

# An introduction to low mood for parents

## What we'll be covering in today's session:

- **What low mood is and to provide a better understanding of signs, symptoms and how it can impact children.**
- **Understand factors that can create and maintain low mood.**
- **Strategies to build your confidence in supporting your child's emotional wellbeing.**



# Mental health

Just like physical health, mental health is an essential aspect of overall well-being. It affects your thoughts, emotions, relationships, and your ability to handle different situations.

We all have mental health

<https://youtu.be/DxIDKZHW3-E?si=ljUyejaT0tMHYfWw>

## What is low mood?

There are many reasons why children might start to experience low mood. Feeling low sometimes is a normal emotion and we will all have times where we notice our mood lower. When we feel this way we will often look for causes as to why we feel that way. However, there is often not one specific reason or cause for us feeling low.



# Low mood

As a parent, it can be useful to understand the difference between having a generally low mood and feeling depressed. This can help you to think through what your child is experiencing and the type of support they need.

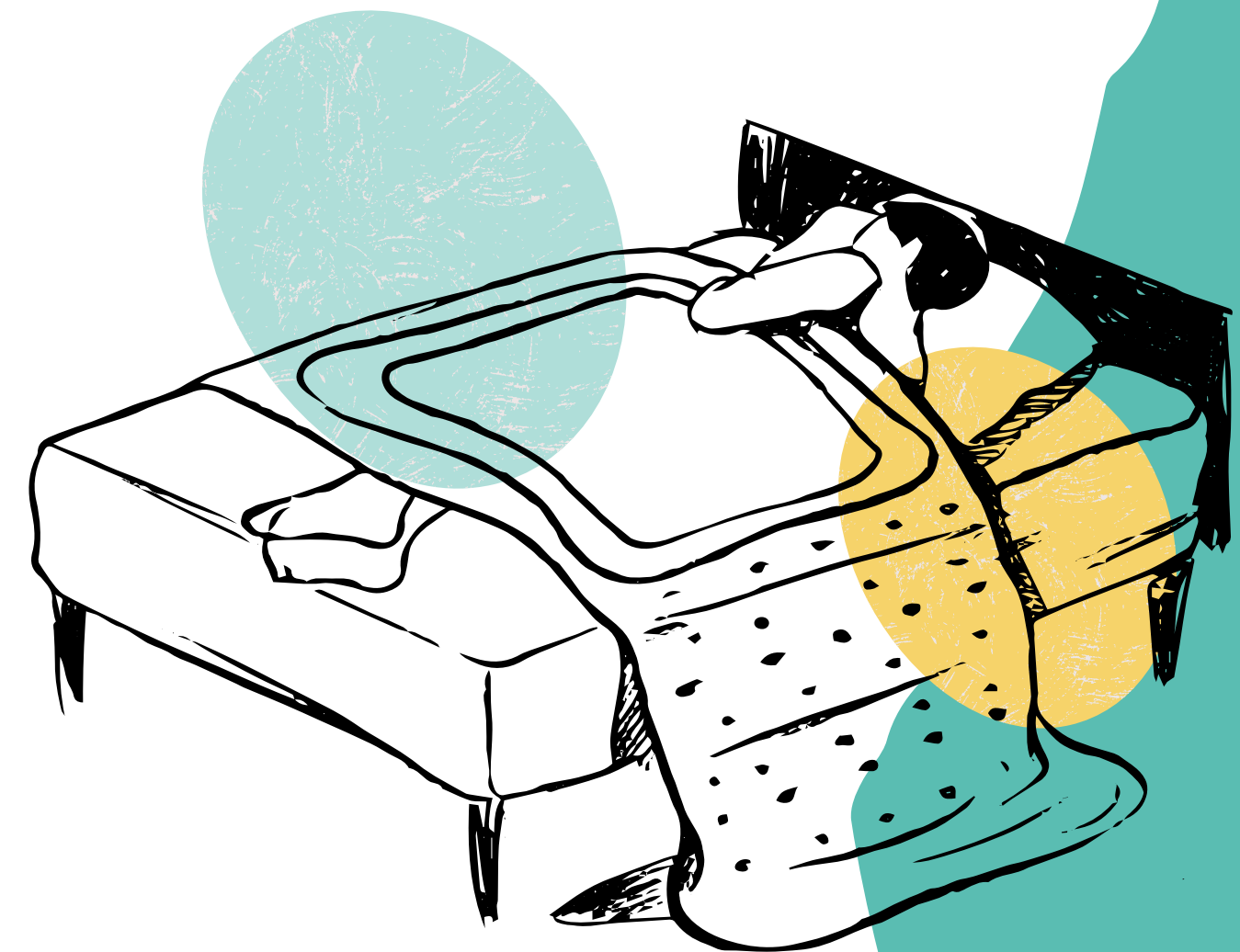
If your child is experiencing a low mood, they may feel a number of symptoms, but then feel better after a few days or weeks. They may also start to feel better quite quickly after making small changes in their life or routine. For example, after resolving a disagreement with a friend, getting to the end of a stressful time at school or starting a more regular sleeping pattern.

