

## Module Two: What Keeps Perfectionism Going?

This module will cover:

- The link between thoughts, feelings, and behaviours.
- How perfectionism can become a maintaining cycle.
- Using language to support your child's wellbeing.

### Thoughts, feelings, and behaviours

Have you heard of cognitive behaviour therapy, or CBT? It's the type of therapy this program is based on. In CBT, we assume that people's thoughts, feelings, and behaviours are all linked. Here's an example of what this can look like:



Sometimes, people seem to get stuck in a vicious cycle. Their thoughts, feelings, and behaviours all reinforce each other in a way that negatively affects their wellbeing. The good news is that because these parts are all connected, by changing one part, we can disrupt the cycle and turn it into something more helpful.

We can't *directly* change our feelings. For example, has anyone ever told you while you were feeling sad that you should just "cheer up"? If you've had that experience, you probably know that it's not very helpful advice! Likewise, if we have an unpleasant physical sensation, like nausea or pain, we can't just decide to stop feeling it. However, we do have a bit of control over what we think and how we behave. This is why CBT focuses on making changes to thoughts and behaviours.

One way that we can track the impact of our current habits in thinking and behaviour, as well as the effects of changing our habits, is to break down events into parts. We did this in the table below, based on the example event we provided above:

Event	Thought (interpretation)	Feeling (emotion or physical sensation)	Behaviour	Outcome
<i>I made a mistake in a presentation at work (forgot to update slides).</i>	<i>I'm stupid/not good enough. My colleagues think I'm stupid too.</i>	<i>Ashamed. Anxious. Nauseous.</i>	<i>Took the next day off work to avoid seeing my colleagues.</i>	<i>Lost a day of pay because I didn't have any leave available. Now I'm dreading going back to work.</i>

You will see that we've referred to the thoughts as interpretations as well. That's because we think that the key part of the cycle is not the event itself but *what we interpret the event to mean*. The interpretation we make will impact the feelings we have, the behaviour we enact, and therefore the outcome of the event. For example, let's look at a table about the same event, but with a different interpretation:

Event	Thought (interpretation)	Feeling (emotion or physical sensation)	Behaviour	Outcome
<i>I made a mistake in a presentation at work (forgot to update slides).</i>	<i>That's a bit embarrassing, everyone makes mistakes sometimes.</i>	<i>A little embarrassed. Face feels a little hot from blushing.</i>	<i>Corrected the mistake. Talked to a colleague about it later and laughed.</i>	<i>The mistake got fixed and I felt better after talking to someone about it.</i>

Hopefully, from this example, you can see that two different people can be in the exact same situation and have completely different interpretations of what it means, which leads to quite different feelings, behaviours, and outcomes.



