

# Understanding your story



## About this booklet

If you haven't been feeling like 'you' lately, you might want to try and find out why.

You can do this by exploring:

- The things that are happening now
- The things that have happened in the past
- What is important to you today

The people who support you may call this a '**formulation**'. But for ease in this booklet we will call it **telling your story**.

This booklet is to help you to make sense of what is going on. It has ideas from the young people who helped write this booklet.

They found it useful so hopefully you will too.

**Good luck!**

### This booklet helps you to:

- Spot important events or relationships
- Think about what may cause difficulties
- Understand what mental health challenges are
- Recognise your personal strengths and the support you have around you
- Spot what makes things better or worse on a daily basis
- Look at changes you could make, next steps, and what would help you to make those changes?



There are sections in this booklet where you can write down your thoughts and feelings. You may want to keep this booklet in a safe place.

## How does telling your story work?

Telling your story consists of five main factors, we can use these to make a plan for meaningful change:



- **Past** – What has happened in your past that may be important?



- **Triggers** – Things that spark a reaction: What was happening when your current difficulties started?



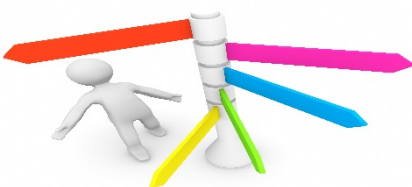
- **Current** – What is happening in your life right now? What is good? What is difficult?



- **Positives** – Do you have helpful people in your life? What are you good at? What is going well?



- **What makes change difficult?** – Is anything happening that makes it hard to make changes?



- **The Plan** – Start thinking about how you want to make changes and feel better



## Past

Sometimes, things that happened in the past can still affect how we feel now. This can be in helpful or harmful ways.

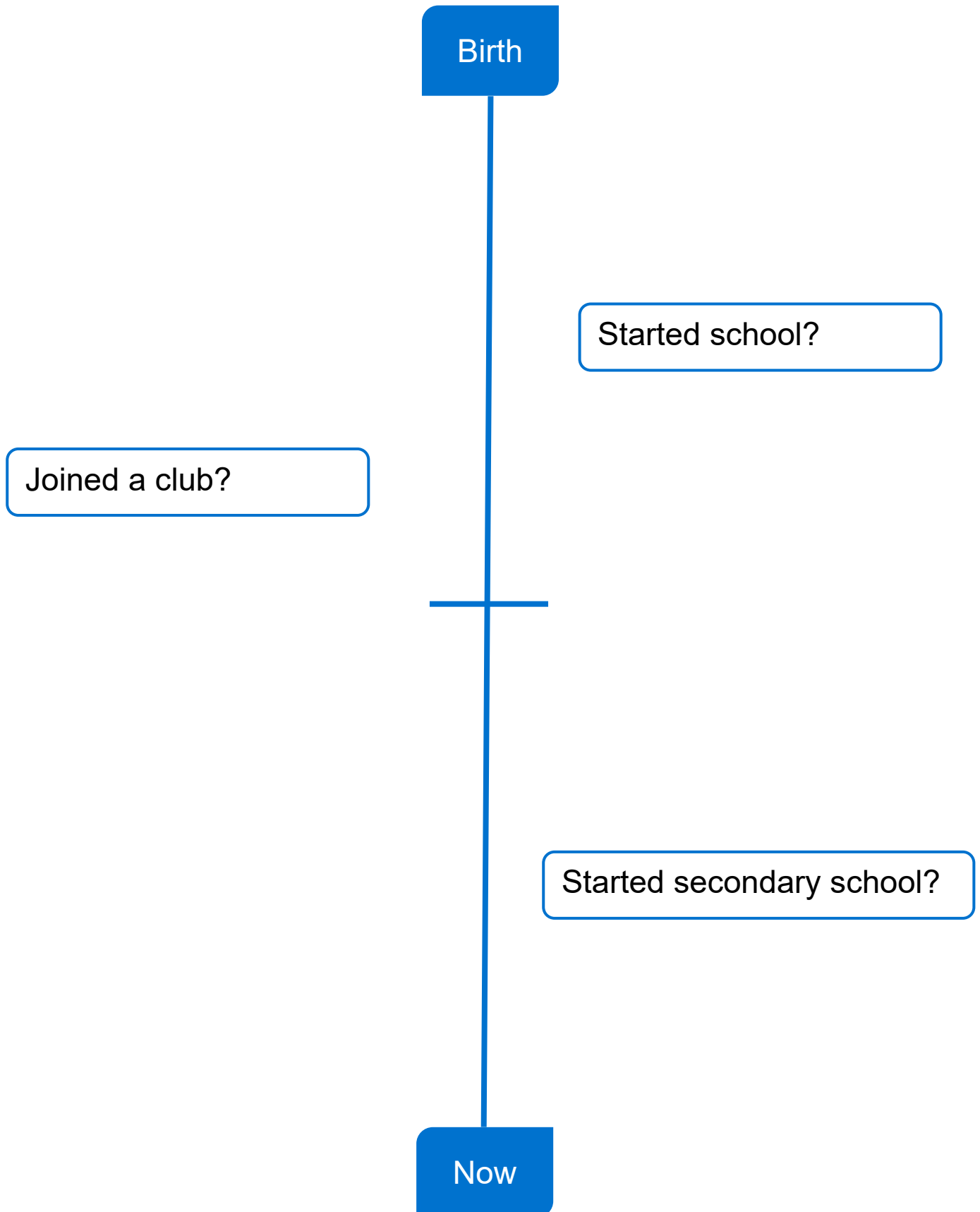
### Examples of important past experiences may be:

