



UW PACC

Psychiatry and Addictions Case Conference

UW Medicine | Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences

BRIEF TEXTS FOR PTS AND ALCOHOL MISUSE: DEVELOPING AND EVALUATING PROJECT BETTER AND COPE+

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**TRAUMA RECOVERY & RESILIENCE INNOVATIONS
UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON**



SPEAKER DISCLOSURES

No conflicts of interest to disclose

PLANNER DISCLOSURES

The following series planners have no relevant conflicts of interest to disclose; other disclosures have been mitigated.

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OBJECTIVES

1. To describe the Trauma Recovery & Resilience Innovations Program
2. To describe limitations of existing behavioral treatments for co-occurring posttraumatic stress disorder symptoms and alcohol misuse (PTSD+AM)
3. To describe recent research findings evaluating brief, self-directed cognitive behavioral therapy text message interventions for PTSD+AM

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THE PROGRAM FOR TRAUMA RECOVERY & RESILIENCE INNOVATIONS (TRI)



- We are part of the UW Department of Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences
- **We aim to better serve people who have experienced trauma**, their loved ones, their community, and their care providers
- **We strive to broaden access** to scientifically supported, culturally mindful, trauma recovery tools, strategies and trainings
- **We develop, test, and implement new intervention programs** and by adapt existing tools
- We are **researchers**, clinicians, clinical trainers, and educators

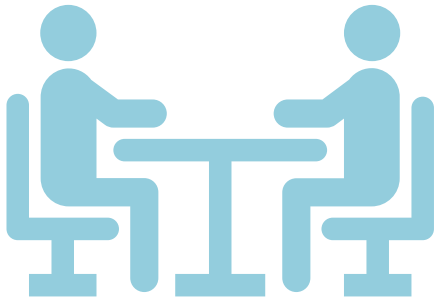
PTSD & alcohol misuse often co-occur and can have devastating impact



Sources: Blanco et al., 2013; Castillo-Caniglia et al., 2019; Debell et al., 2014; Drapkin et al., 2011.

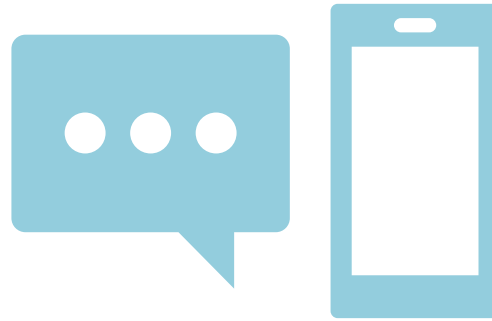
We need additional treatment options for individuals with PTSD+ AM.

Standard in-person treatments are characterized by **high dropout** and **low engagement**.



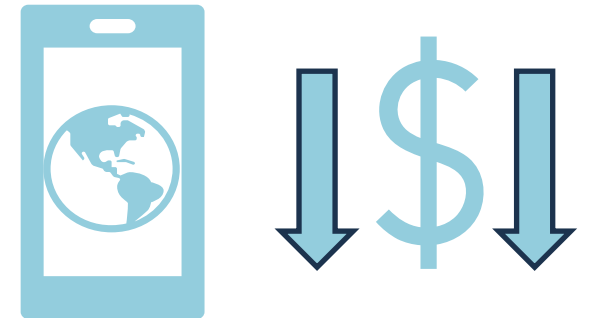
(Back et al., 2019; Foa et al., 2013)

Novel, tech-based interventions that are **accessible, brief, and self-directed** could increase reach



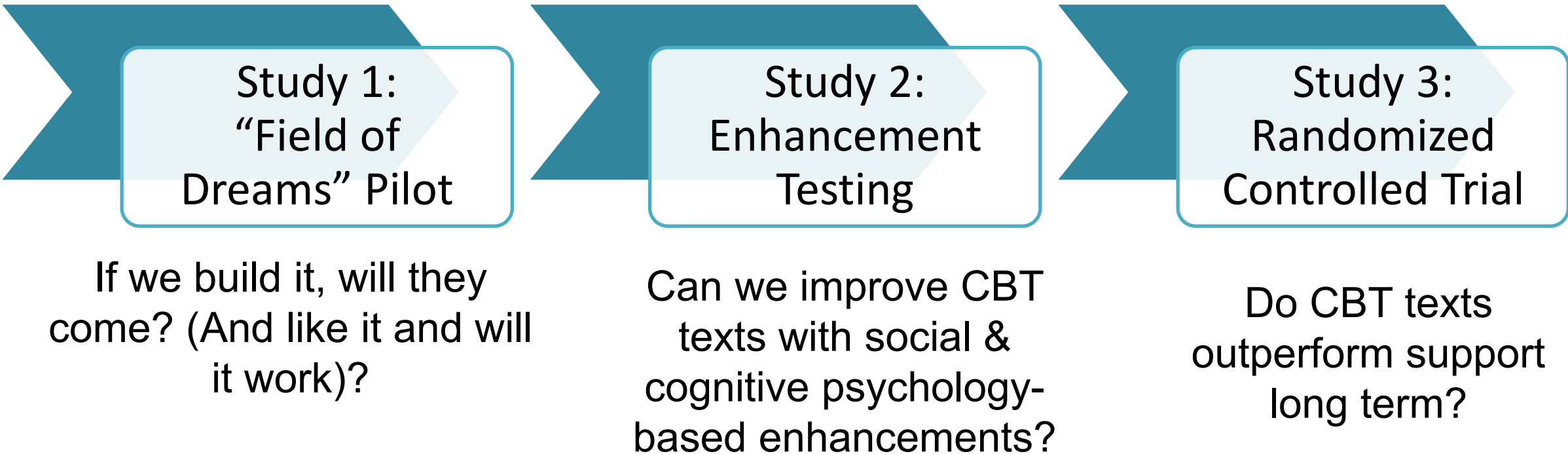
(Mohr et al., 2021)

Text message interventions are particularly **promising**



(Suffoletto, 2016; Tofighi et al., 2017)

WE ARE CONDUCTING STUDIES ON TEXT MESSAGES AS A WIDE REACH INTERVENTION



Study 1:
“Field of
Dreams” Pilot

If we build it, will they come? (And like it and will it work)?

