

# Managing self-harm

A young person's guide to understanding  
and coping with self-harm



# What you'll find in this workbook

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# Introduction

Experiencing negative thoughts and feelings can be overwhelming and distressing. If you're reading this workbook then it's very likely that you've self-harmed as a way to cope with this distress. Although self-harm is a way of coping, our hope is that this workbook will support you to understand the self-harm and find other coping strategies to manage difficult feelings. This is an interactive workbook where you will learn and practice new skills and exercises to help support your emotional wellbeing.

To help you develop your skills each session of the workbook will include a take-home task. There is no right or wrong answer to the tasks but we know that the more we practice something the more changes we notice.



## Exercise one: My workbook plan

Answer the questions below to plan when you are going to complete the take home tasks:

I'll start at this time...	I'll complete the tasks in this location...	I can talk to the below people if I need help or feel stuck...

# Session One: First aid kit

The aim of this first aid kit is to increase safety and reduce risk of harm if you do engage in self-harm. The purpose is not to condone or encourage you to hurt yourself, but to help you to stay safe if stopping self-harm is not immediately possible (Nice, 2011).

## Recommended first aid kit



These items can be picked up for a low cost at Superdrug, Wilkos, Asda, Home Bargains, B&M and most other major retailers.

Do you have access to any of the above? If not fill out the first aid kit plan below to problem solve this.



### Exercise two: My first aid kit plan

1. What do I have?

2. What do I need in my first aid kit to keep myself safe?

3. How and when can I get these items?

4. Do I need to ask for support from a family member or carer to get these items?

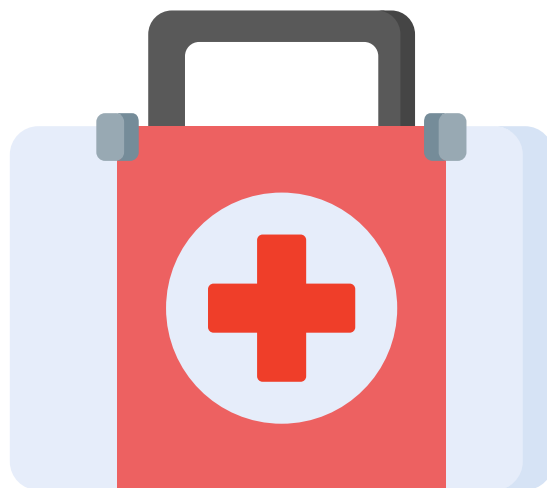
5. Who do I need to ask and when will I do this?



### Exercise three: Emotional first aid kit

As well as physically caring for your injuries you can also add different coping strategies to help you access techniques and support to manage the urge to self-harm. Examples might be; speaking to a friend, listening to relaxing music, drawing a butterfly on your wrist, using red marker to draw on an injury, pressing ice against your skin.

Please list anything that helps you to cope when you feel an urge to self-harm in/ around the emotional first aid kit box below.



As you make your way through the workbook you will learn more strategies and skills to add to your First Aid Kit and Safety Plan.

## Treating different self-harm injuries

Sometimes self-harming can lead to your body going into shock. Your body may be in shock if you experiences weakness, dizziness, feeling cold and faster/shallower breathing.

**Any sign of shock requires medical attention as soon as possible.**

### Overdose/self-poisoning

- There is no safe way to self-poison, whether this be with medication, chemicals or fluids.
- What is an overdose? Taking anything over the recommended daily dose OR taking the full daily recommended dose within four hours (rather than spread throughout a 24 hour period).
- ALL overdoses taken within 48 hours require immediate medical attention at A&E.
- Any overdose taken within a 7 day period, where you are experiencing physical problems such as stomach ache, requires medical attention at A&E.
- If an overdose has been taken over a week ago you should see your GP urgently, however, if you have any physical complaints then attend A&E.

### Cutting

- Use a new/clean blade or tool each time.
- Have access to a first aid kit – this is important to control any bleeding and prevent infection.
- Keep wounds clean.
- Lots of blood loss can lead to shock.
- If you have cut a limb, raising the limb in the air will help to reduce blood flow.
- Seek medical attention:
  - If the cut is bleeding heavily and/or the cut is deep.
  - If you lose any feeling in the area.
  - If you have any signs of infection (redness, soreness, swollen, hot to touch, weeping).

### Burning

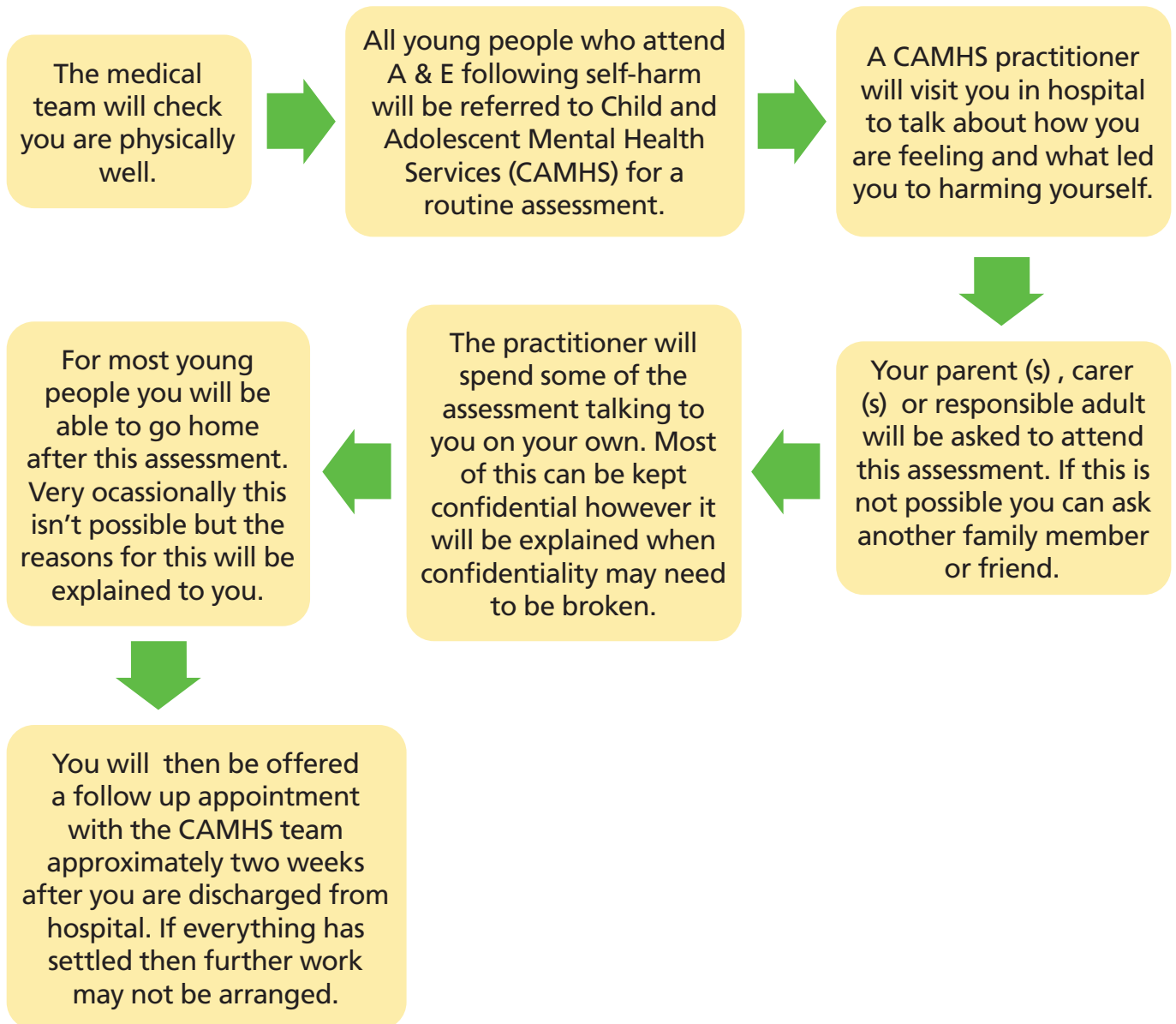
- Run cold water over the burn for at least 10 minutes.
- Remove anything surrounding the burn, e.g. clothes, rings, watches or bracelets.
- If anything gets stuck in the burn, do not remove it.
- **Chemical burns:** Liquid - wash the burn under lukewarm water for at least 30 minutes. Powder – remove any of the powder before washing. **For all chemical burns you should seek medical advice.**

