

# **Behavioural Activation in Groups**

Handbook

## Introduction

This handbook was originally created by Joe Curran and Paul Bliss (Cognitive Behavioural Psychotherapists, Sheffield Health & Social Care NHS Foundation Trust) to accompany their group format of Martell and colleagues' Behavioural Activation for Depression (BA). In collaboration with NHS Education Scotland (NES), Joe Curran and Paul Bliss came to Scotland in 2015 to provide training in that group format, Behavioural Activation in Groups (BAG).

Martell and colleagues have been developing BA over the last 30 years. The extensive evidence-base for its effectiveness has led to BA being recommended in 'The Matrix: A Guide for the Delivery of Evidence-Based Psychological Therapies in Scotland' (Scottish Government, 2015), the Scottish Intercollegiate Guidelines Network (SIGN) clinical guideline (2010) and the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (2009) clinical guideline for the treatment and management of depression in adults.

NES has provided training in Behavioural Activation in both individual (BA) and group (BAG) formats, and Brief Behavioural Activation for Depression (BATD-R), to increase the access for people experiencing depression to evidence-based psychological therapies and to standardise the quality of the therapy available across Scotland. For more information, the most up-to-date version of Martell and colleagues' BA for Depression can be found in the following:

*For people currently experiencing depression*

Addis, M. E. and Martell, C.R. (2004) *Overcoming Depression: One Step at a Time: The New Behavioural Activation Approach to Getting Your Life Back*. Oakland: New Harbinger.

If assistance is required in obtaining a copy of this book, GPs and local libraries should be able to assist through the 'Books on Prescription' scheme.

*Clinical guide for BA Practitioners*

Martell, C.R., Dimidjian, S. and Herman-Dunn, R. (2010) *Behavioural Activation: A Clinician's Guide*. New York: Guilford.

*A digital version can be accessed online via Athens here: <http://site.ebrary.com/lib/nhsscotland/detail.action?docID=10356630>*

## Copyright

The following handbook contains material from:

1. Martell, C. R., Addis, M. E. and Jacobson, N.S. (2001) *Depression in Context: Strategies for Guided Action*. New York: Norton.
2. Addis, M. E. and Martell, C. R. (2004) *Overcoming Depression One Step at a Time*. New Harbinger: Oakland.
3. Martell, C.R., Dimidjian, S., Herman-Dunn, R. (2010) *Behavioural Activation: A Clinician's Guide*. New York: Guilford.

