

BEHAVIOURAL ACTIVATION FOR DEPRESSION

## BOOKLET FOUR

### Finding direction: values, flow and strengths

# 4

#### *Contents*

Introduction and overview	2-3
Values	4-19
Flow	20-23
Strengths	24-27

TALKING THERAPIES SOUTHWARK

South London and Maudsley  
NHS Foundation Trust



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Improving Access to Psychological Therapies



## Introduction

Leading a life that we find interesting and meaningful is one of the things that protects us from depression; and re-engaging in activities that matter to us in some way (whether it be sport, music, family, company of friends, gardening, an interest in science or film, work, collecting antiques, fixing bikes, etc.) is one of the things that helps lift us out of depression.

One of the reasons it is easy to get stuck in depression is that in the depressed mindstate it is sometimes very difficult to feel any connection with the things that make life meaningful. It can be as if we have forgotten they exist or no longer believe they can really give us any sense of satisfaction. Then of course it is hard to find the motivation to do the things that would actually make us feel better. It is very understandable that people often decide to wait until they feel better, stronger, before making the effort.

However, the evidence suggests waiting to feel better can just mean being depressed for longer. It seems to be important to take action, to make changes, to do different things, even in very small ways, regardless of feelings. Then, at some point after that, mood will start to shift.

But there is more to this than simply keeping busy.

It makes a difference *what* we chose to do, and also *how* we approach these activities.

This booklet aims to provide pointers to some of the things that may be helpful. You can then make use of these ideas in your Roadmap Activation Plan.

There are three sections to the booklet:

### **1. Values: what really matters to you**

Working through the first section of the booklet offers an opportunity to consider what is important to you about the way you want to live your life & the kind of person you want to be.

### **2. Activities that engage: finding flow**

This section aims to help you identify activities that are particularly likely to engage you and take you out of depression.

### **3. Drawing on your strengths**

This section invites you to consider the strengths that you bring to your recovery and how to use them.

# Values

## **What are values?**

By values we mean things that are important to us about how we live our lives.

They are not to be confused with targets or goals which can be achieved and ticked off a list.

They are definitely not a list of ‘shoulds’; a list of things other people have said we should do. No one else can tell you what your values are or what they should be.

Values come from our own sense of what enriches our lives, and what gives a sense of self-respect and of living our lives well, regardless of the difficulties we experience.

## **Why look at values?**

It can often be helpful to take time to reflect on what is most important to us. This can be especially true when recovering from depression - because depression so easily knocks us ‘off course’. Exploring values can play a part in helping us find our way again.

Values are a bit like directions. Without any direction life can feel aimless. Values can give a sense of purpose and meaning in life. They are what you want your life to be about.

## Instructions

Pages 6-7 show some different areas of life which are associated with important values for some people.

Read through them and see which you think might be important in your life. Which do you care about? Or, if it is difficult to connect with these values right now, which have mattered to you in the past?

In looking at values it is generally important to focus on the things that are about *your* behaviour and that are under your control rather than on how you would prefer other people to be. For example, in thinking about what you value in friendships, you might say, “I value friends who are reliable and there when I need them”. That’s fine, but it will be more helpful if you also include things that are about *your own behaviour*, for example, “I would like to be a reliable friend and be there for my friends when they need me”. You can have this as a valued direction regardless of others’ behaviour. It is more under your control. Then you can have the sense of living your life well, living by your values, whatever the circumstances.

### PHYSICAL HEALTH & WELLBEING

Is physical health and wellbeing important to you? If so, what do you do to take care of yourself? What would you want to be doing to look after your health?

**COMMUNITY & SOCIETY**  
Is being a citizen or being part of a community important to you? This might be a local community or a charity or a political party or a campaigning group. What sort of contribution do you want to make?

### SPIRITUALITY

What does spirituality mean to you? (Maybe a religious faith or personal relationship with God or a connection with nature or something greater than ourselves.) What part do you want this to play in your life?

### RECREATION & LEISURE & FUN

What is important to you about leisure time? Do you follow any interests, sports or hobbies? Would you like to? Is it important to spend time just having fun? If so, what do you do for fun?

### PARENTING & GRANDPARENTING, etc.

If you are a parent, grandparent, uncle, aunt or godparent, etc. what is important to you about this role and how you fulfil it?

### MUSIC, ART, CREATIVITY

Is music or art or writing or some other form of creativity important to you? What part do you want this play in your life?





## FRIENDS

What sort of friend do you want to be?  
How would you like your friends to remember you? What do you value about friendship?

