

A solid green circle containing the text 'Let's Talk' in white.

Let's Talk

Self Help Information to manage anxiety, depression, panic and sleep problems

Leaflet 1: Getting active

Leaflet 1: Getting Active. (Behavioural activation)

Depression

Depression has a variety of symptoms, including loss of energy and interest in life leading to withdrawal and avoidance. Behavioural activation is an effective treatment for depression because it targets the role of avoidance in depression. It is focused on activities to help patients re-establish daily routines, increase pleasurable activities and address important necessary issues.

How does behavioural activation work?

When people are depressed they feel physically unwell, have negative thoughts and change the way they behave. People who are depressed reduce the frequency and type of their usual behaviours. They commonly stop going out with others, reduce interactions with friends, work colleagues and family, and make little effort to do things they may have previously enjoyed. By avoiding effort, people experience relief from burdensome activity, which leads to more avoiding of effort.

Avoidance is, therefore, **negatively reinforced**, i.e. the frequency of avoidance increases. As people avoid, they also reduce their opportunity for social and personal activities which bring them pleasure and achievement. They experience less **positive reinforcement** for these activities and thus these activities reduce further. Depression is, therefore, a vicious circle of negatively reinforced avoidance and reduced opportunity for positive reinforcement. Both these forces lead to reduction in usual activity for people who are depressed.

Some of the things people avoid are just **routine** activities such as cleaning the house, doing the ironing, washing up. Other routines are disrupted such as the time they go to bed or get up, when they eat and how they cook for themselves. These are the important life routines that make people comfortable in their surroundings.

Other activities that get disrupted are things people do for **pleasure** such as seeing friends, enjoying a day out with families or playing games with children. These are the things that often make people feel well. A third area where people avoid activities is in important **necessary** things such as paying bills or confronting difficult situations at work. These are activities which are important and if neglected may lead to a negative outcome.

By using behavioural activation to restart these activities, people are helped to move out of the negative cycle and start to regain positive reinforcement. This encourages them to continue routine, pleasurable and necessary activities, thus becoming less withdrawn, less isolated and their mood consequently starts to lift.

4 Steps to get Active Again

Step 1: Identifying routine, pleasurable and necessary activities

You should identify routine, pleasurable and necessary activities – things that you would like to do but have usually stopped doing since you became depressed. The worksheet **BA 1** is used to gather this information.

Step 2: Making a hierarchy of routine, pleasurable and necessary activities

Using the worksheet **BA 2**, you should organise the activities in **BA 1** into a hierarchy of difficulty – most difficult, medium difficulty, easiest. Include some of each type of routine, pleasurable and necessary activity in each section of **BA 2**.

Step 3: Planning some routine, pleasurable and necessary activities

Plan some avoided activities into your week, using a blank diary **BA 3** to specify a mixture of routine, pleasurable and necessary activities. These should be initially identified from near the bottom of your list in **BA 2** i.e. the easiest to start with. Activities should be detailed precisely: what, where, when, and who with. The diary should be split into am, pm and evening. Small and regular activities are better in the early stages.

Step 4: Implementing behavioural activation exercises

You should undertake the planned activities written down in the diary. The principle of grading activities and using a mixture of routine, pleasurable and necessary actions should be followed. Record in the same diary if you did the planned activity.

Step 5: Review your progress

Regularly look back at your progress and think about how you have got on. This should help you to begin to overcome your depression and lift your mood. If you have any difficulties, think about whether you could plan things differently for the next day e.g. maybe you chose too difficult an activity to start with and could not achieve it, so need to take activities in smaller steps. Above all, remember to give yourself praise for your efforts – every step is helping you!

BA 1 Behavioural activation

List some **routine activities** here: e.g. washing up, cleaning the house

List some **pleasurable activities** here: e.g. going out with friends or family

List some **necessary activities** here: e.g. paying bills, dealing with difficult situations

BA 2 Behavioural activation

Put your lists in order of difficulty, mixing up the different routine, pleasurable and necessary activities.

The most difficult

Medium difficulty

The easiest

BA 3 Behavioural Activation Diary

		Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Morning	What Where When Who							
	What Where When Who							
Afternoon	What Where When Who							
	What Where When Who							
Evening	What Where When Who							

Some useful books which you may like to buy or borrow from your local library:

David Burns (1980). Feeling Good, The New Mood Therapy. New American Library. New York.

Paul Gilbert (1999). Overcoming Depression.

Dennis Greenberger and Christine A Padesky (1995). Mind over Mood. Guildford

Kathy Naime and Gerrilyn Smith (1994). Dealing with Depression. The Women's Press.

Dorothy Rowe (1993). Depression: The Way Out Of Your Prison. Routledge