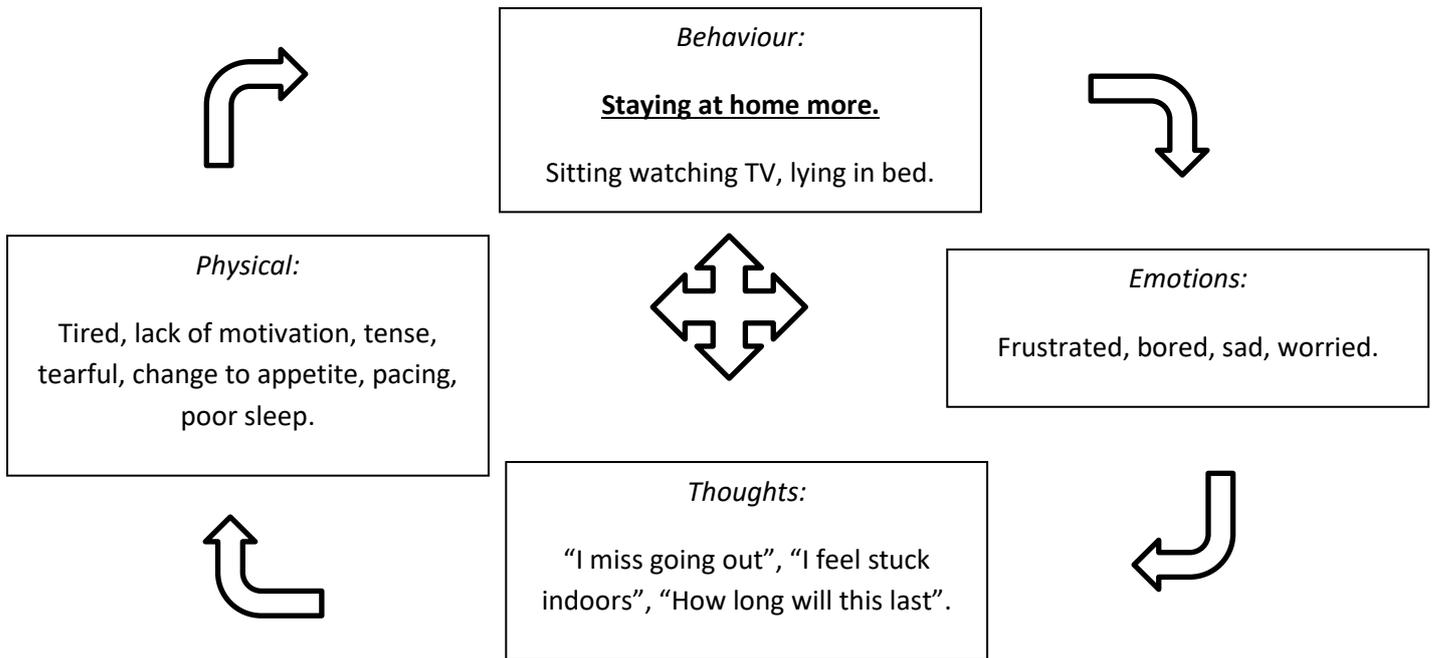


Staying well during isolation- what can I do?

Within CBT, we work on an understanding that the way we **act** (our behaviours) influence how we **think** and interpret situations but also how we can **feel** (physically and emotionally). With the country in lock down and lots of people in isolation, the things we usually do have changed considerably and some of us may have a completely new daily routine... or lack of routine to deal with. Have you thought about how this might change how you think and feel or have you already seen a difference? Have you thought about what you could do to help yourself? See below for an example:



