LIVING WITH PURPOSE

A Guide for Getting More Out of Each Day

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you

We thank the following individuals for their thorough and helpful feedback on the content of this manual:

Jonathan Kanter, PhD, Joseph Mignogna, PhD, Jessica Freshour, PhD, Jessica Breland, MS

We thank Derek Hopko, PhD, and Carl Lejuez, PhD, for their permission to reprint forms from their behavioral activation treatment manual, and David Veale, MD, for permission to modify and reprint diagrams.

Supported by:

Funding was provided for this project by the VA South Central (VISN 16) Mental Illness Research, Education, and Clinical Center (MIRECC).

Additional information:

The contents of this manual do not represent the views of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) or the U.S. government.

This manual can be downloaded at www.mirecc.va.gov/VISN16/living-with-purpose-manual.asp. For a hardcopy of the manual, please contact VISN16SCMIRECCEducation@va.gov.

August 2022

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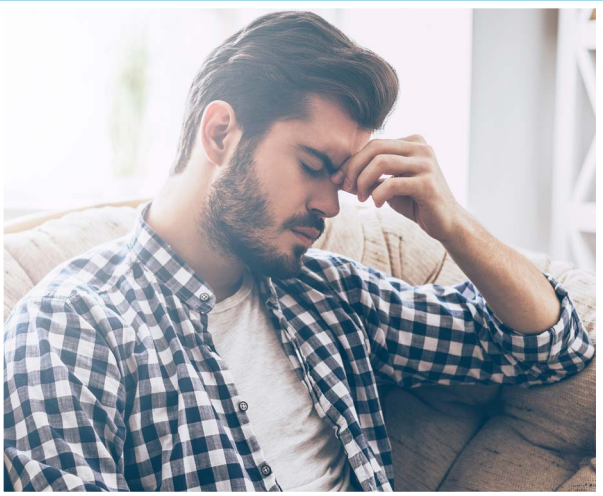
CHAPTER ONE



Introduction

What is depression?

Depression affects millions of Americans every year. It can occur when people's lives become extremely stressful or filled with losses and painful experiences. We all feel down or blue sometimes in response to such events. But if you are having deep feelings of sadness or loss of interest in activities you used to enjoy, for a long period of time, and these feelings are really getting in the way of everyday life, you may be experiencing depression. Depression symptoms include sadness, crying, changes in appetite and sleep, lack of motivation, feeling bad about yourself, and in some cases thoughts of hurting or killing yourself. When people feel this way for a long period of time, they often give up, their ability to do everyday tasks suffers, and they can spiral into deeper and deeper depression.

Your VA clinician has given you this workbook because he or she believes you may be experiencing depression and may benefit from learning some of the tools discussed in this book.

What will I learn from this workbook?

If you are experiencing depression, there are things you can do to help get your life back on track with some help from your VA clinician. This workbook explains one way to do this by tracking and changing daily activities. Just like a marathon runner has to change his or her behaviors to prepare for the big race, you also have to come up with a "game plan" for getting where you want to be. First, you will explore how your behaviors are connected to your mood. Then, you will focus on the things you value most in life and set goals for doing more positive and meaningful activities. Then, you will be given specific ways to schedule and accomplish these activities, one at a time. One benefit of this treatment approach is that it helps you work on something that you can control: your behavior. In this treatment, you don't need to worry about changing your thoughts or your feelings. By concentrating on changing your actions, such as working on goals that are important to you, you may find that your thoughts and feelings change as well, even though you are not directly focusing on them.

You might benefit from this workbook if you:

- Are experiencing current mild to moderate depression
- Are interested in what you can do to create more positive and meaningful activities in your life
- Have a mental health clinician or case manager at VA and meet with your provider on at least an occasional basis

If you are experiencing severe depression or having serious thoughts of hurting yourself, you may need a referral for more help, such as medications or counseling.

CHAPTER ONE

How do I know this will help me?

This workbook is based on a treatment for depression called Behavioral Activation. It was developed from Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT), a well-established treatment that the VA has endorsed as effective for depression. Recent clinical trials have indicated that this approach is at least as effective as CBT or antidepressant medications (Dimidjian et al., 2006).

How to use this workbook

This is a guided self-help workbook, meaning that you will teach yourself new skills and ways of handling your depression. The clinician who gave you this workbook can help explain anything that is not clear and help you problem-solve about how to put these ideas into practice in your own life. You should read this book at your own pace, complete the exercises, and work on adding these ideas into your everyday life. Chapters 1 and 2 provide some background on what depression is and how this approach can help you. In Chapters 3-7 you will start practicing these ideas in your own life by setting and accomplishing specific goals. We recommend that you spend at least a week working on each of Chapters 3-7, or more if you're struggling to meet the goals you set. Chapters 8 and 9 provide some tips for overcoming barriers and getting support from family and friends, so if you're struggling with a goal you've set, skip ahead to read those. Chapter 10 will help you put together everything you've learned in this workbook and plan ways to maintain the changes you've made even when you're done with the workbook. Each chapter is designed to be read in about 20-30 minutes. Overall, we expect that it may take several hours over the course of several weeks to read this entire workbook. However, because this workbook teaches you a new approach dealing with depression, we expect that you will spend more time putting these ideas into practice than reading this workbook. The more time that you put into working on the goals you set, the more likely you are to see improvement in your life and moods.

As an example, your progress through this workbook might look like this:

Week 1	Read Chapters 1 and 2
Week 2	Read Chapter 3 and keep track of your activities
Week 3	Read Chapter 4 and work on goals you set
Week 4	Read Chapter 5 and work on goals
Week 5	Read Chapter 6 and work on goals
Week 6	Read Chapter 7 and schedule activities
Week 7	Read Chapters 8, 9, and 10
Weeks 8 -12	Keep working on goals
Afterwards	Continue to use the ideas you learned

CHAPTER ONE

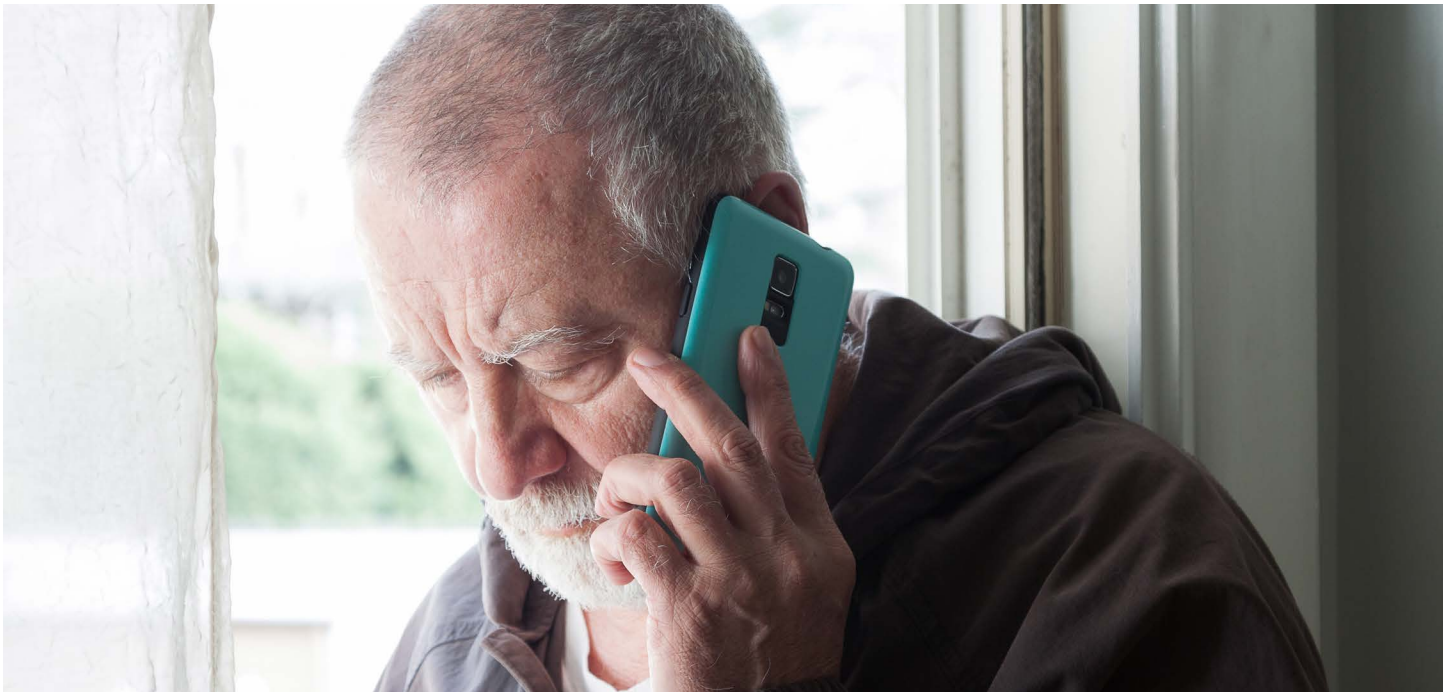
The provider who gave you this workbook should be your guide through this. Each time you see him or her again, make sure to bring the workbook with you so that you can discuss your progress. It likely will be helpful to discuss these things with your clinician each time you see them:

- What have you learned from this workbook?
- What questions do you have about the workbook?
- What goals have you set for yourself since you saw the clinician last?
- What kind of changes have you seen in your life? In your mood?
- Are you struggling to meet your goals or not seeing any progress?

It can be helpful to think about these questions before each appointment so that you know what you should discuss with your clinician and how he or she can help you. It is especially helpful to make a few notes ahead of time so that if you have specific problems or questions about the workbook, you will remember to ask your clinician about them.

If you are feeling suicidal or having thoughts of harming yourself, or if you want additional help for depression:

- Call your VA mental health clinician
- Call the VA Crisis Line (988, press 1)
- Go to your local VA for walk-in mental health services
- Go to the Emergency Room
- If you cannot get help in the above ways and feel you are in immediate danger, call 911



CHAPTER TWO

The Negative Cycle of Depression

Stressful events can trigger depression

Many things can contribute to depression. For example, stressful life events like a death in the family or losing your job, or chronic stress due to a health condition, financial problems, experiences of racism and discrimination, or negative experiences in combat. Additionally, we know that having a difficult childhood, experiencing abuse, and chemical imbalances in the brain are related to depression.

Life stress can lead to depression because it gets in the way of coping effectively. For example, when a person experiences stress, the idea of going to a social event can seem overwhelming. Planning to do hobbies may no longer seem fun or rewarding. Even chores around the house can seem like huge tasks. In response, you may find yourself:

- Avoiding social events
- Pulling back from hobbies
- Procrastinating on responsibilities at work and home
- Giving up pursuing life goals
- Avoiding problems rather than trying to solve them

Your response to depression can make it worse or better

When you become depressed, you may spend a great deal of time sleeping or watching TV. At first, having a break from responsibilities or social activities may seem like a relief. The problem is that these attempts to cope can actually make negative moods worse. This happens because it sets up a cycle where avoiding hobbies, goals, and social activities leads to lower mood and less motivation, which then is followed by more avoiding and again lower mood. This workbook will discuss breaking that cycle by focusing on activities that are enjoyable, goal-directed, and help you move towards what you value in life.

For some people, depression can also be a result of doing things that cause you to "spin your wheels" instead of moving towards your life goals. Other people may be very active with taking care of daily responsibilities like work, chores, and meeting the needs of everyone else in their life, while not leaving time to take care of their own needs and work towards their life goals.

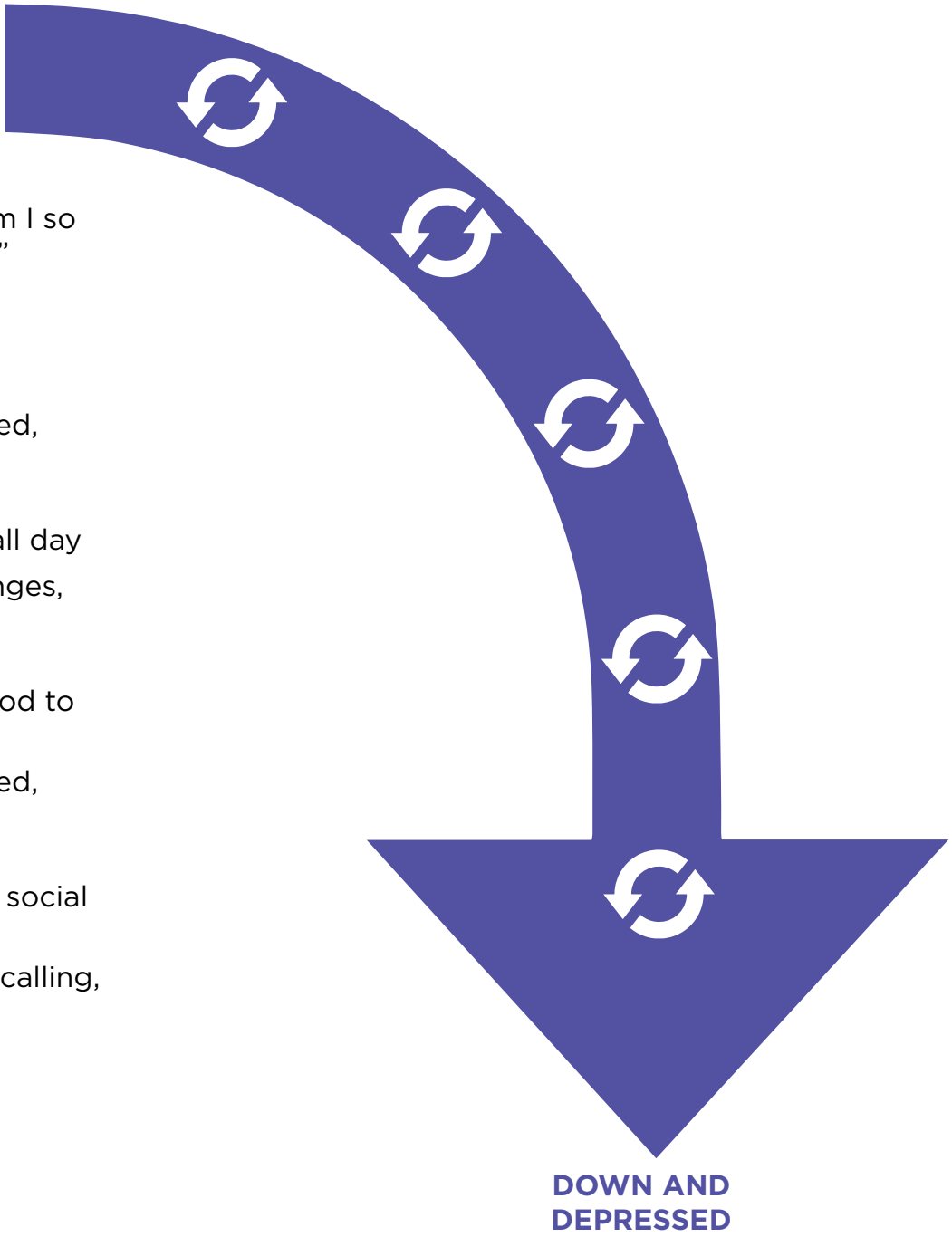
Although there are many different things that can contribute to becoming depressed in the first place, once you become depressed, depression can feel like it takes on a life of its own, making it more difficult for you to do the things you would normally do to help yourself feel better. The way to break out of this cycle is by changing your daily behaviors, a little bit at a time.

CHAPTER TWO

The Depression Cycle

The diagram below gives the example of a 45-year old Persian Gulf Army veteran, Carlos, who was laid off and has become depressed. Read through this diagram carefully and see if you notice anything that is similar to your experiences of depression.

Diagram modified with permission from Veale (2008).



CHAPTER TWO

How has your behavior changed since you became depressed? What have you stopped doing? List those things here.

Since you became depressed, are there any negative or unhelpful things you have started doing? What are those things?

How has this changed your life? What are the consequences of these behaviors?

