

Health and wellness initiatives - Lunch and Learn

***Psychological resilience: strategies for strengthening mental health during isolation***

**Associate Professor Dixie Statham**

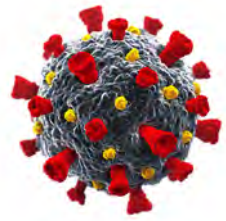
Psychology Discipline, School of Science, Psychology and Sport

26 August 2020

# Overview

1. Mental health during isolation: what do we know?
2. How do we define and measure mental health?
3. How can I improve my mental health and increase my resilience: What helps?

# Mental health during isolation: what do we know?



Review paper: Serafina, G., Parmigiani, B., Amerino, A., Aguglia, A., Sher, L., Amore, M. (2020). The psychological impact of COVID-19 on the mental health in the general population. *QMJ: An International Journal of Medicine*, 113, 8, 531-537. <https://doi.org/10.1093/qjmed/hcaa201>

Eight studies reviewed:

Restrictions and Lockdowns: isolation was associated with feelings of uncertainty, anxiety, pervasive loneliness, depression, fatigue, boredom; distress, impaired cognitive functioning and decision making, increased alcohol use.

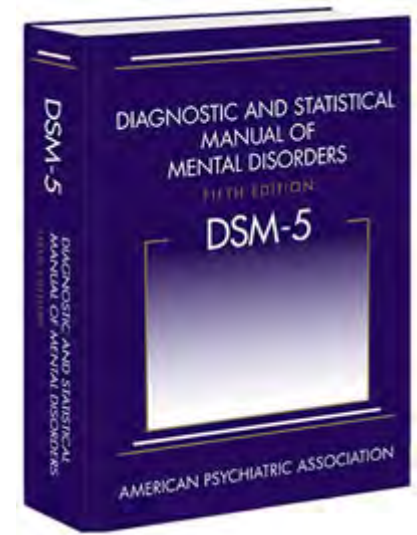
Quarantine: prevalence of emotional disturbance, depression, stress, mood alterations and irritability, insomnia, post-traumatic stress symptoms, anger, and emotional exhaustion was higher in individuals who experienced quarantine compared to those who did not.



# How do we measure mental health?

## Anxiety

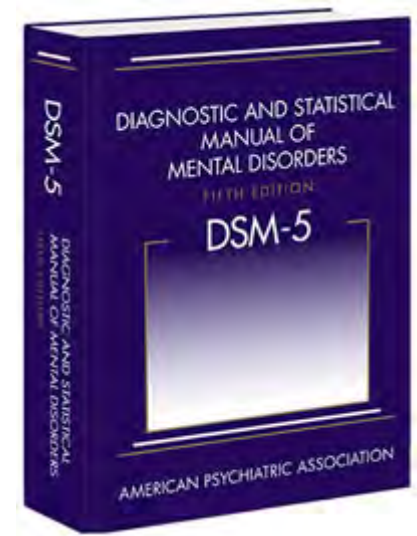
1. Excessive anxiety and worry occurring most days, about several events (e.g., work or school performance)
2. It is difficult to control the worry
3. The worry and anxiety are associated with 3 or more of these symptoms:
  - Restlessness or feeling keyed up or on edge
  - Being easily fatigued
  - Difficulty concentrating or mind going blank
  - Irritability
  - Muscle tension
  - Sleep disturbance (difficulty falling asleep, staying asleep, or restless, unsatisfying sleep)



