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Building Body Acceptance

Module 7

Self-Management Planning

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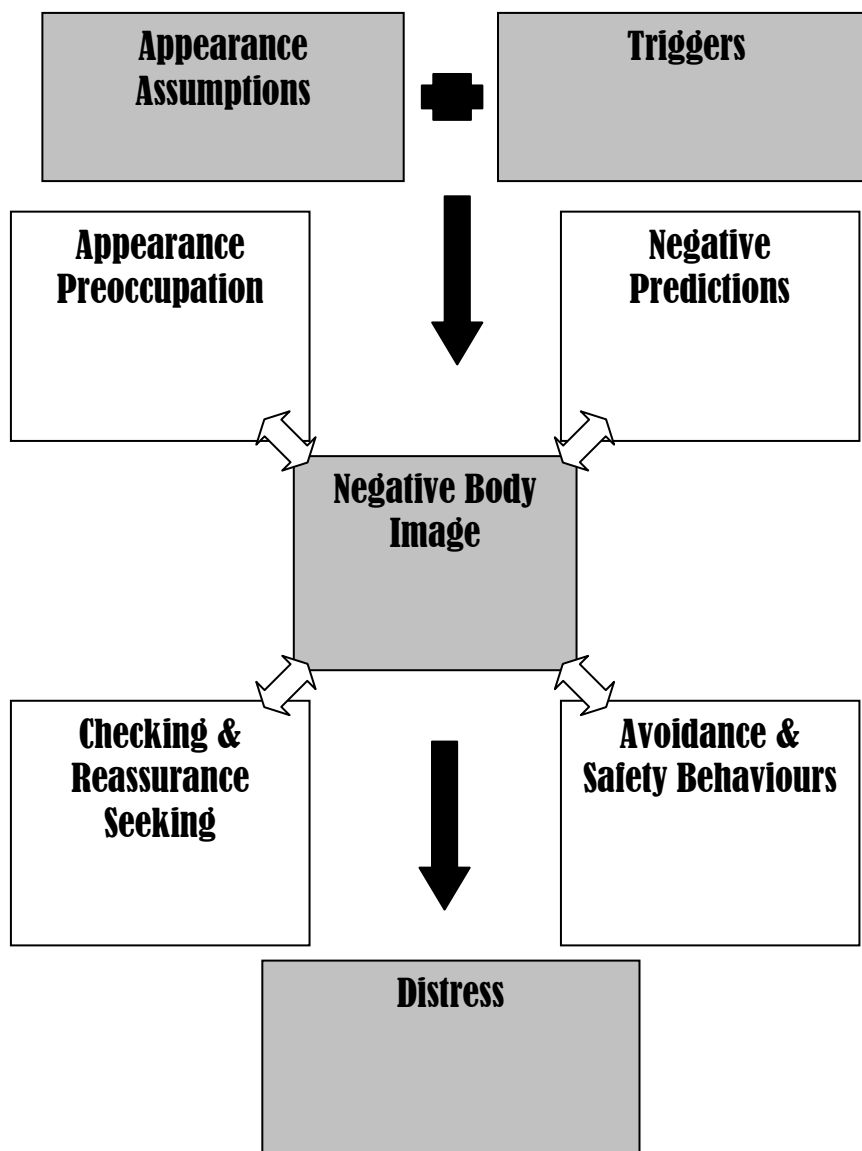
Introduction

Congratulations on making it to the end of this information package! In this final module, you will find a summary of all of the important concepts and strategies introduced to you in the previous modules. You will also find a self-management plan designed to help you stay on track in the future.

The BDD Model Revisited

Remember the model of how BDD is maintained from Module 2? It showed how your old appearance assumptions and current triggers come together to activate your negative body image. Not only does this generate distress, but also an intense preoccupation with your appearance, checking and reassurance seeking behaviours, negative predictions about how others will judge and respond to you, and avoidance or safety behaviours. These four strategies are aimed at reducing your distress, hiding or solving your perceived flaw, and protecting yourself from being judged negatively by others. But in actual fact all they really do is increase your distress in the long term, and fuel your negative body image and appearance assumptions that lay at the heart of the problem. Hence, the vicious cycle continues each time you are confronted with a trigger.

Below is the model to refresh your memory.