## Attending A&E

My nearest A & E Department is:

Address:

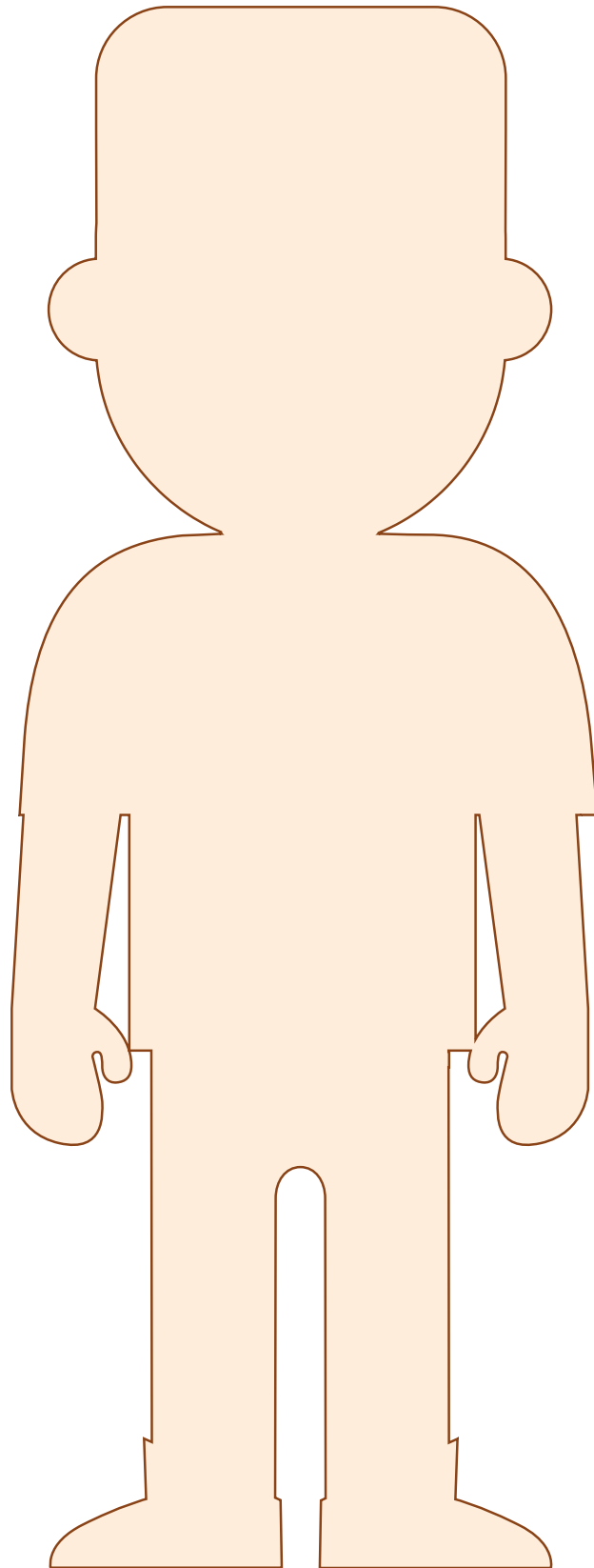
## What happens when I attend A&E?





### Exercise four: Body map

Indicate on the body map below the areas of your body you self-harm.







## Exercise five: Safety plan

Triggers

What has helped?

What could others do to help?

Ways to calm

Who can I contact?

<p><b>Daytime support</b>  <b>Kooth</b> - free online counselling for 10-18 year olds  <a href="http://www.kooth.com">www.kooth.com</a></p> <p><b>Mindmate Single Point of Access</b>          - support with emotional wellbeing and mental health for children and young people. Self-referral: young people 13-17 and parents/carers of 5-17 year olds.  <b>0300 555 0324</b></p>		<p><b>Evening support</b>  <b>Teen Connect</b> - phone/text support for 11-18 year olds from Monday-Friday 3.30pm-2am, Saturday and Sunday 6pm-2am.  <b>Phone 0808 800 1212</b>  <b>Text 0771 566 1559</b></p> <p><b>Safe Zone</b> - crisis support for 11-17 year olds. Monday, Thursday, Sunday 6-9pm. <b>Phone 0113 819 8189</b></p> <p><b>The Market Place</b> - phone support for 11-25 year olds. Same day appointments every day 11.30am-5.30pm. Call <b>0113 246 1659</b>. Next day appointments book online:  <a href="http://www.themarketplaceleed.org.uk/phonesupport">www.themarketplaceleed.org.uk/phonesupport</a></p>
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For information and advice to help with your emotional wellbeing go to [www.mindmate.org.uk](http://www.mindmate.org.uk)



### Take home task

Put your safety plan somewhere you can refer to if needed. Perhaps take a photo of it too so it is easily reachable on your phone too.

## Session Two: Understanding self-harm

Sometimes young people may feel upset or distressed when hearing about self-harm, especially when discussing different methods of hurting yourself. If you feel this may be distressing for you, speak with a trusted person who can support you.

### What is self-harm?

- Self-harm is one way of trying to make unmanageable feelings more manageable.
- Many people self-harm, you are not alone in this.
- People who self-harm do find other ways of managing their feelings.
- Some methods of self-harm may seem more obvious than others.



**Exercise six:** Highlight the methods you have used to harm yourself within the last month.



## What makes someone self-harm?



**Exercise seven:** Circle the factors that are relevant for you. There is space to add any factors you feel have contributed to you engaging in self-harm.

Major life events	Life experiences	Personal factors
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Loss, separation or bereavement</li> <li>• Family breakdown</li> <li>• Traumatic event, e.g. assault, fire, serious incident</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bullying</li> <li>• Struggles with education</li> <li>• Family/relationship problems</li> <li>• Disability</li> <li>• School/college problems</li> <li>• Unemployment</li> <li>• Accommodation problems</li> <li>• Money worries or debts</li> <li>• Parental mental illness</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mental health problems</li> <li>• Lack of support or feeling isolated</li> <li>• Alcohol and drug problems</li> <li>• Difficulties with sexual identity</li> <li>• Difficulties with gender identity</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> </ul>

## Who self-harms?

It's really difficult to say how many young people are self-harming, because lots of people don't share this information with anyone. Here are some stats from YouGov and The Mix (2020).

Over **1 in 3** aged 16-24 have self-harmed. **33%** of these young people have self-harmed within the last 12 months.

