

EXAM STRESS WORKBOOK

EXAM STRESS

Remember, it is normal to worry before an exam – the challenge is how to manage the worry so that it works for you rather than against you!

96% of people experience anxiety in their lives

Anxiety can be a **MOTIVATOR** to help you revise
BUT
Sometimes it can negatively affect your performance and grades

Things that are going well with your revision...

One thing you're finding difficult...



ANXIETY

- ▣ A normal emotion that can be used to enhance performance
- ▣ Becomes a problem when it is more severe and frequent and interferes with everyday life, it can affect social life, academic performance and mood
- ▣ No one factor is responsible for the development of anxiety, rather it is a combination of things including: genes, adverse life events, learning by example, learning from others reactions and coping experiences

THREE CHARACTERISTICS

Physical sensations in the body

- ▣ Associated with adrenaline – preparing the body for action
- ▣ E.g. Sweating, increase in heart rate, trembling (and many others)

Anxious thoughts

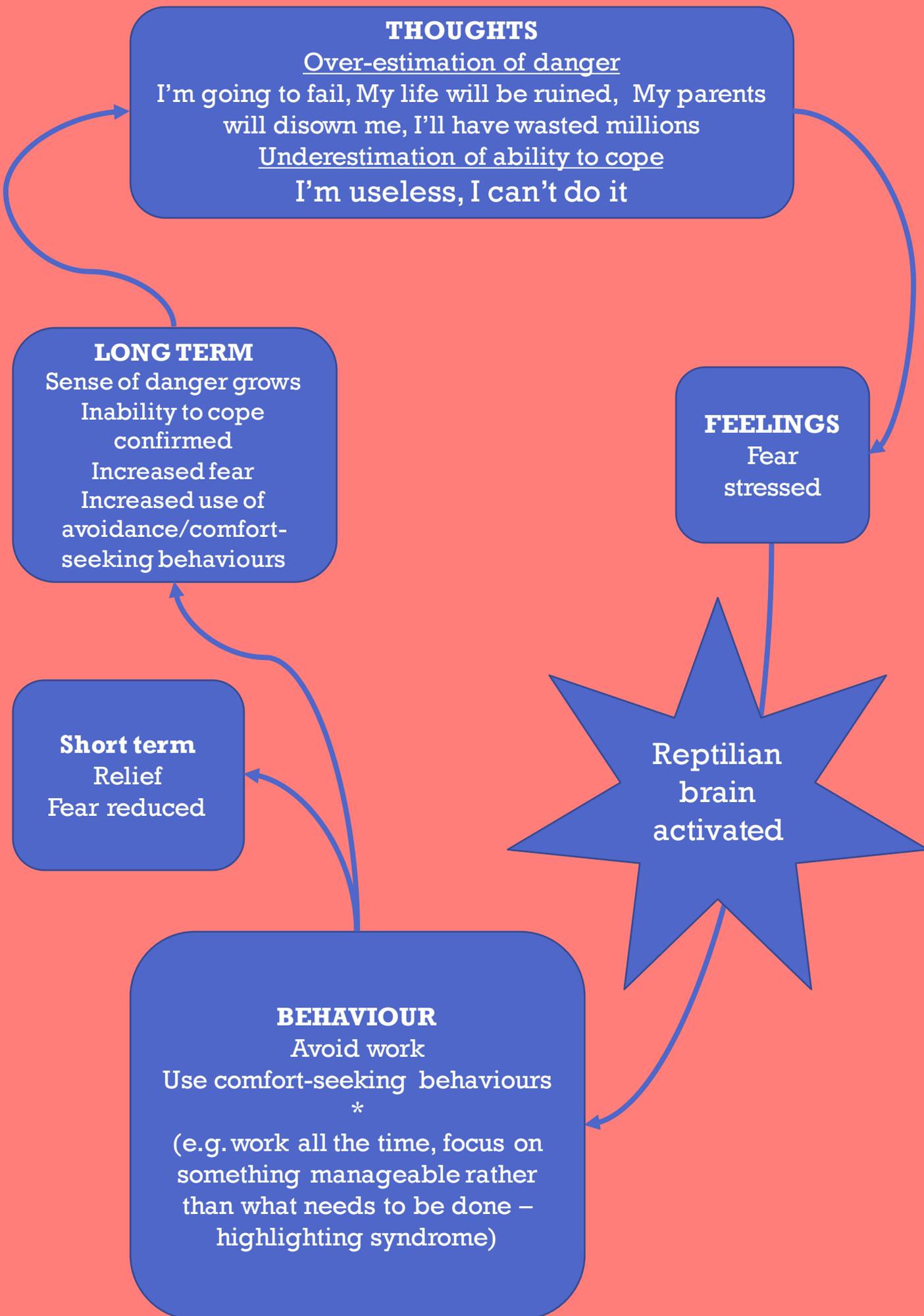
- ▣ Overestimate “danger” → Underestimate ability to cope
- ▣ “Worry” e.g. school, health, personal harm, friendships