- A difficult relationship with a parent
- Having good friends
- Going through a rough breakup
- Having to look after people in your family
- Being bullied at school
- Having your first boyfriend / girlfriend / partner



Take some time to think about the important events (good and bad) that have happened in your life.

Draw them on the timeline below:







## Triggers

Sometimes, the things that make you feel distressed or happy are clear. Other times, you can get upset or happy and don't know where it has come from or why, it just seems to happen.

We may call these triggers.

It is helpful to recognise which things are triggers for you as it can help you manage how you feel.

### Examples of things triggers may be:

- A date that is important to you
- A friend sending you a lovely picture
- You or someone you love becoming ill
- A fight with a friend or a family member



Over the next few days, try writing down when you feel strong emotions - Upset or angry, scared or anxious, happy or excited.

Did anything happen that could have made you feel like that?

This space may not be large enough! Please continue on another sheet if you want to.

How I feel	What happened beforehand?



## Current

Now you have thought about your past. It is important to think about what your life looks like at the moment. What have you been doing over the last week? What are you doing today?

Making sense of what is good and what is bad can help you think about what is most important to try to change.

### Examples of what is happening currently may be:

- Having a difficult time with work at school
- Falling in love
- Having an argument with a friend
- Starting something new
- Family problems



**This too  
shall pass**



Take a moment to think about your own life...

**Things that are important to you...**

**Things that make your life challenging...**

**Things you want to change ...**

## Positives

Sometimes, when things are difficult, it can be hard to notice what is going well.



Positives can simply be eating food or remembering to drink water. Or, they may be having a good friend, or being skilled at drawing or painting. Positives can make your challenges easier to face.

### Examples of what is going well:

- Having someone to talk to
- Something in school is going well
- Having good friends
- A hobby or interest
- Doing exercise
- Playing games
- Having fun



Often, people find it helpful to write down what they are happy to have in their lives. Try writing down some of the things that made you feel happy or positive about yourself.

Doing this can help you to start feeling better.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.



