



A four-session activity and mood group

An Everyday Insight tool
myactivityrecord.com



A facilitator guide for four sessions of behavioral activation, of 50 or 90 minutes each. Each session has its own handout.

What the series is for

Over four sessions, members see how their days actually go, find patterns, build a menu of activities, plan them into the week, and work out what to do when something gets in the way. It follows the usual order of behavioral activation: monitoring, then scheduling, then problem solving, then keeping it going.

How the sessions fit together

SESSION	FOCUS	WHAT HAPPENS
Session 1	A baseline	Yesterday hour by hour, then two more days logged at home.
Session 2	Patterns and the menu	What the logs show, a group menu, and two activities.
Session 3	What gets in the way	Last week's plans, one obstacle walked through, and a plan for the week.
Session 4	Keeping it going	A look back, a plan for low days, and next steps.

Each session stands on its own. Open every one with a two-minute recap of the cycle, so anyone who missed a session can take part. A newcomer can rebuild yesterday on the session 1 handout and join from there.

What you'll need

- That session's handout for each member. Session 1 is four pages, two of them for logging at home, and sessions 2 to 4 are two pages each.
- A few spare session 1 handouts for newcomers.
- Each session builds on the last, so ask members to keep their handouts, or collect them and hand them back.
- A whiteboard or flip chart.

Norms, every session

Set them out loud at the start of each session, in full the first time and briefly after that.

- **Nobody has to share.** Passing counts as full participation. Someone can do the whole activity silently and still get a great deal out of it.
- **No comparing days.** There's no better or worse day to bring. A day spent in bed is as useful to look at as a busy one.
- **No advice unless someone asks.** When a member describes a hard day, the urge is to tell them what would help. Hold it. Ask what they noticed instead.
- **What's said here stays here.** Say it anyway, since a log of someone's day can get personal. Be clear about the limits, too. You can't promise what other members will repeat, and you'll need to act if someone's safety is at risk.

Two ways in. Nobody ever has to show their page. In discussion, members can always talk about the process instead of the content, like what it was like to rate the hours, without saying what they did. Say so each session: "You never have to tell us what's on your page. If you want to talk, you can talk about what this was like."





Session 1: A baseline

50 MIN	90 MIN	STAGE	WHAT HAPPENS
5	10	Welcome and norms	A check-in, then the norms in full.
8	12	Activity and mood	The cycle, on the board.
15	20	Yesterday	Each member rebuilds yesterday hour by hour.
Skip	15	Pairs	Four minutes each on what they see.
15	20	Discussion	What it was like to look at a day this way.
7	13	Logging at home and close	Two days to log before next time.

Pairs are optional. Members can work alone. Session 1 asks for no change at all, only noticing. That keeps the first step easy and gives everyone something to work with in session 2.

SAY “When you feel low, you tend to do less. You skip the walk, put off the call, stay in. That makes sense in the moment, but doing less usually leaves you feeling worse, and then doing anything gets harder. It can work the other way too. Doing something that matters, even something small, often changes how a day feels. Today we’re going to look at how one day actually went.”

SAY “Pick one feeling to follow, like low, anxious, or calm. For each hour from when you woke up, write a few words about what you were doing and rate that feeling from 0 to 100. Blank hours are fine. You’re not grading the day. You’re just writing down what happened.”

Pleasure and mastery. They’re optional, and worth adding for groups that can handle a little more. Pleasure is how much someone enjoyed the hour. Mastery is how much it felt like an accomplishment, given how things are for them right now. Getting dressed on a hard morning can be high mastery. The two often point to activities the feeling column misses.

QUESTIONS FOR SESSION 1

- What was it like to look at a day hour by hour?
- What surprised you?
- Which hours were hardest to remember, and why do you think that is?

Logging at home. Ask members to log two more days on pages 3 and 4, on the day or the evening after. Logging as they go is more accurate than remembering, and two days are enough to start seeing patterns. Members who prefer a phone can use the Activity Record online or in the app.





Session 2: Patterns and the menu

50 MIN	90 MIN	STAGE	WHAT HAPPENS
8	10	Recap and check-in	The cycle in a minute, and how logging went.
12	20	Across your days	Patterns in the logs, alone and then in pairs.
15	25	The activity menu	A group list of things to do, sorted three ways.
10	25	Two activities	Each with a day, a time, and an if-then line.
5	10	Close	One plan each, said out loud.

Recap and check-in. Ask how logging went, not what was in it. Members who didn't log can rebuild yesterday quickly on a spare session 1 page.

What stands out. Keep it descriptive. Ask what was going on in the best and hardest hours. Avoid "you should," and let members draw their own conclusions. If someone says "I wasted the whole day," bring it back to noticing: "What do you see if you look at it as information?"

QUESTIONS FOR SESSION 2

- What do your days have in common?
- Which activities go with a better feeling, and which with a worse one?
- Where are your hardest hours?
- What's on the menu that you haven't done in a while?

The activity menu. On the board, make three columns: things people enjoy, things that bring a sense of accomplishment, and things that connect them with others. Ask the group to fill them, including small and free options. Ask each member what matters most to them, like family, health, or faith, so some activities serve it. Members copy anything useful onto their page and circle what takes less than 15 minutes or costs nothing. Hearing other people's ideas often brings up things a member had forgotten they liked.

Planning the activity. Small and specific beats big and vague. "Walk to the corner after lunch on Tuesday" works better than "exercise more." Ask for a day and a time, then what might get in the way and what they'll do if it does. Plans that name an obstacle and a response ahead of time are carried out more often than plans without one. After the activity, members rate the feeling before and after. That rating is what lets them see what doing it actually did. Encourage one activity for a time of day that tends to be hard.

