

Cognitive Behavior Therapy for Adults with ADHD

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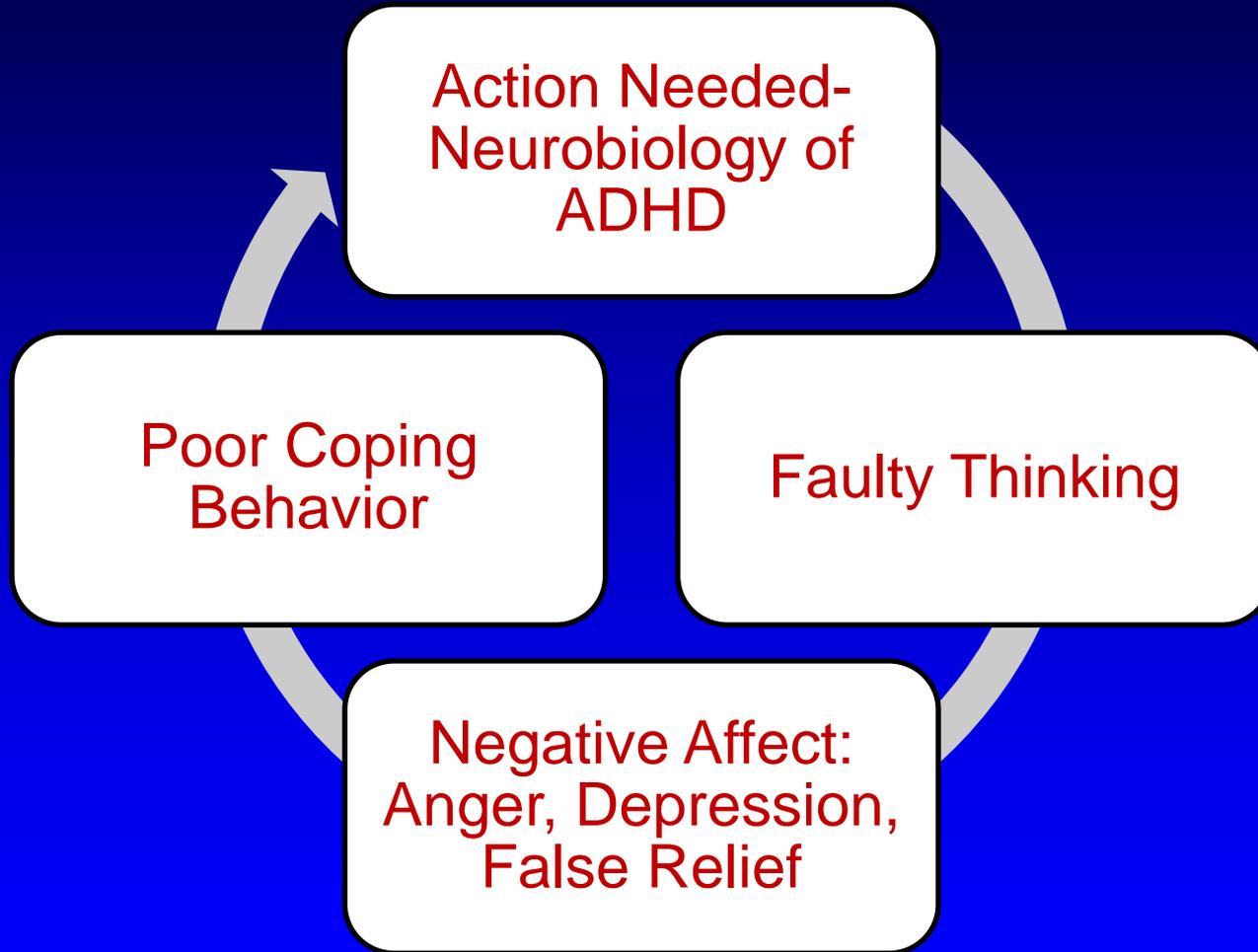
What Is Cognitive Behavior Therapy?

- An approach to therapy that helps people achieve their goals by changing **faulty thinking** and **self-defeating behaviors/ habits**.
- Cognitive--- Thinking
- Behavioral--- Action, behavior, habit

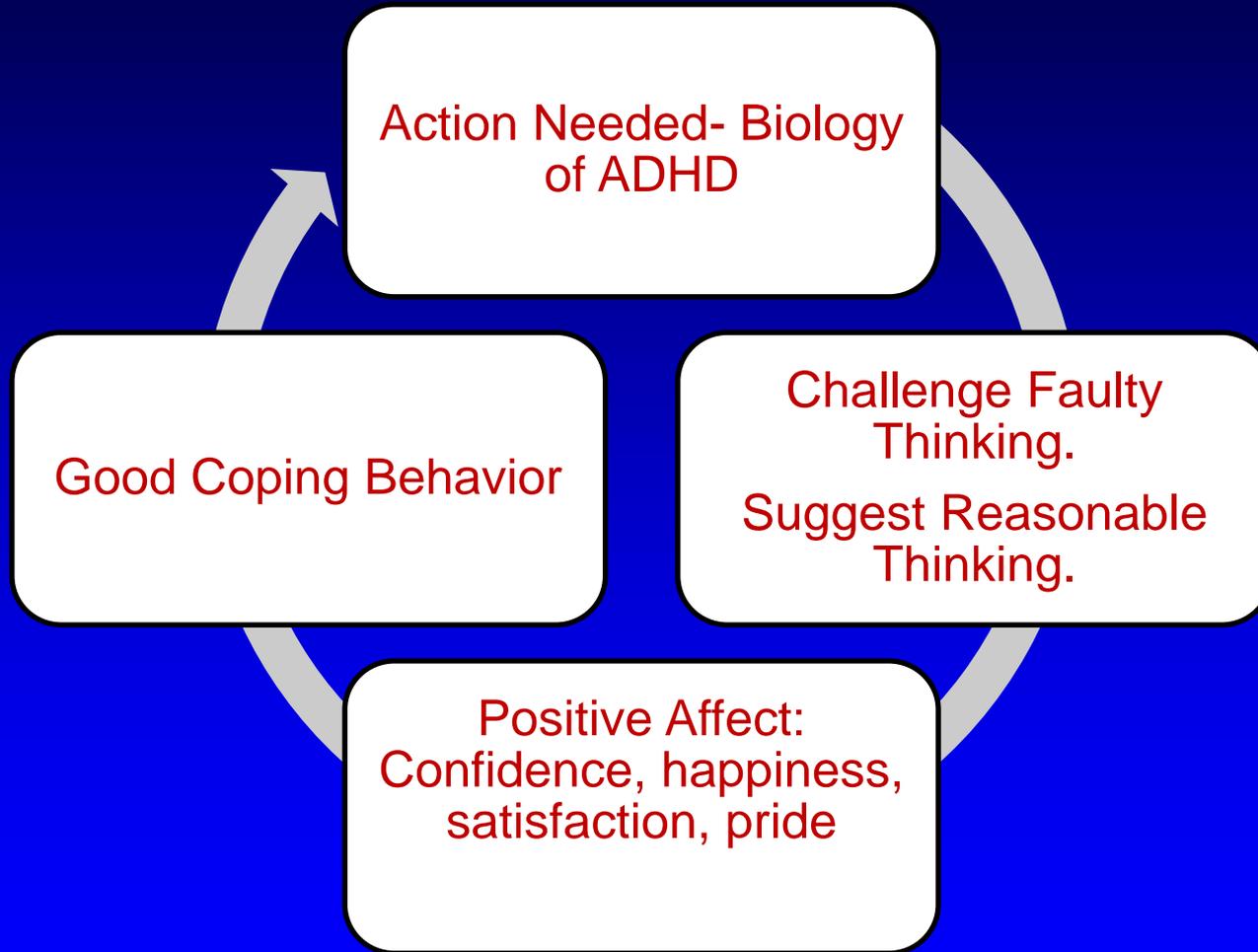
But wait a minute.....