## What makes change difficult?

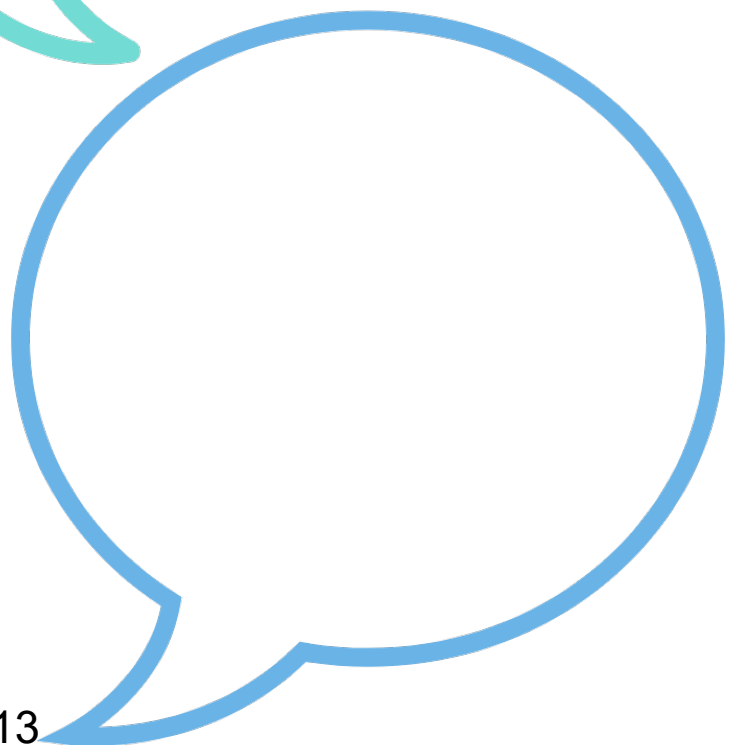
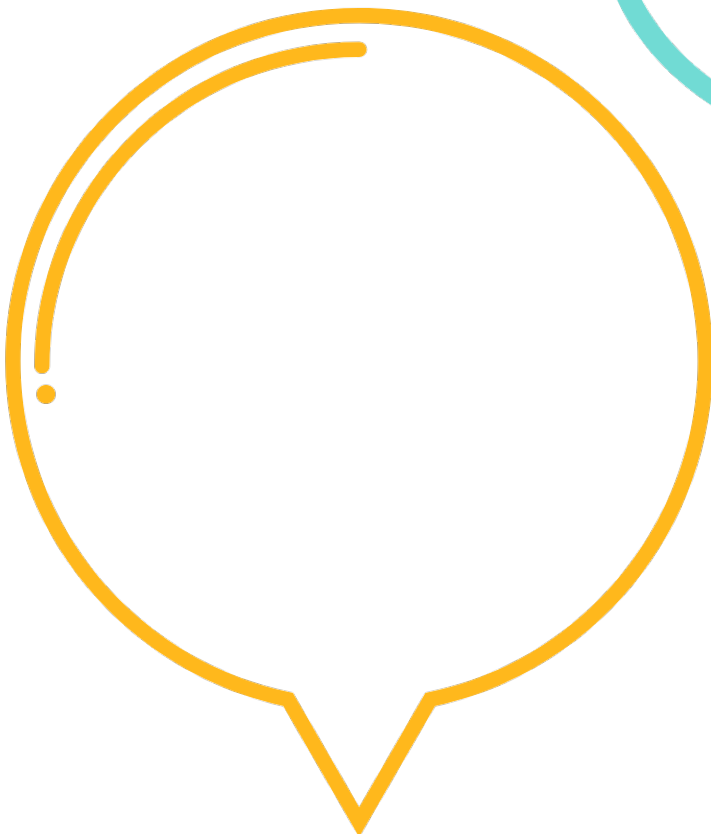
We all feel we get stuck sometimes and it can be difficult to make changes. It is important to try and work out what makes change difficult.

### Examples of what makes change difficult may be:

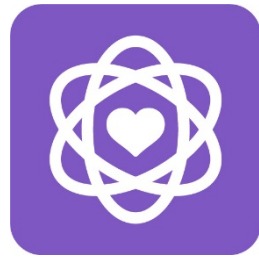
- Fear of the unknown
- Thinking that things will not change
- Doing the same things again and again...
- Unhelpful ways of coping



Think about what  
might be holding  
you back in your  
own life:







## Values – What is (most) important to me

To make changes in your life it is helpful to understand what is (most) important to you. This can be called your 'values'.

Values are important because they can help you to grow and develop. They help you to create the future you want. When you use your values to make decisions, you focus on what is important to you.