SAY "Most of us wait to feel like doing something before we do it. When mood is low, that feeling may not come. So we work from the outside in. You plan the activity, you do it anyway, and you notice what happens to the feeling afterward. Motivation often shows up after you start, not before."





Session 3: What gets in the way

50 MIN	90 MIN	STAGE	WHAT HAPPENS
8	10	Recap and check-in	How last week's activities went, and what happened to the feeling.
15	25	When something gets in the way	One obstacle walked through and another way found.
Skip	15	A worked example	The group works through a made-up obstacle together.
17	25	The week ahead	A plan for each day.
10	15	Close	One plan each, said out loud.

Recap and check-in. Ask how the activities went and what happened to the feeling, with curiosity, not as a report card. Activities that didn't happen are the most useful material for today.

When something gets in the way. Each member picks one time they meant to do something and didn't, then fills in the left side of page 1: what set it off, how they felt, and what they did instead. Usually what they did instead was a way of avoiding a bad feeling, like staying in bed, scrolling, or putting it off, and it worked for a minute and cost them later. Then they plan another way through on the right side, including the smallest version of it.

A worked example, in 90 minutes. Use a made-up member who planned to call a friend on Saturday, felt tired and sure the friend was busy, and watched TV instead. Ask the group what happened, what it cost, and what another way through could look like. Working on someone imaginary first makes it easier to do with your own.

The week ahead. Members plan one small activity for as many days as they can, with a time, and check each off with before and after ratings. A plan they only partly keep still counts. Say so.

QUESTIONS FOR SESSION 3

- What got in the way most often last week?
- What did you do instead, and what did it cost you later?
- What's the smallest version you'd still count?

Session 4: Keeping it going

50 MIN	90 MIN	STAGE	WHAT HAPPENS
8	10	Recap and check-in	How the week's plan went.
12	20	Looking back	What helped, what got in the way, what to keep.
15	25	A plan for low days	Signs, small steps, and people to contact.
7	15	Next week	One activity for after the group ends.
8	20	Closing round	One thing each person is taking with them.

Looking back. Members look over all their pages and fill in what helped most, what got in the way most often, and what they want to keep doing.





A plan for low days. Low stretches come back, and planning ahead is easier than planning in the middle of one. Members write the early signs, three small things they can do even then, someone they can reach out to, and when they would get more help and from whom. If a member's plan for getting help is vague, help them make it concrete. Make sure everyone leaves with a crisis number, like 988.

QUESTIONS FOR SESSION 4

- Which activity helped your mood the most?
- What would you tell yourself on a low day?
- What do you want to keep doing after the group ends?

Closing round. Each member says one thing they're taking with them, with passing allowed. Then give the closing words.

SAY “One last thing. The group ends today, but the practice doesn't. Some weeks you'll keep it up and some weeks you won't. Everyone drifts. When you notice you have, plan one small thing and do it anyway. That's the whole method.”

Facilitator moves

How you respond matters more than which questions you pick. These four moves cover most of it.

1. Ask what happened to the feeling

The question that drives this work is functional, not moral. Not “Did you do your activity?” but “What happened to how you felt when you did it, or when you didn't?” Curiosity about the effect teaches more than praise or disappointment.

2. Work from the outside in

SAY “Most of us wait to feel like doing something before we do it. When mood is low, that feeling may not come. So we work from the outside in. You plan the activity, you do it anyway, and you notice what happens to the feeling afterward. Motivation often shows up after you start, not before.”

3. Shrink the step

When a plan sounds too big, ask, “What's the smallest version you'd still count?” Five minutes of a walk, one dish, one text. A small step that happens beats a big one that doesn't.

4. Count the attempt

When an activity only partly happened, name the part that did. All-or-nothing thinking is common with low mood, and the group can model the alternative.

What to watch for

- **Logs turning into scorecards.** Ratings and plans can become new ways to feel like a failure. Keep everything framed as information.
- **Waiting to feel ready.** Members may say they'll do the activity once they feel better. Name the pattern gently and go back to working from the outside in.





- **“Should” activities.** Plans made of chores someone thinks they ought to do tend not to happen. Make sure at least one activity brings enjoyment or connection.
- **Real barriers.** Money, pain, transportation, caregiving, and shift work are real limits, not excuses. Help the member find something that fits inside them.
- **Safety concerns.** If a member mentions suicide or self-harm, or it shows up on a page, respond calmly, don’t explore the details in the group, check in with them privately right after, and follow your setting’s risk procedures. In the US, 988 is available by call or text at any time.

Notes by setting

- **Inpatient units.** Rebuild a day on the unit instead of a day at home, and plan activities that can happen there, like a walk in the hall, a call, or a group. Don’t depend on homework, and expect members to come and go.
- **Intensive outpatient and partial hospital programs.** When sessions are a day apart, a single evening of logging is plenty, and each plan should be small enough to try before the next session.
- **Substance use treatment.** Boredom and empty hours are common triggers, so the log often shows when risk is highest. Plan activities that fill those hours and steer away from places and people tied to use.
- **Outpatient groups.** Members have time to log and to try activities between sessions, so the follow-up carries more weight here.

Sources

Behavioral activation follows C. R. Martell, S. Dimidjian, and R. Herman-Dunn, Behavioral Activation for Depression, Guilford Press, 2010, and the revised brief treatment by C. W. Lejuez and colleagues, Behavior Modification, 2011. If-then plans draw on P. M. Gollwitzer and P. Sheeran, Advances in Experimental Social Psychology, 2006. The forms in these handouts were written for Everyday Insight.

