



## **Developing Resiliency Exercises**

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## **1: Resiliency Assessment:**

### **Evaluating Resiliency Exercise**

*(Robertson 2012)*

#### **PART ONE:**

As a rough initial guide, rate yourself in terms of the following ingredients of resiliency on a scale of 1-10.

1. I have plenty of support from other people in my life ( /10)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. I am able to accept myself for who I really am ( /10)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. I am confident in my ability to cope with adversity ( /10)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. I am good at communicating and interacting with others at times of stress ( /10)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. I am good at facing challenging problems in life and solving them systematically ( /10)
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
6. I cope well with my emotions in the face of adversity ( /10)

**PART TWO:**

Rather than looking at your total score, go back and consider each example individually. For each item above, if you rated it more than zero, ask yourself why. Also, what could you do to increase your score on each item, making it closer to ten?

<b>Question</b>	<b>What made me rate this above a zero?</b>	<b>What could I do to increase the score to make it closer to ten?</b>
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		

## **2: Exploring Previous Resiliency**

Evaluate Previous Resiliency Strategies: Think of a previous time in your life that you considered to be personally demanding and difficult. Think back to how you handled and came through the situation

### **PART ONE:**

1:What was your goal?

2:What was the outcome?

3:What obstacles did you have to overcome?

4:What unpleasant feelings and thoughts do you remember having in the situation?

5:Who if anyone did you receive external help and support from?

6:What specific attitudes and skills helped you cope with the situation?

7:How would you rate your resilience in that situation?

8:Why wasn't it 0%? What strengths and personal qualities helped you?

9:If it wasn't 100%, how could your resilience be improved during similar situations in the future?

10: Based on your experience how might you advise someone else to cope with a similar situation in the future?

### **3: Recognise and Manage Normal Emotions**

Emotions are normal for certain life events and are designed to help us at these times. Learning to recognise and manage these emotions is paramount if we are to maintain an optimum level of functioning and resiliency in life.

The workshop has looked at the role of normal emotions especially ANXIETY and DEPRESSION

You can read further on these emotions by accessing [www.working-minds.org.uk](http://www.working-minds.org.uk)

[www.working-minds.org.uk/documents/what-is-anxiety.pdf](http://www.working-minds.org.uk/documents/what-is-anxiety.pdf)

[www.working-minds.org.uk/documents/what-is-depression.pdf](http://www.working-minds.org.uk/documents/what-is-depression.pdf)

### **4: Develop Increased Emotional Regulation**

It is important to recognise the impact of emotions on our physical and emotional well being as well as to recognise their impact on our functioning at times

Recognising and reducing coping that works against normal emotional processing may look productive in the short term but can maintain distress in the longer term.

Anxiety maintenance coping can be based on avoidance or over-compensating. These types of coping are embedded in our response to our fight flight system but when we are not in immediate actual physical danger these instinctive coping mechanisms can actually serve to reinforce the miss firing of our survival mechanism.

Depression is a normal response to what we perceive as loss or potential loss, or when we have been experiencing pro-longed or extreme anxiety or frustration. Coping behaviours, which can cause our body to start to get depressed even when we are well, are the same coping strategies that seem the easiest to adopt when we feel low. However they actually serve to maintain the problem in the longer term.

These include the following:

- WITHDRAWING FROM OTHERS
- EMOTIONAL AVOIDANCE\*
- REDUCING ACTIVITY
- REDUCING ROUTINE

It is important to keep these types of coping down in general and especially when we feel low or are experiencing any kind of loss in our lives (for example bereavement, change, relationship breakdown etc.)

### \*EMOTIONAL AVOIDANCE

Emotional avoidance is when we attempt to 'control our emotions' and make attempts to avoid emotions as they arise

The problem with this can be where the emotion is a natural consequence of a specific event and as such is designed to be turned on by way of facilitating our coping (*for example grieving although unpleasant is designed to help us process loss*)

Psychological suffering is normal and cannot be avoided.

Rather than attempting to remove suffering, the underlying assumption that unpleasant feelings are a problem needs to be addressed.

### EXAMPLES OF EMOTIONAL AVOIDANCE

Drinking excess alcohol

Comfort eating

Avoiding certain situations or people

Procrastinating

Becoming withdrawn from life

Suppressing to block unpleasant thoughts or emotions

Prolonged worrying

Over-analysis

Gaining insight into situations in life where we have a tendency to feel our emotions heighten is the first step to understanding how we process situations as well as understand if and how we currently cope. Gaining an individualized formulation helps us to look at this. This is now discussed further and followed by an exercise to help.



## **5: Formulation: Recognising Potential Maintenance Factors**

A formulation is an individualised theory of our understanding of a given scenario and is based on the Cognitive behavioural understanding of how we function. We call this the five areas model.