# How do we measure mental health?

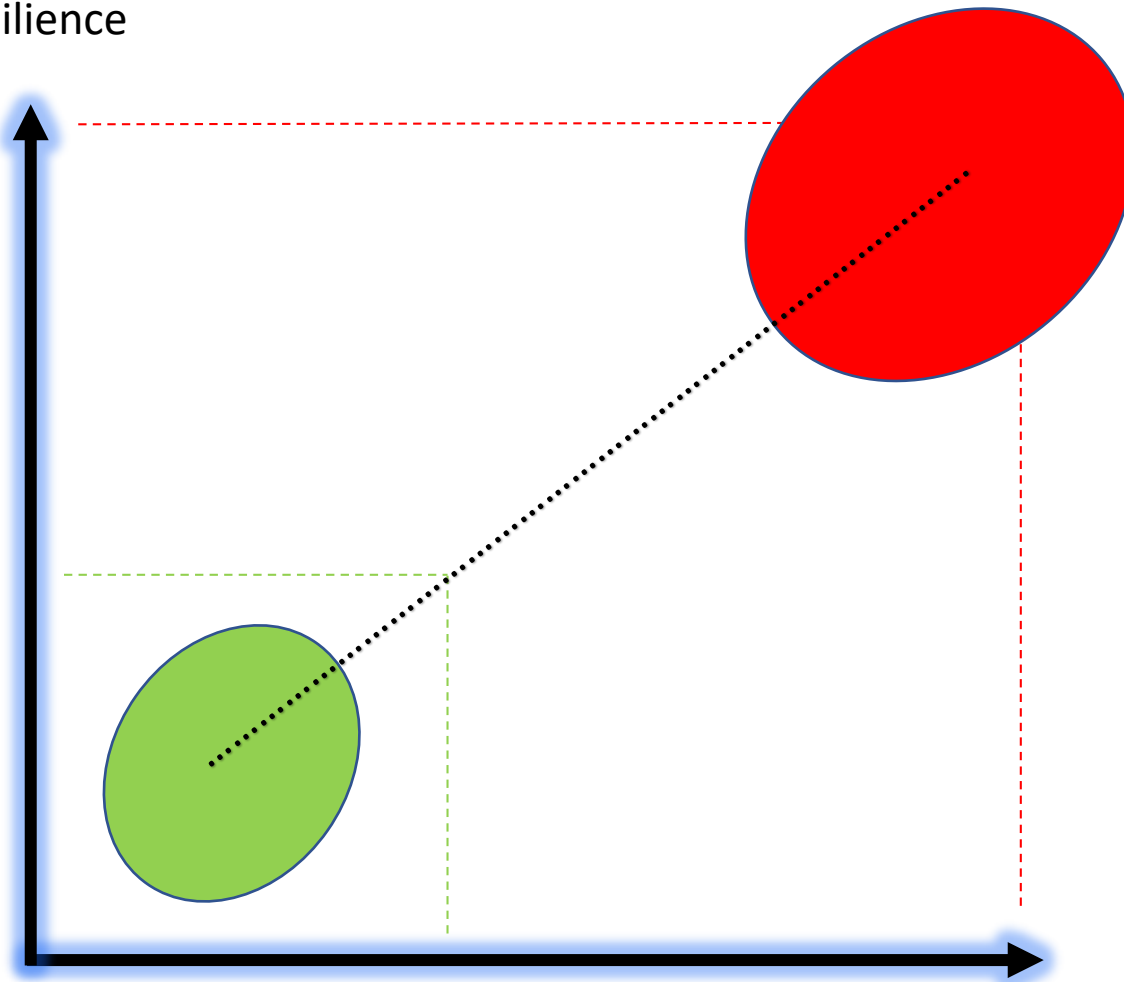
## Depression

1. Depressed mood most of the day, nearly every day (feeling sad, empty, hopeless, tearful)
2. Markedly diminished interest or pleasure in all, or almost all, activities, most of the day, nearly every day
3. A change of more than 5% in body weight, or an increase or decrease in appetite, nearly every day
4. Sleep disturbance (insomnia, or, excessive sleeping)
5. Feeling restless or agitated, or, feeling extremely slowed down
6. Fatigue or loss of energy nearly every day
7. Feelings of worthlessness or inappropriate and excessive guilt
8. Poor concentration, indecisiveness nearly every day
9. Recurrent thoughts of death (not just fear of dying), recurrent suicidal thoughts



Five symptoms including either #1 or #2

High emotional distress  
Weak resilience



Low emotional distress  
Strong resilience

High emotional distress  
Weak resilience

# How do we measure mental health?

Depression and Anxiety

[Depression Anxiety and Stress Scale \(DASS42\)](#)

normal → mild → moderate → severe → extremely severe

Depression

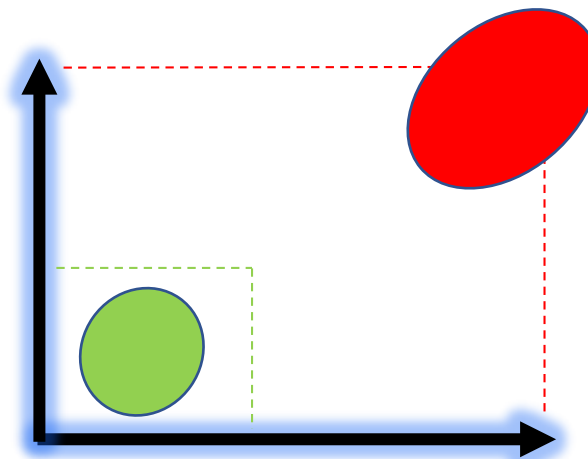
[Patient Health Questionnaire \(PHQ-9\)](#)

minimal → mild → moderate → moderately → severe → severe

Anxiety

[Generalized Anxiety Disorder \(GAD-7\) Scale](#)