## FAMILY

What is important to you in how you want to act as a brother/sister; son/daughter; father/mother or in-law? If you are not in contact with some of them, would you like to be and how would you act in such a relationship?

## WORK

What part do you want work to play in your life? If you have a job at the moment, what matters to you about how you do that job? Which aspects of the job do you find most rewarding? If you are not working at the moment, what would you want from a job?

## INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS

What is important to you in how you act in an intimate relationship? What sort of partner do you want to be? If you are not involved in a relationship at present, how would you like to act in a relationship?

## EDUCATION, STUDYING, LEARNING

Is learning important to you? If so, what kinds of things do you enjoy learning about? What part do you want this to play in your life?

## Examples

On the next few pages there is some space for you to write down your ideas about what is important to you in relation to each of these life areas.

Area	Valued direction
<p><b>Parenting &amp; grandparenting, etc.</b>            If you are a parent, grandparent, uncle, aunt or godparent, etc. what is important to you about this role and how you fulfil it?</p>	<p><i>I love seeing my grandchildren grow up. I would like to be the sort of grandparent that they can always turn to and talk about anything that is troubling them. I also want to be the kind of grandparent that is fun to be with, plays games and reads stories.</i></p>
<p><b>Physical health &amp; wellbeing</b>            Is physical health and wellbeing important to you? If so, what do you do to take care of yourself? What would you want to be doing to look after your health?</p>	<p><i>It is important to me to take care of my skin and hands and feet and nails. It helps me feel good about myself and cared for.</i></p> <p><i>Looking after my teeth is also important, brushing regularly and going for dental checks.</i></p> <p><i>I would like to be eating better, as I find that eating too much junk food at irregular times makes me feel bad.</i></p> <p><i>It does make a huge difference to me to feel healthy and know I am taking care of my health.</i></p>

Here are some examples:

## **Some problems that might come up and suggestions about what to do about them**

### **Problem: Sadness**

Sometimes looking at what really matters to us can be painful because it reminds us of losses, regrets, disappointments. To some extent this is true for all of us and is part of the experience of being human. However, it would be very sad to deny or lose touch with what we care about in order to avoid feelings of guilt or grief. Blocking out feelings may just make us more depressed in the long run. If you find that looking at the values is causing you some sadness, recognise that to feel sadness is normal, and that the sadness tells you something about what you care about. Caring about things is important and is one of the strengths that helps recovery from depression.

### **Problem: The inner critic**

Looking at values can also be an invitation for the ‘inner critic’ to start giving us a hard time about why we haven’t been doing better. Do your best not to listen to this. Focus on what is good in the value itself, regardless of how off-course your life has been. No one charts their life course alone, and it’s all too easy, with hindsight, to under-estimate the pressures on us to make the choices we did. Remember also, that depression tends to bias our memories to the negative and to self-blame, so try to hold that in mind.

### **Problem: Too many ‘shoulds’**

Area	Valued direction
<p><b>1 Intimate relationships</b>            What sort of partner do you want to be? If you are not involved in a relationship at present, how would you like to act in a relationship?</p>	
<p><b>2 Family relationships</b>            What is important to you in how you want to act as a brother/sister; son/daughter; father/mother or in-law? If you are not in contact with some of them, would you like to be and how would you act in such a relationship?</p>	
<p><b>3 Physical health and wellbeing</b>            Is physical health and wellbeing important to you? If so, what do you do to take care of yourself? What would you want to be doing to look after your health?</p>	

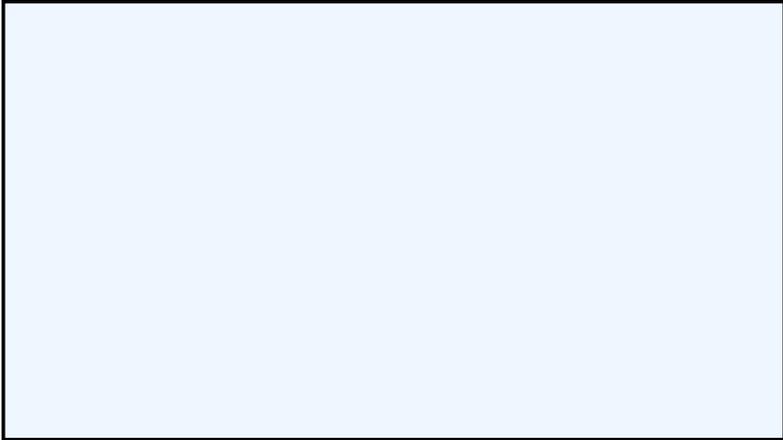
Area	Valued direction
<p><b>4 Music, Art Creativity</b>            Is music or art or writing or some other form of creativity important to you?            What part do you want this play in your life?</p>	
<p><b>5 Friendships</b>            What sort of friend do you want to be? How would you like your friends to remember you? What do you value about friendship?</p>	
<p><b>6 Recreation, leisure &amp; fun</b>            What is important to you about leisure time? Do you follow any interests, sports or hobbies? Would you like to? Is it important to spend time just having fun? If so, what do you do for fun?</p>	

