



Behavioural Activation



When we are experiencing feelings of depression or anxiety we can start to avoid or neglect activities that are good for us and for our wellbeing. We start to avoid activities and often we are waiting for motivation in order to do these activities, when in reality the motivation does not arrive until we make the decision and to actually engage in the activity. A classic example of this is going to the gym. A lot of people can struggle to motivate themselves to attend a gym session, including regular gym goers. However, regular gym goers still go because they know that the benefits of attending a gym session will far outweigh the short-term discomfort and reluctance. They know that once they are engaged in a gym work out, they will start to feel great as endorphins are released. They know they will feel a sense of achievement by the end of the workout.

Avoidance

Avoidance keeps depression going. When we start to avoid positive activities, we don't give ourselves an opportunity to get positive reinforcement from what we do and from our environment. Positive activities are those that give us a sense of enjoyment and a sense of achievement, but we avoid those when we are feeling depressed.

If we are engaged in purposeful activities that give us a sense of enjoyment and sense of meaning, then we are more likely feel positive about ourselves. We gain positive reinforcement from what we do and the environment around us.

The activities we start to avoid can fall into areas, and these are routine, pleasurable and necessary categories. These are described below.

Routine activities are the type of activities that we do as part of our daily routine, these can include going to work, taking care of tasks at home such as cleaning, DIY and cooking. These activities matter because when we are engaged in them we get a sense of achievement and satisfaction from doing them. They give us a sense of purpose.

Pleasurable or enjoyable activities are the those that give us a sense of pleasure, including hobbies and fun activities. Hobbies can include walking, exercise, being creative, reading, writing, listening to music, making music, going to the cinema, visiting the museum and the list is not exhaustive.

Necessary activities are activities are those that necessarily routine or enjoyable and yet give us a sense of achievement when we complete them. Examples of these are managing household bills and finances.

The good news is that we can reverse this cycle. We reverse this cycle using a process called behavioural activation. The following section will take you through how to break the cycle of depression using behavioural activation.



Behavioural Activation: Step 1

List all the enjoyable and pleasurable activities that you have stopped doing in the three sections below. Note that there are sections for routine, pleasurable and necessary activities. These sections matter because all type of activities play a role in how we feel.

Routine
Pleasurable and enjoyable
Necessary



Behavioural Activation: Step 2

Now list all the activities that you have identified from easiest to most difficult.

	Easy
Most difficult	