



Behavioural Activation





Behavioural Activation

Behavioural Activation is an evidence based coping technique for the treatment of low mood or depression, recommended by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE, 2009).

Who is this workbook for?

You may find this workbook helpful if you have noticed your low mood or depression has stopped you from doing your usual activities, such as the things you normally enjoy.

This workbook can be used either alone or with the support of your Psychological Wellbeing Practitioner.

How to use this workbook.

Behavioural Activation has five steps. It is important to work through one step at a time, only move on to the next step of Behavioural Activation once you are comfortable with using the previous step. It is key to follow all five steps of Behavioural Activation in sequence.

It can take some time for a coping technique to become effective and to show improvement. It is important to allow enough time for behavioural activation to be effective.

The book has been designed for you to be able to write on the worksheets and make your own notes. If you need more worksheets, you can find them free to download at the TalkPlus website at the bottom of this page. Before each worksheet you will find an example worksheet from our Case Story Terry, to help you with each step.

Evidence of Effectiveness;

<https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/the-british-journal-of-psychiatry/article/behavioural-activation-history-evidence-and-promise/28347FA380E03B3066B4C8AFAC867B34>

<https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ng222>

Helpful Resources;

A Recovery Programme for Depression, by Lovell and Richards cedar.exeter.ac.uk

Becoming More Active www.primarycare-selfhelp.co.uk

Overcoming Depression and Low Mood, by Chris Williams www.booksonprescription.org.uk