### **A Cognitive Behavioural Model:**

A Cognitive Behavioural (CB) approach is a way of looking at and understanding what is happening in a given situation. It takes into account the various components that are at play in any situation. This can be applied to understanding specific problems such as anxiety or depression (the emotional responses that are most likely keep us in a state whereby we struggle to develop resilience) as well as helping us to understand very specific individual problems that we might be experiencing.

The approach is based on the premise that in any given situation we have five different elements at play that can interact with one another. These elements are:

### **ENVIRONMENT**

This is anything that is external to us and will include other people that we might interact with (for example, family members, friends, managers, work colleagues etc.); it includes external situations (for example, the supermarket, work, the car, a grievance process, your job requirements etc.) and our day-to-day experiences. Basically anything that is external to you as an individual but which can have an influence on you.

### **COGNITIONS**

This is a word to describe our thought processes, the things we tell ourselves consciously and the fleeting thoughts that flash through our mind all the time. These thoughts give meaning to our environment and our experiences. Sometimes we are very conscious of the meaning of things and sometimes these may be more fleeting meanings or associations that you may struggle to be aware of. For example you may feel uncomfortable in a crowd but be unaware of your thoughts about this whereas following an argument with your work colleague you may be aware of the angry thoughts that are running through your mind and fuelling your frustration.

Our thoughts/meanings can be about anything, for example they can be about things in our environment, (“my boss is an idiot!”) about physical sensation (“my chest feels tight, something must be wrong with me”) about a behaviour (“If I leave work before I finish my tasks I am a failure”) or even about an emotion (“oh no I’m feeling anxious again this must mean I am back to square one!”).

As such the meaning we attach to things can drive other areas of our lives. These meanings can be consciously learnt or may be unconsciously associated following previous experiences.

## **EMOTIONS**

Our emotions are the feelings that we have and include experiences like anxiety, stress, anger, guilt, depression, sadness, happiness, joy, excitement, disappointment, frustration etc. Our emotions are on a continuum; we can feel a range of intensity of a single emotion. Different types of cognition/meaning give rise to different types of emotion (as we will see later). Our biology plays a large part in the experience of emotions, without physical changes occurring within our body we could not experience an emotion.

## **BIOLOGY**

By biology we mean anything internal within your body, such as the chemicals and hormones that circulate, your heart beat, the tension in your muscles etc. As mentioned previously changes occur within your body to enable you to feel an emotion, the greater this change the greater the intensity of the emotion.

## **BEHAVIOURS**

Our behaviours encompass the things that we do; this can include both our physical seen behaviours (for example, leaving a situation when you feel anxious) as well as our internal unseen behaviours (for example imagining yourself somewhere else when you feel distressed).

These five areas (ENVIRONMENT, COGNITIONS, EMOTION, BIOLOGY, BEHAVIOUR) interact with one another in a reciprocal fashion with one area influencing another, which in turn influences another, much like a cycle effect as you can see in the diagram below.



Although the above diagram (we call this the formulation process) looks quite simple on paper, it is actually quite complex and each individual has his or her own formulation and vulnerable areas. Simply focusing on one or even two areas will not give the individual the true “formulation” as to the factors that may be causing their emotional distress.

**Example 1:**

If you had an important presentation tomorrow, the way you think about this/make sense of it will determine your emotional response, physical sensations and behaviour.

See the table below: You have a presentation at work tomorrow

<b>COGNITION</b>	<b>EMOTION</b>	<b>BIOLOGY</b>	<b>BEHAVIOUR</b>
“They may think I am stupid”	Fear Apprehension Anxiety	Palpitations Tense Agitated Poor sleep Pre-occupation with event	Cancel the presentation saying you are “ill”
“I had to cancel because I couldn’t cope”	Low Sad Depressed	Heart sink Loss of energy Decreased motivation and drive	Further avoidance Isolate self Avoid communication
“I am no good at my job and I will lose it!”	Anxious Worried Stressed	Heart racing Sweaty palms Churning stomach	Checking behaviours, (seeking reassurance), reduced engagement in role.

As you can see the emotional/biological and behavioural response ranges from anxiety to depression and more importantly, from a single presentation, the client is beginning to spiral into further avoidance and lowering of mood.

## Example 2:

The following scenario further highlights the way that changes in our thoughts, emotions and biology directly affects our behaviour and can worsen over time.

A police officer has been working hard on a specific project for the last 6 months and this has involved intense study and long working hours. He has not seen much of his family and friends and has noticed his sleep pattern become increasingly disturbed.

- **Thought:**

‘My concentration is poor and I feel exhausted all of the time’.