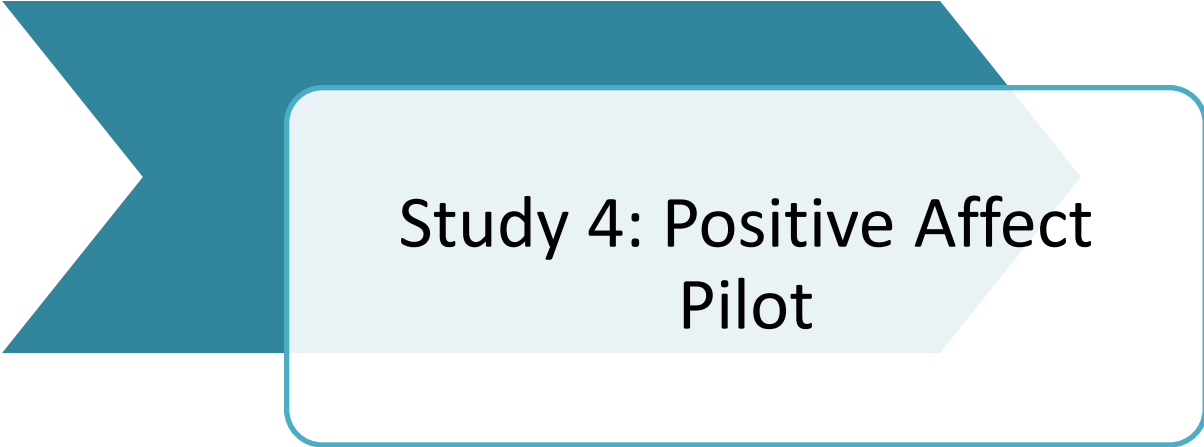
Study 2:
Enhancement
Testing

Can we improve CBT texts with social & cognitive psychology-based enhancements?

Study 3:
Randomized
Controlled Trial

Do CBT texts outperform support long term?

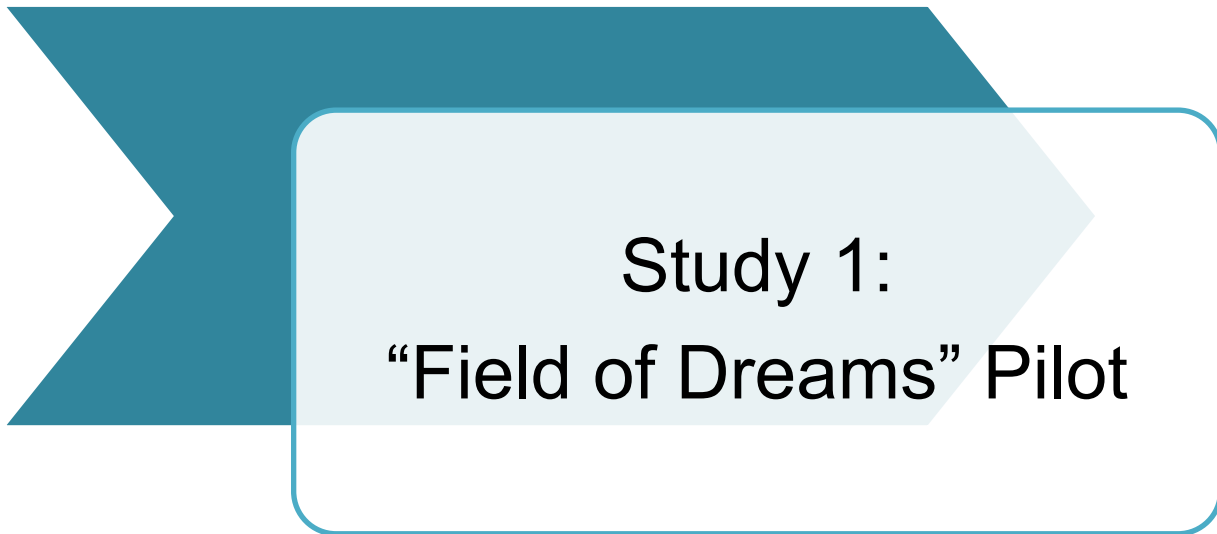
STUDIES CONTINUED



Study 4: Positive Affect Pilot

Can we change PTS+AM
by targeting positive
affect & reward
processes?

