



CHILDHOOD NEURODIVERSITY

SUPPORTING LOW MOOD

Psychology in Schools Team NSFT

With thanks to Particip8!

2025

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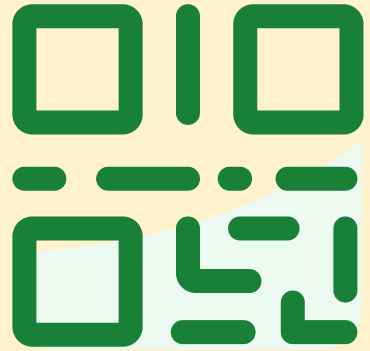
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**what presentation are you
interested in today?**

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What stage are you at?

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How old is your child(ren)?

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How would you rate your current knowledge of low mood in Neurodivergent children?

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How would you rate your current confidence of supporting your neurodivergent child/young person with low mood?

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IMPORTANT MESSAGES

Use of language

- Neurodivergence first
- Parent and carer

Lots of Information





LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF

- Emotional topics being covered today
- Do what you need to look after yourself
- Recording and resources will be shared with everyone who signed up for the workshop

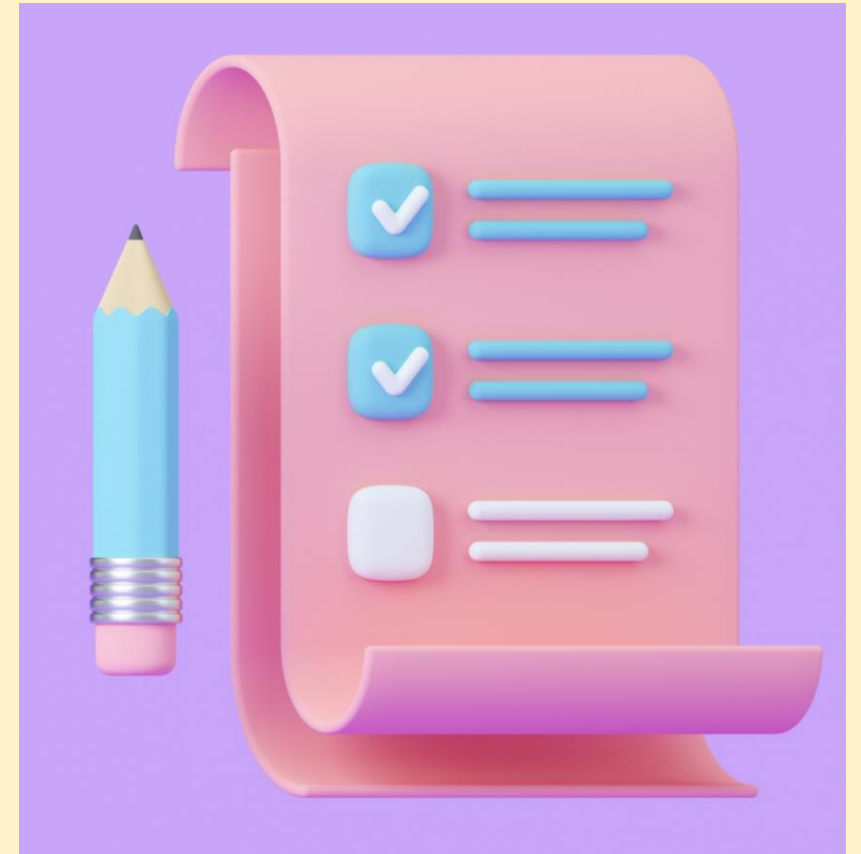
[Childhood Neurodivergence: Managing Parental/Carer Stress - YouTube](#)

TODAY'S WORKSHOP

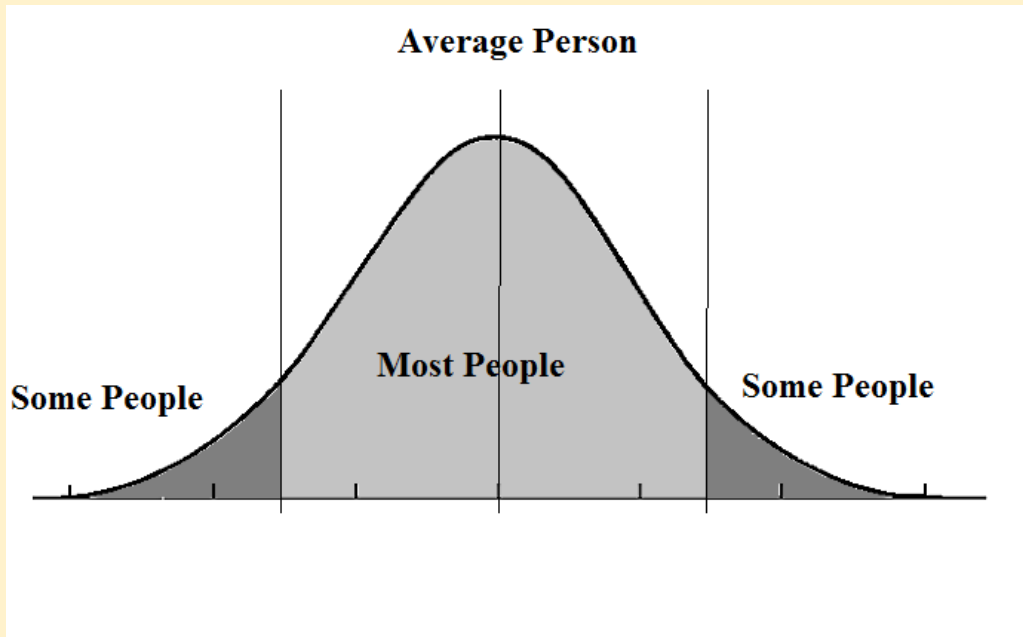
Understanding Low Mood and how it may present in neurodivergent children

Exploring why neurodivergent children may be more vulnerable to low mood.