CHAPTER TWO

The Recovery Cycle

Carlos, with help from his VA clinician and this workbook, gradually worked on changing his depressed behaviors to more positive behaviors even when he didn't feel like doing those things at first. He was able to break the negative depression cycle he was in:

Diagram modified with permission from Veale (2008).

REACHING MY GOALS!

Behavior: Spend time with a friend.

Consequence: End up enjoying self, get suport from friend.

Behavior: Work toward life goals.

Consequence: Feek hopeful and purposeful.

Behavior: Eat healthy and exercise.

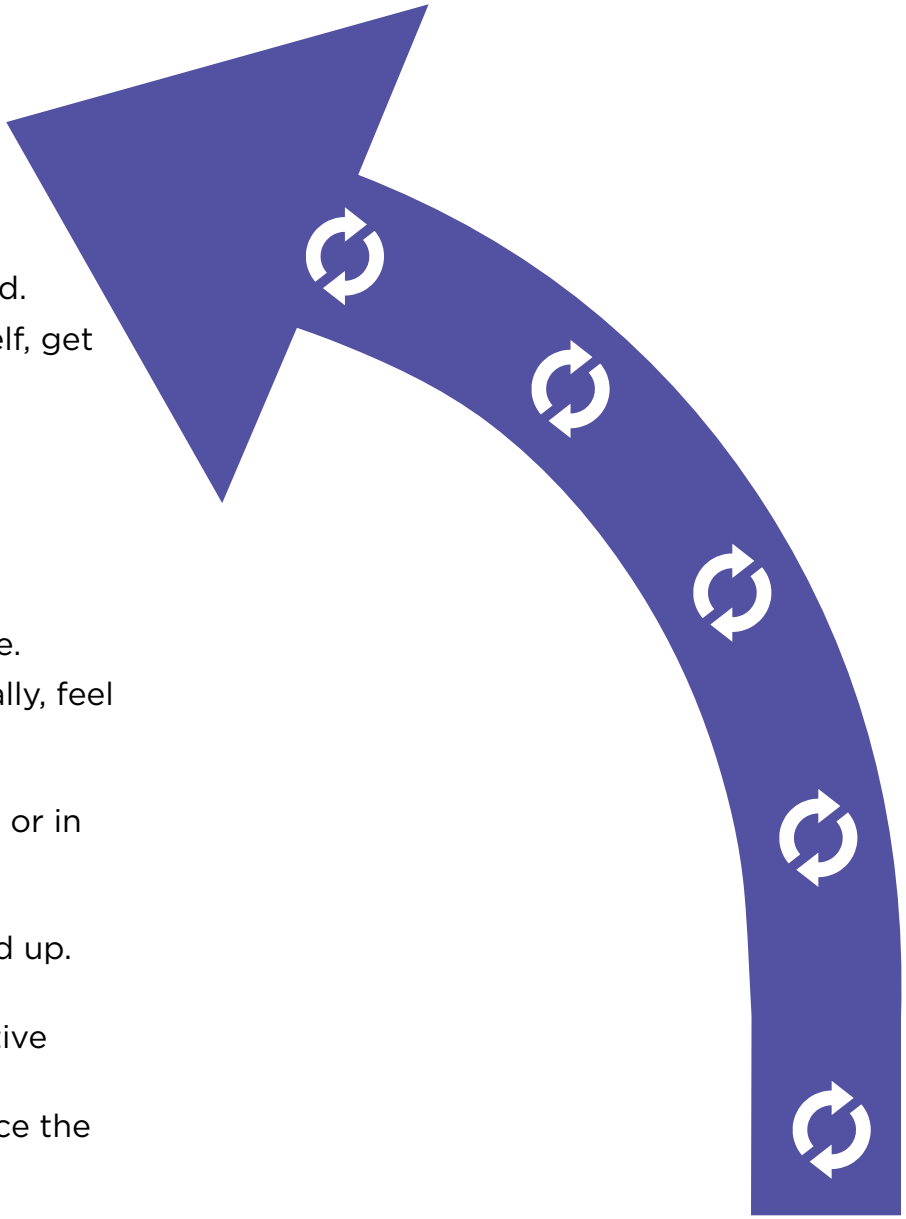
Consequence: Feel better physically, feel proud of self.

Behavior: Work around the house or in yard despite being tired.

Consequence: Feel a sense of accomlishment, things are cleaned up.

Behavior: Distract self from negative thoughts by taking a walk.

Consequence: Feel peaceful, notice the beauty of nature.



You can take back control

So you can see that depressed behaviors can cause negative consequences, setting up a cycle that makes depression symptoms worse. Positive behaviors and working towards life goals can lead to feelings and experiences that reduce depression. The important point here is that, even though it can be hard, you have the ability to do things that can reduce your depression.

Keep in mind that:

1. Doing enjoyable and goal-directed activities can improve your mood because you enjoy doing them.
2. Successfully reaching life goals can lead to a sense of accomplishment, even for activities that might not be enjoyable in the moment (for example, exercise).
3. Short term improvements in mood can give you a "leg up" for more challenging goals and even greater rewards in the future, like the upward spiral Carlos found himself in.

The best place to start working on depression, then, is changing the behaviors in your life that may be increasing your negative mood. Behaviors are linked to thoughts and feelings, so once you start changing your behavior, you are likely to see that your thoughts and feelings change, too.

One reason people with depression don't start making these changes is that they may be thinking:

- "I just don't have the energy to do anything."
- "I'll be able to make these changes when I'm not depressed anymore."
- "I don't want to burden my friends with my negative mood, so I'll just stay home and visit with them when I'm feeling better."
- "Why should I bother making changes...nothing will ever really help."

Essentially, they say to themselves, "I need to feel better FIRST, then I can start changing my behavior."

What do you say to yourself about putting off changes?

Putting off changes can feel right in the moment, but the problem is that if you wait to start making changes, you may be waiting for a while. And while you are waiting, you may find yourself in the negative cycle of depression where it gets harder and harder to begin making changes. Instead, if you begin to make changes now, you may begin to feel less depressed. If you feel less depressed, then you may be more likely to continue making healthy changes in your life. It can feel overwhelming to make many changes at once—and you don't have to. Remember, any small change or increase in activity is good.

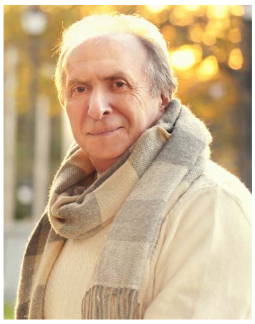
So far we've discussed how changing your behaviors might lead to positive consequences in your life and your moods. In the next few chapters, we will learn about how to start doing that despite your depression.

CHAPTER THREE

Keeping Track of Your Daily Activities

In this chapter, you will start keeping track of your daily activities and your moods. Doing this can help you discover:

1. The relationships between your behavior and your mood.
2. What kind of changes you might benefit from.
3. What types of activities most improve your mood.
4. Particular times, days, or situations that are stressful and lead to negative mood.



Meet **DAVE**, a Vietnam veteran in his 60s, who is disabled because of a back injury. He lives alone, does not work, and although he used to have some neighborhood acquaintances he spent time with, lately he has avoided most social activities. Dave kept track of his activities and how much he enjoyed them for one day. Read through and see if you notice how Dave's mood was connected to his activities.

Time	What I did	Enjoyment Rating (1-10)
5-6AM	Asleep	2
6-7AM	Lay in bed, thinking about how depressed I am	1
7-8AM	Lay on couch, watch TV	2
8-9AM		
9-10AM	Dog climbs up on me, play with dog	4
10-11AM	Play games online	2
11-12PM		
12-1PM	Take a shower	3
1-2PM	Eat lunch, junk food	2
2-3PM	Watch TV on couch	2
3-4PM		
4-5PM	Fell asleep on couch	1
5-6PM	No energy to cook dinner, order and eat pizza	1
6-7PM	Walk down to mailbox to get mail, let dog out	3
7-8PM	Watch TV	2
8-9PM		
9-10PM		
10-12PM	Asleep	2
12-1AM	Lay in bed trying to sleep	1
1AM-4AM	Asleep	2

CHAPTER THREE

Assessing Dave's Activities

After completing the Daily Activity Log for a few days, Dave noticed that his mood was the highest when he was playing with his dog. His mood was also a bit better when he took a shower and went to his mailbox to get the mail. His lowest mood was generally when he was lying in bed trying to fall back asleep or just thinking about his depression.