When a young person is depressed, sadness and low feelings do not change or go away with time. These feelings can become overwhelming and stop them from doing or enjoying things they normally would. When a young person is experiencing this, it's very difficult to shift the situation without extra help and support.



# Identifying the signs

- Being moody and irritable
- Not being interested in things they used to enjoy
- Not wanting to go to school or go out
- Often feeling tired or exhausted
- Becoming withdrawn and isolating self from others
- Feeling unhappy and miserable or becoming tearful
- Sleep problems or sleeping a lot
- Changes in appetite
- Being self-critical
- Show less interest in looking after themselves, for example washing
- Finding it hard to concentrate
- Feeling hopeless and/or worthless
- Becoming worried, frustrated or angry easily
- Complaining of aches and pains

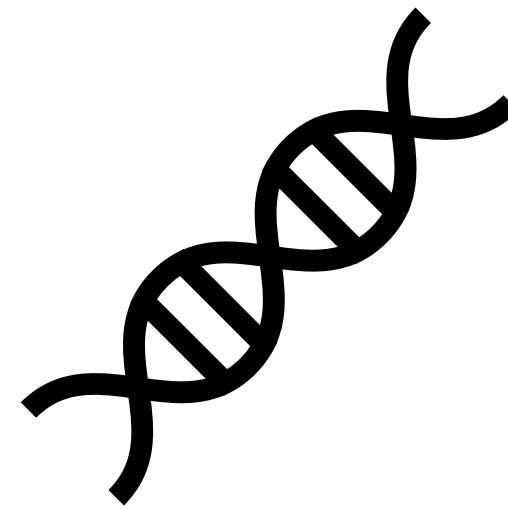