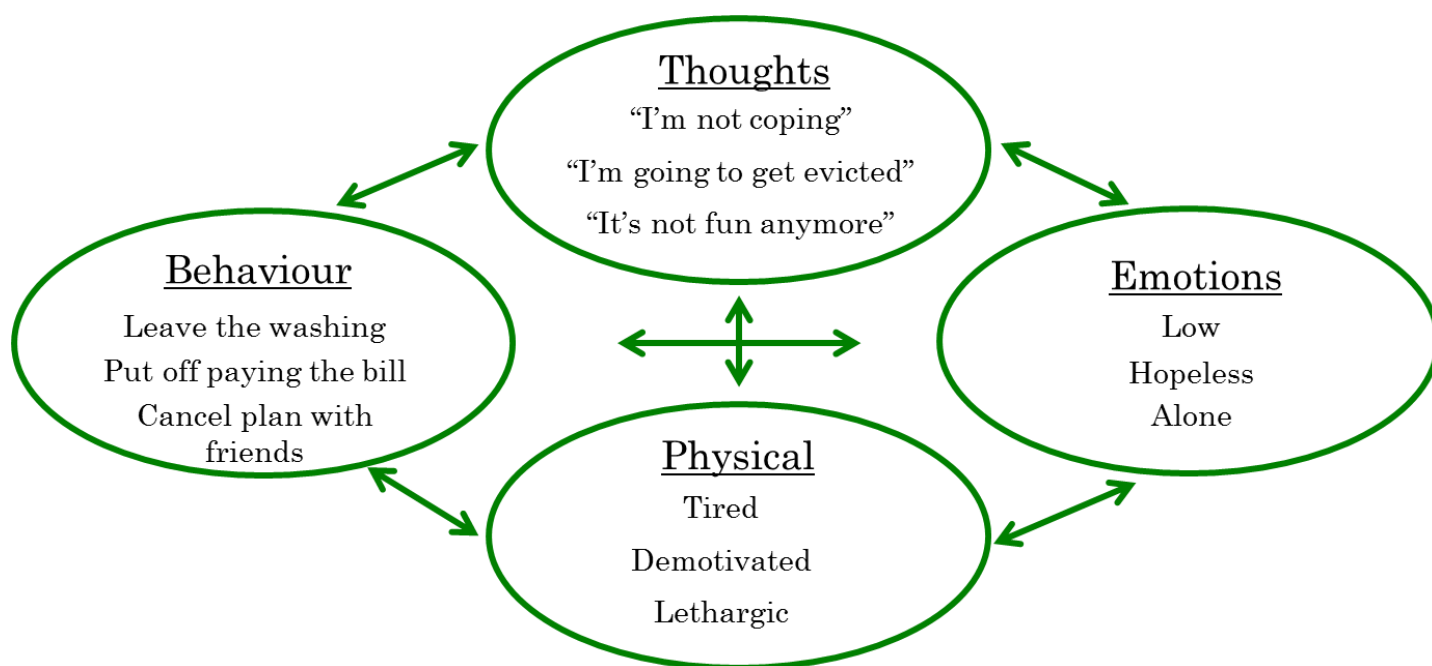
www.talkplus.org.uk



Tackling Withdrawal in Low Mood

Behavioural Activation is an evidence based treatment used to tackle withdrawal from day to day activities in low mood. It works by identifying the activities that we may lack the motivation or interest to do when we are feeling low, or when we find we have little time for ourselves. These activities are then gradually reintroduced to incorporate structure, enjoyment and a sense of achievement back into our daily lives. Behavioural Activation can also be effective for managing stress by reintroducing pleasurable activities that we often have no time for or put off when we feel stressed to get a balance back in our routine and create an outlet for our symptoms.

When we are feeling low in mood, we may find it difficult to carry out everyday activities and so find ourselves withdrawing and avoiding these activities. For example, we may avoid seeing friends, stop doing the washing and put off paying bills because we lack motivation or find them overwhelming. Initially the pressure could make us feel that avoiding the activity would be a better solution, however, the longer we avoid, the more difficult it becomes to build the routine up again.