Area	Valued direction
<p><b>7 Spirituality</b>            What does spirituality mean to you? (Maybe a religious faith or personal relationship with God or a connection with nature or something greater than ourselves.) What part do you want this to play in your life?</p>	
<p><b>8 Community &amp; society</b>            Is being a citizen or being part of a community important to you? This might be a local community or a charity or a political party or a campaigning group. What sort of contribution do you want to make?</p>	
<p><b>9 Education, studying and training</b>            Is learning important to you? If so, what kinds of things do you enjoy learning about? What part do you want this to play in your life?</p>	

Area	Valued direction
<p><b>10 Parenting &amp; grandparenting, etc.</b>            If you are a parent, grandparent, uncle, aunt or godparent, etc. what is important to you about this role and how you fulfil it?</p>	
<p><b>11 Work</b>            What part do you want work to play in your life? If you have a job at the moment, what matters to you about how you do that job? Which aspects of the job do you find most rewarding? If you are not working at the moment, what would you want from a job?</p>	
<p><b>12 Other</b>            Any other values, things that matter to you, that haven't been covered?</p>	

## Reflecting on Values

Were there any surprises or key learnings as you considered your values in different life areas? If so, you can make a note of them here if you want to:



### Rating importance of value domains

On pages 16-17 there is a space where you can rate the importance of each value domain to you at this point in your life.

#### **Example**

Tony values being a supportive brother to his sisters. It is important him. He wants to them to feel they can turn to him for support. He rates the importance 8/10. His relationships with his wife and children are very important and he rates these 10/10. Work is less important to him now than it used to be and he rates it 6/10.

**Rating how ‘on course’ or how true to the value your life has been recently**

Next, you can rate how in line with your values your behaviour has been recently. Take care not to get too down on yourself, though. Remember that depression does knock people ‘off course’.

**Example**

One of Tony’s sisters has been in hospital for the past week. He has sent her some flowers and has phoned her every day, but, not liking hospitals, he hasn’t visited her. He did do some shopping for his other sister who has been visiting the hospital daily. Overall, he thinks he has been partly true to his values and he gives a rating of 5/10.

<p>FAMILY</p> <p><i>IMPORTANCE = 8/10</i></p> <p><i>RECENTLY, HOW TRUE TO VALUE = 5/10</i></p>
--

Tony also values taking care of his health. He rates the importance of this value 7/10. Recently he has been going swimming and eating a healthier diet. However, he is still struggling to give up smoking so he rates his behaviour as only 4/10 true to his values in this domain.

<p>PHYSICAL HEALTH &amp; WELLBEING</p> <p><i>IMPORTANCE = 7/10</i></p> <p><i>RECENTLY, HOW TRUE TO VALUE = 4/10</i></p>
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COMMUNITY

*IMPORTANCE =*  
*RECENTLY, HOW TRUE TO VALUE =*

PHYSICAL HEALTH & WELLBEING

*IMPORTANCE =*  
*RECENTLY, HOW TRUE TO VALUE =*

SPIRITUALITY

*IMPORTANCE =*  
*RECENTLY, HOW TRUE TO VALUE =*

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*IMPORTANCE =*  
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PARENTING & GRANDPARENTING etc.

*IMPORTANCE =*  
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*IMPORTANCE =*  
*RECENTLY, HOW TRUE TO VALUE =*



FRIENDS

*IMPORTANCE =*  
*RECENTLY, HOW TRUE TO VALUE =*

FAMILY

*IMPORTANCE =*  
*RECENTLY, HOW TRUE TO VALUE =*

WORK

*IMPORTANCE =*  
*RECENTLY, HOW TRUE TO VALUE =*

OTHER .....