- **Behaviour:**

Stopped going to the gym, increased alcohol intake to help sleep, reduced social contact due to tiredness and increased irritability at home (arguments.)

- **Emotion:**

Fatigue, irritability, fear over future, loss of pleasure.

- **Physical:**

Less active and as such fatigue increases, working longer hours to try to compensate so lack of concentration, slowed thinking, tearfulness and increased anxiety.

- **Environment:**

Less contact with family friends reduced social contact. Increased arguments at home.

The CB Approach is based on the fact that all five areas interlink. It uses well-grounded theories which help us understand normal processes of emotion and can help us to identify any aspects that may be influencing or altering these natural processes. It focuses on direct change in the areas of cognition and behaviour because these are the only two areas of all five that we have the ability to take direct control over, in doing so we can indirectly influence the other areas of emotion and biology.

Often when individuals’ begin to struggle with emotions, we lose the ability to access logical thinking and as such we can engage in unhealthy behaviours that can actually REINFORCE our symptoms rather than reduce them. Often, the opportunity to sit with a trained individual/coach can help to “see the bigger picture” and promote recovery, however, we can achieve this on an individual level if we have a framework to “formulate” the problem.

It is NORMAL to have emotional reactions and distress, but it is when this goes on for too long that we can develop more pronounced symptoms including anxiety and depression that in turn can take us on the spiral downwards.

## FORMULATION EXERCISES:

The 'formulation' exercises below are designed to help us look at this bigger picture.

Part one of the exercise will focus on two case studies to help us recognise these processes.

Part two will enable you to work on some personal formulations.

### Part One - Case Studies:

#### Case 1: John

Background:

John is a senior manager at a large firm and oversees 2 large sites. He has worked at the company for 15 years and has always believed that he has worked hard and done a good job to be proud of.

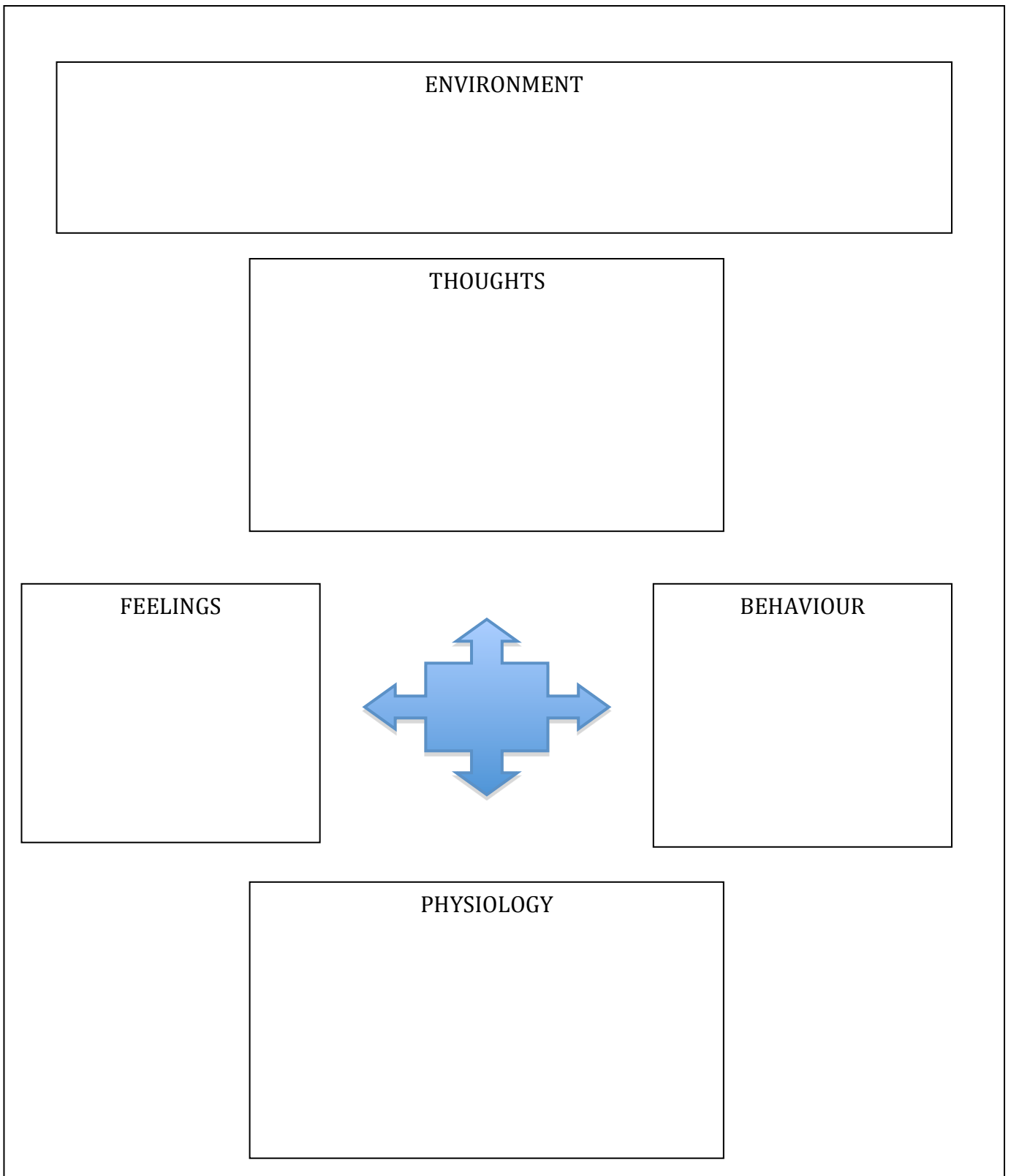
The company was bought out 2 years ago and has undergone a lot of changes. These include: tighter budgets and so fewer staff; John's portfolio of work has increased; and targets are more demanding to keep pace with competitors. He doesn't feel that he has sufficient resources to work in the same way as he used to and is feeling increasingly frustrated that his manager does not seem to listen to his concerns. He knows that he was able to do the job well in the way he used to do it, but the new environment means that he often feels he is failing.