3R's : Strategies for supporting neurodivergent children with low mood.



WHAT DO WE MEAN BY LOW MOOD?



- We can all experience low mood
- Our mood can fluctuate, hour to hour, day to day, month to month
- There are many factors that might impact our mood
- If our low mood is prolonged and impacting on our daily functioning we may need extra support



What have you noticed in your young person which makes you worry about low mood?

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Increased
impulsivity

Difference in
sleep

Taking more
risks

Irritability

Hopelessnes
s

Repetitive
Negative
Thinking

Sensory
Seeking

Negative self
talk

Increased
social
withdrawal

Feelings of
failure

Tearfulness

Masking

More Flat/
inexpressive

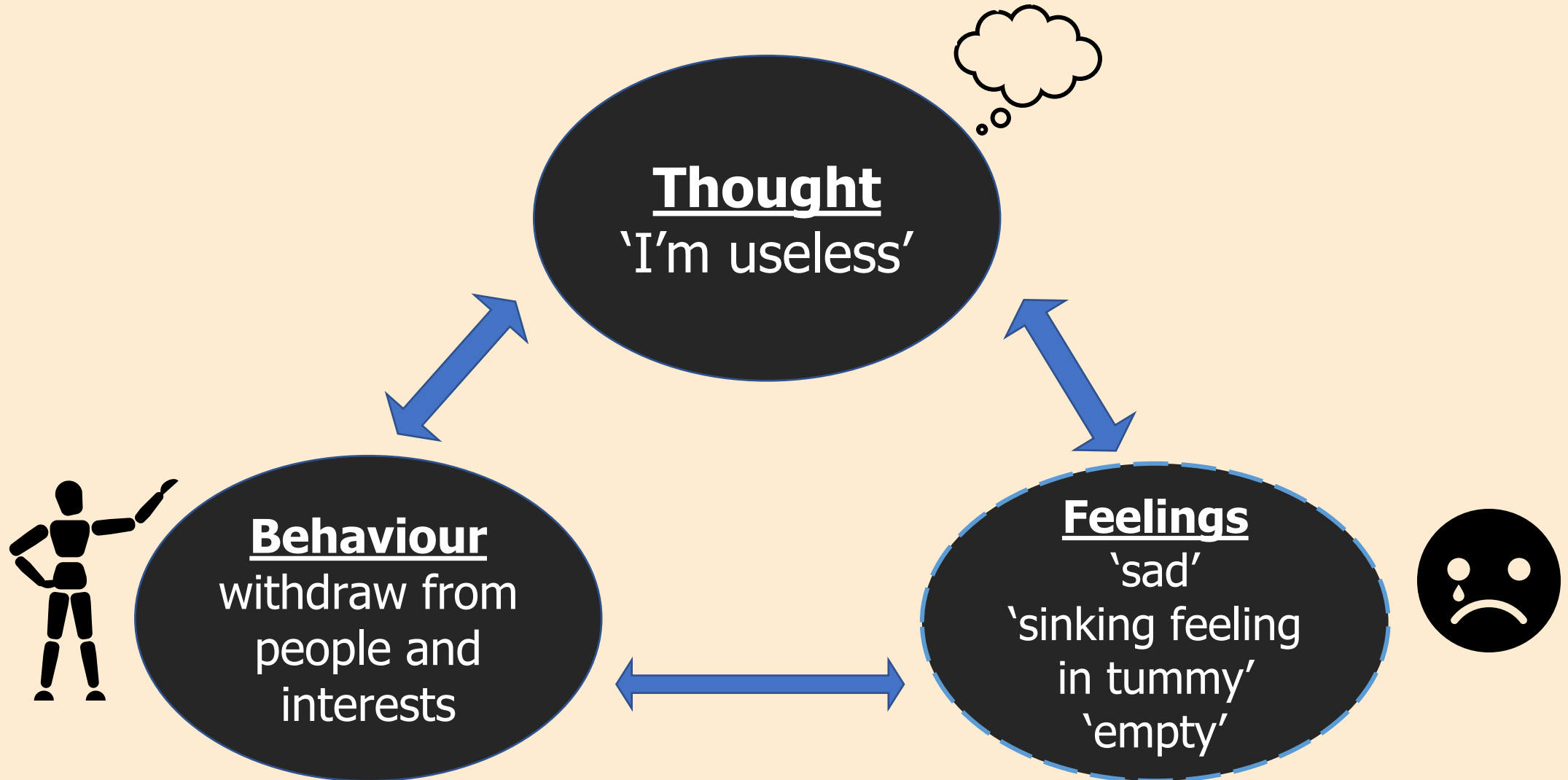
Increased/
decreased
stimming

Increase in
big feelings

Reduced
Concentration

More/Less
interested in
special interests

UNDERSTANDING THE CYCLE OF LOW MOOD



WHY MIGHT NEURODIVERGENT CHILDREN/YOUNG PEOPLE BE VULNERABLE TO LOW MOOD

Social
Isolation

Learning
Differences

Lack of
System
Support

Higher Rates
of ACES

Emotional
literacy

Rigid
Thinking

Living in a
Neurotypical
World

Masking

Communicati
on
breakdowns



EMOTIONAL LITERACY

- Differences in understanding what emotion they are feeling (interoception), and understanding what others might be feeling
- Differences in communicating to others how they are feeling
- Alexithymia and Autism



