

**Module 2**  
*Behavioural Strategies  
for Managing Depression*

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

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

Others:

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# 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.