Anxious behaviour

- ▣ Behaviour aimed at helping you anticipate and/or avoid future danger
- ▣ E.g. Looking out for danger (hypervigilance)
- ▣ Avoiding worry situations



THE STUDY TRAP



*comfort seeking behaviours are those that reduce emotional distress rather than avoiding danger



THE STUDY TRAP – EXPLAINED

▣ In the study trap, we experience lots of worrying thoughts. These thoughts are the result of over-estimations of danger and under-estimations of our ability to cope. These thoughts can be fueled by a sense of pressure, either from ourselves or from those around us.

▣ These thoughts lead to feelings of stress, worry, and sometimes panic. These thoughts and feelings activate the threat system in our brains, which is located in the reptilian part of our brains (amygdala). The reptilian brain is an old part of the brain that is designed to protect ourselves from threat in the quickest way possible.

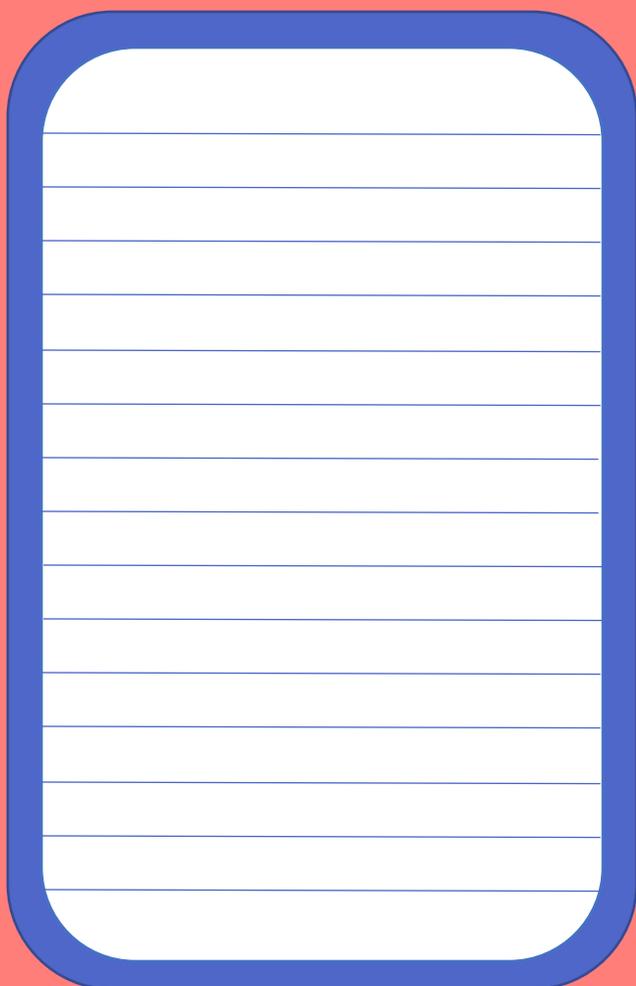
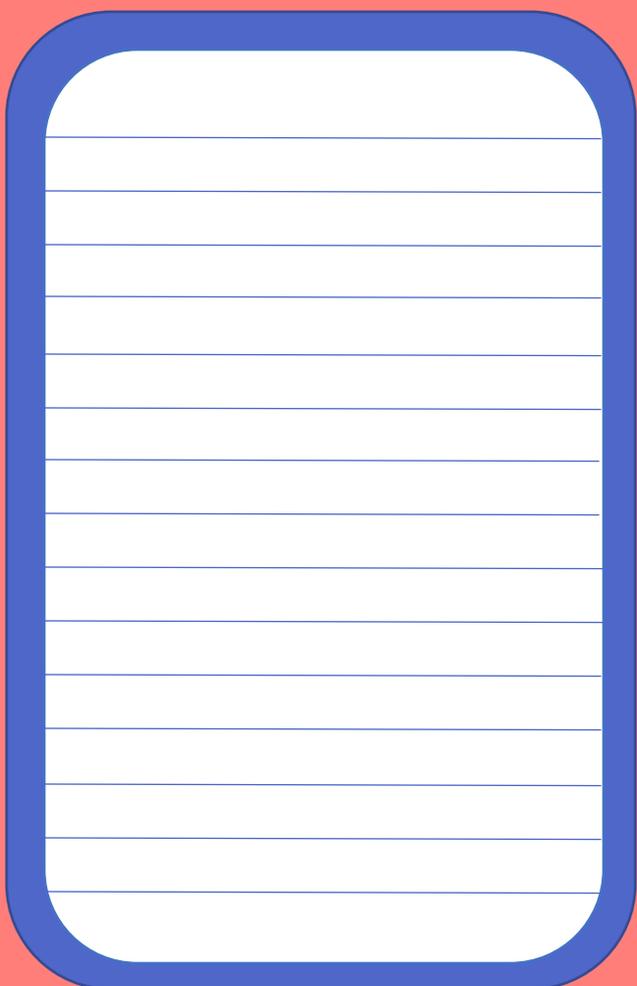
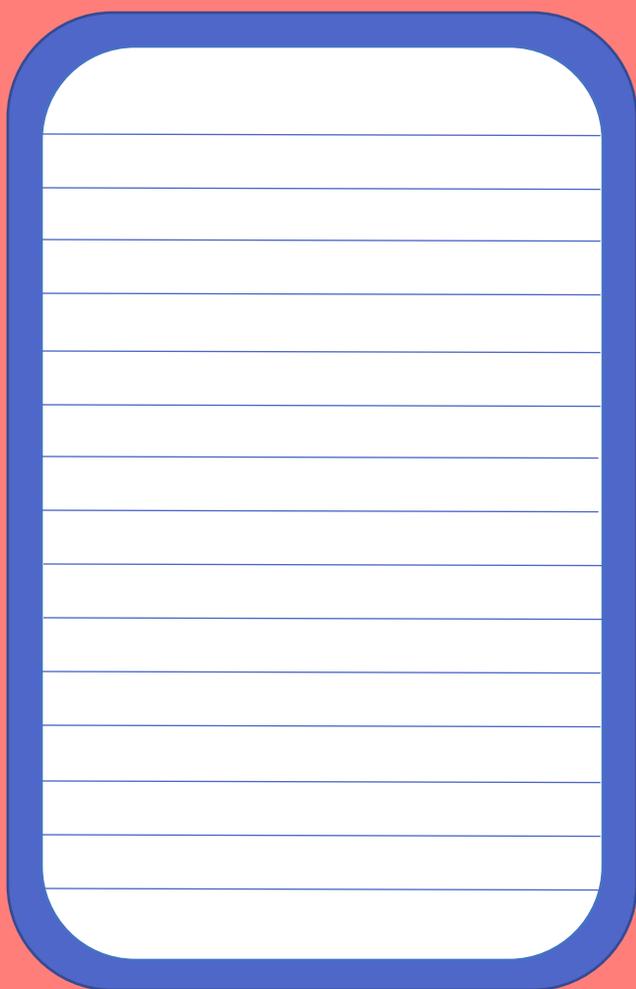
▣ This leads to behaviours such as avoidance and comfort-seeking behaviours. Both behaviours are attempts at the reptilian brain level to reduce the emotional distress and this usually works in the short term. For example, forgetting about work and doing something else, such as playing a video-game can make us feel better in the short term. Equally, engaging in a comfort-seeking behaviour can make us feel better in the short term.

▣ Comfort seeking behaviours are those that make us feel better but are not rationally sound strategies that will improve our ability to work or take our exams. Examples of these are writing perfectly neat revision notes, highlighting for hours without really concentrating on what we're doing, working all night etc etc.

▣ In the short term we feel better and less stressed. However, in the longer term we are not productive and we get no closer to our aim of successful study, so we fuel the cycle further.



WHAT STRATEGIES DO YOU FIND HELPFUL?



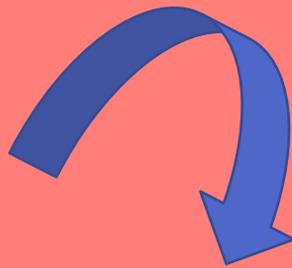
WHAT WE CAN DO TO MANAGE OUR ANXIETY

Try challenging some of our negative thoughts...