MASKING AND LOW MOOD

Neurodivergent children may feel pressured to 'fit in' or be accepted by peers

They may try to 'hide', 'camouflage' or 'mask' their differences

In autistic children, it is thought girls in particular try to mask their differences

LIVING IN A NEUROTYPICAL WORLD: DOUBLE EMPATHY PROBLEM

Both people with different brains (cognitive skills, interests, experiences) struggle to understand each other and communicate



Neurotypical person

may struggle to:

- Recognise/understand neurodivergent differences in communicating and managing low mood
- Tolerate social norms being broken



Neurodivergent person

may struggle to:

- Communicate/recognise that they are feeling low
- Manage sensory distress or distraction
- Follow social norms e.g. personal space



INCREASED RISK OF SELF HARM AND SUICIDE

- Rates of self-harm, suicidal thinking and attempts are sadly higher for neurodivergent children
- For some families, helping managing risk of self-harm is an important part of supporting their neurodivergent child with their emotions



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**what could you do or do
you do to support your
young person's wellbeing?**

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PROTECTIVE FACTORS FOR NEURODIVERGENT CHILDREN

- Special interests
- Self soothing behaviours
- Having a sense of shared connection
- Self-acceptance
- Neuroaffirmative approaches and language are key



STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT OUR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WHO ARE EXPERIENCING LOW MOOD





WHAT CAN WE DO TO HELP?

The 3 R's:

- **R**elationship: connection and communication
- **R**ewards: Understanding the fundamental power of rewards
- **R**educe rumination: Unhooking

B Mosley (2023)

- ❖ Positive self talk
- ❖ Holding the hope

RELATIONSHIP AND CONNECTION

It's important to acknowledge low mood and validate where our young person is at emotionally

We can help with this by prioritizing connection

'Every interaction is an intervention'



CONNECTING WITH NEURODIVERGENT CHILDREN

Connecting at the
right time



Give alternate ways
of communicating



Consider
preferences around
personal space



Be mindful of
sensory differences



Incorporate special
interests



Doing something
they enjoy
alongside them





What do you do to connect with your child?

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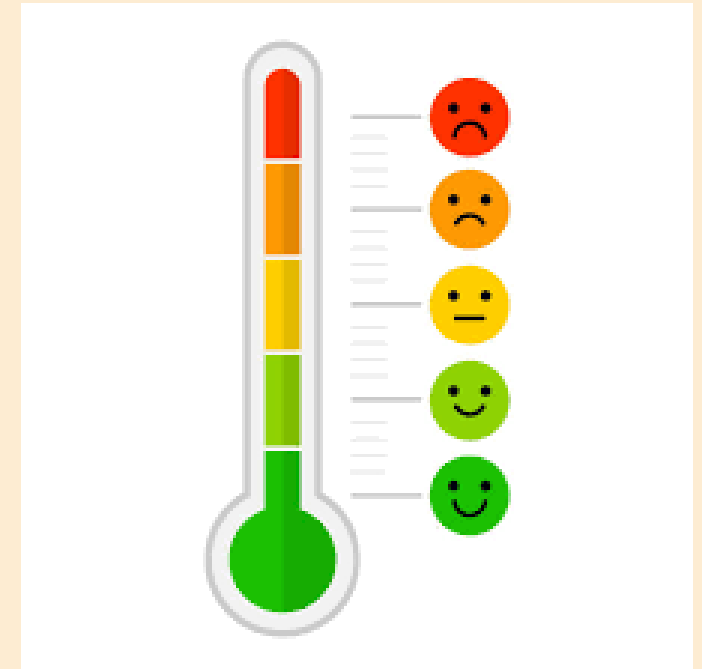
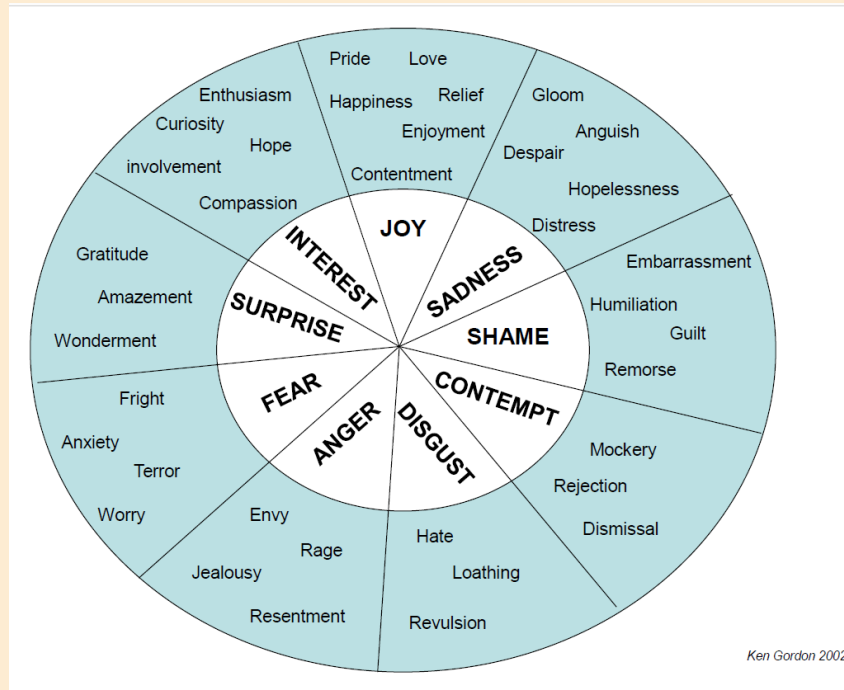