# Factors that can create and maintain low mood



## Social

- Relationship changes
  - Stress
- Life changes



## Biological

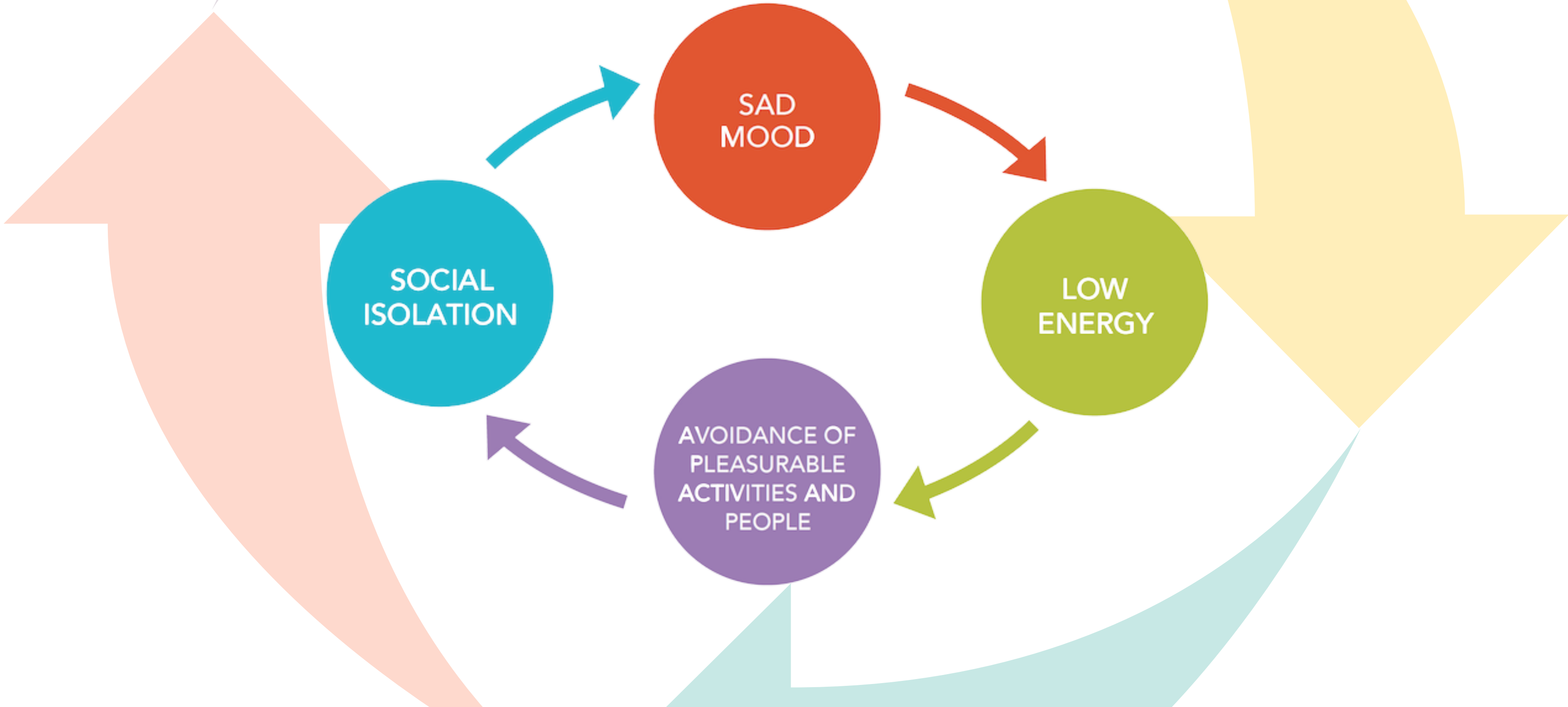
- Brain development
  - Hormones



## Psychological

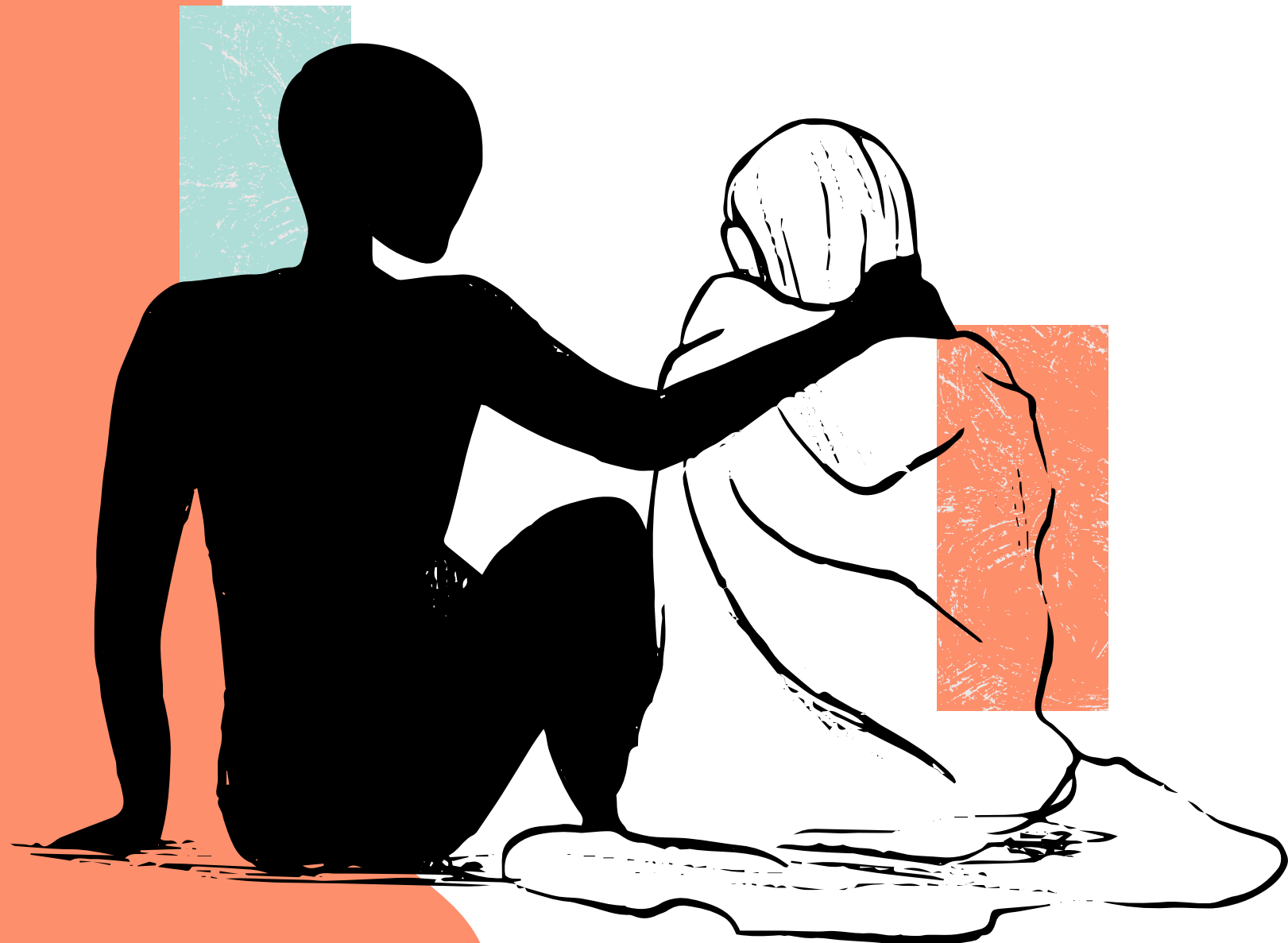
- Developing identity
  - Thinking styles
- Life changes

# Cycle of low mood



# How can I help my child?

**If you are concerned that your child may be experiencing low mood, there are lots of things you can do to help.**



- Start a conversation with your child – let them know you've noticed they don't seem happy at the moment and try and talk to them about this. Reassure them that it's normal to feel sad, low and down sometimes.
- Think together about whether there's anything in particular that's making them feel this way and think about if there are any changes that could make things easier. Feeling low in mood is a normal reaction to life changing events – for example, parents separating or a death in the family.