Situation: Sitting an Exam

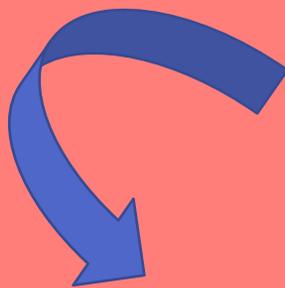
WORST CASE SCENARIO:

I won't know any of the questions, I will panic, I will fail the exam, I won't be able to get a college place or a good job



BEST CASE SCENARIO:

I will get every question right, it will be a breeze, I will get offered scholarships, and the examiners will give me a round of applause



SOMEWHERE IN THE MIDDLE:

I might not know all the answers, but I have revised, all I can do is do my best, and if I do badly its not the end of the world, it is not the only exam I'm sitting



SITUATION: THINK LIKE A JUDGE

Thought on trial:

"I will never be able to revise effectively"

Evidence for this thought:

- I have so many subjects
- I don't have an effective revisions timetable
- I find the subjects hard
- I don't know how to revise

Rate truth of statement
(0-100%)

70%

Evidence thought might not be 100% true:

- The school give a good amount of time to revise
- I can get support from the school and during lessons if I don't understand something
- I can get support from the school to create a revision timetable
- I can break things down into smaller chunks
- I can make it fun and study with friends

Closing summary:

Although I might not know the subjects well, with the help of the school I can create a revision timetable that I can work from, in small chunks to further study these areas. I can make the study fun with support from my friends, and continue to review with my teachers

Review truth of statement:

30%



STRATEGIES: CHOOSE WHICH ONES YOU FIND HELPFUL

Studying

PLAN

People who are better at solving complex tasks, tend to spend much more time planning, than people who rush in. Remember, it's the rational brain that does the planning, so what's going on is that people are giving themselves the time and the space to use their rational brains....

BREAK THINGS DOWN

- Breaking tasks down into smaller and smaller aspects is a really important part of planning. This is where we are using our rational brains. It is important that this is a quick process, that we don't spend too long on it.
- Can be helpful to do this with a pen and paper to encourage the speed and rough nature of this process. Encourage mess – using a computer, for example, can lead to it becoming a time-consuming exercise which becomes pretend work – we feel better for doing it but it doesn't get us anywhere, STUDY TRAP.

PRIORITISE

What is MOST important?

- There's no point investing loads of time on something that is not worth many marks, or won't make much difference to the overall whole. Need to know what are the most important bits of something before we start.

What needs to be done FIRST?

- Often there is a natural order to things and there is no point in starting work on something that will then have to be undone before something else can be done. For example we don't put the windows into a house until the end, otherwise we'll probably break them.

Where is EASIEST to start?

- One of the things that invites an overwhelmed feeling and a slip into the study trap is the sense of not having got going. Sometimes beginning with easy things can reduce these feelings and once we're going we can move forward. At other times people like to start with the hardest tasks so that they know it is a downward slope from here.



MANAGE YOUR TIME

How long can you concentrate for? 20-30mins on average

- Short breaks
- Split day into study time and breaks

E.g. Have hour long work slots, work in small breaks

- Stick to the timetable!

Have the most intensive work when you're most productive

- Are you a morning or evening person?

Allocate rough tasks for particular periods of time – can be really helpful

- "I have one hour left of today; I'm going to focus on..."
- To-do lists!!

MAX OUR THINKING

Reduce cognitive burden

- Write stuff down don't try and remember – more brain capacity for the difficult stuff

Reduce distractions

- Twitter, facebook, tiktok, instagram etc. Are all things likely to make it harder to work
- Put phone in a different room/use different logins for play and work

Reduce multi-tasking

Schedule when you are focusing on different things

- Doing two things at once means neither has your full attention
- Complete tasks whenever possible to so we can out them out of our minds and move on to the next one

MANAGE MIND BLOCKS

- Start somewhere else
- Leave it and come back to it
- Take a short break
- Write anything
- Write a list of options, exhaustive and silly rather than just the best
- Find an example
- Ask somebody else



Reduce Uncertainty

We don't know what will be asked – concentrate on what we do know

- Where it is, what time etc. Reduce uncertainty by planning around what we do know
- Means you will enter your exam calmly, organised and in a better position to answer the questions
- Have breakfast/lunch - pack everything beforehand
- Plan how you will spend the day if it's an afternoon exam

All of this will reduce unknowns which will lower levels of fear and give you the best chance of keeping the rational brain online. It's easy stuff to do as well.



