

Risk and Resilience for Depression and Suicide in Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Teens



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Presentation Topics



- 1) Common definitions of sexual orientation**
- 2) Current scientific evidence for mental health disparities**
- 3) How to discuss sexual orientation with clients**
- 4) Common themes in therapy when working with LGB teens**
- 5) How to conceptualize problems and approaches to treatment using the CBT framework**
- 6) Suggestions for how to navigate psychotherapy treatment with LGB teens.**

1. Common definitions of sexual orientation



ATTRACTION

Opposite Sex
Heterosexual

Multiple Sexes
Bisexual

Same Sex
Homosexual

BEHAVIOR

Opposite Sex

Bisexual

Same Sex

IDENTITY

Opposite Sex

Bisexual

Same Sex

The Influence of Discrimination



- **Heterosexism – omits natural occurrence of LGB experiences**
- **Homophobia – fear of homosexuals, disgust, application of negative beliefs**
- **Internalized Homophobia – self doubt, self disregard**

2. Current evidence for mental health disparities



- 1) Four major domains have been studied using meta-analysis techniques:
 - A. Substance use and abuse
 - B. Risky sexual behavior
 - C. Violence/Victimization
 - D. Depression and Suicide

2. Current evidence for mental health disparities



LGB youth across multiple studies and methodologies are:

- 1) 3 times more likely to report substance use,
- 2) Almost twice as likely to report substance use during last sexual encounter, and
- 3) More likely to report:
 - A. Childhood sexual abuse
 - B. Parent physical abuse
 - C. Missed school due to fear
 - D. Being assaulted at school

2. Current evidence for mental health disparities



Depression and Suicidality Meta-Analysis:

- 1) LGB youth reported higher rates of depression symptoms, on average, than did heterosexual youth.
- 2) LGB youth were over three times more likely to report a history of suicidality:
 - A. Overall ~28% of LGB youth and ~12% of heterosexual youth
 - B. No gender differences in the size of the disparity
 - C. As the severity of the suicidality increased, the disparity increased
 - D. LGB youth were over 4 times more likely to make a serious suicide attempt, one that required medical attention...

3. Discussing Sexual Orientation with clients



- **Must Ask**
 - Attraction
 - Behavior
 - Identity
- **The Role of the Closet**
 - Protections from outside
 - Protections from inside
- **Let youth be in charge of closet door**

4. Common themes in therapy



1) Relationships with family

- Socially conservative families and religious beliefs

2) Relationships with friends

- Identifying “safe” friends and friendship networks

3) Coming out

- Anticipation of negative reactions

4) Establishing romantic and sexual relationships

- Fears of rejection; fears of intimacy; internalized homophobia

5) Self-Esteem, Sense of Self, and Hope for Future

Finally, when working with LGB youth, discuss and emphasize your privacy and confidentiality policies!

5. Conceptualizing LGB Youth Experience

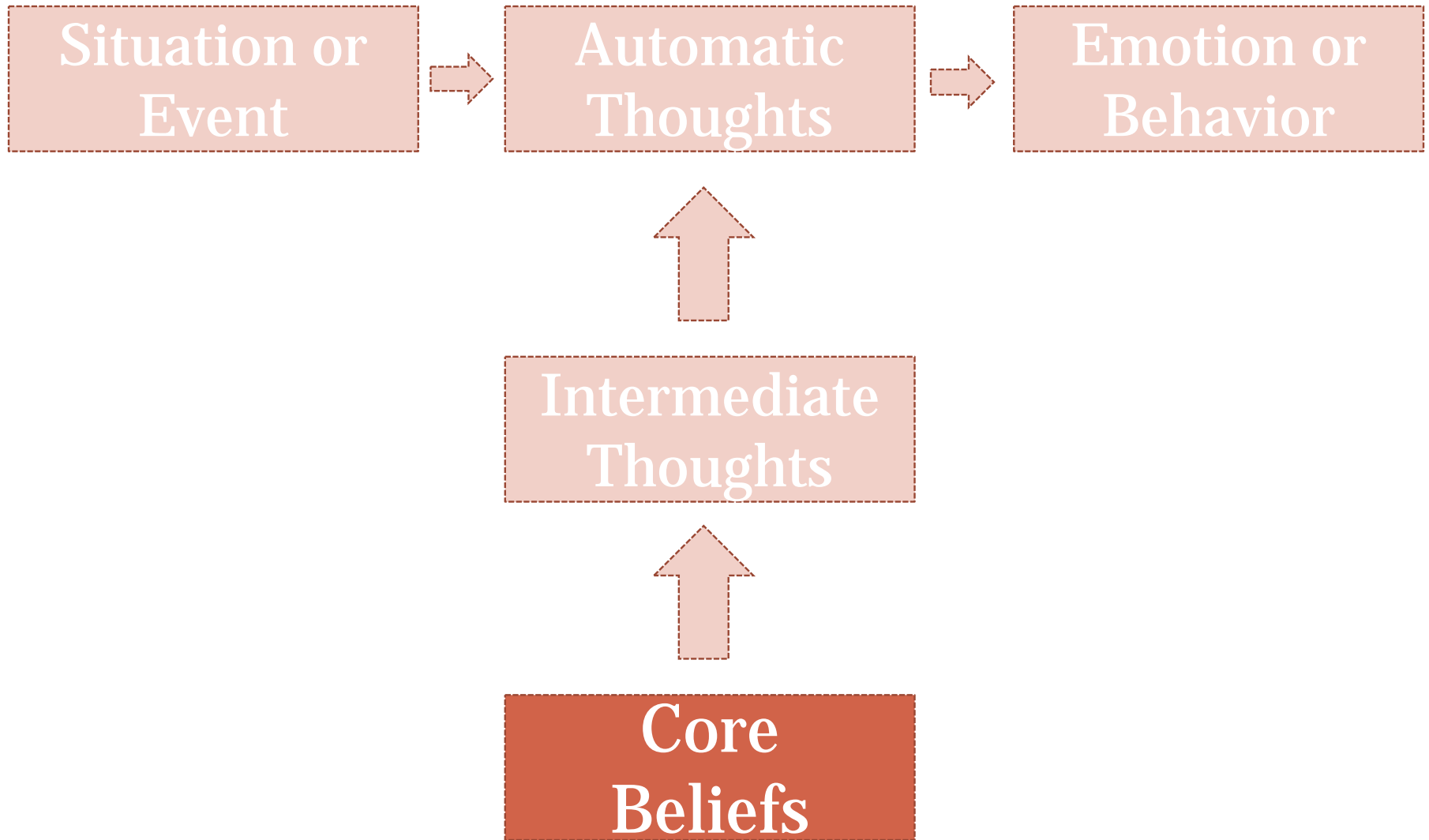


A couple of disclaimers...

