

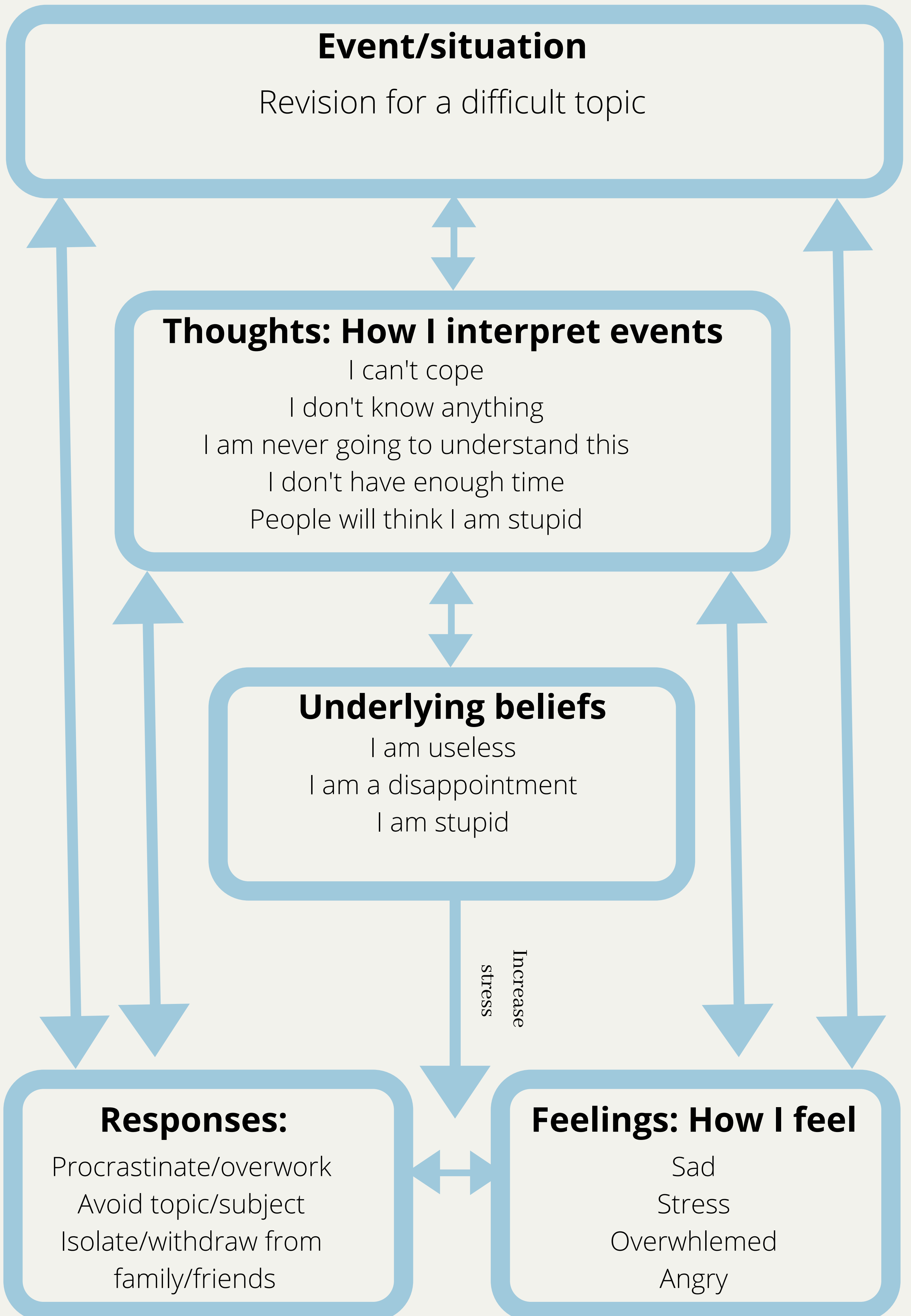
DON'T BE OVERWHELMED

MANAGING THE PRESSURE OF EXAMS

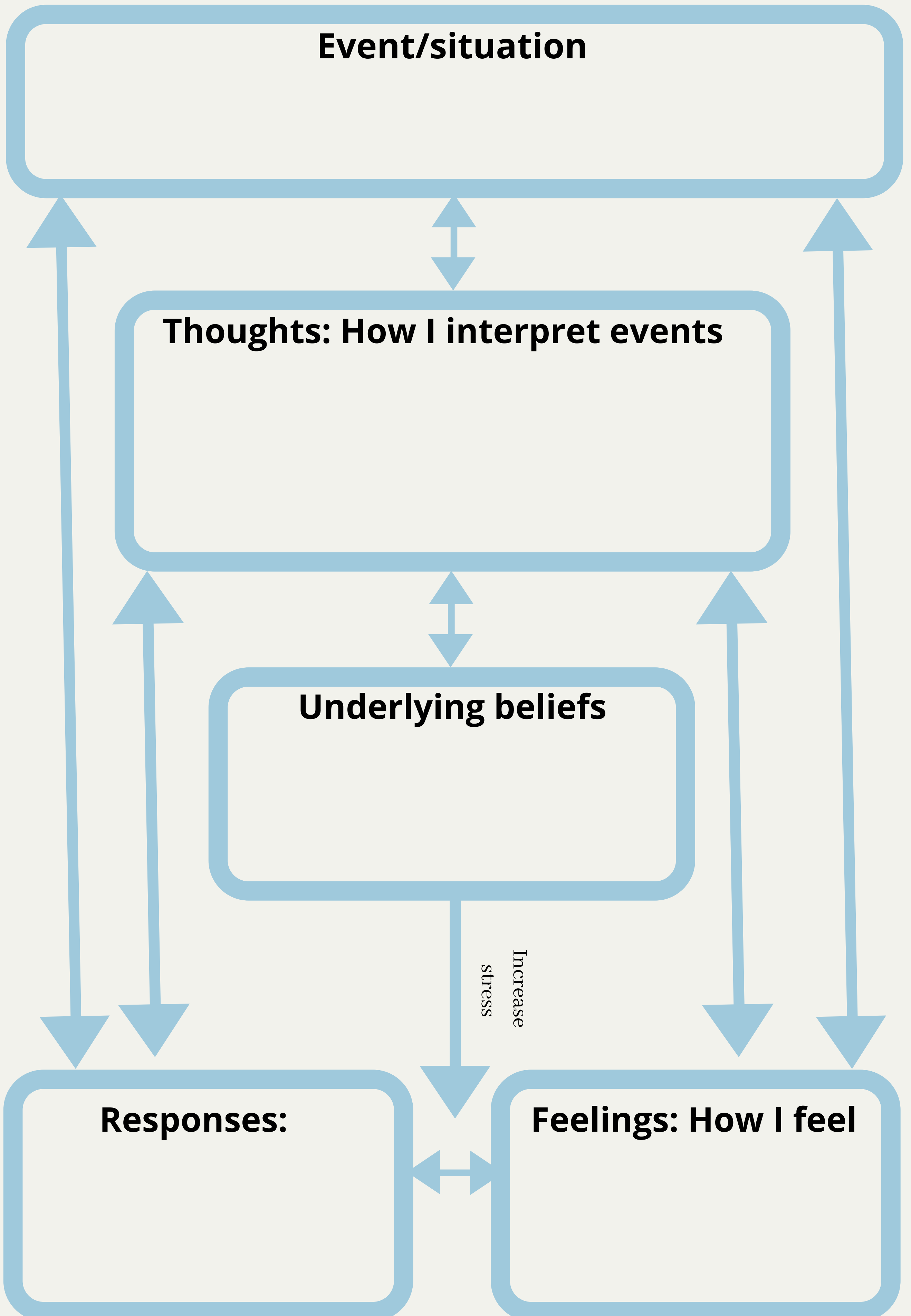


*An easy helpful guide to help you manage the
pressure of exams*

The relationship between our thoughts, feelings and behaviours



Think about the situations which can elevate your stress and complete the diagram