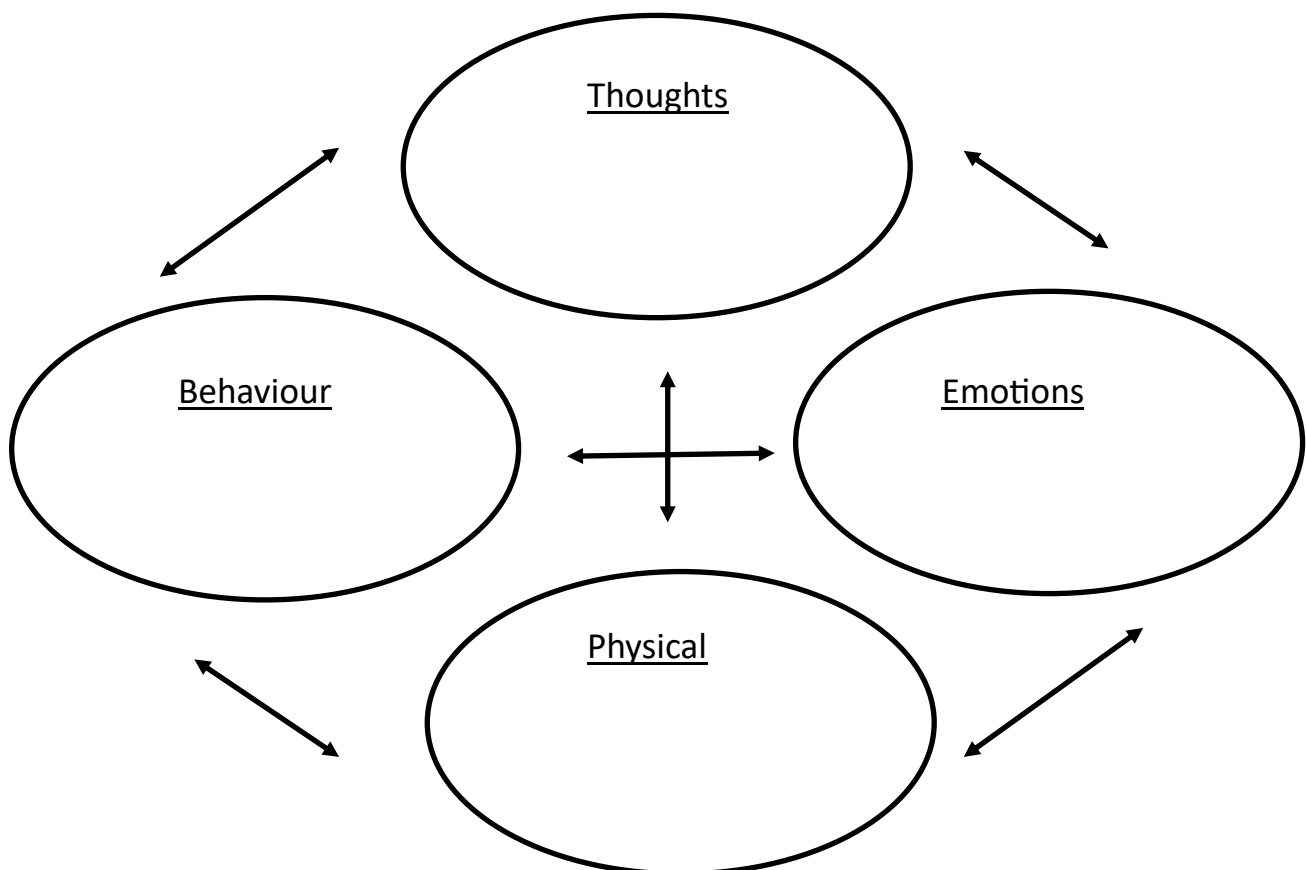
The Vicious Cycle of Low Mood

By withdrawing from activities, such as seeing friends, paying bills and household tasks, we lose out on experiencing achievement, connectedness to others and enjoyment.


'The Vicious Cycle of Low Mood' shown above demonstrates how the things that we do or don't do because we feel low may result in maintaining the way we are feeling. Behavioural Activation breaks the vicious cycle by gradually reintroducing activities, which has a positive effect on the way we feel. There are five steps to Behavioural Activation. This booklet will take you through the steps.

Your own 'vicious cycle' of low mood

On the previous page we saw the 'Vicious cycle' of low mood drawn out, using a model that is frequently used in Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT). It can be helpful as a first step to write down your own vicious cycle. Take a moment to think about how your low mood affects you, and make some notes in the cycle below. How does your low mood affect your thoughts? What have you noticed you do, or have stopped doing when you feel low? What name do you give to the emotions? How does it affect you physically? You might notice some things are similar to the example, or they might be different for you. The notes you make will be personal to your own experience.



You can do this model alone, or with the support of your Psychological Wellbeing Practitioner. It can be quite difficult or strange at first to write down our problems in this way. However breaking down our vicious cycle in the model can be a helpful first step towards recovery.



How does behavioural activation help to tackle low mood?

When you have written out your own vicious cycle, take a moment to reflect on the impact that low mood has on your behaviours. Have you noticed withdrawing from activities you would normally do, or would like to do? Has your usual routine been affected? Are you finding it hard to have the motivation to do things? Has the ways you self-soothe changed? These are very common symptoms of low mood. Let's look at some of the ways the Behavioural Activation technique can be helpful for tackling low mood:

Activity can improve our energy

It is very common to feel tired and lack energy when we are low. This may make us want to rest more, or spend longer in bed. We might tell ourselves that when we feel better and have more energy, we will start doing things again. However, with low mood the reverse is actually true. We need to 'do' first, to begin to 'kickstart' our motivation.

One way of thinking of this is the term '*activation before motivation*'.

In what ways have you noticed low mood impacting your energy levels? You can make any notes for yourself here:

Activity can give us a sense of achievement

When we are low and putting things off, the lack of achievement and the sense that things are 'building up' can feed back into our mood and serve to maintain it. When we begin to do things, we give ourselves the opportunity to feel some satisfaction at carrying out tasks and activities.

How does behavioural activation help to tackle low mood? (continued)

Activity can help us to connect with others

We might withdraw from family and friends when we are feeling low. This may feed back into how we are feeling, resulting in further low mood, or feelings of isolation from others. Planning activities that involve others can help to boost how we are feeling, and help us to stay connected to people that are important to us.

