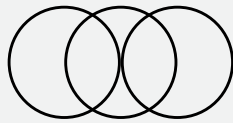
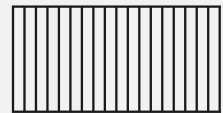
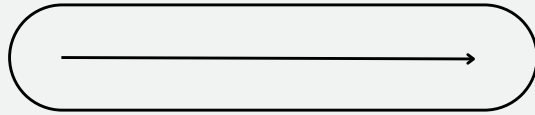


MY



TASK PLANNER

This behavioral activation (BA) tool is designed to help with focus, planning, organization and task accomplishment. BA is an evidence-based tool that utilizes the natural feedback loop that occurs in the brain when we engage in tasks that are meaningful, pleasurable, and confidence-building (even if we don't love doing all of them!). Behavioral Activation (BA) is a specific CBT skill that helps us understand how behaviors influence emotions, just like cognitive work helps us understand the connection between thoughts and emotions.

Action precedes emotion!?

We often wait to feel better or more motivated before doing something. Remember that overwhelm, anxiety and depression come from parts of our brain that are really trying to protect us by getting us to avoid or isolate. This means that as long as we are following the lead of those strong feelings, we will continue to feel less motivated and want to avoid and isolate.

So, when we are feeling anxious and depressed, we cannot wait on the brain to give us the motivation to get out there and do things. Research has shown that our decision to activate (in other words, to do the opposite of what the feelings tell us to do, and do something in line with our values and goals) is necessary to (1) initiate behavioral change and (2) it can even influence the emotions we feel!

So why activate first? Well, activating changes our brain state and can make us feel better, right away. For example, exercise can produce "good chemicals" in the brain that lift mood while they are in the bloodstream. Secondly, the more that we activate, the more situations we find ourselves in that can give us positive experiences. The technical term for this is "reinforcing positive context contingencies." Technicalities aside, we need to "get out there" and give ourselves the best chance of feeling better, even if we don't feel like it at the time.

Illustrated below is an example of the "vicious cycles" of overwhelming emotions, behavior and consequence, according to the research.

The First Vicious Cycle...

Events often get the depression "ball rolling." This could be something new or a reminder from a past stressful event.

What happened
(stressful life events, triggers from past, etc.)

"I lost my job"
"We had our first child"

How you feel
(emotions)

Sad
Anxious
Stressed
Shut down
Embarrassed

What you do
(or don't do)

Stay in bed
Don't engage with family
Don't return calls or texts
Avoid people

The stress of events leads to negative emotions that are distressing and make us want to draw back.

FIRST
VICIOUS
CYCLE

Emotions lead to behaviors: we avoid or isolate, which makes us feel worse.

5.5

The Second Vicious Cycle

Avoidance, isolation, and other behaviors cause further negative events, making us feel even more depressed.

What happened
(life events, triggers, etc.)

"I lost my job"
"We had our first child"

* Increased odds of more hardships and negative life events
My friends stop calling me because I never return calls or texts

How you feel
(emotions)

Sad
Anxious
Stressed
Shut down
Embarrassed

What you do
(or don't do)