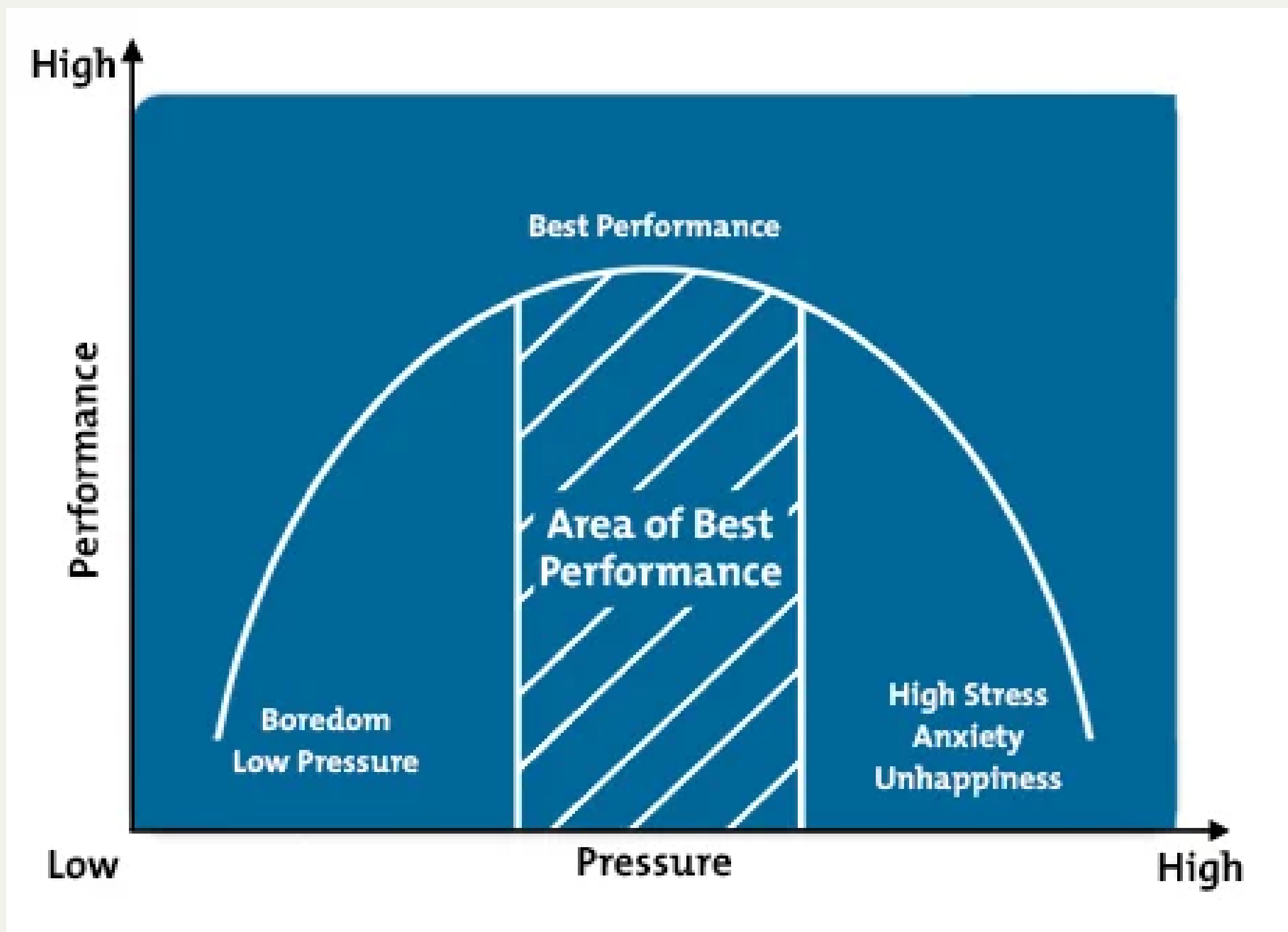


How does this diagram help?

This diagram helps you see how your thoughts, feelings and behaviours interplay with each other. This interplay can often create a cycle of emotion which often worsens over time.