Activity can help to give us a different focus from negative thoughts or worries

As we saw in the earlier CBT cycle, when we are feeling low our behaviours and thoughts can both be affected. When we withdraw from a lot of activities this can give us more time to focus and dwell on negative thoughts or worries. A healthy balance of activities can allow us something different to focus on, so that we spend less time on our unhelpful thoughts.



Have you noticed spending more time on negative thoughts or worries since feeling low? You can make any notes you would like to here:

How does behavioural activation help to tackle low mood? (continued)

Activity can help build a need for sleep

A common symptom of depression and stress is disrupted sleep. Disrupted sleep or insomnia can also predict a future episode of low mood symptoms and anxiety. It is important to be active throughout the day to build up a need for sleep at night to rest and recover from the day. When we are low we tend to withdraw from our usual activities, often we then find it harder to get to sleep at night because we have not built up a need for sleep throughout the day.



On the other hand, when we feel low, we may spend more time in bed for a sense of escapism or due to feeling lethargic. This can shift the time we would normally feel tired to later in the day, and the time we would normally do our activities. Our brain and body is hardwired to be active throughout the daytime and rest in the evening. When we very active in the evening, we find it harder to fall asleep at night as our body and brain is still alert. Avoid strenuous or stimulating activities for at least two hours before bed time. By starting to increase our activity level again throughout the day, because we are active, we build a need for sleep and it becomes easier to sleep at night. Also, setting alarms at a regular time in the morning may help regulate your sleep routine.

Activity can reverse the vicious cycle of emotional eating and can make us feel more hungry.

It is common for symptoms of depression to affect how hungry we feel. It is common to spend less time thinking about our empty stomachs and we may not feel hungry at all. This means we are less likely to do activity as we do not have the fuel need to be active. Increasing our activity levels may increase our appetite as we



need more fuel to sustain our activity levels, and eating more means we have more energy to be active.

Because we are feeling low and unmotivated, we may replace activities we would usually do to make ourselves feel better with eating. A part of behavioural activation is focused on reintroducing activities that make us feel good, connected and achieved which offers alternatives to comfort eating and may improve our self-esteem.

Case stories—Kim

Kim is a 36 year old working Mum who has struggled with feeling low for the past year. She works full time at a law firm and has a 9 year old son with her husband. Kim finds little time for herself in her busy schedule which has left her feeling stressed and overwhelmed.

Behavioural Activation allowed Kim to recognise that her daily life was filled with routine and necessary activities, and few, if any, pleasurable. Kim began by identifying the activities she felt she no longer had time for and was not doing. It was very difficult for Kim to think of pleasurable activities to add into her life as it had been some time since she had been able to engage in them.

Kim spoke with her husband and friends and began to remember what she enjoyed doing in the past and what she always wanted to try. When Kim moved on to step three, ranking activities, she found that almost all the activities would be difficult to carry out currently. It was therefore important that Kim broke down these activities into more manageable steps to make them easier to complete. Kim initially planned one small easy activity into her diary per week where she found she had time. However it would often happen that work or home life got in the way of the activities. Therefore Kim chose to prioritise which routine and necessary activities she would do each day to ensure she had a balance of all activities.

Although at first Kim did not find some of the activities pleasurable over time her enjoyment returned and her mood improved. Kim now ensures she maintains a balance of activities throughout her week by using the diary to plan in advance what activities she does each week.

Case stories—Terry

Terry is 68 years old, retired and caring for their partner. Following their retirement Terry stopped attending their social club that they used to regularly enjoy and began putting off day to day tasks. Terry's partner noticed that they were becoming irritable and their energy levels had dropped so suggested Terry saw their GP for advice.

Terry read through the information on Behavioural Activation and noticed that withdrawing from activities was maintaining the low mood they were experiencing. When identifying activities Terry saw that they had stopped their pleasurable activities and had been putting off doing routine and necessary tasks. These tasks were building up and exacerbating the low mood Terry was feeling.

When carrying out the tasks booked into their diary Terry found that the easier activities were quite difficult to start as they had little energy. Terry used the Behavioural Activation diary to set regular bed times and meal times in order to increase their energy levels. Once Terry felt more able they set small specific tasks to complete for a set amount of time.

