



INITIAL PSYCHOLOGY SESSION (TREATMENT SETTING)

May Chi
PsychLab Forum
QLD Mental Health Week
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WHAT CAN I EXPECT WHEN I SEE A PSYCHOLOGIST?

Depends! 😊

When most people picture a psychologist, they think about the counselling or clinical setting (a comfortable room, a patient/client speaking with a psychologist).

But psychologists work across many settings, and their job depends on the context and setting (e.g. prison, employment, defence force, health clinic, school, recruitment, marketing, performance, research).

Even within counselling and clinical settings, the first session may be very different depending on their training and theoretical orientation.

EXAMPLE OF TWO OVERARCHING APPROACHES

Cognitive

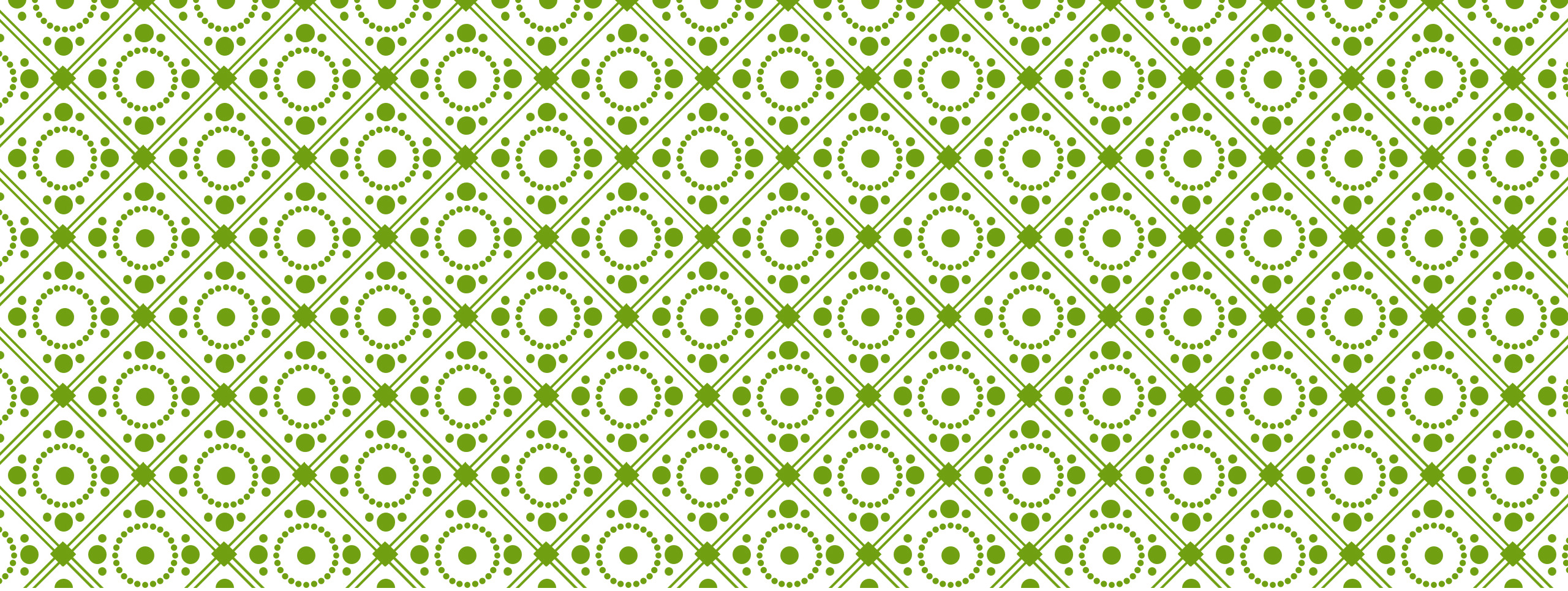
Assumption that our view of the world impacts how we operate in the world. By understanding and shaping this view, we become more effective at navigating life's challenges.

- Thinking styles
- Core beliefs
- Reframing thoughts
- Reality testing

Behavioural

Assumption that our behaviours are shaped by things that happen in our environment. By changing the environment, we reshape our behaviours.