LABELLING EMOTIONS

It can be helpful to ...

- Use Feeling Cards 😊 ☹️
- Sentence completion
- Think about what the behaviour may be trying to communicate

BUILDING EMOTIONAL LITERACY



Be Curious, try to Understand the Problem

What we see Vs
what is
underneath



BUILDING SUPPORT NETWORKS AROUND YOU AND YOUR YOUNG PERSON

- Family and friends
- Support groups
- Hobbies and interests
- Online platforms
- Embracing neuro-affirming spaces and connections



REWARD: BEHAVIOURAL ACTIVATION (BA) CHANGING THE CYCLE OF LOW MOOD



The 2nd 'R' is reward: What positive experiences are being reduced by the low mood?

Be curious and collaborative to work with your child to consider what they might be missing

- There are different types of reward
- Rewards are motivating
- The brains reward system changes in adolescence

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY REWARD?



- Sense of pleasure: What do they get enjoyment from doing?



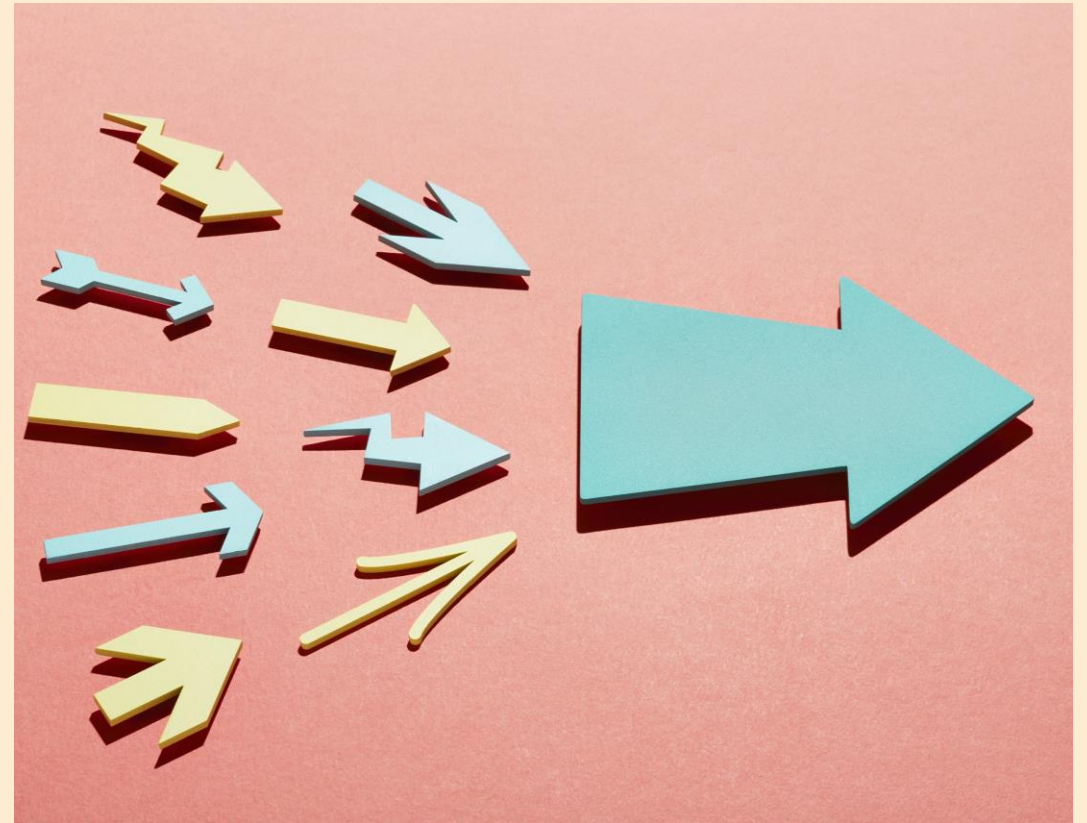
- Sense of achievement: What makes them feel good about themselves?



- Values: What is important to them?



- Goals: Is there something they want to work towards?

