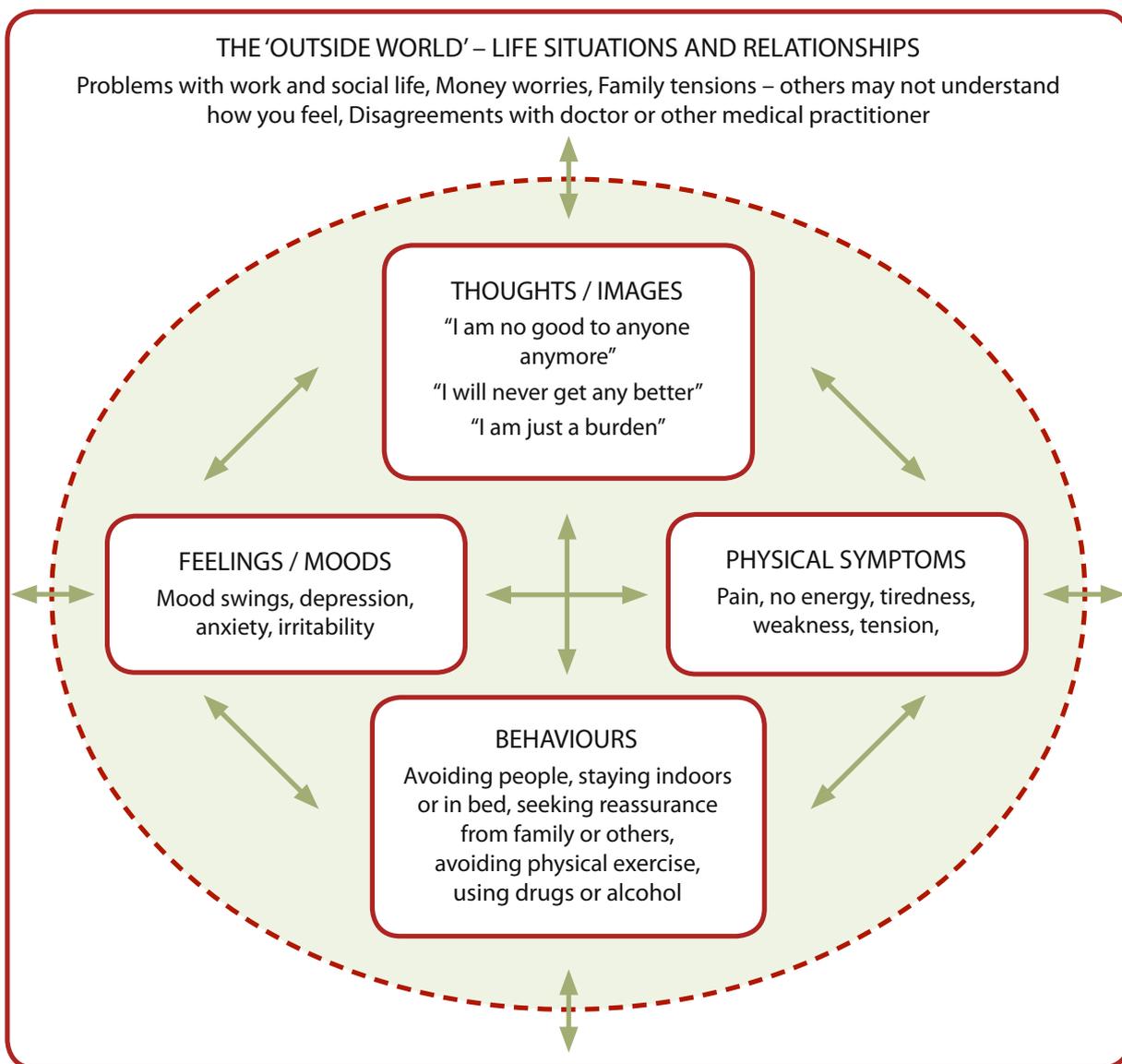


Coping with Physical Illness and Health Worries

The 'Five Areas' diagram below shows how illness and health worries can affect you, your friends and family. If you want to know more about the 'Five Areas', ask your guide.



Think about how you change the way you behave when you're not feeling well.

Do you do any of the following? Is it helpful or not?

- Worry about every symptom in case it is a sign of serious illness?
- Stop doing jobs round the house such as cooking and cleaning?
- Don't bother to get dressed – wear night clothes and dressing gown all day?
- Stop eating proper meals and live on 'bland' foods, such as toast?
- Expect family and friends to rally round and help out?

Coping with Physical Illness and Health Worries

Continued...

Physical illness will affect all of us at sometime in our lives. We may need to get treatment and to take things easy for a while, but worrying about our symptoms may leave us feeling stressed, depressed and anxious which can only make things worse, for ourselves and for those close to us. Talk to your guide about any physical symptoms you may have.

What is health anxiety?

- A person who has health anxiety feels physically ill, and thinks they have a serious condition, but there is no physical cause for their symptoms. Feeling anxious causes more physical symptoms which in their turn cause more worry. The person continues to feel ill and cannot be reassured by tests and visits to the doctor.

What causes health anxiety?

- The person is very aware of normal physical feelings in their body. They may also focus on common illnesses such as colds, and worry that they are a symptom of a serious illness. For example, someone with health anxiety may worry that they have a brain tumour whenever they have a headache. Tension then makes their headache worse and they worry even more.
- Because of worries about their health, the person goes to the doctor again and again with their symptoms. However, they are not reassured by normal test results.
- People with health anxiety tend to misinterpret information from doctors, TV, magazines etc.

How can you stop worrying about your health?

- Accept that worrying about your health all the time is likely to make you feel worse.
- Look for other explanations for your symptoms.
- If you have an illness, accept that some symptoms may be normal.
- Learn that constantly going to health professionals to get reassurance is often unhelpful.
- Realise that behaving as though you are ill (staying in the house, avoiding people, not eating proper meals) can make you feel worse.
- Use skills such as relaxation; relaxed breathing; changing unhelpful thinking; and changing unhelpful behaviour.

There are a number of other leaflets that your guide can give you if you are affected by physical illness or health anxiety, including 'Coping with Chronic Pain' for people affected by pain that won't go away. Talk to your guide about what you have read and the symptoms that affect you so that you can decide which other leaflets you and your guide might look at together.

FOR MORE LEAFLETS IN THIS SERIES GO TO www.primarycare-selfhelp.co.uk