- **ADHD is not caused by faulty thinking & bad habits**
- **It is caused by neurobiology & genetics.**
- **However, living with ADHD can lead to faulty thinking and bad habits, & then we don't deal with ADHD effectively.**

CBT Neurobiological Model



CBT Neurobiological Model



WHY BOTHER?

ADHD & Life Expectancy

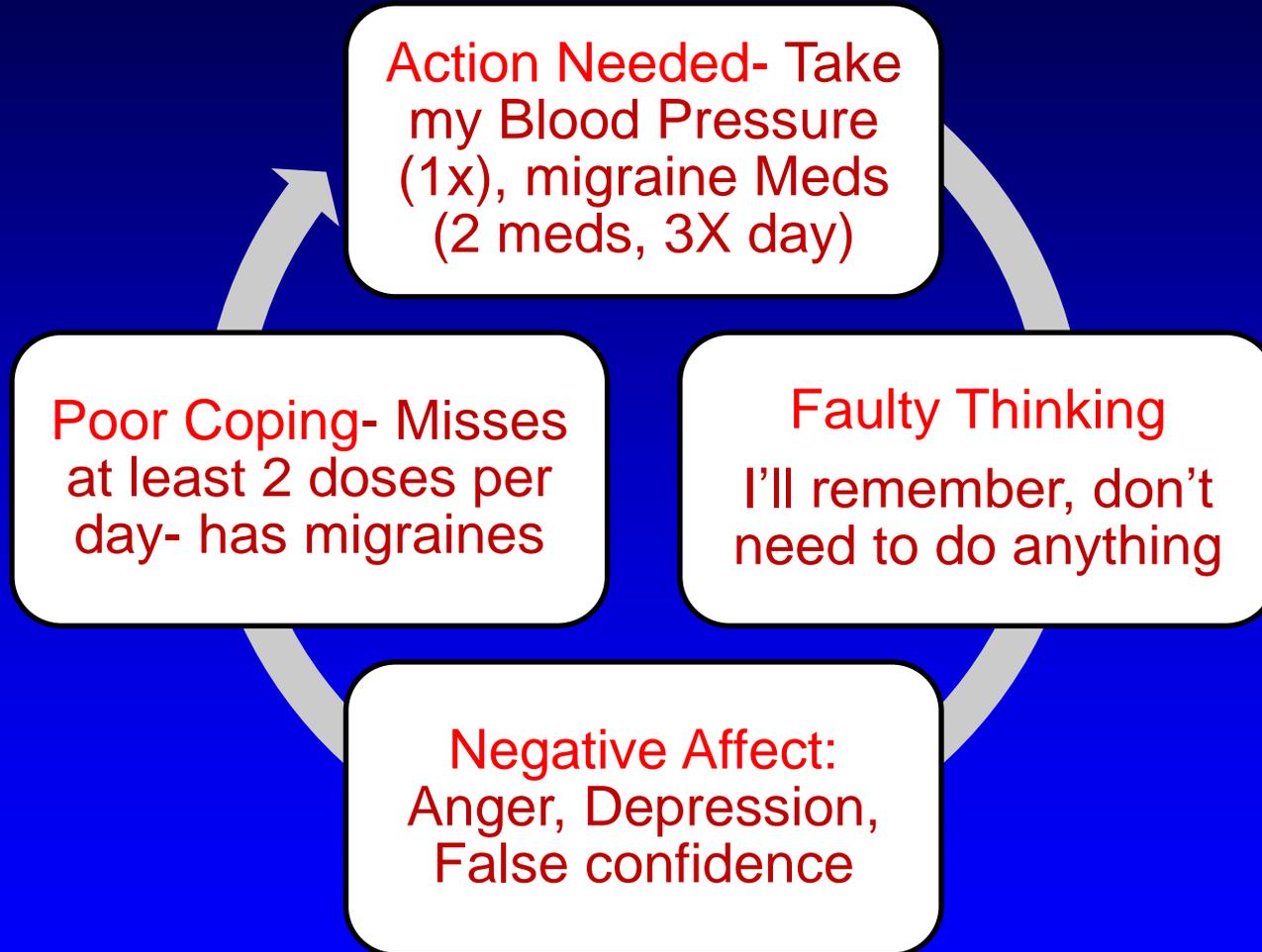
- **Dr. Russell Barkley studied estimated life expectancy in adults with persistent ADHD.**
- **He followed up a Hyperactive and Control (non-ADHD) children from childhood into adulthood in their late 20s.**
- **Divided the ADHD group in their 20s into those who still had full ADHD (persistent ADHD) and those who did not (non persistent ADHD)**
- **Computed Estimated Life Expectancy with Goldenson Index, from U of Connecticut.**
- ***From Barkley, R. A. & Fischer, M. (in press). *Hyperactive child syndrome and estimated life expectancy at young adult follow-up: The role of adult ADHD and other potential predictors. Journal of Attention Disorders, in press****

ADHD & Life Expectancy

- Adults with Persistent ADHD had an estimated life expectancy of **42** healthy years
- Adults in the Control group had an estimated life expectancy of **54.7** healthy years.
- Persistent ADHD was associated with a **12.7** year decrease in estimated life expectancy in Dr. Barkley's data.
- Further, Dr. Barkley found impulsivity was a major predictor of estimated life expectancy.
- From Barkley, R. A. & Fischer, M. (in press). *Hyperactive child syndrome and estimated life expectancy at young adult follow-up: The role of adult ADHD and other potential predictors. Journal of Attention Disorders, in press*

That is “Why Bother.” CBT can help adults with ADHD control impulsivity & make wise choices that may prolong their estimated life expectancy.