mild → moderate → severe

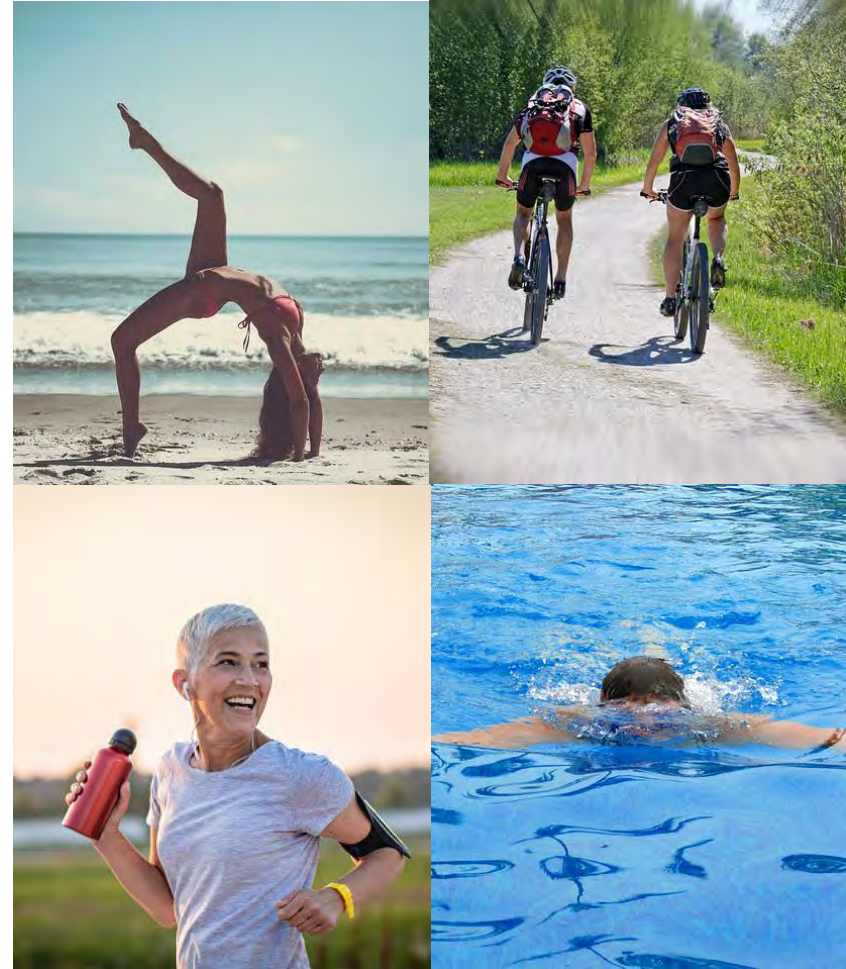


# What helps?



# What helps to improve mental health and resilience?

## EXERCISE



# What helps to improve mental health and resilience?

## DIET



# What helps to improve mental health and resilience?

## POSITIVE CONNECTIONS



# What helps to improve mental health and resilience?

## MEDICATION



# What helps to improve mental health and resilience?

## PSYCHOTHERAPY

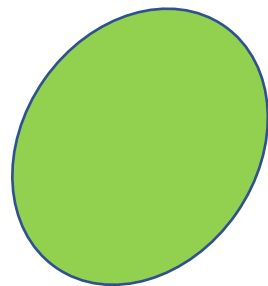
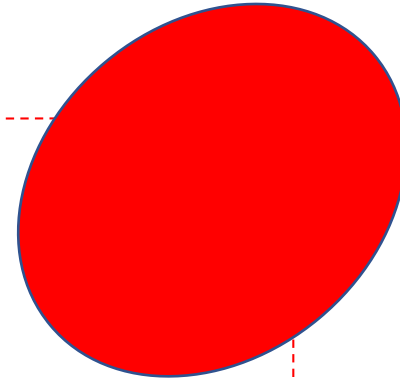


Does everyone need  
cognitive therapy?

# Does everyone need Cognitive Therapy? (No, but...)

High emotional distress  
Weak resilience

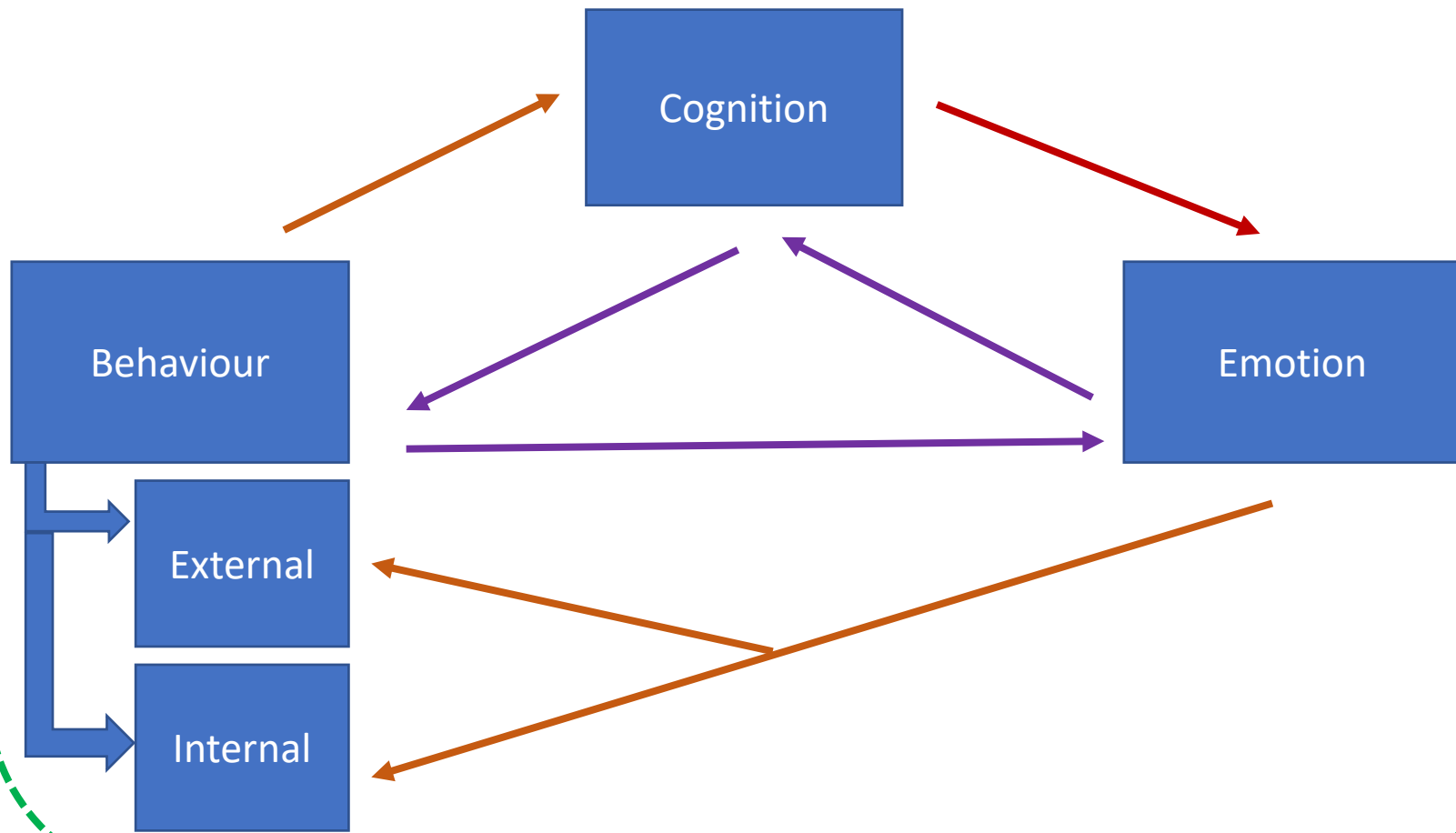
Understanding and using evidenced-based cognitive techniques is helpful for anyone wanting to improve their psychological functioning and resilience.