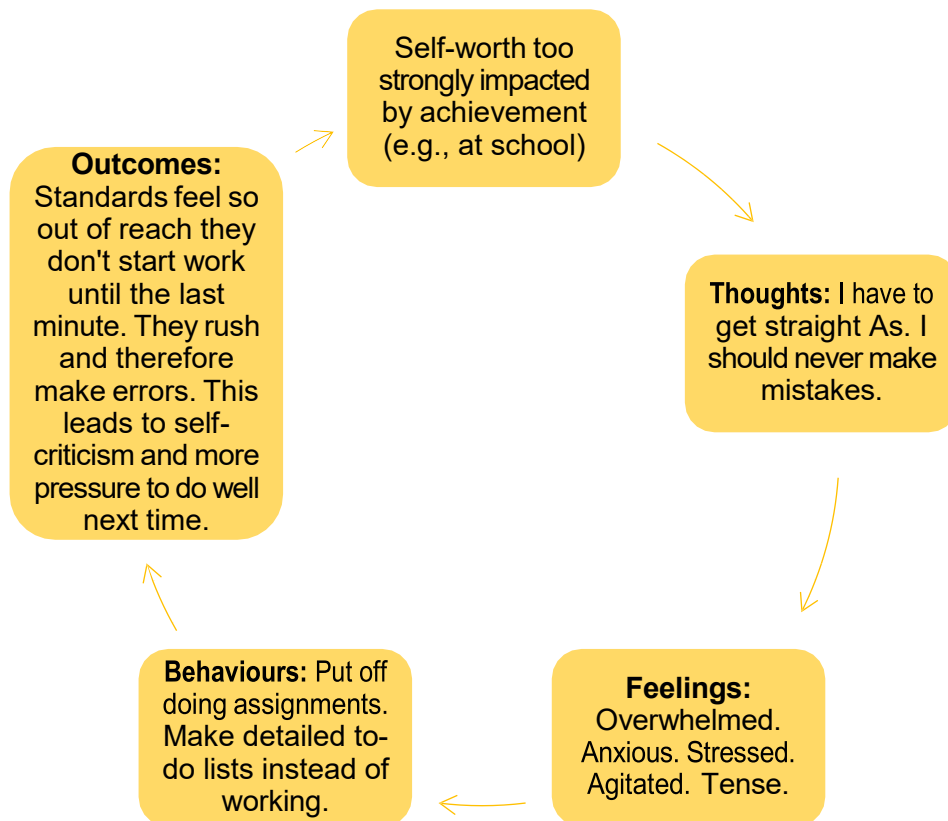
Can you apply this approach to something that happened to you? It doesn't need to be anything too serious – maybe you have a recent example where you made a mistake of some kind. Please fill out the table below. First, write what originally happened. Second, write what you might have felt/done/the outcome if you'd had a different interpretation.

**Event/situation:** \_\_\_\_\_

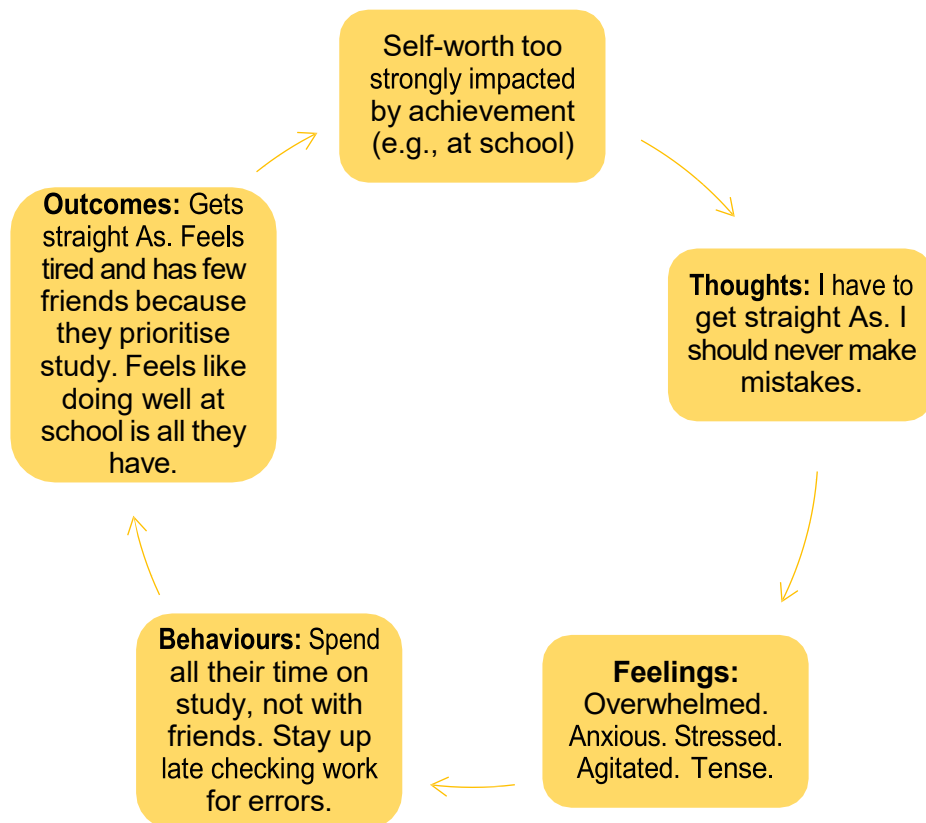
	<b>Thought (interpretation)</b>	<b>Feeling (emotion, physical sensation)</b>	<b>Behaviour</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
<b>What originally happened</b>				
<b>Using a different interpretation</b>				