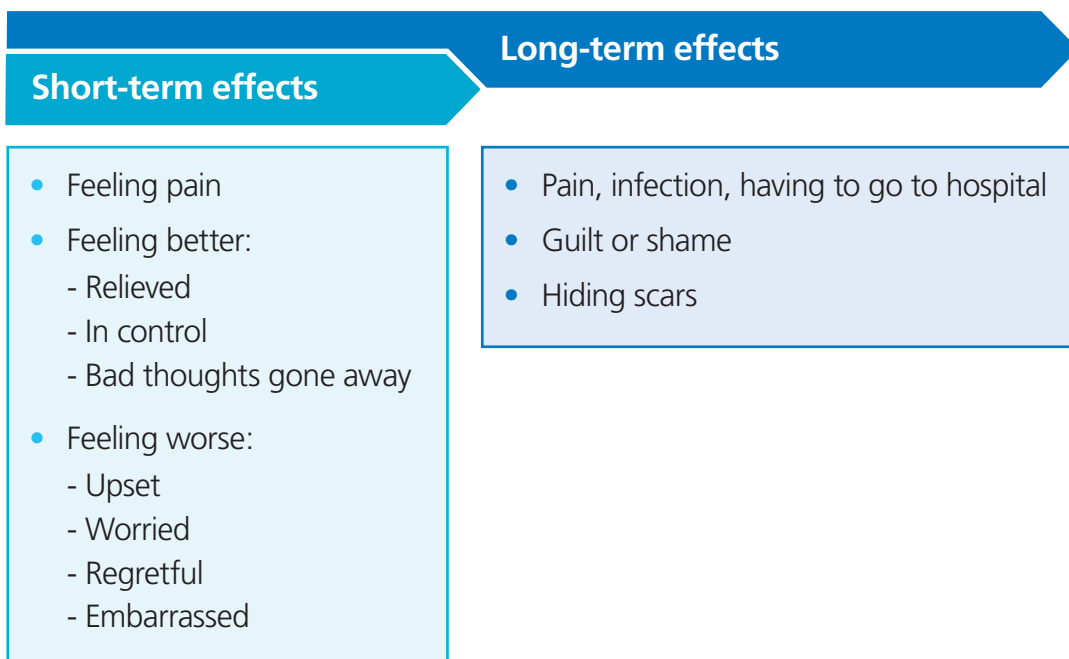
**Girls** are more likely to self-harm, however but this may be due to **boys** using less obvious means of self-harm (e.g. punching walls or getting into fights where they know they will be hurt).

**LGBTQIA+** young people are **2x** more likely to harm themselves.



**1 in 4** young people who have self-harmed felt unable to tell anybody.

## Effects of self-harm



**Exercise eight:** Using the table above, highlight the effects of your self-harm, and add any more that you can think of.

## Why people want to stop self-harming

Three speech bubbles of different colors (green, purple, orange) containing quotes from people who self-harm.

- “Every time you see where you self-harmed it reminds you of when you did it and makes you down again.”
- “I can’t wear short sleeved t-shirts in the summer.”
- “It is painful - especially if my wounds get infected.”

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## What are your reasons for wanting to stop or manage your self-harm?

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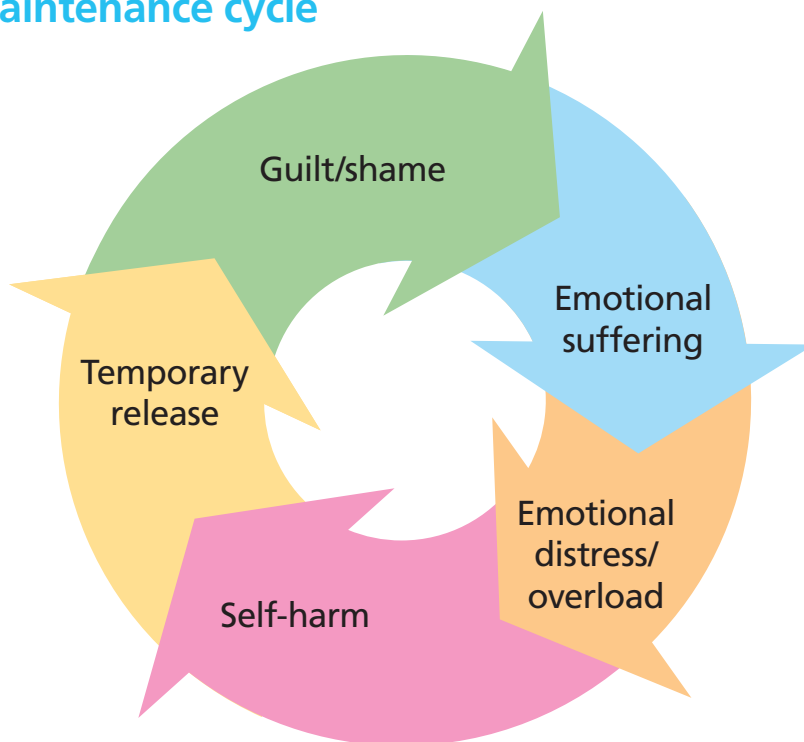
## Take home task: Self-harm triggers diary

Complete the following diary to help unpick the triggers to self-harming.

Day	What happened before I self-harmed?	Thoughts and feelings (including any memories or images)	How I felt immediately afterwards	How did I feel later on?	Did anything help?

## Session Three: What keeps my self-harm going?

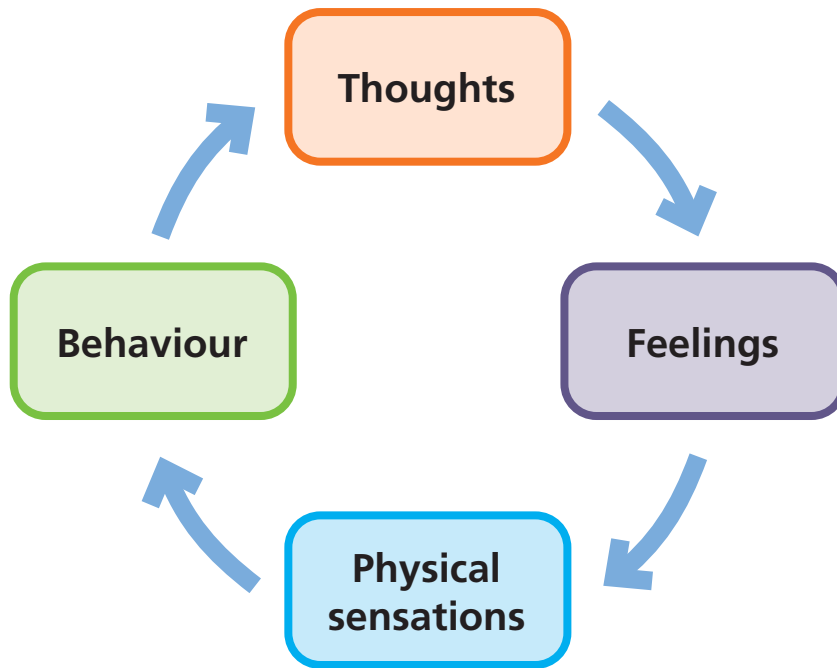
### Self-harm maintenance cycle



Does this cycle relate to you? Write your thoughts below

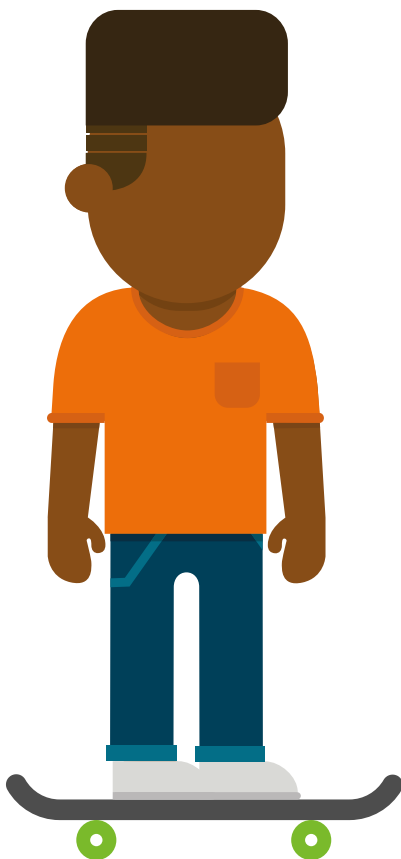
### Making sense of self-harm

We have thousands of thoughts a day, some positive, some neutral and others more negative. These thoughts may happen automatically without our awareness whereas others (often the less helpful and more negative ones) can get a bit more 'stuck'. We all have negative thoughts from time to time but we know that the way we think has an impact on the way we feel (both emotionally and physically) and the behaviours we do.