Stay in bed
Don't engage with family
Don't return calls or texts
Avoid people

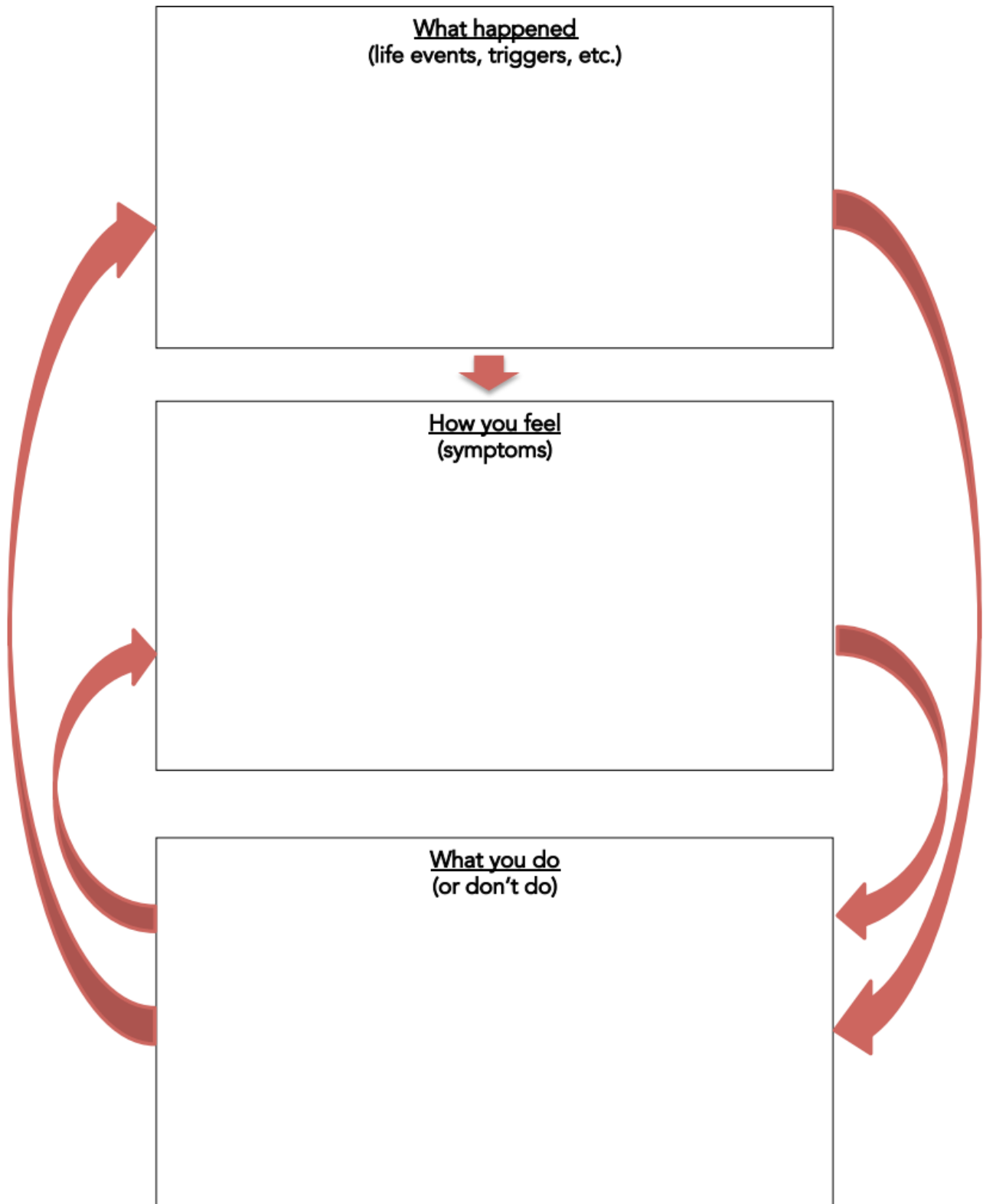
SECOND
VICIOUS
CYCLE

FIRST
VICIOUS
CYCLE

5.6

Your cycles?

Try to determine your own "vicious cycles," identifying specific events, emotions, and responses.



Breaking the Cycle

Let's utilize behavioral activation to help you follow through on the tasks that bring meaning, value, and pleasure to your life!

List 3 activities you enjoy doing:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

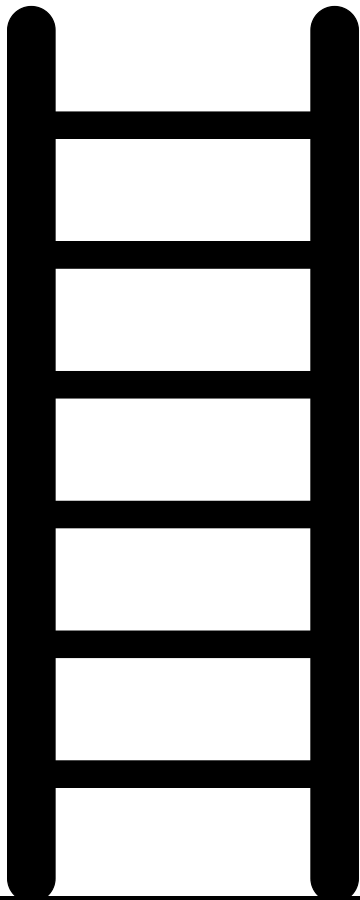
Now list three responsibilities you need to accomplish:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Now, let's make a plan! Using your lists above and the tool below, plan the steps you'll take to help activate yourself toward reaching your daily goal.

	« My Goal For Today:
	Ex: Clean my bathroom
	« Step (Almost there!):
	Ex: Pull out cleaning supplies, start cleaning!
	« Enjoyable thing:
	Ex. Play music or turn on a podcast
	« Step (Look at me go!):
	Ex: Put dirty laundry in the wash
	« Enjoyable thing:
	Ex: Walk the dog
	« Step (let's get going):
	Ex: Eat breakfast, brush teeth

Now you give it a try!

	« My Goal For Today:
	« Step (Almost there!):
	« Enjoyable thing:
	« Step (Look at me go!):
	« Enjoyable thing:
	« Step (let's get going):

Tips for success:

- **Use timers** as needed to help with transitioning between tasks.
- Practice self-compassion! We don't have the same capacity everyday. Check in with yourself, consider current challenges and **adjust expectations** to show yourself grace.
- **Remember you values.** When you *really* feel resistant to certain tasks, take some time to remember how it will honor your values and bring meaning to your day/life.
- **Catch yourself comparing and refocus on the present moment.** When we struggle with task completion or self-activation, we have a tendency to self-criticize and hyper-focus on how everyone else *seems* to accomplish things. When this happens, practice noticing your thoughts are hooking you in an unhelpful place, utilize your cognitive defusion skills (eg: "I am having the thought..." or changing the volume/speed of thoughts or treating thoughts like infomercials and not "buy" what they are "selling").
 - Use your **mindfulness skills to bring yourself back to the present moment**, the here and now. Look around you, engage your 5 senses, take a non-judgmental stance, before proceeding with your task!