- Listen and provide emotional support – Try not to ask too many questions, come up with quick solutions or gloss over their sadness. Empathise with how they're feeling and don't take it personally if you're on the receiving end of their sadness, anger or frustration.
- Encourage them to talk about how they feel, either to you or another trusted adult. If they don't feel they are able to talk to you, reassure them that you are always there and encourage them to speak to someone else they trust. You could also try again another day if they're struggling to open up that day.
- Help your child to think about who they can go to for support when they need it – doing this can remind your child there are so many people around them who care about them and want to help them.



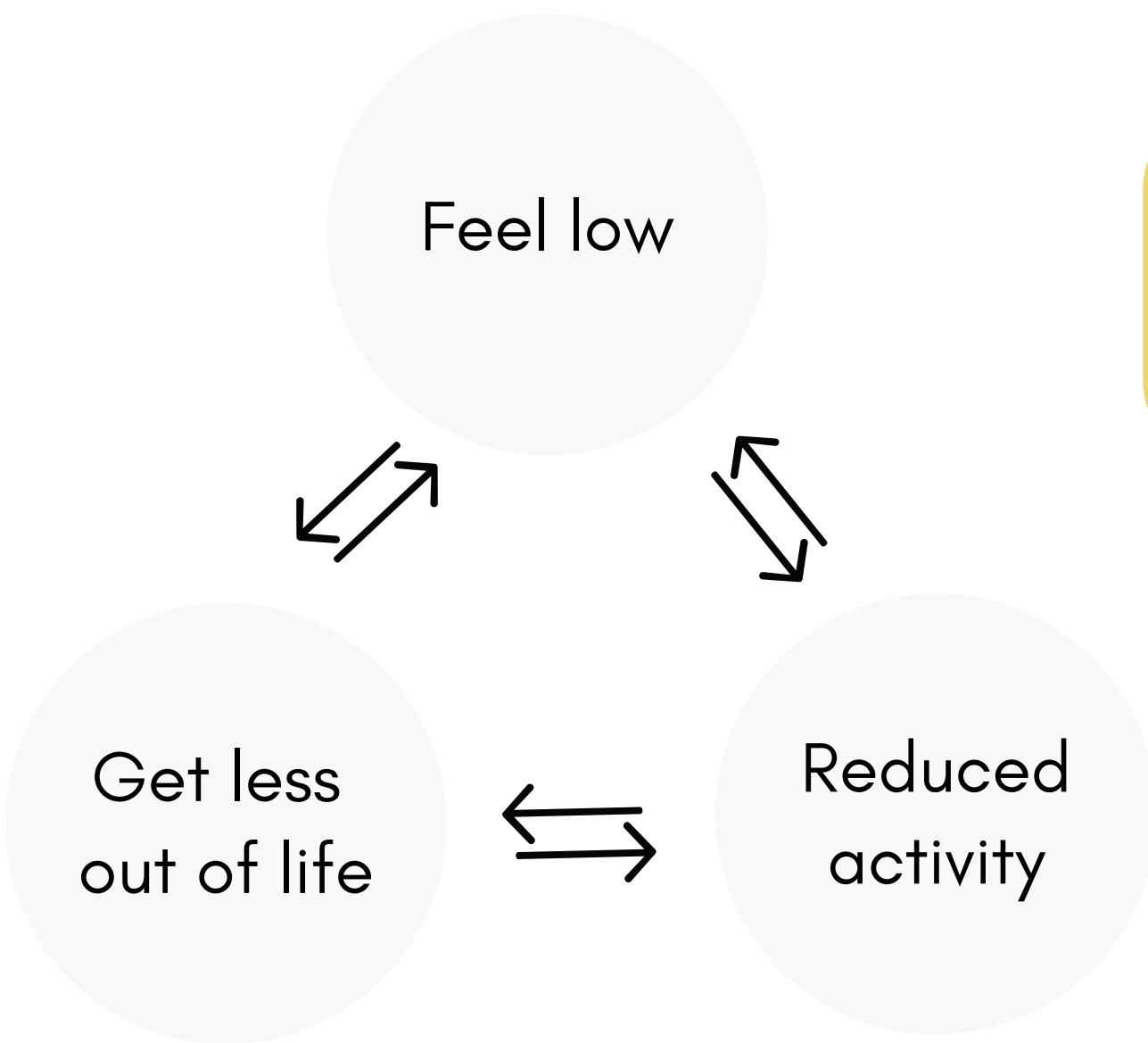


- Explore together what they would find helpful. Encourage them to think about the things they enjoy doing – think about all the different hobbies they have and activities they enjoy.
- Help them to do the daily things that support their wellbeing (even the "simple" things such as eating regular healthy meals, getting enough sleep, exercising, getting fresh air, drinking enough water, reducing screen time and spending time with loved ones). You could come up with a list of things they would find helpful when struggling with their mood.
- Keep a routine and have nice things planned. Even if they do not feel like doing an activity, trying to do it will help improve their mood. Break things down into small steps. Do one step at a time so tasks are not overwhelming.