Our thoughts, feelings and behaviours can become a negative cycle where the things we do to manage negative thoughts can make us feel worse in the long run. The good news is that a cycle can be broken and by making some changes we can start to turn a negative cycle into a positive cycle.

Let's look at an example together. Read what Sam has to say about the last time they self-harmed:

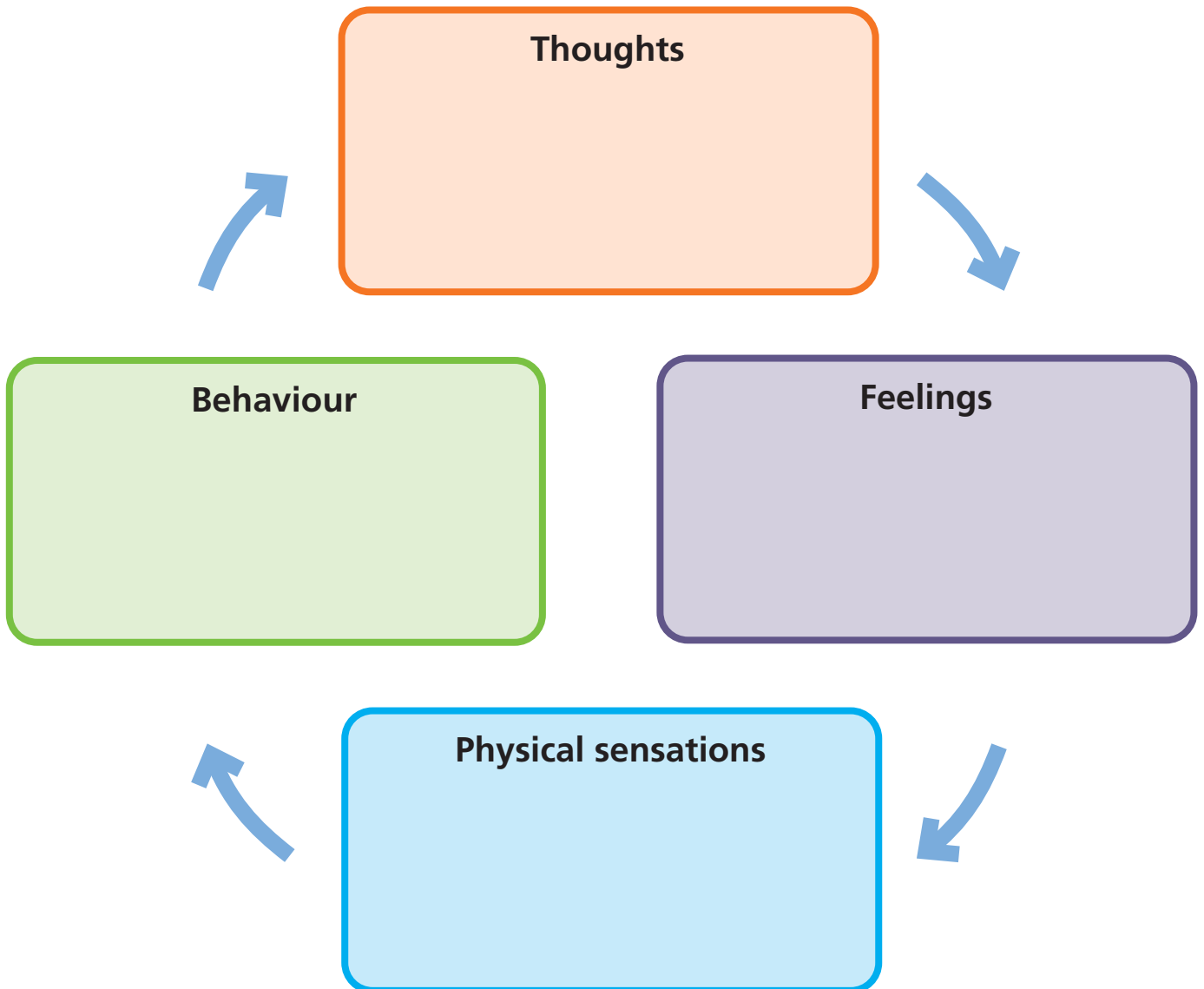


It was Sunday evening... about 9pm I think. I'd been in my room all day because none of my friends were around. I felt lonely and bored so was just scrolling through my phone by myself. I could see pictures of other people doing fun things and looking happy. It made me feel sad because I don't have anyone to talk to. Everyone else seems happy when I'm not. I don't think anyone understands. I felt sick, was shaking and my heart was racing. I didn't want to get out of bed or see anyone. I ignored my friend's messages and cut my arms to try and feel better. The next day I felt angry with myself, like I'd let myself down.



## Exercise nine: Mapping out Sam's cycle

The situation





Looking at Sam's cycle answer the following questions:

- Do you think this cycle is a positive or negative cycle?
- If the situation occurred again what do you think would happen?
- How do you think this cycle could be broken?
- Can any of these areas be changed?
- What do you think Sam could do differently?
- What advice would you give Sam?



