

Behavioral Activation for Depression

Caleb W. Lack, Ph.D.
Associate Professor / Clinical Psychologist
University of Central Oklahoma
www.caleblack.com

www.caleblack.com

1

What is Behavioral Activation?

Based on premise that problems in vulnerable individuals' lives and behavioral responses reduce ability to experience positive reward from their environments

Aims to systematically increase activation such that patients may experience greater contact with sources of reward in their lives and solve life problems

www.caleblack.com

2

What is Behavioral Activation?

Focuses directly on activation and on processes that inhibit activation, such as escape and avoidance behaviors and ruminative thinking

www.caleblack.com

3

Origins of Behavioral Activation

BA as an application of reinforcement theory to the treatment of depression (e.g., Lewinsohn, 1974)

The behavioral component of cognitive therapy treatment for depression (Beck, 1976)

www.caleblack.com

4

Origins of Behavioral Activation

BA as an independently effective intervention for depression (e.g., Jacobson et al., 1996)

BA has evolved into a stand-alone, evidence-based behavioral treatment for Major Depressive Disorder

www.caleblack.com

5

Research Support

Suggests BA alone is capable of both relieving overt and covert depressive symptoms

- Affect, activity, quality of life
- Maladaptive cognitions

Long-term follow-up suggest BA alone is as or more effective than CT

www.caleblack.com

6

Functional Analytic Framework

BA sees depression not as a medical illness but as a result of contexts a person is in

Looks outside the individual to establish relations between behavior and environment

Does not ignore biological or genetic vulnerabilities, but does not place them as the sole source of problematic behavior

www.caleblack.com

7

Basics of BA

Triggers for a particular problem can be found in the life of the client, rather than the client

Much depressed behavior stems from avoidance and trying to cope with low positive reinforcement / high aversive control environment

BA attempts to reduce avoidance and increase positive reinforcement and routine

www.caleblack.com

8

Key Elements of BA

- Behavioral case conceptualization
- Functional analysis
- Activity monitoring and scheduling
- Emphasis on avoidance patterns
- Emphasis on routine regulation
- Behavioral strategies for targeting worry or rumination
- Goals are specific to the individual (not necessarily pleasant events)

www.caleblack.com

9

Course of BA

- Orient to treatment
- Develop treatment goals
- Behavioral analyses
- Repeated application of activation and engagement strategies
- Troubleshooting
- Treatment review and relapse prevention

www.caleblack.com

10

Treatment Rationale

Emphasize relationships between environment, mood (or anxiety) and activity

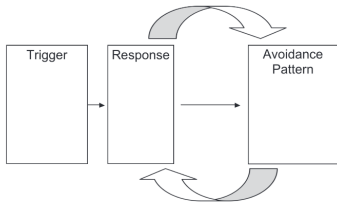
Highlight vicious cycle that can develop between depressed mood, withdrawal/avoidance, and worsened mood (or anxiety)

Suggest activation as a tool to break this cycle and support problem solving

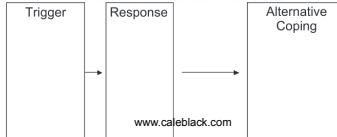
www.caleblack.com

11

Get out of the TRAP

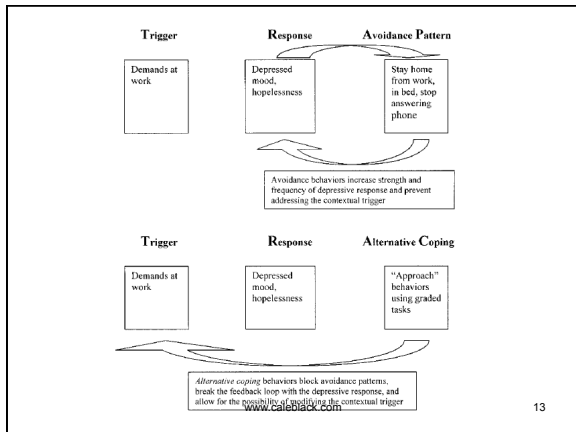


And back on TRAC



www.caleblack.com

12



Treatment Rationale

Emphasize an "outside → in" approach: act according to a plan or goal rather than a feeling or internal state

