

Module 2
*Behavioural Strategies
for Managing Depression*

Contents

| | <u>Page</u> |
|---|-------------|
| Behavioural Activation: Fun & Achievement | 2 |
| Fun Activities Catalogue | 5 |
| Behavioural Activation Worksheet | 7 |
| Weekly Activity Schedule | 8 |
| Module Summary | 9 |

Behavioural Activation: Fun & Achievement

The symptoms of depression can bring about some drastic changes in a depressed person's life, daily routines, and their behaviour. Often it is these changes that makes the depression worse and prevents the depressed person from getting better.

For example, a lack of motivation or a lack of energy can result in a depressed person cutting back on their activities, neglecting their daily tasks and responsibilities, and leaving decision-making to others. Have you noticed these changes in yourself when you are depressed?

When your activity level decreases, you may become even less motivated and more lethargic. When you stop doing the things you used to love, you miss out on experiencing pleasant feelings and positive experiences. Your depression could get worse and this becomes a vicious cycle.

Similarly, when one begins neglecting a few tasks and responsibilities at work or at home, the list may begin to pile up. As such, when a depressed person thinks about the things they have to do, they may feel overwhelmed by the pile of things they have put off doing. This may result in them feeling guilty or thinking that they are ineffective or even, a failure. This will also worsen the depression.



Increasing Your Activity Level

One way to combat depression is to simply increase your activity level, especially in pleasurable activities – having fun – and tackling your list of tasks and responsibilities, but doing it in a realistic and achievable way, so that you set yourself up to succeed. Becoming more active has a number of advantages:

Activity helps you to feel better. At the very least, when you start engaging in some kind of activity, it gives your mind something else to think about – a different focus. Doing things, even a little at a time, can help give you a sense that you are moving forward, taking control of your life again, and doing something – experiencing a sense of **ACHIEVEMENT**. You may even find **PLEASURE** and enjoyment in the activities you do.



Activity helps you to feel less tired. Usually, when you are physically tired, you need rest. However, when you are depressed, the opposite is true. Sleeping more and sitting around doing nothing will only cause you to feel more lethargic and tired. Also, doing nothing leaves room for your mind to ruminate on depressive thoughts, which will make you feel even more depressed.

Activity can help you think more clearly. Once you get started, you may find that you take a different perspective on particular problems in your life. Also, because your mind takes a different focus as a result of the activity, your thoughts may become clearer.

This is one of the ways of turning the vicious cycle of depression around, by using behavioural strategies – engaging in pleasurable activities and tackling small tasks.

Fun & Achievement

It makes good sense to do fun and pleasurable things to make yourself feel better, but these are not the only sorts of activities that will help generate positive feelings. Being depressed isn't just about feeling sad – there are a lot of other feelings involved as well, such as hopelessness, guilt, and despair. So, it also makes sense to do things that result in other positive feelings, such as achievement and a sense of purpose. When you are

planning things to do for yourself, it is important to remember to include a mixture of activities, adding those that have the potential to give you other positive feelings. An example of this is paying off money on your credit card, doing the ironing, or doing the shopping. Doing these things can help you feel more in control of your life (e.g., paying off your debts) and give you satisfaction that you have started doing something (e.g., catching up on household chores). Doing tasks that give you a sense of achievement or mastery will help you feel like you are starting to get back on top of things again. Some activities may combine the two. For example, making your bed may give you a sense of pleasure at having a neat, tidy bed, but it may also give you a sense of achievement at having done something to improve your home environment. This sense of achievement is just as important as getting pleasure out of something, and may indeed prompt you to do more.

Start Simple

Even though there are a number of advantages in increasing your activity level, it may not be easy to get started. Often, this is because when you are depressed, you think negative thoughts such as “I won’t enjoy doing this,” or “It’s too hard,” or “I’ll probably fail at this too.” These thoughts may stop you from getting started. Often the big mistake people make is trying to do too much too soon.



When you are depressed, things that you usually don’t even have to think about doing (when you are not depressed) can seem to require a huge amount of effort. The idea is to start with small easy steps and begin with things that you can do. Think of it in terms of training for a sports event.

If you hadn’t been doing any running for 6 months, would you try and run a marathon without doing any training? Of course not! You would go on a training programme that starts out within your present capabilities, and then slowly build up your fitness and endurance. Similarly, when you are depressed, it is unreasonable to expect yourself to be able to jump out of bed and clean the house before going out to meet a friend for a late lunch. If you set your goals too high, you might end up not doing them, become disappointed in yourself, and feel worse than ever. Instead, plan to do things that are achievable at your current level of functioning. Start with small steps and slowly build yourself up to the large tasks that seem unmanageable right now. For example, aim to get out of bed for 10 minutes, then slowly build up the amount of time you are out of bed for. Don’t try to clean the whole kitchen – just aim to do the dishes. If this is too much, just stack all the dirty dishes in a pile. Aim to get one bench top clean, or just wash 5 plates. Any task can be broken down into smaller and smaller steps until you find something achievable.