To help manage this emotion you must first understand the cycle, and work on breaking the cycle in each area (thoughts, feelings and behaviours).

Why do I need to manage my exam stress?



High levels of stress are associated with lower performance. In order to give your best performance, it is important to reach the optimum level of pressure/stress.

Manage thoughts

How do you speak to yourself?

When faced with challenging situations it is common to experience self-criticism. Everybody has an inner critical voice, but it is important we do not let this take over.

Inner Critic

The inner critic is that nagging inner “voice” or thoughts that create negative internal dialogues. It blames you for things that go wrong, compares you to others and is always trying to find new ways to undermine your self-worth.

One of the problems with our critical thinking is that we usually believe it as an absolute truth, as opposed to seeing it as what it is (just thoughts). When we accept our critical thoughts without questioning them, we allow the inner critic to grow and have a continuous negative impact on our self-esteem.

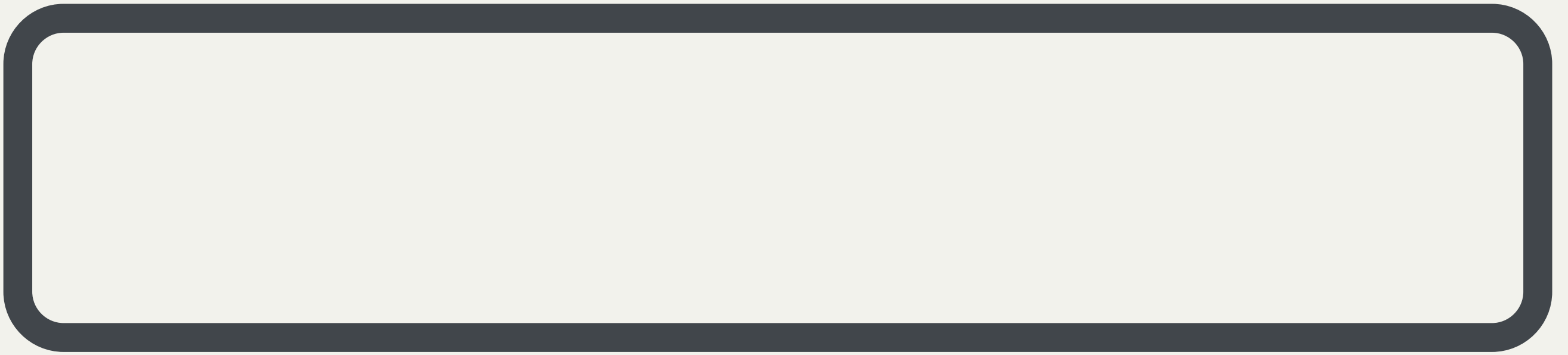
Stop '*shoulding*' yourself

'Should' statements are a common negative thinking pattern that the inner critic uses to make us feel wrong, guilty, frustrated or somehow behind in life. It makes us feel hopeless about the situation we are in and diminishes our sense of self-esteem.

Self-reflection

Do you judge yourself as a bad or unworthy person if you don't live up to your 'shoulds'?