He is finding it difficult to switch off from work, sometimes taking work home with him. He is now having trouble sleeping. He is becoming increasingly irritable with family members and this is leading to personal life stress.

Exercise:

1. Consider the employee's problem from the five areas already discussed today in the sheet below.
2. Based on your formulation what factors are contributing to John's on-going problems?
3. List some of the possible strategies that John could utilise in order to reduce his distress and improve resiliency.
4. List some of the possible strategies that the employer could utilise to **assist** John in reducing **his distress and increase his resiliency**.
5. Consider the pros and cons of each of the options
6. Suggest the most suitable resolution based on the Cognitive Behavioural Model of resiliency and explain why

**Formulation:**

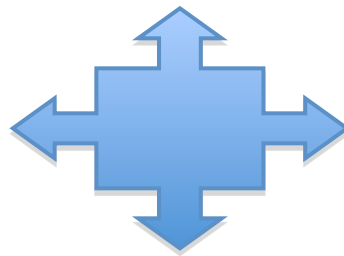


**Formulation:**

ENVIRONMENT  
Change in Management Policies/Processes  
Work Structure Change

THOUGHTS  
They don't listen to me  
I can't cope  
I was doing the job fine the way I was  
Things used to be a lot better  
They should listen to me  
They are not giving me the resources I need to do the job  
They are breaking up my marriage

FEELINGS  
Stress  
Irritability  
Frustration  
Anger



BEHAVIOUR  
Taking work home  
Shouting at kids  
Isolating himself at home  
Social isolation  
Drinking more at home

PHYSIOLOGY  
Poor Sleep  
Poor concentration  
Poor Memory  
Lethargy



## Case 2: Julie

### Background

Julie is 28 years old, she has recently moved into a new role in the company. She works as a design engineer. In addition she purchased a house last year but has had some recent problems with her finances because she has had several bills to pay out that were unexpected. She has noticed that she is struggling to get to sleep and is worrying about her money situation. She is concerned that she “may not have enough money to get through the month”. She is waking throughout the night and is feeling tired when she wakes up.

She has started to get in early and is working late to check her work. She is asking reassurance from a colleague at work who is now doing some of her tasks for her. She is becoming increasingly anxious and is telling her self “I will make a mistake and be in trouble, then I could lose my job”. When she gets reassurance from her work colleagues that what she is doing is ok she feels this eases her distress. However the next time she has to complete a task she worries that it will be wrong and seeks advice again. She worries that “everyone will get fed up of carrying me and I will get into trouble”. She tries to keep in the background at work and says little in meetings, as she is concerned she will say something wrong. She is reporting some irritable bowel symptoms and has been to the pharmacist for some medicine to help this.