Some of the tasks Terry had been putting off had become quite difficult, so Terry broke them down into manageable steps. This allowed Terry to complete the tasks without becoming too tired and gradually build up their level of activity.

Follow Terry's journey: You can see Terry's example worksheets before each blank worksheet in the booklet.

Step One: Keeping a 'baseline' diary of your current activities

Why complete a Baseline Diary?

In Behavioural Activation it is helpful to see how your low mood has affected your own personal activities and routines. It can help you to identify what sorts of activities you may have withdrawn from, and the sorts of things you still do and how this may impact your mood.

If you are working with a Psychological Wellbeing Practitioner (PWP), they may ask you to keep a 'baseline' diary between your appointments. This would form Step One of Behavioural Activation. You can also carry out this step if you are using this booklet as self help.

How to complete the Baseline Diary.

- Write in the diary when you do an activity— this can be anything, such as work, chores, anything you do at home. You can also record when you were doing less activity, for example if you noticed being in bed a long time.
- Fill out the diary *just as things are for you right now*.
- Rate your mood before and after activities when you can.

This can give you, and your PWP if you are working with one, some really good information about how your low mood may have impacted your day to day routines and activities.

To complete Step 1 use **Worksheet 1**.

Fill in the worksheet with any activities that you do throughout the week as you do them.

Worksheet One: Baseline Diary (Terry's example)



Date:	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday	Sunday
Morning							
What	Stayed in bed late		Did breakfast for myself and partner	Went to the shop, felt tired so just got the essentials		Stayed in bed and watched Tv until Midday	Sorted out the pile of bills
Where							
When							
Who							
Mood before:	Low		low	Tired		Fed up	Worried
Mood after:	Low		A bit happier	Frustrated		Okay	Relieved
Afternoon							
What	Did some laundry by myself	Had some caring tasks to do for my partner	Went back to bed for a sleep		A friend popped in for a cup of tea unexpectedly		Went for Sunday dinner at the pub with my partner
Where							
When							
Who							
Mood before:	Low	low	Low, tired		Low, Irritable		Low, Tired
Mood after:	Felt I had achieved	Low but pleased to help	Low, guilty as thought I had wasted my day		Okay, Tired, Surprised		Happier, Pleased
Evening							
What	Watched TV and went to bed early	Sat on sofa, felt tired and was worrying		Made dinner for my partner, ate a bit but didn't have much appetite		Called a friend for a chat	
Where							
When							
Who							
Mood before:	Low, tired	Worried		Low		Frustrated	
Mood after:		Low, anxious		Better for having		Calmer	

Worksheet One: Baseline Diary

Date:																					
Morning																					
<i>What</i>																					
<i>Where</i>																					
<i>When</i>																					
<i>Who</i>																					
Mood before:																					
Mood after:																					
Afternoon																					
<i>What</i>																					
<i>Where</i>																					
<i>When</i>																					
<i>Who</i>																					
Mood before:																					
Mood after:																					
Evening																					
<i>What</i>																					
<i>Where</i>																					
<i>When</i>																					
<i>Who</i>																					
Mood before:																					
Mood after:																					



Step Two: Identifying Activities



The second step of Behavioural Activation is to identify activities that you're not doing. These may be things you used to do but no longer find pleasure in, or those that you seem to have little time in your week to do. You can also include activities that you have always wished to do but have never had the motivation to begin. You could use your baseline diary from Step One to help with this.

Activities can be broken up into three separate categories; routine, necessary and pleasurable. Evidence shows that in order to have a healthy balance of mood we should include these three main types of activities as part of our weekly routine.

Routine Activities

Activities that are done day to day to make our lives more comfortable. Such as; washing, housework, preparing food and exercise.

Necessary Activities

Activities that are essential and the longer we leave them the worse the negative consequences. Such as; paying bills, applying for jobs, booking medical appointments.

Pleasurable Activities

Activities that give a sense of achievement or connectedness to others and improve our quality of life. Such as; seeing friends, hobbies, gardening, sports.