Dave's Positive Mood Activities:

- ✓ Playing with dog
- ✓ Taking a shower
- ✓ Getting the mail

Begin Tracking Your Own Activities

Now, it's your turn to begin keeping track of your activities and moods. On the next page is a blank copy of a Daily Activity Log. The first column has the time of day. In the second column, write down what you did during that time. In the last column, rate your enjoyment of the activity on a scale of 1 (not at all enjoyable) to 10 (very enjoyable). Keep track of your activities for several days, including some weekdays and some weekend days. There are extra tracking forms at the end of this book.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

(not at all enjoyable) (very enjoyable)

Then come back to this workbook and answer the following questions based on what you noticed. Try to record your activities every few hours so you remember what your activities were. To help you remember, put it in a place that you will see it, like on your refrigerator or on the bathroom mirror. If it's too overwhelming to fill out throughout the day, another option is to set aside some time each night to fill it out. Even if you forget to fill it out sometimes, do the best you can.

- ✓ Track Daily Activities
- ✓ Answer Questions
- ✓ Determine Enjoyable Activities

DAILY ACTIVITY LOG

Not Enjoyable at all

Very Enjoyable

Time	What I did	My enjoyment on a scale of 0-10
5 AM-6AM		
6AM-7AM		
7AM-8AM		
8AM-9AM		
9AM-10AM		
10AM-11AM		
11AM-12PM		
1PM-2PM		
2PM-3PM		
3PM-4PM		
4PM-5PM		
5PM-6PM		
6PM-7PM		
7PM-8PM		
8PM-9PM		
9PM-10PM		
10PM-11PM		
11PM-12AM		
12AM-1AM		
1AM-2AM		
2AM-3AM		
3AM-4AM		
4AM-5AM		

CHAPTER THREE

Activity Log Questions

After you have kept track of your activities and how much you enjoyed them for several days, answer the following questions:

1. What activities did you rate as more enjoyable?

2. What activities did you rate as less enjoyable?

3. Are there any times of day, days of the week, or situations where your enjoyment ratings are higher or lower?

4. Based upon what you learned from this, what kind of changes do you think it might be helpful to make?

If you were able to come up with a change that might be helpful, keep that in mind for the next chapter where we will talk about setting goals. If not, move on to the next chapter where we will discuss more ideas for positive changes you might work on.

CHAPTER FOUR

Pleasant Activities

In this chapter, we will discuss bringing more pleasant activities into your life. Pleasant activities can be big things like going to a party or traveling, or small things like taking a walk, enjoying a cup of coffee, or calling a family member on the phone. At the beginning, you may have a hard time coming up with things you enjoy doing, but answer these questions below to help you think more about it:

What activities are you doing lately that you enjoy?

What enjoyable activities have you given up doing because of depression?

What kind of activities would you like to try but never have?

If you're having trouble coming up with ideas, read through the checklist on the next page and mark off activities that you might enjoy, or used to enjoy.

CHAPTER FOUR

Check off the activities you are interested in:

Outdoors:	
Taking a walk	
Visiting a park	
Hiking	
Fishing	
Hunting	
Gardening or yard work	
Boating	
Camping	
Playing golf	
Listening to the sounds of nature	

Working on Health:	
Attending a therapy group at the VA	
Attending a Vet Center support group www2.va.gov/directory/guide/vetcenter.asp	
Exercising (Ask your doctor for a referral to a local VA gym)	
Taking an exercise class at a gym	
Cooking a healthy meal	

At Home:	
Working on home improvement project	
Cooking or baking	
Washing the car	
Working on car	
Re-arranging furniture or decorating	
Restoring old furniture or building your own furniture	
Collecting things	
Playing with a pet	

Entertainment:	
Playing cards or games with friends	
Playing bingo	
Going to a concert	
Going to a musical, play or comedy	
Going to a sporting event	
Going to the movies	
Going dancing	

Social events:	
Visiting family or friends	
Going to a party or gathering	
Inviting a friend or relative to dinner	
Talking with a fellow Veteran at the VA	

Taking Care of Yourself:	
Getting a haircut	
Listening to music	
Doing a hobby	
Taking a bath	
Writing in a journal	
Meditating	

Education, Learning, or Art:	
Learning something new (musical instrument, language, or skill)	
Doing something artistic (painting, pottery)	
Reading a book	
Taking an art or computer class	
Writing stories, novels, etc.	
Creating your own webpage	

Helping Others:	
Volunteering at the VA or other places http://www.volunteer.va.gov/	
Charity work	
Doing favors for others	
Helping or talking to someone	
Giving gifts	

Religious Activities	
Going to a place of worship	
Attending a prayer group	
Reading religious books	

Treats:	
Eating your favorite meal	
Drinking a cup of coffee or tea	

CHAPTER FOUR

Setting SMART Goals

Now that you've got some ideas for positive activities to add into your life, you're ready to begin setting some goals. Your goals should be SMART!

Specific – say exactly what you want to do

Measurable – have a way to figure out whether you've achieved your goal or not

Achievable – be realistic--don't aim too high or too low

Relevant – your goal should really matter to you

Timely – set a deadline for finishing your goal

For example, these goals have been changed into SMART goals:

ORIGINAL GOAL	Try to spend time organizing my baseball memorabilia.	Exercise more.
SMART GOAL	On Saturday morning, I will spend 1 hour organizing the baseball memorabilia I have on the top shelf of the den.	I will take a 15-minute walk around the neighborhood three mornings a week.

It's helpful to begin with small, easy goals. Just as a train is slow to start up but gains speed as it's moving, achieving smaller, easier goals at the start will provide "momentum" that will help keep you going.

The key is that your goal should represent a small improvement over what you are currently doing. It is easy to want to do too much at first or try to immediately get back to what you could do before you were depressed. For example, maybe when you were not depressed, you were getting out of bed and showering every morning. Now, you are lucky if you do this twice a week. So, you could start by setting a goal of getting out of bed and showering by 10AM three days out of the week. Then, the following week you can increase it.

As another example, perhaps before you were depressed, you spent a few hours each week doing a hobby. Now you have not done it for many months at all. Don't expect yourself to get back to where you were immediately. Perhaps spending just 15 minutes this week doing the hobby would be a good place to start. The goal is for you to pick goals that represent small improvements and will be slightly challenging, but not so challenging that you won't do them.

Overall, the important thing is that you are picking a specific activity you want to try, and you're setting a specific goal for how often and how long you will do it. Try setting some SMART goals to get yourself doing more enjoyable activities over the next week.

My Goals for the Next Week

Easiest Goal:

Medium Goal:

Hardest Goal:

Remember: The more you work on your goals, the more improvement in your mood and life you are likely to see.

CHAPTER FOUR

Let's return to **DAVE**. Remember that he noticed in his Daily Activity Log that he enjoyed playing with his dog, taking a shower, and walking out to his mailbox. He decided to set these SMART goals:

Easiest Goal: Play with dog for 10 minutes five days a week

Medium Goal: Take shower by 10AM three days this week

Hardest Goal: Take dog for a 15-minute walk every evening

Another example is **KEISHA**, a 27-year old Marine who had served in Afghanistan. Keisha worked full-time and was a single mom to 3 and 5 year old boys. She often felt overwhelmed by all of her responsibilities at work and home and rarely had any time to herself to do hobbies or see her friends. When she was in the military, she was working on her college degree but after being discharged and getting divorced she had dropped out. She hated her office job and was disappointed that she had to give up her goal of becoming a physical therapist, but she felt that she just didn't have time in her schedule to continue.