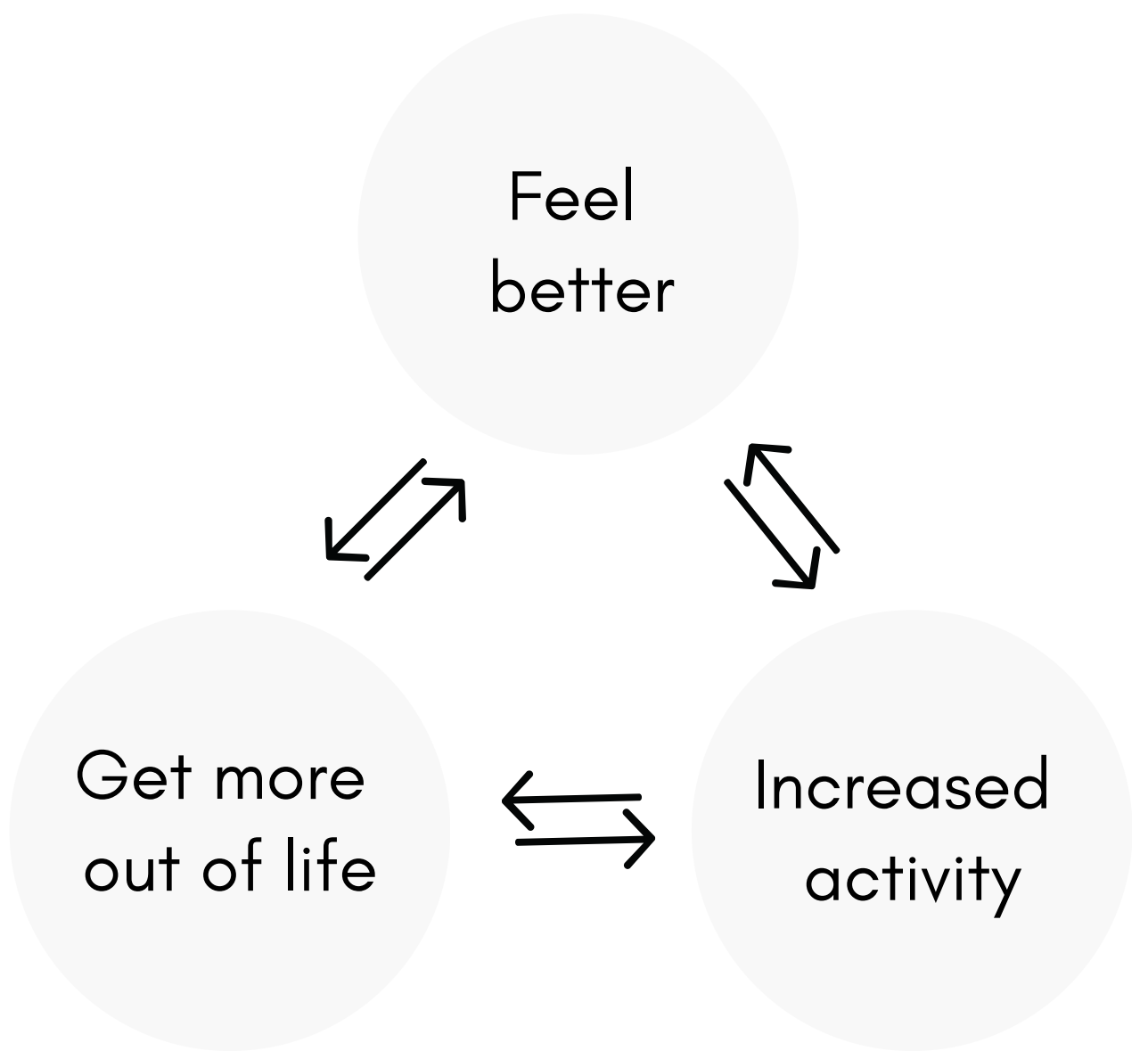
- Let them know these feelings won't last forever and there is support to help them feel better.
- Seek professional help if you're worried about your child's mental health and things aren't getting better. You can speak to your child's school regarding in school support, a referral into MHST or you can visit your GP.
- Supporting your child who is struggling can be difficult. It is important to also take care of yourself. It is ok to ask for help when you need it and share your worries.