List common judgements you draw from these statements



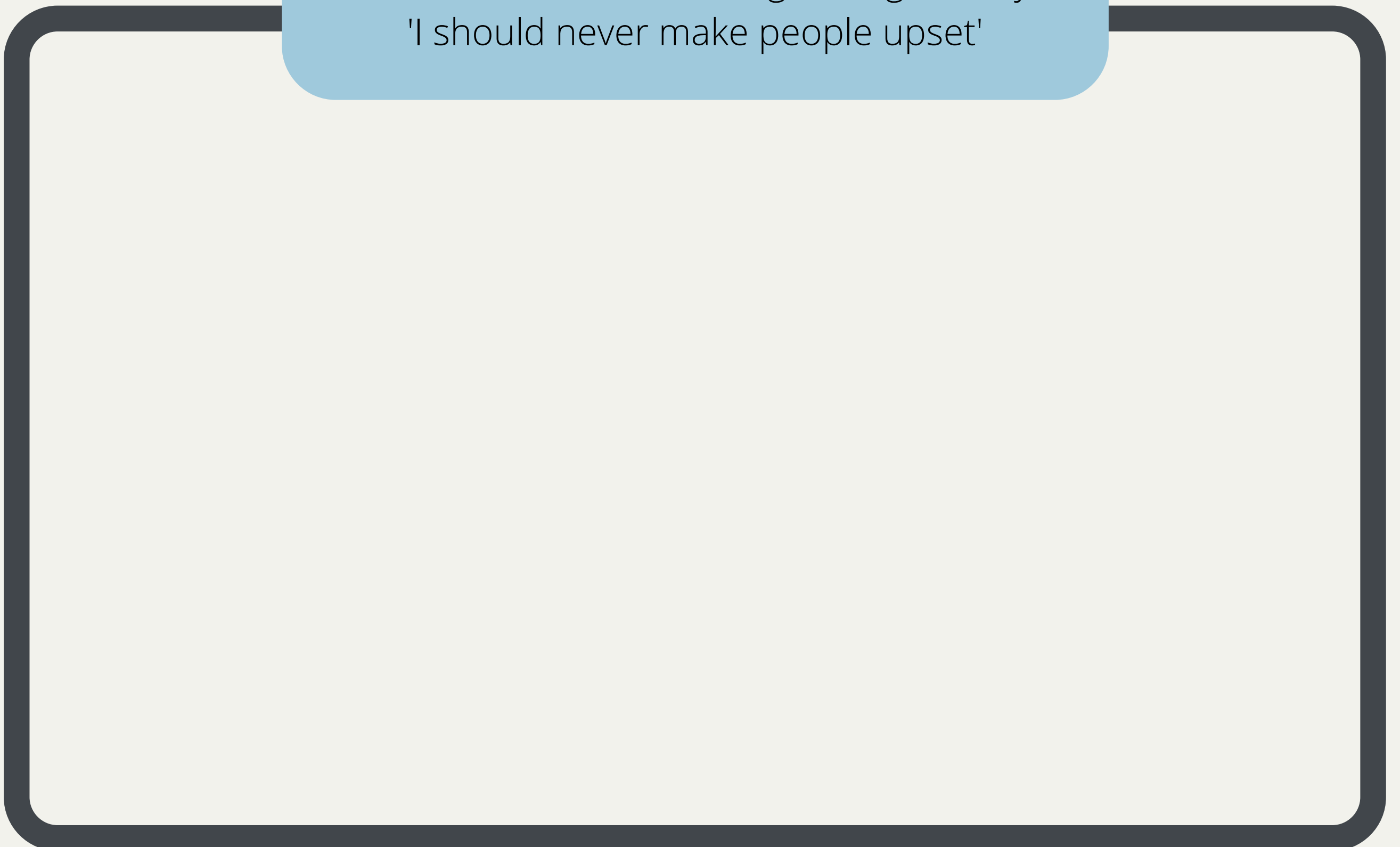
How often do you 'should' or 'shouldn't' yourself? List your more frequent 'shoulds' and shouldn't below.

Examples:

'I should be more productive'

'I should understand things straight away'

'I should never make people upset'



Review the list of 'shoulds' and 'shouldn'ts' above and mark the ones that your inner critic is constantly using to put you down.

Now that you have identified your unhealthy "shoulds" and "shouldn'ts", let's create more balanced and flexible statements.

Use a kinder choice of words such as 'I want', 'I prefer' or 'I choose'

E.g. 'I should be more productive' becomes 'I want to increase my revision, I will work for an extra half an hour'.

Be realistic in setting your expectations

E.g. 'I should understand things straight away' becomes 'I would like to understand things straight away, but accept there will be subjects and topics that are more challenging'

Link your statements with your understanding of the world.

E.g. 'I should never make mistakes' becomes 'I do not like making mistakes, but everyone makes mistakes, and now I am able to identify a gap in my knowledge and improve for next time'

Rewrite your statements using the above methods.