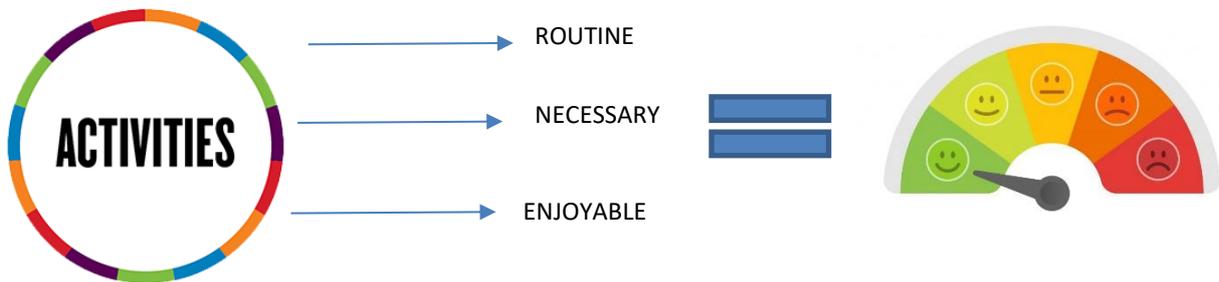
As you can see in the cycle above, all the areas are connected and influence each other. It's understandable to feel worried about what's going on and even a little upset that you can't do as much as you usually would. Things, for a time are going to be restricted. However, it's really important that at this time we focus more on the things that we **can** still do, rather than those things that we can't.



It's important to do this and maintain a sense of structure and routine because anxiety and low mood exist in a part of our brain that try to protect us from harm or upset by telling us to avoid things. So if we're already feeling upset, the added stress of isolation may make us think that sitting on the couch or lying in bed and waiting for things to pass could be our best option. In the short term, this may even make us feel a bit better. But if we follow the lead of that mood, we're going to continue to feel like avoiding things and our motivation to do things that are still possible will slowly decrease. So doing the things that are still possible will start to feel like a big effort!

So what can you do?

A tried and tested technique to help keep your motivation and mood lifted is to keep a weekly planner which includes routine, necessary and enjoyable activities for yourself. So in this sense, you can follow a plan and **not** your mood. Staying engaged in a routine and with activities will keep those “feel good” chemicals in your brain flowing which help to naturally lift your mood and will also create opportunities for positive experiences for yourself. Planning activities can help to create a sense of achievement, purpose and even closeness with those around you.



Putting it into practice...

To begin the process we start by making a list of activities in our life that we both need and want to do. It’s really important at this stage to focus on what **is still possible** for you. Of course it’s disappointing and frustrating that places we love to visit are closed and we don’t have the same freedoms as we are used to. It may be helpful to write at the top of your planner **‘this is temporary’** or even design a planner of things that you plan to do once the restrictions have been lifted. But for now, focus only on the things within your control and within your capabilities.

<p>ROUTINE <i>Things that you would do as part of your day to day life. May include things like washing up, cleaning, cooking, grocery shopping, tidying, exercising.</i></p>	<p>NECESSARY <i>These could overlap with routine tasks but can usually be differentiated due to being time sensitive. Include things like paying bills, attending appointments, going to work.</i></p>	<p>ENJOYABLE <i>Things that you do for fun. Activities that bring you joy, have value to them, give you a sense of purpose or help you to blow off steam.</i></p>

“But everything I do I can’t do because of the lockdown...”

When it comes to thinking about activities you enjoy, you may start to think “but everything I enjoy I can’t do now because of the lockdown”. Considerable changes are in place at the moment and we’re all having to adapt to a new way of temporary living. This doesn’t mean that we necessarily have to lose an activity or hobby that we enjoy but we might have to find a new way to keep it in our lives. Trying to do the same things that we did before, in the same way, may not be possible right now and could make us think we should give up on doing the things we love.

BUT!

Before you give up on an activity, it’s worth thinking about the following things:

- Is there any part of the activity that you can still do?
- Is there any way that you can maximise your experience so that you get the most out of it?
- Is there anything you can do to make up for the bits you can’t do?

For example, before the lockdown, Jane used to love spending afternoons in the park with her friends. At first, she feels low because she thinks that this won’t be possible at all. After thinking through the questions above, Jane realised that although she couldn’t spend the entire afternoon outside, she was still allowed to go out for a walk for an hour each day. Although it wasn’t the same as spending the all day at the park, Jane realised that she might be able to make the most of this experience by visiting her favourite parts of the park. She recognised that she wouldn’t be able to walk side by side with her friends, she could call them on a group phone call whilst she walked, perhaps whilst they walked in parks nearby.