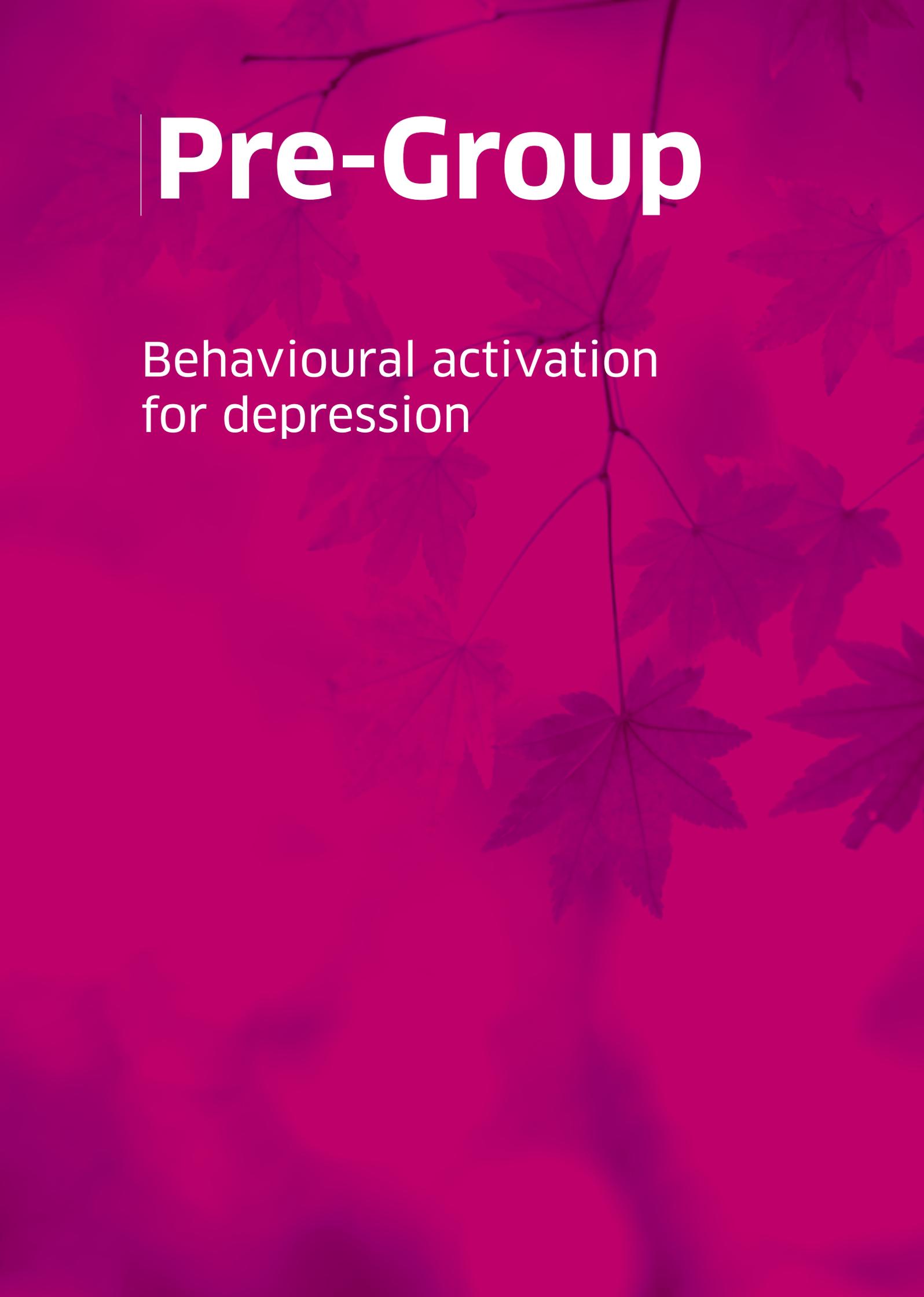
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The e-book of Martell et al (2010) is there for BA clinicians to use as a reference. Its limited photocopy license allows worksheets to be copied for personal use or individual clinical work but not for making additional handouts for therapy groups.

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# Pre-Group

Behavioural activation  
for depression

## Behavioural activation for depression

Depression is a problem that can be a vicious cycle for many people. You may be experiencing depression for the first time or you may have had the experience for many years. Depression can feel like you have an illness. The main features of depression include being slowed down mentally and physically, tiring easily, having feelings of guilt and self-blame and having the blues. As you feel more depressed you may do less and less and then blame yourself for doing less. You may feel unmotivated or lazy. As it becomes more difficult to do things, you become more and more depressed.

Although depression has been called the 'common cold' of psychological problems, it is important to realise that your depression is not the result of some personal defect or mental process. Depression is often a signal that something needs to be changed in your life. Most people can recognise some incident or series of incidents that have triggered the onset of their depression. Common incidents include the loss of a loved one, the loss of a dream, lack of achievement, daily struggles that seem insurmountable or interpersonal difficulties. When people get depressed they tend to shut down and withdraw from the world. Gradually the depression worsens and becomes a problem itself.

Several different treatments for depression have been developed. One effective treatment is called Behavioural Activation for Depression (BA) which we have arranged into a format suitable for a group, Behavioural Activation in Groups (BAG). With your group facilitators, you will work toward breaking the cycle of depression by engaging in activities that are meaningful to you.