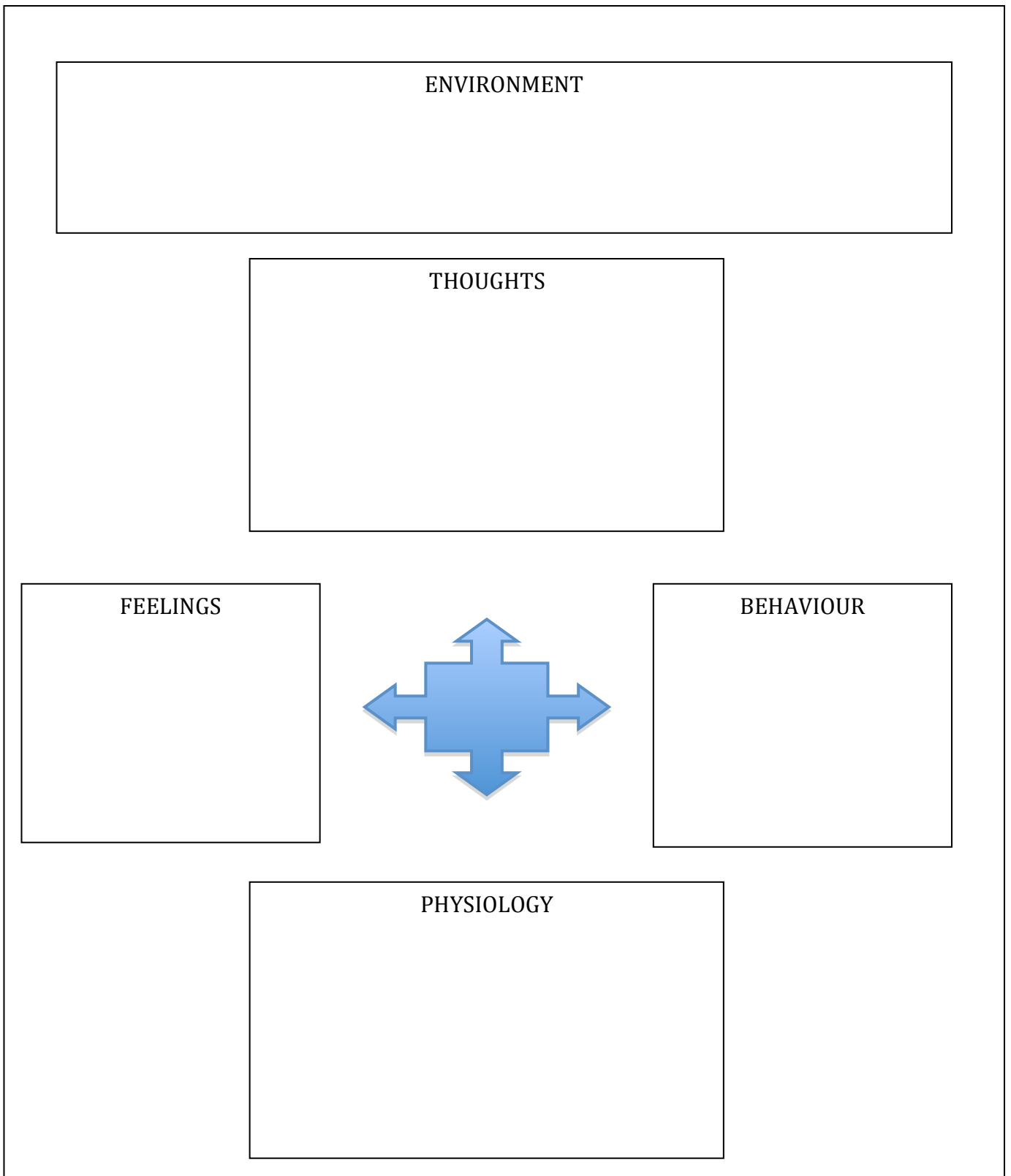
She believes she is struggling with her new role, as there are some aspects of it that she has not done before. However she feels that the majority is work she should be able to pick up easily. She is unsure about the change in her role now and is finding that she is worrying about losing her job and having thoughts that she should not have moved. She is struggling to concentrate at work and has made some mistakes.

She lives alone but has a boyfriend she has been seeing for a few months. She recently noticed some feelings of anxiety when she was out in the pub at the weekend with him and has started to avoid going out and is trying to get her boyfriend to stay in with her. She has also stopped going to the gym because of this.

### Exercise:

1. Consider the employee’s problem from the five areas already discussed today in the sheet below.
2. Based on your formulation what factors are contributing to Julia’s on-going problems?
3. List some of the possible strategies that Julia could utilise in order to reduce her distress and improve resiliency.
4. List some of the possible strategies that the employer could utilise to **assist** Julia in reducing **her distress and increase her resiliency**.
5. Consider the pros and cons of each of the options
6. Suggest the most suitable resolution based on the Cognitive Behavioural Model of resiliency and explain why

**Formulation:**



**Formulation:**

**ENVIRONMENT**

New role at work. Some new elements to her job. Financial difficulties. Colleague doing some of her work. Lives alone and recently purchased new house. Has a boyfriend