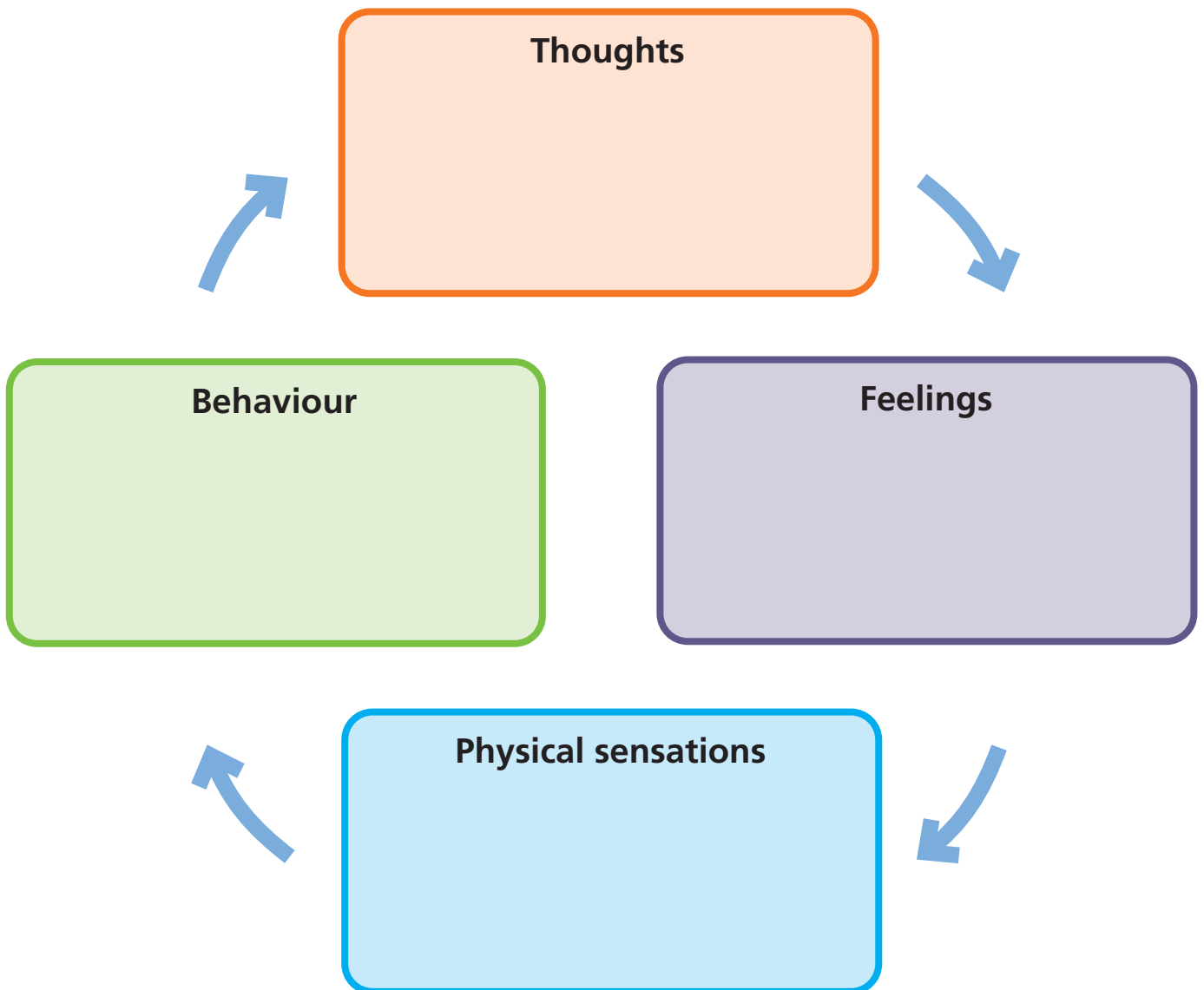
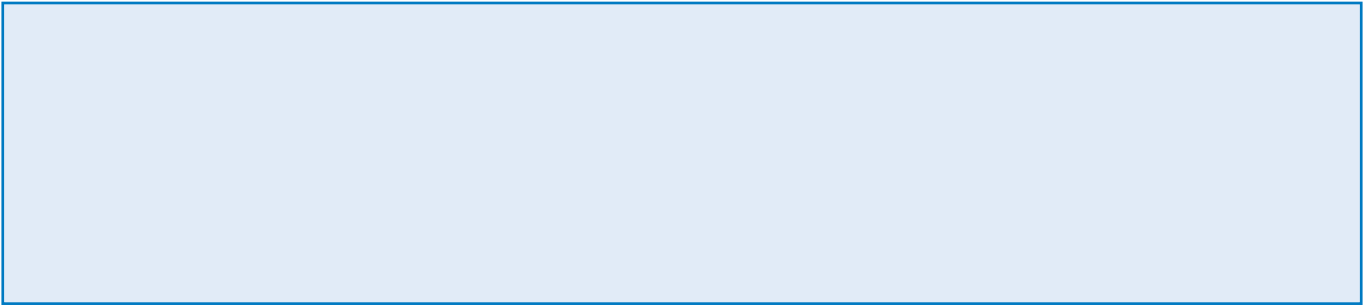
### Take home task

Think of the last time you self-harmed and use the blank cycle on the next page to draw out your own thoughts, feelings, physical sensations and behaviours.

After you've done this ask yourself the following questions:

1. Do you think this cycle is a positive or negative cycle?
2. If the situation occurred again what do you think would happen?
3. How do you think this cycle could be broken?
4. Can any of these areas be changed?
5. What could you do differently?
6. What advice would you want someone to give to you?

The situation

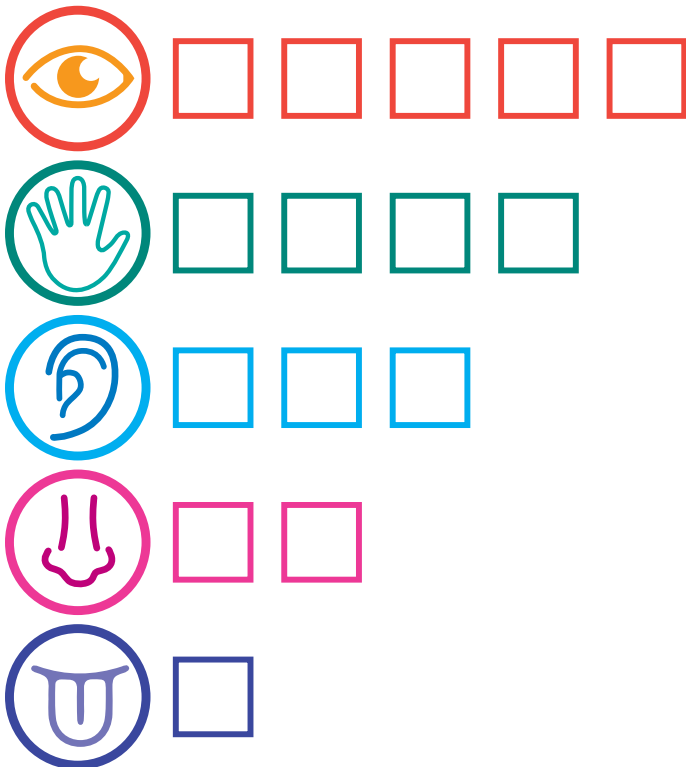


## Session Four: Coping with self-harm

If you feel that self-harm is the only way you can manage distressing thoughts and feelings it can be difficult to stop doing it. This session will introduce you to some different coping strategies that you can use and add to your emotional first aid kit.