### The maintaining cycle of perfectionism

Perfectionism can keep going thanks to some common vicious cycles that people fall into. Here's an example of one such cycle, using the elements we have already discussed:



Perfectionism can also be reinforced in situations when goals are seemingly achieved:



## Language to support your child in changing perfectionism

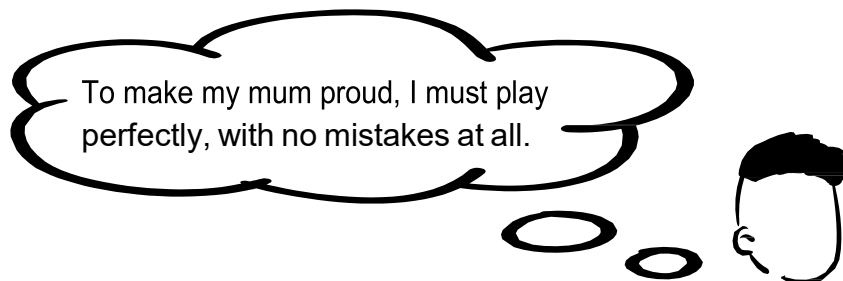
People who are more perfectionistic tend to say that they believe their parents have high expectations of them<sup>1</sup>. This finding is a little bit hard to interpret because people who have high expectations of themselves are also more likely to perceive that others have high expectations for them. That is – while it's possible that people with perfectionism *do* tend to have parents with high expectations, it's also possible that their parents *do not* have high expectations, but they interpret things in a way that makes it seem like they do.

So, this is a good time to consider any things you may say or do that accidentally reinforce perfectionism, such as praising your child's *achievement*. Here's an example:

Alice has a son called Jack who is perfectionistic about playing the piano. She goes to watch Jack play a recital. He does a wonderful job – doesn't play a single wrong note. She's proud of him because she knows how nervous he was before the show. She says to him...



Now, if Jack weren't experiencing perfectionism, he would be likely to interpret this in the way Alice means it. That is, he would see that Alice is happy for him and interpret this as evidence of how much she loves and supports him. Unfortunately, Jack has a pre-existing belief that he must do things perfectly for others to like him. So, what he takes from his mother's encouraging message is something quite different. What he hears is...



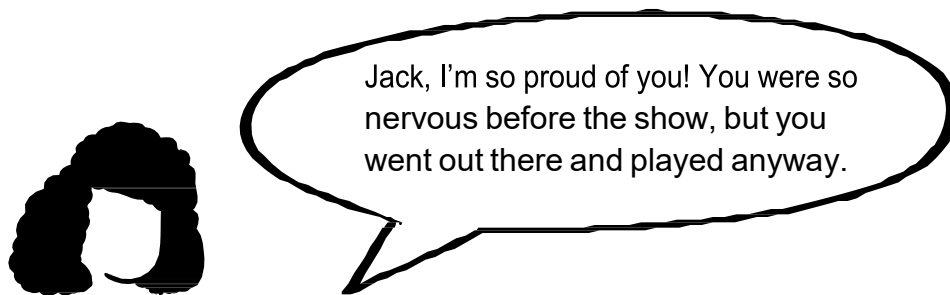
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<sup>1</sup> Smith, M. M., Hewitt, P. L., Sherry, S. B., Flett, G. L., & Ray, C. (2022). Parenting behaviors and trait perfectionism: A meta-analytic test of the social expectations and social learning models. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 96, Article 104180. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrp.2021.104180>

Oh dear – that’s not what Alice meant to say at all!

