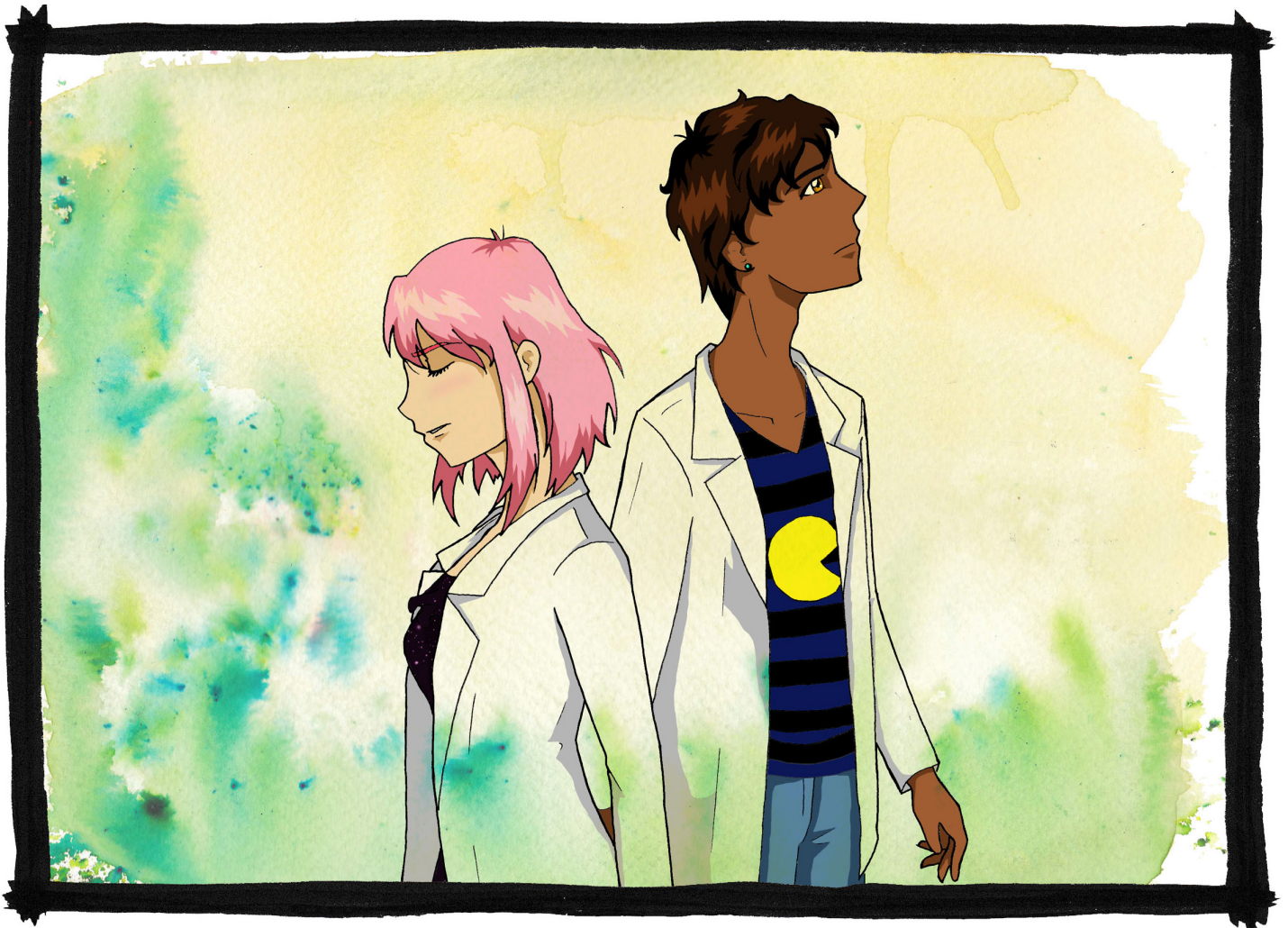


BEHAVIOURAL EXPERIMENTS



**Final report into ways to combat thinking with
the power of experiments...**

Dr Rob Kidney



University
of Exeter

Guide inside



BEHAVIOURAL EXPERIMENTS



Ok, so let's start by clearing a few things up.

Have you ever had thoughts that worry you, scare or frighten you?

Have you ever had thoughts that make you feel like you can't do something, or that something bad might happen?

Have you ever had thoughts that stop you from doing the good things that you want to do in your life?

If the answer is YES, then our research tells us you are officially a normal human being.