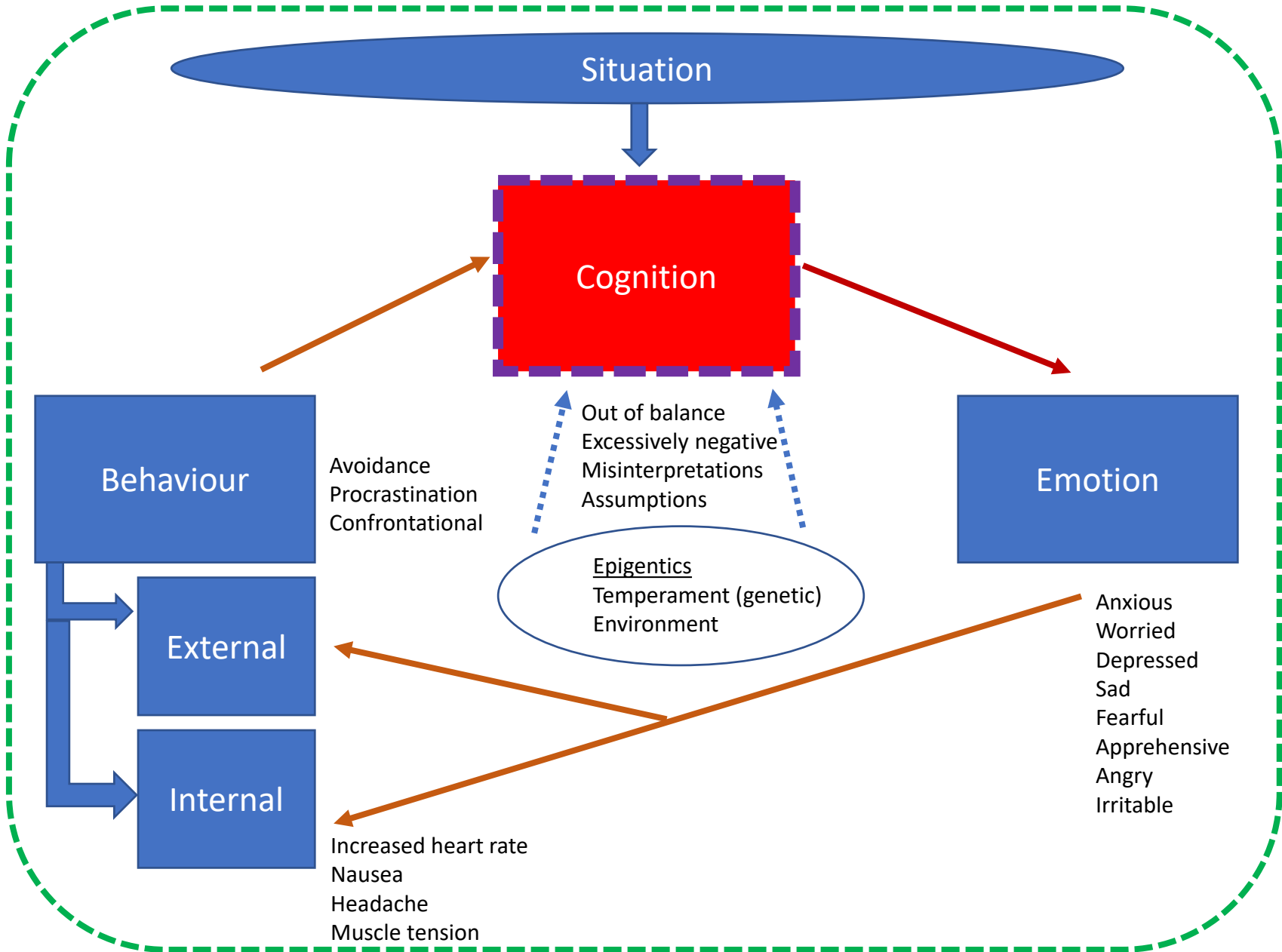
Low emotional distress  
Strong resilience