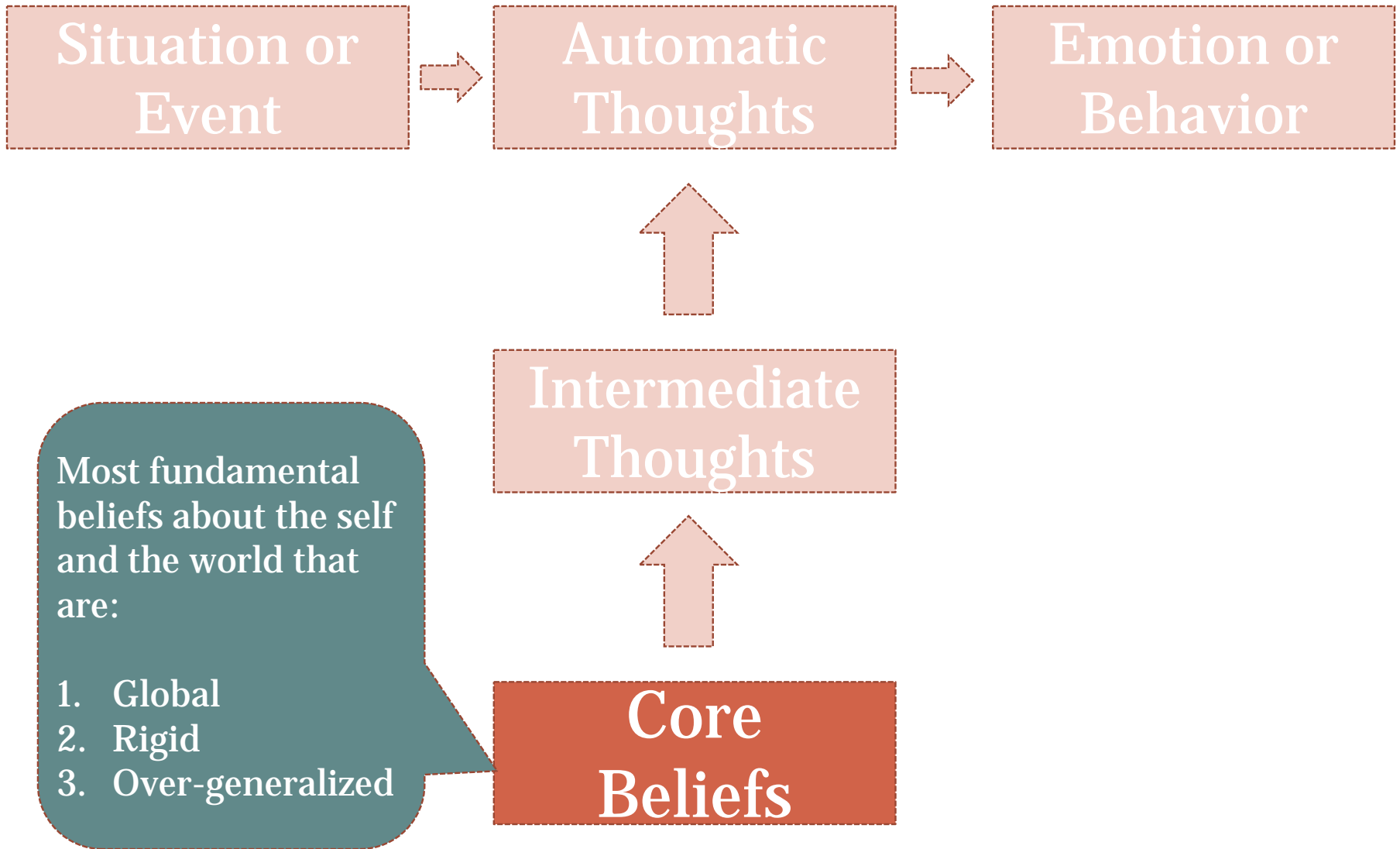
Despite the robust mental health disparities among LGB youth:

- 1) There are no targeted effectiveness studies with LGB youth
- 2) We are not intending to “pathologize” LGB youth
- 3) Most LGB youth DO NOT report depression symptoms or suicidality