Experiment 24601

Intrusive Upsetting Unwanted Thoughts study

FACT FILE: Restricted

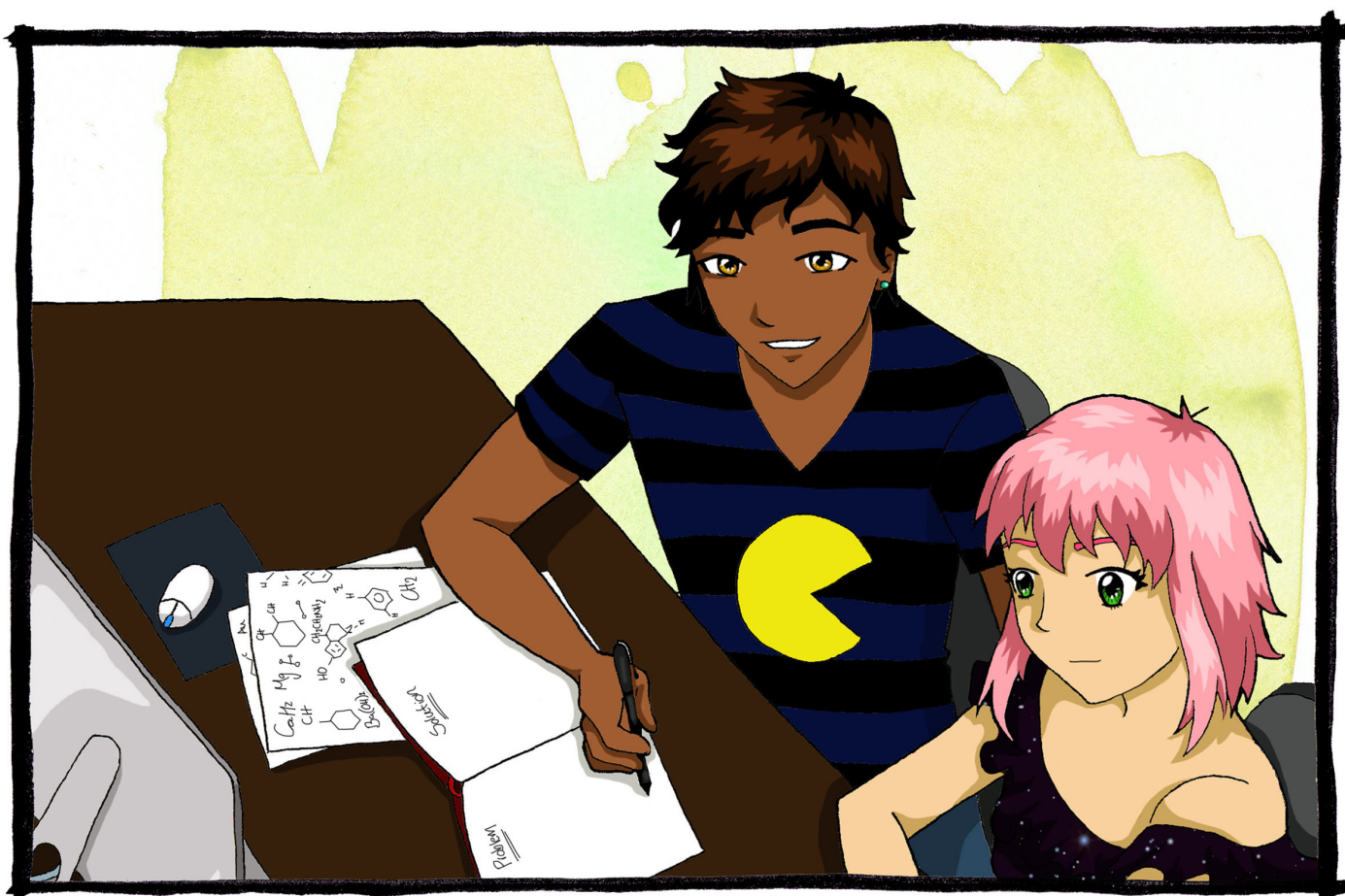
In 2014 Radomsky and his team asked 777 university students from 13 different countries around the world whether they experienced unwanted upsetting thoughts appearing in their mind. Across Europe, Asia, Africa, Australia and South America, the answer was 'Yes'. Nearly everyone asked had this happen to them (94%). The thoughts were about all sorts of things such as, being dirty, causing or experiencing harm or danger, doubting if you have done or not done something, thoughts that go against your values, upsetting religious or sexual thoughts, violence... in fact almost anything. It seemed the only normal thing was having the thoughts in the first place.

It may even be the case that there are a very small number of people that don't have intrusive thoughts like this.

Weird. Just... Weird.

(Or maybe they just wouldn't admit if they did)

Problem is, these thoughts can be really good at telling you that they are right.



It's time we did something about this.

This is where the power of experiments comes in.

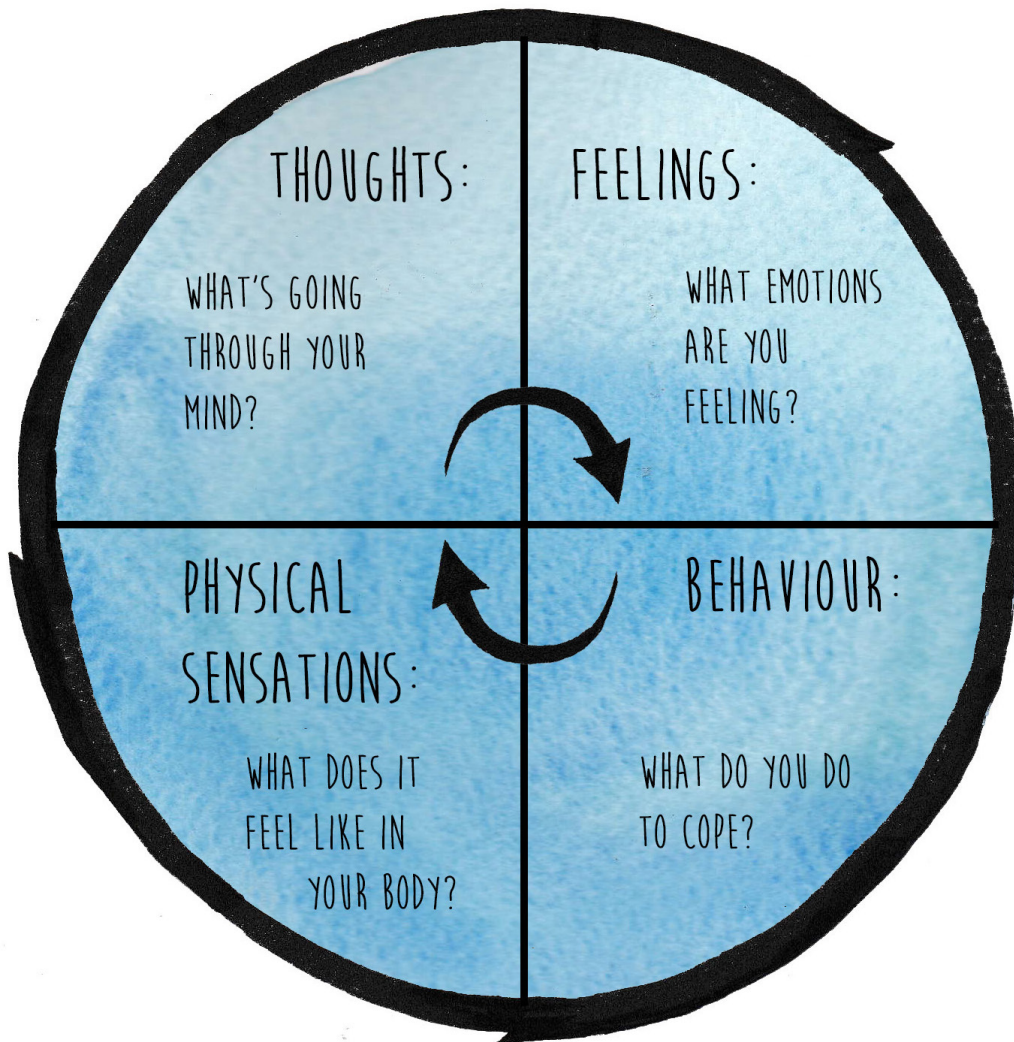
There is a simple model to understand how these thoughts can take over. It looks at 4 different areas:

Thoughts: What is going through your mind?

Emotions: What emotions are you feeling?

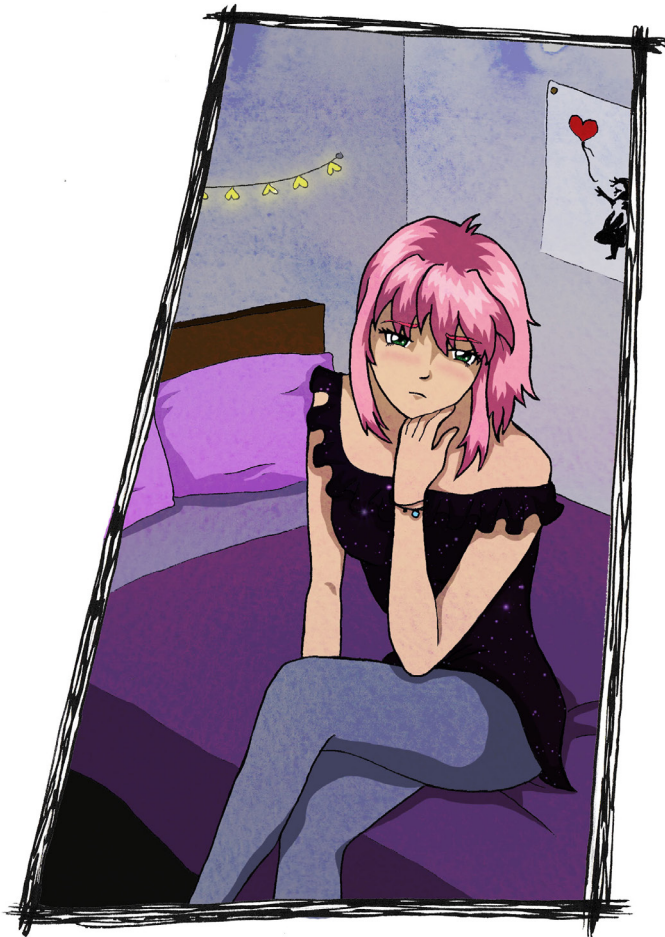
Feelings: What does it feel like in your body?

Behaviours: What do you do to cope?



Once tricky thoughts come in (and we know they will) they get fused with tricky emotions. That's what gives them their strength. We tend to do whatever we need to, so we can get by in the moment. This is how it happened to us...

Zee's story

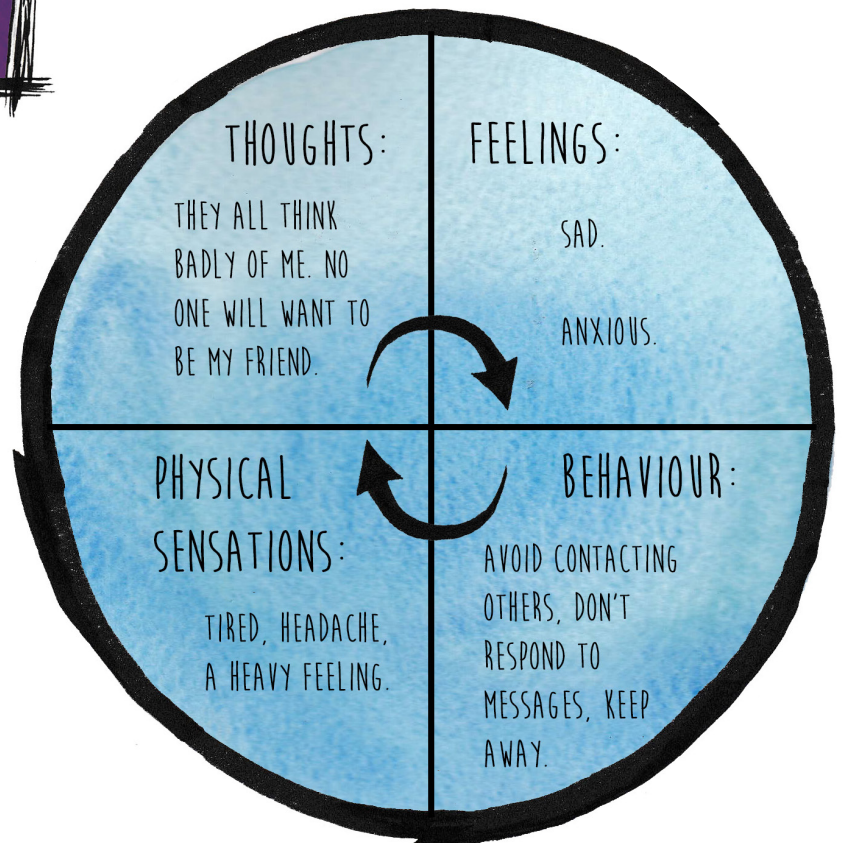


One day I had an argument with my friend. Later, she said some mean things on social media. What made it worse was that some other people liked what she wrote.