### Mindfulness and relaxation exercises

#### Grounding techniques



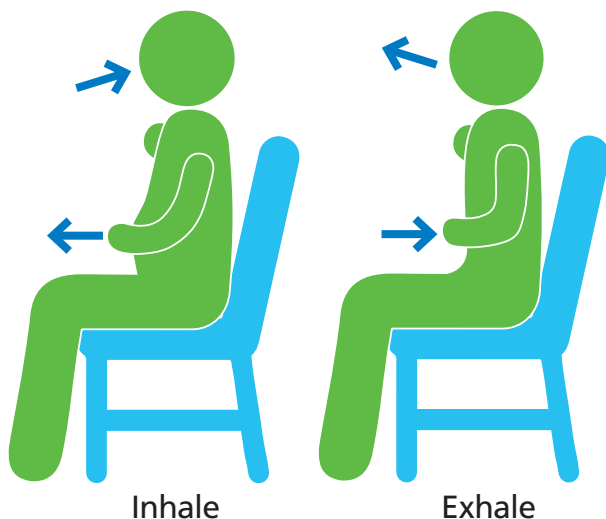
#### Deep breathing



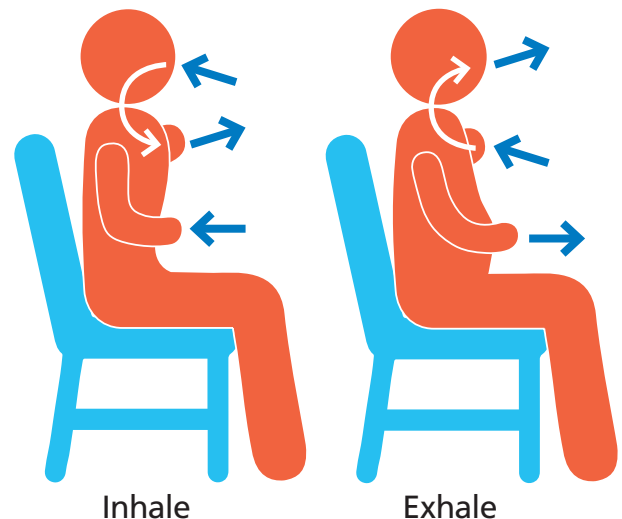
in **4**  
hold **7**  
out **8**

#### Diaphragmatic breathing

**Right** - belly breathing



**Wrong** - chest breathing



## Self-soothing exercises

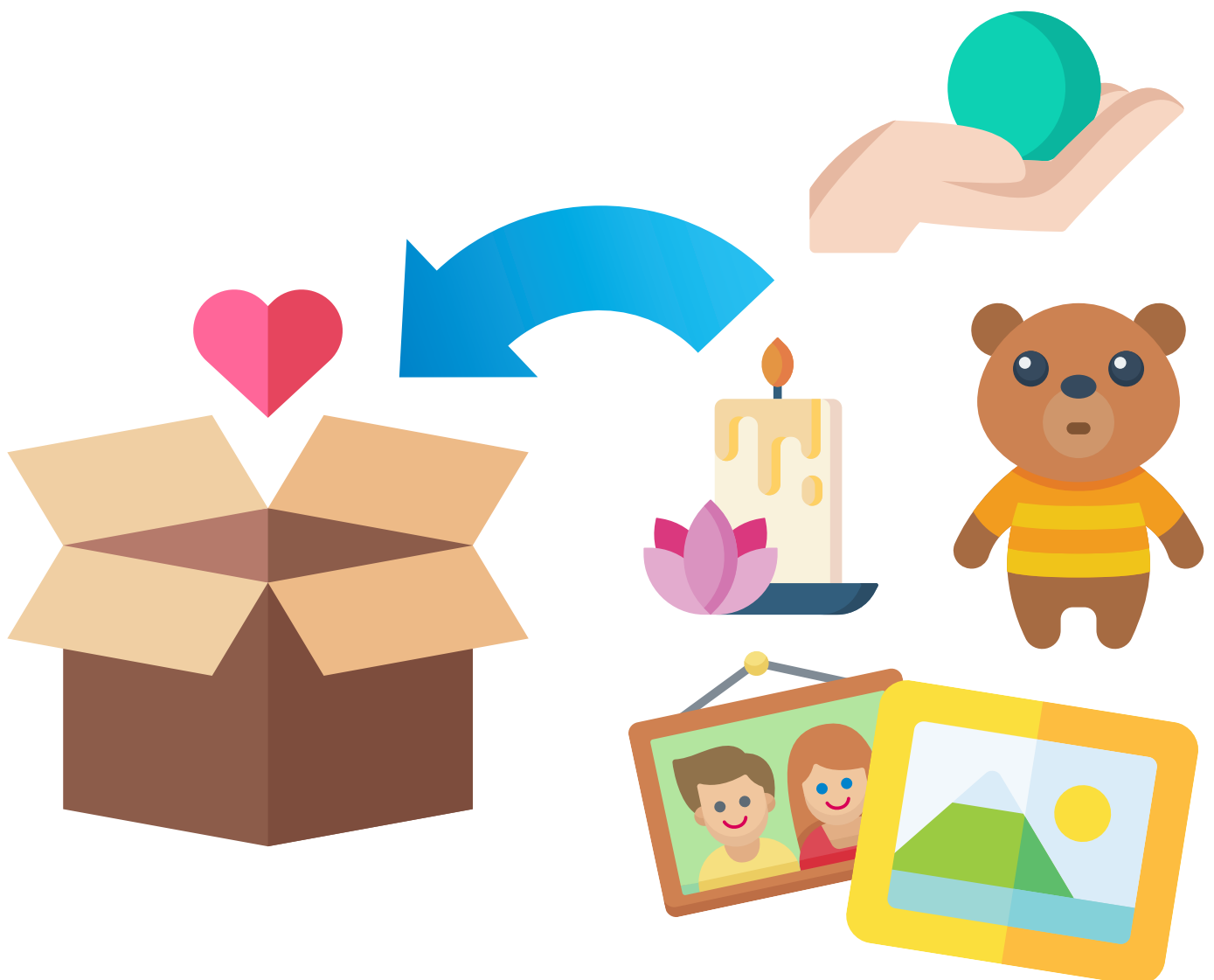
### Mindful glitter jar

- Shake it up and watching the glitter fall whilst breathing deeply to help feel calmer.
- Easily made using an old jar, water and glitter. Can be used alongside breathing techniques, to slow breathing and shift focus outside of their thoughts.



### Calm kit/relax box

- Filled with your favourite things, especially things that can help focus the senses.
- Great way to get creative, and to practice self-care and grounding.
- Can be used whenever you are feeling worried, stressed, sad, angry, or have urges to harm yourself.
- You could use an old shoe box, or pick up a nice box from B&M, The Range or TK Maxx.
- The box could include a nice smelling body spray or candle, something soft to feel or squish, some photos of their favourite memories or people, and some uplifting quotes.

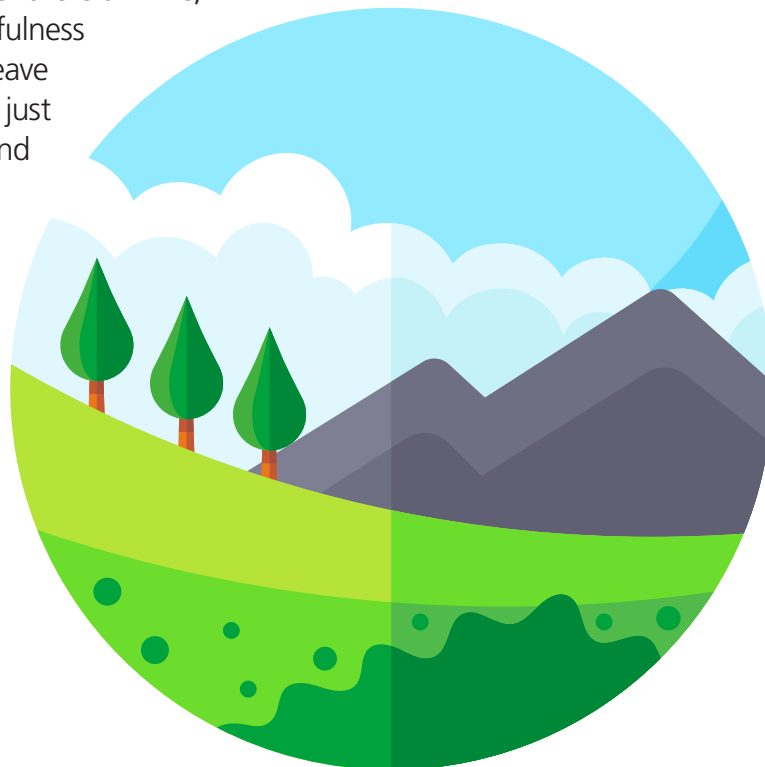


## Visualisation exercise

### Relaxing 'safe place' imagery

Take a couple of minutes to focus on your breathing, close your eyes, become aware of any tension in your body, and let that tension go with each out-breath.

- Imagine a place where you can feel calm, peaceful and safe. It may be a place you've been to before, somewhere you've dreamed about going to, somewhere you've seen a picture of, or just a peaceful place you can create in your mind's eye.
- Look around you in that place, notice the colours and shapes. What else do you notice?
- Now notice the sounds that are around you, or perhaps the silence. Sounds far away and those nearer to you. Those that are more noticeable, and those that are more subtle.
- Think about any smells you notice there.
- Then focus on any skin sensations - the earth beneath you or whatever is supporting you in that place, the temperature, any movement of air, anything else you can touch.
- Notice the pleasant physical sensations in your body whilst you enjoy this safe place.
- Now whilst you're in your peaceful and safe place, you might choose to give it a name, whether one word or a phrase that you can use to bring that image back, anytime you need to.
- You can choose to linger there a while, just enjoying the peacefulness and serenity. You can leave whenever you want to, just by opening your eyes and being aware of where you are now, and bringing yourself back to alertness in the 'here and now'.





