



BEHAVIOURAL ACTIVATION

This strategy is suggested in the 16-18 BrainWaves lesson:

Boosting your mood

About behavioural activation

Behavioural activation is a well-researched strategy for boosting mood, and can even treat depression. It involves engaging in positive, fulfilling or healthy activities which can make you feel good, and therefore make you more likely to continue participating in those activities. This often involves replacing a negative behaviour with a positive alternative, which in turn increases pleasure and meaning, and improving social relationships.

For example, someone that feels low might avoid socialising with others, making them feel more disconnected and further decreasing mood in a negative spiral. Behavioural activation in this context might involve committing to a weekly meet up with friends. This may lead to an improvement in their mood and better peer connections, making them feel happier and more confident, therefore motivating them to continue this activity.

The scientific evidence behind behavioural activation

Although there is a lack of evidence in school cohorts, the following evidence in adolescents and adults with depression and anxiety suggests significant benefits for improving mood and reducing symptoms, compared to controls. Research also indicates the acceptability of behavioural activation in young people:

- Veale, D. (2018) Behavioural activation for depression. *Advances in Psychiatry Treatment*, 14(1), 29-36, DOI:10.1192/apt.bp.107.004051
- Arnott, B. et al. (2020) Behavioural activation for overweight and obese adolescents with low mood delivered in a community setting: feasibility study. *BMJ Paediatrics Open*, 26(4), e000624, DOI:10.1136/bmjpo-2019-000624
- Tindall, L. et al. (2017) Is behavioural activation effective in the treatment of depression in young people? A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Psychol Psychother*, 90(4). 770-796, DOI:10.1111/papt.12121
- Dubicka, B. et al.(2021) Feasibility study of a new behavioural activation programme for young people with depressed mood. *Child and Adolescent Mental Health*, 27(2), 131-137, DOI:10.1111/camh.12474



Further reading

This NHS site provides an overview of behavioural activation, including an explainer video and example worksheets: <https://www.gmmh.nhs.uk/behavioural-activation>