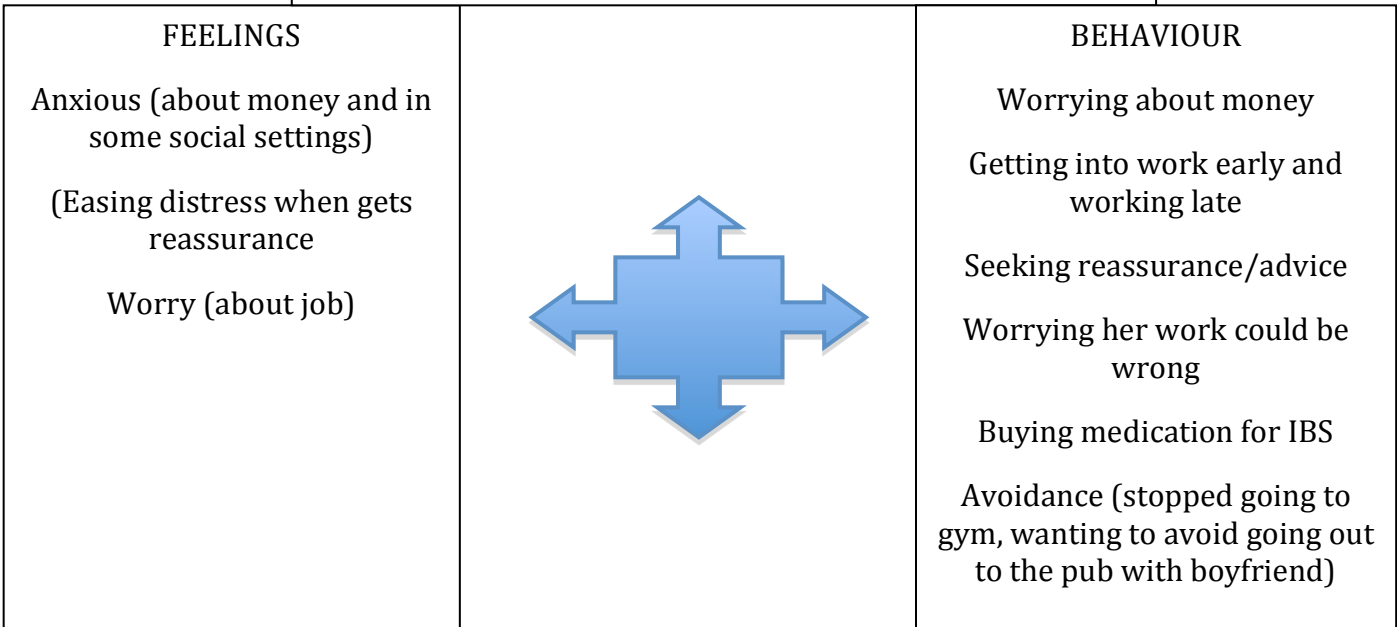
**THOUGHTS**

“I may not have enough money to get through the month”

“I will make a mistake, be in trouble and I could lose my job”

“everyone will get fed up of me and I will get into trouble”

“I am struggling with my new role”