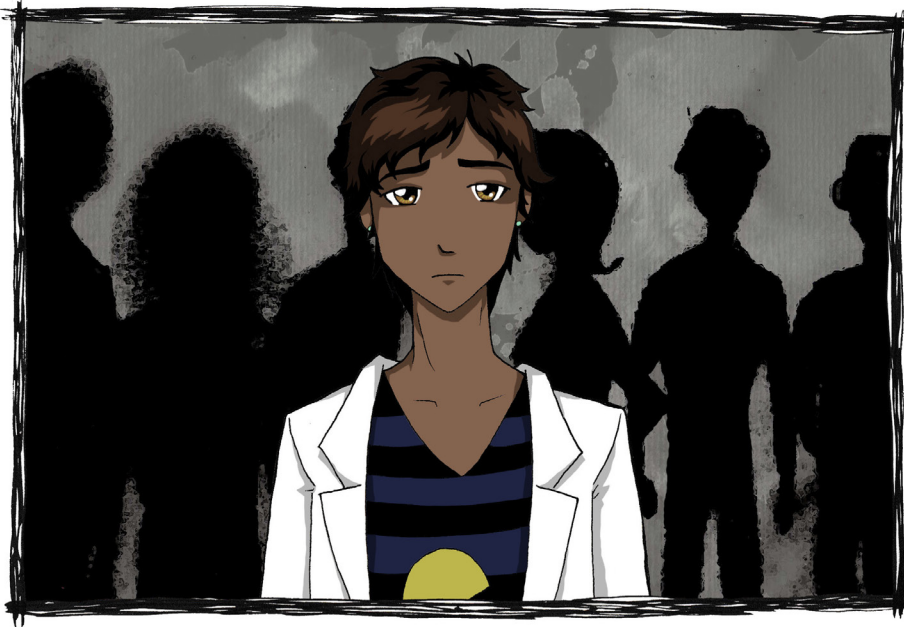
I started to think that this meant that everyone thought badly of me, and that no one would want to be with me or talk to me.

Then I just didn't feel like I could be near anyone. I stopped talking to friends, and eventually they stopped talking to me. This just seemed to tell me I was right all along.

It looked like this:



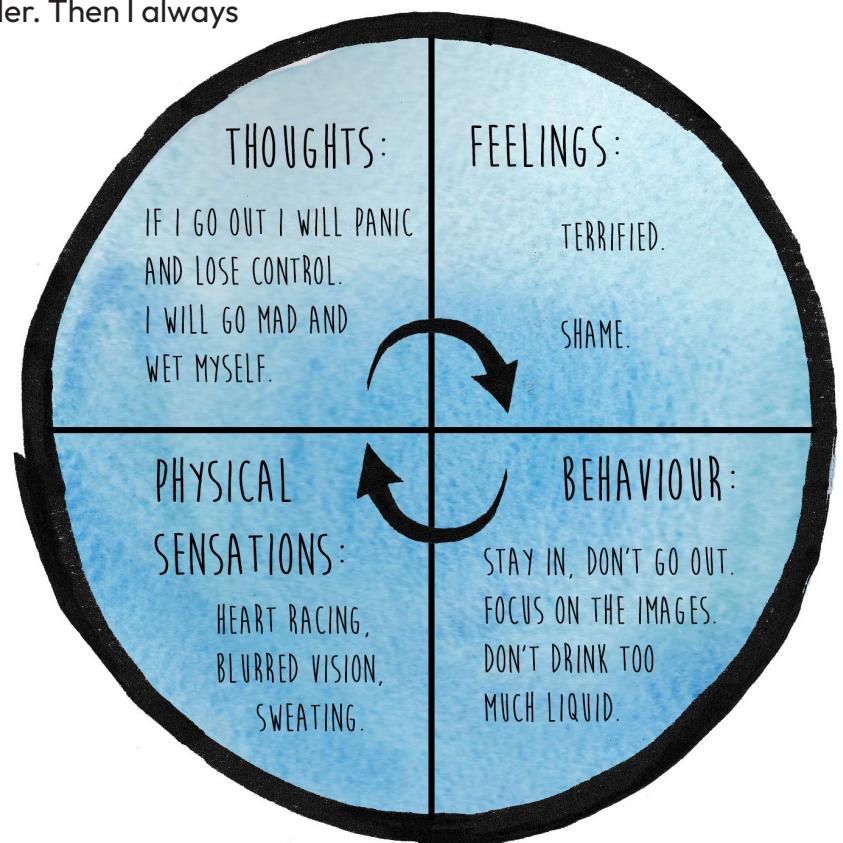
Tao's story

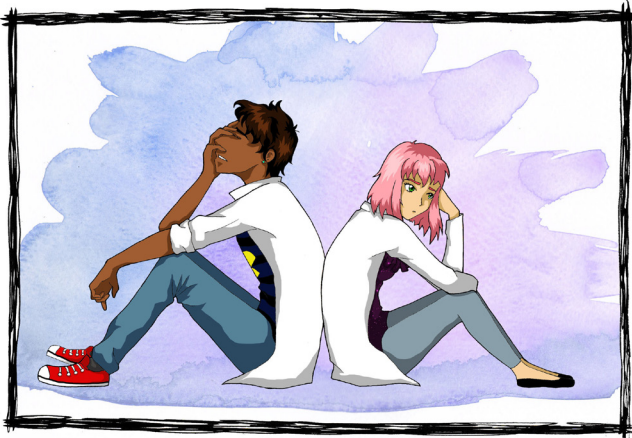


For me it was a bit different. I just had this feeling that there was something wrong with me. That if I went out the house I would panic and maybe even go mad or lose control of my bladder.

I just kept getting all these images of me looking crazy or wetting myself. It really upset me. I felt so anxious I stopped going out in case it happened. Slowly it just got harder and harder. Then I always stayed in.