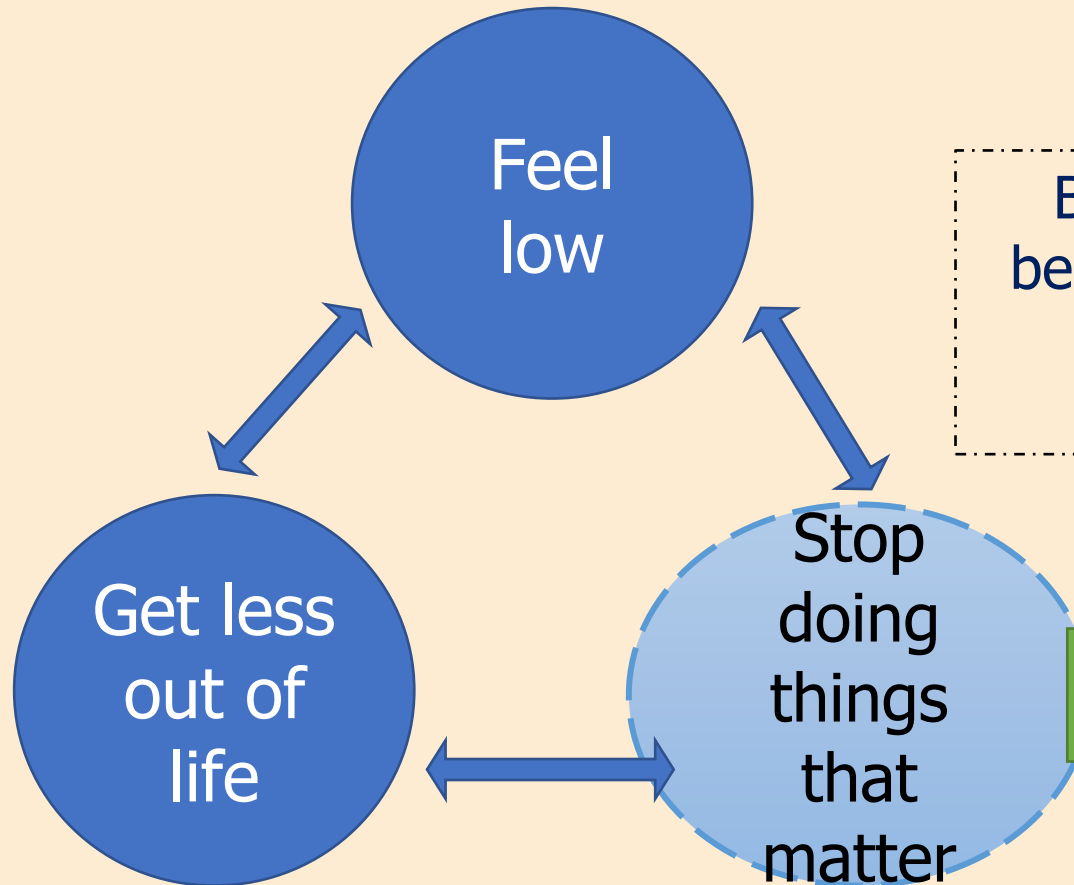




What might your child or young person find rewarding? What would motivate them to engage in an activity that might offer them a positive experience?