Remember no one is expected to be perfect, including you

The best way to combat self-criticism

Identify the thought

Challenge the thought

Replace with a more accurate thought

Questions to ask yourself....

What is the evidence against this thought?

Is this the case all the time? Are there times this was not the case?

Do other people think the same?

What would you tell a friend if they had the same thought?

Is this opinion or fact?

What is the good of the situation?

Challenging negative thoughts record

The goal of this exercise is to identify and reframe the self-critical thoughts that have been negatively impacting your self-esteem. Over time, you'll get better with the thought challenging skill and apply it anytime you need to, even without this piece of paper to guide you.

The negative thought

I am not ready for this exam, I am going to fail.
I do not know anything

Evidence for the thought

I do not understand topic A well.

I am not smart enough

Everyone is smarter than me

Evidence against the thought

Not understanding some concepts does not mean I will fail.

One grade below my expectations does not define me.

I have revised, and I am currently getting above __ grade. This is good enough.

Everyone has different skills in life, just because someone is better than me at something, this does not mean I am not good enough.

I cannot predict what will come up to know it will be everything I do not know

A more realistic thought

Though there are some aspects I find difficult, there are also areas I am comfortable with. I have prepared to the best of my ability and this is what matters. I cannot go back and change anything I have done, so now it is important I focus on what I can do going forward.

Challenging negative thoughts record

The negative thought

Evidence for the
thought

Evidence against
the thought

A more realistic thought

Catastrophizing

When we catastrophize we do two things:

- 1) We predict the worst possible outcome
- 2) we assume that if this outcome transpires, we won't be able to cope and it will be a disaster

For example:

We'll fret over an exam, assuming that we will fail horribly and subsequently end up broke and destitute.

How to decatastrophize

What are you worried about?

My upcoming exams and failing

How likely is it that your worry will come true? Give examples to support your answer.

It is unlikely I will completely fail as I have been consistent with getting 5/6's. I have also revised and feel comfortable in some of my knowledge

If your worry does come true, what's the worst that could happen?

I will not get to go to my uni/sixth form/college of choice.

I will then have to pick somewhere different to go and maybe resit some exams. This may delay my plans but it will not ruin my life.

If your worry does come true, what's most likely to happen?

I will be upset in the short-term but in the long-term everything will come together and I will still have a future.

If your worry comes true, what are the chances you'll be okay...

1 week...**10%** 1 month...**60%** 1 year...**100%**

How to decatastrophize

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If your worry does come true, what's most likely to happen?

If your worry comes true, what are the chances you'll be okay...

1 week...

1 month...

1 year...

Remember do not let your inner critic guide this activity make sure you are being realistic and considering true facts in your answers

Manage behaviours

How are your behaviours affecting your mood?

To emotionally regulate our self we often look for quick fix behaviours to help us. The problem with these behaviours is they do not offer a long term solution so the worry/stress will continue to pop up and in some cases can create new problems

Behaviours that could be making you feel worse...

Not trying in work/subjects to **avoid** feeling you are good enough. This behaviour will lead to you falling behind reinforcing your thought that you are not good at the subject.

Overworking yourself to protect yourself from having regret about not doing enough. This will make you feel run-down and tired, affecting your ability to remember and pay attention. This will make you feel worse as you will feel you are not retaining information.

