

Behavioural Activation

Small, meaningful actions can help reopen the pathways to living.

When Depression Narrows Your World

Depression can gradually reduce motivation, energy, interest and a sense of accomplishment. This often leads to doing less, which can provide short-term relief, but it also maintains low mood and can result in fewer positive experiences. Behavioural activation (BA) helps you gently increase activities that are aligned with your values and bring a sense of achievement, connection or pleasure — even when motivation is low.

Action creates change, not motivation.

You don't have to feel better to start — small steps can lead to meaningful change.

The Process at a Glance



1. Notice the Pattern

Take a moment to reflect on what has been happening.

What have I been doing less of?

What have I been avoiding or putting off?

What gives me a short-term sense of relief?

What has this cost me over time?

Avoidance is understandable. The question is whether it is helping you build the life you want.

2. What Matters to Me?

Consider the areas of your life that are important to you. Choose what matters, not what you think you 'should' be doing.

Relationships

Health & Self-Care

Work / Study

Home & Daily Life

Learning / Growth

Enjoyment / Creativity

3. Plan One Small Step

Make the first step small enough that you can realistically do it on a difficult day.

WHAT I'LL DO	WHEN / WHERE	WHO / WHAT WILL HELP	EXPECTED DIFFICULTY (0–10)
			0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
			0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
			0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

4. Afterwards, Notice

Take a few minutes to reflect. Progress is not only about feeling better in the moment.

Mood before activity

____ / 10

Mood after activity

____ / 10

Sense of accomplishment

____ / 10

What did I notice?

What might I repeat, adapt or make slightly harder next time?

SOURCES

Cuijpers, P. et al. (2023). Individual behavioral activation in the treatment of depression: A meta-analysis. *Psychotherapy Research*, 33, 886–897.
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NOTE

Evidence-informed educational resource.
Independently written and designed for B&F educational use.