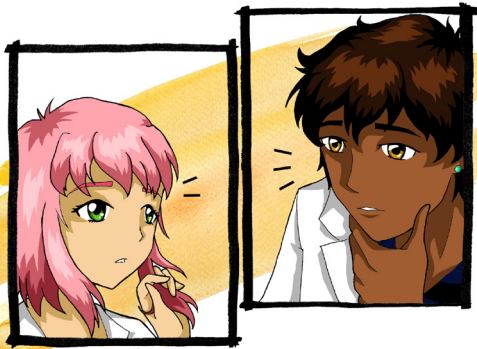
It looked like this:





We both felt pretty stuck. It seemed that there was no way out and that things were always going to be like this.

But that helped us to realise... we needed to make a change if we wanted things to be different. That change was to start running experiments.



What if we weren't the problem?

What if the thought was the problem?

What if the thought was lying to us?

It was time to find out the truth.

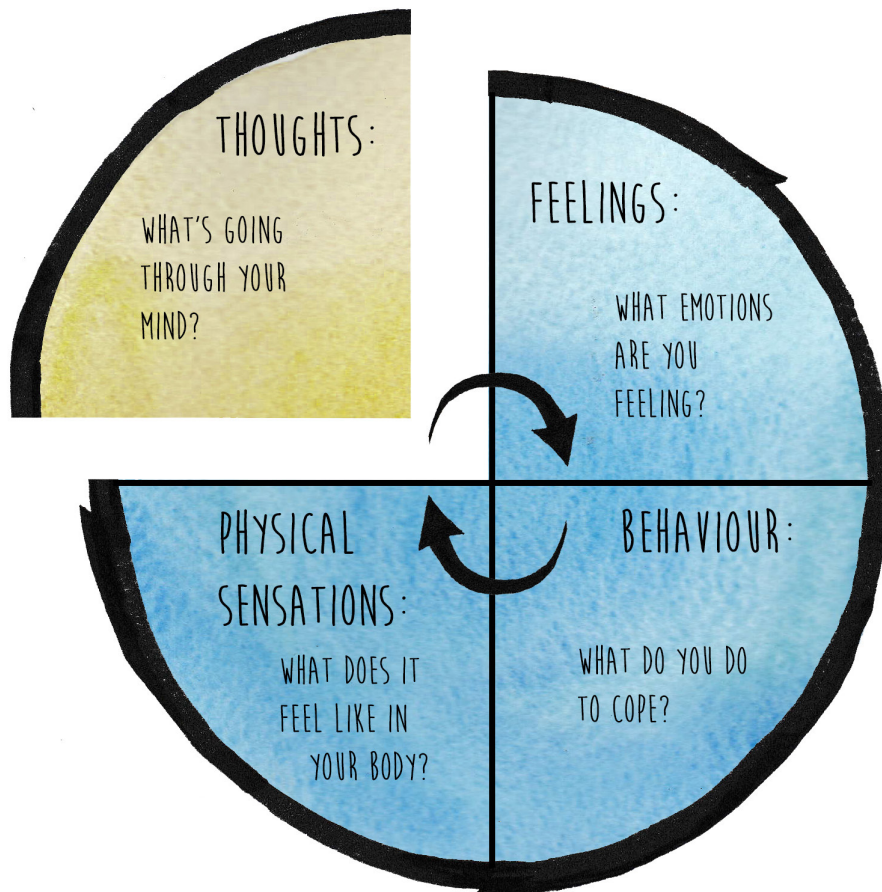


Key file:

Thoughts are **just** thoughts, **not** facts. Just because we think something (or feel it) does not make it true. The key to find this out is in doing an experiment on the thought. That means to call it out. To really test if it is true.

Our experiments have identified some key steps in making this happen. Getting the experiment right is the key.

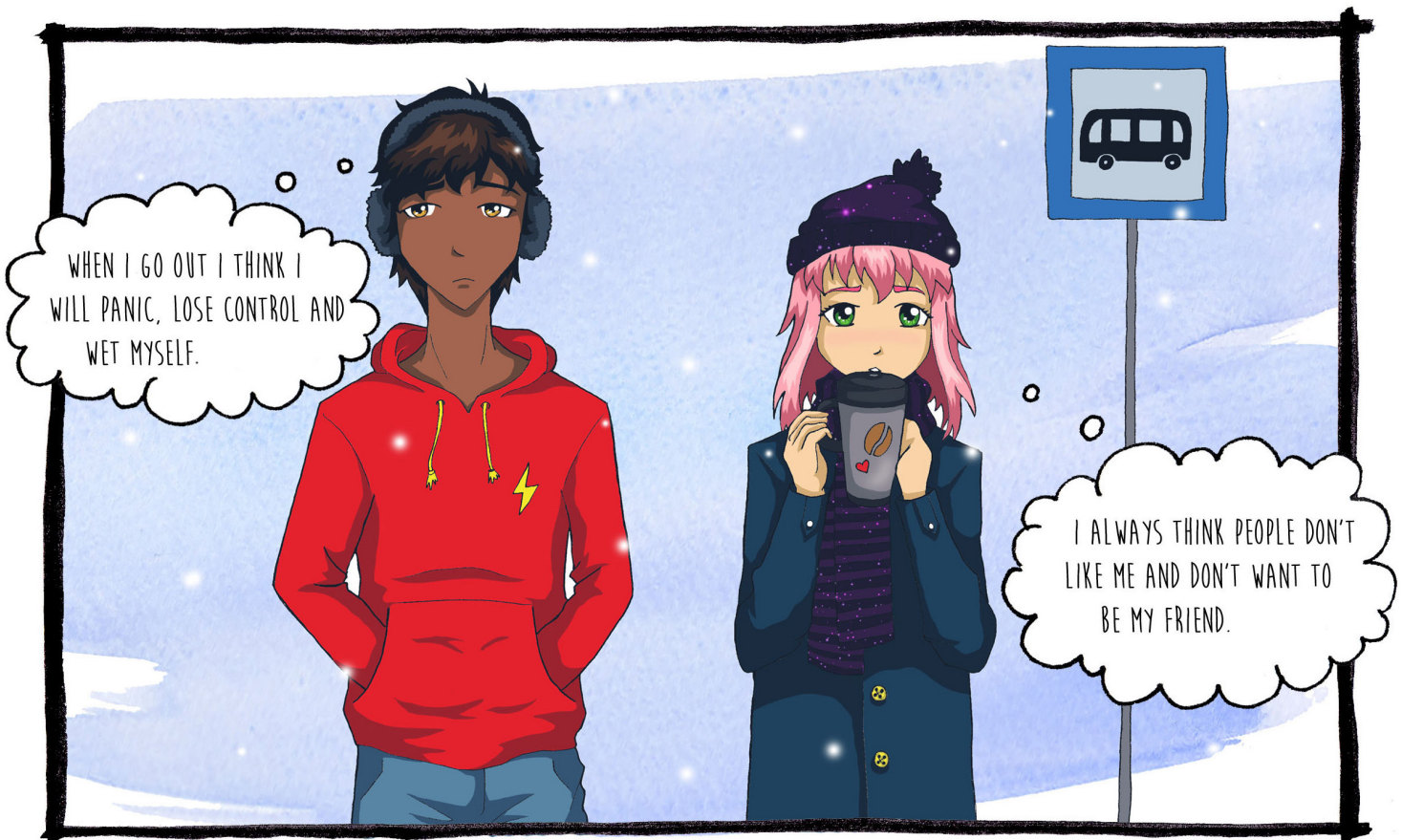
Step 1: Catch what the thoughts are and when they happen