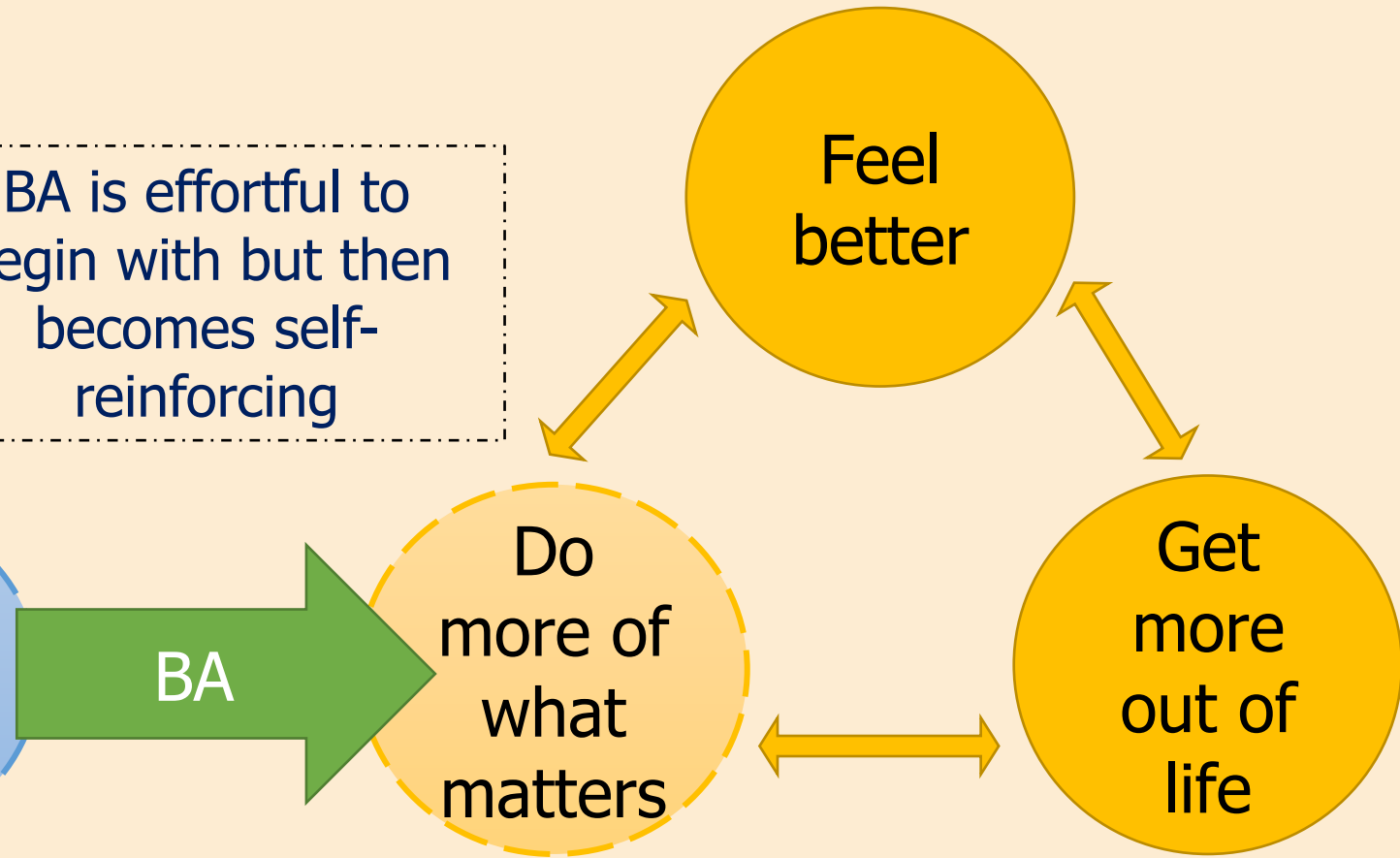
CHANGING THE CYCLE OF LOW MOOD

Vicious cycle of low mood



BA is effortful to begin with but then becomes self-reinforcing

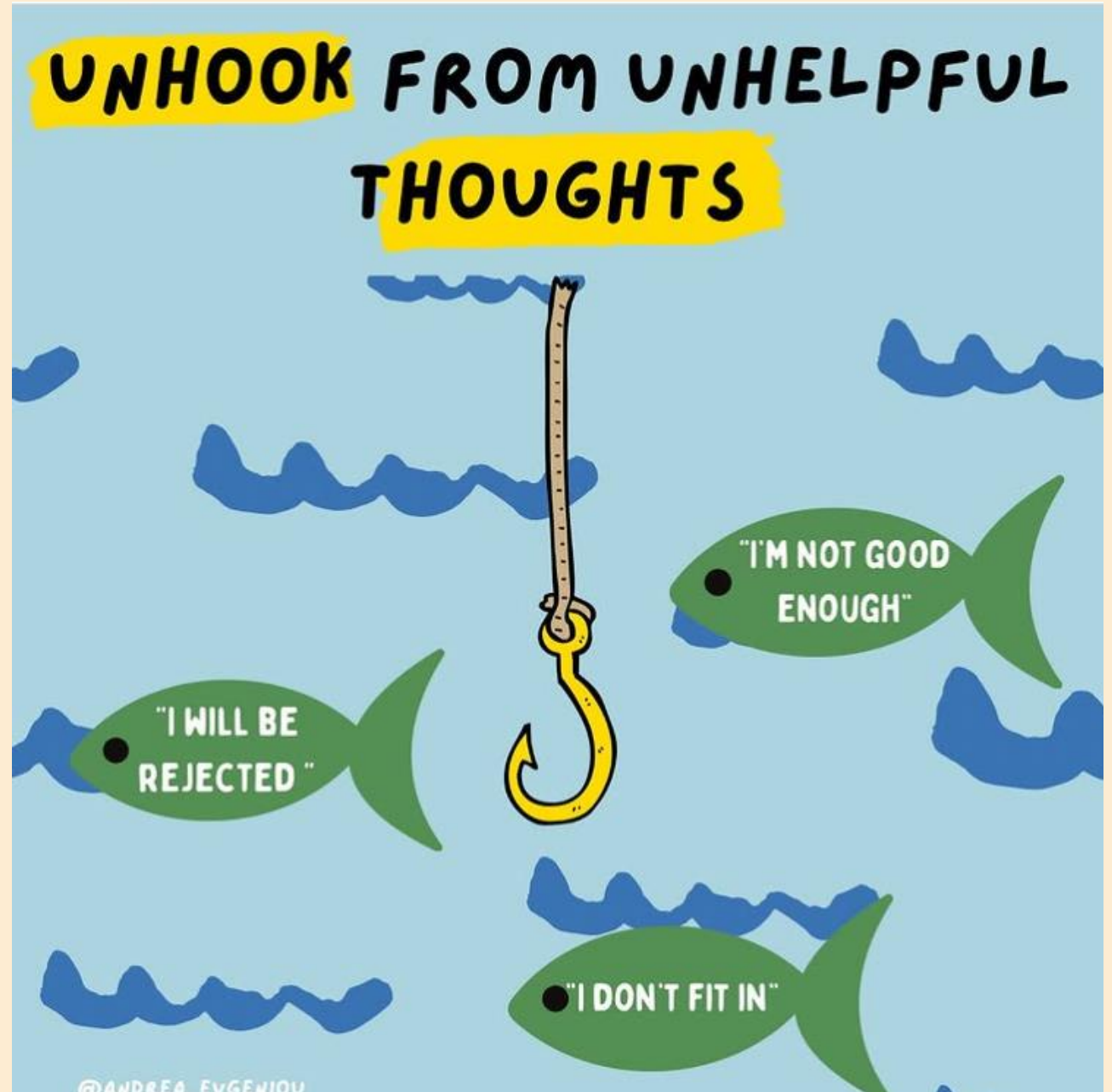
Positive cycle of activity



RUMINATION: UNHOOKING FROM UNHELPFUL THINKING

“The fundamental challenge of being human involves learning when to follow what your mind says and when to simply be aware of your mind while attending to the here and now”