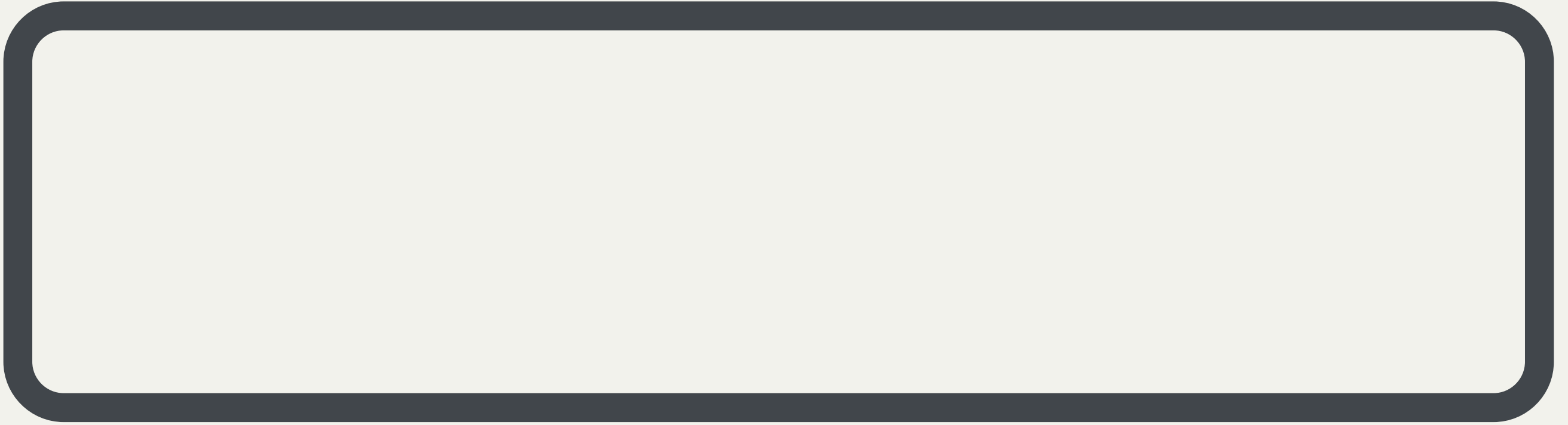
Restarting work repeatedly as you feel things have to be perfect straight away. This will increase the pressure you put on yourself making you feel nothing is good enough, and take away important time you need.

Procrastinating with work to remove to initial feelings of being overwhelmed. This can cause work to build up over-time making facing the work more stressful in the long run.

Self-reflection

Are there behaviours you do which can make you feel worse in the long-term

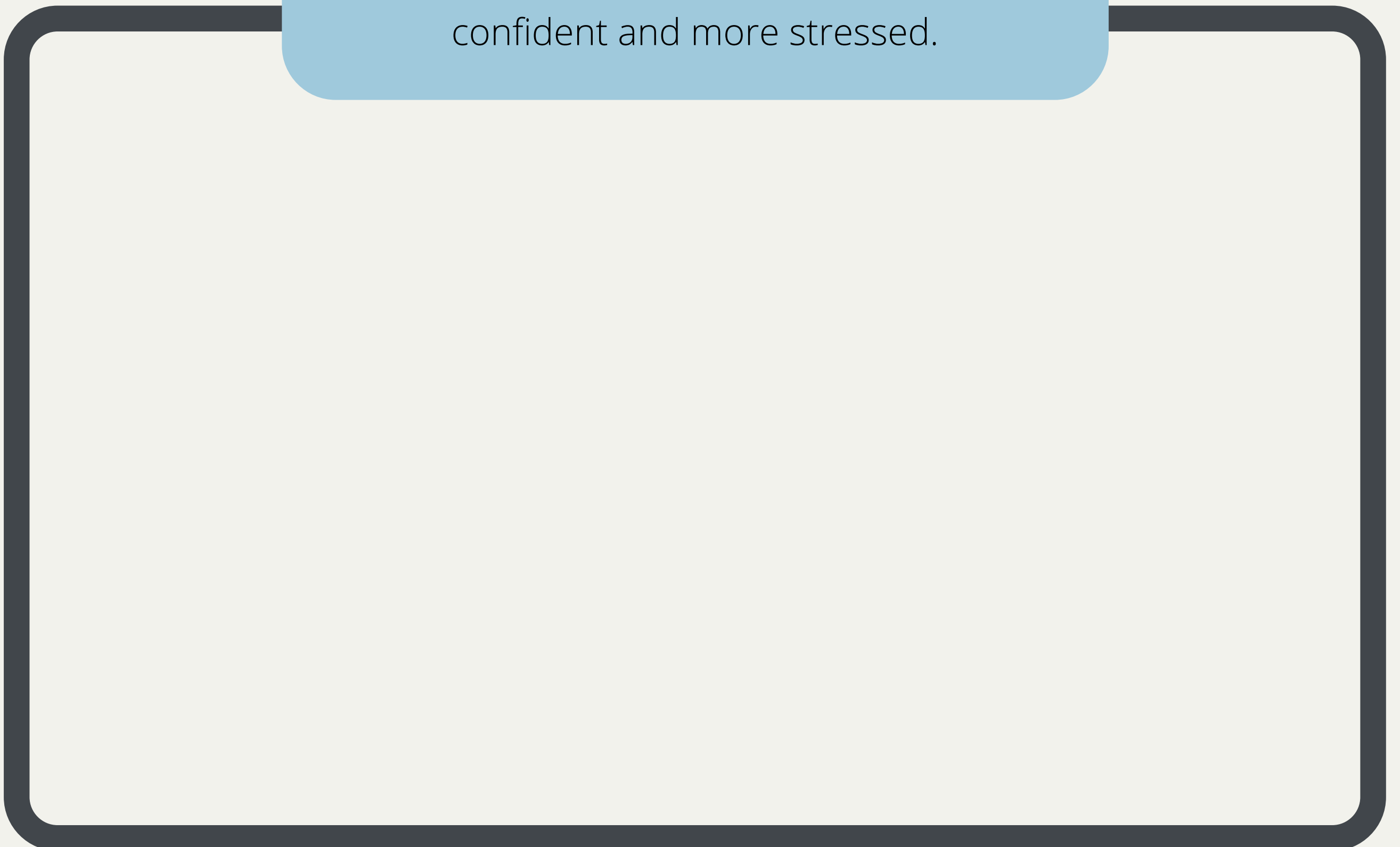
List common behaviours you recognise in yourself