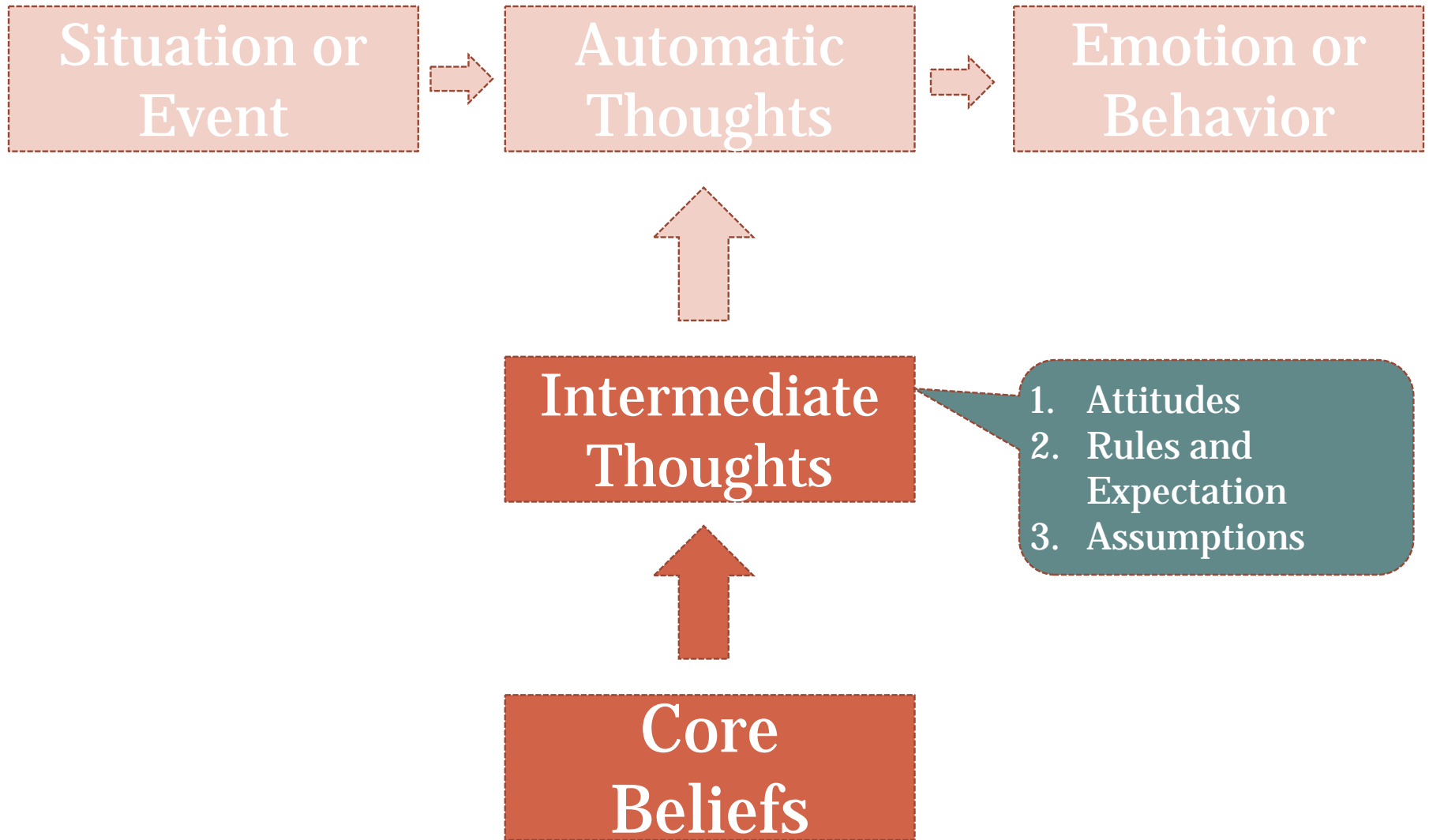
Basic CBT Model



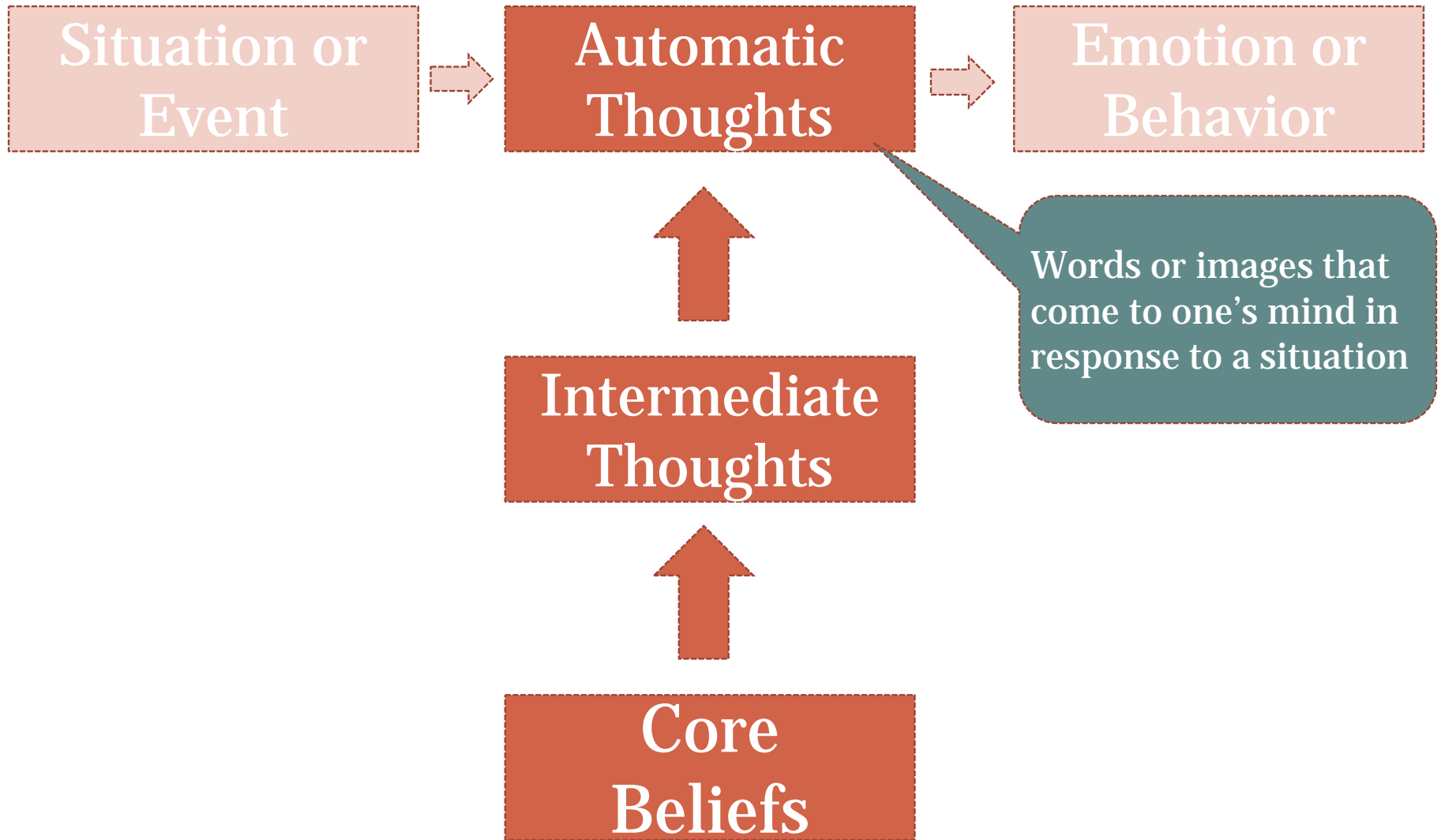
Basic CBT Model



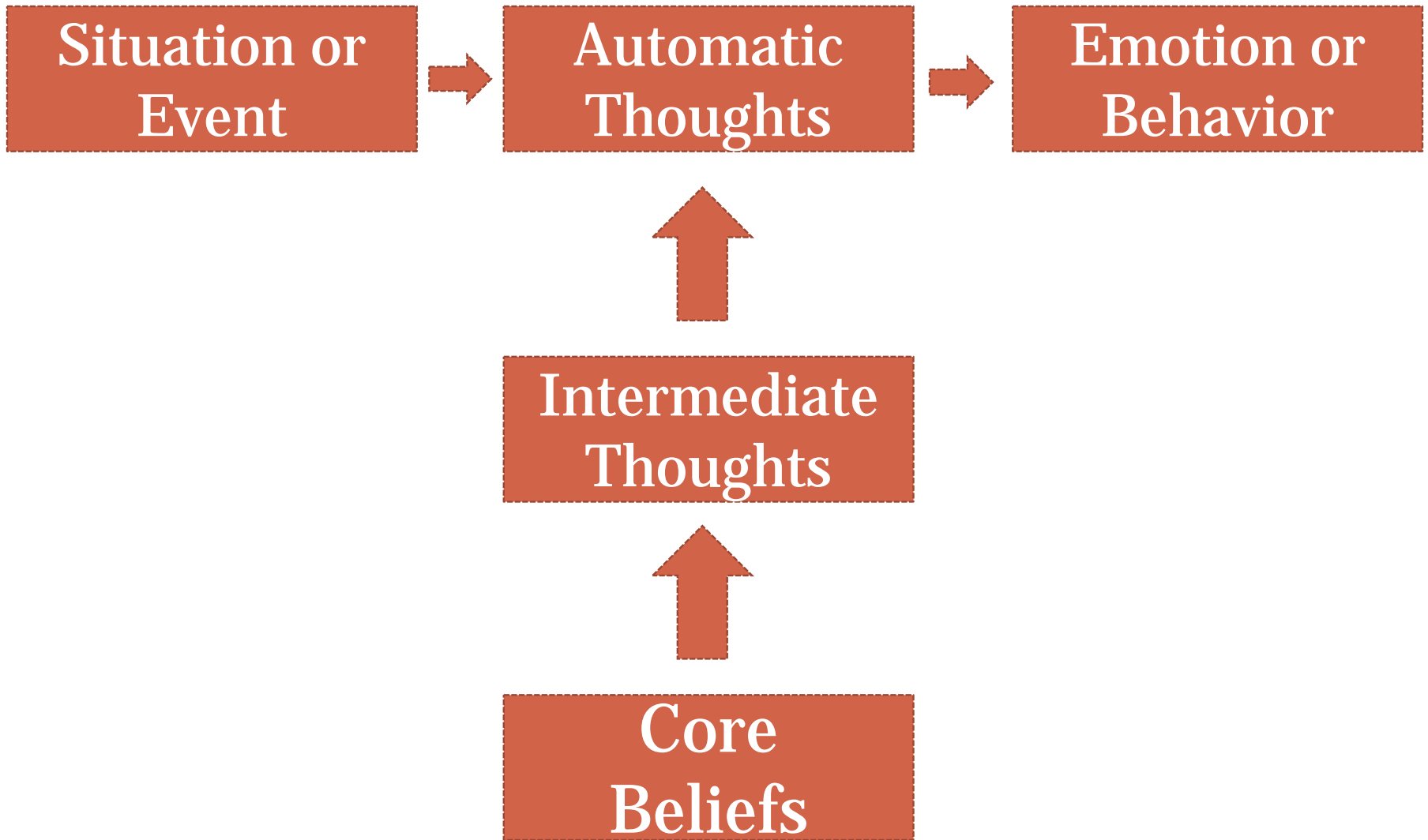
Basic CBT Model



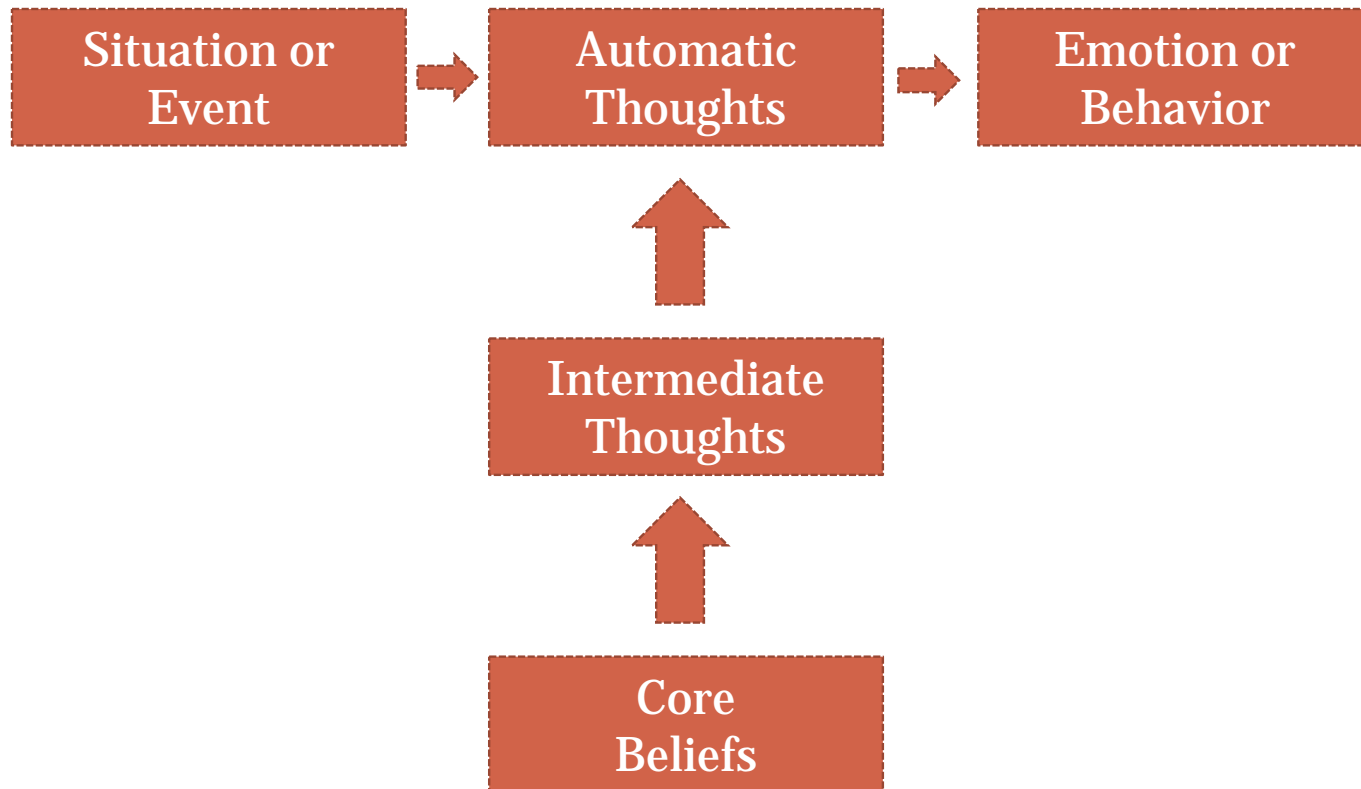