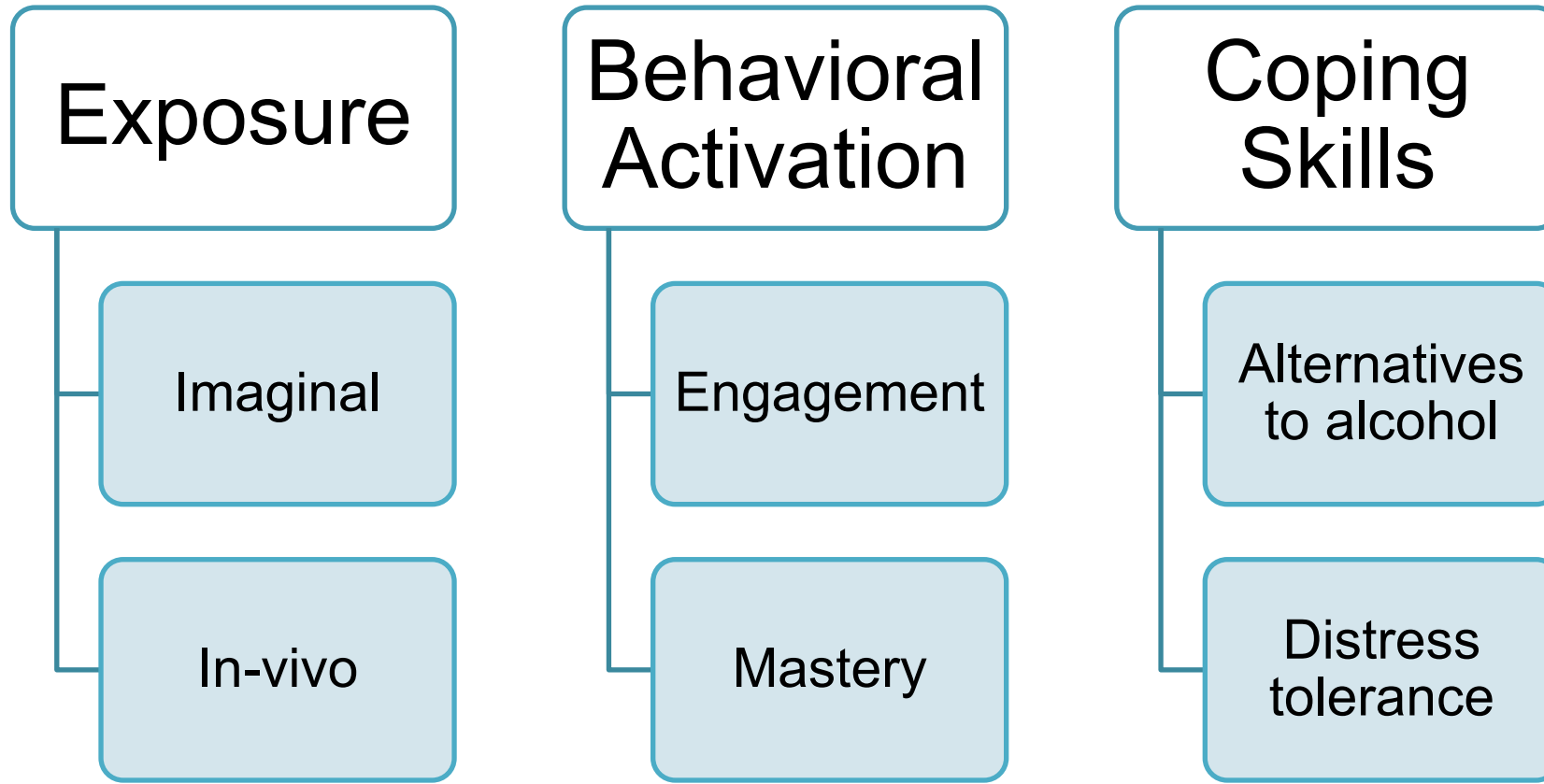
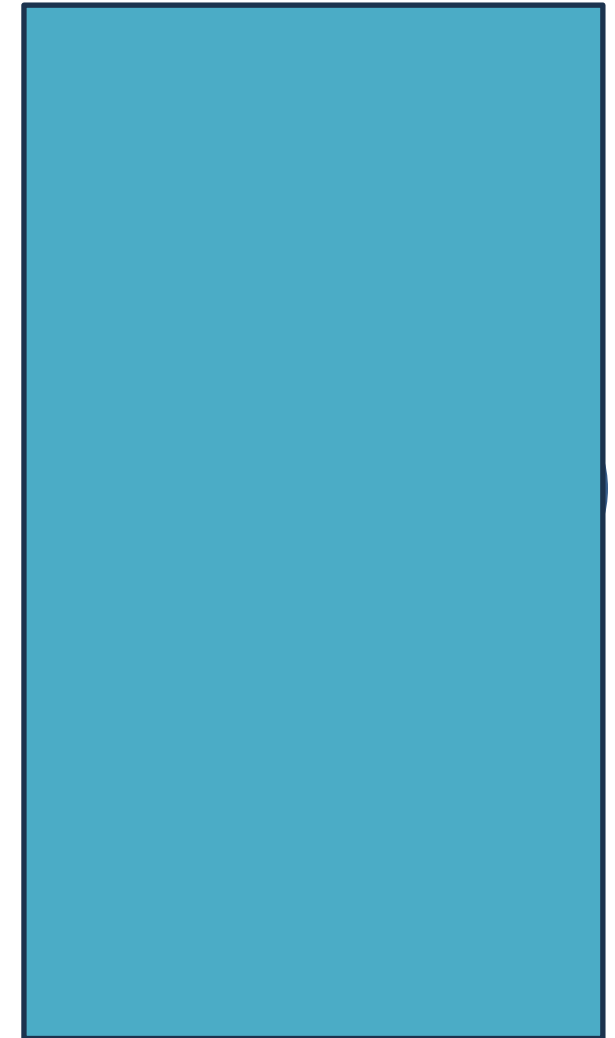
OUR FIRST STUDY WAS A PILOT



Study 1:
“Field of Dreams” Pilot

If we build it, will they
come? (And like it and
will it work)?

EVIDENCE-BASED CBT PRINCIPLES FOR PTSD+ AM WERE ADAPTED INTO TEXT MESSAGES.



STUDY 1 SAMPLE TEXT MESSAGES

Drinking to cope with painful feelings or memories can be tempting. But, it can make things worse. What's one thing you can do instead this week?

CBT

We know it can be hard to keep going amidst life's problems. A journey of 1,000 miles begins with a single step. We are walking with you.

Support

KEY STUDY 1 METRICS

Recruitment was
efficient (59 PPs
in 1 month)

Retention was
high (100%
@post, 95% @8
weeks)

PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK FROM CBT PARTICIPANTS LAID THE GROUNDWORK FOR A PATH FORWARD



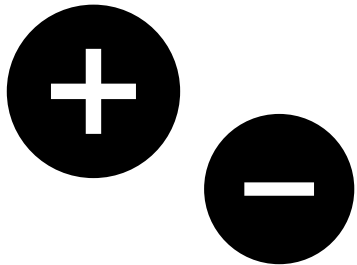
OUR SECOND STUDY TESTED ENHANCEMENTS TO OUR ORIGINAL CBT TEXTS



Study 2:
Enhancement Testing

Can we improve CBT texts
with social & cognitive
psychology-based
enhancements?

STUDY 2 USED A (3X2) FACTORIAL DESIGN TO TEST THEORY-DRIVEN ENHANCEMENTS



Message framing (gain vs loss vs no framing)



Mindsets (growth mindsets vs simple reminder)

STUDY 2 INCLUDED CBT TEXTS FROM STUDY 1 AND ADDITIONAL TEXTS WITH A COMBINATION OF ENHANCEMENTS

- Message framing to facilitate greater engagement skills
- **Growth mindsets** to increase motivation and support for overcoming setbacks

The impact of stressful events can be very difficult. To prevent things from getting worse, remember to sit with your feelings and memories this week.

Sitting with your emotions and memories can help you change how you think and feel. Remember that setbacks are a chance to learn—you can develop these coping skills!

Week 1 texts as a function of condition

Tuesday

Wednesday

Friday

**Introduce Skill
(all conditions)**

This week we’re focusing on painful feelings and memories, which are common after stressful events. Approaching – feeling and sitting with them can actually reduce their impact. How can you approach your feelings & memories this week?

sitting with your feelings and memories
this week.