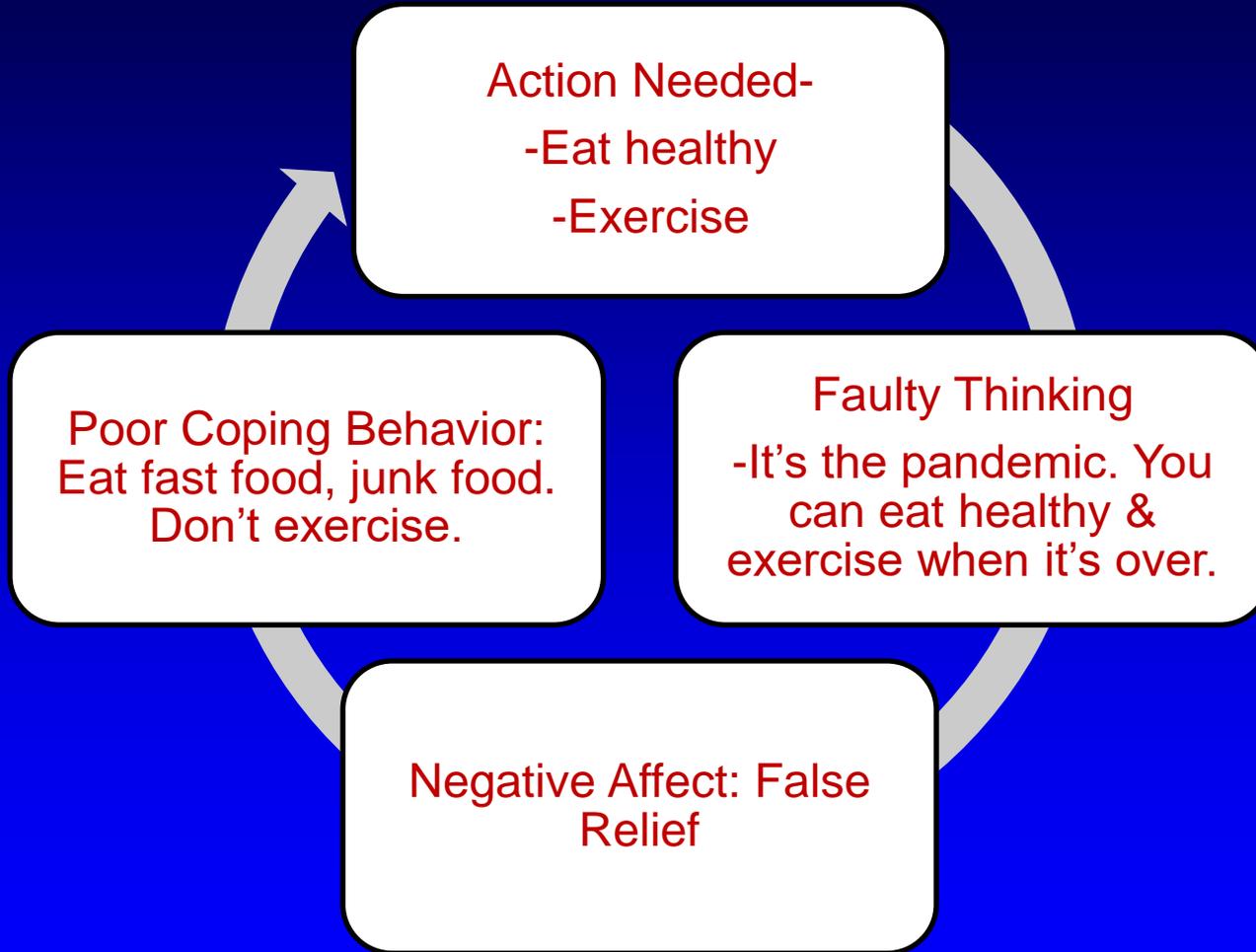
Sandy (Age 47, ADHD) & Her Medicine



Chester, ADHD Age 40

Chester is just a regular guy with ADHD, age 40, married, with 1 son in high school, who works as an engineer for GM. During the pandemic, Chester worked from home, & he and his wife Cindy spent most of their time around the house. He found himself slacking off on his exercise (walking, jogging or going to the gym after work) and eating more junk food. By the time he got vaccinated a year later, he had gained 11 pounds, his asthma was worse, and his Adderall seemed less effective.

Chester



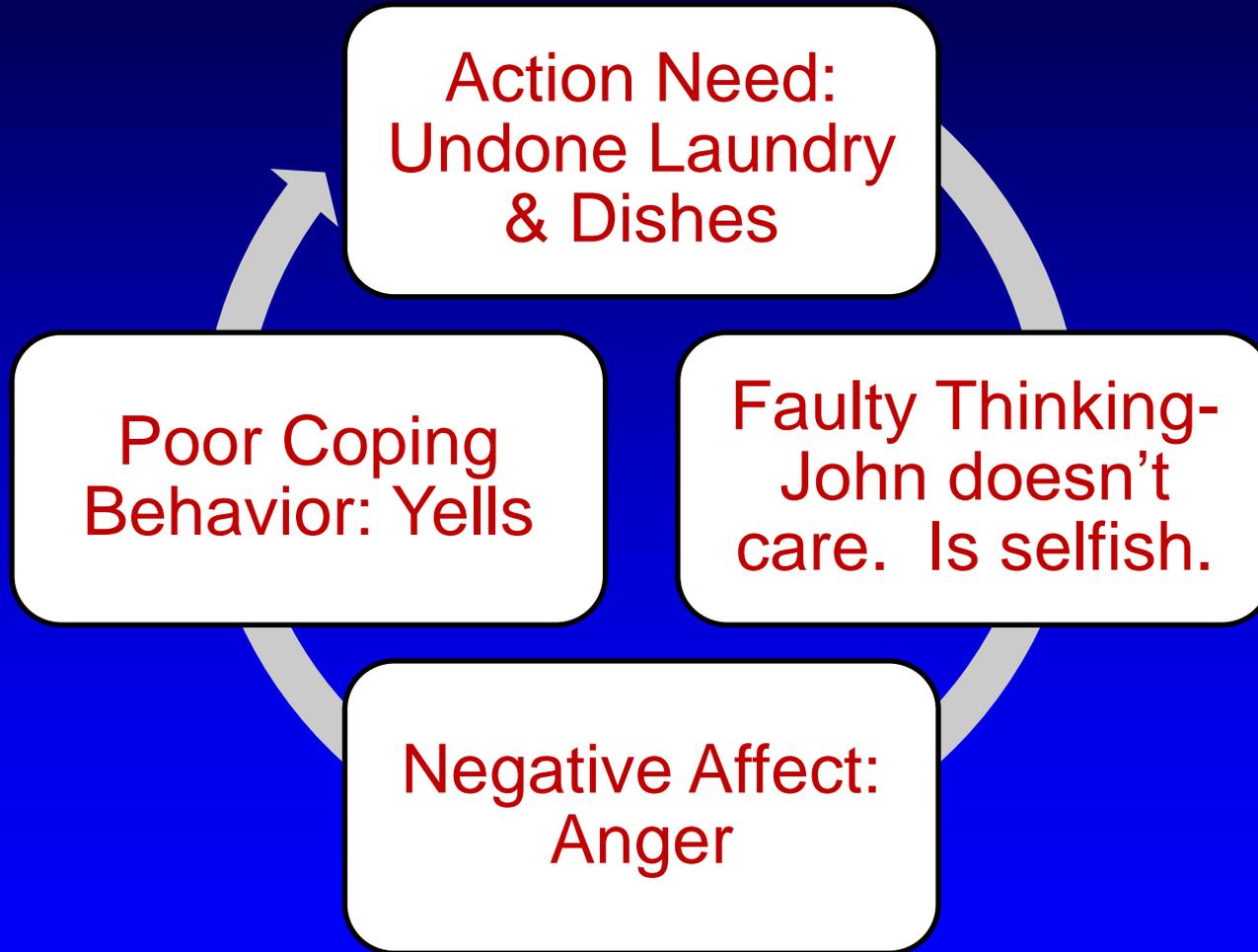
John: Laundry & Dishes

- John, diagnosed ADHD, promised his wife Alice he'd get the laundry done & the dishes out of the sink before she got home from work.
- It's 1 PM & he has **plenty of time**.
- **Why not watch the football** game, do E mail, & surf the internet?
- John gets **so involved** that he **doesn't notice the time** until Alice comes in the door & **blows up because nothing is done**.