Top tip: When selecting the parts of the activity to do, it’s important to make sure that the parts you chose made your experience the best it could be! For example, if Jane enjoyed her afternoons in the park mainly because she enjoyed connecting with friends, she might instead choose to stay at home and speak to her friends on a video call. However if being outside was the most important, then she may choose to just focus on the walk and talk to her friends another time.

Another way of keeping in touch with meaningful activities is to think about what is valuable to us and try to figure out what it was about the activities that we can't do at the moment that made us enjoy them so much. A value is something that means something to us, something of worth and importance. If we can find the value, we can find other ways of recreating it in other activities.

Let's take going for a coffee with friends as an activity that someone enjoys doing. Why might someone enjoy that?

- Do they enjoy getting out the house?
- Do they enjoy having a coffee made for them?
- Do they enjoy meeting up with friends and having a chat?
- Do they enjoy the walk over to the coffee shop and having some alone time?



Using the example above, if the person recognises that meeting up with friends and having a chat is what they find most valuable, could it be possible to arrange a video call and have a coffee with friends that way? Although it isn't exactly the same as the original activity, it is allowing the person the ability to fulfil the value that underpins it and find a sense of enjoyment. Better than no coffee at all right?

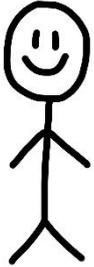


Here's some helpful questions to ask yourself to tap into the values of activities that you typically like:

- Why did I start doing that activity in the first place?
- Is there a way for me to do that activity indoors?
- What do I enjoy the most about this activity?
- Why does this activity make me happy?
- Do I do this activity with other people or by myself- is this the only activity I do with other people/by myself?
- Why is this activity important to me?

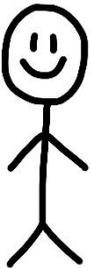
Making a plan

Once you've got your list of activities it's time to start making a plan of when you're going to do these. As we mentioned earlier, the reason why we make plans is because we're much more likely to stick with a concrete commitment than if we're following the lead of our mood... see below for an example:



This is Jerry. He's decided that this week he's going to paint the garden shed. He hasn't decided on a specific day or time- just when he feels like it. He's not been feeling very motivated since the lockdown and has been spending a lot of time watching TV. He thinks he'll get around to it at some point.

**WHO DO YOU
THINK IS MORE
LIKELY TO PAINT
THE GARDEN SHED
THIS WEEK?**



This is Terry. He's decided that this week he's also going to paint the garden shed. He's also been feeling demotivated since the lock down but feels that sitting on the couch isn't helping. He's chosen the colour paint he wants the shed to be, cleaned the brushes so they're ready to use and based on the weather forecast which he checked he's planning to paint the shed on Tuesday afternoon from 13:00.

Now making the plans can be as simple or as creative as you want it to be. Making the planner itself can even be an activity. If part of the change in your daily routine is now having the children at home more, could this include them? Planners can be daily, weekly, fortnightly or monthly- it's about what works for you. Including in the packs are some examples of planners, some split up into morning afternoon and evening and some split up into 2 hourly slots. Every person is different and it's down to you to experiment with what will help you. See examples of 2 template diaries on the next page.

Top tip: Start small. A lot of us can find it hard to take on too much in one go, especially if we're not feeling ourselves. If we set ourselves too big of a task and don't succeed, we might start to call ourselves "no good" or "a failure". Especially in this difficult time, there's no harm in starting small and building on it. When planning out activities, start with the ones which are easiest. Break the bigger activities down into smaller ones or have a go at doing an activity for just 5 minutes and seeing how you feel then... if you want to carry on then feel free to do so, if not then feel free to stop and try again another time.

Be kind to yourself and remember that even a small change is better than no change at all.