# Cycle of low mood:



**VS**

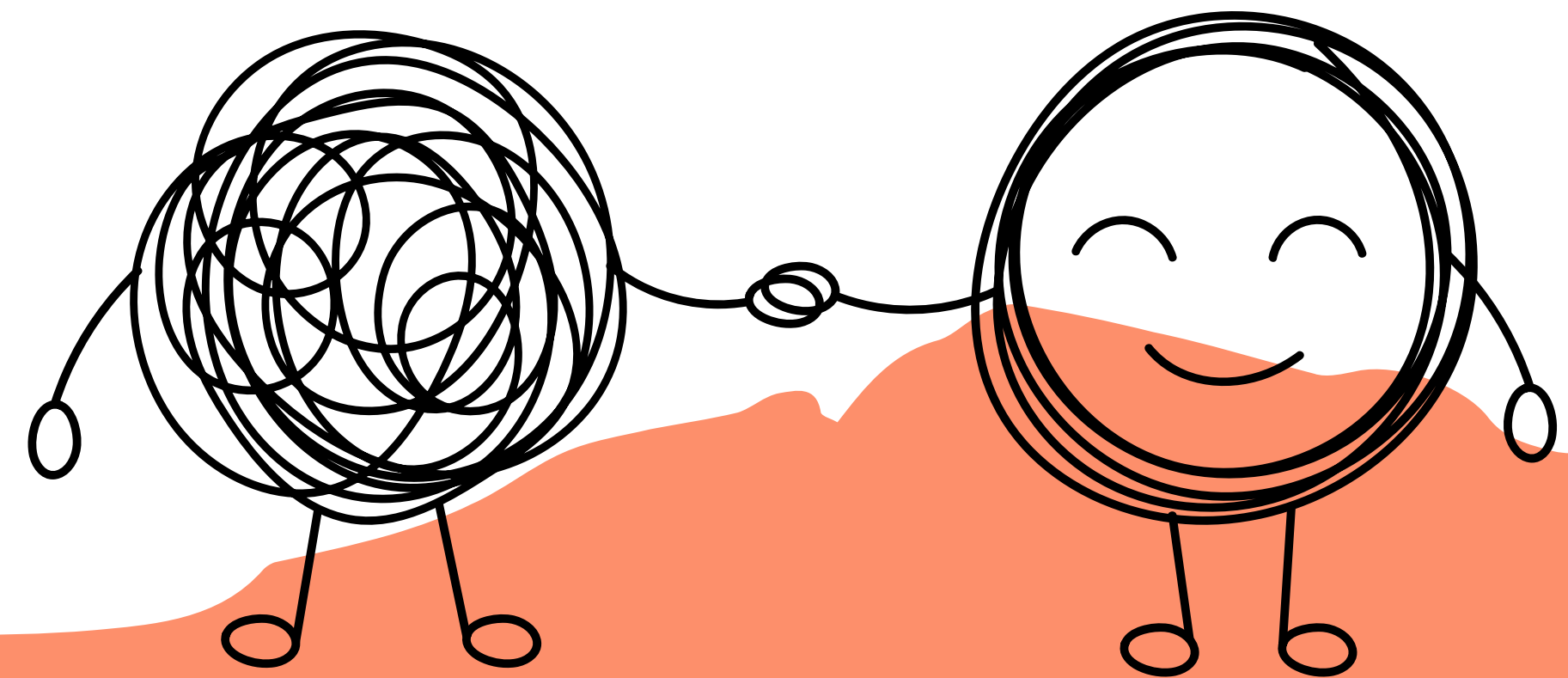
# Positive cycle of activity:



**Doing things  
differently...**



**Thinking and  
feeling  
differently...**



# ACEs

One of the strategies we use is looking at whether the activities a child does relates to the “ACEs”.

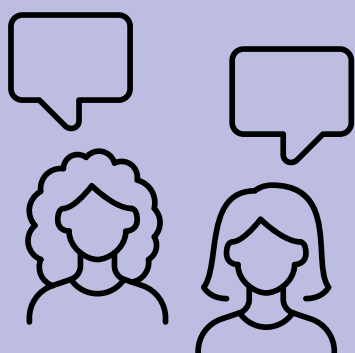
## Achievement

These are activities that give your child a sense of achievement when they do them. For example, cleaning their room, completing their homework, participating in a hobby like dance.



## Closeness

These are activities that help your child to connect with others and give them a sense of closeness. For example, watching tv with a family member or cooking together.



## Enjoyment

These are activities that your child enjoys. For example, they may enjoy watching a movie, reading a book or playing a game.



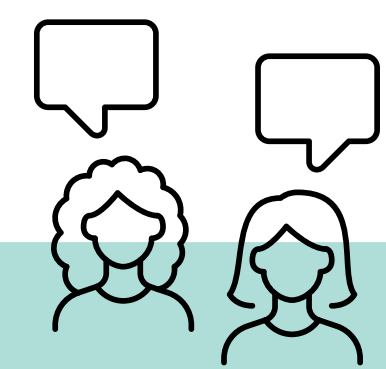
# "ACE" activities



## Achievement

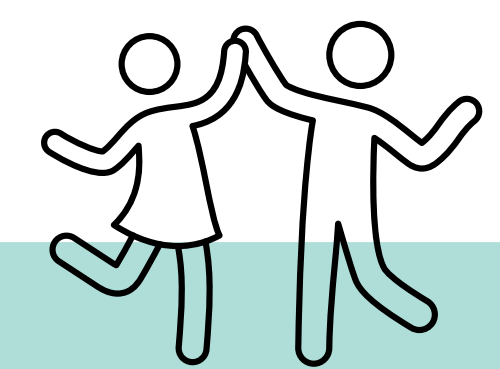
Did your child get something out of the activity?