John: Laundry & Dishes



Alice: Laundry & Dishes



ADHD as a Neurobiological Executive Function Problem

- **Executive Functions:**
 1. **initiating tasks**
 2. **sustaining attention and effort**
 3. **Managing time**
 4. **planning**
 5. **working memory**
 6. **controlling emotions**
- **EF impairment = failure to listen, follow through, remember priorities, pay attention to partner, inhibit, etc.**

How CBT Works

- *Start by changing Faulty Thinking or Poor Coping Behavior- whichever is easier.* It's circular so you eventually get to the other.
- **If we change Thinking first**, we will feel better, & then show Positive Coping Behavior- follow-through, time management, interpersonal relations, etc.
- **If we change Behavior/ Habits first**, as a result we then improve Faulty Thinking & feel better.

Principles of Behavior Change

- **Select a behavior/ habit for change**
- **Break it down into small steps- Shaping**
- **Put the steps on your calendar- phone or paper**
- **Set alarms or to remind you to do steps**
- **Set positive incentives**
- **Incorporate fun, humor, support**
- **Get help from others if needed**

Common Faulty Thinking

Faulty Thinking

- I have plenty of time left
- I'll do 1 more thing before I leave
- Since I can't get organized, why bother
- I'll remember to take all my medicines
- I have to do it perfectly or not at all
- I'll exercise tomorrow

Poor Coping

- Put it off to tomorrow
- Play videogame, get there late. Miss event.
- Leaves house a mess & wife yells at him
- Forgets some medicines
- Never does papers & fails class
- Never exercises

Steps for Changing Faulty Thinking

- **Identify faulty thinking**
- **Provide a logical challenge**
- **Identify more reasonable thinking**
- **Experiment to see which belief fits the situation**
- **Disconfirm the faulty thinking by logic, experience, or experiment.**

Corrected Thinking

Reasonable Thinking

- I am out of time. Now.
- I must leave right away
- I will get as organized as time permits
- I find planners daunting, but I will try
- I need reminders for ___
- I can live with a decent paper that isn't perfect

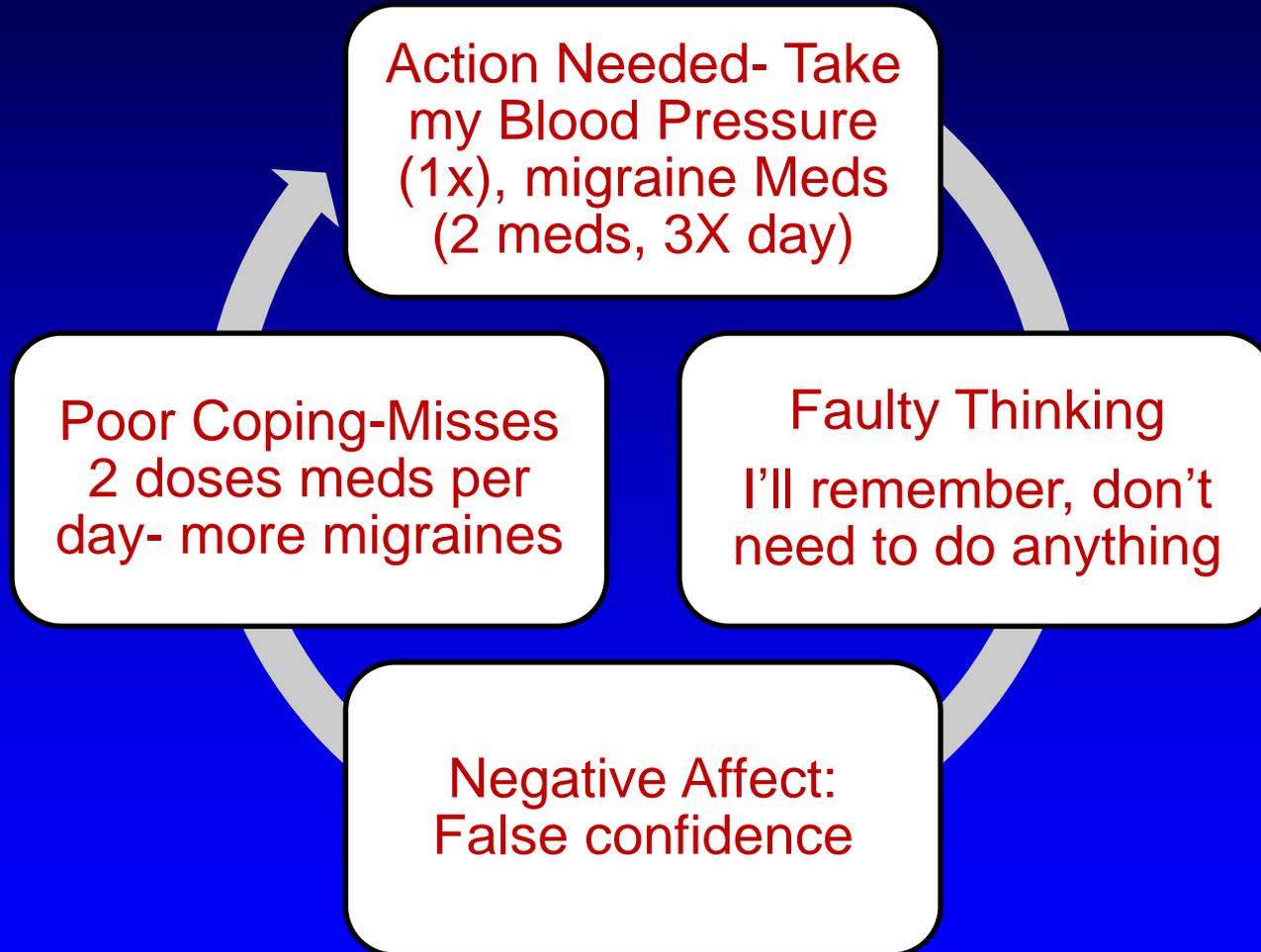
Good Coping

- I need to do it now
- Leaves now, on time
- Get decently organized
- Makes a few entries in planner & feels OK
- Set up reminders for ___
- Turns in a paper and gets a B.

We make Logical Errors

- **All or none thinking-** my life will always be a disaster, so why bother fixing it
- **Overgeneralization-** just because I blew it in 1 relationship, I will never get married
- **Jump to conclusions-** my wife yelled at me today. I can't do anything right.
- **Catastrophizing-** I have always failed at work, so I will definitely get fired
- **Should statements-** I should always do things on time, even though I have AD/HD