We think of praise as a way of making your child more likely to repeat a certain behaviour in the future by rewarding them for that behaviour with your attention. So, the specific behaviour you pay attention to matters. That is, the words you use when praising your child affect what behaviour your child will understand that they should repeat. In the example above, Alice has done two things well with her praise: it is labelled (i.e., mentions a specific behaviour) and it is concise (i.e., not too long or too detailed). The only issue is that she has inadvertently praised the behaviour of playing the piano piece perfectly.

So, to help you rephrase these kinds of messages, to think about the **specific behaviour** in your child you want to reinforce. Ask yourself – what did your child do in this scenario that you would like them to keep doing? Here’s an example rephrasing for Alice:



With this rephrasing, Alice focussed on the behaviour she wants to reinforce – doing something important even though he felt nervous beforehand.



### Key tips for language that does not “confirm” perfectionism

If you’re doing this program, it’s likely that you (like Alice) have a child who is especially sensitised to messages from others that reinforce perfectionistic beliefs. Knowing that, here are some tips for using language to support your child to reduce their perfectionism:

1. As in the above example, be mindful about *what* you praise in situations related to achievement – try focussing on the behaviour you want to reinforce, rather than the outcome.
  - a. Remember to label the behaviour and be concise.
2. Actively look for opportunities to praise your child for personal qualities or desirable behaviours outside of situations related to achievement.
  - a. For example, if your child comforts a sibling after they graze their knee, you could praise them for taking care of their sibling.



What aspects of your child's personality do you admire? Can you think of any opportunities to point these qualities out to them? Write a reflection in the box below:

### A final note on your language

We want to be clear that we **are not** suggesting that it's your fault your child has perfectionism. However, we know that as their parent or caregiver, you are a powerful moulding force for your child, and we want to take advantage of that to help them. Pointing out behaviours from your child that you like that aren't related to success or failure can help train your child's brain to focus less on achievement, which can help to reduce perfectionism.

**That brings us to the end of Module 2!** A quick reminder of the main points:

### Key points from Module 2

- Our thoughts, feelings, and behaviours are all linked together – so, if we make helpful changes to our thoughts and behaviours, we can improve how we feel.
- What we think about a situation, or the interpretation we have of it, has an especially strong impact on how we feel and what we do, and therefore on the outcome of the situation.
- You can support your child to change their perfectionism using your language – focussing more on their personal qualities or specific behaviours you want to see more of, instead of commenting on their “successes” or “failures”.



**How do these key points relate to your child?** Write any reflections you have here. The reflection could include things you learned or things you already knew but have a greater understanding or appreciation of.





## Module Two Homework Exercises

Disclaimer: These concepts might prove challenging for your child to grasp, necessitating repeated practice for comprehension. Keep in mind that persistence is crucial, and don't hesitate to take breaks when necessary.

There are two parts to the homework for this module.

**First:** Help your child to learn about the relationship between thoughts, feelings, and behaviours, using the following handouts:

1. The information sheet titled '*Think, Feel, Do*', which your child can read with you to learn about how their thoughts, feelings, and behaviours are linked together.
2. The information sheet titled 'How to distinguish between thoughts, feelings, and behaviours', you can read with your child to further their understanding of thoughts, feelings, and behaviours. Then, have your child complete the 'knowledge quiz' to access their knowledge. Please, then review any questions with your child that they answered incorrectly.
3. The worksheet titled '*Can You Help Lucy?*', which your child can complete with you to practise applying the 'think, feel, do' model (you might like to complete this worksheet too, so you and your child can talk about your answers together!).
  - Kindly be aware that two variations of the '*Can you Help Lucy?*' worksheet are available. The first version includes examples and language designed for children who lean toward the younger end of the 7–12-year-old age range. We encourage you to exercise your judgment in selecting the version that best suits your child's needs.

