

How to Use the Cross-sectional CBT Model

The Trigger: Start by identifying the trigger. This could be a difficult situation or event, something that someone says or does, an internal feeling like pain or discomfort or an old memory or image. In CBT we work on the basis that it is generally not the trigger, but the way we think and react to the trigger that causes our distress. Once you have the trigger, write this in the box provided.

Thoughts: Try to identify any negative, unrealistic or unwanted thoughts in response to the trigger. Examples could include “I can’t cope with this”, “I will look stupid”, “I am not good enough”, “They don’t like me”, “I must avoid mistakes”, “There is no point trying”.

It’s important to distinguish between thoughts and feelings. We might say something like “I felt like she didn’t want to talk to me”. In this example the thought is “She didn’t want to talk to me” and the associated feeling might be embarrassment, anxiety, anger or hurt. The thought is usually the words that we use in our mind and the feeling is the emotional response to the thought.

Once you have identified the negative thoughts, – what your mind says – write them down in the box provided.

Feelings: These include our emotional responses to our thoughts and can include anxiety, depression, anger, jealousy, resentment, hurt, guilt or shame.

Try to identify the feelings that are linked to the negative thoughts and write them down in the box provided.

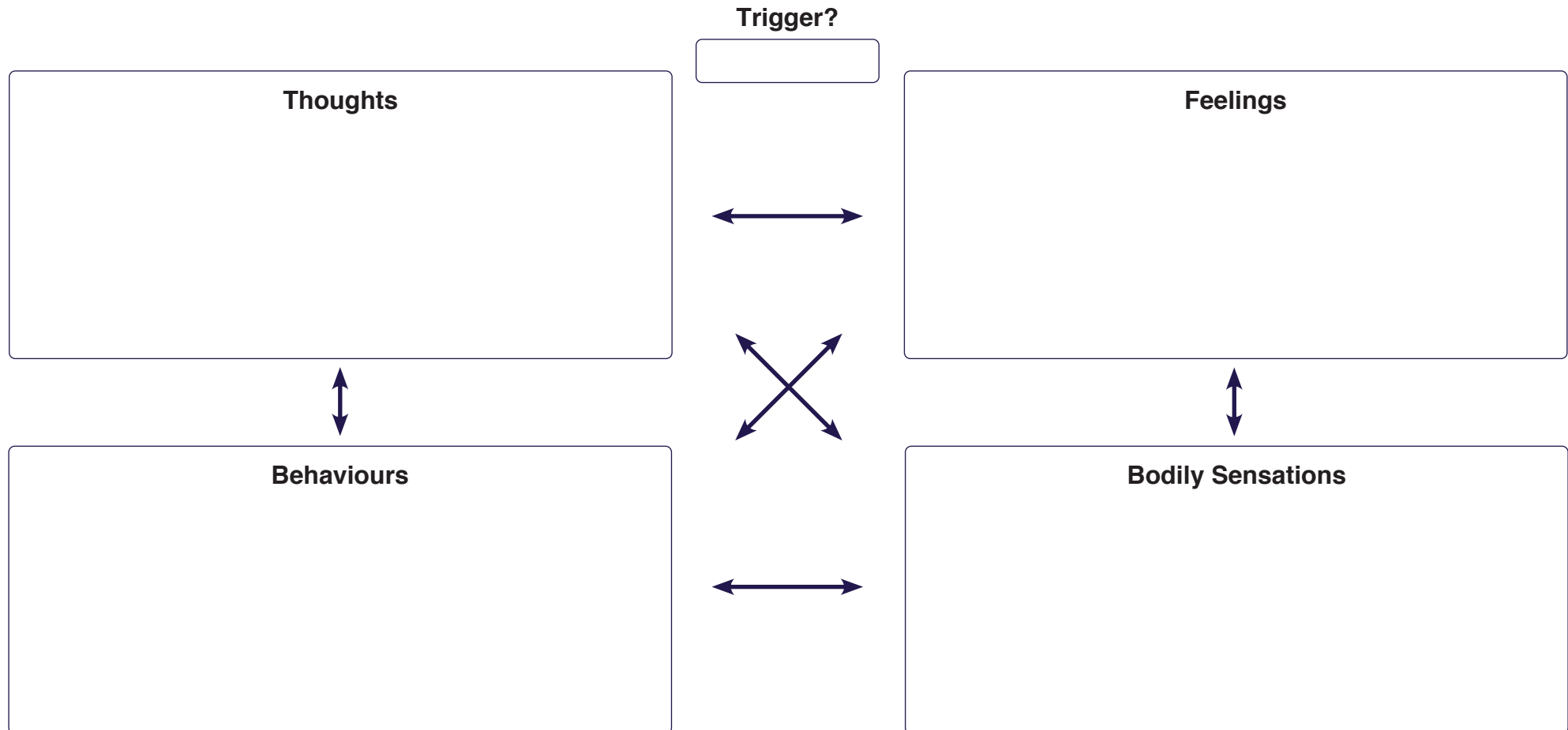
Behaviour: This involves anything that we do or avoid doing. We sometimes distinguish between external and internal behaviours. External behaviours are often easier to identify and include visible reactions or observable behaviours such as using our body language, withdrawing, avoiding, procrastinating, arguing, reassurance seeking and checking. Internal behaviour can include the things we do in our mind such as overanalysing, worrying and ruminating.