What new problems/stresses can these behaviours cause?

Examples:

Not completing biology work as it is hard, means when exams come around I feel less confident and more stressed.



Review your behaviours and think which ones you would benefit in trying to change

This or that?

Sometimes it is helpful to think of the consequences of your behaviours to see which outcome would benefit you more

Situation: **Revise for biology exam**

Option 1

Begin work as soon as I am home, and do not stop until bed time. I have to write at least 5 pages of notes and remember it all.

Consequences: Tired for next day less focus in school. Feel upset/stress if target is not met, likely to stay up too late to reach this.
Feeling of stress builds up and affects me for several days

Option 2

Take a break when I get home for an hour. Start revision and give myself regular breaks. If I notice I begin to feel stressed take some time to relax and restart revision when I am calm.

Consequences: Feel as though I am not doing enough/there is no time for this
However, in the long run this will help me be more productive as I will not feel run down.

Situation: **Revise for biology exam**

Option 1

Ignore the work as it is difficult and will make me feel overwhelmed and unable to concentrate. Do it last minute so I do not have to think about it.

Consequences: Feel as though I will fail the exam as I have not given enough time to the topic, falling behind on areas which is affecting my understand of new learning. Feeling even more overwhelmed when I finally have to face it.

Option 2

Take the subject slow, start by making a plan of what I will revise doing small bits at a time.

Consequences: Small levels of stress when I face topics I do not understand. However, this reduces risk of falling behind, and builds confidence. This is also more manageable than a big stress at the end.

This or that?

Sometimes it is helpful to think of the consequences of your behaviours to see which outcome would benefit you more

Situation:

Option 1

Consequences:

Option 2

Consequences:

Situation:

Option 1

Consequences:

Option 2

Consequences:

Manage feelings

The role of feelings

It is often the way we feeling which leads to our engagement in unhelpful behaviours as we want to escape the unpleasant sensation which ones with feeling stressed/worried/upset.

Reducing physical sensations...

Breathe



Breathe in through your nose, and out through your mouth.

Make sure your breathe out is longer than your one in.

You can follow a 3 in, 5 out count to help.

Relax



Tense your muscles as tight as possible for 4-10 seconds, quickly release them. Pause for 10 seconds and repeat.

This will help release any tension that you may have

Listen to your body

When you are feeling run down or tired, give your body the time it needs to recover. Sleep and eat well to help support its recovery

