

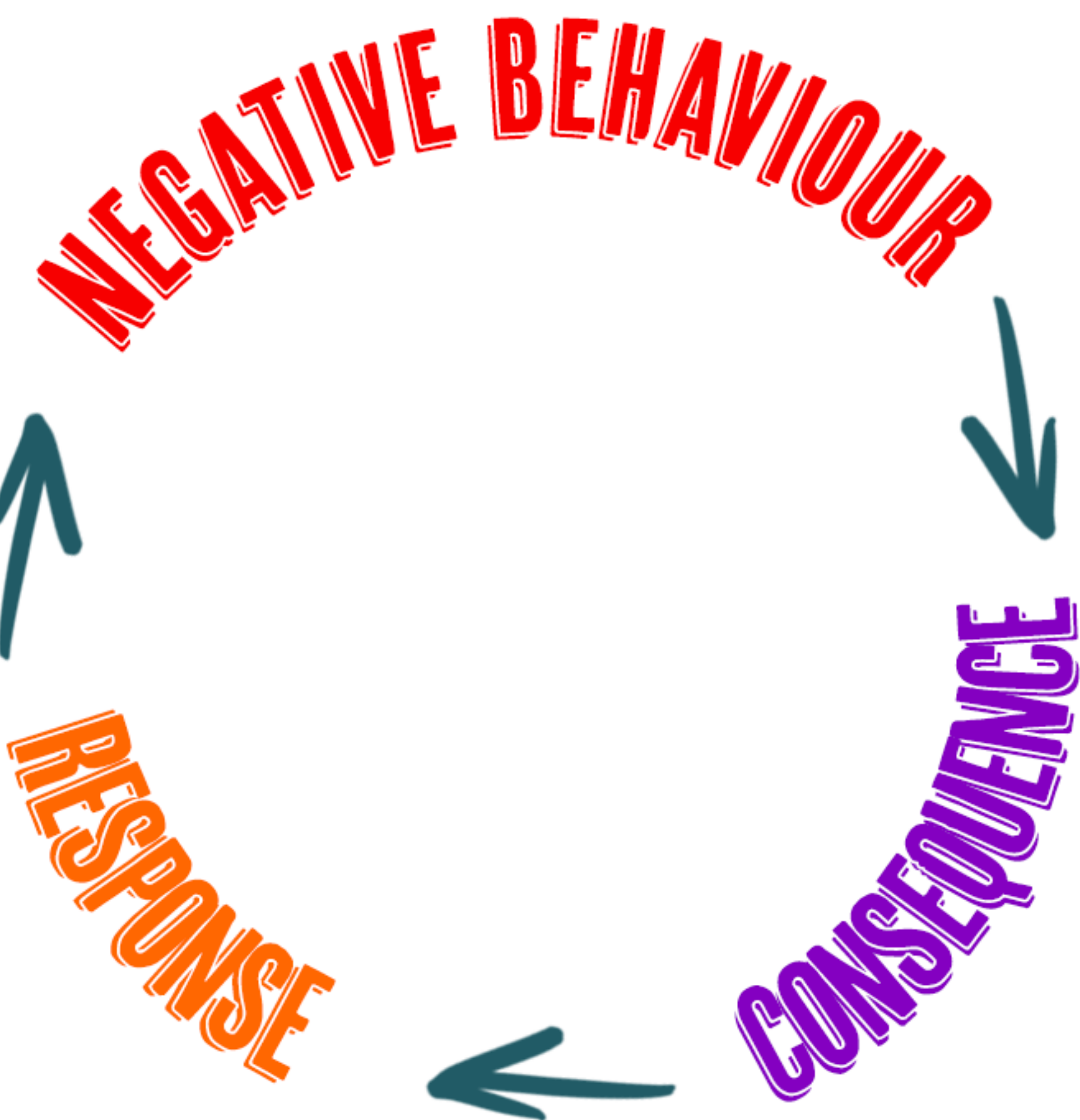
## Part 1

Avoidance is a coping mechanism we often adopt when facing difficult experiences, the following advice from the team here at Isorropia will help you recognise and work through these situations.

### Negative Cycle of Avoidance

An avoidance behaviour is something someone will or will not do to reduce anxiety provoking situations. These behaviours only exacerbate the fear and make it more difficult to recover in the long run.