We encourage you to keep using the 'think, feel, do' model with your child when they tell you about difficult situations they experience. You can help them identify their thoughts, feelings, how they behaved, and what the result was (we have provided a handout for this, titled '*What I Think, Feel, Do*'). With repeated practise, they should develop a better understanding of themselves, see their emotions as more predictable, and feel more in control of their behaviour. Look out for opportunities to apply the 'think, feel, do' model to the area of perfectionism you and your child identified as the focus of the program when you did the '*Perfectionism Quiz*' as part of Module 1 homework.

**Second:** Have some fun with your child whilst practising the tips around language from this module. Agree on a game to play with your child (e.g., a card or board game, I spy, or hide and seek). Whilst playing, practise praising them for something other than whether they win the game. You could praise them for showing curiosity by choosing a game they've never played before or for behaviour that shows good sportsmanship. Some tips for this exercise:

- Don't criticise or control your child's behaviour during the game.
- Don't worry about "playing by the rules" or reprimanding any "cheating" during this exercise. Instead, focus on finding opportunities to praise any positive behaviour of theirs that is unrelated to winning or losing the game.
- If your child praises you, model accepting the compliment without dismissing it.

Important Note: It is not necessary to complete the module and homework exercises in one sitting. Dependent on your child's needs, you may want to work through the module and exercises in blocks throughout the week.

# Think, Feel, Do

Did you know that what you **think** affects how you **feel** and what you **do**?

We call this **think, feel, do**! Let's talk more about it.

## Think

We all think lots of different things every day! Thinking is the way we talk to ourselves. It helps us understand what happens to us. Thinking also helps us decide what to do.



## Feel

One thing we can feel is **emotions**. Here are some emotions:



Happy



Excited



Calm



Worried



Sad



Angry

We can also **feel things in our body**, like:

- Sick
- Tired
- Hot
- Itchy
- Cold
- Hungry



## Do

People do all sorts of things. Some things we often do are:



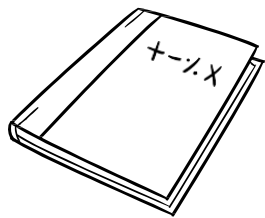
Walk



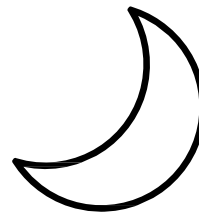
Talk



Play



Study



Sleep

Something you are doing right now is **reading**!

Now we know what **think**, **feel**, and **do** mean...

But how do they work together?

Lucy can help us show you!

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One day, Lucy's friends are laughing together at recess. Lucy isn't standing with them.

When she sees her friends laughing, Lucy **thinks**...



This thought makes Lucy **feel** sad...



And when Lucy feels sad, what she **does** is cry...



Then, Lucy spends recess sitting alone.

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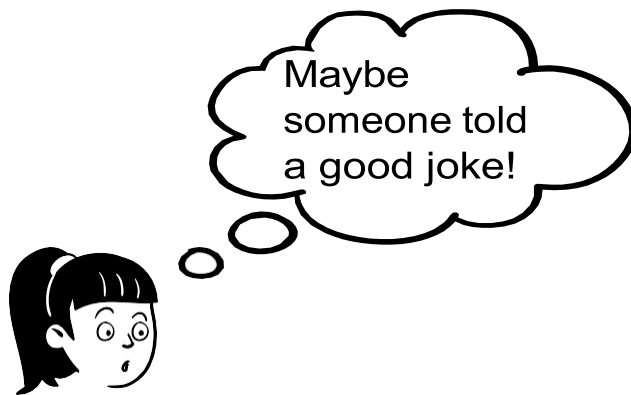
Oh no – poor Lucy! The good news is that we know how to help her. Remember what brain scientists told us? We can train our brain to feel better!

If we change what we **think**, that will change how we **feel** and what we **do**.

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Let's try it out with Lucy. She comes up with a new thought when she sees her friends laughing at recess.

This time, Lucy **thinks**...



This thought makes Lucy **feel** curious about what the joke was...



When Lucy feels curious, what she **does** is ask what the joke was...



When her friends tell her the joke, Lucy laughs too!

Yay – Lucy feels much better! All she had to do was try a new way of **thinking**.