High emotional distress  
Weak resilience

# Cognitive Therapy – The Model

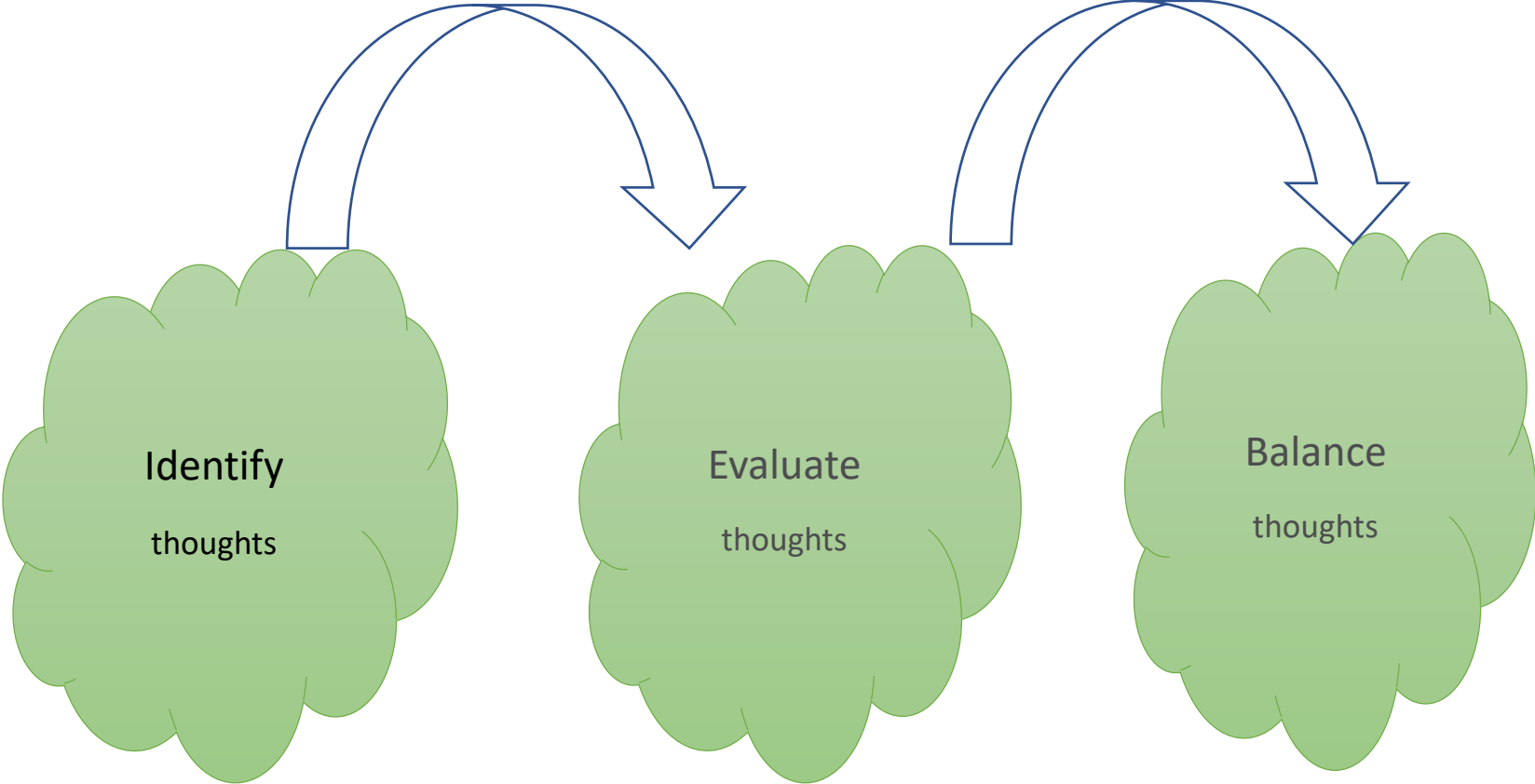






# How can I use this model?

# A Three Step Process



# Step 1. Identify

*The out-of-balance, negative, exaggerated or unrealistic/distorted patterns of thinking which can often occur automatically, and lead to the onset and the continuation of negative psychological states (frustration, anger, anxiety, depression...)*

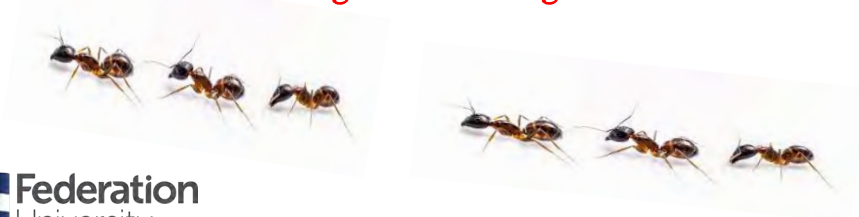
## Common types:

- Polarised thinking (black and white thinking).....thinking in extremes, something is either all good or all bad
- Overgeneralisation.....making global attributions; tendency to use “always” and “never”
- Catastrophising.....thinking that the worst consequences will always occur