AIMS: TEST ENHANCEMENTS AND CHOOSE MOST EFFECTIVE INTERVENTION CONDITION

CBT Skills

No Framing +
Simple Reminder

Loss Framing +
Simple Reminder

Gain Framing +
Simple Reminder

No Framing +
Growth Mindset

Loss Framing +
Growth Mindset

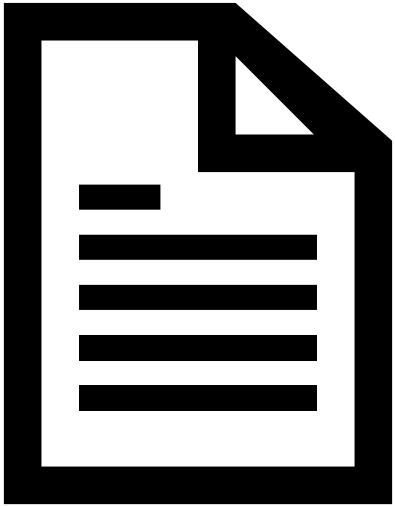
Gain Framing +
Growth Mindset

Community participants were recruited and screened (N= 505)

Timeline: Assessments and Intervention

Screening	Phone verification	Baseline Assessment	4 weeks of texts	Post Follow-up	1-month Follow-up	3-month Follow-up
				(n= 478 93%)	(n= 479 93%)	(n= 456 90%)

All assessments were self-report and completed online.



- **Trauma and PTSD Severity**

Posttraumatic Symptom Checklist (PCL; Weathers et al., 2013)

- **Heavy Episodic Drinking (HED)**

Quantity Frequency (Baer, 1993)

- **Other Alcohol Misuse: Typical Weekly Drinking, Negative Alcohol-related consequences**

Daily Drinking Questionnaire (DDQ; Collins et al., 1985)

Short Index of Problems (SIP, Miller, 1995)

- **Depression and Anxiety**

Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS21; Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995)

WE AIMED TO IDENTIFY THE MOST EFFECTIVE INTERVENTION CONDITION.

A priori decision rules

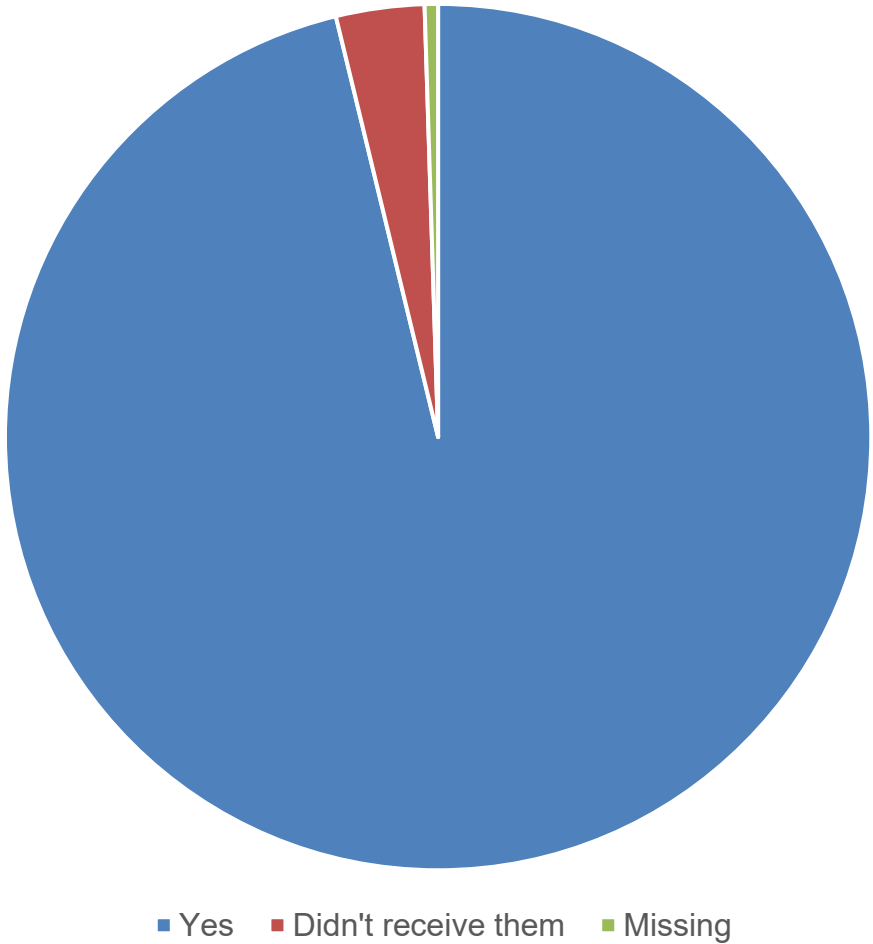
A priori decision rules were designed to:

- 1) identify enhancement(s) that improved outcomes**, whether alone or in combination
- 2) avoid enhancement(s) that had negative impact on outcomes**, whether alone or in combination,
- 3) prioritize primary outcomes (PTSD -1, HED -2)**, then secondary outcomes (alcohol consequences - 1, weekly drinking -2, depression -3, anxiety -4)
- 4) preserve simplicity** - if effects are equivalent, choose simplest condition (i.e., no framing, simple reminder)

SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS (N = 505)

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>%</i>
Age	36.27	11.03	
Gender Identity			
Male			19.6
Female			71.3
Transgender			2.4
Another Identity (e.g., agender, non-binary, gender queer)			6.7
Racial Identity			
Asian			4.0
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander			0.0
Black or African American			3.6
Native American/American Indian/Alaska Native			2.6
White			74.7
More than one race			12.3
Unknown/Prefer not to answer			3.0
Ethnic Identity			
Hispanic or Latino			11.1
Not Hispanic or Latino			85.7
Unknown/Prefer not to answer			3.2

Did you read the text messages?



Source: Lindgren..... Bedard-Gilligan, *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 2025

PARTICIPANTS FOUND THE TEXT MESSAGES HELPFUL, RELEVANT, AND INTERESTING

Intervention Feedback (Scale 1-7)	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
How helpful were the text messages?	4.08	1.52
How relevant were the text messages to your experiences?	4.47	1.60
How likely would you be to do a study like this again?	6.20	1.27
How interesting were the text messages?	4.17	1.53
How often did you use the skills in the text messages?	4.34	1.63
How familiar were you with the skills described in the text messages?	5.06	1.49
How helpful were the skills described in the text messages?	4.54	1.68

Source: Lindgren..... Bedard-Gilligan, *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, 2025

PARTICIPANT “LIKES”

They seemed semi personal and not the typical "self-care is important" bs.