This means getting a really clear idea of when the **thoughts** come in and what you think will happen. Try to take a step back. Is it all the time or just sometimes? When it happens, what you are thinking?

What is it that you fear or predict? When does it happen?

When we stepped back and looked for our thoughts, this is what we found...



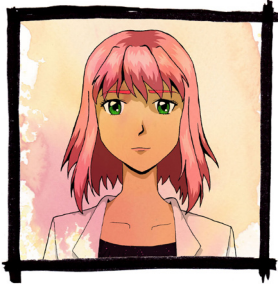
Sometimes the thought is really easy to find, other times you might need some help from someone to spot it. Like any skill it can take practise sometimes.

What thoughts do you notice? Once you have an idea of when your thought happens, you can write it in the experiment log (part 1) on page 21. It is okay to practise this step for a bit to get confident.

This is what step 1 looked like for us:

What thoughts when?

Part 1



Zee: Whenever I think about talking to or messaging a friend, I think they just won't want to talk to me.

You:



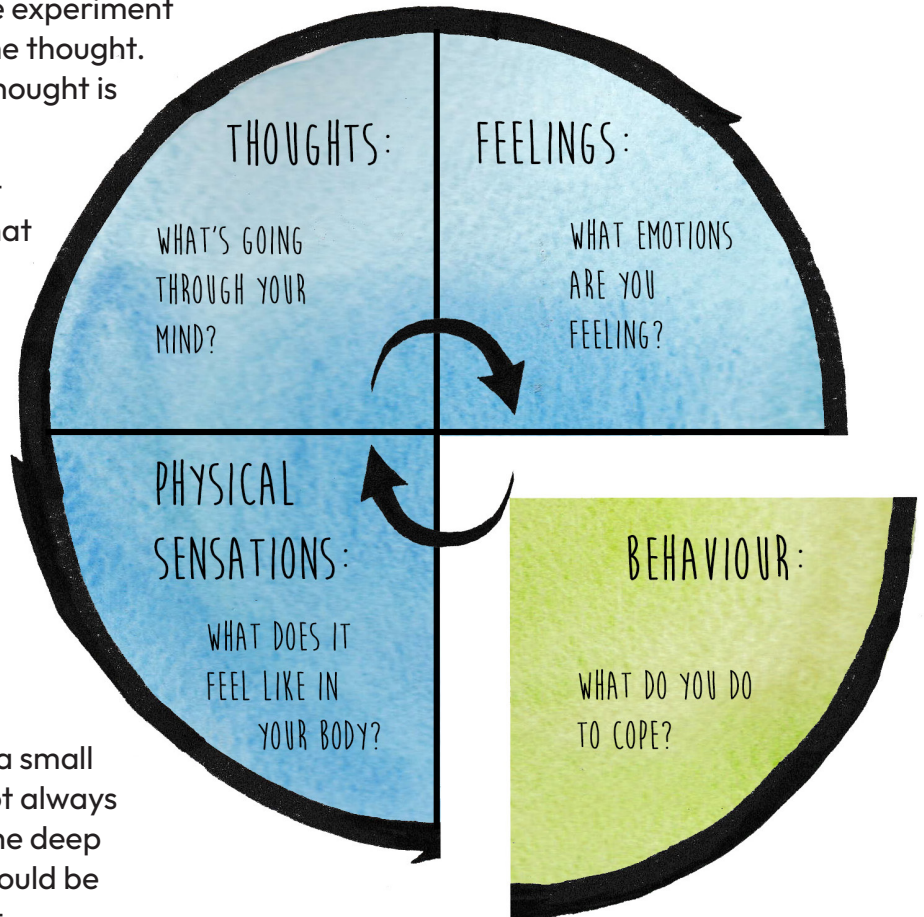
Tao: When I want to go to the shops, I think I'll panic, lose control and wet myself.

You:

Step 2: Design it

The next step is to design the experiment that you can do to test out the thought. How can you find out if the thought is telling you the truth?

This will often be about what will happen if you change what you **do** to cope. This means doing something to get a bit closer to the worry.



Our first experiment can be a small step forwards, (you might not always want to jump straight in at the deep end). Your first experiment could be possible but still a bit difficult.



Zee: I found this really hard at first. It meant thinking about doing things that frightened me. But I remembered it could be a small step. So I thought about sending a message to someone I used to talk to.



Tao: Once I had my 'what thoughts when' from part one, it was pretty clear to me that I needed to go to a shop. Going into town seemed way too much. Then then I thought about the small shop down the road. That might be possible.