Sometimes it is easier to aim to do a task for a set period of time rather than trying to achieve a set amount. Read a book for 5 minutes rather than reading a whole chapter. Say you will spend 10 minutes weeding the garden rather than aiming to weed a certain area. In this way, it will be easier for you to achieve your goal. In the beginning, the important thing is not what you do or how much you do, but simply the fact that you are **DOING**. Remember that action is the first step, not motivation, and you’ll soon find yourself feeling better!

On the next page is a Fun Activities Catalogue. There are 185 activities listed in this catalogue. Choose two or three from the list to do in the coming week. Remember to include one or two achievement-type tasks to your schedule as well. Use the worksheet on page 7 to plan ahead which activity you will do, when you will do it (date), and then rate your depression, pleasant feelings, and sense of achievement **BEFORE** and **AFTER** the activity. Take this as an experiment to evaluate your mood before and after doing an activity. See if this helps in lifting your mood.

On page 8 is a Weekly Activity Schedule. You could use this worksheet to plan your schedule for a week. Try including a few tasks you need to tackle or some errands that you need to run, and remember to add in some fun activities as well.



FUN Activities catalogue

The following is a list of activities that might be fun and pleasurable for you. Feel free to add your own fun activities to the list.

1. Soaking in the bathtub
2. Planning my career
3. Collecting things (coins, shells, etc.)
4. Going for a holiday
5. Recycling old items
6. Relaxing
7. Going on a date
8. Going to a movie
9. Jogging, walking
10. Listening to music
11. Thinking I have done a full day's work
12. Recalling past parties
13. Buying household gadgets
14. Lying in the sun
15. Planning a career change
16. Laughing
17. Thinking about my past trips
18. Listening to others
19. Reading magazines or newspapers
20. Hobbies (stamp collecting, model building, etc.)
21. Spending an evening with good friends
22. Planning a day's activities
23. Meeting new people
24. Remembering beautiful scenery
25. Saving money
26. Card and board games
27. Going to the gym, doing aerobics
28. Eating
29. Thinking how it will be when I finish school
30. Getting out of debt/paying debts
31. Practising karate, judo, yoga
32. Thinking about retirement
33. Repairing things around the house
34. Working on my car (bicycle)
35. Remembering the words and deeds of loving people
36. Wearing sexy clothes
37. Having quiet evenings
38. Taking care of my plants
39. Buying, selling stocks and shares
40. Going swimming
41. Doodling
42. Exercising
43. Collecting old things
44. Going to a party
45. Thinking about buying things
46. Playing golf
47. Playing soccer
48. Flying kites
49. Having discussions with friends
50. Having family get-togethers
51. Riding a motorbike
52. Sex
53. Playing squash
54. Going camping
55. Singing around the house
56. Arranging flowers
57. Going to church, praying (practising religion)
58. Losing weight
59. Going to the beach
60. Thinking I'm an OK person
61. A day with nothing to do
62. Having class reunions
63. Going ice skating, roller skating/blading
64. Going sailing
65. Travelling abroad, interstate or within the state
66. Sketching, painting
67. Doing something spontaneously
68. Doing embroidery, cross stitching
69. Sleeping
70. Driving
71. Entertaining
72. Going to clubs (garden, sewing, etc.)
73. Thinking about getting married
74. Going birdwatching
75. Singing with groups
76. Flirting
77. Playing musical instruments
78. Doing arts and crafts
79. Making a gift for someone
80. Buying CDs, tapes, records
81. Watching boxing, wrestling
82. Planning parties
83. Cooking, baking
84. Going hiking, bush walking
85. Writing books (poems, articles)
86. Sewing
87. Buying clothes
88. Working
89. Going out to dinner
90. Discussing books
91. Sightseeing
92. Gardening
93. Going to the beauty salon
94. Early morning coffee and newspaper
95. Playing tennis
96. Kissing
97. Watching my children (play)
98. Going to plays and concerts
99. Daydreaming
100. Planning to go to school
101. Thinking about sex
102. Going for a drive
103. Listening to a stereo
104. Refurbishing furniture
105. Watching TV, videos
106. Making lists of tasks
107. Going bike riding
108. Walks on the riverfront/foreshore
109. Buying gifts
110. Travelling to national parks
111. Completing a task