They were informative and helped me learn different coping mechanisms

It helped me think about things in a different more specific way than I am accustomed to.

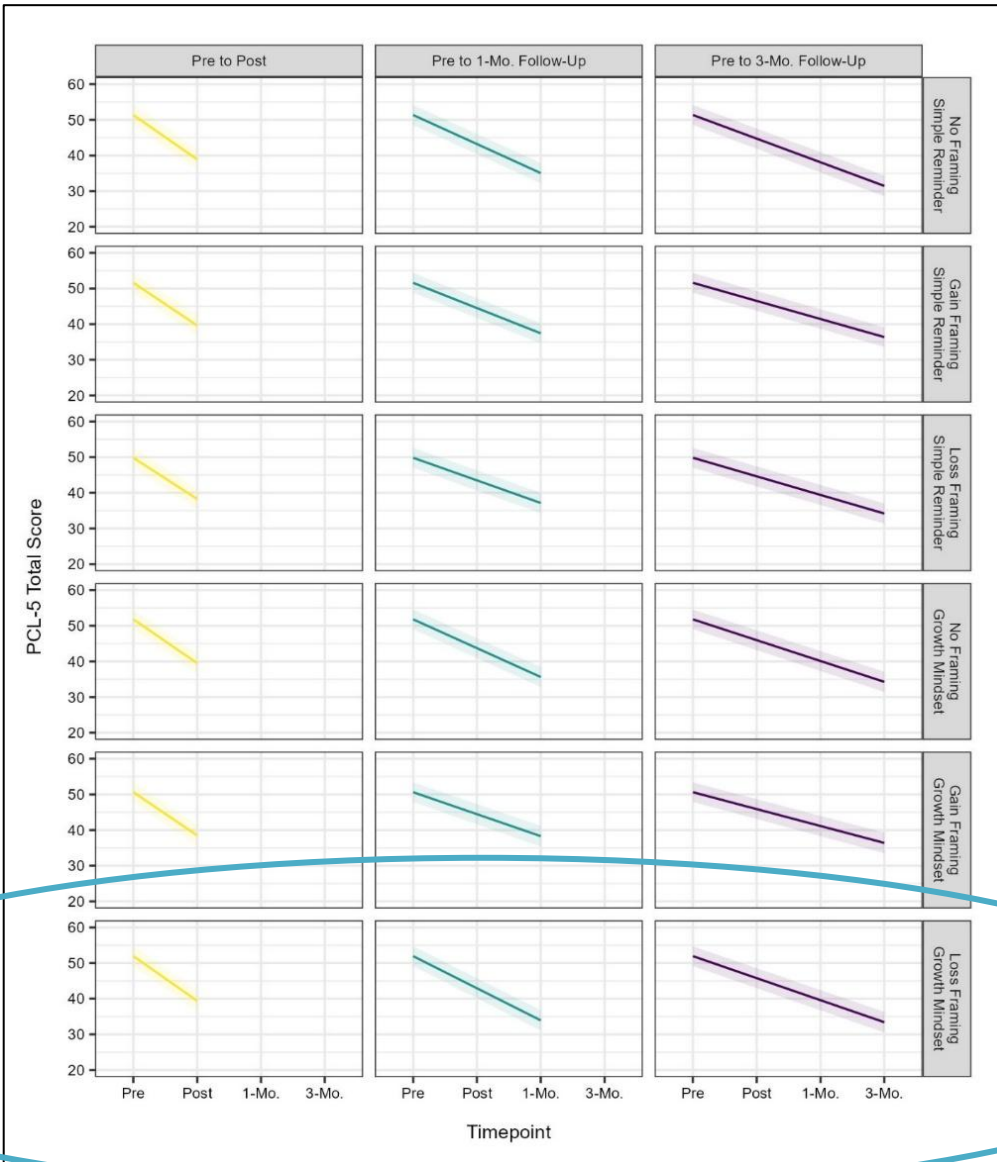
It was nice having a positive reminder that I am in charge of my world, it sort of acted like a cheerleader or a coach that tells you not to forget

I liked that they were succinct and weren't too distracting

They were straightforward and they took many AA-style and CBT skills and texted them in straightforward format.

Regardless of content, having a reminder that drinking wasn't the default option made me consider what I was doing more thoroughly.