A New Way of Operating

The old BDD model represents a vicious cycle where what you think and do, with the good intention of protecting yourself, instead backfires and increases the problem. The good thing about a cycle is that you can reverse it from a negative cycle to a more positive cycle. It is like a wheel moving in one direction that has some momentum behind it. By making some changes and putting some force against the old motion, you can usually get it to spin in the opposite direction. Initially, trying to change the direction of the wheel can be a real effort and may not be smooth at first. However, with some persistence it starts to get easier and the wheel eventually gathers its own momentum in the new direction.

We hope that by now you have been able to start loosening up the old BDD cycle. So let's take a moment to review the key strategies introduced throughout these modules, and see how they might fit together in a new model which you will see over the page.

Notice in the new model that current triggers can still initially activate your old unhelpful appearance assumptions. This is because those old assumptions have generally been around for a long time, so you can't expect them to disappear overnight. The key thing is that instead of allowing these old assumptions to then guide your thoughts, feelings and behaviours, you **choose** to do things differently. Over time these old assumptions may then fade out and not be so easily activated.

So, when your old appearance assumptions are activated and your negative body image pops up again, you instead:

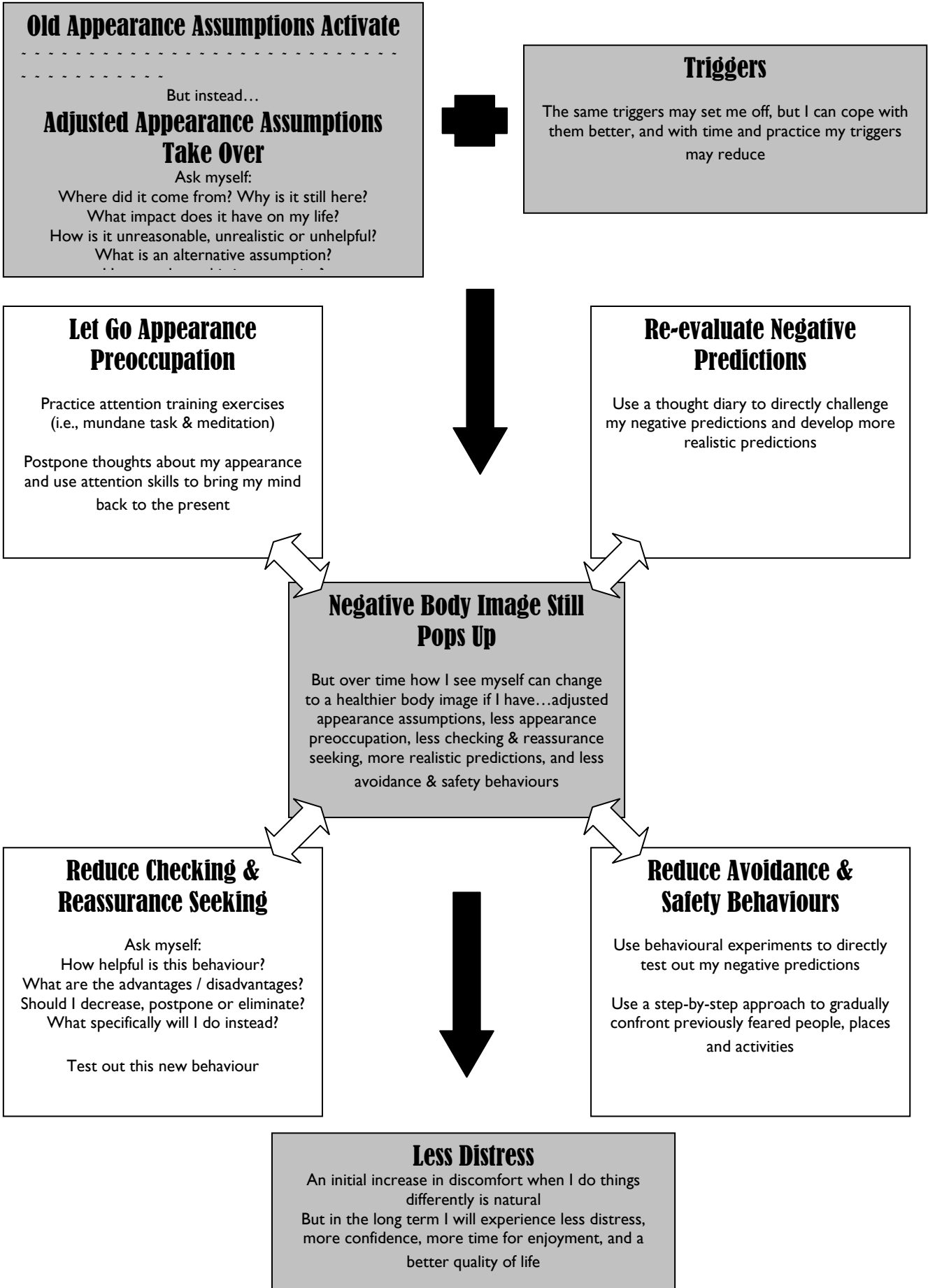
- **Adjust your appearance assumptions** by challenging them, devising new helpful appearance assumptions, and putting them into practice;
- **Let go of your preoccupation with your appearance** by practicing your attention training exercises (mundane task focussing & meditation) regularly, and then using these attention skills to bring your attention back to the here-and-now non-judgementally by using either your breathing or the task at hand as an anchor. You can also combine your new attention skills with a postponement exercise to decrease the amount of time you spend preoccupied with your appearance;
- **Reduce any unhelpful checking or reassurance seeking behaviours** by evaluating how helpful the old behaviour really is, generating a new more helpful behaviour, and then putting it into practice;
- **Re-evaluate any negative predictions** by using a thought diary to test out the evidence for and against your predictions; and
- **Reduce any avoidance or safety behaviours** by using behavioural experiments to gradually test out the negative predictions driving these behaviours.