Basic CBT Model



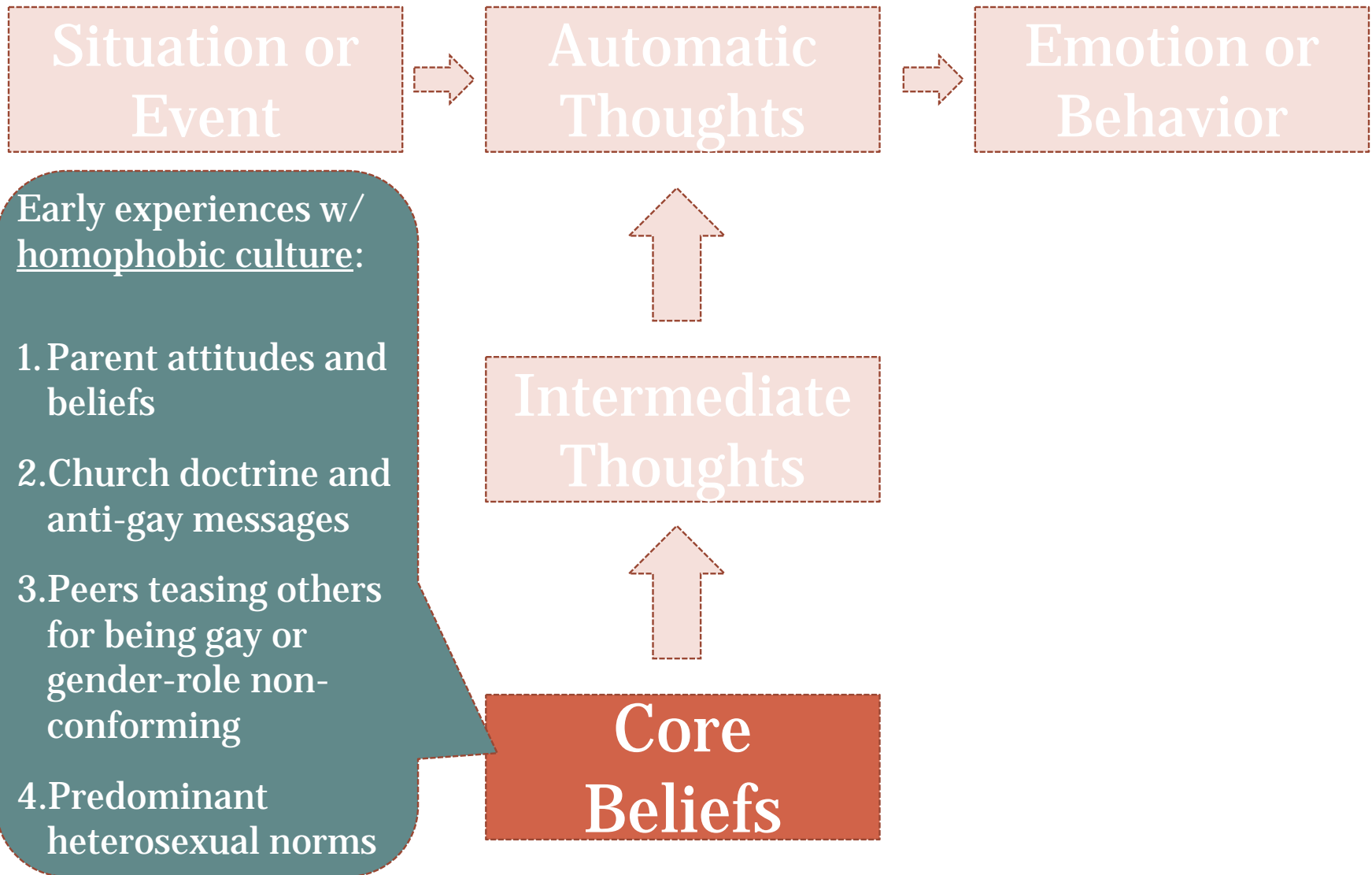
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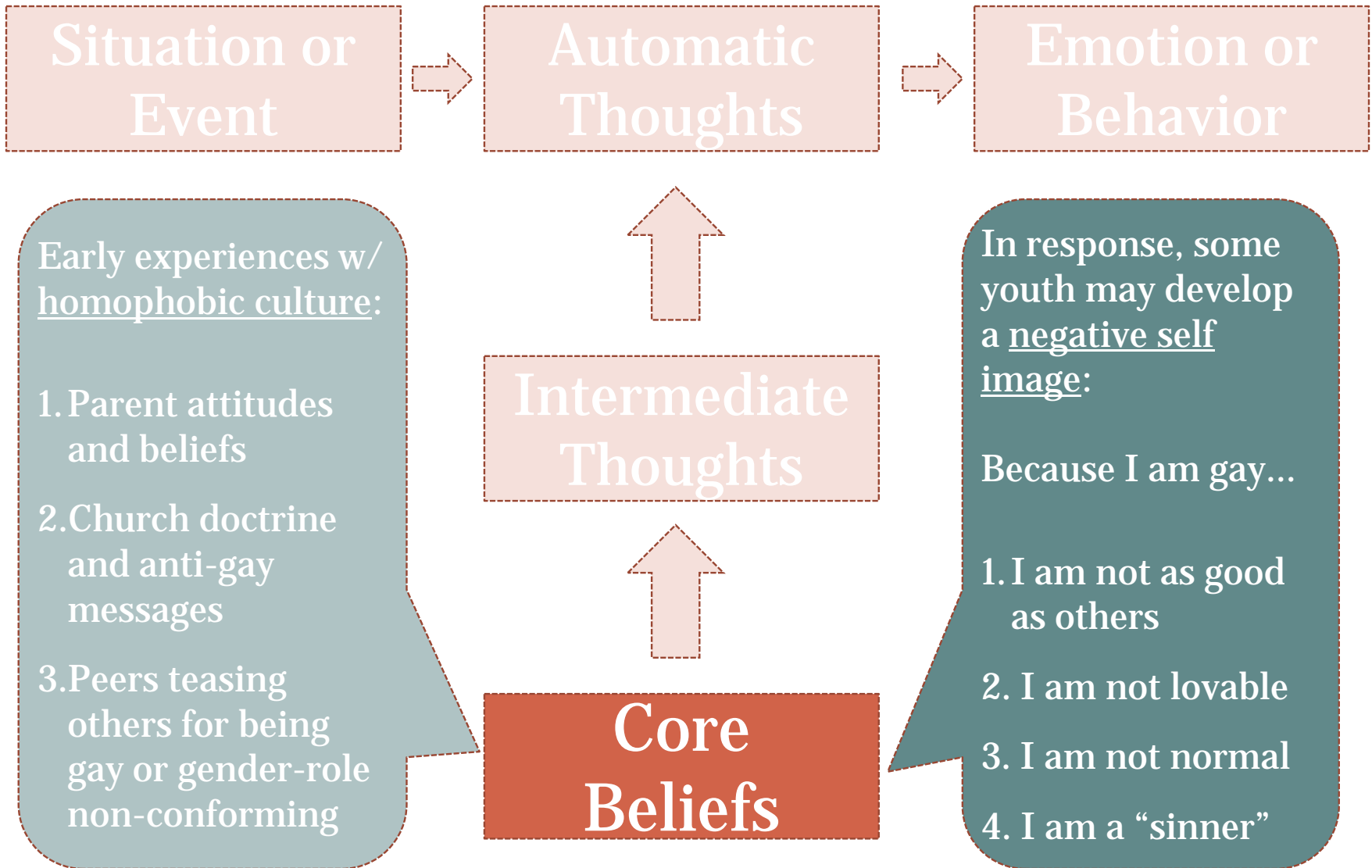
5. Conceptualizing LGB Youth Experience Using the CBT Framework