Sandy (Age 47, ADHD) & Her Medicine

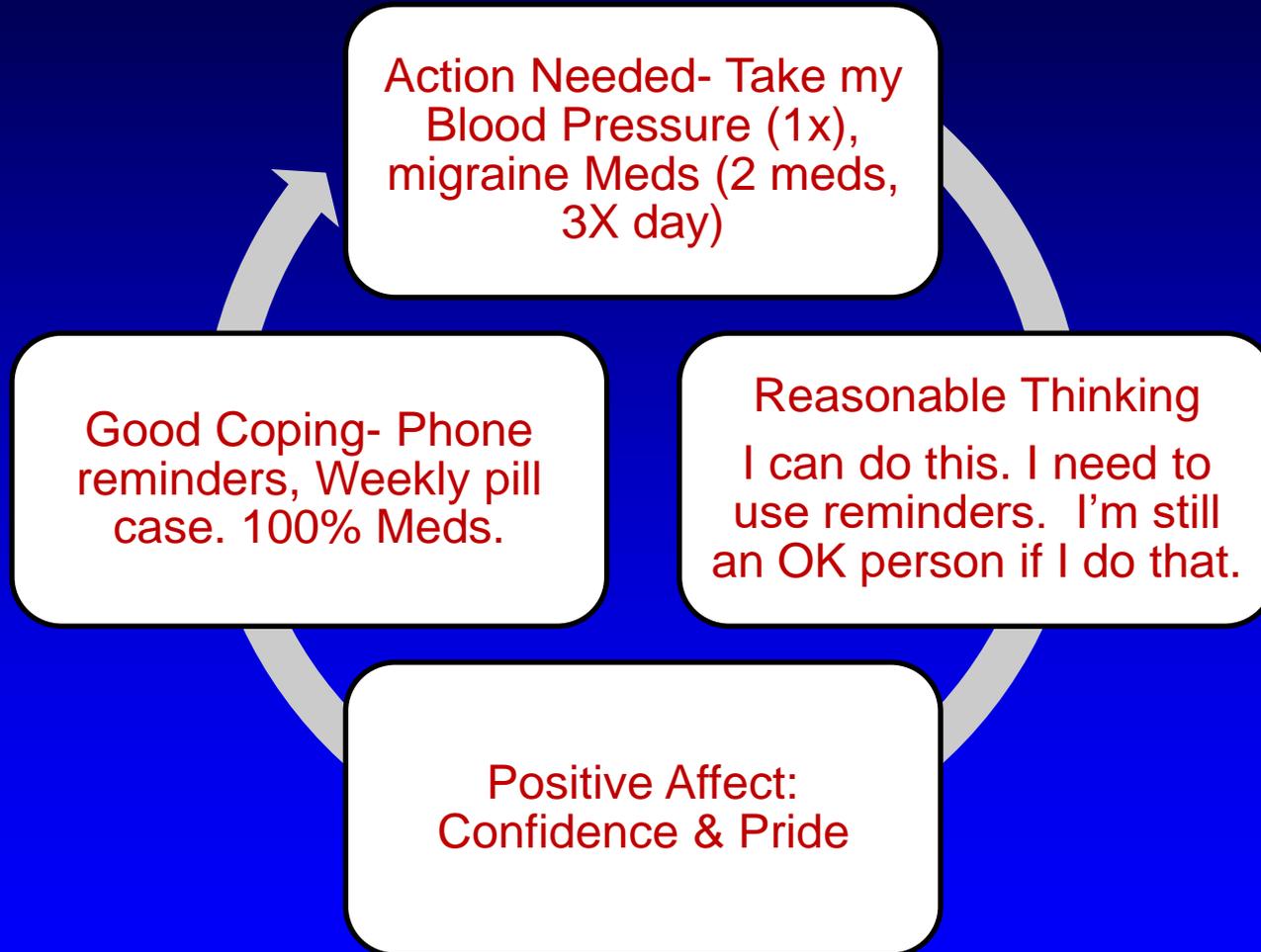


Sandy Changes

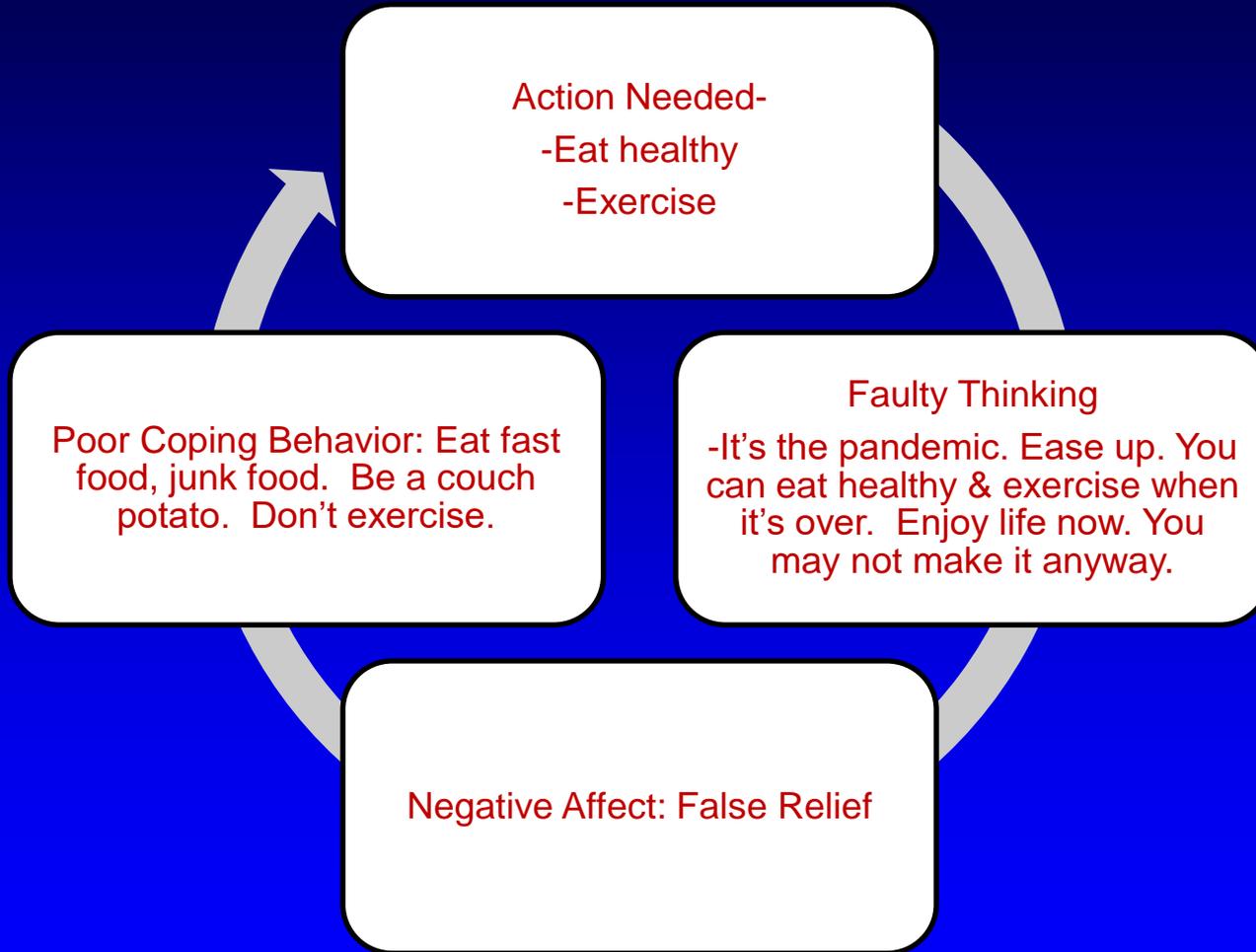
Thinking and Behavior

- **Challenge:** I have ADHD. Working memory doesn't always work. I will not always remember blood pressure checks & medicine. Buck up, girl.
- **Reasonable thinking:** I need to use reminder systems. I will try several and see what works.
- **Coping Behavior:** I will put a reminder in my phone 15 min. before and at the time to take blood pressure & migraine meds in AM and migraine meds at noon & PM. Noon & PM will be at lunch & dinner. Also, put pills for week in special pill case labeled by day on Sundays.