Doing each of these things, although hard in the short term, can lead to less distress and a wide range of long term benefits to your life. The key thing is to keep going, because the more of the above strategies you use, the more likely you are to reverse that old cycle of BDD and develop a healthier body image.

You will notice throughout these modules and in the *New Way of Operating* model, that we have never directly tackled your negative body image. That is, we have never directly tried to change how you see yourself. What you may notice if you continue to use the strategies recommended throughout these modules, is that over time how you see yourself may change to a healthier and less negative body image. This change will happen when you are no longer engaged in thinking and behaviours that had previously fuelled your negative body image (i.e., appearance preoccupation, checking & reassurance seeking, negative predictions, avoidance & safety behaviours). Most importantly, what we hope you are noticing already is an improvement to your quality of life as you reduce the impact of your negative body image on how you live day to day.

My New Way of Operating



Dealing With Set-backs

Now that you have made it to the end of this information package, the most important thing is to keep going! It is important to recognise though, that even if you are trying your hardest to put all of the strategies in place, you can expect some set-backs to happen along the way. Change is never a straight-forward process.

Think about the idea of trying to learn a new sport. It will take some time for the skills to feel more natural and to learn all the new rules. You will need to persist and practice to make it easier on yourself. At times, you may come up against some tough competition, but that doesn't mean that you should give up! It just means that you might need some more practice.



Try not to focus too much on any set-backs that you experience. Instead, focus your attention on what you will do next to get back on track, such as practicing the strategies summarised by the “My New Way of Operating” model. You can even use any set-backs you experience as a way of learning something new about yourself, to help avoid similar problems in the future.

It may be helpful to create a personalised self-management plan to recognise the signs of a set-back and to put things in place as soon as possible. This way you can prevent a small set-back from turning into a large one.

On the next page is a self-management plan worksheet for you to identify:

- **Early warning signs of a set-back.** These are clues you can keep watch for that indicate you might be starting to become preoccupied with your appearance again.
- **Potential problem situations.** These are the things that could potentially trigger off the old vicious cycle of BDD in the future.

By being aware of these early signs and potential triggers, you will be in a better position to “spot” the onset of BDD, and then take early action to prevent it from becoming worse.

There is also room for you to record helpful:

- **Strategies or techniques.** These are the things you have learnt in these modules that are helpful for reducing your BDD.
- **Coping statements or phrases.** These could include your new appearance assumptions, ideas you have developed from your thought diaries, or any other things you have found helpful from these modules.