Were they pleased when it was done and out of the way?



## Closeness

Did the activity make your child feel close to anyone, even if they weren't with them?



## Enjoyment

Did they enjoy the activity?

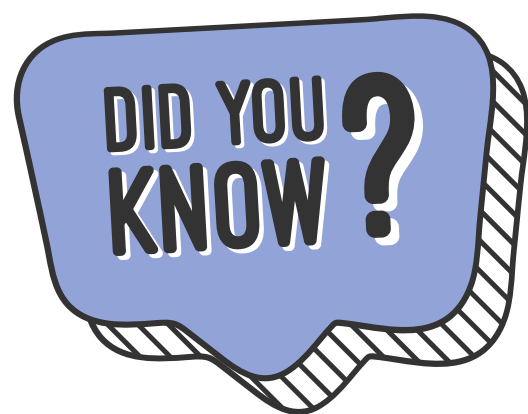
Was it fun?

Mood can be affected by what your child does, where they spend their time and who they spend it with.

Looking at the different activities your child does day to day can be really important in helping you understand if they are meeting the needs of the "ACEs".

It is hard to feel low when we are regularly doing activities which are important and enjoyable to us.

# Negative Automatic Thoughts



We all have lots of thoughts that go through our mind every day, between 70,000 to 100,000 in total!!

Some of these thoughts can be unhelpful and can make children (and adults) feel bad, we call these Negative Automatic Thoughts (NATs) or sometimes ANTs. They come when they want to, without a choice and can be difficult to stop. They present themselves as facts and people often believe them. They are unhelpful and get us when we are feeling down and keep us there.

It is important for you to be aware of your child's NATs and it can be helpful to help them to find ways to challenge these thoughts.





# Examples of NATs

Nobody likes me.

I'm stupid.

They are so happy, why can't I be?

No-one will believe me.

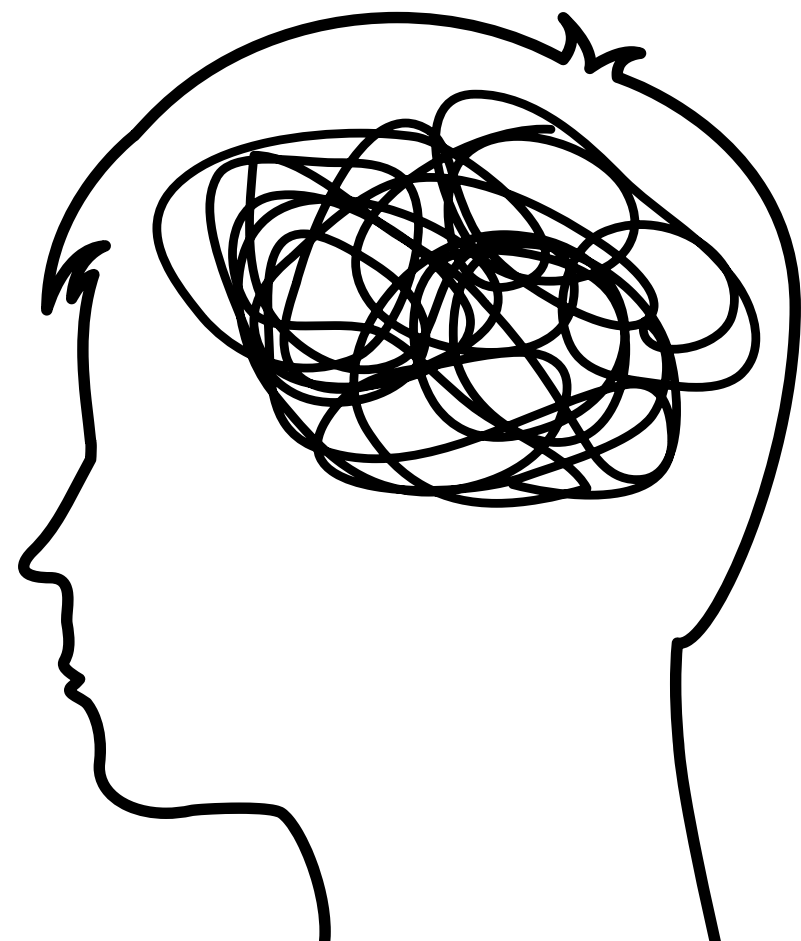
I will fail the test.