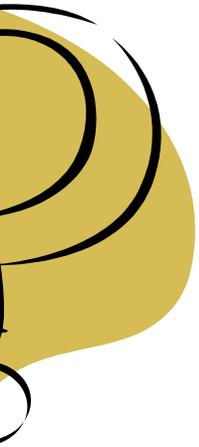
*IMPORTANCE =*  
*RECENTLY, HOW TRUE TO VALUE =*

INTIMATE RELATIONSHIPS

*IMPORTANCE =*  
*RECENTLY, HOW TRUE TO VALUE =*

EDUCATION, STUDYING, LEARNING

*IMPORTANCE =*  
*RECENTLY, HOW TRUE TO VALUE =*



## From values to small action steps

### **First, chose one of the value domains**

You can chose any domain that is at least somewhat important to you, but you might like to chose one where you have also rated your recent behaviour as not very true to the value.

### **Then, think of one small way in which you could act in line with this value during the next week.**

Be as specific as possible about what you will do, and where and when you will do it. Imagine yourself carrying this out and if you discover any obstacles see if there is a way around them, and if not, think of something else you can do in line with this value.

### **Example:**

#### **FAMILY**

*I really value my relationship with my cousin but I have been avoiding seeing her because I didn't want her to see me when I was feeling down. But I would rather be open and honest with her.*

*I will text her tomorrow to arrange a time to meet. I will say I am sorry I have not been in touch and would love to see her. I will text before lunch. I cannot see any obstacles to doing this. I am a bit anxious she will be upset with me for avoiding her, but that won't get better if I put it off. My cousin matters more to me than feeling anxious. I will set a reminder on my mobile so I don't forget.*

**A space for your example:**



**How did you get on?**

.....

.....

Use the work you have done on values to write ideas for your activation plan in the Activation Plan Booklet.

# Flow

## What is Flow?

Flow is what you experience when you are totally involved in an activity, giving it your full attention, with thoughts, feelings, desires all in harmony.

This is very different from doing something with your mind half somewhere else, perhaps judging how well you are doing, worrying about what others think or what else you should be doing, etc.

## Flow is associated with happiness and wellbeing

Flow was first described by Csikszentmihalyi (pronounced chick-SENT-me-hi-ee) who was studying happiness. He found that people felt best when their days included times when they experienced flow.

He gave lots of people from different walks of life buzzers to carry around with them that went off at random times during the day. Each time the buzzer sounded they wrote down what they were doing and how they felt.

Some of the findings were surprising: he concluded that it is more difficult to enjoy free time than to enjoy work!

He said that if we sit about not doing anything very interesting or challenging we are almost bound to end up feeling restless, vaguely anxious, dissatisfied, and lacking in energy.

### **Free time is a challenge!**

#### **What activities are best for experiencing Flow?**

The activities that give an experience of flow often have an element of **challenge**. They usually require some **effort**, especially in the early stages. They may require some **practice and skill**.

Different people will experience flow from different activities but here are some examples:

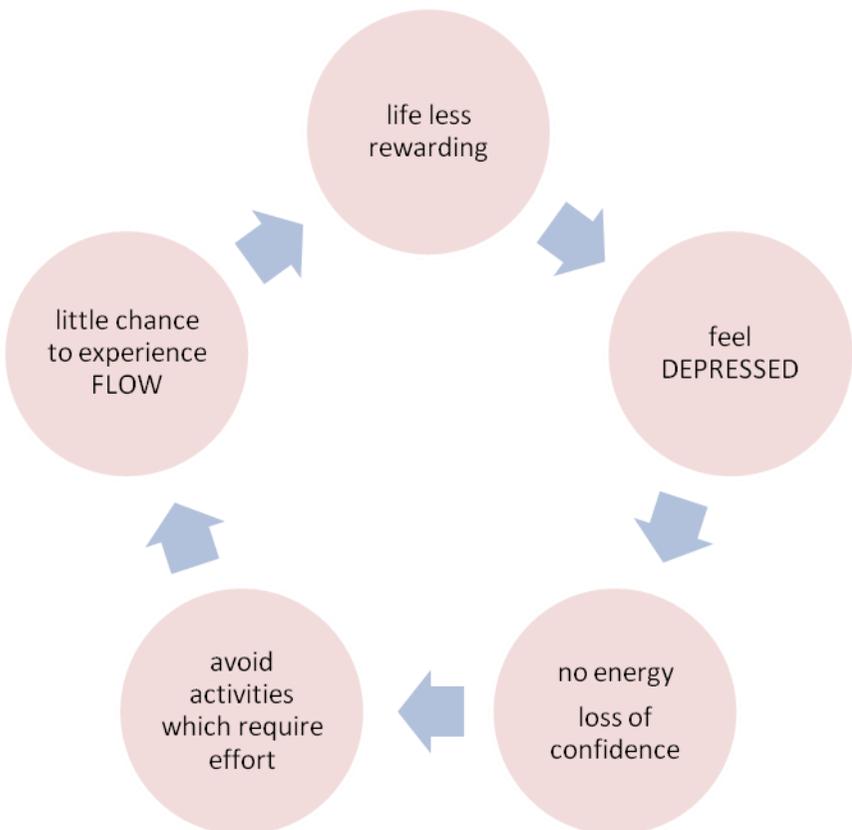
- Playing darts with total concentration
- Dancing and feeling completely at one with the music
- Being absorbed in designing or making something
- Playing a musical instrument
- Playing sport