- Personalisation.....taking things personally, i.e., blaming yourself for circumstances that are not your fault, or are beyond your control

## Common types:

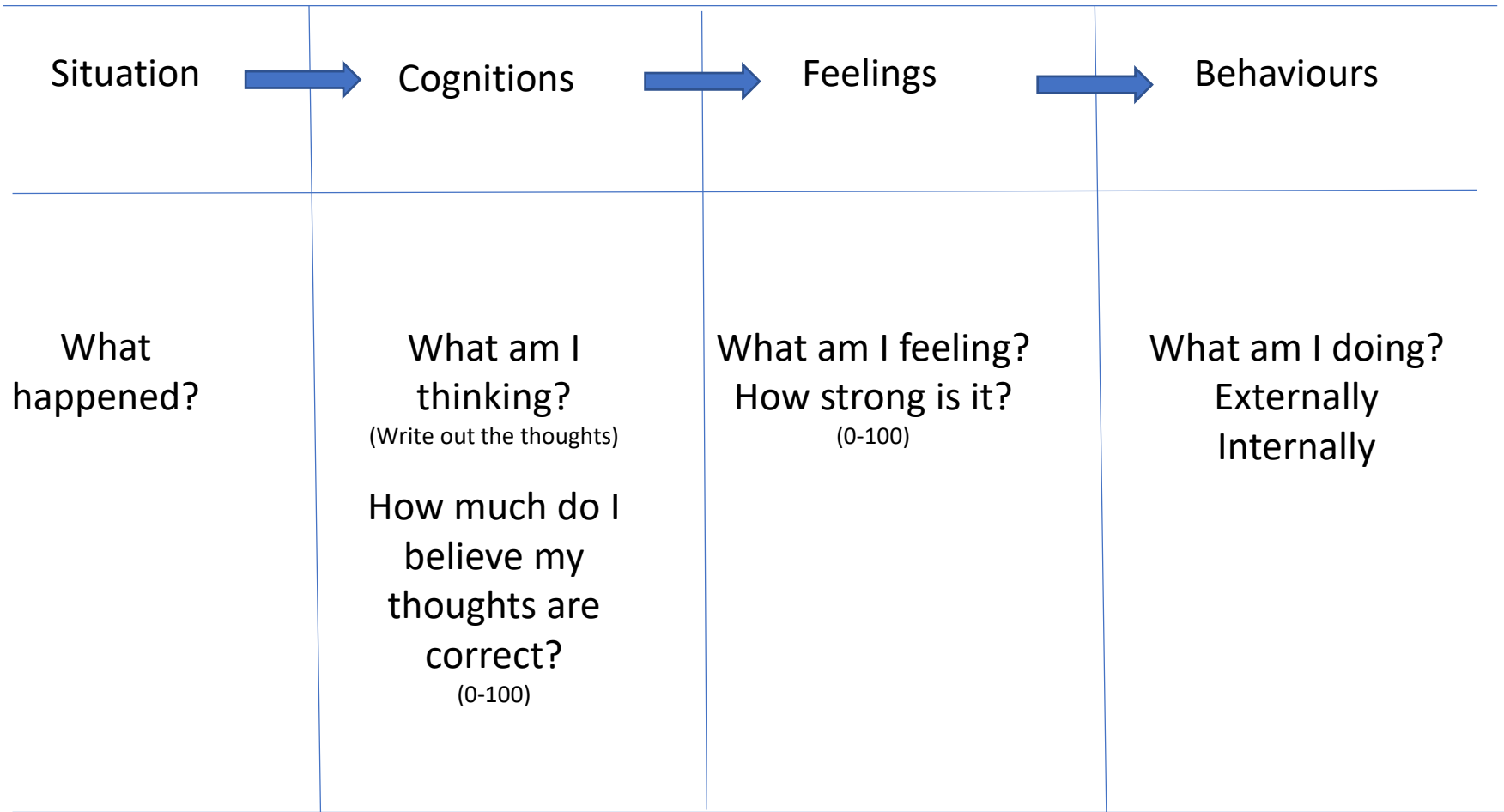
- Mind-reading.....assuming that you know what others are thinking, without any evidence
- Filtering .....ignoring any positives and focussing exclusively on negatives
- “Should”.....telling yourself what you ‘should’ do, and evaluating yourself negatively when you don’t do the ‘should’
- Emotional reasoning.....believing that the way you feel about a situation is a reliable indicator of reality, rather than looking for evidence
- Labelling.....attaching critical, blaming labels to oneself (harsh self-criticism) and to others