When she started this program, she wasn't sure how it could help her. She thought, "I don't have time to do hobbies! I barely have time to cook dinner every night." Her psychiatrist helped her think about activities that both she and her sons might enjoy together, or ways that she could get more time for herself. Keisha realized that one thing she missed was having time to spend with other adults. Most of her friends didn't have children and she didn't have the money to pay for a babysitter to go out with her friends on weekends.

KEISHA'S SMART GOALS:

Easiest Goal: Read a book on lunch break at work Mon & Wed.

Medium Goal: Take sons swimming on Saturday afternoon

Hardest Goal: Invite a mom from son's daycare to a playdate

CHAPTER FOUR

Barriers to Reaching Your Goals

It's also important to think about possible barriers that might get in the way of working on the goal that you set. Imagine yourself doing the activity. For example, you set a goal of going to the library to check out some books. Think about doing this for a minute. Where are you? Where is the library? How are you feeling? What is the first step you have to take to start this? Then what? The more you can walk yourself through doing the activity right now in your mind, the more your ideas about barriers will be realistic and helpful. Perhaps things like your physical health or not having a car might make it difficult for you to get to the library. To work around these, you might ask a family member to drive you or call ahead to ask the librarian to reserve books so you don't need to walk around the library for long periods of time.

Spend a minute thinking through the goals and barriers. Then complete this chart, listing each of the three goals you set on page 20 as well as the possible barriers and solutions for each goal:

Goal	SMART Goal	Barriers	Solutions to Barriers
Example: Get books from library	Go Wednesday afternoon, on way home from Vet Center	Will feel tired	Reserve books online ahead of time so that they will be waiting for me at the front desk

For more ideas on ways to overcome barriers, look ahead to Chapter 8. For ideas about enlisting the help of others, look ahead to Chapter 9.

Now that you've set some goals, use the worksheet on the next page each day to keep track of whether you spent time working on your goals, doing pleasant activities, and how you enjoyed your activities.

CHAPTER FOUR

Assessing Your Progress

Did you meet the goals that you set earlier?

Easiest Goal:	Yes	Somewhat	No
Medium Goal:	Yes	Somewhat	No
Hardest Goal:	Yes	Somewhat	No

YES

1.How did you get yourself to do it?

2.Think about your mood. What was it like when you were working on your goal? What was it like when you met your goal?

3.How did it make you feel about yourself to do that?

4.Congratulate yourself! Move on to the next chapter.

NO

1. If you did not meet your goal, what got in the way?

2. How could you work around what got in your way so that you could meet your goal?

3. Do you think you need to change your goal to make it easier or to better fit with what you want to get done?

4. Give yourself another week to work on the goals you have set for this chapter before moving on to the next chapter.

Tracking My Progress on My Goals

	What did I do to work on a goal today?	**How much did I enjoy working on it?** 0 (not at all) to 4 (very much)
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		
Saturday		
Sunday		

At the end of the week, use the "Assessing Your Progress" worksheet on the previous page.

CHAPTER FIVE

Living According to Your Values

Values are things that are personally meaningful to you. To identify your most important values, ask yourself "What do I want other people to remember about me? As I get older, what do I want to be able to look back at my life and be proud of?" For example, some people identify being a good friend as an important value. Others identify religion or spirituality as an important value. Each person has their own set of values, so there's no right or wrong answer to this question.

Below is a chart that contains a list of possible life values people may have. Reading through the values in the first column, think about each area and how important it is to you. Pick the value that is most important to you, and put a one next to it in the first blank column. Then pick the next most important value and put a 2 next to it. Rank each value according to how important it is to you. If a value is not important to you at all or doesn't apply to you (for example, if you are not a parent, the value "parenting" may not apply), then cross it off.

Next, go to the right-hand column. Ask yourself, "how am I doing in this area? Am I living the way I want to in this area? Am I satisfied with what I am doing in terms of this value?" Rate each area on a scale of 1 (need a lot of work) to 5 (doing great in this area).

Value	**Importance** 1 = Most important 9 = Least important	**How I am doing** 1 = need a lot of work 5 = doing great in this area
Relationship with Significant Other		
Parenting		
Relationships With Other Family members		
Relationships With Friends		
Education/Personal Growth		
Work/Productivity		
Community/ Giving back/Helping others		
Religion/Spirituality		
Health		
Other:		

CHAPTER FIVE

Pick 1 or 2 areas that are both important and need some work. What are they?

1)_____

_____

2)_____

_____

Think about how you would like these areas to change. What would you like to be different about these areas?

1)_____

_____

2)_____

_____

Think about what you can do differently to improve these areas of your life. Try to come up with as many ideas as you can.

For example:

- *If you want closer relationships with family members, you could call them more often or spend more time with them doing things you both enjoy*
- *If you want to improve your health, you could try to eat more fruits and vegetables*
- *If you want to work on religion/spirituality, you could spend more time praying or attending services*

Now, set some SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Timely) goals. For example, if one thing you wrote down above was "Spend more time with my elderly parent" a specific goal might be *"Visit my mother twice a month for Sunday lunch."* Write down your specific goals here.

Goal	SMART Goal	Barriers	Solutions to Barriers
Spend more time with my elderly parent.	Visit my mother twice a month for Sunday lunch.	Spending time in the nursing home is depressing, makes me want to avoid it.	Take mother out to lunch at a restaurant.

CHAPTER FIVE

DAVE had set goals of playing with his dog, showering, and taking his dog for a walk. By this time, he was starting to notice that he looked forward to these activities and enjoyed following through on his goals.

In completing the values assessment, Dave realized that his most valued life areas were religion/spirituality and parenting. However, he had not been doing much to work on these areas lately.

Easiest: Spend 30 minutes looking up local churches online to see if I might like any of them

Medium: Attend one church service on Sunday to see if I like it

Hardest: Offer to take my grandson fishing this weekend

KEISHA was also starting to notice some improvements. Although she did not complete all of her goals last week, she was proud of the progress she made. She had taken her sons swimming on Saturday afternoon and enjoyed it. She hadn't invited a potential friend on a playdate, so she set that as a goal for the next week. In completing the values assessment, Keisha rated education and helping others as her top values. Remember that Keisha dropped out of college after she divorced because she needed to work full time and raise her sons.

After doing the values assessment, she realized that she really wanted to go back to college and become a physical therapist. She decided to look into options for online classes that she could work on in the evenings after her sons were asleep. She worried that she would only be able to take one class per semester, but she hoped that if she was able to get GI Bill benefits she might eventually be able to go back to school full time.

Tracking My Progress on My Goals

	What did I do to work on a goal today?	**How much did I enjoy working on it?** 0 (not at all) to 4 (very much)
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		
Saturday		
Sunday		

At the end of the week, use the "Assessing Your Progress" worksheet on the next page.

CHAPTER FIVE

Assessing Your Progress

Did you meet the goals that you set earlier?

Easiest Goal:	Yes	Somewhat	No
Medium Goal:	Yes	Somewhat	No
Hardest Goal:	Yes	Somewhat	No

YES

1.How did you get yourself to do it?

2.Think about your mood. What was it like when you were working on your goal? What was it like when you met your goal?

3.How did it make you feel about yourself to do that?

4.Congratulate yourself! Move on to the next chapter.

NO

1. If you did not meet your goal, what got in the way?

2. How could you work around what got in your way so that you could meet your goal?

3. Do you think you need to change your goal to make it easier or to better fit with what you want to get done?

4. Give yourself another week to work on the goals you have set for this chapter before moving on to the next chapter.

CHAPTER SIX

Activities That Give You a Sense of Accomplishment

Earlier, we discussed how when a person starts becoming depressed they may start procrastinating on things that need to be done, like yard work, cleaning, paying the bills, or projects at work. The negative consequences of this kind of procrastination include feeling guilty and upset about not getting anything done, which can feed into negative thoughts and feelings about yourself. In this chapter, we're going to talk about increasing activities that break this cycle of procrastination and contribute to a sense of accomplishment or purpose.

For example, even something like washing the dishes piling up in the sink can give you a sense of accomplishment—you worked on an unpleasant task, finished it, and now you have a clean sink and dishes. Larger tasks like remodeling a bathroom or working hard on a big project at work may even help improve self-esteem.