**PHYSIOLOGY**

Struggling to get to sleep

Waking throughout night

Tired on waking

**IBS**

## Personal Formulation

Think of a recent situation that you found difficult and would like to address

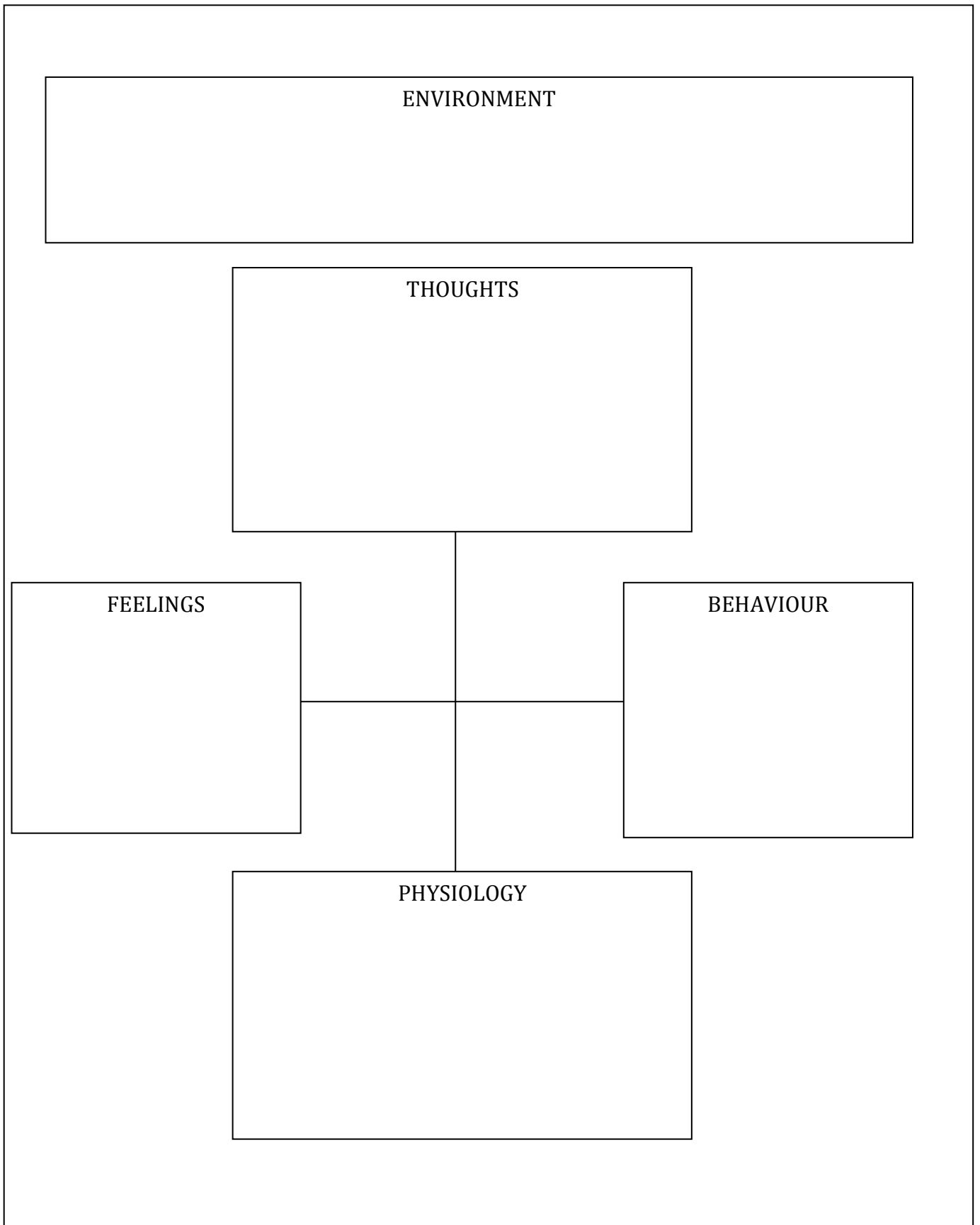
Use the same format that you used for the case studies to formulate your situation and identify areas that might help based on this new understanding

### Details of the situation:

### Exercise:

1. Consider your problem from the five areas already discussed today in the sheet below.
2. Based on your formulation what factors are contributing to your on-going problems?
3. List some of the possible strategies that you could utilise in order to reduce your distress and improve resiliency.
4. List some of the possible strategies that the employer could utilise to **assist** you in reducing **your distress and increase your resiliency**.
5. Consider the pros and cons of each of the options
6. Suggest the most suitable resolution based on the Cognitive Behavioural Model of resiliency and explain why

**Formulation:**



## 6: The Function of Acceptance:

It is often that when we review some of our formulations that there are areas outside of our control and influence that are in the main the cause or reason for our distress or unhappiness (*for example when a relationship breaks down or when we lose a loved one, or even a manager whom we don't like*). At these times we need to recognise the limits of our influences and work on accepting issues, which we may not like, or want to accept. If we find ourselves fighting against something over which we have little or no control we can find that we become even more frustrated and unwell and the situation still does not change.

The study below shows how the actual fight can become the problem.

- In a recent study on 'coping with noise' it was found that often people's ability to manage noise (e.g. noisy neighbours, traffic noise etc.) varied from person to person. Some people feeling as though the noise was 'driving them mad' and others feeling less upset by the noise, perhaps 'barely noticing it after a while'
- The study showed that those individuals who were more resilient to the noise were more accepting of it and that those who initially struggled could be taught coping skills that reduced their upset with it, thus reducing their distress
- The study showed that the process by which people acquired resilience revolved around this concept of acceptance.
- Individuals reported that they had 'let go of their struggle with it' and thereby become less pre-occupied with it. This had ironically led to them being less pre-occupied with it and led to them being aware of the sound less often.
- When we struggle to accept something that is distressing to us and is out of our control to influence, we naturally and unconsciously have it on 'the back of our minds'
- This means that every piece of data that is taken in and processed by our brain is filtered through this and where the data is related in anyway this becomes something of importance and is brought to our attention.

Taking time to recognise if we are engaging in a fight over something out of our control can be helpful in reducing the loss of energy and the heightening levels of frustration that may accompany this. We can then often focus our energy more productively in areas of influence, which will challenge and empower us rather than the opposite.

