

Behavioral Activation Resources from the MHSIS Library for December 2025

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In support of its December 2nd Practice Chat with guest host Valerie Fox, PhD, OTR/L, CPRP, the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) Mental Health Special Interest Section (MHSIS) is featuring these attached Behavioral Activation resources, globally sourced and collated in its member-created library:

-  Behavioral Activation intervention activities
-  Value of OT in Behavioral Activation
-  Behavioral Activation efficacy evidence
-  Behavioral Activation assessment tools
-  Everyday Evidence Podcast recording & free articles

MHSIS Interim Chair, Allison Sullivan, DOT, OTR/L, writes:

Behavioral Activation (BA) has become an increasingly important framework for occupational therapy practitioners seeking to address depressive symptoms, functional withdrawal, and sedentary behavior through engagement in meaningful, values-based activities. Across the literature, BA is consistently described as a straightforward, evidence-informed approach that helps individuals reconnect with reinforcing daily routines, strengthen personal agency, and increase participation in life roles. Within occupational therapy, BA aligns closely with our profession's emphasis on activity analysis, habit formation, environmental structuring, and the therapeutic use of meaningful occupations to improve well-being.

This compilation brings together key resources that illustrate how BA principles are being translated into occupational therapy practice and research. Included are foundational behavioral activation sources, an open-access treatment manual, and outcome measures that assess activation, avoidance, and environmental reward. The collection also highlights an Everyday Evidence podcast describing OT-led ABLE and duoABLE interventions developed by Emily Kringle and colleagues, which apply BA strategies to reduce post-stroke sedentary behavior by embedding activation within clients' everyday routines. Current evidence, including recent AJOT commentaries on activating lasting engagement, underscores the relevance of BA within rehabilitation, community mental health, and chronic condition management.

Collectively, these materials offer a concise, practice-ready foundation for OT practitioners who wish to integrate Behavioral Activation into intervention planning, client education, and goal setting. Whether used to support mental health service delivery, address inactivity-related health risks, or enhance participation outcomes, BA provides a structured yet flexible pathway for helping clients re-engage with the occupations that make life meaningful.

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OT in Behavioral Activation:

Brick, R., Lyons, K. D., Rodakowski, J., & Skidmore, E. (2020). **The Issue Is—A need to activate lasting engagement.** *American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 74, 7405347010. <https://doi.org/10.5014/ajot.2020.039339>

Abstract: Occupational therapy practitioners provide interventions to promote activity engagement to multiple clinical populations. They help clients develop restorative, adaptive, and compensatory skills to improve their performance in daily activities. The issue addressed in this article is that current clinical frameworks lack translation of learned skills to consistent everyday performance. There is a gap between what clients can do and what clients actually do in everyday life. Behavioral activation provides an explicit, structured, and practical approach that can translate capacity into long-term engagement. This article presents behavioral activation as a transdiagnostic approach that targets populations experiencing chronic illness to bridge the gap between what the client can do in therapy and what the client could do in everyday life.

Behavioral Activation Evidence:

Ekers D, Webster L, Van Straten A, Cuijpers P, Richards D, et al. (2014) **Behavioural Activation for Depression; An Update of Meta-Analysis of Effectiveness and Sub Group Analysis.** *PLoS ONE* 9(6): e100100. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0100100

Abstract: Background: Depression is a common, disabling condition for which psychological treatments are recommended. Behavioral activation has attracted increased interest in recent years. It has been over 5 years since our meta-analyses summarized the evidence supporting and this systematic review updates those findings and examines moderators of treatment effect.

Method: Randomized trials of behavioral activation for depression versus controls or anti-depressant medication were identified using electronic database searches, previous reviews and reference lists. Data on symptom level and study level moderators were extracted and analyzed using meta-analysis, sub-group analysis and meta-regression respectively.

Results: Twenty six randomized controlled trials including 1524 subjects were included in this meta-analysis. A random effects meta-analysis of symptom level post treatment showed behavioral activation to be superior to controls (SMD2 0.74 CI20.91 to20.56, k = 25, N = 1088) and medication (SMD20.42 CI20.83 to-0.00, k = 4, N = 283). Study quality was low in the majority of studies and follow- up time periods short. There was no indication of publication bias and subgroup analysis showed limited association between moderators and effect size.

Conclusions: The results in this meta-analysis support and strengthen the evidence base indicating Behavioral Activation is an effective treatment for depression. Further high-quality research with longer term follow-up is needed to strengthen the evidence base.