These tasks don't need to be things that you enjoy, and often these are things that you DON'T enjoy right at the moment you start doing them—but they are tasks that still need to be done. Give yourself a small reward (nice meal, a small purchase you've been wanting to make), or a "pat on the back" if you do work on one of these goals. What could you reward yourself with?

Choose Your Tasks

Start thinking about tasks you've been avoiding or procrastinating on, whether it's cleaning, yard work, paying bills, exercise, doing tasks at work, making phone calls, or any other type of everyday task. Also think about things that might contribute to your personal growth like learning to play an instrument or speak a new language, taking on a challenging new task at work, or going back to school. What are the things that you could be working on? What kinds of things have you been avoiding?

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

CHAPTER SIX

Think back to **KEISHA**. She had always enjoyed working out and had been very physically fit when she was in the military, but stopped working out after she was discharged. She set her next goal of working out three times a week. She found that the local YMCA had a gym, childcare for her sons, and a financial assistance program for membership. The first week, she forced herself to go to the gym as she promised, but didn't really enjoy it. She felt tired and sore and frustrated that she was so out of shape compared to when she was in the military.

When she came back to the VA the following week, she discussed her experience with her psychiatrist. He reminded her that working on long term goals might not always seem enjoyable in the short term, but may be worth it in the end. Keisha's psychiatrist asked her to list all the consequences of exercising and not exercising, and this is what she came up with:

GOAL: Exercising 3 times a week

Short Term Consequences:

- Feel tired/sore
- Reminds me of how out of shape I am, not like I used to be in the military

Long Term Consequences:

- Start enjoying it, feel proud
- Get healthier
- Lose Weight
- Have more energy

Short Term Consequences:

- Feel relieved to not go to gym
- Watch TV instead
- Feel guilty for not exercising

Long Term Consequences:

- NOTHING CHANGES
- Feel like I gave up
- Depression doesn't improve

After several weeks, she started noticing that she didn't get so out of breath anymore and she started looking forward to her evenings at the gym. Eventually, she noticed that she felt calmer and more positive after exercising. Over the next few months as she continued adding more positive activities in her life and working toward her goals, she noticed that her mood gradually improved.

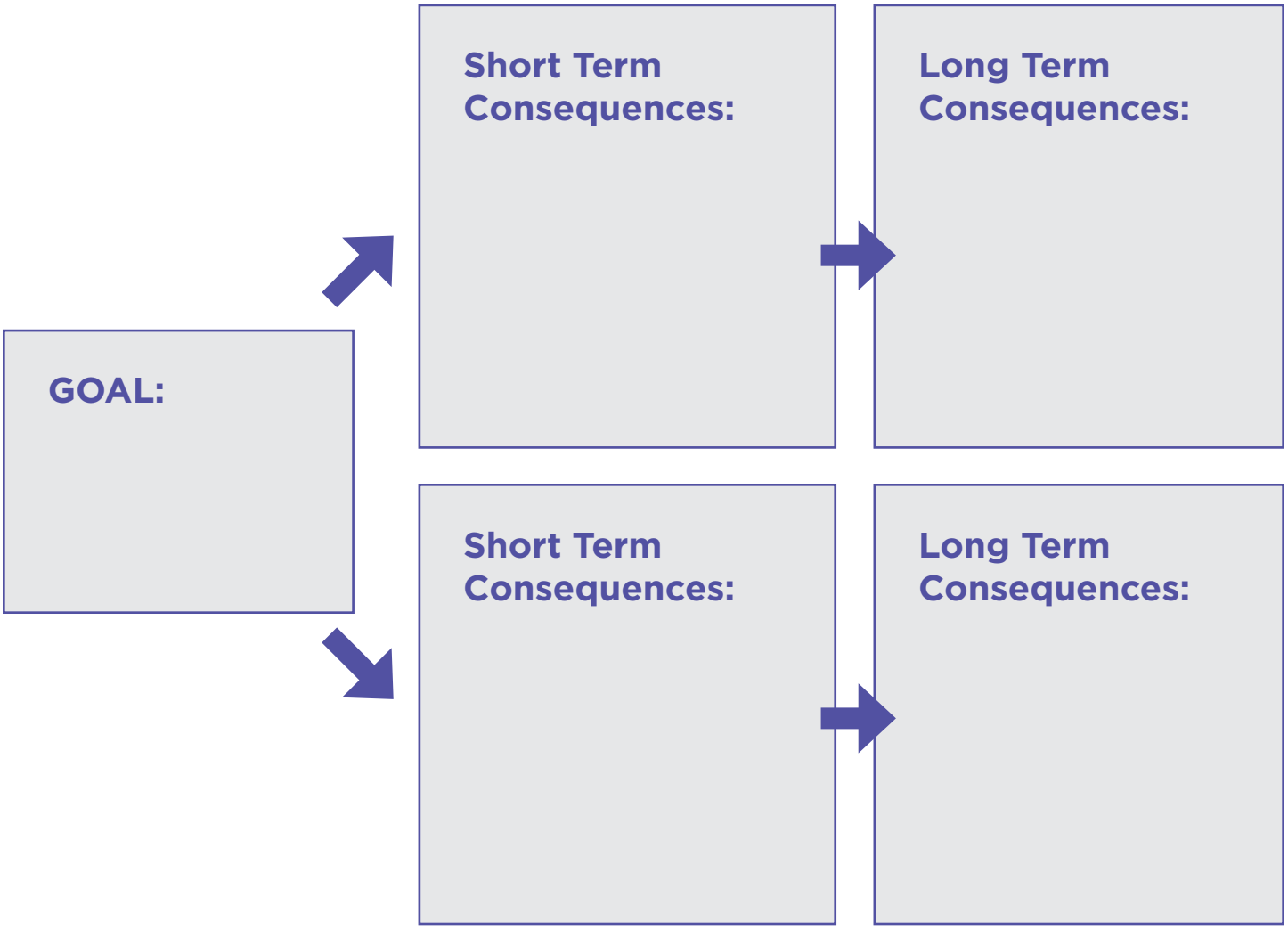
CHAPTER SIX

Short and Long Term Consequences

One reason you might have gotten into the cycle of procrastination is that many of these tasks are unpleasant or difficult in the short term. However, working on them often has really important long-term benefits.

You may have a similar experience with this program. Any kind of change can be difficult, and it can be especially difficult when you're depressed and your goals are not immediately rewarding. List the short and long term consequences of the goals you've set. This can help you keep in mind not only how you feel currently, but where you are heading in the future.

Next, let's start thinking about the reasons for working on your goals. Come up with one goal that will help you feel like you've accomplished something. Make sure it's a SMART goal (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Timely). Complete the diagram below for that goal:



Importance of Goals

After thinking about the short and long-term consequences of working on your goal, how important do you think it is to work on your goal? Why?

Set SMART Goals

Next, set goals. What do you think is realistic for you to accomplish over the next week? Be specific--remember to make SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and timely) goals, and start with easier goals first. Complete the goals and barriers worksheet below:

Goal	SMART Goal	Barriers	Solutions to Barriers
Example: Wash dishes	Spend 10 minutes three times a week washing dishes	Feeling overwhelmed by the mess	Tell myself "the only way to get rid of the mess is to work on it. I'll get there one step at a time."

CHAPTER SIX

Let's check in again on **DAVE**. During the past month, Dave attended several new churches and found one where he really enjoyed the pastor's sermons and he could participate in the parish by becoming a greeter. Dave also took his grandson out fishing, and although he felt a little overwhelmed as he was planning their day, he found he really enjoyed himself once they were spending time together.

Dave decided that it was time to add to his list of activities by beginning to work on tasks that he'd been avoiding doing around the house. He had not washed dishes for the past week or mowed the lawn for two weeks. In addition, Dave was avoiding anything related to some outstanding bills that he couldn't pay: he avoided getting the mail in case he might receive another bill, he avoided answering the phone because he worried it would be a collection agency, and he avoided paying his bills because he knew he didn't have the money to pay them in full. The stress of his financial problems was making him miserable and he decided that the only way to manage that stress was to call his credit card company to ask if they would be willing to work out a payment plan with him. Although he hated making phone calls and especially hated thinking about his financial problems, he decided that the long term consequences of avoiding it altogether were a lot worse than the stress of making an unpleasant phone call—and if the credit card company refused to work with him, he reasoned, at least he wouldn't be any worse off than he is right now.

