Seek understanding, not blame** – listen to your behaviour and try to understand. **Create a new story** – be the survivor who is overcoming adversity. **Be kind to yourself** – treat your feelings with respect and compassion. **Allow yourself to cry** – it's OK to be vulnerable, this isn't a sign of weakness – just a way to deal with what you've been through. **Ask others** – check out with safe people if your belief is accurate. **Healing above all** – focus on what matters. **Listen to your needs** – no more neglect - really hear what you need. **Setbacks are not failures** - remember that healing is a process; there will be ups and downs. **If one way does not work, try another** – as in a maze turn a corner and try a new path. **Soothing talk** - talk to yourself very gently as to a friend or a small child. **Set an action plan for one small goal** - be specific, set a deadline and tell someone about it. **Reach for community resources** – lean on them for support. **Tolerate the feeling** – no feeling is final, just get through it safely. **Plan it out** – take the time to think ahead. **Try something, anything safe** – a good plan today is better than a perfect one tomorrow.

Affirmations

Affirmations are positive words or phrases which can help to challenge unhelpful thinking.

Some people might say them regularly throughout the day, say them each morning or evening, choose one to display or keep in your purse or wallet, and some people might not like them at all.

If the idea seems useful to you then practice using these in different ways until you find something that works for you.

You could write your own affirmations, or have a look online or in books for ideas. There are also recorded affirmations available online.

- ❖ I have strength
- ❖ I am determined and successful
- ❖ I am a good and worthwhile person
- ❖ I am a unique and special person
- ❖ I have inner strength and resources
- ❖ I am confident and competent
- ❖ I hold my head up high
- ❖ People like me – I am a likeable person and I like myself
- ❖ I care about others, I am needed and worthwhile
- ❖ I am a loving person
- ❖ I have a lot to be proud of.
- ❖ I am in control of my life
- ❖ I can achieve anything I want to achieve
- ❖ I make wise decisions based on what I know
- ❖ I have set my goals and am moving towards them
- ❖ I accept myself as a unique and worthwhile person
- ❖ My life has meaning and purpose
- ❖ I am in control of my choices



Self-Compassion in Daily Life

The goal of the mindfulness is to be is to be mindful and self-compassionate in daily life.

That means to (1) know when you're under stress or suffering (mindfulness) and (2) to respond with care and kindness (self-compassion). The simplest approach is to discover how you already care for yourself, and then remind yourself to do those things when your life becomes difficult.

Physically – soften the body. How do you care for yourself physically (e.g., exercise, massage, warm bath, cup of tea)?

Can you think of new ways to release the tension and stress that builds up in your body?

Mentally – reduce agitation. How do you care for your mind, especially when you're under stress (e.g., meditation, watch a funny movie, read an inspiring book)? Is there a new strategy you'd like to try to let your thoughts come and go more easily?

Emotionally – soothe and comfort yourself How do you care for yourself emotionally (pet the dog, journal, cook)? Is there something new you'd like to try?

Relationally– connect with others. How or when do you relate to others that brings you genuine happiness (e.g., meet with friends, send a birthday card, play a game)?