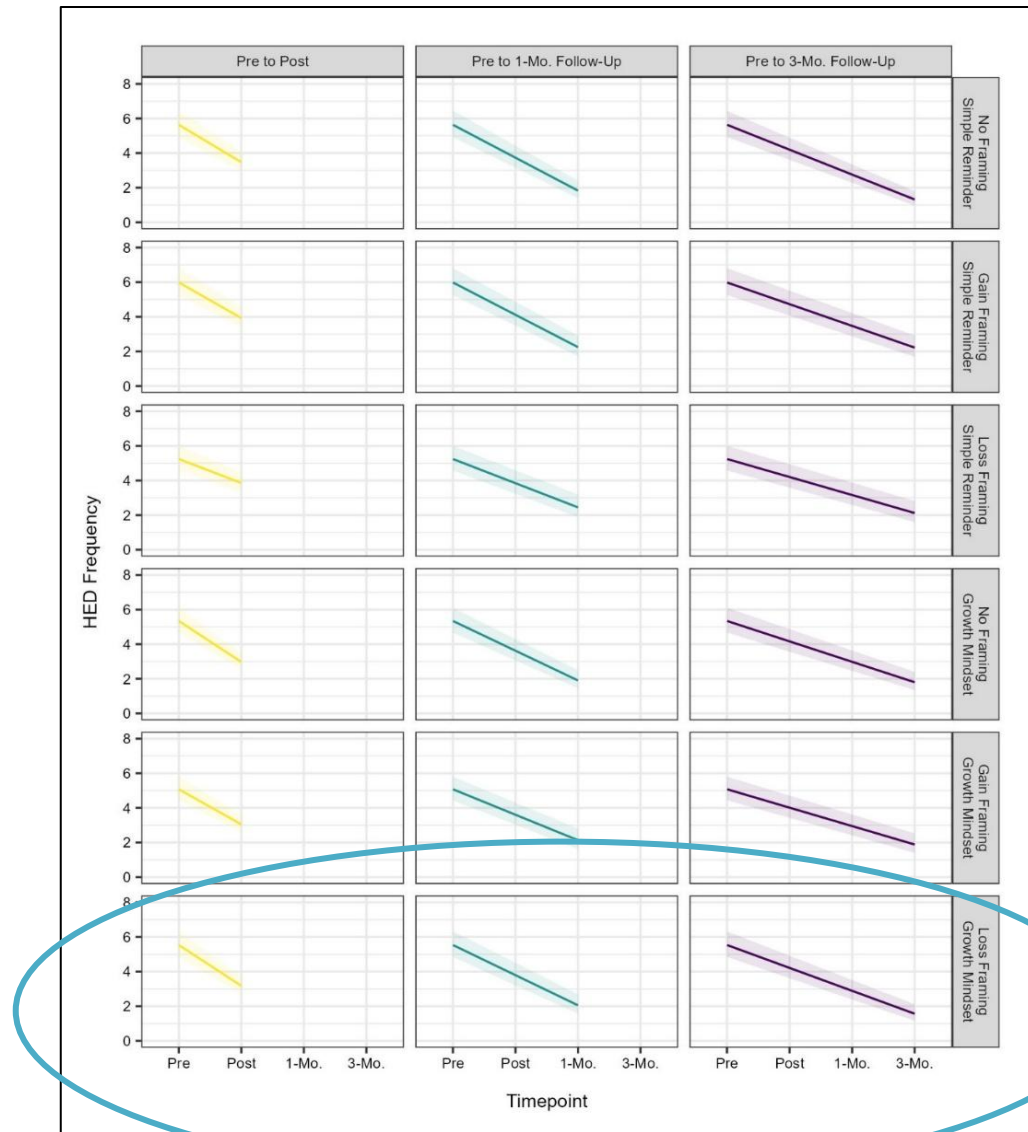
PTSD SYMPTOMS IMPROVED



PTSD symptoms

- No condition made participants worse
- Model testing indicated that loss framing and growth mindset in combination had biggest impact

HEAVY DRINKING EPISODES REDUCED



Heavy drinking episodes

- No condition made participants worse
- Model testing indicated that **loss framing and growth mindset, in combination had biggest impact**

DECISION RULE DECISIONS

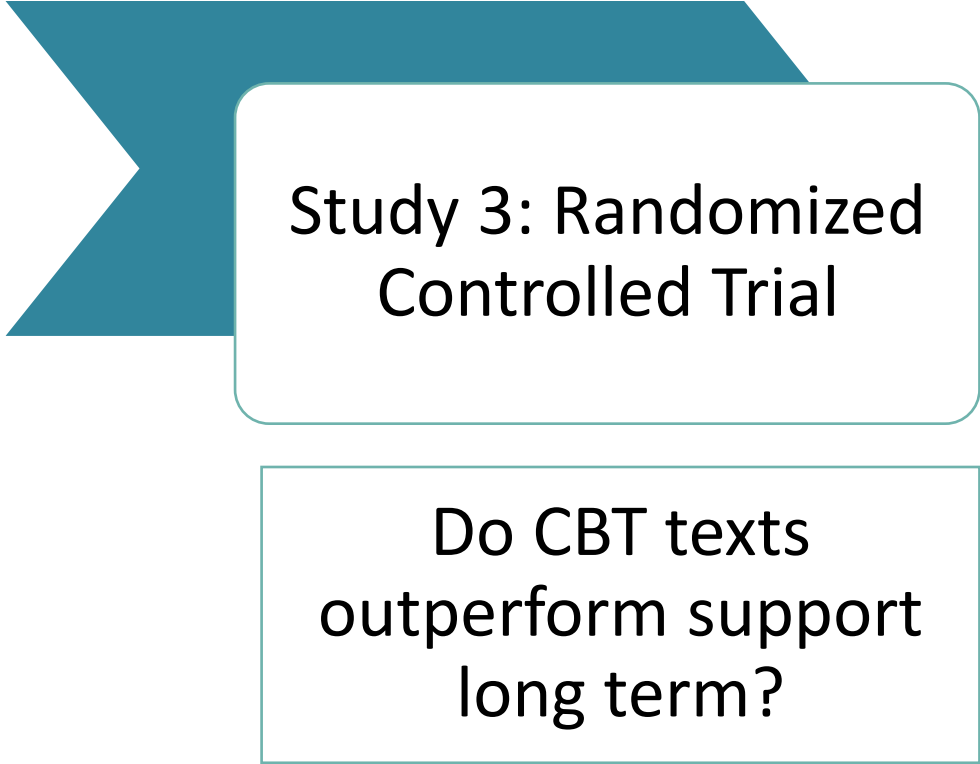


**LOSS FRAMING +
GROWTH MINDSET**

Caveat

- No framing + simple reminder was close second
- Considered pivot but retained enhancements for clinical reasons
 1. Study 1 feedback
 2. Good clinical practice to provide skills rationale and support for trying hard things