You will not just increase your activity. Firstly, the group will help you to identify actions in your life that you have stopped engaging in since you became depressed but wish to become involved in again. Secondly, the group will also help you to identify those actions you have taken in order to withdraw from the world and the others around you. And, thirdly, the group will help you to identify the major situations in your life that you would like to change.

Activity is more than 'just doing it', as the saying goes. When people feel depressed, doing the kinds of things that will keep life moving and on track feels difficult, if not impossible. The activities that are meaningful to you and your life are what are important. For example, one person may enjoy living in a clean environment, but feels too depressed to wash dishes. If he washes dishes, despite how he feels, he may still feel sad but may have a very slight improvement in mood because his house is cleaner.

Activities in BA are varied and the group will help you to find the right activities that have a chance of helping to alleviate your depression or make you feel more in control of your life. The advantages of becoming active in spite of feeling depressed are clear:

1. Guided activity can lead to improved mood. Activating yourself regardless of the depression can give you a sense of control in your life. You might find that some activities are enjoyable once you try them, even if you initially think that nothing brings any enjoyment. Even those activities that aren't pleasurable can give you a sense that you have achieved something.
2. Guided activity can break the cycle of fatigue. Often when people are depressed they feel tired and fatigued. This can be a way of withdrawing from the world. Unfortunately, staying in bed and getting extra sleep often results in feeling more tired. Guided activity, even when you feel very fatigued, can make you feel more energised and refreshed. It can have the opposite effect when you are depressed than when you are fatigued for other reasons. When you are depressed, even though your body tells you that you need a rest, you need to activate yourself.
3. Guided activity can lead to feeling motivated. Many people who are depressed believe that they 'just need to become motivated' but the very symptoms of depression often block such motivation. Ironically, engaging in activity even when you feel unmotivated can lead to feeling motivated. You don't need to wait to feel like doing something before you do it, you engage in an activity because you have committed to doing it.

Engaging in activity when you are depressed is not easy. It may be difficult for you to organise your time properly or to get involved in activities that you normally enjoy. Sometimes activity becomes so difficult when you are depressed that even the most basic things feel extremely hard. Your group facilitators understand this and will work with you within the group to help you recognise, and overcome, the things that get in the way of activating.

BA can help you to overcome problems in your life. You will learn how to monitor your life, to look at your daily activities like a rich tapestry. You will learn how certain feelings are connected to certain activities. You will learn how to increase activities that make you feel better. The group will teach you how to select activities, how to recognise traps that inhibit meaningful activity, and how to incorporate new activities into your daily routines so that they become new habits that lead to improvements in the quality of your life.

You will be asked to continue the work begun in sessions during the week between group sessions. You may find that becoming more activated as a way of coping with depression allows you to operate more effectively in the world and that your life will begin to feel like it is back on track. Taking the first step and coming to the group has been your first guided activity. Further steps may be easier than you imagine.

*Adapted for BA Group application from 'Appendix B. Beginning Activation: A Self Help Manual' in Martell, C.R., Addis, M.E. and Jacobson, N.S. (2001) Depression in Context: Strategies for Guided Action. New York: Norton.*

# The steps to ending depression

Here's a preview of the steps this group will guide you through:

## Step 1

Understand how depression works, particularly the links between what you do, where you do it, how you do it, and how it makes you feel.

## Step 2

Identify particular areas of life where the way you're responding to depression isn't helping and learn how to change the response.

## Step 3

Learn to approach difficult situations rather than avoid them.

## Step 4

Begin to address larger life issues that may put you at risk for developing another episode of depression.

### Exercise: Examining the steps

The four steps above describe, in a general way, the behavioural activation approach to ending depression. How do they strike you? You might jot down some notes or thoughts about each step. Do they make you optimistic? Sceptical?

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What do you hope to be doing differently by the end of these sessions?

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Please complete this exercise in preparation for the first group meeting.