## Exercise ten: Capturing my safe place

Draw or add photograph of safe place here:





### Exercise eleven: Adding to your emotional first aid kit

From the different techniques discussed today, draw or write what you would add into your emotional first aid kit below:



### Take home task

Try out some of the strategies introduced to you this session and complete the ratings in the 'Physically Managing Self-Harm Urges' table on the next page.



## Take home task: Physically managing self-harm urges

Coping strategies	Helpful	Not much use	Useless	Harmful
Using a red pen to mark where you might usually cut				
Hitting a punch bag or cushion to vent anger and frustration				
Screaming into a pillow				
Rubbing ice across your skin or holding an ice cube				
Do some exercise				
Speak to a friend				
Postpone the action for 5, 10, 15 mins				
Listen to music (that will improve your mood)				
Walk the dog/spend time with a pet				
Write letters about what you would like to say to people (you don't have to send them)				
Talk to a family member				
Sing				
Draw, paint, sculpt, do something creative				
Meditate or practice mindfulness				
Read				
Flicking an elastic band on wrists, arms, legs				
Writing negative feelings on a piece of paper then ripping it up				
Keep a diary or journal				
Cook something				
Cry				
Play an instrument				
Reality checklist – where am I, what am I doing?				



## Session Five: Moving on from self-harm

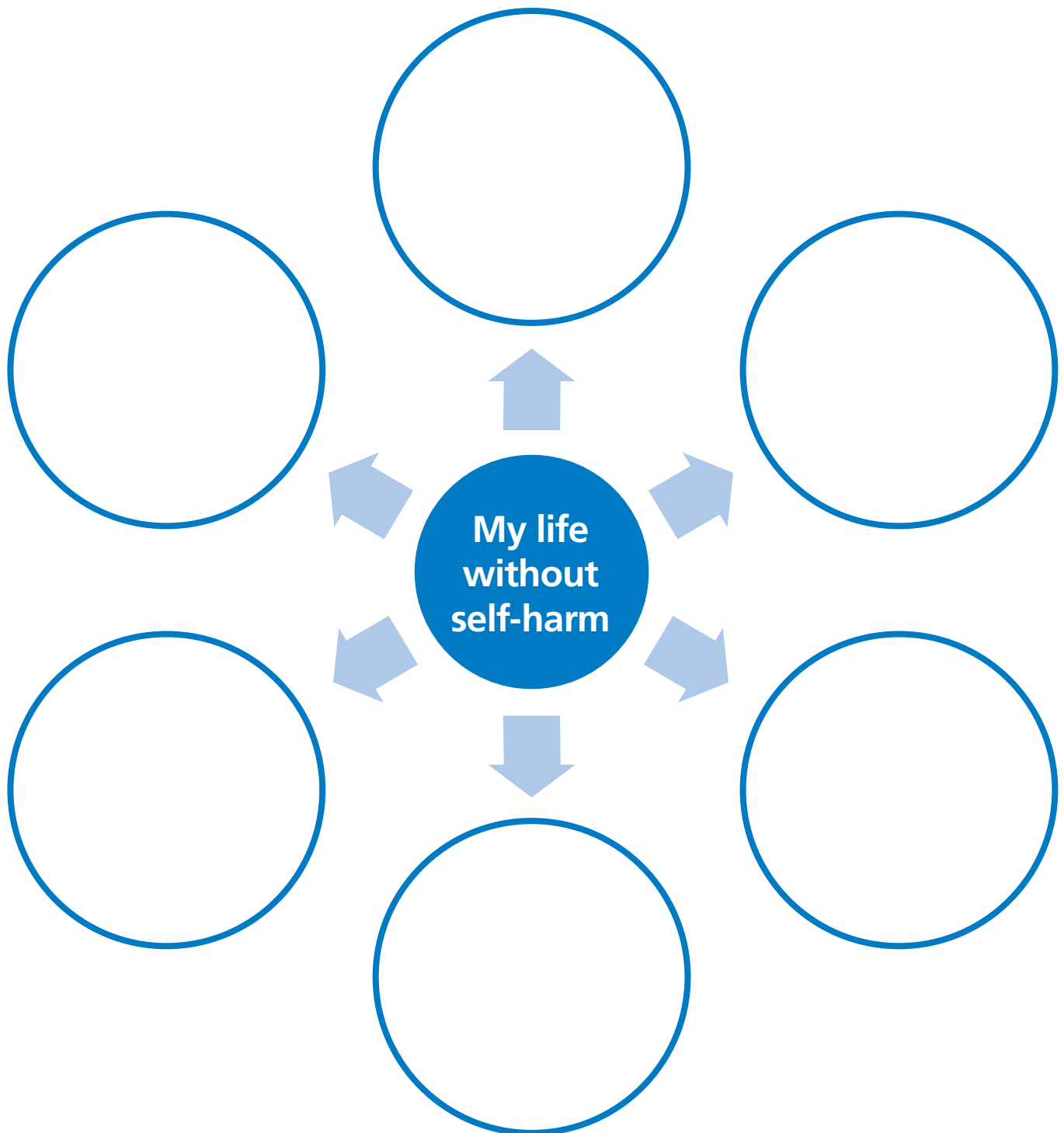
In this session we/you will be creating a plan which will support you to move forwards and away from self-harm.

The first step is to identify all the positives to moving on from self-harm.



### Exercise twelve: My life without self-harm

Using the spider diagram below add all the benefits to moving on from self-harm:



## Planning for the future

A helpful way to stop behaviour is to plan for the future and for those times we may get the urge to self-harm.



### Exercise thirteen: My keeping well plan

Under the situation column think of situations you might come up against in the future. Under the action column, try and think of as many things you can do to help you keep safe in that situation.