How will you test your thought? What will your experiment look like? Write this down in the experiment log (part 2).

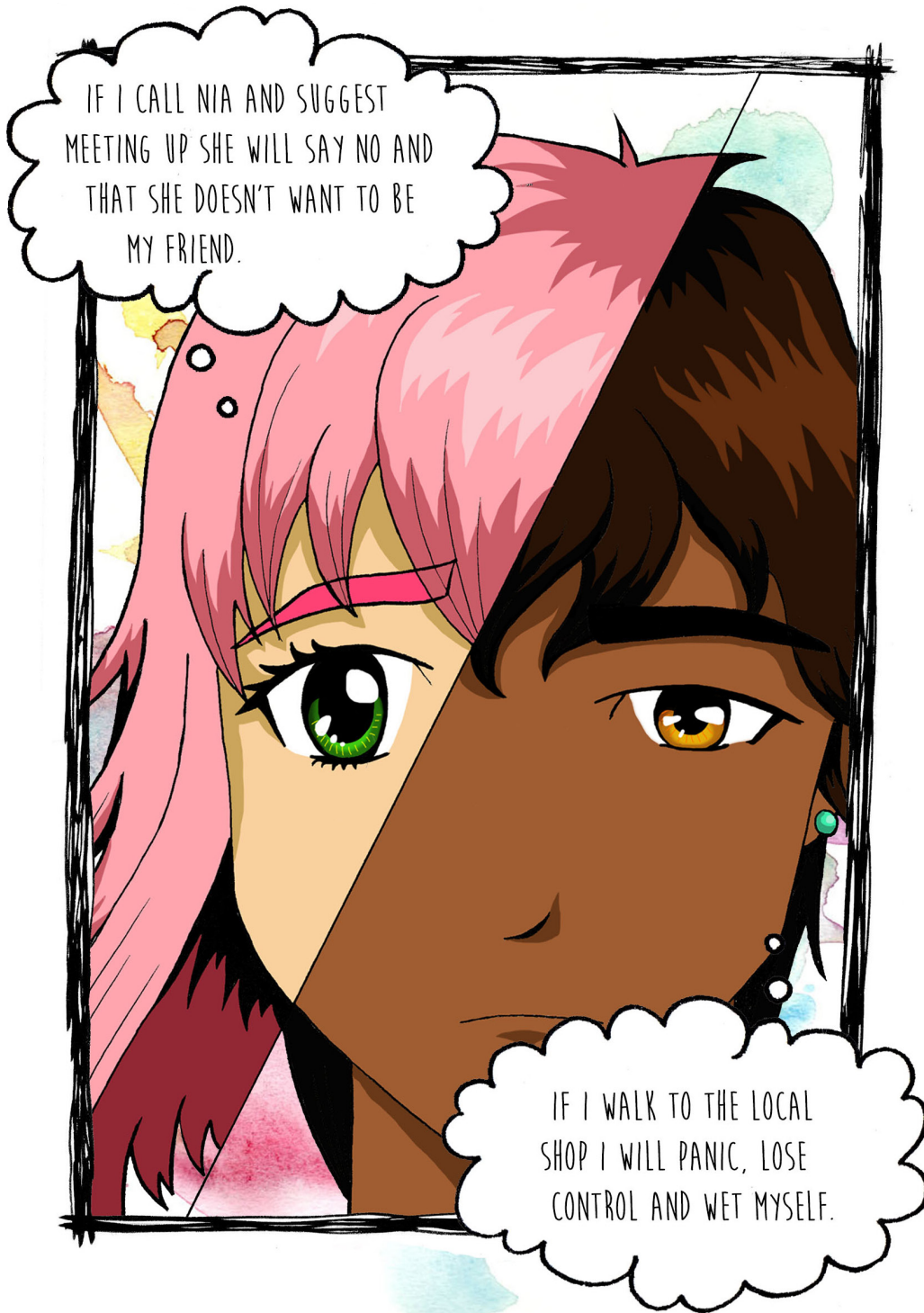
What thoughts when? Part 1	Experiment plan Part 2
 <p><i>Zee: Whenever I think about talking to or messaging a friend, I think they just won't want to talk to me.</i></p>	<p><i>Send a message to Nia tonight saying 'Hey, how's things?'</i></p>
<p><i>You:</i></p>	<p><i>Your experiment:</i></p>
 <p><i>Tao: When I want to go to the shops, I think I'll panic, lose control and wet myself.</i></p>	<p><i>Walk to the local shop and buy something.</i></p>
<p><i>You:</i></p>	<p><i>Your experiment:</i></p>

Step 3: Make predictions

Next thing is to work out, what will happen **if your thoughts are right?**

It can really help to write these as:

'If then



What will happen in your experiment if the thought is right? Write this down in your experiment log (part 3).

What thoughts when? Part 1	Experiment plan Part 2	If the thoughts are right then... Part 3
<i>Zee: Whenever I think about talking to or messaging a friend, I think they just won't want to talk to me.</i>	<i>Send a message to Nia tonight saying 'Hey, how's things?'</i>	<i>She will send back a message telling me not to message her again.</i>
<i>Tao: When I want to go to the shops, I think I'll panic, lose control and wet myself.</i>	<i>Walk to the local shop and buy something.</i>	<i>I will have a panic attack and wet myself.</i>
<i>Your thoughts:</i>	<i>Your experiment:</i>	<i>If your thoughts are right then...</i>

Now work out, what will happen if your thoughts are not right?



Zee: She might message me back in a nice way, or even end up sending a few messages to each other to catch up.



Tao: I guess I would feel anxious but I would make it back okay and not wet myself.

What will happen in your experiment if the thought is **not** right? Write this down in your experiment log (part 4).