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 112. Thinking about my achievements 113. Going to a footy game (or rugby, soccer, basketball, etc.) 114. Eating gooey, fattening foods 115. Exchanging emails, chatting on the internet 116. Photography 117. Going fishing 118. Thinking about pleasant events 119. Staying on a diet 120. Star gazing 121. Flying a plane 122. Reading fiction 123. Acting 124. Being alone 125. Writing diary/journal entries or letters 126. Cleaning 127. Reading non-fiction 128. Taking children places 129. Dancing 130. Going on a picnic 131. Thinking "I did that pretty well" after doing something 132. Meditating 133. Playing volleyball 134. Having lunch with a friend 135. Going to the hills 136. Thinking about having a family 137. Thoughts about happy moments in my childhood 138. Splurging 139. Playing cards 140. Solving riddles mentally 141. Having a political discussion 142. Playing cricket 143. Seeing and/or showing photos or slides 144. Knitting/crocheting/quilting 145. Doing crossword puzzles 146. Shooting pool/Playing billiards 147. Dressing up and looking nice 148. Reflecting on how I've improved 149. Buying things for myself 150. Talking on the phone 151. Going to museums, art galleries 152. Thinking religious thoughts 153. Surfing the internet 154. Lighting candles 155. Listening to the radio 156. Going crabbing 157. Having coffee at a cafe 158. Listening to the radio 159. Getting/giving a massage 160. Saying "I love you" 161. Thinking about my good qualities 162. Buying books 163. Taking a sauna or a steam bath 164. Going skiing 165. Going canoeing or white-water rafting 166. Going bowling 167. Doing woodworking 168. Fantasising about the future 169. Doing ballet, jazz/tap dancing 170. Debating 171. Playing computer games 172. Having an aquarium | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 173. Erotica (sex books, movies) 174. Going horseback riding 175. Going rock climbing 176. Thinking about becoming active in the community 177. Doing something new 178. Making jigsaw puzzles 179. Thinking I'm a person who can cope 180. Playing with my pets 181. Having a barbecue 182. Rearranging the furniture in my house 183. Buying new furniture 184. Going window shopping 185. Thinking I have a lot more going for me than most people |
|---|---|

Others:

Behavioural Activation Worksheet

FUN & ACHIEVEMENT

One way of combating depression is to prescribe some fun for yourself. By engaging in some simple, pleasant activities, you can improve your mood and your energy level. However, because you're feeling depressed right now, you might not experience the same level of pleasure doing an activity as when you were not depressed. But don't stop after one or two activities. Keep going and you'll find that your mood will begin to lift. Try it and see!

You may also want to engage in some simple tasks or responsibilities that you have neglected for some time. Often, accomplishing tasks can improve your motivation and give you a sense of achievement. Start with tasks that are simple and achievable. BUT remember that it is important to **BALANCE** both responsibilities and pleasurable activities. Try not to go overboard on one and leave out the other.

Use the following rating scale to rate your depression, pleasant feelings, and sense of achievement **BEFORE** and **AFTER** the activity.

| | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------|---------|--------|------|----------|------|--------|-----------|---------|
| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
| Absolutely None | Minimal | Slight | Mild | Moderate | Much | Higher | Very High | Extreme |

| | Depression | Pleasure | Achievement |
|------------------|------------|----------|-------------|
| Activity & Date: | Before: | _____ | _____ |
| | After: | _____ | _____ |
| Activity & Date: | Before: | _____ | _____ |
| | After: | _____ | _____ |
| Activity & Date: | Before: | _____ | _____ |
| | After: | _____ | _____ |
| Activity & Date: | Before: | _____ | _____ |
| | After: | _____ | _____ |

What did you notice about yourself?

Weekly Activity Schedule



Use the schedule below to plan your activities for the coming week. Make sure you balance fun and pleasurable activities with your daily responsibilities and duties.

| | Mon | Tues | Wed | Thur | Fri | Sat | Sun |
|-------------|-----|------|-----|------|-----|-----|-----|
| 8 to 9am | | | | | | | |
| 9 to 10 | | | | | | | |
| 10 to 11 | | | | | | | |
| 11 to 12pm | | | | | | | |
| 12 to 1 | | | | | | | |
| 1 to 2 | | | | | | | |
| 2 to 3 | | | | | | | |
| 3 to 4 | | | | | | | |
| 4 to 5 | | | | | | | |
| 5 to 6 | | | | | | | |
| 6 to 7 | | | | | | | |
| 7 to 8 | | | | | | | |
| 8 to 10 | | | | | | | |
| 10 to 12 am | | | | | | | |

Module Summary

- When people are depressed, they may experience a loss of motivation and energy that often stops them from engaging in activities that might lift their mood
- This decrease in activity levels may perpetuate depressed mood as people may become even less motivated and more lethargic
- Daily tasks and responsibilities might be neglected as well, and when a depressed person thinks of the things they have to do, they may feel overwhelmed by the long list
- Add a few pleasant and fun activities to your weekly schedule to help you lift your mood
- You might also want to start tackling your list of things to do by starting with small or simple tasks, to give you a sense that you have achieved something
- When you increase your activity level, this will help you feel better and less tired, and help you think more clearly

Stay Tuned ...

In the next module, we will discuss how your thoughts affect the way you feel, and what role thoughts play in maintaining depression.