- Exposure schedules
- Activity scheduling
- Reinforcements (rewards/ punishments)
- Training trials



SIMILARITIES ACROSS INITIAL COUNSELLING SESSIONS



PURPOSE OF THE INITIAL SESSION (FROM A PSYCHOLOGIST'S PERSPECTIVE)

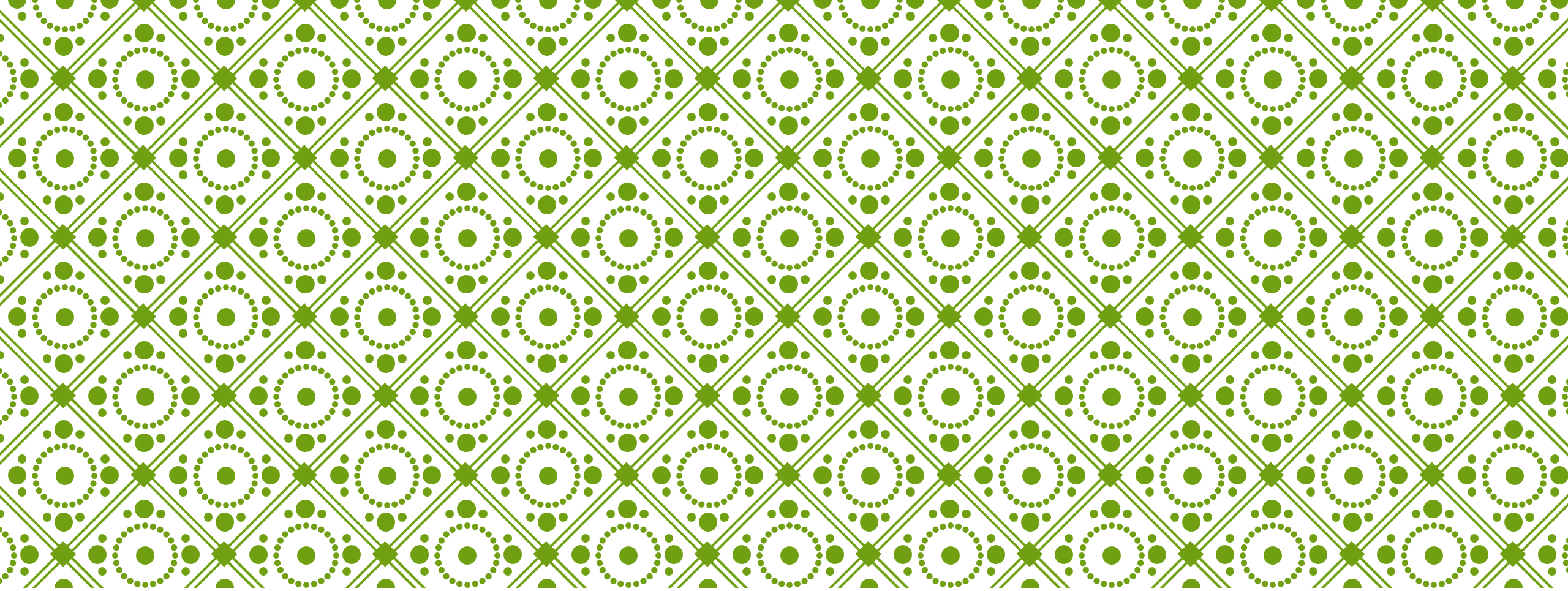
- ❑ To get a working understanding of the client's presenting issue (aka the reason why they are here).
- ❑ To establish a relationship that makes it more likely for both client and therapist to work together (aka rapport).
- ❑ To develop a mutual understanding of expectations and limitations of service.
- ❑ To begin a formulation based on the presenting issue, informed by therapy modality, that maps onto desired outcome.
- ❑ To provide some skills development or education while there is still buy-in from the client to change.
- ❑ To communicate a plan or the next steps to the intervention.

FIRST SESSION BINGO!

Informed consent obtained	Client feels comfortable	Baseline/Outcome measure administered	Psychoeducation
Communication with referrer	Opportunity for client to ask questions	Skills training	Schedule of appointments
Relevant client history obtained	Forms signed/returned	Notes completed	Homework assigned
Joint understanding and agreement to activities/plan	Formulation and treatment plan	Risk assessment and plan	Psychologist has some idea of presenting problem

BUT WHAT ABOUT WHAT THE CLIENT WANTS?

