

# Imagine a brighter future: development of a school-based positive imagery intervention to target anhedonia in adolescents

## Background

### Adolescent Depression

- Peak age of first depressive episode is during adolescence
- Linked to poorer academic performance, reduced socialising and increased risk of suicide
- Associated with recurring and long-lasting episodes

### Anhedonia

- 'Inability to feel pleasure in normally pleasurable activities'
- A hallmark symptom of depression
- Predictor of suicide and poor treatment response
- Thought to be caused by deficits in the approach motivation system, which are associated with low levels of enjoyment (positive affect) and desire to engage in pleasurable activities
- Pharmacological treatments are ineffective for treating anhedonia

### Current Treatments

- Only partially effective – largely focus on treating negative symptoms of depression (negative thoughts and feelings of sadness)
- Little focus on treating deficits in positive affect and increasing positive emotions
- Early interventions are difficult to access
- Only developed for adults with anhedonia
- Little research into adolescent treatments for anhedonia

### Positive Future Imagery

- Depressed individuals have difficulties generating vivid future or past mental images
- Imagery, rather than verbal, processing of retrieving a positive memory leads to greater improvements in mood
- Positive mental imagery is linked to optimism and subsequent resilience
- Treatments should focus on encouraging vivid positive mental imagery and imagery-based processing of positive information

### Development of a Novel Intervention

- Targeting the underlying mechanisms that drive anhedonia in adolescents using positive future imagery
- Fewer sessions (4 sessions v. 15 sessions for adults)
- Early intervention to prevent the long-lasting and severe outcomes associated with depression and anhedonia
- School-based to increased accessibility

## Aim

1. To fine tune the intervention through a case series
2. An RCT to investigate whether it is feasible and acceptable to deliver this novel intervention in a school setting

## Methods

### Participants

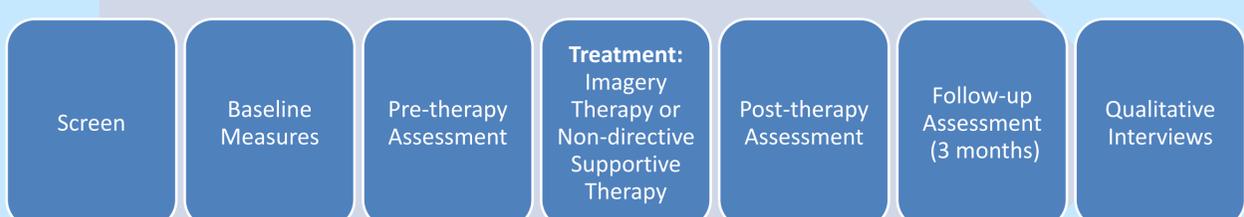
- Aged 16 – 18
- Case series: n=10
  - RCT: n=56

### Questionnaires

#### Primary outcome measures

- **Low mood:** Mood & Feelings Questionnaire
- **Anhedonia:** Snaith-Hamilton Pleasure Scale

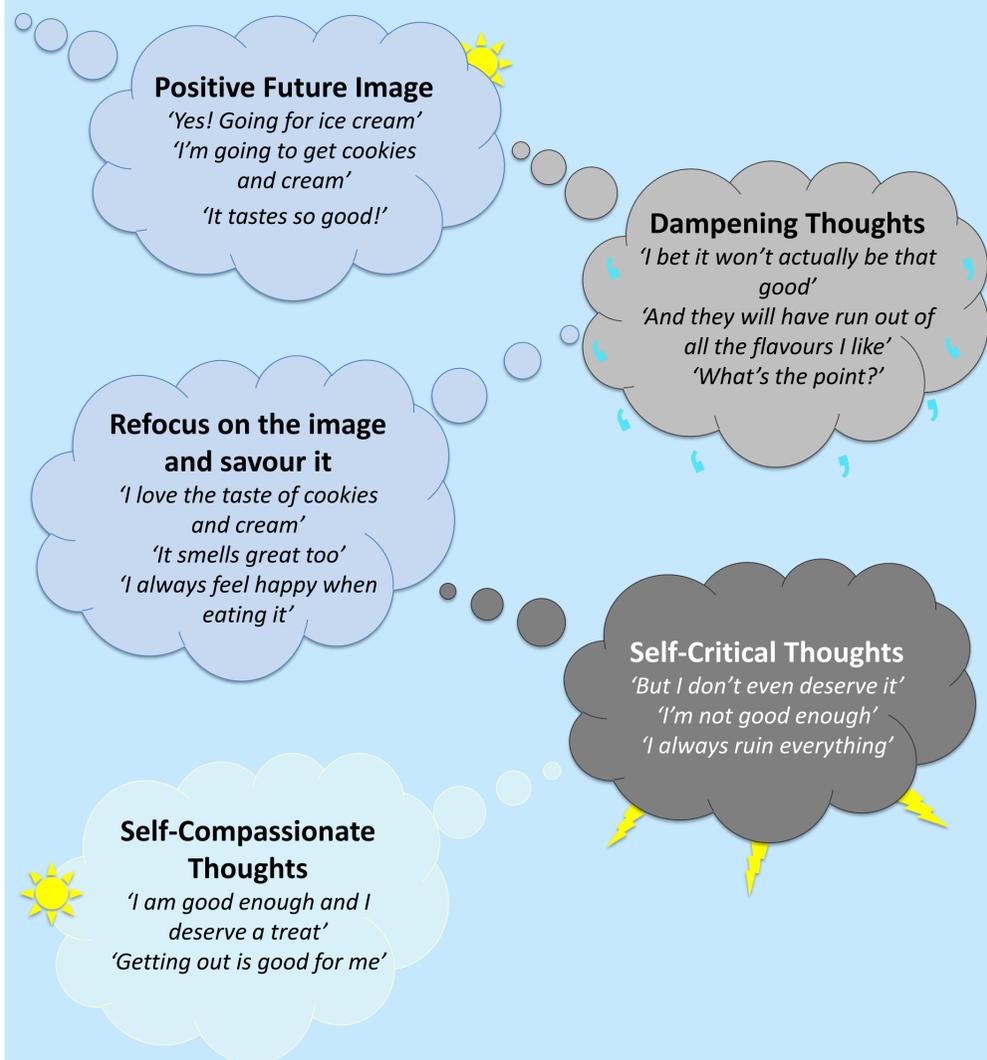
### Design



## Intervention

### 4 sessions

1. Psychoeducation on the effects of positive memories and mental imagery vividness on mood
2. Positive future imagery: effects of savouring, dampening thoughts, self-critical thoughts and self-compassionate thoughts on mood and behaviour (*illustrated below*)
3. Positive future imagery for long-term goals
4. Summary and plan for the future



## Patient and Public Involvement

- **School Talks & Events**
- **Young People Advisory Group:** *focusing on positive future imagery is a different way of tackling symptoms and more useful than just focusing on being in a 'bad moment'*
- **Psychology & Systems Sciences Divisional School Participation Event**

## Ethics

### Stigma

- Amendments to the recruitment process have been made to reduce stigmatization