People often avoid things that help them feel well and that help to maintain their wellbeing. Neglecting these important activities may lead to negative consequences. These things could be showering, hobbies, socialising, cooking, paperwork, food shopping or going to work.

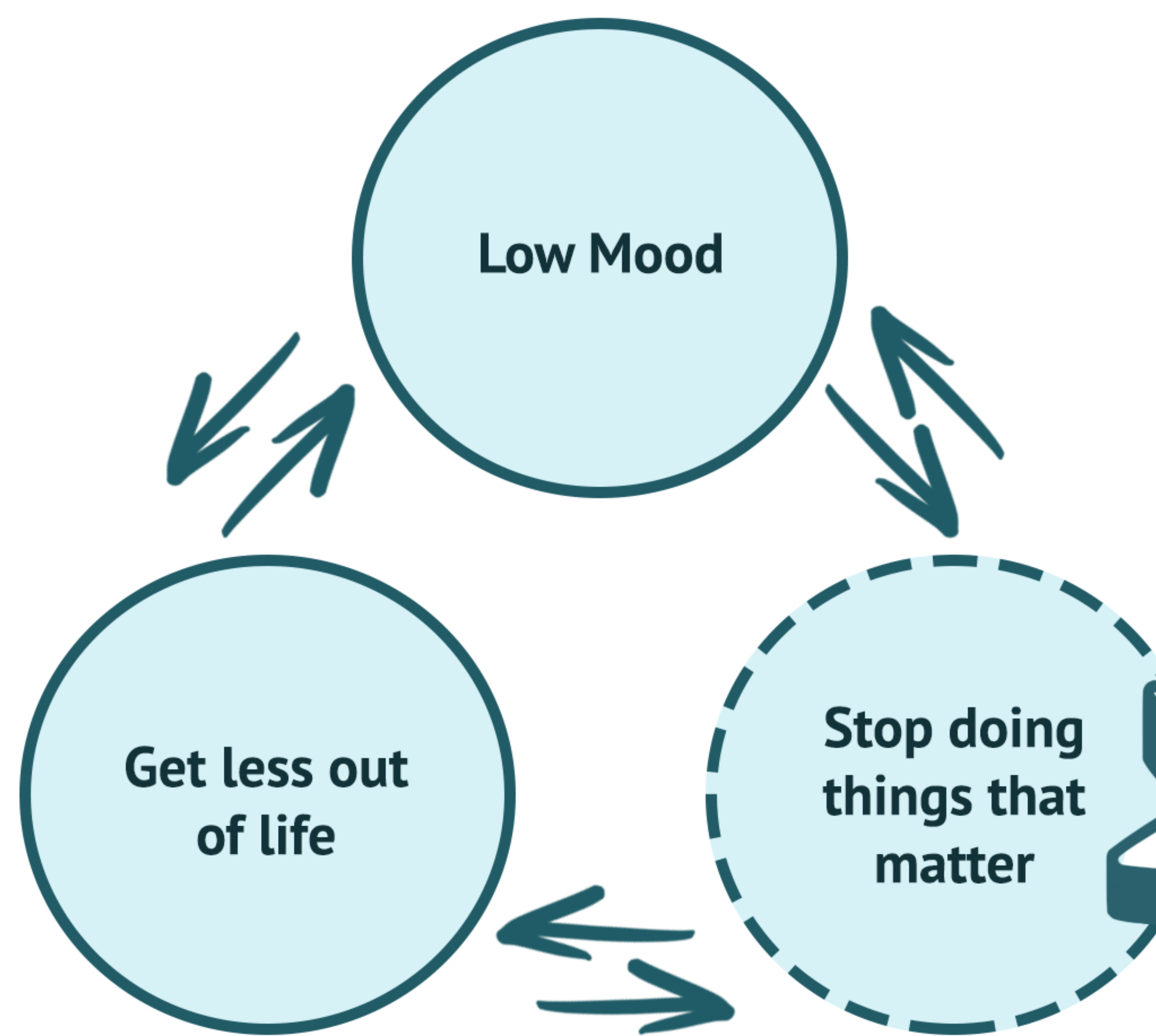


### Behavioural Activation

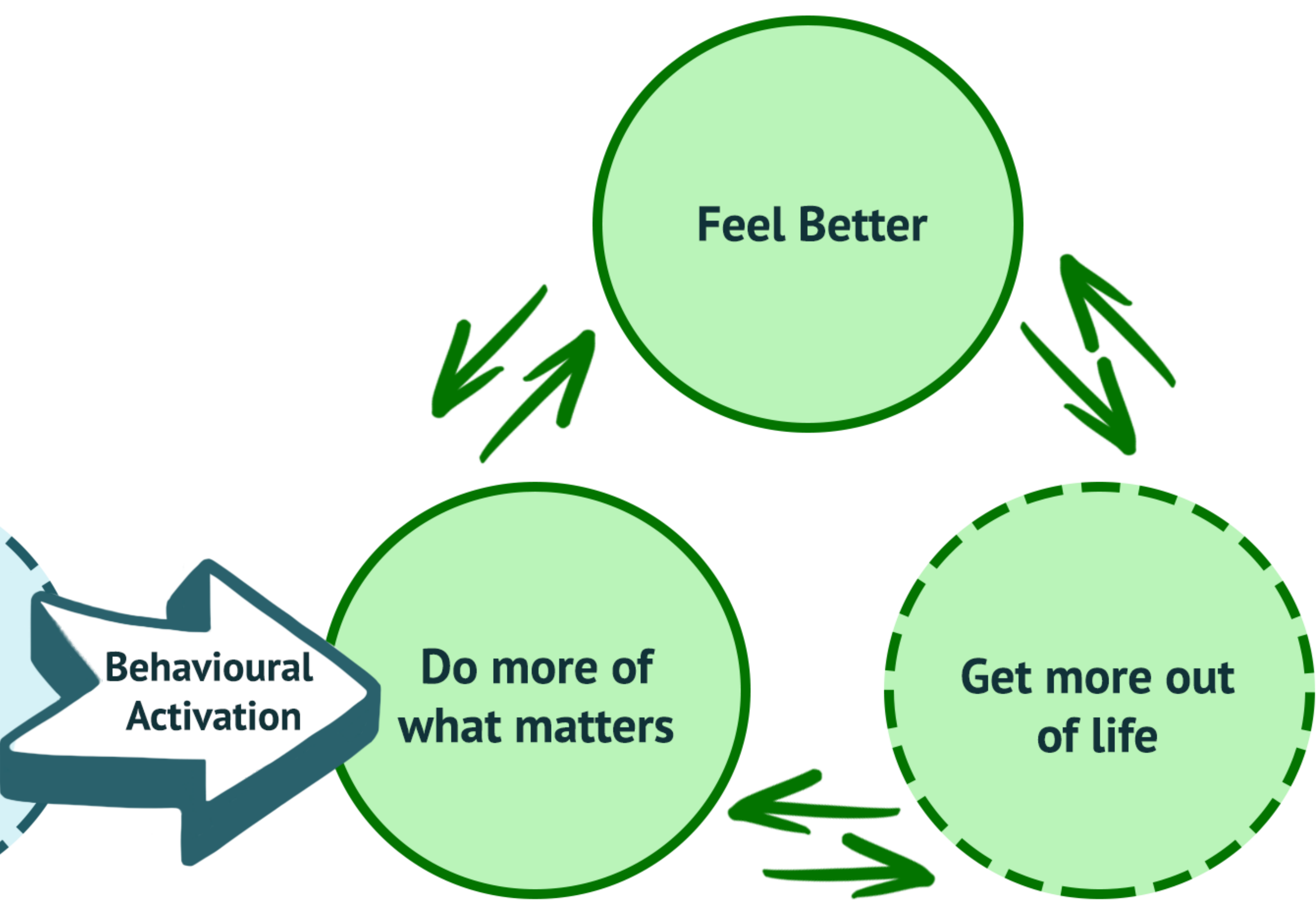
The aim of behavioural activation is to increase the amount of engagement in activities that bring pleasure and a sense of achievement from life, the goal of this being to reverse the cycle of depression.

Often a person will turn to unhealthy behaviours in an attempt to avoid negative feelings. This provides temporary relief in the short term but will only make things worse in the long run. Replacing unhealthy behaviours with rewarding ones increases one's sense of achievement and in turn reduces feelings of depression.