The Three Legged Stool Analogy

Often when we are feeling low or stressed, we can notice an imbalance of these activities and it can maintain the vicious cycle of these difficulties.

If we imagine a three legged stool, we require all three legs to be an equal height to maintain stability.

We also require that stability to maintain our wellbeing.





Step Two: Identifying Activities



Below are some examples to help you get started, however categorising activities can be very individual, so you may find that you put yours in different categories.

Routine	Necessary	Pleasurable
Washing the dishes	Paying the bills	Seeing friends
Eating a healthy meal	Food shopping	Learning a new skill
Hoovering	Making a GP appointment	Reading
Washing the car	Taxing the car	Doing a hobby
Having a regular bed-time	Personal care	Spending time with family
Going to the gym		

Activities I have withdrawn from:

Routine:

Necessary:

Pleasurable:

To complete Step 2 use **Worksheet 2**.

Fill in the worksheet with activities you have withdrawn from in the three different categories.



Worksheet Two: Identifying Activities

(Terry's example)

Routine Activities
Laundry
Dishes
Make the bed
Cook a healthy dinner
Sweep the patio

Necessary Activities
Pay the gas bill
Book flu jab
Collect pension
Call the plumber

Pleasurable Activities
Social club
Coffee with Bill
See Grandchildren
Take wife for a meal
Walk in the park



Worksheet Two: Identifying Activities

Routine Activities

Necessary Activities

Pleasurable Activities

Step Three: Ranking Activities

The third step of Behavioural Activation is to rank activities in order of how difficult they would be to carry out currently. Think of which activities would be easiest to do, or most difficult to carry out depending on your mood. Behavioural Activation works best if it is graded, only carry out activities to begin with that you feel are achievable, before moving on to activities that may be more difficult. This can be particularly important if you have withdrawn from activity for a period of time.

Activities are ranked into three separate levels of difficulty; easiest, moderate and difficult. These levels of difficulty will be individual to you. Whilst ranking the activities it is important to include at least one pleasurable, routine and necessary activity in each category to ensure a healthy balance of each is carried out. For example;

Easiest Activities

Routine: Mopping the bathroom

Necessary: Find gas bill

Pleasurable: Call a friend

Moderate Activities

Routine: Wash the car

Necessary: Arrange a Dentist appointment

Pleasurable: Go for lunch with a friend

Difficult Activities

Routine: Go to the gym

Necessary: Monthly food shop

Pleasurable: Go to choir practice

We use the term 'easiest' to help us categorise the activities that may be more manageable to begin with. However that does not mean to say they will feel 'easy' when we are low.

It may be difficult initially to think of easier activities to complete, some ideas to help are;

- Ask a friend or family member to help.
- Break larger tasks down into more manageable steps, e.g. Clean the house can be broken down into smaller tasks, such as 'dust the living room for twenty minutes'.
- No activity is too small to start with, e.g. Listen to a voicemail message.
- To start with, maybe aim for completing 10 minutes of a task rather than the whole activity in one go.

To complete Step 3 use *Worksheet 3*.

Fill in the worksheet with activities from *Worksheet 2* into the levels of difficulty, indicate which category of activity they are.



Worksheet Three: Ranking Activities

(Terry's example)

Easiest Activities	Routine	Necessary	Pleasurable
Make the bed	✓		
Sweep the patio	✓		
Book flu jab		✓	
Coffee with Bill			✓
Walk in the park			✓

Moderate Activities	Routine	Necessary	Pleasurable
See Grandchildren			✓
Dishes	✓		
Laundry	✓		
Collect pension		✓	
Call the plumber		✓	

Difficult Activities	Routine	Necessary	Pleasurable
Social club			✓
Pay the gas bill		✓	
Take wife for a meal			✓
Cook a healthy dinner	✓		



Worksheet Three: Ranking Activities

Easiest Activities	Routine	Necessary	Pleasurable

Moderate Activities	Routine	Necessary	Pleasurable

Difficult Activities	Routine	Necessary	Pleasurable



Step Four: Scheduling Activities

The fourth step of Behavioural Activation is to begin to schedule in the activities that have been identified in steps two and three. The purpose of scheduling the activities in is that we are more likely to carry out an activity that we have planned and scheduled. We can gradually reintroduce routine, a sense of achievement and pleasure back into our lives.