Hayes et al (2012)

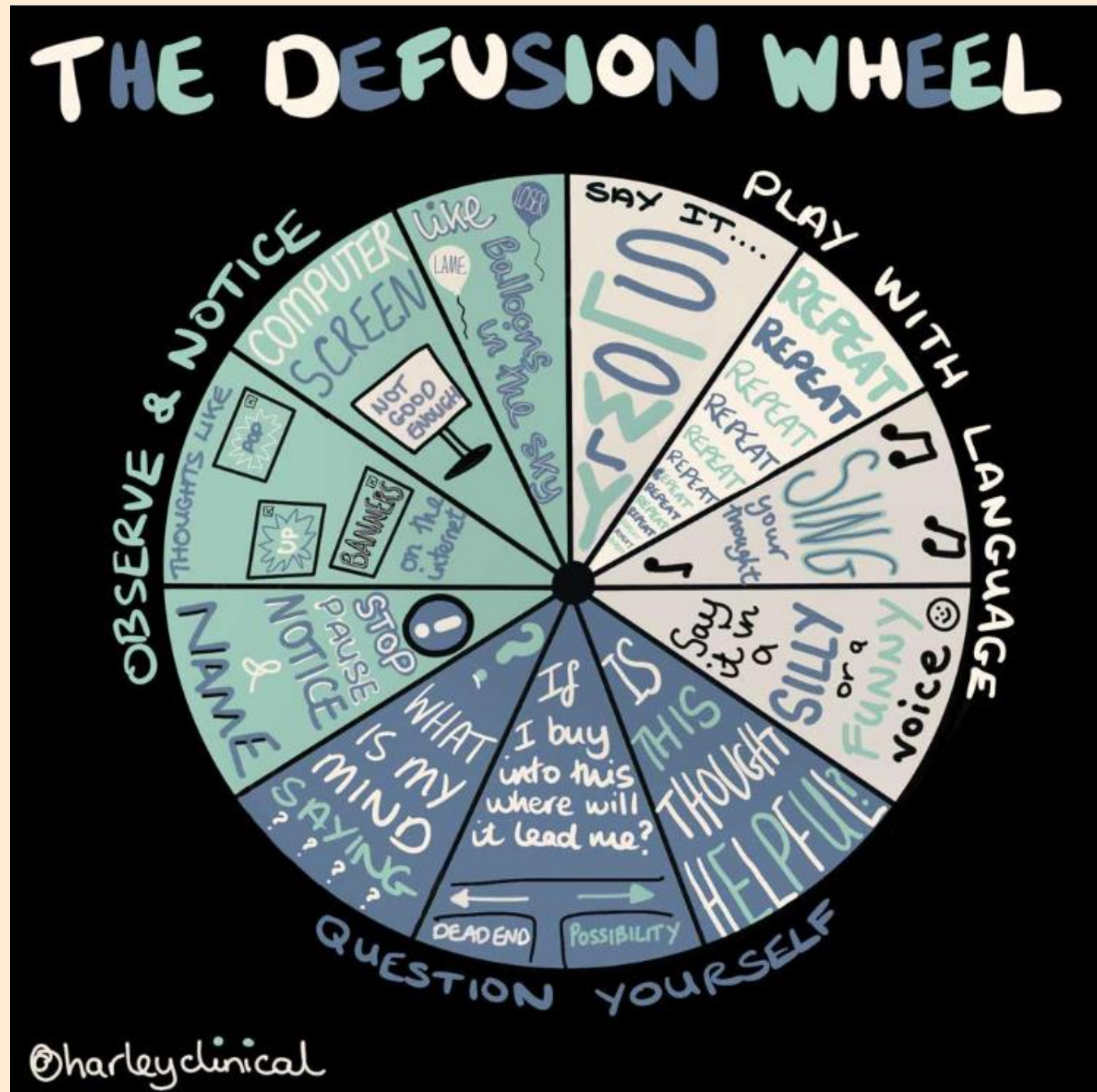


UNHOOKING FROM UNHELPFUL THINKING

Externalise worries using
a worry box or 'worry
monster'

Mindfulness techniques
like leaves on a stream
or clouds in the sky

Diffusion techniques



POSITIVE SELF-TALK

- Celebrating their successes and strengths
- Encouraging and modelling positive self-talk
- Being your child's champion!



‘Listen to your child. Help them manage their reactions. Throw lots of love at the whole thing.’

‘Embrace who your child is , let them be them, support and find ways to enable them to have the same outcome as everyone else’

HOLDING HOPE

‘Listen to your child . Stop and take time to hear them. Evaluate what is their normal.’

‘Always validate there feelings.’