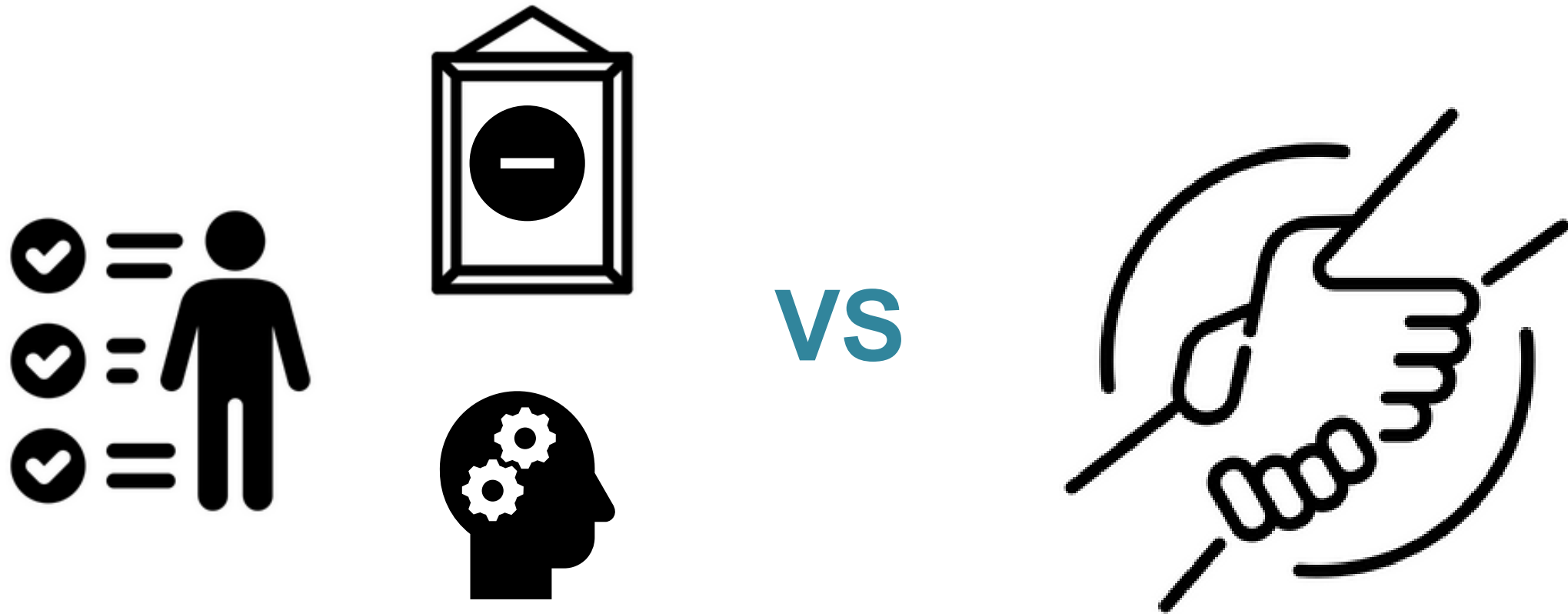
STUDY 3 TESTS LONG TERM EFFECTS OF CBT TEXTS COMPARED TO SUPPORTIVE TEXTS



Study 3: Randomized
Controlled Trial

Do CBT texts
outperform support
long term?

WE ARE EVALUATING THE WINNING CBT INTERVENTION COMPARED TO SUPPORTIVE TEXTS



Community participants were recruited and screened (N= 378)

Timeline: Assessments and Intervention

Screening	4 Weeks of Texts	1-week post Follow-up	1-month Follow-up	3-month Follow-up	6-month Follow-up	9-month Follow-up	12-month Follow-up
Phone verification	Weekly symptom Assessment	(n= 329) 95%	(n= 327) 95%	(n= 321) 93%	(n= 320) 93%	(n= 321) 93%	
Baseline Assessment	92-96% retention						



Week 1 texts as a function of condition

Tuesday

Wednesday

Friday

CBT (loss framing + growth) Messages

This week we're focusing on painful feelings and memories, which are common after stressful events. Approaching – feeling and sitting with them can actually reduce their impact. How can you approach your feelings & memories this week?

(Avoid loss) The impact of stressful events can be very difficult. To prevent things from getting worse, remember to sit with your feelings and memories this week.

(Growth) Sitting with your emotions and memories can help you change how you think and feel. Remember that setbacks are a chance to learn—you can develop these coping skills!

Supportive Messages

We hope that writing to you might help during this hard time and reduce your sense of being alone a little bit. We are thinking of you. Be well.

We are reaching out because you are in our thoughts. You are not alone. We are glad to be in touch with you.

When things are hard, we sometimes feel all alone. Know that we are thinking of you and wishing you the best.

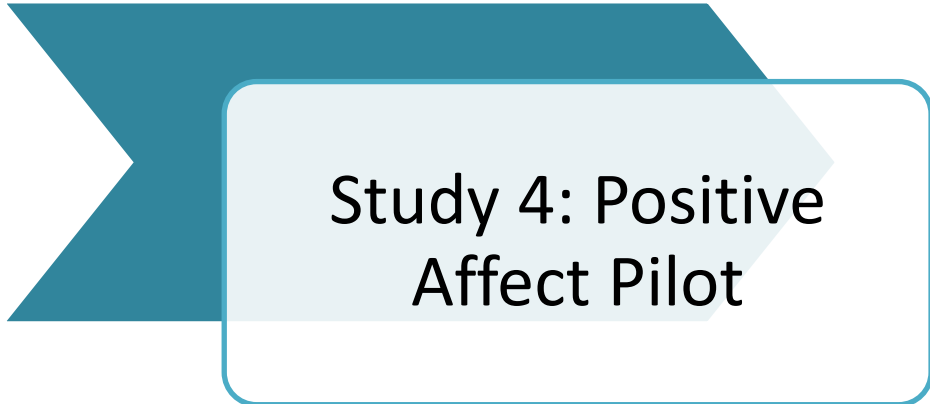
How do CBT and supportive texts compare over time?



We are eager to find out!