To learn something new, know there's a different path	To not feel scared and angry and confused and sad	Hope	To know someone cares
To understand what's going on with me	A psychologist who is 'a normal human'	Someone I can talk to	Some strategies that I can implement myself
Someone to tell me what to do (you are the professional, you will know)	Catharsis	I don't know what I want, but I want something. Help me clarify it	To meet a legal/ professional/ personal obligation
My wife told me to come	To vent or confide in someone	Something that will help me	A psychologist who 'knows their stuff'



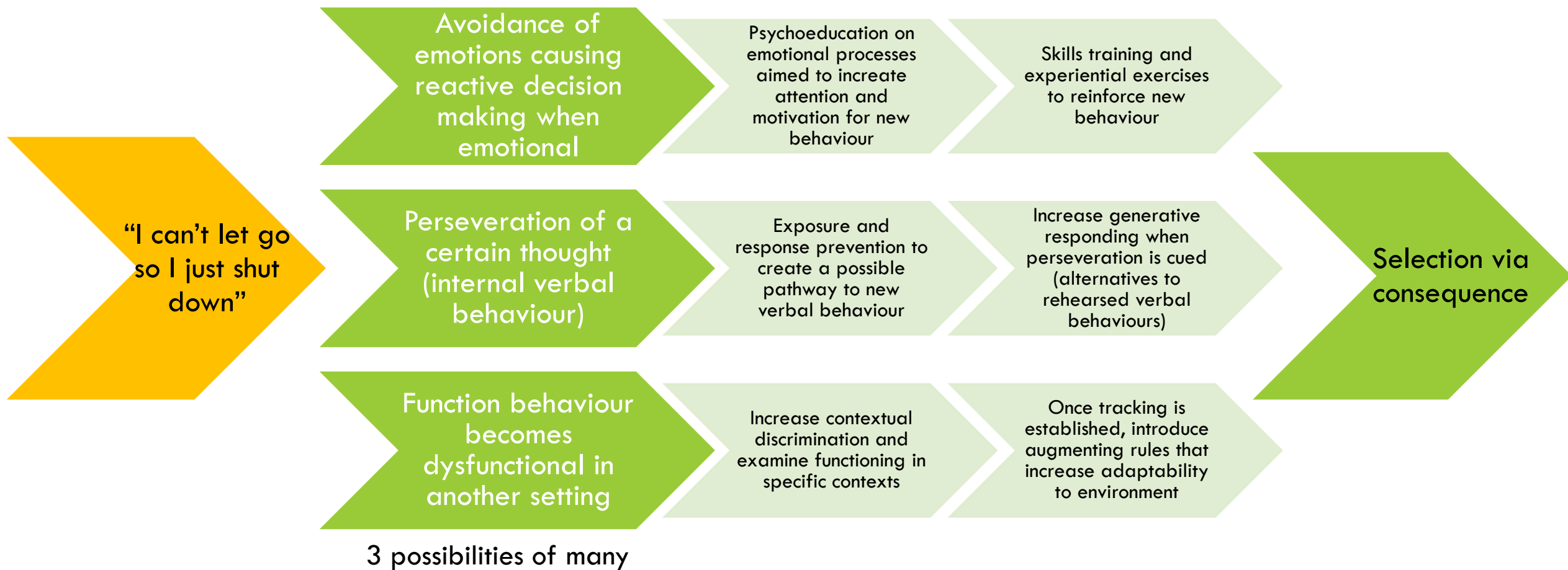
EXAMPLE OF AN INITIAL APPOINTMENT

Does someone want to role play
something from a bingo tile?

WHAT MAY SHE BE LOOKING FOR WHILE SHE IS LISTENING

- How are internal and external stimuli functioning for the client?
 - Is the relationship with thoughts/emotions/sensations problematic?
 - Is there an alignment of behaviours with intention/desire?
 - What are the competing contingencies?
 - What is the strength of the associations?
- Can the client see this functioning?
- What function does this behaviour serve?
- To the detriment of what?
- What is the level of willingness to engage in intervention? Ability to engage?