‘It's hard to understand how your child is feeling but try to keep calm & don't take it personally. Your child loves you & trusts you the most’

‘Keep being curious, become the detective and stay resilient. Be your child’s Ambassador, give them a voice. Everyday is a learning day. Talk to Others and ask for support’



What help is out there?

- **School:** tutor, pastoral support, head of year, SENCO
- **Suffolk School Nursing** - School Nursing Service
- Suffolk County Council
- **Emotional Wellbeing Hub:** Information, advice, and support for anyone concerned about the emotional wellbeing and mental health of a child or young person.
<http://www.emotionalwellbeinggateway.org.uk/>
- **NSFT Wellbeing services:** you can self-refer to Wellbeing 16 years + www.wellbeingnands.co.uk
- **Recovery College** | Norfolk and Suffolk NHS
- **GP**

Key resources if you are worried about your young person

- **Young Minds parent helpline** 0808 802 5544 (9am -4.30pm M-F) and webchat service:
<https://www.youngminds.org.uk/parent/parents-helpline-and-webchat/>

- **111, option 2 crisis support**

- **Papyrus – Prevention of Young Suicide**

[Papyrus UK Suicide Prevention | Prevention of Young Suicide \(papyrus-uk.org\)](https://www.papyrus-uk.org/)

- **Psychology in Schools Parent Workshop: Understanding Self Harm in Children/Adolescents**
[Understanding Self-Harm in Children/Adolescents \(youtube.com\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...)

- [MIND urgent help](#)

If you need
urgent mental
health help,
call 111 and
choose option 2



Mental health crisis support 24/7 for people of all ages in Norfolk and Suffolk

Childhood Neurodivergence Parent/carers workshop series



[Neurodiversity online parent/carers workshops - Suffolk SEND Local Offer](#)

Previous Recordings in this Series

Childhood neurodiversity what you need to know as a parent/carer

Watch here: [Childhood Neurodiversity: What You Need to Know as a Parent/Carer](#)

Childhood neurodiversity: supporting social relationships

Watch here: [Childhood Neurodiversity: Supporting Social Relationships](#)

Childhood neurodiversity: supporting your child's education

Watch here: [Childhood Neurodiversity: Supporting Your Child's Education](#)

Childhood neurodiversity: supporting your child with anxiety

Watch here: [Childhood Neurodiversity: Supporting your child with anxiety](#)

Childhood Neurodiversity: Supporting Sleep Difficulties

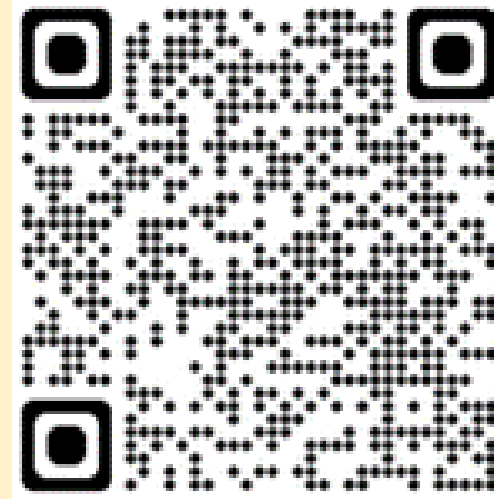
Watch here: [Childhood neurodiversity: Understanding and supporting sleep difficulties workshop](#)

Childhood Neurodiversity: Parental Carer Stress

Watch here: [Childhood Neurodivergence: Managing Parental/Carer Stress](#)

Psychology In Schools: Free Live Workshops And Video Recordings

Upcoming LIVE Parent/Carer
workshops on mental health
www.nsft.uk/workshops Eventbrite



Recorded previous mental health workshops on a range of topics:

- School Avoidance, Tics and Tourette's, Self-harm, Managing Behaviour, Social Media, OCD, Exam stress and more!

www.nsft.nhs.uk/parent-workshops

Recovery College



Recovery College

Open to all those interested in mental health recovery in Norfolk and Suffolk, the Recovery College provides free educational courses to equip you with the skills and strategies to move on with your recovery and/or to support others.

[Recovery College | Norfolk and Suffolk NHS](#)

Discovery college

The Discovery College offers free educational online courses and webinars on mental health topics for 16 - 25 year olds. The courses and webinars are designed so that 16 - 25 year olds can become an expert in discovering themselves and their self care alongside others their age.

[Discovery College | Norfolk and Suffolk NHS](#)



Local Parent Support

- <http://www.suffolklocaloffer.org.uk/>
- [PACT | Parents And Carers Together | Suffolk](#)
- [Suffolk Parent Carer Forum](#)
- [SUFFOLK SENDIASS https://suffolksendiass.co.uk/](https://suffolksendiass.co.uk/)
- [Suffolk Family Carers | Support for unpaid family carers](#)
- [Families Together Suffolk | Local Family Charity | Formerly Homestart Mid And West Suffolk](#)

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**How would you rate your
knowledge of low mood?**

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How would you rate your confidence in supporting your young person with low mood?

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I have found this session helpful

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What are two things you will take away from this session?

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Name one thing that could be improved about this session?

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Feedback Survey

Childhood Neurodiversity:
Supporting Low Mood (LIVE)



<https://forms.office.com/e/L63iGRUKsq>