*Addis, M. E. and Martell, C. R. (2004) Overcoming Depression One Step at a Time. New Harbinger: Oakland. Pages 11-12. Reproduced with permission.*

# Session 1

Learn your patterns and  
start to change them

# Session 1

## Agenda

1. Introduction
2. Ground rules
3. Getting to know each other
4. What is depression?
5. Training

## Goals for this session

1. Introduce the BA group programme and ground rules
2. Get to know each other
3. Prepare for and set training for the week ahead

## Activity and mood monitoring chart

In the large box write one word to describe the activity you engaged in during the hour.

In the mood box write one word which best describes how you felt at the time. As a starting point, identify the words you most often use to describe your mood (e.g. Bored, frustrated, down, pleased, interested etc). Then rate the intensity of this mood on a scale of 1 to 10 where 1 is the least intense/strong and 10 is the most.

Time	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
6 am	In and out of sleep	Awake sitting in lounge	Awake sitting in lounge	Asleep	In bed thinking		
<b>Mood</b>	Frustrated 7	Down 7	Down 7		Sad 5		
7 am	In lounge watching news	Sitting in lounge	In lounge	Asleep	In bed thinking		
<b>Mood</b>	Bored 5	Down 7	Sad 4		Sad 6		
8 am	In lounge watching TV	Walked to shop for paper	Tried to walk to shop	Asleep	Breakfast		
<b>Mood</b>	Bored 5	Pleased 4	Nervous 7		Down 5		
9 am	Phoned friend – no reply	Read paper	Sat in lounge doing nothing	Shower and breakfast			
<b>Mood</b>	Upset 7	Interested 7	Frustrated 7	Pleased 4			
10 am	Sat in the house doing nothing	Washed the dishes	Did not meet friend for coffee	Went to friend's workshop			
<b>Mood</b>	Fed up 6	Satisfied 6	Useless 7	Pleased 6			
11 am	Tried to read paper	Telephoned Mum	Went in to the garden	Helped friend repair car			
<b>Mood</b>	Frustrated 5	Glad 6	Occupied 4	Satisfied 6			
12 pm	Watched TV	Chips for lunch	Tidied up garden	Lunch with friend			
<b>Mood</b>	Fed up 7	Annoyed 5	Occupied 6	Pleased 7			
1 pm	Had a nap	Watched TV		Walk in the park			
<b>Mood</b>	Drowsy 5	Fed up 6		Pleased 7			

*Adapted from Martell, C.R., Addis, M.E. and Jacobson, N.S. (2001) Depression in Context: Strategies for Guided Action. New York: Norton.*

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Time	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
6 am							
<b>Mood</b>							
7 am							
<b>Mood</b>							
8 am							
<b>Mood</b>							
9 am							
<b>Mood</b>							
10 am							
<b>Mood</b>							
11 am							
<b>Mood</b>							
12 pm							
<b>Mood</b>							
1 pm							
<b>Mood</b>							
2 pm							
<b>Mood</b>							
3pm							
<b>Mood</b>							
4pm							
<b>Mood</b>							

Time	Mon	Tues	Wed	Thurs	Fri	Sat	Sun
5pm							
<b>Mood</b>							
6pm							
<b>Mood</b>							
7pm							
<b>Mood</b>							
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4am							
<b>Mood</b>							
5am							
<b>Mood</b>							

Adapted from Martell, C.R., Addis, M.E. and Jacobson, N.S. (2001) *Depression in Context: Strategies for Guided Action*. New York: Norton.

# Self-reflection sheet

## Session number:

1. What did I learn from today's session?
2. What training for the week did I plan?
3. Thinking about today's session, I noticed myself behaving in this way... (Describe...)
4. This way of behaving/being is helpful because...
5. This way of behaving/being may be unhelpful because...
6. If I were to usually behave this way in my everyday life the likely consequences would be...
7. Is there anything I need to change as a result of my reflections?



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