My Self-Management Plan

What are the early warning signs that tell me I might be heading for a set-back and need to do something about it myself? (e.g. particular negative thoughts about my appearance; behaviours such as checking, reassurance seeking, avoidance, safety behaviours; feelings of depression, anxiety, disgust or embarrassment)

What situations are potential problems for me? (e.g. times of increased stress, going on a date, having my photo taken, attending a party)

What strategies/techniques have I learned that I could apply when I notice some early warning signs? (e.g., mundane task focusing, meditation, postponement, thought diary, setting behaviour goals, experiments, stepladder, etc).

What are some of the coping statements or helpful phrases that I can use to help myself cope when I am feeling distressed about my appearance, or have had a set back?

Maintaining My Gains

Congratulations for making it to the end of this Information Pack! Now the most important thing is for you to **keep going** and **keep practicing** what you have learned.

It is important to mention again that change is never a straight forward process. Sometimes you will feel like you are making great progress, and sometimes you might feel like you are getting nowhere. This is completely expected. After all, if changing BDD was easy, you probably would have done it some time ago. We encourage you to remember that wearing out your old BDD cycle will take time, practice, persistence and patience. We also encourage you to review the Modules, especially:

- Modules 1 and 2, where we discussed the negative consequences of BDD, and
- this Module, where we discussed your 'New Way of Operating' and developed a 'Self Management Plan'

Together, these will hopefully motivate you to keep working on this problem, as well as remind you of the important strategies for doing this.

One way to help you maintain your gains is to recognise what you have already achieved and how your life has changed for the better as a result. If we don't take a moment to reflect on this, it is easy think that we haven't changed at all or that our efforts haven't been worth it. You will be more likely to keep going if you can appreciate the changes you have made so far by working through these Modules. We recommend that you keep adding to this list as you continue reversing the old BDD cycle and practice using your 'New Way of Operating' in your everyday life.

What positive changes have I made?	How is my life better?