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Kanter, J. W., Manos, R. C., Bowe, W. M., Baruch, D. E., Busch, A. M., & Rusch, L. C. (2010). **What is behavioral activation? A review of the empirical literature.** *Clinical Psychology Review*, 30(6), 608–620. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2010.04.001>.

Abstract: Behavioral Activation (BA) for depression is an empirically supported psychotherapy with a history dating back to the 1970s. To date, there have been no systematic reviews examining how BA treatment packages and their accompanying components have evolved over time. This review sought to identify and describe the specific treatment components of BA based on the techniques detailed in empirical articles and referenced treatment manuals when available.

The following component techniques were identified: activity monitoring, assessment of life goals and values, activity scheduling, skills training, relaxation training, contingency management, procedures targeting verbal behavior, and procedures targeting avoidance. The implementation of these techniques is reviewed, along with their empirical support both as standalone interventions and as components of larger treatment packages. Whereas activity scheduling, relaxation, and skills-training interventions have received empirical support independently, other procedures have demonstrated effectiveness primarily within comprehensive BA treatment protocols. Although BA interventions varied in the tools used, activity monitoring and activity scheduling emerged as consistent components across approaches. Possible directions for the continued evolution of BA are discussed.

Keywords: behavioral activation, depression, clinical psychotherapy, treatment components

Behavioral Activation Assessment

Manos, R. C., Kanter, J. W., & Luo, W. (2011). **The behavioral activation for depression scale-short form: development and validation.** *Behavior therapy*, 42(4), 726–739. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.beth.2011.04.004>

The Behavioral Activation for Depression Scale – Short Form (BADS-SF), is a 9-item measure, is available for use by researchers and clinicians and is published openly in the literature. The full measure can be accessed in several locations:

- A direct PDF of the scale and instructions is available on a [Webflow resource site](#).
- It is provided in an appendix to an Oxford Academic book which can be viewed online via the [Oxford Academic link](#).

Abstract: Following a landmark component analysis of cognitive therapy by Jacobson and colleagues (1996), there has been renewed interest in behavioral activation (BA) treatments for depression. The Behavioral Activation for Depression Scale (BADS) was developed to measure when and how clients become activated over the course of BA treatment. Multiple studies

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have provided initial support for the BADS but have also identified several potential problems. Four studies were conducted in order to develop and provide initial evaluation of a short form of the BADS that addresses these concerns. In Study 1, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted on existing data using the original BADS in order to identify items to retain for the short form. In Study 2, these items were administered to a new sample of college students with elevated depressive symptoms and were analyzed with exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses. Study 3 examined the predictive validity of the BADS-SF by examining the BADS-SF and depression scores in relation to activity tracking and reward-value ratings over the course of 1 week. Study 4 examined BADS-SF data over the course of BA treatment for two clients using cross-lagged panel correlations. With one client, changes in BADS-SF scores led changes in depression scores by 1 week, whereas with the other client changes in BADS-SF and depression scores occurred concurrently. These studies resulted in a nine-item scale that demonstrated good item characteristics as well as acceptable internal consistency reliability, construct validity, and predictive validity.

Behavioral Activation Intervention:

Lejuez, C. W., Hopko, D. R., & Hopko, S. D. (2001). **A brief behavioral activation treatment for depression: Treatment manual.** *Behavior Modification, 25*(2), 255–286.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/014544550125200>

ABSTRACT: The brief behavioral activation treatment for depression is a simple, cost-effective method for treating depression. Based on basic behavioral theory and recent evidence that the behavioral component may be the active mechanism of change in cognitive-behavioral treatments of clinical depression, the authors designed a treatment to systematically increase exposure to positive activities and thereby improve affect and corresponding cognitions. This article describes the rationale for the treatment and provides the treatment in manual form to be utilized by patients in therapy.

Everyday Evidence Podcast Recording and corresponding articles:

Access Recording Here: [Everyday Evidence: Activating Behavior for Lasting Engagement \(ABLE\)](#)

In this 2024 *Everyday Evidence* podcast episode, assistant professor and director of the Disability and WELLness laboratory at the University of Minnesota, Emily Kringle, discusses her work on developing the ABLE and duoABLE projects, which are behavioral activation-based interventions aimed to reduce post-stroke sedentary behavior through engagement in meaningful daily activities.

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Additional Resources: ABLE Intervention:

- <https://doi.org/10.1080/10749357.2019.1623437>
- <https://doi.org/10.5014/ajot.2020.040345>

Sedentary Behavior:

- <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12966-017-0525-8>