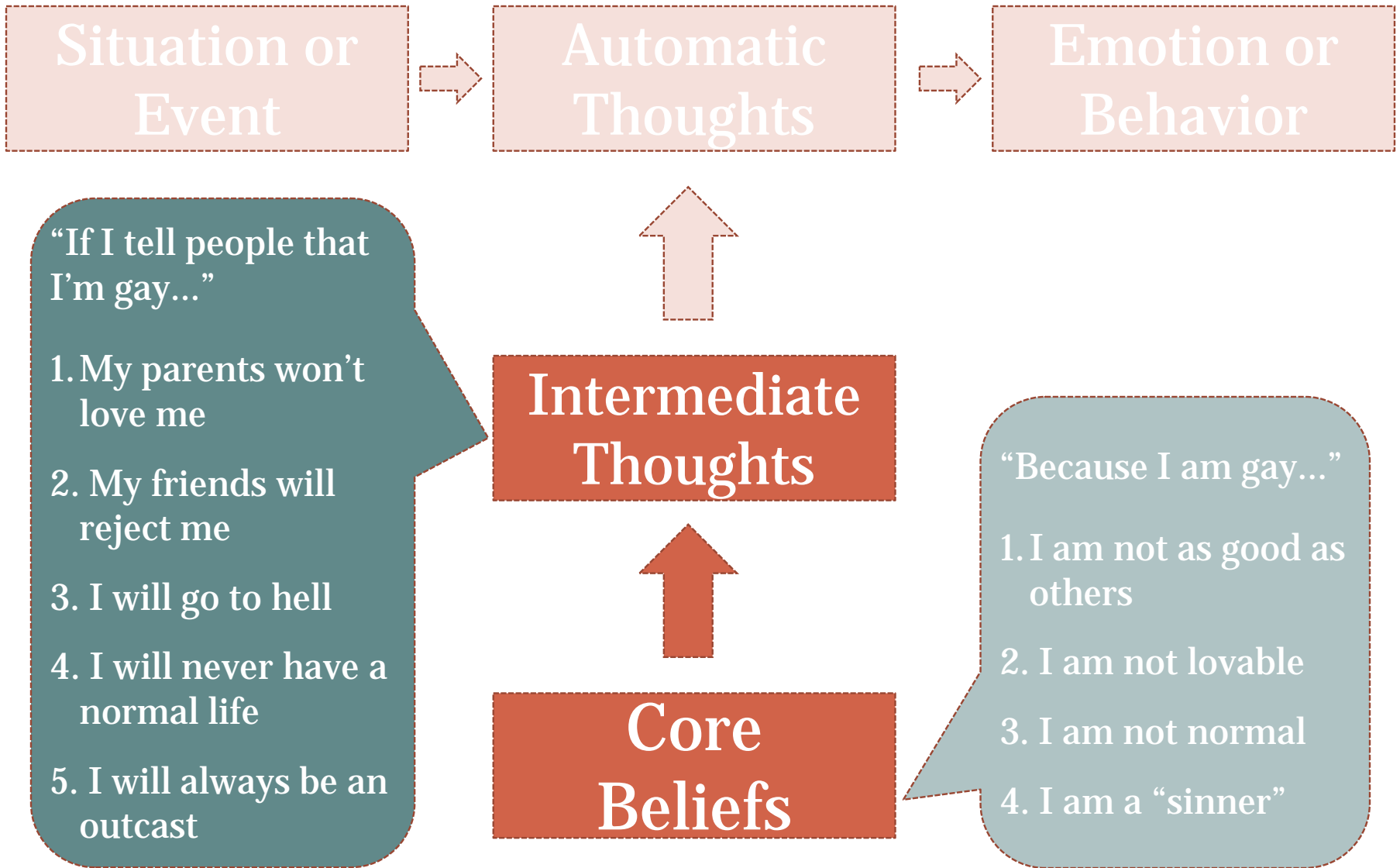
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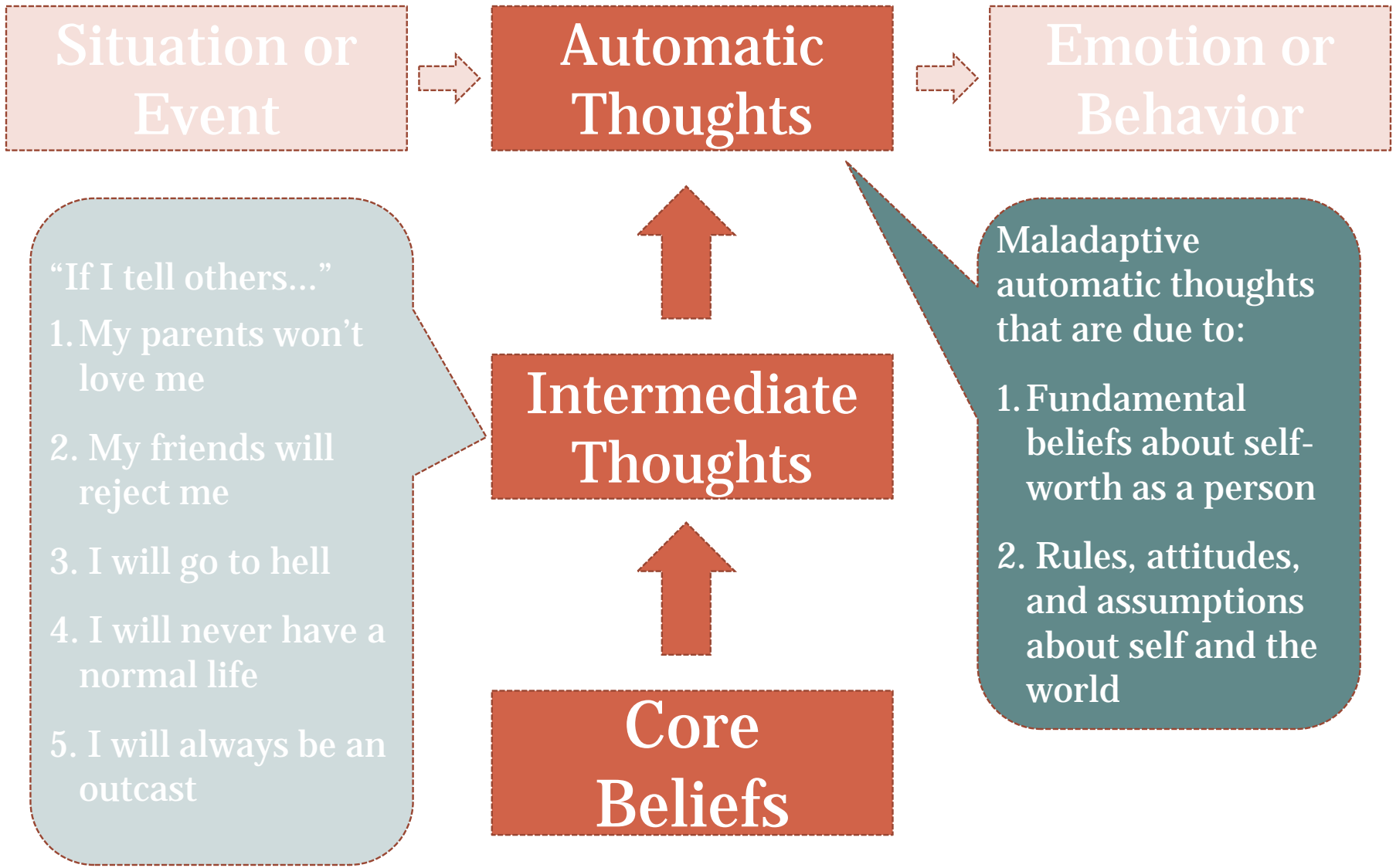
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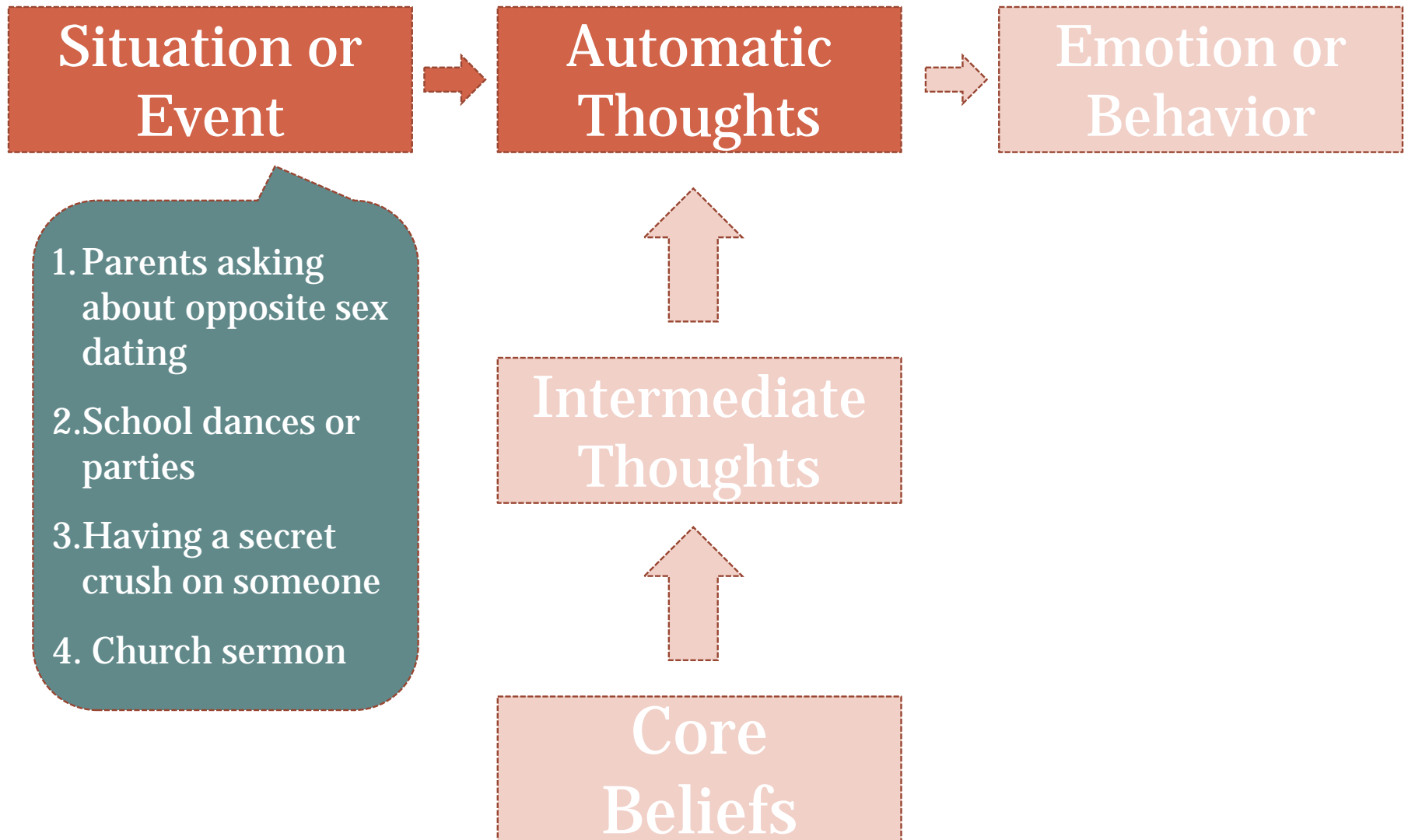
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Margaret:

17 Years Old

Senior in H.S.

Honors Student

Chemistry Major

Applying to colleges

Family:

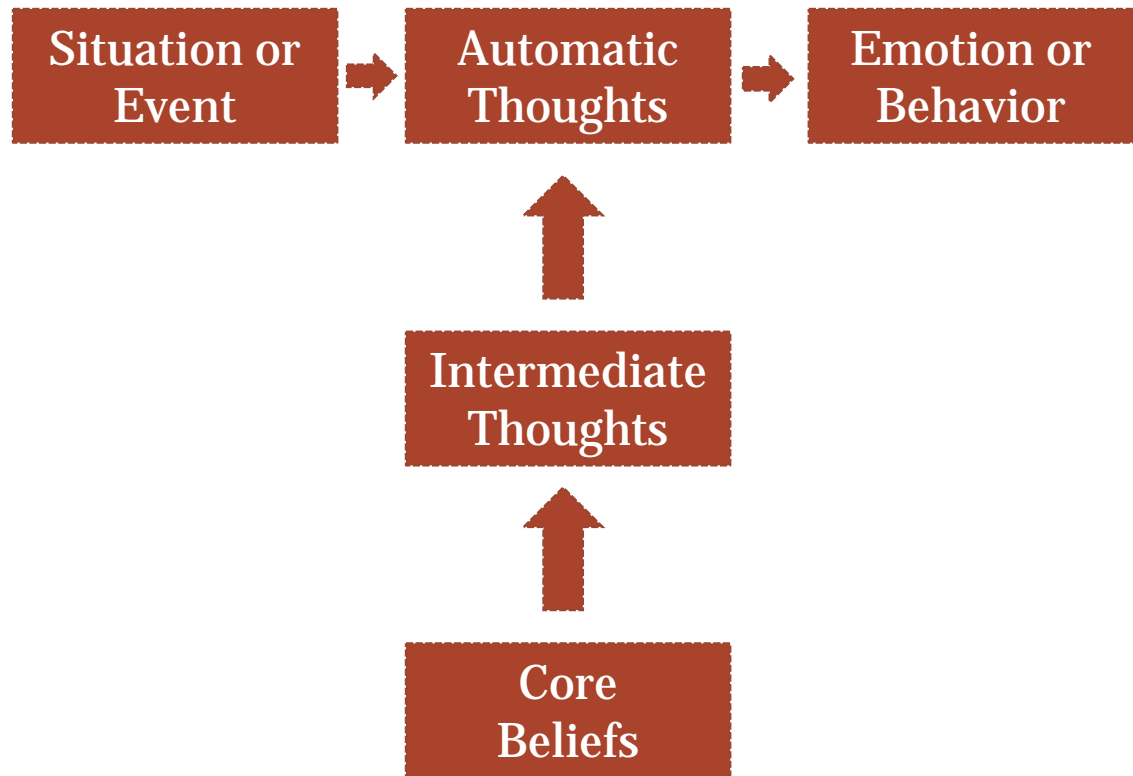
Two Bio Parents

Two Bio Siblings

Father is a minister

Mother violin teacher

Parents are “progressive”

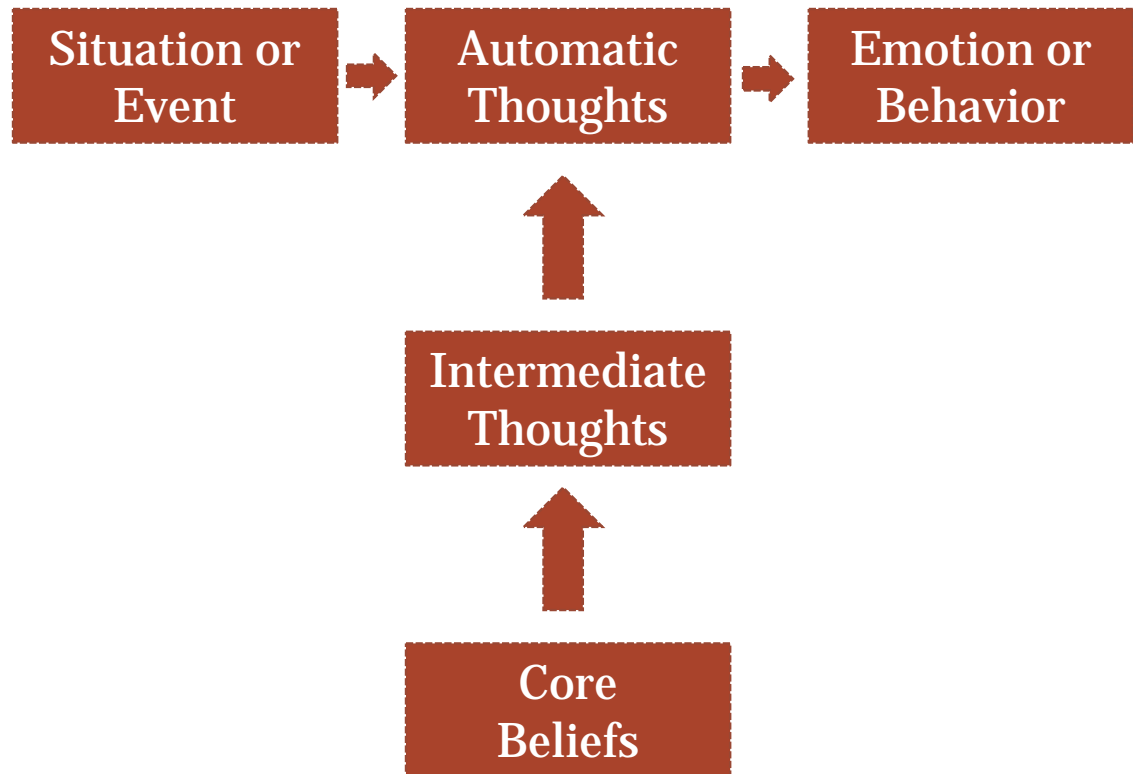


Conceptualizing LGB Youth Experience: A Case Study



Psychiatric History:

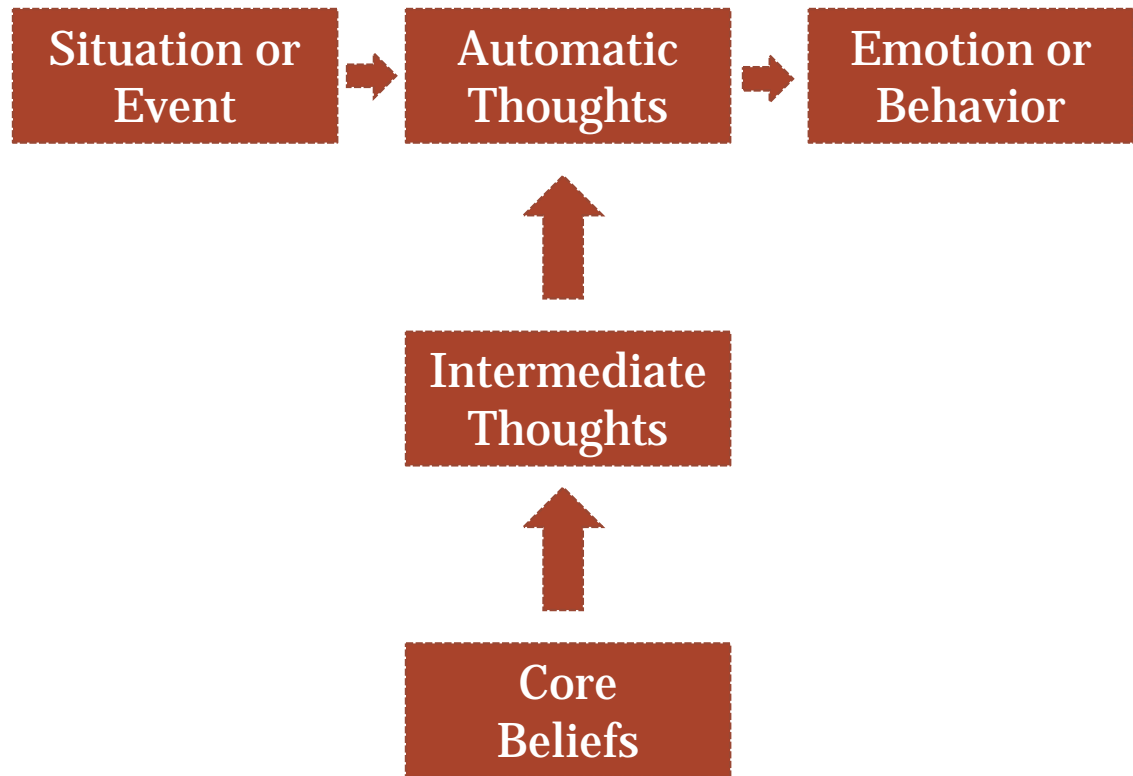
- Family history of anxiety
- Reason for seeking treatment: Suicidality
- Moderate MDD & GAD
- Suicidal thoughts but no plans or intent, and no history of attempts
- Average mood is 4/10
- Difficulties concentrating
- Low Energy
- Moderate Insomnia



Conceptualizing LGB Youth Experience: A Case Study

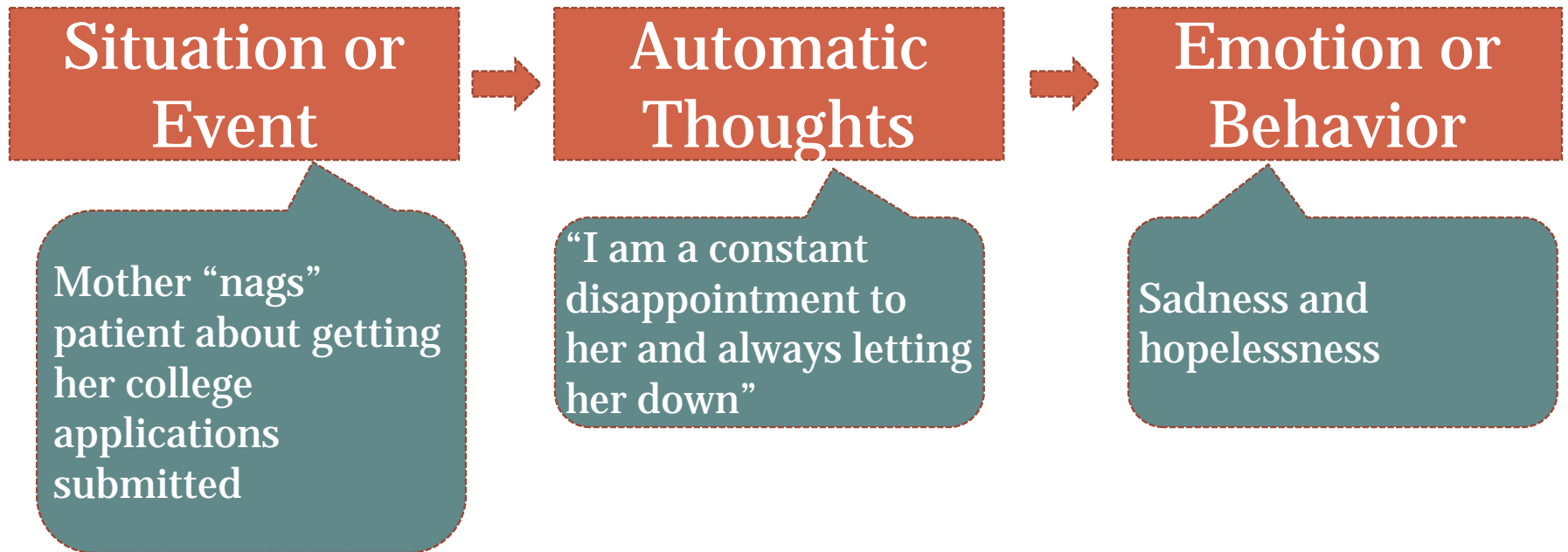
Psychosocial History:

- Has experienced same-sex attraction for several years
- Is “out” to parents and they are supportive
- Never been in a romantic or sexual relationship
- No kissing, no hand-holding, no love letters (with same-sex teen)