#### Vicious Cycle of Depression



#### Positive Cycle of Activity



Once we have identified and are aware of our negative behaviour patterns we are then able to come up with positive replacement behaviours, which should be activities that are easy and rewarding. Create a list of rewarding behaviours that may help you, then plan when and how to complete them. It is important that you are specific about what you plan to do, this will make it easier to achieve.



## Part 2

### Behaviour Experiments

This is a way of testing out our negative thoughts or beliefs in an attempt to refute the negative way of thinking which someone could have had for a long time.

- Step 1:** What is the negative belief that you are wanting to test? Rate the strength of which you believe this thought between 0-100%.
- Step 2:** Is there an alternative belief? One that you don't believe as strongly? Rate the strength of this belief between 0-100%.
- Step 3:** What experiment could put this belief to the test?
- Step 4:** What safety behaviours would need to be dropped?
- Step 5:** What problems are you likely to face? How could they be overcome?
- Step 6:** Analyse the outcome... what happened? What did you observe?
- Step 7:** What have you learned? How does this affect your original beliefs? How can you maintain the progress you've made?

The benefit of behaviour experiments are that they are not as long as Exposure Therapy or Behavior Activation, they can be done as a one off or frequently and they can help you to challenge negative automatic thoughts and beliefs. It can be easier to start by tackling easier problems first to enable you to get used to the way it works then work your way up to challenging the things you find more difficult.

### ABC's of Anxiety

#### Alarm:

- Fight of flight is a natural part of our makeup, it helps with alerting us of possible dangers.
- It is our bodies response to imminent danger, whether it's real or not.
- Many who experience uncomfortable anxiety have an extra sensitive alarm and will quickly respond to situations that actually have little threat.



#### Belief:

- When the alarm sounds, you immediately start assessing the situation.
- The brain creates beliefs that reinforce the alarm.
- These beliefs promote anxious thoughts and make it hard to quiet the alarm, encouraging false alarms.



#### Coping:

- After the alarm goes off, you do what you can to make it stop, this is a coping strategy.
- These can be good or harmful.
- Those suffering from anxiety may develop negative coping strategies that keep them anxious, or make their anxieties worse over time.





## Part 3

### Exposure ladder

This involves gradually and repeatedly facing the things you fear, with slow exposure the aim would be that your fears and anxiety get less and less. Start by writing down 10 real life situations that give you anxiety and that you would usually try to avoid. Rank them on a scale of 1-10. Identify the situation that gives you the least anxiety and put this at the bottom of the ladder. Continue adding situations to the steps of the ladder, they should progressively build up in how anxiety provoking they are.

**For example: The fear of heights.**

10. On the top floor, look out the window.
9. Take the lift to the top floor and look around.
8. Take the lift up another floor and look around, repeat.
7. On that floor, look out the window and peer down.
6. Go outside the building and take the lift up 2 floors.
5. Stand next to the tall building and look up.
4. Go upstairs, look out the window and peer down.
3. Go upstairs and look out the window.
2. Stand on a chair by yourself.
1. Stand on a chair with a friend nearby.



At the bottom of the ladder there is exposure to small degrees of heights, repeating the same step frequently will help you to become more comfortable until the anxiety starts to ease off. On the next step of the fear ladder take a bigger step out of your comfort zone getting closer towards making your way to the top. The higher up the ladder you go the more anxiety provoking situations you are exposed to, the more you do this the less anxious you'll become and the more relaxed you will be. There may still be some anxiety but by this point you'll have created a collection of positive experiences around the thing that made you anxious and knowing you survived all the other times it will start to feel normal.

With this type of therapy you decide how fast you want to go. You may find that within your ladder there might be smaller steps inbetween each step. Every step needs to be repeated several times until you are ready to take the next one. This should mean that your anxiety has lowered, or that you've reached a point where you believe that your anxiety trigger will not hurt you.

**Remember...**

- Keep trying even when the going gets tough.
- Ask for help and support from friends/family.
- Monitor your ABC's.
- Through the course of exposure treatment you will learn to think and act differently in response to your fears.
- You will learn to tolerate anxiety instead of avoiding situations.
- You're going to be challenged to leave your comfort zone.
- Prepare yourself for some uneasiness, but be sure to stay open-minded in the process.