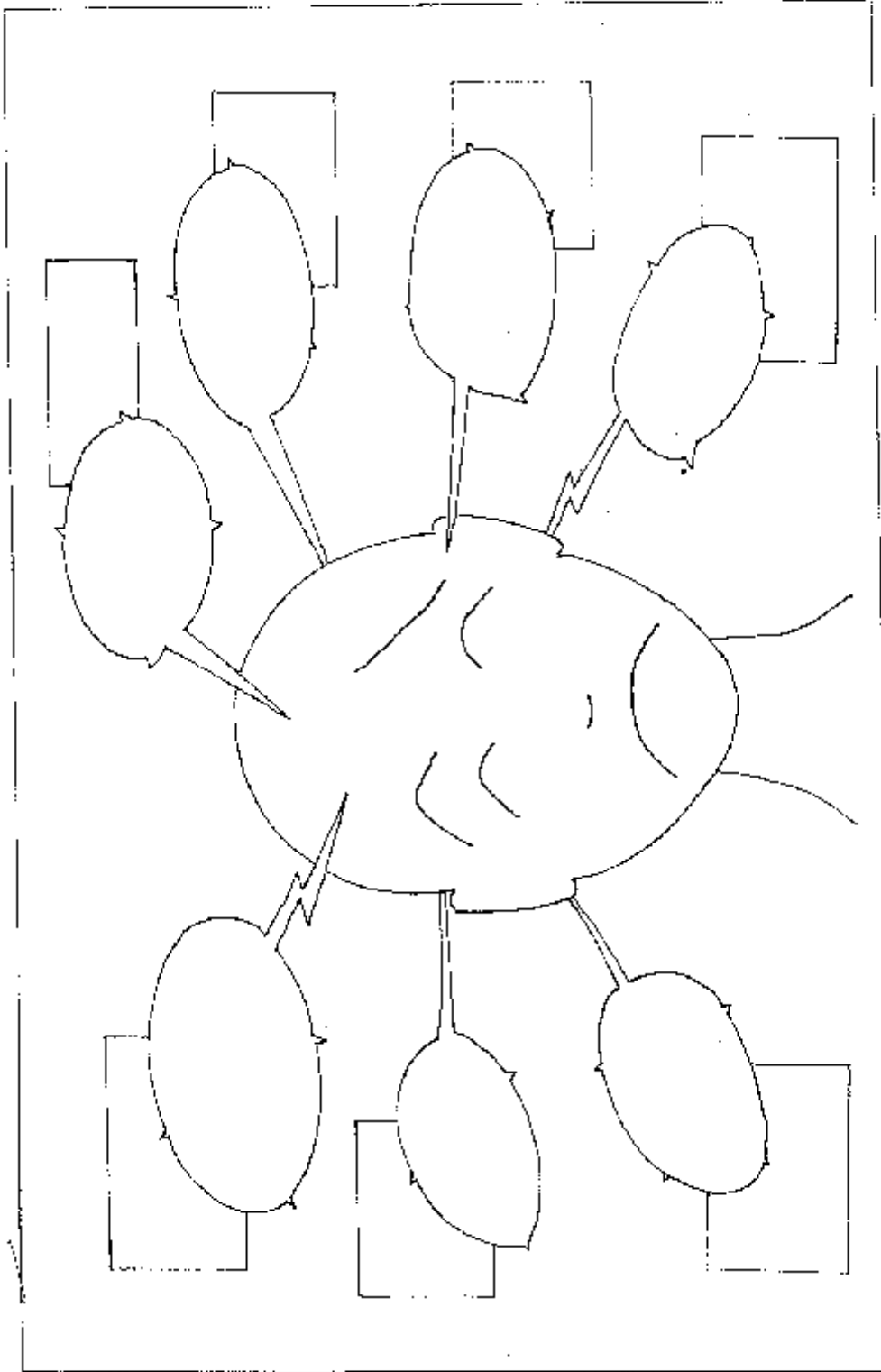
Is there any way that you'd like to enrich these connections?

Spiritually (if the idea of spirituality fits with you) – what do you do to care for yourself spiritually (pray, walk in the woods, help others)?

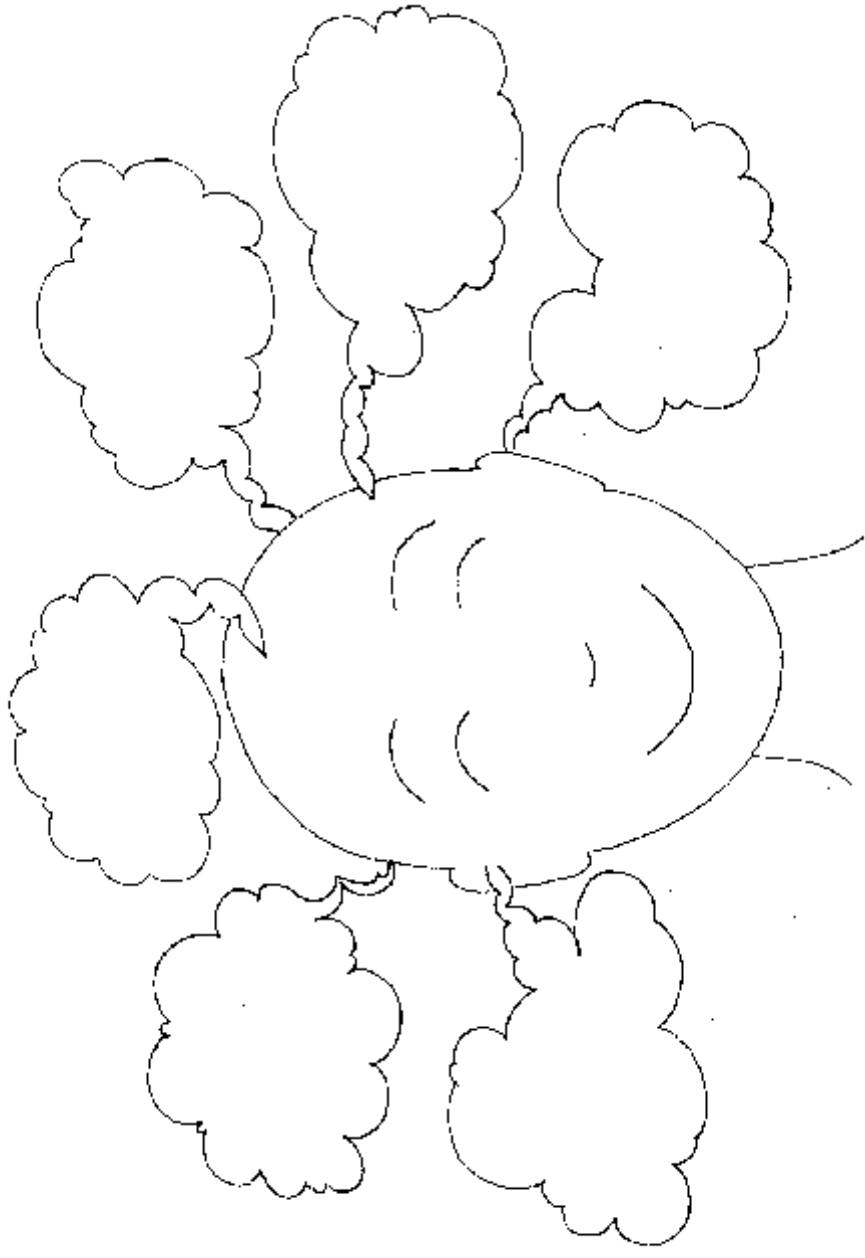
What helps? What doesn't help?