## Automatic Negative Thoughts (ANTS)



# The *Thought Record*

Step 1: Identify:



# The Thought Record

## Situation

I forgot about an important meeting where I had to present a report on my team's progress to the senior manager

## Cognitions

I'm an idiot  
This is a disaster  
My manager will think I can't do my job  
I've let everyone down  
The team will be angry with me  
I'll never get promoted now

labelling

## Feelings

Anxious  
Guilty  
Afraid

## Behaviours

Avoidance:  
Don't answer the phone  
Avoid my team members  
Avoid my manager  
Tense  
Shaky  
Tearful

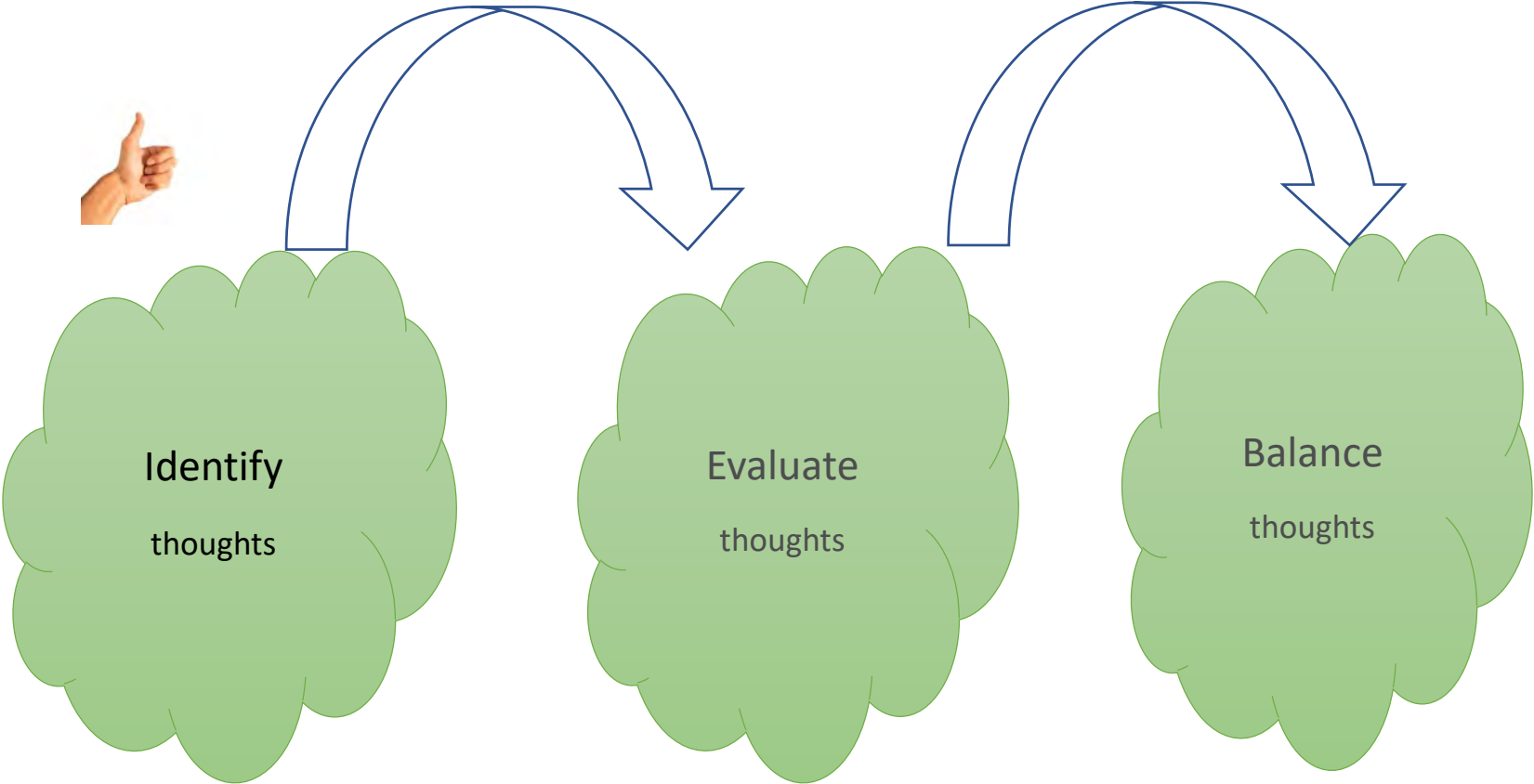
mind reading

catastrophising

polarised thinking



# A Three Step Process



# Step 2. Evaluate

My thought (s):

---

---

What evidence do I have that supports my thought?

---

---

What evidence do I have that does not support my thought?

---

---

What would I say to a friend if they were thinking this?

---

---

Am I worrying about something I can't control?

---

---

How does this thinking help me?

---



# Evaluate

Is there possibly another reason, other than what I'm thinking, that would explain this?

---

---

Am I interpreting this situation without all the evidence?

---

---

What is the worst possible thing that could happen? (Am I catastrophising?)

---

---

Am I basing my thoughts on facts or on feelings?

---

---

Could I be misinterpreting the evidence?

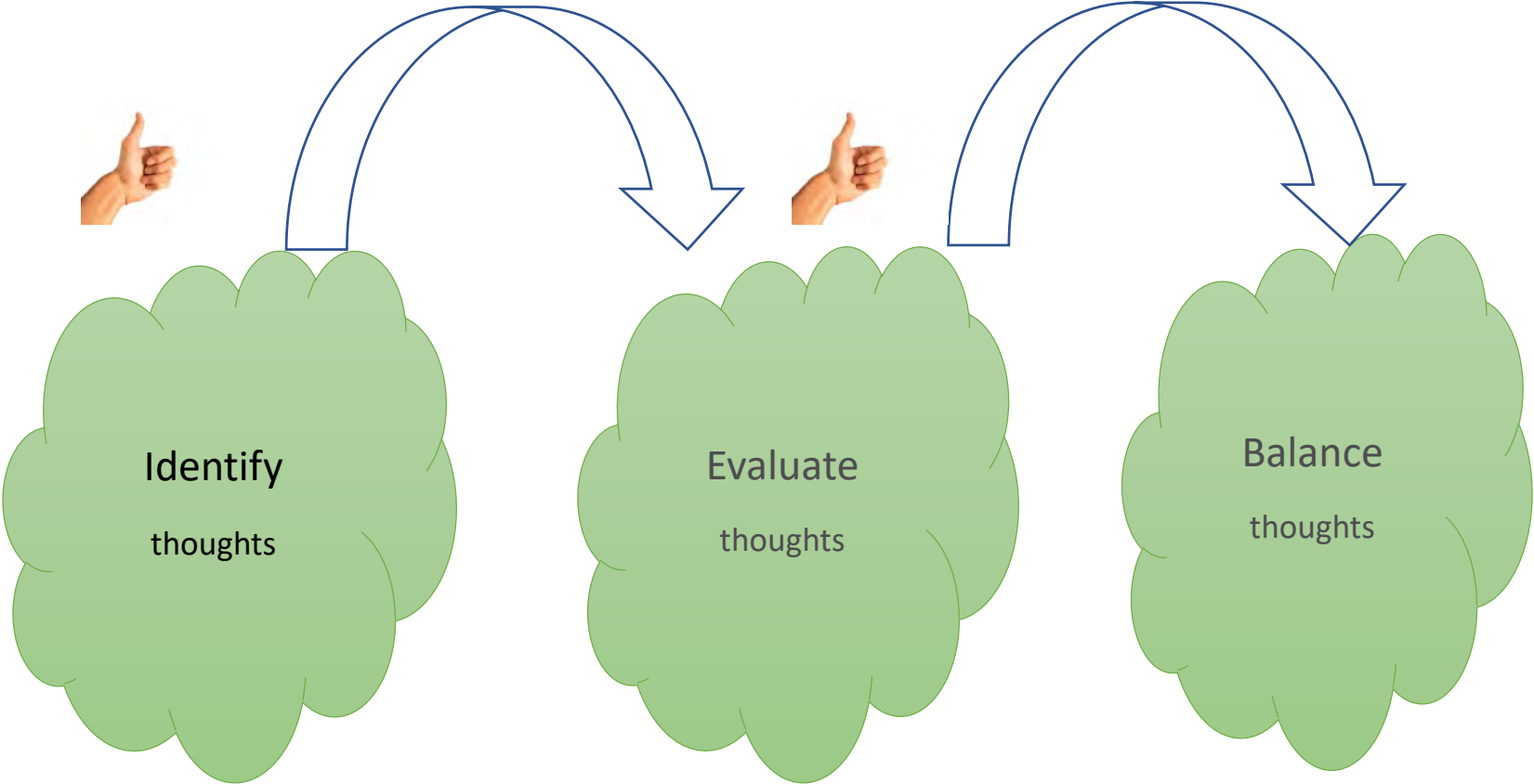
---

---

Am I seeing this situation in black and white terms, when it's actually more complicated?