### Examples of values may be:

- Trust
- Loyalty
- Equality
- Honesty
- Caring
- Trying hard



Below is a list of values. Circle any of the values that are important to you in your life. You can use the blank boxes to add your own values:

Having close friends	Being ambitious and hard working
Having loving relationships	Being good at what you do
Having a life filled with adventure	Having an exciting life
Enjoying food and drink	Being creative
Being self-sufficient	Designing things
Working things out – Solving problems	Trying to be a better person
Being true to religious faith and beliefs	Being physically fit



## Making sense of your formulation

Once you have taken the time to think about:

- The things that are happening now
- The things that have happened in the past
- What is important to you today

It can be helpful to make sense of how different experiences can have an affect on you today.

### Example of how a past experience could impact on you today:

#### **Past:**

Bullied in Primary School.

#### **Triggers:**

Had argument with my friend.

#### **Current:**

Don't like myself, not going out, friend not talking to me.

#### **Values:**

Having loving relationships.

Can you see how 'being bullied in Primary School' and 'Had an argument with my best friend' have affected the information in 'Current'?

Because 'Having loving relationships' is important to them, an argument with their friend might make them feel alone.

Think about some of the information in this workbook. Can you see how some of your experiences might be connected to or have an effect on others? Or to things that are happening for you at the moment?

The boxes below might help you to make some links:

Past:

Triggers:

Current:

Positives:

What makes change  
difficult:

Values:

You can use this box to write how your experience or event is having an impact



## Goals, plans and finding ways forward

Remember that all of these factors together can help you make sense your current feelings and difficulties. It is important to think about this, when planning important changes.

Once you have made some sense of how your past has impacted on your story you can you can set some goals to positively change your future.

My big goals are...

Smaller steps I can take to achieve these goals are...



You can make your goals easier to achieve by breaking them down into smaller, more doable steps.

Let's imagine you value being independent but you're afraid of using buses...



**Step 1**

Walk to the end of your street

**Step 2**

Walk to the bus stop (with a friend, if you prefer)

**Step 3**

Ride the bus with a friend

**Step 4**

Ride the bus by yourself

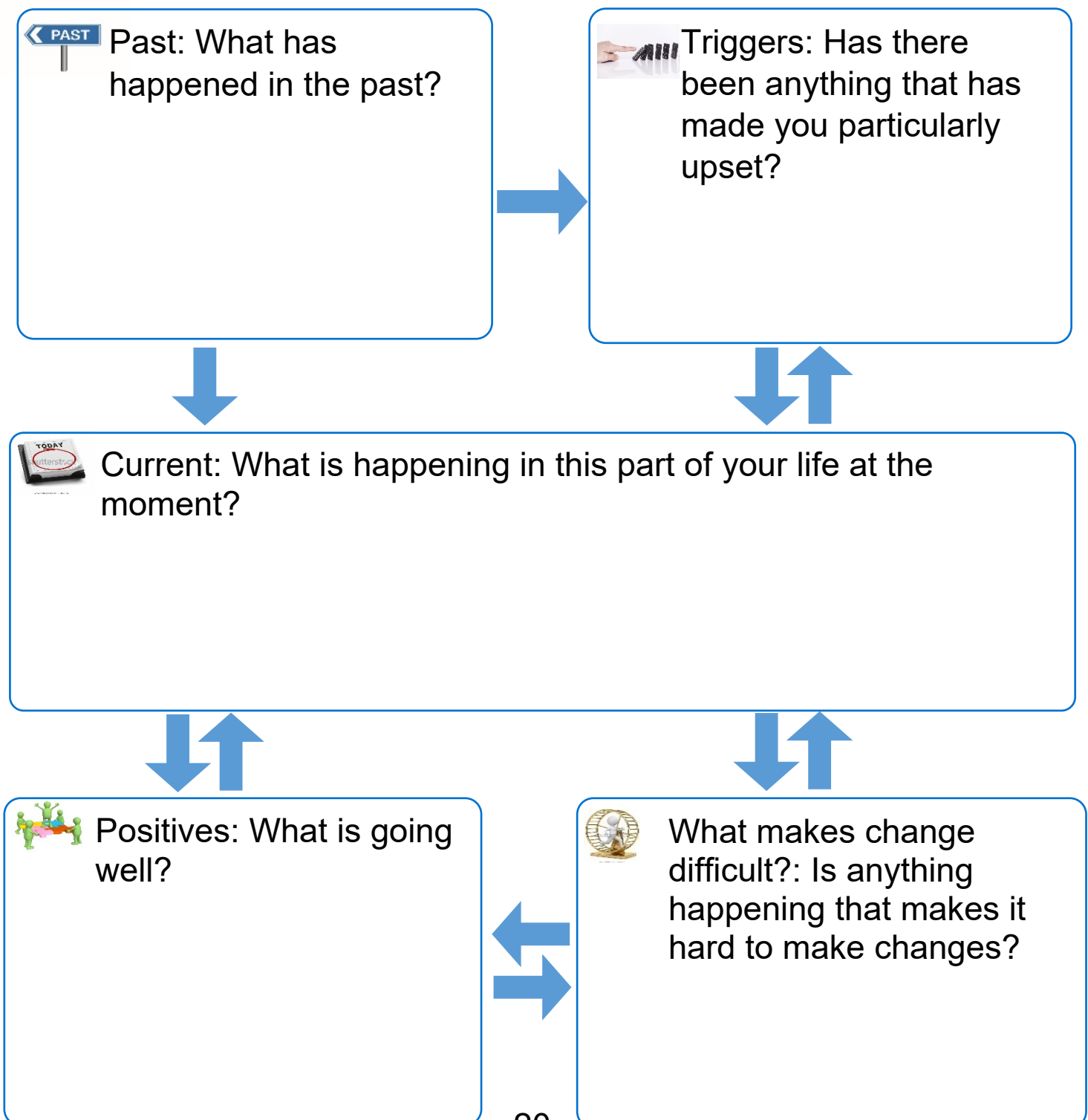
Try not to put too much pressure on yourself to complete these steps quickly. It is okay to take your time - Remember progress looks different to everyone.