It can be helpful to understand what triggers our negative feelings and thoughts and what helps us to feel better.

Complete each of these sheets with drawings or words and phrases.



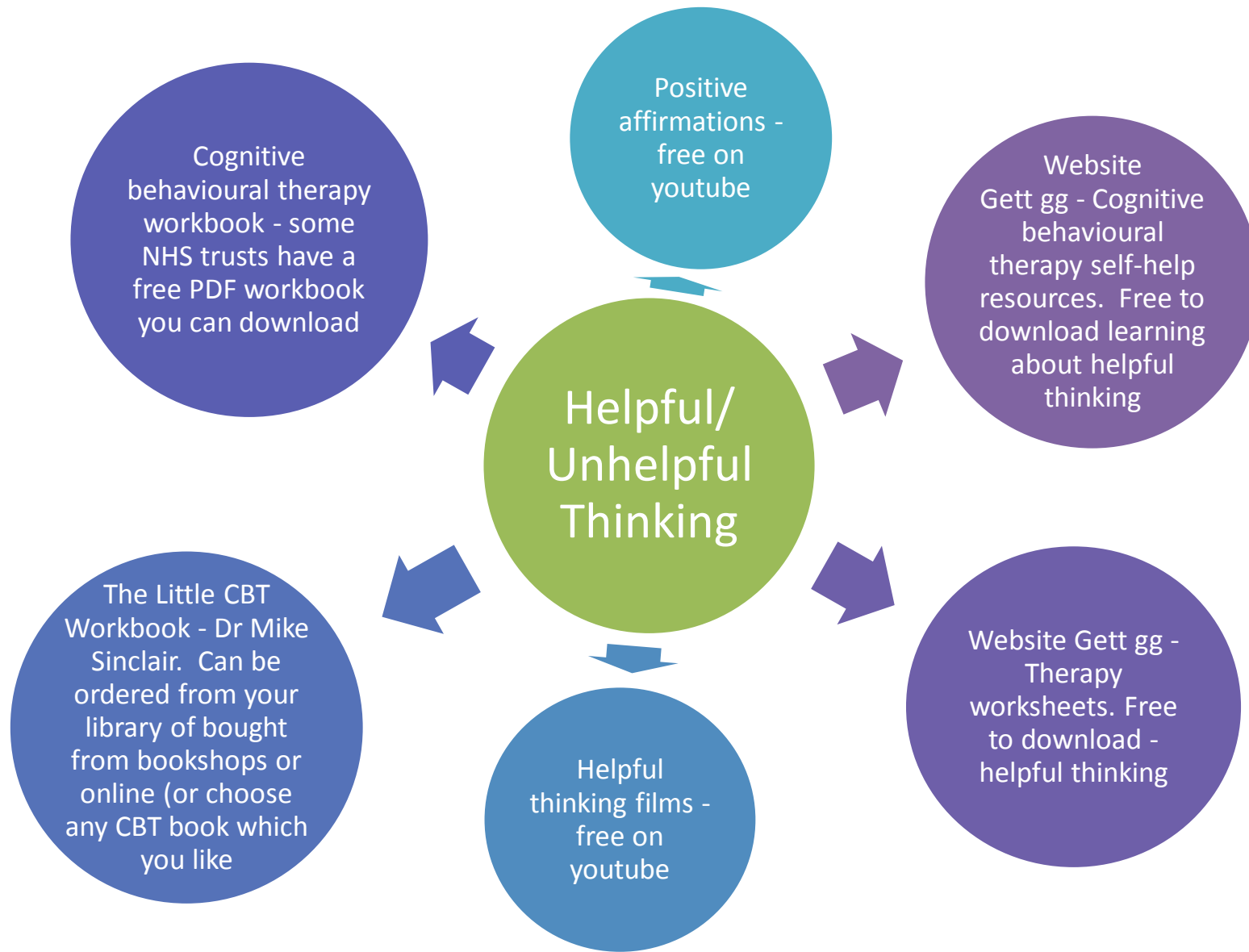
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Homework

- Try to use one of the positive coping skills each day.
- Celebrate and praise yourself when you use a positive coping skill.
- Try to do one compassionate caring thing for yourself this week.

There's a world of help out there...



Acknowledgements

Notts SVS Services would like to thank the following organisations who allowed us to use their materials in writing this course.

The National Association for People Abused in Childhood www.napac.org.uk

www.get.gg (www.getselfhelp.co.uk)

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