Dave set these new goals for himself for the following week:

Easiest: Wash dishes for 10 minutes, three times per week

Medium: Mow the lawn this Saturday

Hardest: Call the credit card company Monday

Now spend the next week working on your goals. Each day, complete the "Tracking My Progress" worksheet on the next page.

Tracking My Progress on My Goals

	What did I do to work on a goal today?	**How much did I enjoy working on it?** 0 (not at all) to 4 (very much)
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		
Saturday		
Sunday		

At the end of the week, use the "Assessing Your Progress" worksheet on the next page.

CHAPTER SIX

Assessing Your Progress

Did you meet the goals that you set earlier?

Easiest Goal:	Yes	Somewhat	No
Medium Goal:	Yes	Somewhat	No
Hardest Goal:	Yes	Somewhat	No

YES

1.How did you get yourself to do it?

2.Think about your mood. What was it like when you were working on your goal? What was it like when you met your goal?

3.How did it make you feel about yourself to do that?

4.Congratulate yourself! Move on to the next chapter.

NO

1. If you did not meet your goal, what got in the way?

2. How could you work around what got in your way so that you could meet your goal?

3. Do you think you need to change your goal to make it easier or to better fit with what you want to get done?

4. Give yourself another week to work on the goals you have set for this chapter before moving on to the next chapter.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Activity Scheduling

By this point, you have worked on increasing three kinds of activities:

- Enjoyable, pleasant activities
- Activities that fit with your life values
- Activities that give you a sense of accomplishment.

You may have met many of your goals for increasing these three types of activities. To keep yourself moving forward with these changes, we recommend that you make a schedule for working on your goals. This is important for several reasons:

1. Setting a specific time for an activity will help you accomplish it. Otherwise, it's too easy to put off working on your goals.
2. Setting a routine or a schedule can be helpful for following through on your goals. For many people with depression, it can be difficult to get motivated at first. When you have a schedule set ahead of time, you can follow it to help get you moving in the right direction.

Start making a schedule or "to-do list" of goals for yourself today. No goal is too small! Put down everything you want to accomplish, like "cook dinner" or "get the mail." Then check off each goal that you work on.

My Plan for Today:

Time	What I plan to do	Did I meet my Goal?

Try to stick as closely to your plan or schedule as possible. Continue working on your goals and keeping track of your activities. Below are extra copies of the "My plan for today" form so that you can keep planning goals for each day over the next week.

CHAPTER SEVEN

My Plan for Today:

Time	What I plan to do	Did I meet my Goal?

My Plan for Today:

Time	What I plan to do	Did I meet my Goal?

CHAPTER SEVEN

Assessing Your Progress

After a few days working on your goals, stop and assess your progress.

Did you meet the goals that you set earlier?

Easiest Goal:	Yes	Somewhat	No
Medium Goal:	Yes	Somewhat	No
Hardest Goal:	Yes	Somewhat	No

YES

1.How did you get yourself to do it?

2.Think about your mood. What was it like when you were working on your goal? What was it like when you met your goal?

3.How did it make you feel about yourself to do that?

4.Congratulate yourself! Move on to the next chapter.

NO

1. If you did not meet your goal, what got in the way?

2. How could you work around what got in your way so that you could meet your goal?

3. Do you think you need to change your goal to make it easier or to better fit with what you want to get done?

4. Give yourself another week to work on the goals you have set for this chapter before moving on to the next chapter.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Barriers and Troubleshooting

There are quite a few things that can get in the way of achieving your goals, but just about anything can be overcome with effort and finding the right kind of help. Below are some common problems Veterans have with completing more positive and meaningful activities and potential solutions. These are just some ideas to get you started. You or your clinician might also have more ideas about solutions.

PROBLEM: I can't think of anything I might enjoy doing.

SOLUTION: This may be the depression talking. Your depression can make you feel like *nothing* would be enjoyable. You might not enjoy something the first time you try it, but as you keep working on it, you may notice you're enjoying things more. You can try many different types of things to find the ones you like best. Also, remember that this workbook is not just about doing pleasant activities but also about spending time doing meaningful life activities that move you closer to your goals and values.

PROBLEM: I can't do anything because I have no motivation and am too depressed.

SOLUTION: The first step in changing your mood is changing your behavior. If you wait until you are feeling better to do more enjoyable activities and work towards your goals, you may never start. Flip back to the diagram on pages 8–10 to remind yourself that some behaviors can increase depression while others decrease it. Go back to your activity and mood tracking sheets from Chapter 3 to remind yourself how your mood changed when you were doing enjoyable activities vs. when you weren't. Go back to page 32 and list out the short and long term consequences of doing these activities.

Some other tips:

- Start with a small, easy task and gradually work your way up to more challenging activities.
- Commit to doing the activity for 10 minutes only. Usually once you get started, it seems much easier and more enjoyable.
- Everyone has had times when they have trouble getting started with something. Ask yourself "When I've had trouble in the past getting started with an activity, what has helped me?"
- Ask a friend or family member for help in working on your goals (see chapter nine).

CHAPTER EIGHT

PROBLEM: My physical health, disability, or chronic pain interferes with doing activities.

SOLUTION: Several things have been shown to be helpful for Veterans with these problems:

- Talk to your doctor about whether physical therapy or medication might help.
- Pace yourself. Avoiding all physical activity often makes chronic pain or health problems worse. On the other hand, "overdoing it" will make you feel a lot worse the next day. Instead, figure out how much activity you can handle before you overdo it.
- Take breaks during activities and break activities down into smaller pieces that can be done at different times.
- Ask others for help doing activities that are difficult.
- Find alternative activities that do not require as much physical effort. For example:

INSTEAD OF: →	TRY THIS
Playing catch with my grandkids	Reading a book to my grandkids
Playing basketball with fellow Vets	Going fishing with fellow Vets

PROBLEM: Not having enough money gets in the way of doing activities.

SOLUTION: Brainstorm free or low-cost activities, such as:

- Having a cup of coffee with a neighbor
- Going to the library to take out books, use a computer, or sign up for a computer class
- Going to a museum, zoo, or other cultural center--many have free admission days
- Connecting with other vets online, at a site like http://maketheconnection.net/ or www.woundedwarriorproject.org
- Volunteering at the VA or an organization like the Disabled American Veterans (your local DAV may also offer van rides to the VA for appointments if you can't drive yourself)

PROBLEM: I don't have a car or money for gas to go places away from home.

SOLUTION: Think about activities that can be done at home or nearby.

- Calling a friend on the phone
- Starting to write a journal
- Taking a walk around the neighborhood
- Playing a card game or board game
- Cleaning or organizing your home
- Contacting your local VA to see if you qualify for travel assistance to medical appointments at the VA

PROBLEM: I think I would be less depressed if I could work, but I can't find a job.

SOLUTION: Consider the following solutions:

- Contact your local VA, regional office, or Vet Center to ask about resources
- Visit http://www.vetsuccess.gov/ for job searching tips and other resources
- Visit http://www.vetsuccess.gov/about_the_vre_program/ for more information about Vocational Rehabilitation, a service that can help Veterans with service connected disabilities find jobs
- Visit http://www.gibill.va.gov/ for information about the Post 9-11 GI Bill
- If you don't qualify for other employment or education programs through the VA and are between 35 and 60, visit http://benefits.va.gov/vow/education.htm for information on the Veterans Retraining Assistance Program

PROBLEM: I don't have time to do more pleasant or meaningful activities.

SOLUTION: This is a difficult problem and you may need some help to figure out some solutions. Bring this up at your next appointment with a VA clinician or ask a close friend or family member if they can help you problem-solve. For example:

- If you have a spouse or partner, ask if they are willing to help you find an extra hour per week to work on a hobby or goal. Some Veterans are reluctant to ask for help for fear of burdening a spouse. But it's likely that if you feel less depressed, your family will be happier as well.
- Think about your typical day. If you have limited time for relaxation, then you need to make sure you are using it in the best possible way. Are you are spending time napping, watching TV, playing on the internet or video games? If so, consider using some of this time to do more rewarding activities. If you spend an hour having lunch with a close friend or taking a walk in a park, you will probably enjoy that more than spending an hour watching TV on the couch.