OBSERVATIONS INFORM DIRECTION OF SESSION



HOW IT ACTUALLY LOOKS

“I can’t let go
so I just shut
down”

Do you find that you
shut down because
the emotions would
otherwise be too
strong?

Can we slow down
and notice the
feeling instead of
just reacting?

Now that the
feeling doesn’t push
you around so
much, what do you
want to do instead?

Is it like your mind
just returns again
and again to the
issue?

Let’s imagine that
the thought is a
train, and we want
to coast it to a stop
at the station.

In this station, there
are many trains.
Which one do we
want to get on?

Do you mean that
you find it hard care
about everything, so
it’s easier to not care
about anything?

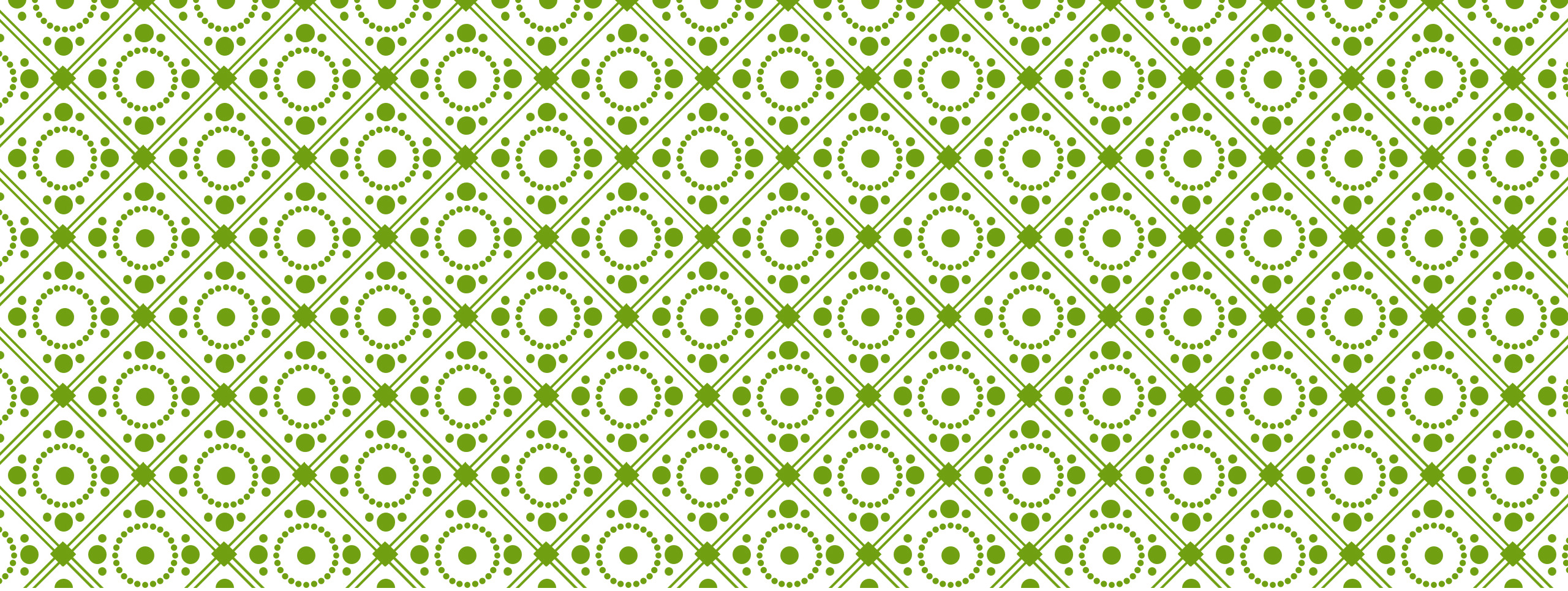
So when is caring
helpful? When is it
a waste of good
energy?

Sometimes you
might make a split-
moment decision. Is
it ok to change
your mind?

How did you
go with the
strategies?

3 possibilities of many

Selection via consequence



**BURNING QUESTIONS?
FEARLESS FEEDBACK?**

may@madeitclinic.com