Sandy (Age 47, ADHD) & Her Medicine



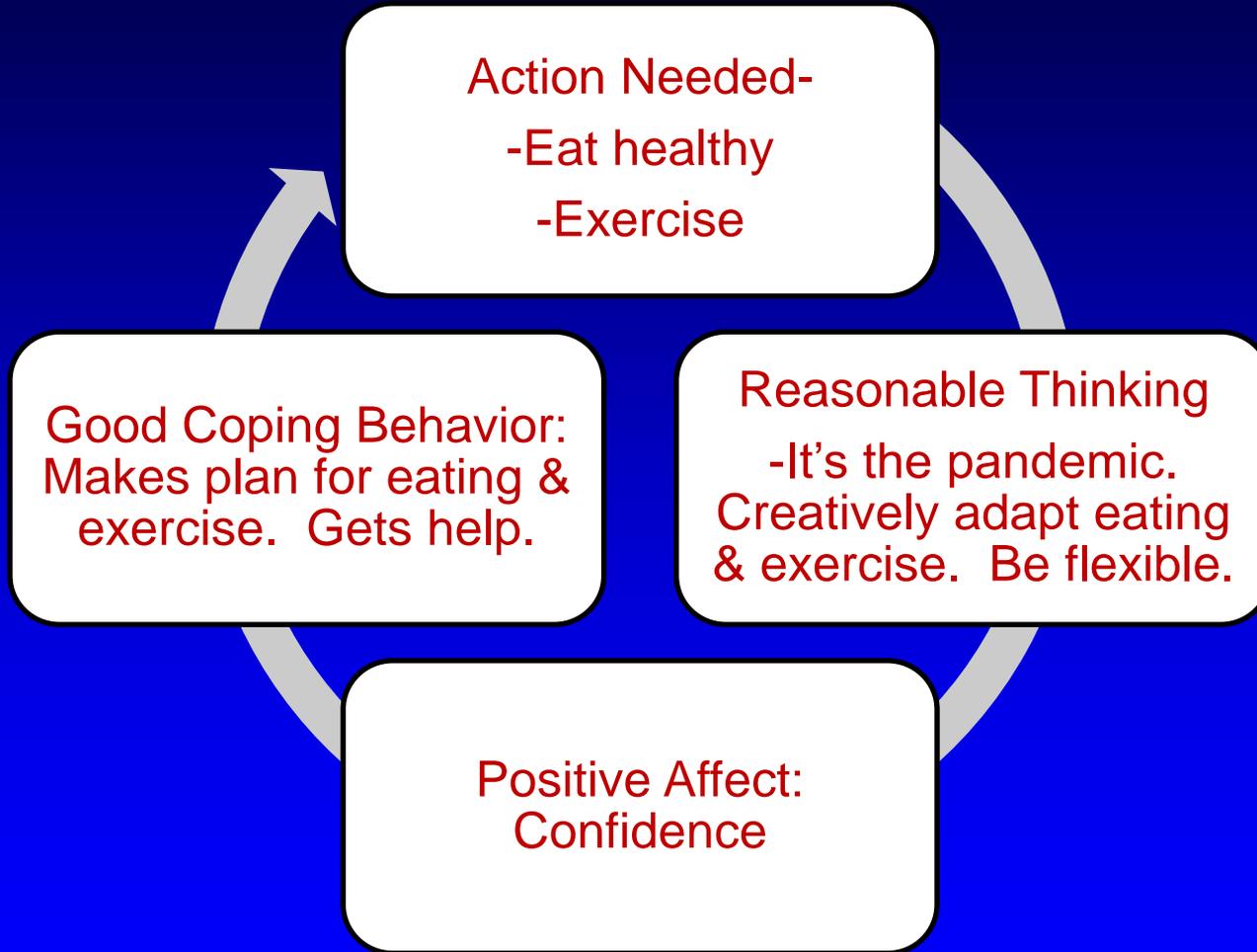
Chester



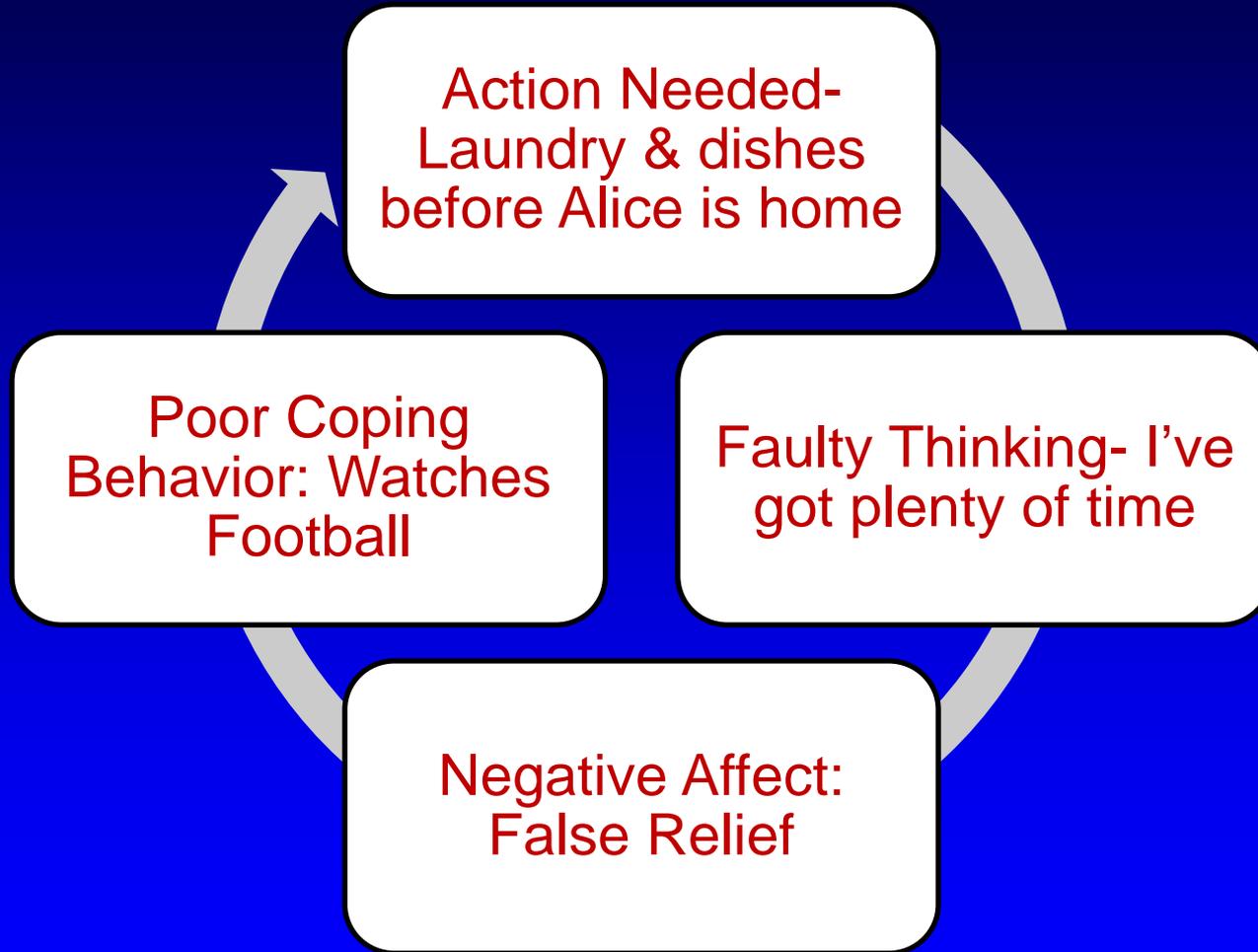
Chester Changes Thinking and Behavior

- **Challenge:** I have ADHD. If I ease up, I'll lose all the progress I made through hard work. Because it's the pandemic, I have to be creative & adapt my exercise & eating so I don't drive myself crazy but I still get some exercise in & eat right.
Reasonable thinking: I can do this without either the extreme of total junk food/no exercise or becoming a total health food/exercise junkie
- **Coping Behavior:** I will get help making a written plan from my wife, my therapist, & my dietician.