Graded.

It can be very difficult to find the motivation to begin carrying out activities after a period of withdrawing from them, therefore it is important to start with activities from the 'Easiest Activities' table in Step 3, before moving onto moderate or more difficult activities.

Balanced.

Evidence shows that a balance of different types of activities, routine, necessary and pleasurable, is best for our mood. When planning activities into the diary ensure a mix of the three categories are incorporated so that balance is achieved. For some people it may be that they are not engaging in any pleasurable activities due to feeling all their time is occupied by routine or necessary activities. It may be that the diary can be used to prioritise which activities are most essential and ensure some pleasurable activities are included.

Specific.

The more specific we are when scheduling in activities to complete the more likely it is that we will complete that activity. Therefore the diary used in Step Four is specially designed to enable you to plan these activities into your week in detail, by asking you to include;

What: Be specific about what activity you will be carrying out.

When: The exact time and duration of the chosen activity.

Where: What locations will you be in while carrying out the activity.

Who: Whether you will be alone or with others while completing the activity.

E.g. Clean worktops at 4:30pm in the kitchen by myself.

Fill out your diary.

The final part of Step 4 is to begin filling out a diary sheet, keeping in mind the three conditions above. It is very important not to over fill the diary at the beginning. Throughout the weeks you can start to fill the diary up more as your mood improves.

**To complete Step 4 use Worksheet 4.
Fill in the diary following the conditions above.**

Worksheet Four: Scheduling Activities (Terry's example)



Date:	02/10	03/10	04/10	05/10	06/10	07/10	08/10
Morning							
What	Make the bed			Make the bed			
Where	Bedroom			Bedroom			
When	7am			7am			
Who	Myself			Myself			
Mood before:							
Mood after:							
Afternoon							
What			Book flu jab				Coffee with Bill
Where			On the phone				Railway café
When			2:00pm				1:00pm
Who			Myself				Bill & I
Mood before:			Fed up				low
Mood after:			Achievement				A bit brighter
Evening							
What							
Where							
When							
Who							
Mood before:							
Mood after:							



Step Five: Implementation and Monitoring

The final step of Behavioural Activation is to complete the activities you have planned into your diary. Monitoring your mood while carrying out activities allows you to see the benefits of increasing activity levels. It is important to be flexible and to increase levels of activity week by week. Reviewing the diary on a weekly basis can help us to highlight our achievements and identify and overcome any obstacles.

Monitor your mood.

Monitoring your mood during Behavioural Activation allows you to see the effect that carrying out these activities can have on your mood. The diary allows space to record the intensity of your mood before and also after carrying out the activity, using a scale of 0-100%.

Being flexible.

Day to day life can throw obstacles into our path unexpectedly, it may be that you cannot complete a planned activity due to such obstacles. It is therefore important to be flexible, activities not completed can be postponed to a later date when you feel it would be more achievable.

Increasing activity levels.

Once you have completed your first week of Behavioural Activation you may find that you wish to begin to add more activities gradually into the diary at your own pace. It is important to remember that this is a gradual process and should not be rushed, it may be that you spend a few weeks completing a small number of easier activities before moving on to those that are more difficult.

Obstacles & Solutions

Too difficult to start	Use the '5 minute rule'- commit to doing the activity for 5 minutes
Tasks are too large	Break tasks down into smaller chunks
Lack of energy or motivation	Be time specific instead of task specific
Not enough time	Prioritise and ensure a balance
No improvement in mood	Complete activities in spite of how you feel, not because of how you feel

Visit the **'problem solving booklet'** for more information on how to overcome obstacles and find the best solution for you.



Maintaining Progress

NHS

What has been the most helpful from this coping technique?

What are my early warning signs?

Are there any future obstacles coming up?

How can I prepare for these?

What are my goals?



Book created: July 2023

Review date: July 2024