This is distinctly different from the "inside → out" approach of cognitive therapy

Rationale will likely need to be repeated several times over the course of treatment

www.caleblack.com

14

Treatment Rationale

Emphasize the importance of focused activation

Not random, but very purposeful activity for that individual

Conveying optimism during TR is important, especially with empathy for difficulty of changing behavior

Therapist takes more of a "coach" role than in other treatments

www.caleblack.com

15

Treatment Goals

Collaboration where the ultimate goal is to have clients engage the environment so that it is more positively reinforcing

Should be focused, specific, and operationally defined goals

With BA, focus is often on short-term goals within therapy, and long-term goals for after treatment

www.caleblack.com

16

Style and Stance of an Effective BA Therapist

- Maintain session structure.
- Remain action-oriented.
- Validate clients' experiences.
- Work collaboratively with clients.
- Be nonjudgmental.
- Express warmth and be genuine with clients.
- Reinforce reports or examples of adaptive behavior.

www.caleblack.com

17

Behavioral Analyses

Focuses on contextual triggers for depression and responses elicited by them

Be sure to note those of low levels of positive reinforcement / aversive control

Analyses can be viewed as series of hypotheses, which can be generated via a series of specific questions

These, in turn, guide treatment planning

www.caleblack.com

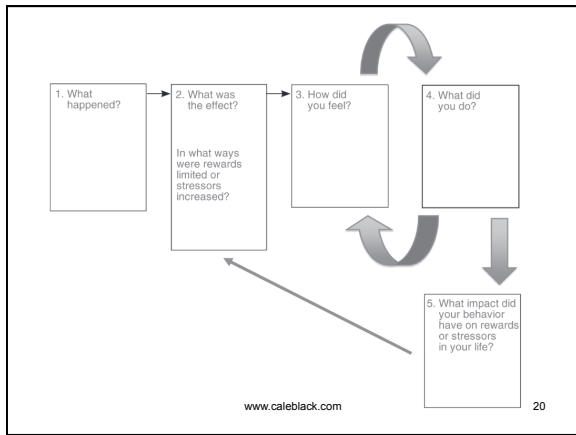
18

Behavioral Analyses

- What triggered the depression?
- What depressive symptoms is client experiencing?
- How is client coping with depression?
- How is avoidance maintaining the depression?
- What routines have been disrupted?

www.caleblack.com

19



www.caleblack.com

20

Activation Strategies

- Focused activation**
- Stems from behavioral analysis, highly idiographic approach to finding pleasant behaviors
- Viewed as experiments (based on those hypotheses generated) – does X help client function better or improve their mood?
- Kept track of via activity charts/logs

www.caleblack.com

21

BA Activity Chart

- The central tool of BA, it is used to
- Monitor baseline assessment of activity
 - Monitor mood and intensity ratings
 - Monitor mastery and pleasure ratings
 - Monitor breadth or restriction of activity
 - Monitor range of feelings
 - Schedule activation assignments
 - Evaluate progress

www.caleblack.com

22

Behavioral Activation Activity Chart— Planned Activities

Instructions: Record the specific activities that you and your therapist agreed you would do this week in each of the rows (Activities 1–4). You do not need to use all of these rows, or you can add more rows, depending on the specific activities you plan for the week. For each day, place a check mark to indicate if you engaged in the assigned activity. Record a mood rating for each day in the last row; mood is rated between 1 and 10, with "1" = "not at all depressed" and "10" = "most severely depressed."

	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.	Sun.
Activity 1:							
Activity 2:							
Activity 3:							
Activity 4:							

www.caleblack.com

23

Behavioral Activation Activity Chart— Monitoring Activity and Emotion

Instructions: Record your activity for each hour of the day (what were you doing, with whom, where, etc.). Record an emotion associated with each activity (e.g., sad, happy, scared, angry, ashamed, disgusted, surprised). Rate your intensity of feeling between 1 and 10, with "1" = "not at all intense" and "10" = "very intense."

	Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
5:00 A.M.–7:00 A.M.							
7:00 A.M.							
8:00 A.M.							
9:00 A.M.							
10:00 A.M.							
11:00 A.M.							
12:00 A.M.							
1:00 A.M.							
2:00 P.M.							
3:00 P.M.							
4:00 P.M.							
5:00 P.M.							
6:00 P.M.							

www.caleblack.com

24

**Behavioral Activation Activity Chart—
Monitoring Activity/Pleasure/Mastery**

Instructions: Record your activity for each hour of the day (what were you doing, with whom, where, etc.). Record a rating for the pleasure ("P") and the mastery ("M") that you experienced as you were doing each activity. Pleasure and mastery are each rated between 1 and 10, with "0" = "low" and "10" = "high."

	Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
5:00 A.M.–							
7:00 A.M.							
7:00 A.M.							
8:00 A.M.							
9:00 A.M.							
10:00 A.M.							
11:00 A.M.							
12:00 A.M.							
1:00 A.M.							
2:00 P.M.							
3:00 P.M.							
4:00 P.M.							
5:00 P.M.							
6:00 P.M.							

www.caleblack.com 25

Activation Strategies

Graded task assignment

This is how you achieve focused activation
 Uses the process of shaping to move from easier tasks to those that are more difficult / require more participation
 Again, based on functional analysis and tailored to the client

www.caleblack.com 26

Grading Complex Tasks

Reengaging with friends.

- Make a list of people with whom the client has lost contact.
- Gather as many current telephone numbers or e-mail addresses as possible for those individuals.
- Choose one or two people to contact.
- Choose a day, time, and method for contacting them.
- Make the call or send the e-mail.
- Invite the person to meet face-to-face.
- Identify another old friend.
- Repeat.

www.caleblack.com 27

Grading Complex Tasks

Improving an unsatisfying work context in which a client feels overwhelmed and is falling behind on important work projects.

- List all the work projects.
- Record the deadline for each project or indicate if projects are ongoing.
- Identify one project to target in the coming week.
- Identify the specific subcomponents of that project.
- Record the amount of time estimated for each subcomponent.
- Schedule one subcomponent task each morning.
- Monitor the amount of time spent, what was accomplished, and the barriers that arose.
- Bring the monitoring form back to the next session to troubleshoot and choose a new project for the next target.

www.caleblack.com

28

When helping clients to structure and schedule activities, often it is helpful to keep the following considerations in mind:

- What task frequency will be most effectual for the client?
- What duration and/or intensity of the activity will be most effectual for the client?
- On what specific days and at what times should the client do the activity?
- Have you and the client started “small”?
- Have you and the client countered “all-or-nothing activation”?
- Have you and the client identified activities that are likely to be naturally reinforcing?

www.caleblack.com

29

Routine Regulation

Maintenance of a regular schedule of activities is an important piece of BA

A – assess what is making me depressed

C – choose to self-activate

T – try the new behavior

I – integrate new behavior into routine

O – observe the results

N – never give up

www.caleblack.com

30

Attention to Exposure

Rumination is seen as blocking activation strategies for the client

Treated by developing behaviors that instead block it and maximize naturally reinforcing environments

Encouraged to focus on the environment, rather than rumination thoughts

www.caleblack.com

31

Obstacles

Primary problem encountered is the passiveness of many depressed clients

Can be avoided by

Having client agree with BA model of depression

Suspend judgment until behavioral experiments have taken place

Use activity charts to reinforce activity-mood connections

www.caleblack.com

32

Obstacles

Follow a planned process

Determine if environment is preventing HW

See if patterns of avoidance are preventing completion of activities

Use between-session calls (sparingly) if needed

Use the graded task approach to HW

www.caleblack.com

33

The 10 Core Principles of Behavioral Activation

Principle 1: The key to changing how people feel is helping them change what they do.

Principle 2: Changes in life can lead to depression, and short-term coping strategies may keep people stuck over time.

Principle 3: The clues to figuring out what will be antidepressant for a particular client lie in what precedes and follows the client's important behaviors.

Principle 4: Structure and schedule activities that follow a plan, not a mood.

Principle 5: Change will be easier when starting small.

Principle 6: Emphasize activities that are naturally reinforcing.

Principle 7: Act as a coach.

Principle 8: Emphasize a problem-solving empirical approach, and recognize that all results are useful.

Principle 9: Don't just talk, do!

Principle 10: Troubleshoot possible and actual barriers to activation.

www.caleblack.com

34