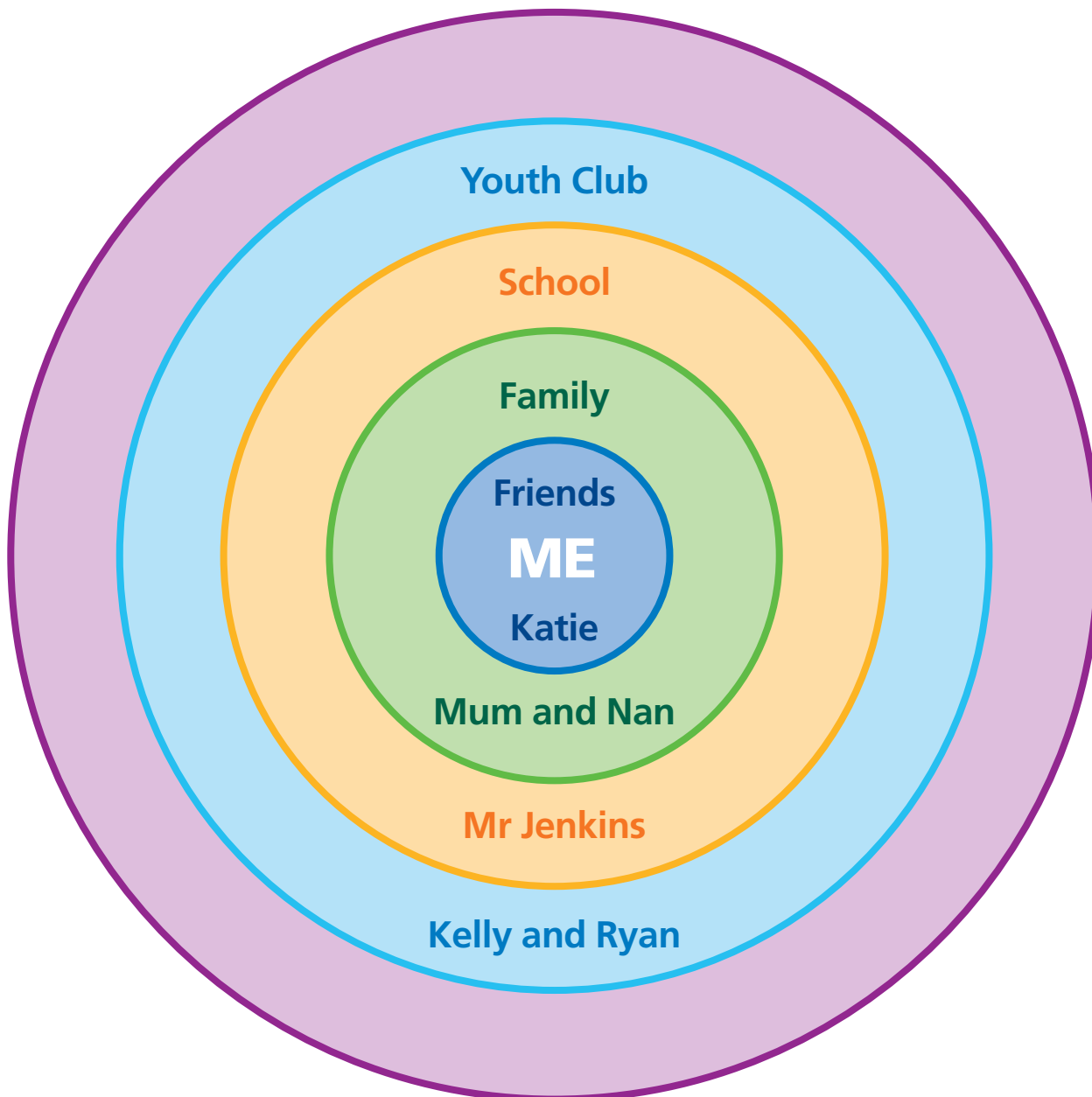


<b>Situation</b> What could happen?	<b>Action</b> What could I do to keep myself safe?
I start to have bad thoughts	Talk to a friend Journal Track thoughts in an app

## Drawing on your social network

We know that having lots of support around us helps to keep us well and makes it easier to manage any difficult hurdles in the future. The circle diagram below symbolises your life with you in the centre. You can use the circles to map the important people in your life with the closest being place at the centre and the least close in the outer circles. You could put whoever you want on this map including extended family, school, friends and even a sports club.

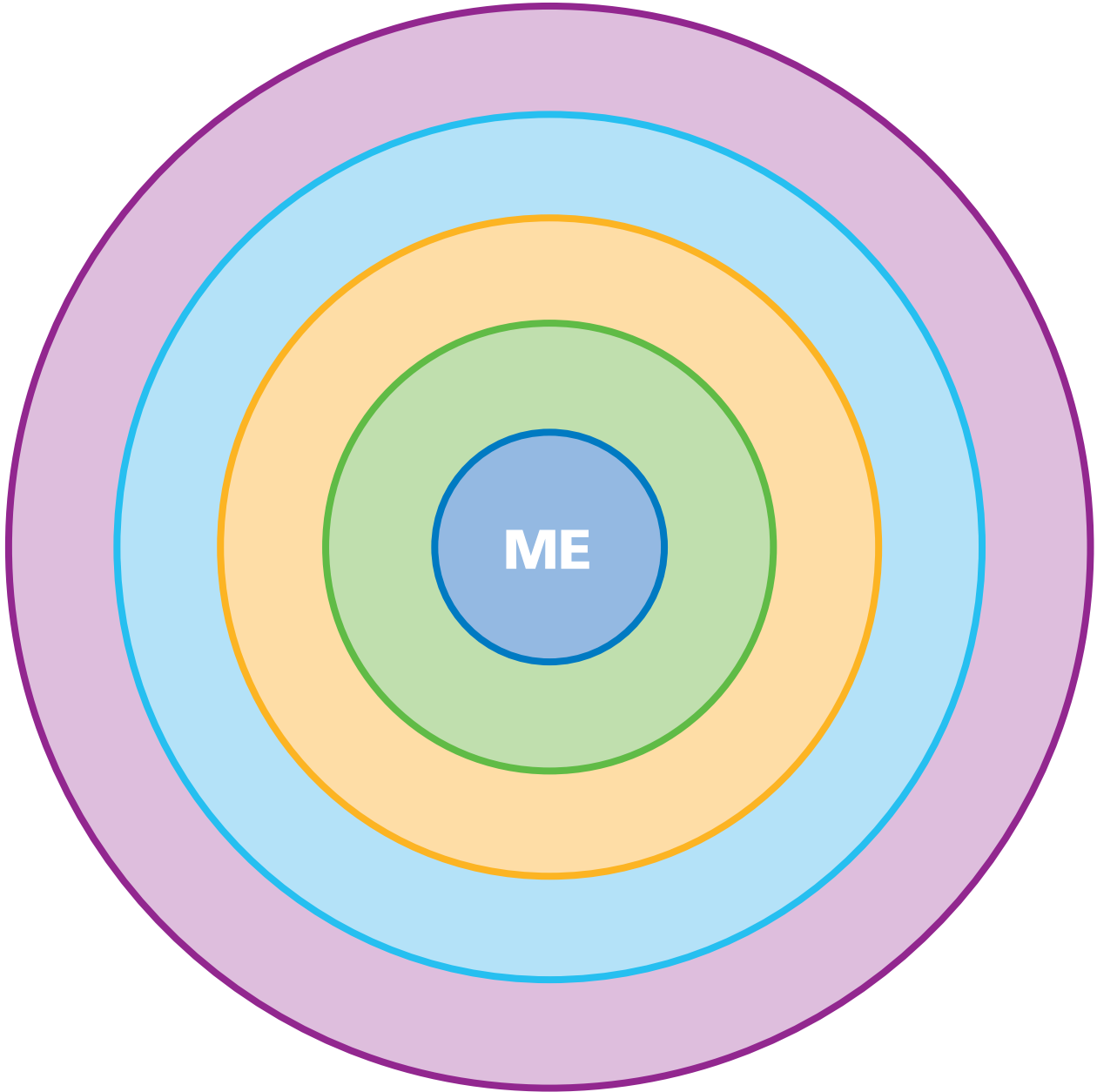
Look at the example below:





### Exercise fourteen: Mapping my social network

Now create your own circle diagram identifying the people in your life that could offer you support.



## Well done - you have now completed your sessions on self-harm!

From this workbook you will have learned how to keep yourself safe and ways to manage your thoughts.

Using the letter template below, write yourself a letter reflecting on everything you have learned and any progress you have made.

You may want to write this to yourself to pick up in those moments you have negative thoughts. Perhaps you want to congratulate yourself on how far you have come or encourage yourself to keep going.

This is your letter... to you from you.



## Useful information

### Websites

- [www.harmless.org.uk](http://www.harmless.org.uk)
- [www.lifesigns.org.uk](http://www.lifesigns.org.uk)
- [www.selfinjurysupport.org.uk](http://www.selfinjurysupport.org.uk)
- [www.mind.org.uk](http://www.mind.org.uk)
- [www.nshn.co.uk](http://www.nshn.co.uk)
- Find the Calm Harm app on [www.calmharm.co.uk](http://www.calmharm.co.uk)

### Helplines

- **Childline 0800 11 11**  
Free confidential 24hr helpline for young people who are aged up to 19 years old.
- **Samaritans 08457 90 90 90**  
Free confidential 24 hour helpline.
- **Young Minds 0808 802 5544**  
Charity committed to improving the mental health of young people. Support for those worried about a young person's behaviour or mental health. Provides information leaflets.
- **Family Lives 0808 800 2222**
- **Get Connected 0808 808 4994**



## Notes and questions page