- **12-month assessment closes October 2026**

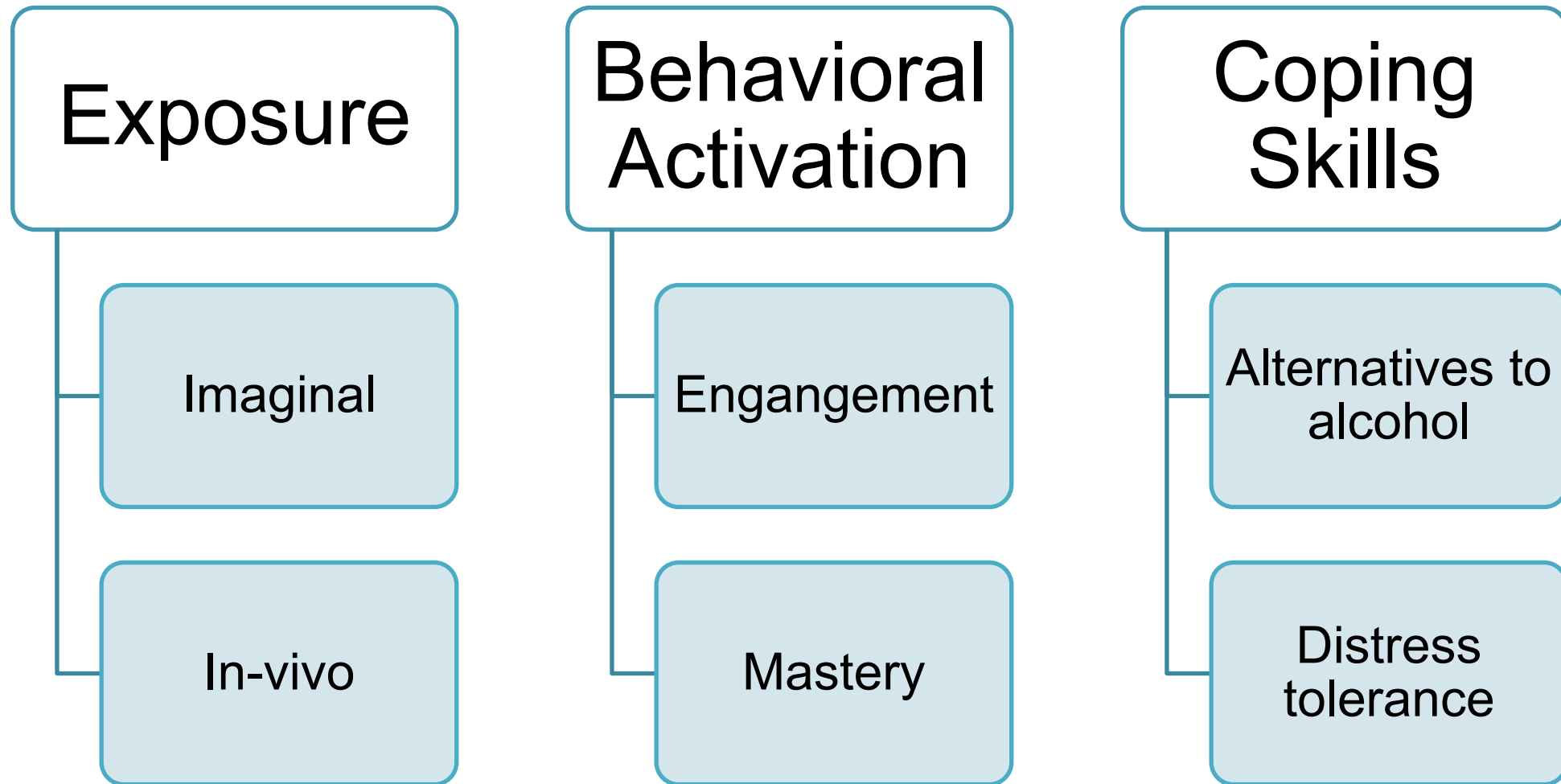
STUDY 4 FOCUSES ON THE POSITIVE



Study 4: Positive
Affect Pilot

Can we change PTS+AM
by targeting positive
affect & reward
processes?

SO FAR... WE ADAPTED EVIDENCE-BASED CBT PRINCIPLES FOR PTSD+ AM INTO TEXTS.



BUT THERE ARE OTHER OPTIONS

Expos

Imag

In-v



oping
skills

alternatives
o alcohol

Distress
olerance

THERE ARE POSITIVE TARGETS

Intervention targets:

- Reward
- Positive affect
- Enhancement
Drinking

RATIONALE FOR CONSIDERING THESE TARGETS

Positive affect treatments are effective for anxiety & depression

- Improve the positive
- Reduce the negative

STUDY 4 SAMPLE TEXT MESSAGES

Day 1

When we have experienced stressful events and are struggling to experience positive emotions, we may not have enough rewarding or pleasurable activities in our daily life.

Intentionally adding positive activities can improve your mood and health and have a big impact.

What is one thing you can do each day this week that might feel positive or rewarding? Pick something and give it a try!



We conducted an open pilot trial of the Positive Affect Texts.

Timeline: Assessments and Intervention

Screening
N=25

Phone
verification

Baseline
Assessment

4 weeks
of texts

1-week Post
Follow-up

(n = 25)
100%

5-week
Follow-up

(n = 24)
96%

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS SUGGEST POSITIVE AFFECT TEXTS ARE EFFICACIOUS AND ACCEPTABLE

Preliminary Findings from Pilot		
Outcome Variable	Cohen's d (1 Week Post)	Cohen's d (5 Weeks Post)
PTSD Symptoms	-1.03	-1.02
Typical Weekly Alcohol Consumption	-0.92	-0.77
Heavy Drinking Episodes	-1.37	-0.98
Alcohol-Related Consequences	-1.13	-0.73
Positive Affect	0.42	0.35
Negative Affect	-1.11	-1.14

*They felt a
grounding way to
check in with
myself during
chaos of the day*

*I liked how they were
trying to develop
consistency within me.
Each text had a
reminder of practicing
that week's
mindfulness &
awareness activity.*

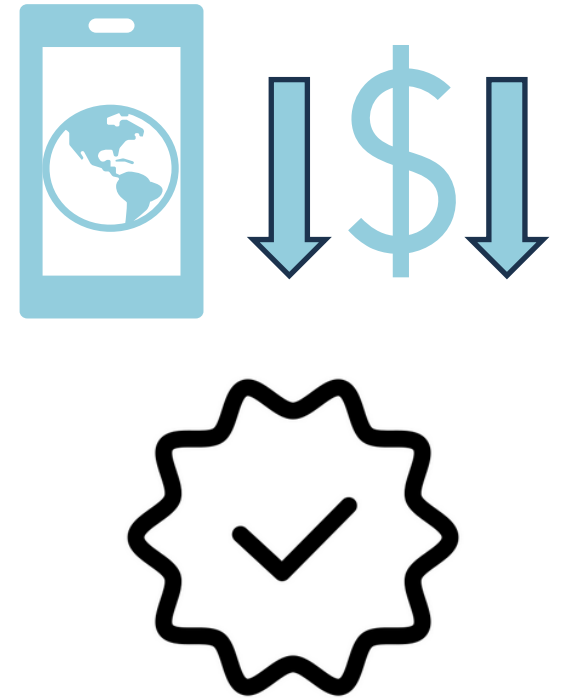
*They didn't come across
as pushy or too strong
and seemed to come at
right about the times I
needed them the most
coincidentally enough*

NEXT STEPS WITH THESE DATA

- **Continuing analyses**
 - Secondary outcomes
 - Participant Feedback
- **Finalizing intervention via new grant submission.....**

There is a need for additional treatment options for individuals with PTSD+ AM.

- **Text interventions are promising**
 - They have strong potential for wide reach and scale
 - They reduce symptoms
 - They are acceptable & feasible



Thank you!