Once you have identified the behaviours linked to the negative thoughts and feelings, write them down in the box provided.

Physical Sensations: We often notice unpleasant or uncomfortable feelings in the body. This can include tension, fatigue, physical irritability, shaking, feeling nauseous or pain. Body sensations can arise from distressing thoughts and feelings as well as causing negative thoughts, unhelpful behaviours and distressing emotional feelings in turn.

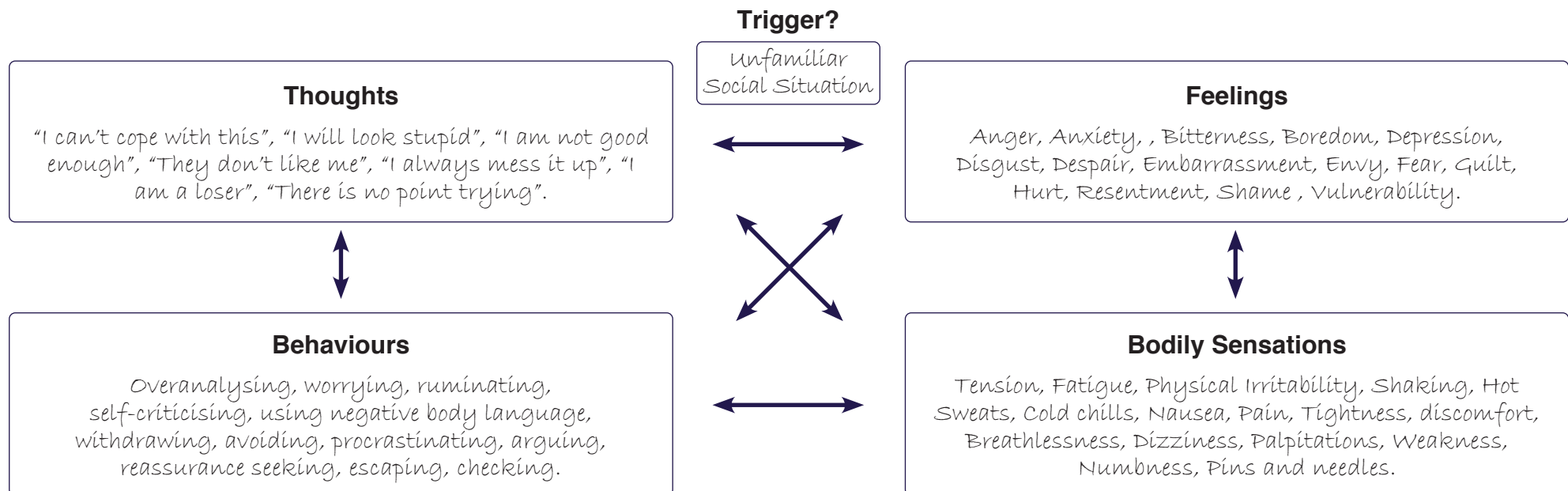
Write down any body sensations or symptoms in the box provided.

Once you have identified the thoughts, behaviours, feelings and physical sensations, map them out in the following boxes, showing the links or interconnections between them by drawing arrows between the boxes. Notice how thoughts and behaviours can influence the nature and intensity of the feelings. Ask yourself, how might changing my thoughts and behaviours alter my emotional and physiological response?



This simple model demonstrates how thoughts and behaviours are hard-wired to emotional and physiological feelings. The key point in this model, is that whilst our thoughts, behaviours, feelings and sensations are all inter-connected, negative or self-defeating cycles can be interrupted and changed by altering our thinking and behavioural patterns.

The basic premise behind CBT is that we can overcome a wide range of problems by changing how we think and what we do. This has been rigorously tested in numerous research trials and CBT is consistently acknowledged as the recommended treatment of choice for a wide range of anxiety and mood disorders. The causal relationship between thoughts, behaviours, feelings and physiological reactions can be illustrated using the examples in the following simple CBT model:



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These causal relationships are not just psychological. Neuro-Imaging studies have demonstrated that changing thinking and behavioural patterns leads to structural and architectural changes in the brain itself.

This shows that cognitive and behavioural change leads directly to physiological changes in the body as well as emotional changes to our feelings. The CBT model therefore illustrates how thoughts, behaviours, feelings and physical symptoms are all deeply intertwined.