## Flow and depression

It is partly a lack of flow and other satisfying activities that leads to depression in the first place and then keeps it going.

With depression usually comes lack of energy and loss of confidence, both of which make it difficult to start doing things that require effort, or are challenging in some way.

But these are the very activities that are likely to be most effective in lifting the depression. It is a vicious circle:



## Breaking the depression cycle

To break the cycle, it helps to start engaging in a few activities that are likely to lead to the experience of flow, and to do this regardless of how you feel. Small steps are fine.

First remember some times in your life when you have experienced flow. It doesn't matter if these were a long time ago. Just think of times when you were completely absorbed in what you were doing. Make a note of them here.

What were you doing when you felt totally absorbed in an activity?

Is there a way you could bring more of these activities, or similar activities into your life now? Make a note here and add any ideas you have to your Activation Plan Booklet.

Ideas for FLOW activities that you could increase in your life

## Drawing on strengths

Everyone has strengths that can be brought to recovery from depression but the pattern of strengths varies from person to person. Some of the qualities or strengths that can be really helpful in recovering from depression are:

Curiosity   Patience   Kindness   Sense of humour  
Determination   Courage   Open-mindedness

Pick one of these qualities or another strength and remember a time when you showed this quality. It doesn't matter in how small a way or how long ago. Then just note a few details (what, where, when, who with) in the box opposite.

Here are a couple of examples:

Quality ....patience.....

*When I took my Dad to the hospital for a check-up last month he was very worried and we had to wait over two hours to be seen. He kept fretting, but I stayed patient because I knew that would be best for him.*

Quality ....kindness.....

*My neighbour locked herself out of her flat. I let her come in and sit in my kitchen and I made her a cup of tea while she waited for her partner to get home (even though I didn't really want to). This was two weeks ago.*

Some spaces for your own examples:

Quality .....

Quality .....

Quality .....

## Using strengths to help you

### Example

Lindsay wanted to start exercising again. She rated the importance of taking care of her health as 9/10, and for Lindsay, exercising is an essential part of that. She remembered the dance-exercise class at the local leisure centre that she used to enjoy.

However, she thinks she will get upset when she goes because she will see how unfit she has become. She thinks she will have difficulty keeping up with the others in the class. She thinks they will wonder what has happened to her and why she has put on weight. Just imagining what they will think upsets her. Lindsay thinks she feels bad enough already without putting herself through more stress. Also she feels so tired in the evenings. She really hasn't got the energy to get out. And if she did, she might feel even more exhausted.

#### **The Challenge:**

*going to the dance exercise class in line with value of looking after health but expecting to feel fat and unfit and judged and even more tired and miserable*

#### **Strengths:**

*I could bring open-mindedness about how I will really feel (just possible I might enjoy it??) . I could bring patience because it will take time to bring up my level of fitness. I could bring kindness and not expect myself to be perfect. Some courage would be helpful but not sure I have much of that.*

Look back through your work on values and on flow.

Find an example of something you might do that:

- is in some way challenging
- matters to you.

Write the challenge in the box below and then make some notes on what strengths you could bring to help you:

**The Challenge:**

**Strengths:**

## BEHAVIOURAL ACTIVATION FOR DEPRESSION

### *LIST OF BOOKLETS*

1. Introduction to BA for Depression
2. Monitoring activity and mood
3. Roadmap: The Activation Plan
4. **Finding direction: values, flow and strengths**
5. Avoidance and the depression TRAPs
6. Problem solving
7. Thinking habits
8. Next steps

**We hope you have found this booklet helpful. We welcome your feedback.**

You can give comments to your therapist or by emailing us at [slm-tr.SPTS@nhs.net](mailto:slm-tr.SPTS@nhs.net) or writing to us at Talking Therapies Southwark, Middle House, Maudsley Hospital, London SE5 8AZ.

[www.slam-iapt.nhs.uk](http://www.slam-iapt.nhs.uk)

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