## Have a go at telling your story

You can use the information you wrote down earlier in the booklet to help to fill out the boxes on these pages.

You can write your story so that it focuses on different parts of your life, for example being at school (e.g. what happened at school in the past? What went well for you at school?). Some prompts have been included to get you started.





Continue on this page to write down what matters to you, your goals, plans and next steps.

My goals are...

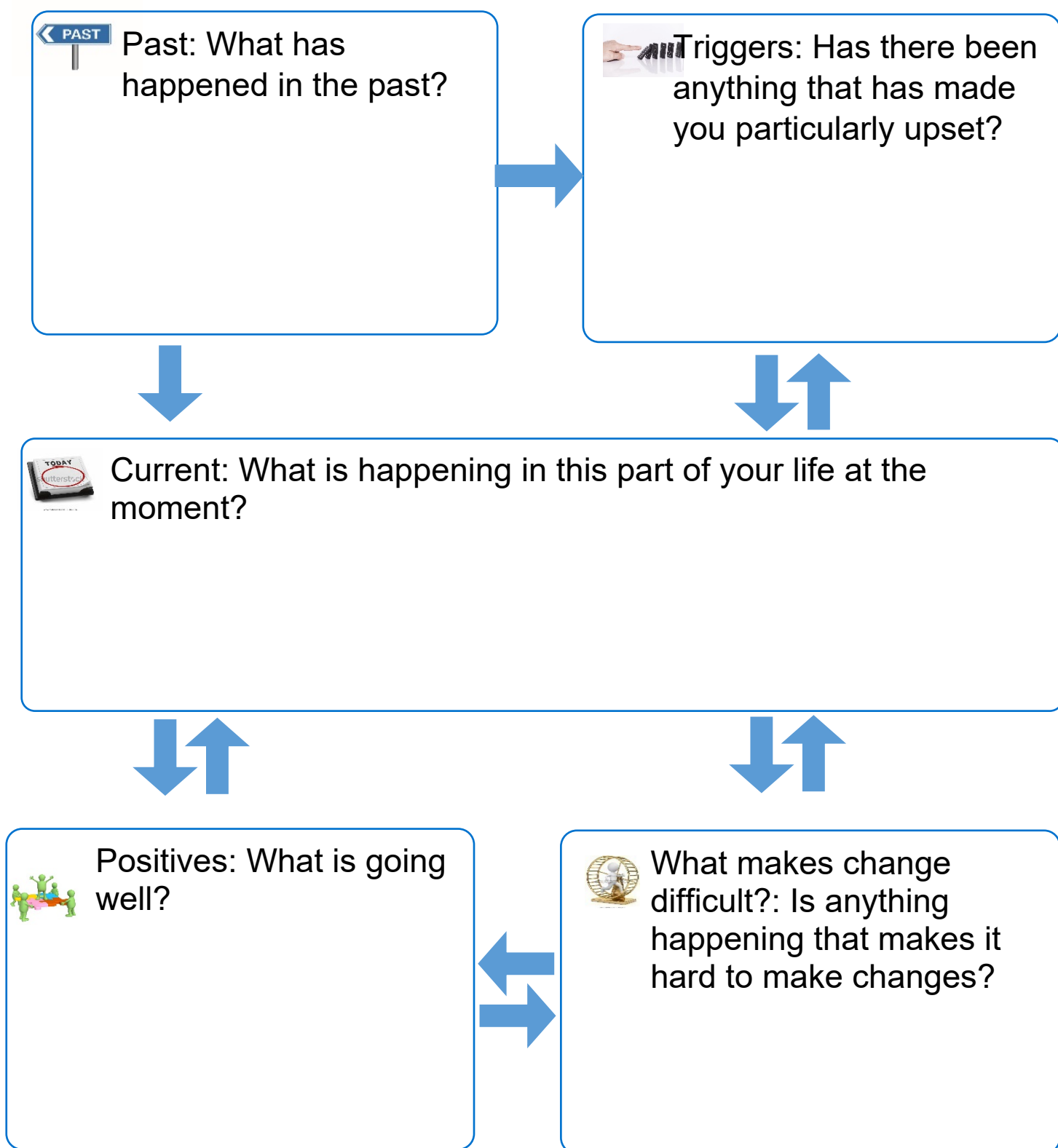
Small steps to achieve these goals are...