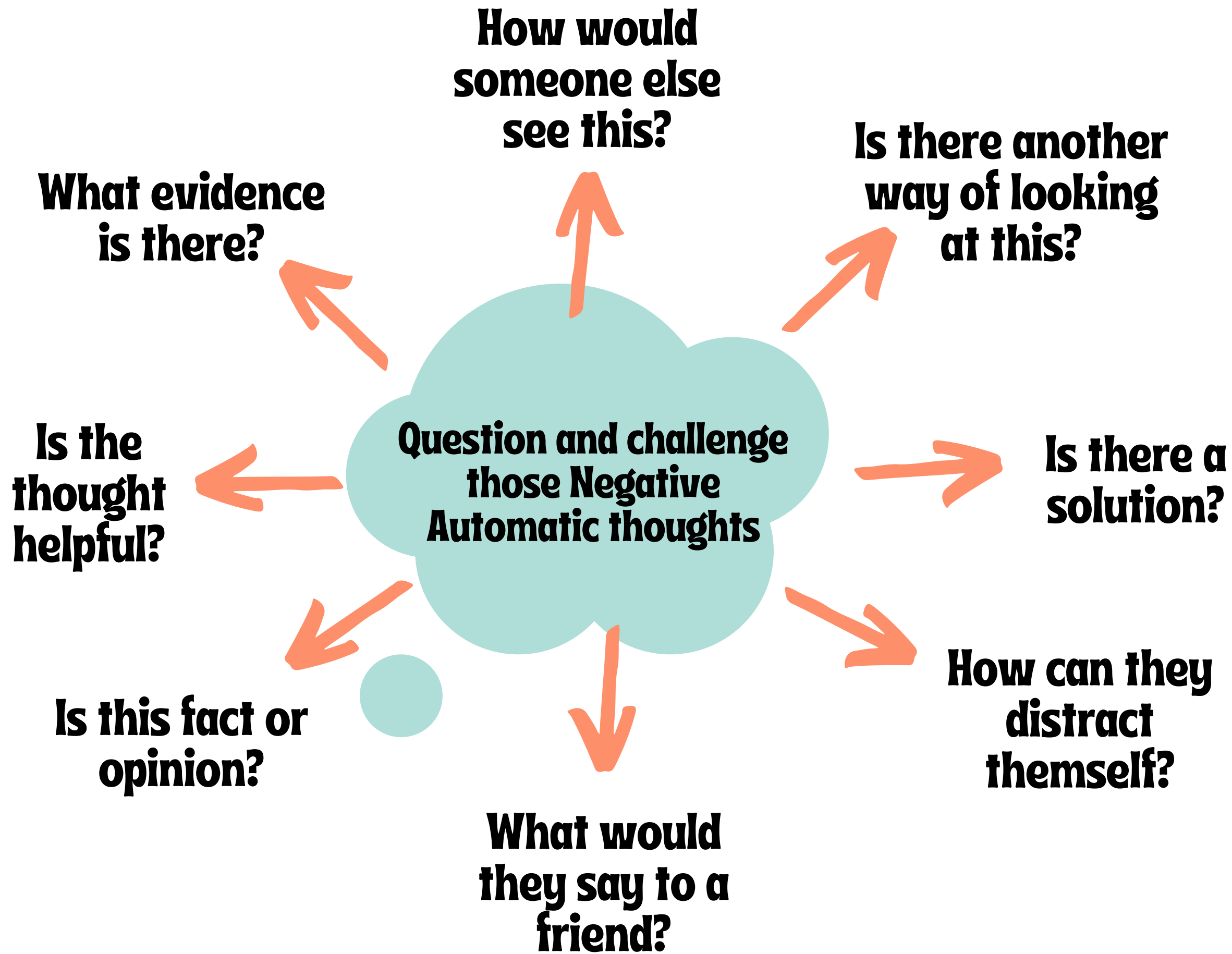
I can't believe I only got 85%.

My friends will fall out with me.

I feel awful today so that means today will be awful.

They think I look silly.





# Further support

- This May Help practical advice for parents - <https://thismayhelp.me/>
- Young Minds parents guide for depression and low mood - <https://www.youngminds.org.uk/parent/parents-a-z-mental-health-guide/depression-and-low-mood/>. They also run a free helpline for parents 0808 802 5544 from Monday to Friday, 9.30am to 4pm
- Young Minds tip on How to talk to your child about mental health - <https://www.youngminds.org.uk/parent/how-to-talk-to-your-child-about-mental-health/>
- Move Mood app to help improve your mood - <https://www.movemood.co.uk/>
- How to boost positivity for your family at home suggestions from BBC Bitesize - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/bitesize/articles/zykkvwx>
- Childline calm zone for activities and tools for when children feel anxious, scared or sad - <https://www.childline.org.uk/toolbox/calm-zone/>
- Little Parachutes recommend picture books that help children cope with different things - <https://www.littleparachutes.com/category/feelings/sadness/>
- The Sleep Charity information and advice around sleep - <https://thesleepcharity.org.uk/information-support/children/>





# Thank you for listening!

Any questions?