## **7: The Amygdala Hijack: Accessing the Meanings Behind our Distress**

This is when we experience an emotion that is out of proportion to the situation that may have triggered it

This can be related to a build up of distress that is triggered by a small event (the straw that breaks the camels back). Recognising our early signs of emotion can help to prevent this build up. An irrational CORE BELIEF can also trigger it

Recognising our 'amygdala triggers' can help us manage these better.

The exercise below looks at a process that we can use to help us determine the beliefs behind these hijacks and ways that we can recognise these beliefs and specific triggers to help us manage them better in the future.

### **PART ONE**

#### **List experiences that you found difficult in the past?**

Consider:

- What pressures am I feeling?
- What is difficult for me now?
- What difficulties am I expecting?
- What feels distressing?

## PART TWO

A) Think of a really clear example of a time when you experienced a distressing/difficult emotion.

*(For example, frustration, sadness, fear, distress, anger, jealousy, embitterment)*

Whether it happened today or last week, recall some of the details of the event and give it a name.

*(For example, "getting some negative feedback from my manager", "my friend not returning my calls to arrange a night out", "having a dispute with my colleague", "my daughter shouting at me and storming out", "feeling I'm being treated unfairly at work" etc.)*

### Details of the event:

B) Now begin to think about the meaning of the event, and the emotions and actions at the time.

Using the table on the next page, record the **activating event** in the first column (for example "having a dispute with my colleague").

In the second column (**beliefs**) write down what the event meant to you, what were your thoughts about the event at the time (for example "He thinks I'm stupid!", "he's got no respect for what I do for this team!", "I'm not valued", "he is thick and should never have got the job")

In the third column (**consequences**), list the emotions that you were feeling at the time (for example, upset, angry,) as well as any response you made (for example, phoned my friend to tell her, started to look on the internet at more advanced courses I could do)



**ABC: (Albert Ellis's Model)**

<b>ACTIVATING EVENT</b>	<b>BELIEFS/VALUES/MEANING</b>	<b>CONSEQUENCES</b> <b>1. EMOTIONAL</b> <b>2. RESPONSES</b>

This process will give you an idea of the beliefs that are triggering your emotional responses and help to identify any coping that maintain this. The function of this exercise is to raise awareness of your beliefs so that you can manage them better.

You can work further in this area accessing PDF at <http://www.working-minds.org.uk/documents/accessing-meanings.pdf>

## **8: Developing our Protective Behaviours**

- Exercise
- Social support and Communication skills
- Managing your time and priorities
- Effective problem solving
- Relaxation and meditation
- What makes you happy?

The areas above have all been proven to increase our resilience and help us to handle pressure more effectively. There are many training workshops that are already in existence that can help to target these areas if you feel that any are in need of development.

The latter one 'what makes you happy' will however be addressed here:

## 8: What Makes You Happy?

### PART ONE

List experiences that you found positive in the past?

Consider:

- What do I have fun doing?
- What do I get enthusiastic about?
- Who do I enjoy sharing experiences with?
- When do I sleep well at night?
- What aspects of my life am I enjoying?

### PART TWO

A) Think of a really clear example of a time when you experienced a positive emotion.

*(For example, gratitude, pleasure, satisfaction, pride, interest, hope, joy, happiness)*

Whether it happened today or last week, recall some of the details of the event and give it a name.

*(For example, "getting some positive feedback from my manager", "my friend calling me after a difficult day", "enjoying a night out with my friends", "getting a good grade on my assignment", "seeing my son laughing" etc.)*

### Details of the event:

--

B) Now begin to think about the meaning of the event, and the emotions and actions at the time.

Using the table on the next page, record the **activating event** in the first column (for example “getting a good grade on my assignment”).

In the second column (**beliefs**) write down what the event meant to you, what were your thoughts about the event at the time (for example “I’ve achieved something that’s really important to me!” “My partner will be pleased that all the hard work has paid off”, “it’s important for me to try new things and persevere with them”)

In the third column (**consequences**), list the emotions that you were feeling at the time (for example, happy, proud) as well as any response you made (for example, phoned my friend to tell her, started to look on the internet at more advanced courses I could do)

**ABC: (Albert Ellis's Model)**

<b>ACTIVATING EVENT</b>	<b>BELIEFS/VALUES/MEANING</b>	<b>CONSEQUENCES</b> <b>1. EMOTIONAL</b> <b>2. RESPONSES</b>

## 9: Resiliency Plan

Setting goals can help you live life in accord with your values, and are a useful way to keep your resiliency plan on track.

Once you have identified the most important values and areas of your life to work on, as well as behaviours that you have recognised may be working against your resiliency- try to identify specific achievable goals (outcomes) that are consistent with them.

VALUES	LONG TERM GOALS	SHORT TERM GOALS	FIRST STEPS