## Have a go at telling your story

Is there another part of your life you would like to understand better? You might like to think about things like your family life or your social life...

You can use the boxes below to think about this.





Continue on this page to write down what matters to you, your goals, plans and next steps.

My goals are...

Small steps to achieve these goals are...



This workbook alone may not provide all the answers. It will help you to make sense of the person you are today and develop into the person you want to be.



It is important to know that a formulation is never really finished, because your story is still being told. Your story will change over time as you discover more about yourself and your situation.

Remember to go back to your stories and update them as you learn more about yourself.

## Here's what other young people thought about the workbook

Note / doodle pages throughout the book enable young people to personalise it, and take notes as they go. I like this because having a physical booklet that can be returned to and worked on over time could help young people understand why they are where they are.

You can write formulations about small parts of your life or your life as a whole.

Think about adding a reminder after the positive exercise, about why completing this book is both important and a positive step.

Everyone should get one of these to fill in.

Why hasn't this been done sooner?

You can write formulations about small parts of your life or your life as a whole.

Positivity activity is good because keeping up positivity making the tasks in the booklet more enjoyable.

The 'helpful resources' links are 'really helpful, thank you'.

## Helpful websites and resources

- Cumbria, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust - A range of mental health self-help guides available to view/download in various formats [www.cntw.nhs.uk/selfhelp](http://www.cntw.nhs.uk/selfhelp)
- Kooth [www.kooth.com/](http://www.kooth.com/)
- Living Life [www.lltff.com](http://www.lltff.com)
- Moodjuice  
[www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk/mildmoderate/entry.asp](http://www.moodjuice.scot.nhs.uk/mildmoderate/entry.asp)
- William Howard School  
[www.williamhoward.cumbria.sch.uk/mental-health/](http://www.williamhoward.cumbria.sch.uk/mental-health/)
- Young Minds [www.youngminds.org.uk/](http://www.youngminds.org.uk/)
- Beating Anxiety One Step at a Time: Overcoming Anxiety to Reach my Goals [leaflet]. (2015).n.p.
- Lai, S, W., & O' Carroll, R, E. (2017). 'The Three Good Things' – The effects of gratitude practice on wellbeing: A randomised controlled trial. Health Psychology Update, 26(1), 10-18.
- Understanding what influences your mental health and wellbeing [leaflet]. (2021). Cumbria, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust - [www.cntw.nhs.uk/5P](http://www.cntw.nhs.uk/5P)



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