What thoughts when? Part 1	Experiment plan Part 2	If the thoughts are right then... Part 3	If the thoughts are not right then... Part 4
<i>Zee: Whenever I think about talking to or messaging a friend, I think they just won't want to talk to me.</i>	<i>Send a message to Nia tonight saying 'Hey, how's things?'</i>	<i>She will send back a message telling me not to message her again.</i>	<i>She messages me back in a nice way, or even ends up sending a few messages.</i>
<i>Tao: When I want to go to the shops, I think I'll panic, lose control and wet myself.</i>	<i>Walk to the local shop and buy something.</i>	<i>I will have a panic attack and wet myself.</i>	<i>I will feel anxious but I will make it back okay and not wet myself.</i>
<i>You:</i>	<i>Your experiment:</i>	<i>If your thoughts are right then...</i>	<i>If your thoughts are not right then...</i>

Step 4: Run the experiment



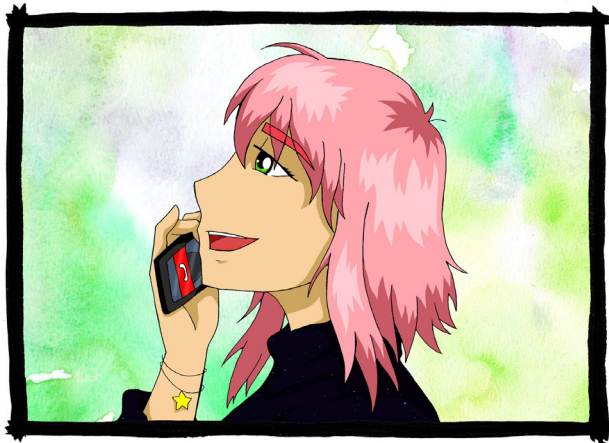
Okay. It's time to call that thought out. Put your planned experiment into practice. You've made the plan, now let's go for it. Remember thoughts are just thoughts, not facts. This is a great way to find out more. Plan what day and time you will run it.

Is there anything you can think of that might get in the way? If yes, is there anything you can do about this, or is there a better time?

Do you need any help or support to run the experiment or can you do it by yourself?

Step 5: What did I learn?

So you did it! Well done. Now it's time to look back on your predictions. Did your prediction come true, or not?



Zee's experiment

At first Nia didn't get back to me. I started to wonder if she was ignoring me. I started to feel bad. But, an hour later she sent me back a nice message. We have messaged each other loads since then and she suggested meeting up.

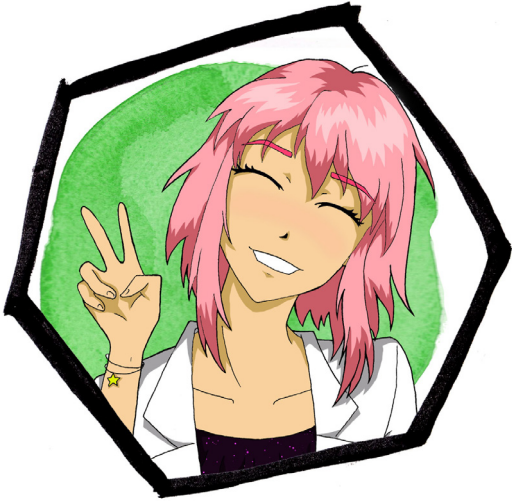


Tao's experiment

I did feel really anxious before I went, but I reminded myself that it was just a thought and kept going. Once I started walking it slowly got easier. I bought a drink and walked back home. I didn't lose control or wet myself.

Did you manage it, and did you cope even if it was tough? Looking back at your step 3 predictions, which one was right?

What does this mean about your tricky thought?



Zee: My prediction did not come true. It made me think that perhaps I could start to contact other people or meet up sometimes. I'm not saying it's all easy now, but I do think I can do more experiments like this to find out. I don't need to just believe the upsetting thoughts I have.

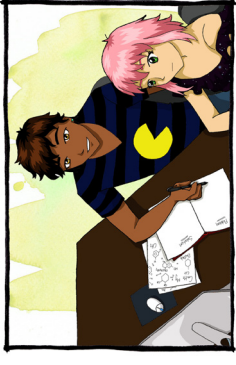


Tao: My prediction did not come true. I did feel anxious, but I knew that would happen because I was doing something scary. Even though it was hard I found that I could do it. I now think I can manage this walk without my worries coming true. I am now going to try some more experiments to do some longer walks with more people about. This seems more possible for me now.

Looking at your own predictions, write down what the outcome was and what you learnt in part 5.



Experiment log



What thoughts when? Part 1	Experiment plan Part 2	If the thoughts are right then... Part 3	If the thoughts are not right then... Part 4	What did I learn? Part 5
<p>Zee: Whenever I think about talking to or messaging a friend, I think they just won't want to talk to me.</p>	<p>Send a message to Nia tonight saying 'Hey, how's things?'</p>	<p>She will send back a message telling me not to message her again.</p>	<p>She messages me back in a nice way, or even ends up sending a few messages.</p>	<p>After an hour she messaged me back. It was a nice message. My thoughts were not right. We have messaged since and are going to meet up. I don't need to just believe the upsetting thoughts I have. I can test them.</p>
<p>Tao: When I want to go to the shops, I think I'll panic, lose control and wet myself.</p>	<p>Walk to the local shop and buy something.</p>	<p>I will have a panic attack and wet myself.</p>	<p>I will feel anxious but I will make it back okay and not wet myself.</p>	<p>My worries were not true. It was hard, but once I started walking it slowly got easier. I bought a drink and walked back home. I didn't lose control or wet myself. I am now going to try some more experiments to do some longer walks with more people about.</p>

Having found out that maybe those upsetting thoughts aren't always right, what does that mean about your worries?

**Well done. You've had a really great practice.
Now it's up to you to do as many experiments as
you want to find out about your thoughts.**

There's an experiment log for you on the next page. We hope that this will help you to complete your experiments too.

**We've only just begun ours, but we're going to keep going.
We hope you will too.**



Experiment log



What thoughts when?
Part 1

Experiment plan
Part 2

If the thoughts
are right then...
Part 3

If the thoughts are
not right then...
Part 4

What did I learn?
Part 5

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My notes

My notes

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