EXAMPLE 1

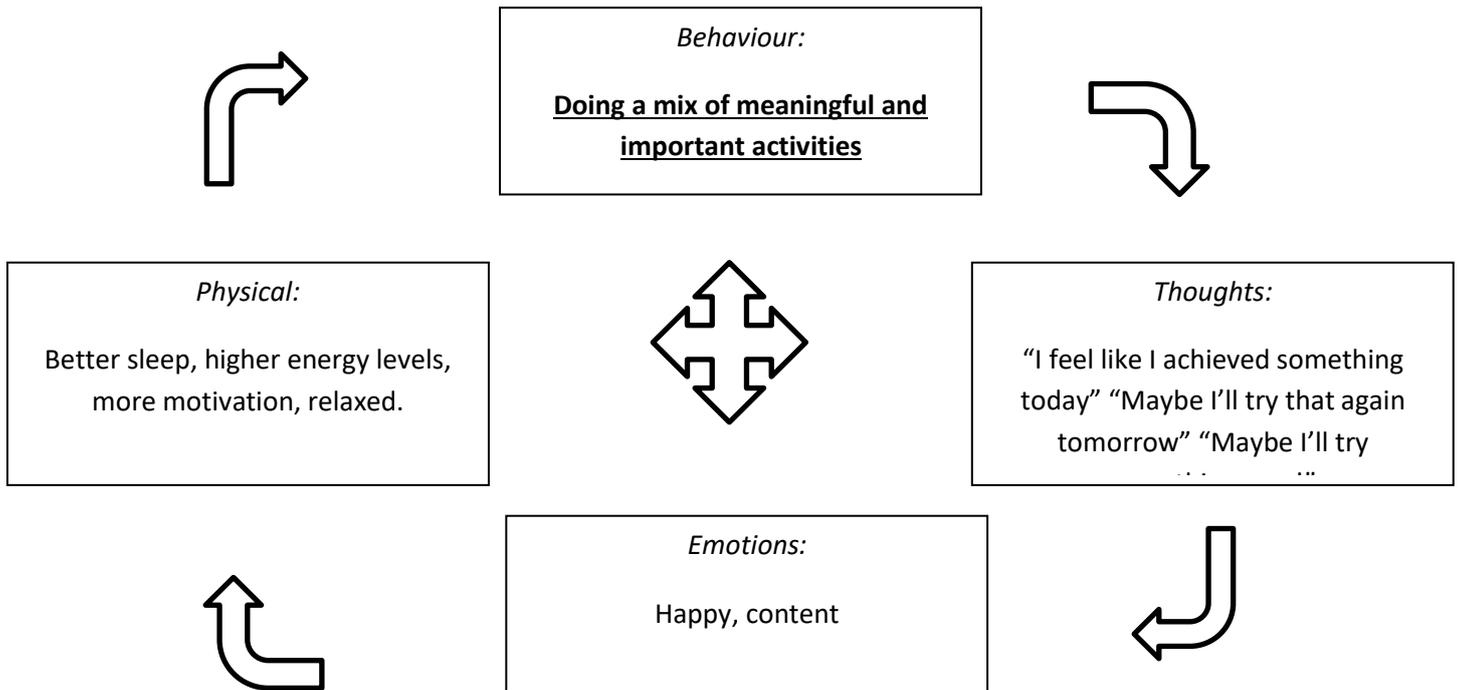
	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Morning							
Afternoon							
Evening							

EXAMPLE 2

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
06:00-08:00							
08:00-10:00							
10:00-12:00							
12:00-14:00							
14:00-16:00							
16:00-18:00							
18:00-20:00							
20:00-22:00							
22:00-12:00pm							

How is this going to keep me feeling good?

As we saw earlier, avoiding activities can cause us to fall into a cycle where we feel low, lose our motivation and energy, think badly of ourselves and find it hard to do the things we usually enjoy or need to do. When we stick to a routine and engage in a balance of necessary and fun activities- even if we don't feel like doing them at the start- we break ourselves out of this cycle of low mood and start a cycle of good mood.



As we can see from the cycle above, sticking to a routine and keeping engaged with the activities that are important and meaningful to us gives us a sense of achievement. If we feel like we've achieved something we feel happier. If we feel happier our sleep improves, we have more energy and we feel more motivated so we want to do more. It might take some time to get ourselves into this cycle and, to begin with, we might have to do things even when we don't feel like doing them but over time this becomes easier and the cycle sustains itself.

Why don't I feel better immediately?

Imagine you had a chest infection and the doctor gave you antibiotics to clear up the infection. Would you expect to feel better after taking one tablet? Probably not. It's the same with these activities, you may not feel better doing only one or two things, and it may take time for it to build up. But if you keep prescribing yourself a regular routine, you will start to feel better!