---

# A Three Step Process



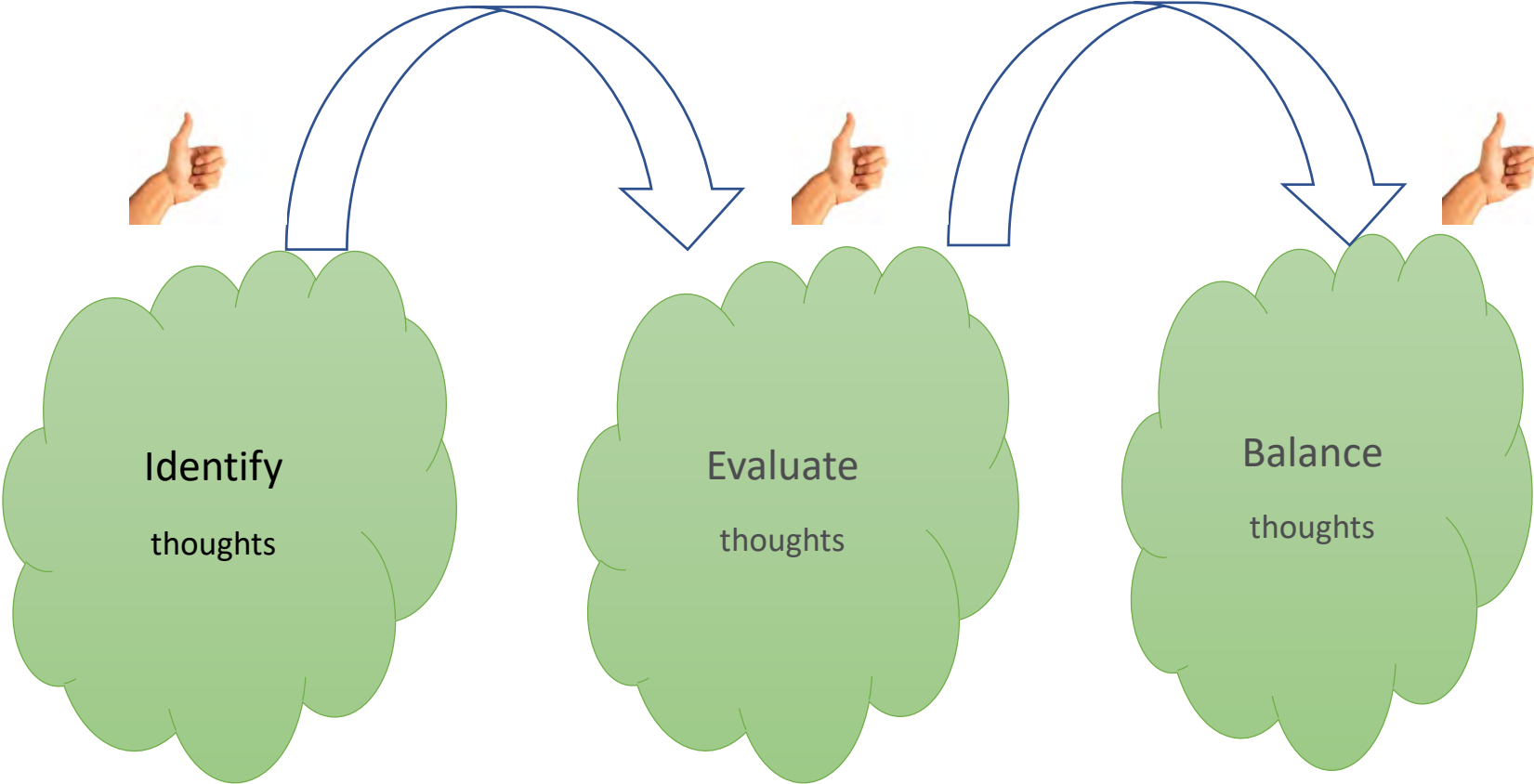
# Step 3. Balance

After looking at all the evidence for and against my thought(s), and having asked myself the evaluating questions, I balance my thinking:

## *Thought Record*

Situation	Cognitions	Feelings	Behaviours
I forgot about an important meeting where I had to present a report on my team's progress to the senior manager	I made a mistake  This is not a good situation  My manager will be wondering what happened  Some of the team may feel let down or annoyed  I hope this doesn't affect my promotion.	Hopeful  Bit concerned  Mostly comfortable	Engage:  Call my manager and apologise  Talk to my team and apologise  Offer to make a recorded presentation

# A Three Step Process



# The take-away points:

- ❖ We are *all* affected psychologically by the experience of isolation
- ❖ Levels of emotional distress occur on a spectrum (low to high), as does resilience (weak to strong).
- ❖ Emotional distress can be measured
- ❖ Strategies we can use to support our psychological health include:

- Exercise
- Diet
- Positive Connections
- Medication

- **Psychotherapy**

  - Cognitive techniques**

    - \* Identify out-of-balance thoughts (recognise the ants when they appear)
    - \* Evaluate the thoughts (how are these ants helping me?)
    - \* Balance the thoughts (getting the ants out of your head)

# Resources

**CENTRE FOR CLINICAL INTERVENTIONS:** is a specialised clinical psychology service based in Perth - useful online resources.

Back from the Bluez - an online, self-help workbook (free) with 9 modules for understanding depression and strategies for how to manage your mood:

<https://www.cci.health.wa.gov.au/Resources/Looking-After-Yourself/Depression>

Looking After Yourself: Self Help Resources for Mental Health Problems.

<https://www.cci.health.wa.gov.au/Resources/Looking-After-Yourself>

**THIS WAY UP:** is part of the Clinical Research Unit for Anxiety and Depression (CRUfAD). CRUfAD is a joint facility of St Vincent's Hospital and the University of New South Wales established to reduce the impact of anxiety and depressive disorders on individuals.

iCBT: internet based CBT + other well-being courses (low fixed cost)

<https://thiswayup.org.au/how-we-can-help/courses/>

Blog: Supporting you through the COVID-19 Pandemic (free online tools)

<https://thiswayup.org.au/blog/>