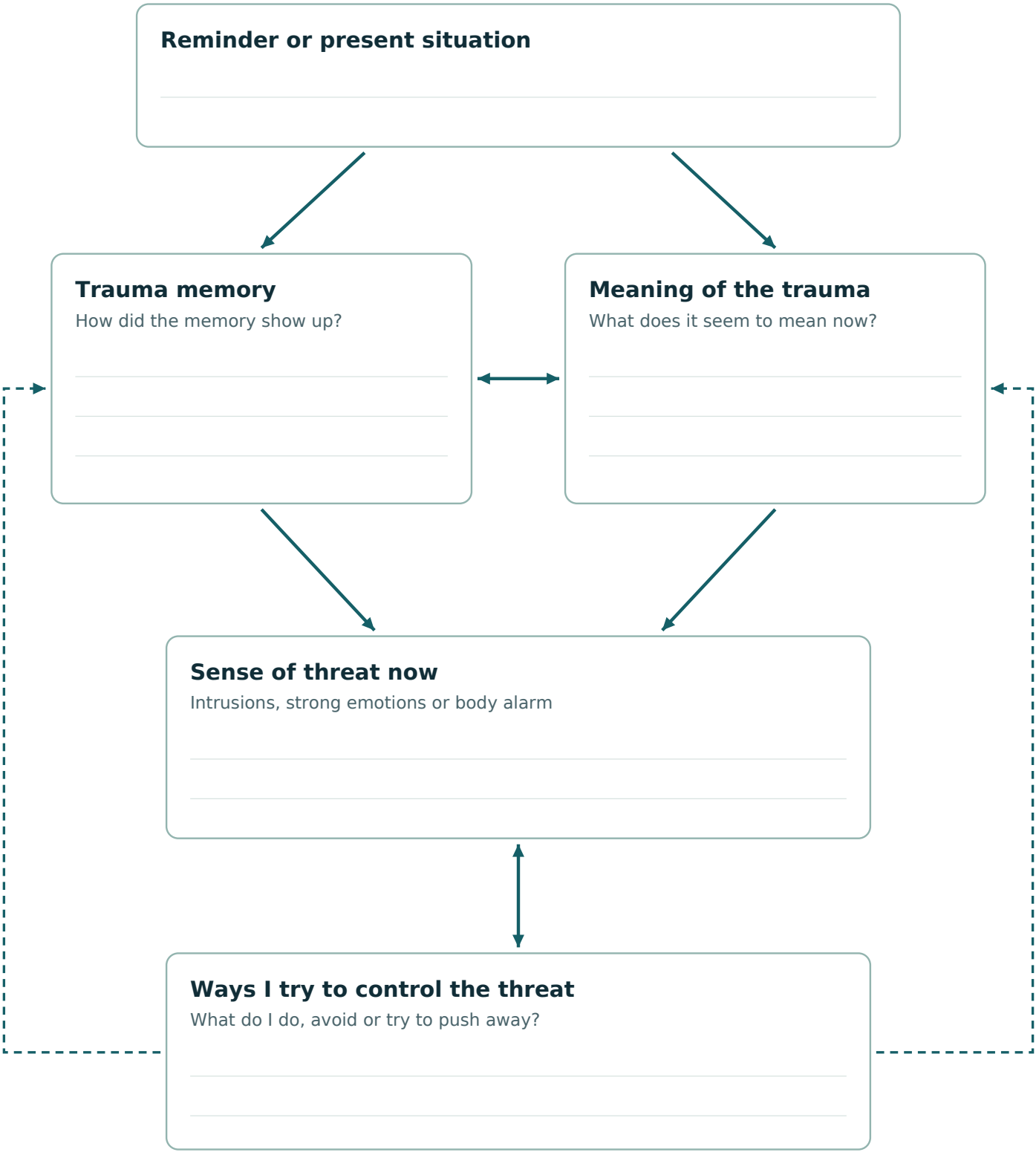
PTSD maintenance model

Complete with your therapist. Use brief labels; you do not need to describe the traumatic event.

Editable PDF: replace or delete the fictional examples. Blank PDF: print and write. Guidance follows.



Dashed links: some responses can prevent changes in memories and meanings. Check actual safety.

Maintenance section of Ehlers & Clark (2000), simplified for a personal map with your therapist.

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Using this resource

PTSD maintenance model

What this helps with

Ehlers and Clark's model explains how trauma memories and the meanings given to the trauma can create a sense of serious threat in the present. This sheet focuses on those maintaining relationships, rather than the full history of how PTSD develops. Memories and meanings can influence each other. Ways of controlling threat can sometimes keep it going or prevent new learning. A therapist helps distinguish this pattern from actual current danger.

How to use it

1. With your therapist, use a brief label for a reminder or current situation. No traumatic detail is needed.

2. Describe how the memory shows up, and what the event or its effects seem to mean now. Follow the two-way link between these boxes.

3. Add the sense of threat in the present: emotions, body alarm or intrusions.

4. Describe how you try to control the threat. The two-way link means threat and these responses can affect each other.

5. Discuss the dashed return arrows: do any responses prevent changes in memories or meanings? Record real risks, support and treatment plans separately with your therapist.

A fictional worked example

A sudden traffic sound gives Tom a sense that a road incident is happening again. He thinks, "I am in danger now", feels alarmed and becomes watchful. He avoids journeys and tries to push the memory away. These understandable responses may stop him learning what is different in the present. His therapist also checks an actual issue: roadworks make his usual route unsafe. They plan around this real risk and select a supported treatment focus. The map is not a request to relive the event alone.

Keep in mind

Complete with a trauma-trained therapist. Do not use the map for unsupported reliving, memory updating or exposure. Actual danger, unstable housing, abuse or unmet health needs must be addressed in their own right. Pause if mapping the pattern becomes overwhelming or disorienting.

Sources and attribution

Ehlers, A., & Clark, D. M. (2000). A cognitive model of posttraumatic stress disorder. Behaviour Research and Therapy, 38(4), 319-345.

NICE. (2018). Post-traumatic stress disorder (NG116).

Original material informed by the sources above. No outside organisation endorses this worksheet.

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