EMPOWER & THRIVE COUNSELING

Understanding Depression & Behavioral Activation

A practical guide to the connection between mood, motivation, and everyday activity.

A gentle reminder: This resource is for education and reflection. You can skip any prompt that feels uncomfortable, and you do not need to complete everything at once.

How depression can affect daily life

Depression can affect energy, interest, sleep, concentration, and the way we think about ourselves. When everyday activities feel harder, it can be tempting to withdraw or wait until motivation returns.

The mood–activity cycle

Low mood may lead to doing less, avoiding responsibilities, or disconnecting from people and enjoyable experiences. This can reduce opportunities for accomplishment, pleasure, and connection, which may further lower mood.

What is behavioral activation?

Behavioral activation is an evidence-based approach that helps people gradually reconnect with meaningful activities. Rather than waiting to feel motivated, you begin with small, realistic actions and notice what changes over time.

Start small and make it doable

Choose one activity that matters to you. Break it into the smallest useful step, decide when you will try it, and adjust the plan for your energy level. Rest and pacing are part of a sustainable plan.

Notice without judging

Afterward, gently rate your mood and sense of accomplishment or connection. A helpful action does not need to feel good immediately to be worthwhile.

Try a 5–10 minute version of an activity: step outside, tidy one surface, send one message, or engage in a valued hobby. Small steps count.

YOUR REFLECTION WORKSHEET

Putting it into practice

Use these prompts to notice patterns, identify what helps, and choose one manageable next step.

What activities have I been doing less often lately?

One small activity that could support pleasure, connection, or accomplishment is…

When and where will I try it? What might get in the way?

Before and after the activity: what did I notice about my mood, energy, or sense of accomplishment?

If your distress feels unmanageable or you are concerned about your safety, reach out to a trusted professional. For immediate danger, call 911. In the U.S., call or text 988 for crisis support.