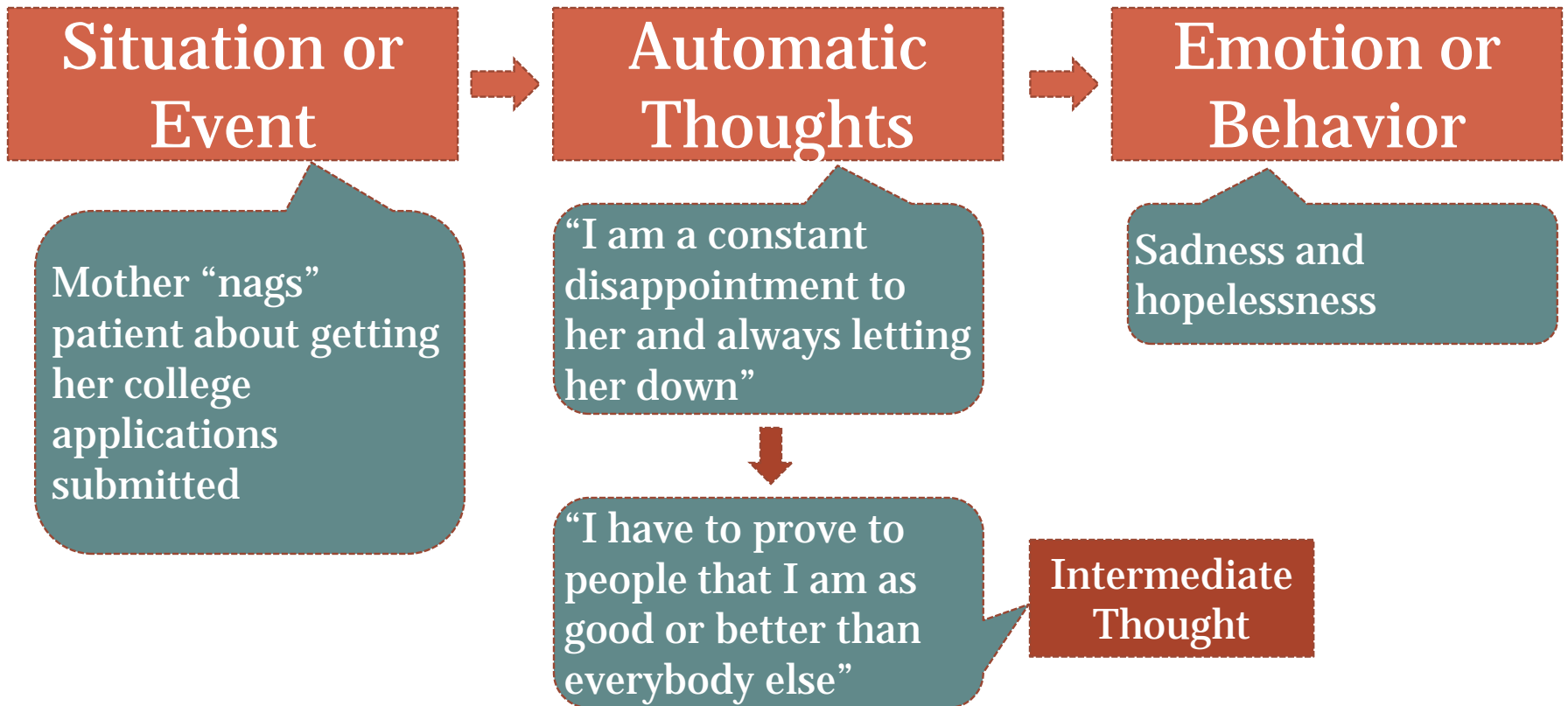


Conceptualizing LGB Youth Experience: A Case Study

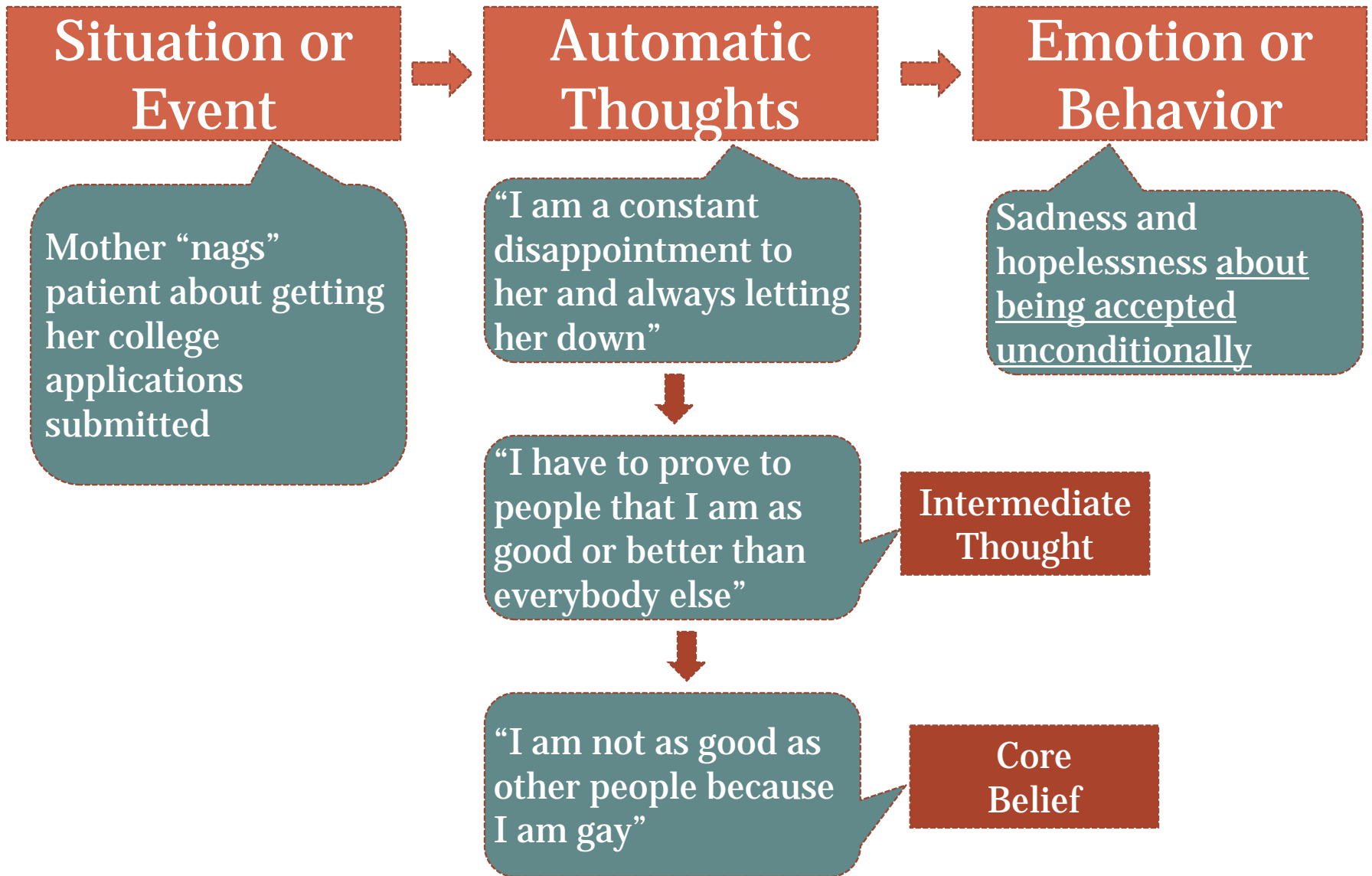
Traditional CBT Interpretation Focused on Surface-Level Automatic Thoughts



Deeper Meaning Related to Sexual Orientation



Deeper Meaning Related to Sexual Orientation



6. Suggestions for navigating therapy w/ LGB teens



For LGB teenagers in which gay-related issues are influential:

- 1) Gay-related stressors and influences may not be obvious
- 2) Core beliefs may be unconscious and deeply entrenched
- 3) Automatic thoughts may not appear to be gay-related
- 4) Using the “vertical arrow” technique can help identify core beliefs that are feeding into automatic thoughts
- 5) Identifying, challenging, and changing core beliefs may be the key to success!

Reasons to be hopeful!



- 1) Most gay youth are resilient and do not report histories of depression symptoms or suicidality**
- 2) Strength-based approaches to protecting teens**
- 3) Some evidence for the power of positive parent relationships**
- 4) Most gay youth do not report mental health problems**
- 5) Society and acceptance of homosexuality is changing**

6. Suggestions for navigating therapy w/ LGB teens



- **Nondiscrimination policies**
- **Inclusive forms and assessment questions**
- **Visible signs of diversity**
- **Training for all staff positions**
- **Confront discrimination when displayed**
- **Include diverse examples and stories**
- **Don't assume youth want to discuss**
- **Emphasize privacy policies**
- **Know community resources**

6. Resources



- **National**

- PFLAG – www.pflag.org
- GLSEN – www.glsen.org
- GLMA – www.glma.org
- The Trevor Project- www.thetrevorproject.org
 - ✦ 866-488-7386

- **Local**

- Persad Center – www.persadcenter.org
- GLCC – www.glccpgh.org
- Dreams of Hope – www.doh.org