Helpful video –
girl speaking
about her
anxiety

<https://vimeo.com/219870603>

Calming the reptilian brain once the rational brain has gone!

- We need to calm the reptilian brain and give the rational brain space...
- REMEMBER: the reptilian part brain is activated when we get stressed/worry and wants to get rid of the threat quickly (avoidance comfort behaviours etc.) by calming this part of our brain we can reduce the avoiding behaviours and allow rational to take over
- Attentional focus & Physiology

Plan for immediately after the exam

- Don't spent the rest of the day on post-mortem (don't be analysing how the exam went!!) - it will mess things up for the next one/spoil the fun of finishing
- Make a plan of what you'll do, if you'll go off on your own or spend time with others



BARRIERS TO REVISION: WHAT GETS IN THE WAY?

BARRIERS	SOLUTIONS
Leaving it too late	Act NOW! Set a day and time to get started
Hate revising	Try different strategies & materials, make it fun, revise with friends, try a quiz with family/friends testing you
Poor organization	Study timetables/lists, prioritise
Confusing revision notes	Use BBC Bitesize/revision books/speak to teacher
Nowhere to revise	Find a small area that can be used as a small study space/local library
Not enough time	Make time – plan time in your week, prioritise
Other things to do	How important is this? What's in it for you?
Think you can't do it	Reflect on positives/your strengths/past achievements
Cramming/too much revision	Start early/use effective planning
Not knowing how to revise	Try out different methods taught at school/find one that suits you



EXAMPLE TIMETABLE

TIMES	8.00am - 4.00pm	4.00pm - 6.00pm	6.00pm - 6.45pm	6.45pm - 7.45pm	7.45pm - 8.00pm	8.00pm - 9.00pm
MONDAY	School times	Drama club	Dinner	Homework	Social media	Homework/ revision
TUESDAY	School times	Revision	Dinner	Homework	Social media	Homework/ revision
WEDNESDAY	School times	Netball	Dinner	Homework	Social media	Homework/ revision
THURSDAY	School times	Revision	Dinner	Homework	Social media	Homework/ revision
FRIDAY	School times	Chill out!	Dinner	Homework	Social media	Homework/ revision
TIMES	9.00am - 10.00am	10.00am - 11.00am	11.00am - 1.00pm	1.00pm - 3.00pm	3.00pm - 5.00pm	5.00pm - 6.00pm
SATURDAY	Breakfast/ shower etc.	Hour of power revision	See friends/ lunch	Revision	Watching/ playing sport/gaming	Revision
SUNDAY	Breakfast/ shower etc.	Revision	See friends/ lunch	Flash card revision	Out with family	Get someone to test me/ dinner

- Here you can see sports and enjoyable activities have been factored into this revision timetable
- It's important to pencil in some time throughout the week to keep your body active and for you to have fun
- Spending time away from revision will help you to feel energised and refreshed
- As well as being good for your physical health, exercise is also known to brighten your mood, lower stress levels and increase productivity levels



TIMES	8.00 am - 4.00 pm	4.00 pm - 6.00 pm	6.00 pm - 6.45 pm	6.45 pm - 7.45 pm	7.45 pm - 8.00 pm	8.00 pm - 9.00 pm
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SATURDAY						
SUNDAY						

THE BACK-UP TEAM

Who is in your back-up team?

What sort of support can they offer?

Emotional?

Practical?

Talking?