Chester



John Changes



John Changes Faulty Thinking

- **Identify:** I've got plenty of time.
- **Challenge:** I have ADHD. I am blind to time. I never have enough time & I never judge time for chores accurately. So this is an false, irrational statement for me.
- **Reasonable thinking:** I need plan, structure, & monitor the time to do the chores. Disregard the “plenty of time thought.”
- **Experiment:** I'll plan/ monitor chore time & see if that helps.
- **Disconfirms** his faulty thinking

John Changes Behavior

- **Select behavior:** Laundry/ dishes done before Alice gets home
- **Small steps:** Put up laundry, rinse dishes, laundry to dryer, finish dishes, put away dry laundry
- **Divide up time:** Washer (35 minutes), Dryer (45 min.). Dishes (20 minutes). Put away clothes (10 min.)
- **Set alarms on phone:** Washer- 1 PM; Dishes- 1:15 PM; Dryer- 1:40 PM. Dishes- 2 PM; Put away clothing- 3 PM.
- **Set positive incentives:** surf web when done.

John Now



Sally

Sally is overwhelmed in her new position as a web designer for a marketing company. She has her own web design assignments. Because she is good, everyone is asking her for help, distracting her. She never gets her own work done & fails to meet her boss's deadlines. At home are many unfinished projects, a screaming 8 year old son with ADHD, & and angry husband complaining her follow through stinks.

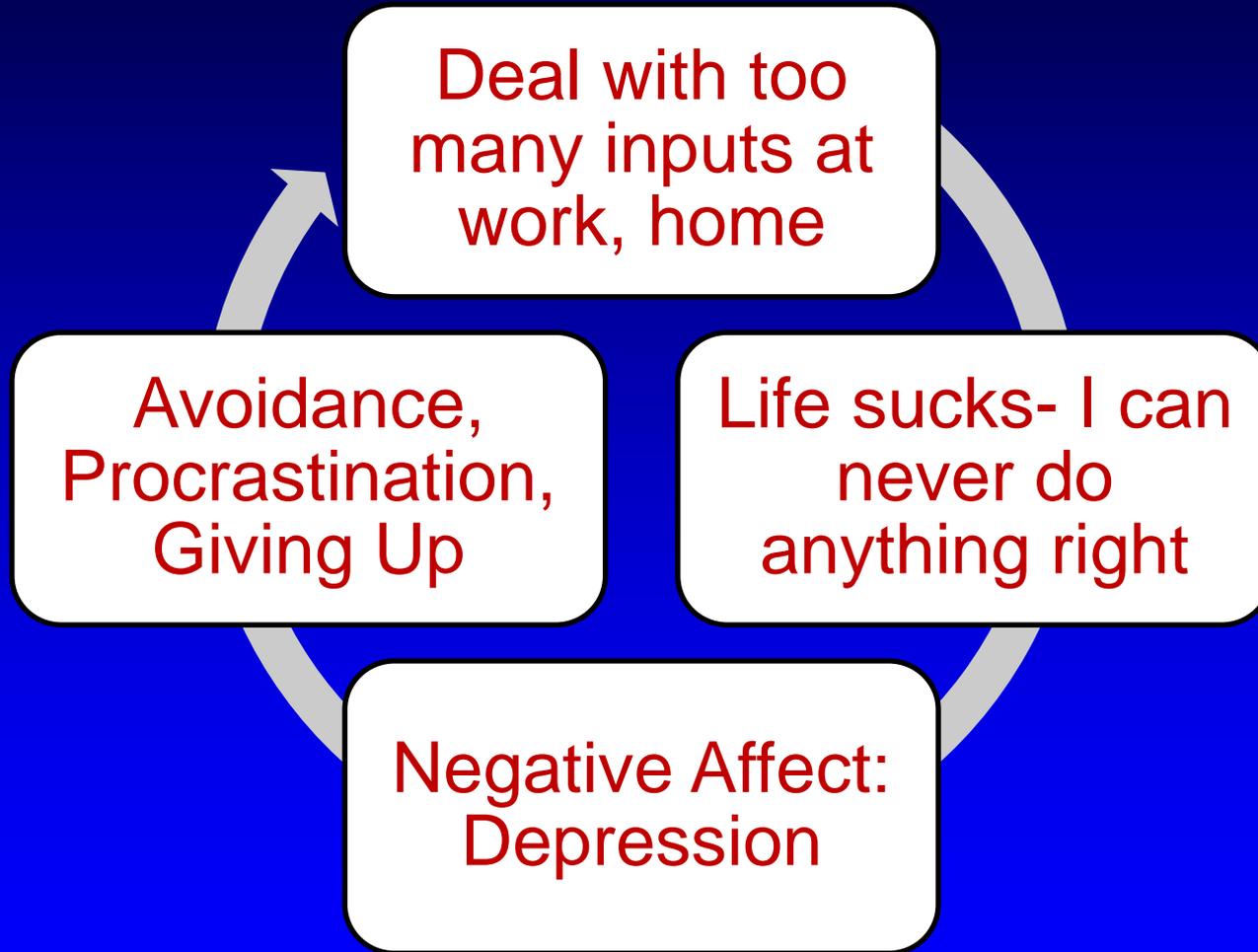
Sally 2

Life has always been like this. First, she struggled to make it through school, with her parents always on his case. Then, she struggled in college, dropping out & teaching herself web design. She always knew she was different, but never understand how. After her son was diagnosed with ADHD, she knew he had it too & sought an evaluation.

