

BEHAVIORAL ACTIVATION FOR DEPRESSION

When you feel sad or depressed, the first thing you may want to do is stay inside and sleep. You may feel that you do not have much energy and that nothing makes you happy. While this is common with depression, it is really important to stay busy and fill your day with activities. This sheet provides information on behavioral activation, what it means, and how you can use it in your own life to try to feel better.

WHAT IS BEHAVIORAL ACTIVATION?

Depression keeps you from doing things that bring you joy and excitement. When this happens, you may turn to negative behaviors, such as avoidance, withdrawal, and oversleeping. When you do these negative behaviors, you end up feeling worse overall and fall into a “downward spiral.” Behavioral Activation helps reverse this.

HOW DOES BEHAVIORAL ACTIVATION WORK?

Behavioral Activation works to reverse this “downward spiral” using actions and choices. It has two parts. First, you decrease the negative behaviors that make depression worse. Second, you replace these with rewarding behaviors that make depression better.

WHAT ARE THE STEPS TO BEHAVIORAL ACTIVATION YOU CAN DO AT HOME?

1. Complete a daily schedule of everything you do in a day. This will help you see how much time is not doing anything rewarding. You should also mark down how you would feel during the day at these different times.
2. Look for patterns in your day. Do you see any connections between your activity and how you were feeling? For example, if you were drawing a picture, were you feeling happy? When you were sitting with nothing to do, were you feeling sadder? Were there times when you were feeling anger? What was going on?
3. Come up with a list of positive activities. They should be easy and rewarding. If they are too hard, it will be difficult to do them. Rank them in order of which you would like to try first. Some examples may be going for a walk, reading a book, talking with a friend, cooking a meal, coloring, exercising, writing a poem, volunteering, or watching a movie.
4. Schedule a positive behavior at a time when you are normally doing a negative behavior. Add in at least one positive activity in a day to start, but feel free to add in more if you want.
5. Continue to add in positive, rewarding behaviors in place of negative behaviors and monitor to see how you feel.



This information sheet was developed by the Autism Services, Education, Resources, and Training Collaborative (ASERT). For more information, please contact ASERT at 877-231-4244 or info@PAautism.org. ASERT is funded through the Office of Developmental Programs, PA Department of Human Services.