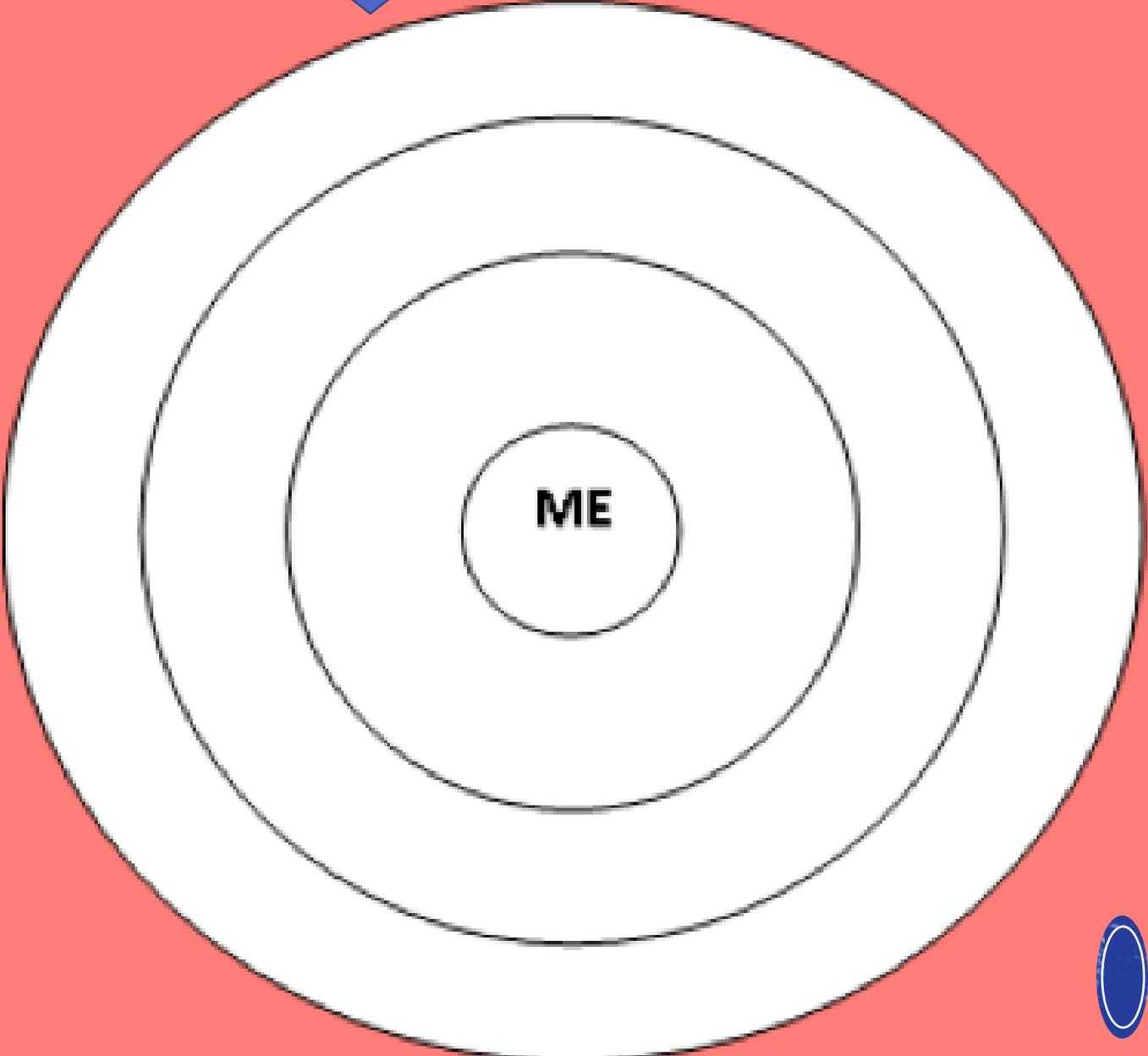
A hug?

Learning?

Make you laugh/fun?

The back-up team works better if the people who are in it, know they are in it.

How could you let them know they are part of yours?



ME



SOME SELF-SOOTHING IDEAS!

Watching TV/ a funny film/ YouTube clips



Playing on the PlayStation/XBox

Doing something physical e.g. go for a walk, play football, go skateboarding

Having a Bath



Doing nails/ makeup/ face mask



Baking

Listening to music – have a "relaxing" playlist



Spending time with pets



SLEEP



- No screens at least an hour before bed & leave your phone out of reach
- Go to bed when you feel tired
- Do something relaxing and unrelated to work in the half hour before you go to bed
- Try and stick to the same wake up time each day
- Make sure you have had enough exercise and fresh air during the day
- Try some mindfulness/relaxation exercises if you can't fall asleep
- You should aim to be getting 8-10 hours sleep every night



EXTRAS

Who could I talk to if I want more support?

- Form tutor or trusted teacher
- Pastoral lead
- ChildLine
- Education Mental Health Practitioner (via school / CAMHS)
- CAMHS (via GP, School)

Helpful Apps



Mindfulness Exercise:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rOne1P0TKL8>