Sally 3

Now that she has a diagnosis & some meds, ***what does she do next to change a lifetime of negativity?***

Sally



Sally- Targets Work First



Sally Selects Target Behaviors

- **Get her own web design assignments done by deadlines. High priority.**
- **Don't get distracted by others' requests for help.**
- **Learn to set limits on helping others.**
- **Request a room with walls & a door as her office, not an open cubicle that anyone can enter.**

Sally's New Routines

- **Make next day's To Do list the night before.**
- **Review & prioritize To Do list upon arriving at the office with AM coffee.**
- **Establish estimated times in work day to complete high priority tasks.**
- **Go through day working through To Do list, checking off each item.**
- **Got an office. Keep office door closed.**

Interference Control

- **Establish routine for “fire brigade”**
- **Set up E mail address just for others’ requests for help**
- **Ask people to send her such requests by E mail**
- **If still done in person, digitally record the request & listen, putting on To Do List**

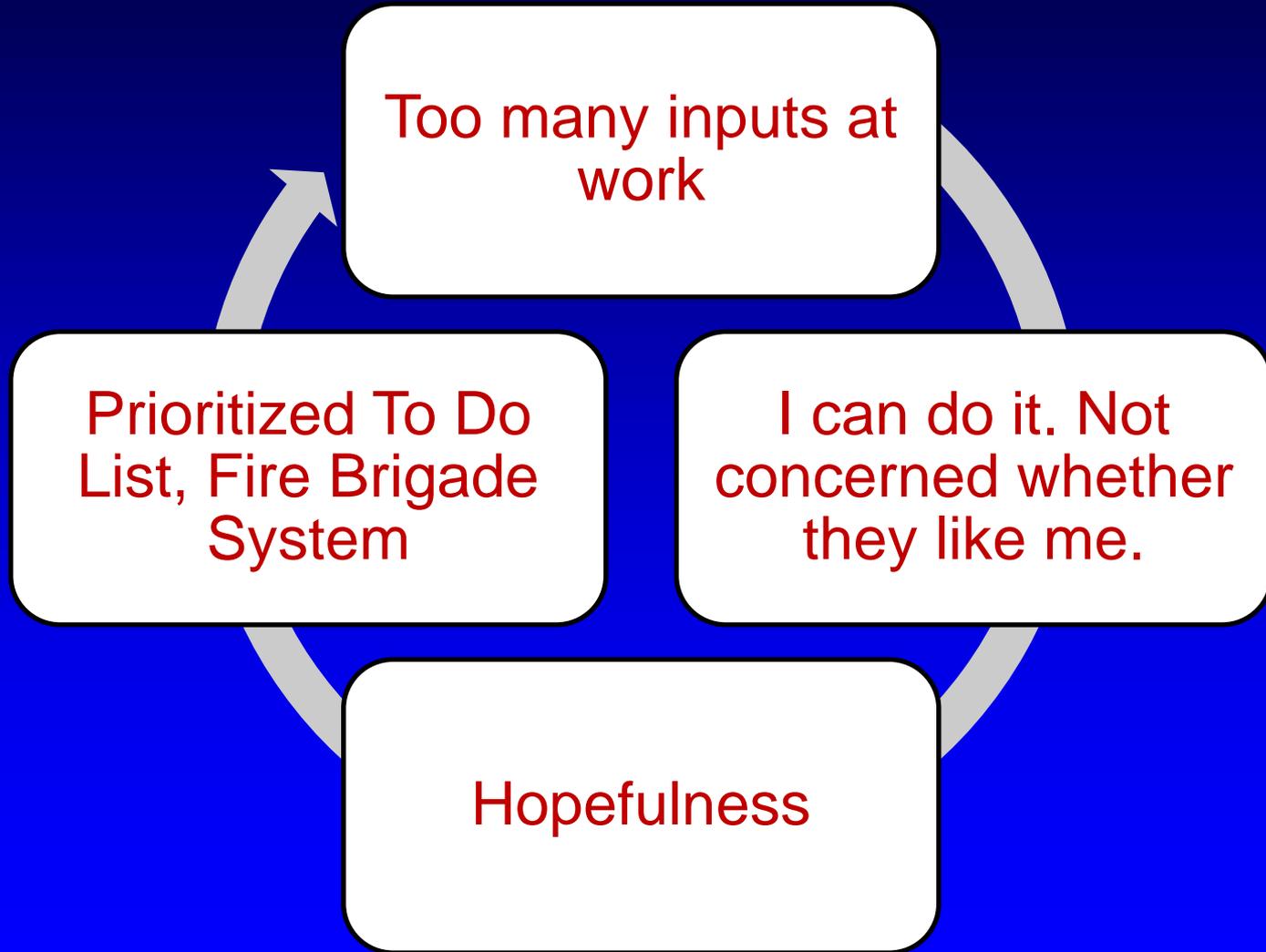
Challenge Faulty Thinking

- **Identify:** I'm afraid to say No to others because they won't like me.
- **Challenge:** This isn't a popularity contest. I'm here to do my job. So what if they don't like me. I'm being used.
- **Clear thinking:** It's OK to say No or Not Now.
- **Experiment:** Try E mail request system.

Outcome for Sally

- **Got more of her work done**
- **Others only E mailed for help if really needed.**
- **Sally helped others after her own work was done.**
- **She was respected, not disliked, for setting limits. Boss pleased.**
- **Sally felt less overwhelmed.**

Sally Now



Break Down Tasks

- **Choose a complex task from your To Do List**
- **Write out a list of the steps to complete it**
- **Schedule yourself in your calendar to do each step**
- **Build in rewards for effort & completion**

Steps to Clear The Basement

- Divide basement into 4 areas**
- Buy plastic storage bins & garbage bags**
- Label bins for items to keep in each area**
- Label trash bags for “Give to Charity.” Keep others for garbage**
- Schedule 2 hours per area**

Basement 2

- **Work on area at designated time**
- **Arrange for spouse/friend to praise you for effort**
- **Treat yourself and your spouse/friend to dinner out after completing each area**

Routine for the Mail/ Bills

- **OHIO** (not the state)- Only Handle It Once
- Pick a place for your Mail Center
- Get 2 baskets or trays
- Label one “Money Papers” & the other “All Other Mail”
- Keep all your bill paying supplies (checkbook, stamps, envelopes nearby)

Mail/ Bills 2

- **Daily, sort mail into Money vs. Other Papers**
- **Identify 5 times in the week to deal with the mail**
- **Assign 3 of them to Money Mail and 2 to Other Mail**
- **Put them in your calendar**

Mail/ Bills 2

- **On Bill Days, read the Money Mail, pay bills, make phone calls, etc.**
- **On Other Mail days, read the other mail, trash it, file it, make phone calls, etc.**
- ***Coordinate this with your spouse so you can work as a team on mail/ bills***

Behavior Change

- ✓ **Use memory-management tools: alarms on devices, e-mail reminders, placing items in plain sight, sticky notes, etc.**
- ✓ **Use a calendar/ planner with To-Do lists. Update as a couple. Electronic or paper and pencil- whatever works**
- ✓ **Always carry your calendar/ planner**
- ✓ **Establish a daily routine for the mail. Divide into “money papers” versus everything else. Deal with “money papers” on the spot.”**
- ✓ **Establish daily check in times and weekly calendar checks with your partner**
- ✓ **Agree that your partner will call or page you as a reminder on certain occasions.**
- ✓ **Break big tasks into chunks; schedule each. If you need help doing this, ask your partner**
- ✓ **De-clutter the home. Streamline. Label.**

Summary

- **CBT for ADHD helps us change faulty thinking that prevents coping with ADHD.**
- **Can help us manage our health better**
- **Can help us at work and at home**
- **May contribute to better relationships**
- **Works well together with medication**
- **Really does not have any side effects**

Best References

- ***The Adult ADHD Toolkit.*** J.R. Ramsay & A. L. Rostain. New York: Routledge Press, 2015
- ***Cognitive- Behavioral Therapy for Adult ADHD 2nd ed).*** J. R. Ramsey & A. L. Rostain. New York: Routledge Press, 2015.
- ***Mastering Your Adult ADHD: A Cognitive-Behavioral Treatment Program (2nd ed).*** Steven Safren, Susan Sprich, Carol Perlman & Michael Otto. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017.