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## HOW TO DISTINGUISH BETWEEN THOUGHTS, FEELINGS AND BEHAVIORS

### What are feelings?

Feelings are like the way your heart and body tell you how you are doing inside. They can be happy, sad, excited, scared, or lots of other things, including butterflies in your stomach or headaches. Imagine feelings the way you feel in your body when something happens. For example, when you get a new toy, you might feel happy and have a big smile on your face.

### What are thoughts?

Thoughts are like the words and pictures that pop into your mind or head. Imagine it's like having a little voice inside your head that talks to you, like when you think about what you want to eat for lunch or when you plan what games to play with your friends.



### What are behaviors?

Behaviors are the things you do or actions you take. It is how you show what you are thinking and feeling on the outside. For instance, when you are happy, you might jump up and down or laugh. When you are angry, you might stomp your feet or frown. Behaviors are like the way you show your thoughts and feelings to the world.

**Example:**

"When you see your favorite ice cream, you might have the thought, 'I want ice cream'. That thought can make you feel excited, and you might have grumbings in your stomach like when you are hungry. Then, your behavior might be asking your parents if you can have some ice cream or pointing to the flavor you like.

## Knowledge Quiz!!

Identify if each of the following statements is a thought, feeling or behavior?

Statement	A.	B.	C.	Your answer
1. Chocolate is my favorite flavour of cake.	A. Thought	B. Feeling	C. Behaviour	
2. I am excited for my birthday party.	A. Thought	B. Feeling	C. Behaviour	
3. I wonder what the weather will be like tomorrow.	A. Thought	B. Feeling	C. Behaviour	
4. I gave my sister a hug.	A. Thought	B. Feeling	C. Behaviour	
5. I am nervous about the test.	A. Thought	B. Feeling	C. Behaviour	
6. I threw a ball to my friend.	A. Thought	B. Feeling	C. Behaviour	

**Answer Key:**

1. A
2. B
3. A
4. C
5. B
6. C








Oh no – this hasn't turned out well for Lucy at all!

Let's use some brain science to help Lucy. If we help Lucy to come up with a new thing to **think**, that will change how she **feels** and what she **does**.



 What could Lucy **think** instead of “*I made the flowers look messy*” to make her feel better? Can you think of anything nice you could say to her?

Sometimes it's hard to think of new thoughts! Here are some ideas for thoughts that might make Lucy feel better:

- It's okay if the bouquet isn't perfect.
- My mother will be happy that I tried to do something nice for her.
- I can rearrange the bouquet.

**Please write your answer in this box**



If Lucy had a different thought, like one of the ones you suggested, how would she **feel**? How would she feel if you said something nice to her?

If it's hard to think of how Lucy would feel, you could think about how you feel when someone says something nice to you!

**Please write your answer in this box**



This is the last part!



If Lucy had a different thought and feeling, what would she **do**?

Do you think she would:

- Give her mother the bouquet she already made?
- Rearrange the bouquet?
- Ask her father for help?

**Please write your answer in this box**

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, intended for the user to write their answer to the question above.

Thank you for helping us to help Lucy! Please talk about your answers with your parent or caregiver. They might be able to learn from you. They might also have some ideas you didn't think of.



**Well done for finishing this activity!**

## Can You Help Lucy?



Lucy decides to make a birthday card for her friend. Her friend loves cats, so she decides to draw a cat on the card. She works really hard, but she can't make the cat look the way she wants!

Lucy **thinks** *"I suck at drawing"...*

This makes Lucy **feel** embarrassed...


Because she's embarrassed, what she **does** is throw the card in the bin.

Now, Lucy doesn't have a card to take to her friend's party.

Oh no – this hasn't turned out well for Lucy at all!

Let's use some brain science to help Lucy. If we help Lucy to come up with a new thing to **think**, that will change how she **feels** and what she **does**.



 What could Lucy **think** instead of “*I suck at drawing*” to make her feel better? Can you think of anything nice you could say to her?