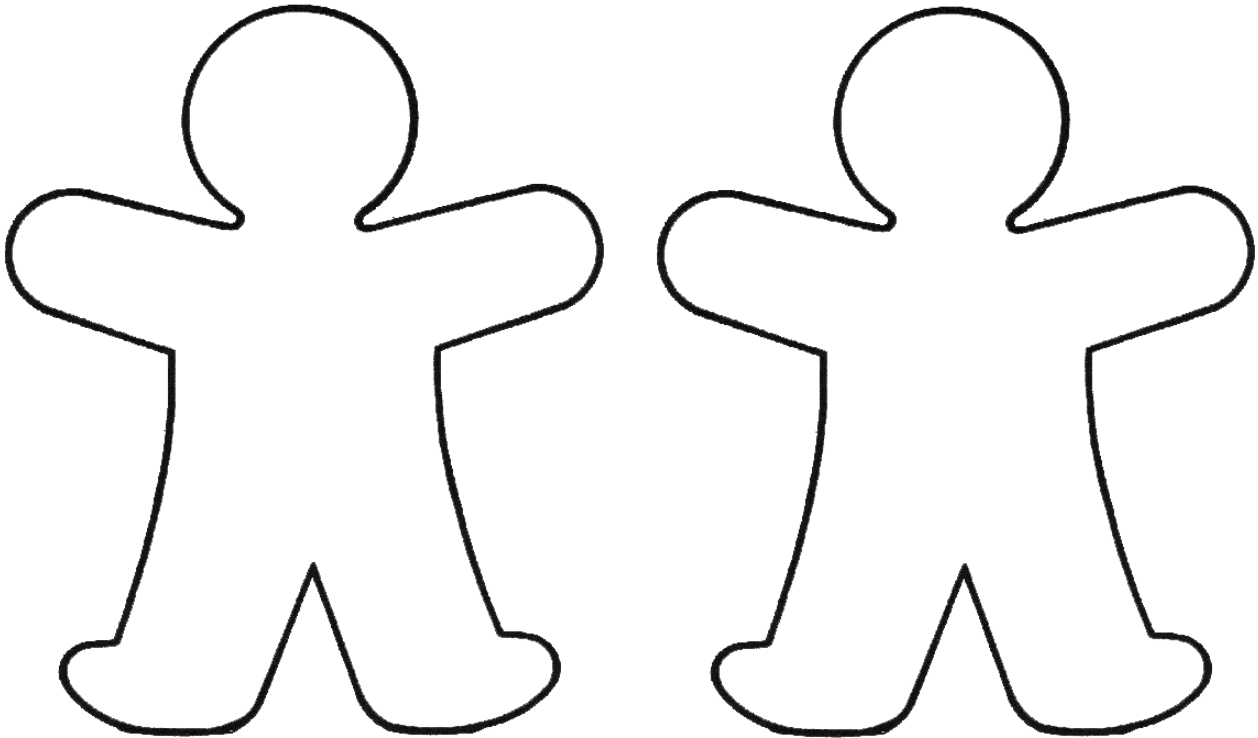
Building Body Acceptance

Another way of appreciating the changes you have made is to re-do the self-portrait you did in Module 1. If you feel comfortable to do so (and without looking at Module 1), take a moment to do a drawing that captures how you see yourself now. Remember you don't have to be an artist, this is just for you to look at. Stick figures or any other visual representation is fine.

MY SELF PORTRAIT

When you are finished, compare it to the drawing you did in Module 1 (page 6). Notice if there are any differences in how you see or represent yourself from when you first started these modules to now. Has the area you disliked changed in any way in the picture? Have other areas you hadn't focused on before become more prominent in the picture or changed in some way? What do you make of any changes you see?

Finally, it is important to recognise that up until now it is likely that you have judged yourself mostly on an aspect of your appearance that you dislike. Let's take a moment to try to broaden out your sense of who you are as a person beyond a specific aspect of your physical appearance, by appreciating all that makes you...you.



Write in the centre of the figure above, the aspect of your appearance that you had been using to define yourself as a person and determine your happiness in life (e.g., nose)

Now, list all the qualities, abilities, achievements, roles you have, etc...that make up who you are as a person. Fill up the figure above with all of these labels, and if you run out of space write them around the outside of the body.

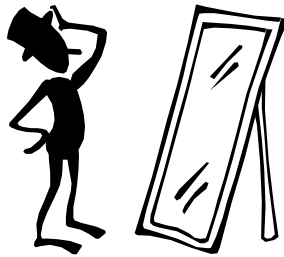
If you are having trouble thinking of things, here's a list to get your mind brainstorming. I am...

- a Mother/Father
- a Wife/ Husband/Girlfriend/Boyfriend
- a Son/Daughter
- a Friend
- a Hard worker
- a Good listener
- Compassionate
- Generous
- Fun
- Creative
- Friendly
- Smart
- Sporting
- Healthy
- Curious
- Organised
- Reliable
- Independent
- Artistic
- Supportive
- Etc...

The take home message is that you are more complex a person than just a “nose” or just “acne” or just “receding hair”, or however you had been defining yourself up until now. You are a person with many aspects both within you and without. If more of your time, thinking, emotions and behaviour are shared amongst all these things, rather than fixed on one aspect of your appearance that you dislike, then you will be well on the path to “Building Body Acceptance” and hence building a better life. Well done, keep going and the path will get easier!

Module Summary

- To reverse the vicious cycle of BDD you need to:
 - Adjust your old appearance assumptions
 - Let go of your preoccupation with your appearance
 - Reduce any unhelpful checking or reassurance seeking behaviours
 - Re-evaluate any negative predictions
 - Reduce any avoidance or safety behaviours
- Changing your old appearance rules, thoughts and behaviours takes time and lots of practice
- Expect set-backs, but rather than focussing on them, use your self-management plan to recognise them early, prevent them from getting worse, and help you get back on track. Also, take a moment to review what you had already achieved prior to the set-back, as a way of motivating yourself to keep using the strategies you had found helpful.



To finish up ...

Congratulations! You have made it to the end of the modules. We hope you have found them to be beneficial and that you will maintain the gains you have made. Do keep using the strategies and review the modules from time to time. Good luck!

About The Modules

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BACKGROUND

The concepts and strategies in these modules have been developed from evidence based psychological practice, primarily Cognitive-Behaviour Therapy (CBT). CBT for Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD) is based on the approach that BDD is a result of problematic cognitions (thoughts) and behaviours.

REFERENCES

These are some of the professional references used to create the modules in this information package.

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“BUILDING BODY ACCEPTANCE”

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