- Brainstorm ways to include pleasant and meaningful activities along with your daily tasks and chores. For example, listening to books on tape while commuting to work, enjoying a cup of coffee while folding the laundry, or calling a friend on the phone while doing chores around the house.
- Are there any ways you could change your schedule or daily routines to be more efficient? For example, cooking larger meals so that you can eat leftovers the next night or running errands on your lunch break so that you're not stuck in long lines at stores on the weekends might help.
- Are you spending too much time taking care of others and neglecting your own needs? Do you need to say "no" more often when others ask you for favors or help? How could you prioritize working on the goals you set in this book rather than what other people ask you to do?

PROBLEM: I plan to do more positive activities but I keep forgetting to do them.

SOLUTION: Use reminder systems—"post-it" notes, a calendar, an alarm on your phone, or leaving an important object out in a place you will notice (for example, if you want to go fishing tomorrow, set your fishing pole by the front door so you will see it and remember). Commit to do an activity with friends so they will remind you. Ask a family member to remind you.

PROBLEM: I'm doing everything the workbook says and still not noticing any change in my depression.

SOLUTION:

- Ask yourself: How long have you been trying to get more active? Be patient with yourself, and try to notice and celebrate small improvements. Getting over depression and getting back on track can take time and persistence. Don't give up.
- Ask yourself: What is still missing in my life? I have gotten more active, but perhaps there is a big area that I still have not changed in yet. For example, perhaps I've become more social but I'm still not really looking for a job. Is there an area that I'm still really avoiding?
- Discuss this with your VA clinician.

CHAPTER NINE

Enlisting the Support of Friends and Family

Depression can get in the way of your relationships with other people. For example, depression can make you feel like isolating or staying away from people that you care about. Or depression can make you irritable and more likely to get into arguments. But other people can be a great resource to help you with depression.

- For many people, the first step is to tell your friend or family member that you are struggling with depression. Explain what symptoms you have when you get depressed or have them read the first two chapters in this workbook.
- Tell them about the changes you're trying to make—to get more active, do more positive activities, and work towards your goals. The more people you tell about your goals, the more likely you are to follow through with them.
- Friends or family may be glad to support you but may not know the right way to help. So it's up to you to tell them specific ways they can help you.

Ask Friends and Family to:

- Do pleasant activities with you
- Invite you along when they have pleasant activities or outings planned
- Encourage you to do pleasant and meaningful activities even when you don't feel like it
- Help you find time to do more positive activities
- Problem-solve about how to work towards your goals
- Encourage you to talk about positive activities and goals rather than focusing on how bad you feel
- Be patient with you while you work on making these changes
- Take over one chore or task for you so that you have time to do a more positive activity

Keep in mind that these are just suggestions. Some people may want a spouse to remind them about working on goals, but other people may feel like this is nagging. The important part is that you think about what is most likely to help you move towards your goals and ask for help with that specific thing.

CHAPTER NINE

Here are things that are usually ***not*** helpful for friends and family to do:

- Criticize or blame you for being depressed.
- Take over all of your daily responsibilities for you. Remember, doing activities that give you a sense of accomplishment is an important part of overcoming depression. This can include simple household tasks like cooking dinner or paying bills.

Who could you ask for help?

What help would you like from them?

CHAPTER TEN

Putting It All Together

We've talked about increasing three kinds of activities:

1) Activities that are enjoyable or pleasant

2) Activities that work towards your values in life

3) Activities that make you feel like you've accomplished something

During this program, you have set goals and worked on each of these areas. Going forward from here, think about the following questions:

How have your daily activities changed since you started this program? What are you doing differently?

What kind of consequences have you noticed in your life?

How has your mood or depression changed since starting this program?

What have you learned about what kinds of things improve your depression?

CHAPTER TEN

Creating Goals for the Future

Knowing what you know about the relationship between your mood and your behavior, what goals are you going to keep working on after you complete this workbook?

My Future Goals

Easiest:

1) _____

2) _____

Medium:

3) _____

4) _____

Hardest:

5) _____

6) _____

Hopefully this book has given you some insight into your depression and skills to manage it. If you are still struggling with depressed mood at this point, speak to your VA clinician to discuss medications or a referral for counseling. Remember to keep working on your goals and to stay as active as possible in activities that you enjoy and think are meaningful and worthwhile.

The next few pages contain extra progress worksheets so that you can continue working on the goals you have set in this program. After awhile, you may find that you no longer need to continue using forms because you automatically use the ideas and skills you have learned in this workbook. If you notice that over the next few months you gradually stop being active and working towards your goals, you may benefit from re-reading this book again.

CHAPTER TEN

Tracking My Progress on My Goals

	What did I do to work on a goal today?	**How much did I enjoy working on it?** 0 (not at all) to 4 (very much)
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		
Saturday		
Sunday		

CHAPTER TEN

Tracking My Progress on My Goals

	What did I do to work on a goal today?	**How much did I enjoy working on it?** 0 (not at all) to 4 (very much)
Monday		
Tuesday		
Wednesday		
Thursday		
Friday		
Saturday		
Sunday		

CHAPTER TEN

DAILY ACTIVITY LOG

Not Enjoyable at all

Very Enjoyable

Time	What I did	My enjoyment on a scale of 0-10
5 AM-6AM		
6AM-7AM		
7AM-8AM		
8AM-9AM		
9AM-10AM		
10AM-11AM		
11AM-12PM		
1PM-2PM		
2PM-3PM		
3PM-4PM		
4PM-5PM		
5PM-6PM		
6PM-7PM		
7PM-8PM		
8PM-9PM		
9PM-10PM		
10PM-11PM		
11PM-12AM		
12AM-1AM		
1AM-2AM		
2AM-3AM		
3AM-4AM		
4AM-5AM		

CHAPTER TEN

DAILY ACTIVITY LOG

Not Enjoyable at all

Very Enjoyable

Time	What I did	My enjoyment on a scale of 0-10
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6AM-7AM		
7AM-8AM		
8AM-9AM		
9AM-10AM		
10AM-11AM		
11AM-12PM		
1PM-2PM		
2PM-3PM		
3PM-4PM		
4PM-5PM		
5PM-6PM		
6PM-7PM		
7PM-8PM		
8PM-9PM		
9PM-10PM		
10PM-11PM		
11PM-12AM		
12AM-1AM		
1AM-2AM		
2AM-3AM		
3AM-4AM		
4AM-5AM		

CHAPTER TEN

Assessing Your Progress

After a few days working on your goals, stop and assess your progress.

Did you meet the goals that you set earlier?

Easiest Goal:	Yes	Somewhat	No
Medium Goal:	Yes	Somewhat	No
Hardest Goal:	Yes	Somewhat	No

YES

1.How did you get yourself to do it?

2.Think about your mood. What was it like when you were working on your goal? What was it like when you met your goal?

3.How did it make you feel about yourself to do that?

4.Congratulate yourself! Move on to the next chapter.

NO

1. If you did not meet your goal, what got in the way?

2. How could you work around what got in your way so that you could meet your goal?

3. Do you think you need to change your goal to make it easier or to better fit with what you want to get done?

4. Give yourself another week to work on the goals you have set for this chapter before moving on to the next chapter.

CHAPTER TEN

Assessing Your Progress

After a few days working on your goals, stop and assess your progress.

Did you meet the goals that you set earlier?

Easiest Goal:	Yes	Somewhat	No
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YES

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4. Give yourself another week to work on the goals you have set for this chapter before moving on to the next chapter.

CHAPTER TEN

My Plan for Today:

Time	What I plan to do	Did I meet my Goal?

My Plan for Today:

Time	What I plan to do	Did I meet my Goal?

Veterans
Crisis Line
DIAL 988 then PRESS 1