Sometimes it's hard to think of new thoughts! Here are some ideas for thoughts that might make Lucy feel better:

- It's okay if the card isn't perfect.
- My friend will be happy that I tried to do something nice for her.
- I can make a new card.

**Please write your answer in this box**






If Lucy had a different thought, like one of the ones you suggested, how would she **feel**? How would she feel if you said something nice to her?

If it's hard to think of how Lucy would feel, you could think about how you feel when someone says something nice to you!

**Please write your answer in this box**

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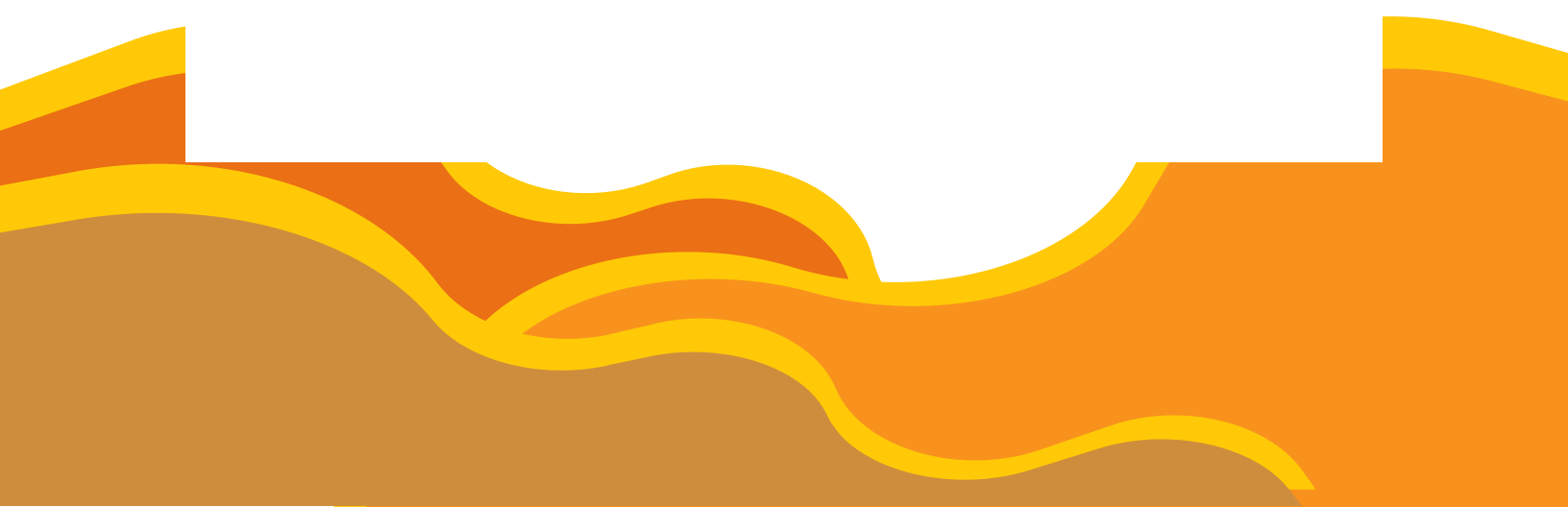


This is the last part!



If Lucy had a different thought and feeling, what would she **do**?

Do you think she would:

- Take the card she already made?
  - Draw a new card?
  - Ask one of her parents for help?
- 

Thank you for helping us to help Lucy! Please talk about your answers with your parent or caregiver. They might be able to learn from you. They might also have some ideas you didn't think of.



**Well done for finishing this activity!**

# What I Think, Feel, Do

Did something tricky happen to you? Let's use **think, feel, do**.


**What happened?**

**What did you think?**

**What did you feel when you had that thought?**

**What did you do when you had that thought?**

**How did it end?**



How could it have ended if you were to **think, feel, do** things differently?

**What happened?**

**What could you think instead?**

**What would you feel when you had that thought?**

**What would you do when you had that thought?**

**How might it end?**

