

Key Strategies Training

Lesson 7:

Using Behavioral Strategies to Change Actions

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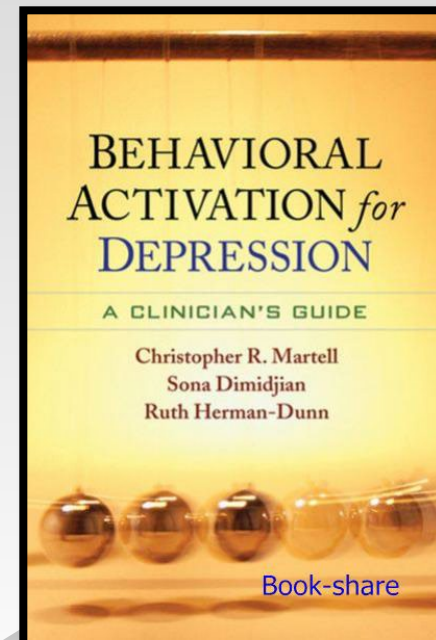
Behavioral Activation

Source:

- Behavioral Activation for Depression: A Clinician's Guide (Martell, Dimidjian, & Herman-Dunn, 2010)

Behavioral Activation (BA)

- Demonstrated effectiveness
- Versatile, standalone treatment
- Action focused
- Based on operant conditioning



Changing Behaviors

“We encourage an experimental approach that focuses on trying a behavior and observing the outcome”

(Martell et al., 2010, p. 31)



Strategies for Change



- **BHV-5:** Experimenting with new actions
- **BHV-6:** Improving skills
- **BHV-7:** Generalizing effective actions
- **BHV-8:** Assessing behavioral change and impact

BHV-5: Experimenting with Actions

*Experimenting with new actions and
observing results*

Strategy Marker

Once the therapist and client have a clear understanding of client behaviors, they can now focus on experimenting with new behaviors.



BHV-5: Experimenting with Actions

Theoretical Context

Martell and colleagues (2010) state that, “We encourage an experimental approach that focuses on trying a behavior and observing the outcome... Experiments are based on functional analyses of past behavior and hypotheses regarding potentially reinforcing activities for each client” (p. 31).



BHV-5: Experimenting with Actions

Suggestions for Use

To facilitate experimenting with new actions, the therapist may focus first on actions that the client is readily willing and able to change and will quickly ease distress. The therapist may begin this process by asking, “If you were already feeling better, what might you be doing differently?”



BHV-5: Experimenting with Actions

Example:

- Client:** *I'm tired of feeling down. I just want to be happier and feel better.*
- Counselor:** *And if you were feeling better, what might you be doing differently? These may be important behaviors for us to target.*

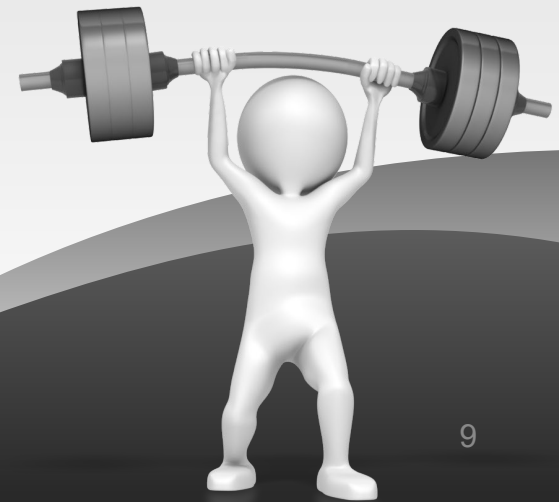


BHV-6: Improving Skills

*Improving skills through training and
behavioral rehearsal*

Strategy Marker

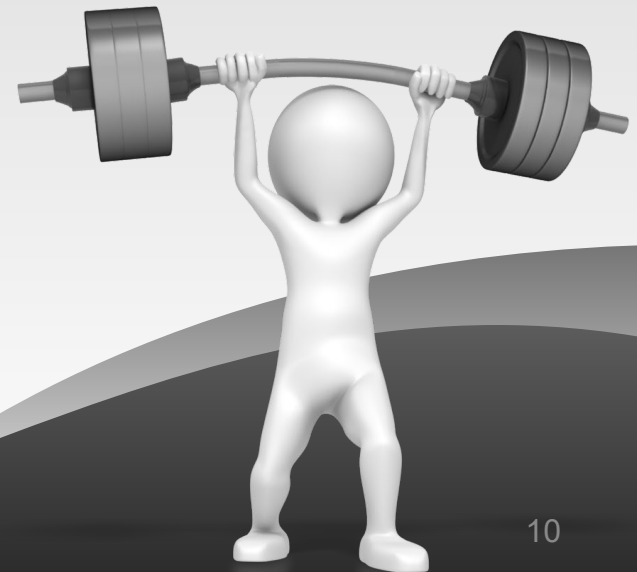
When potential actions seem difficult to implement, it may be helpful for the therapist to help the client improve skills by providing training and practicing new skills within psychotherapy.



BHV-6: Improving Skills

Theoretical Context

According to Martell and colleagues (2010), “Clients also should not be expected to simply rely on willpower to engage in an agreed-upon assignment. The therapist should take time to discuss a plan of implementation with the client. The more specific and detailed the plan, the better!” (p. 33).



BHV-6: Improving Skills

Suggestions for Use

To maximize the usefulness of this strategy, the therapist should make certain that agreed-upon assignments continue to be realistic and understandable. The therapist can reflect on the following question: Does this assignment give us both enough information so that the agreement we are making is clear?



BHV-6: Improving Skills

Expected Consequence

If used effectively, training and behavioral rehearsal are expected to result in a wider repertoire of effective actions that result in positive reinforcement.

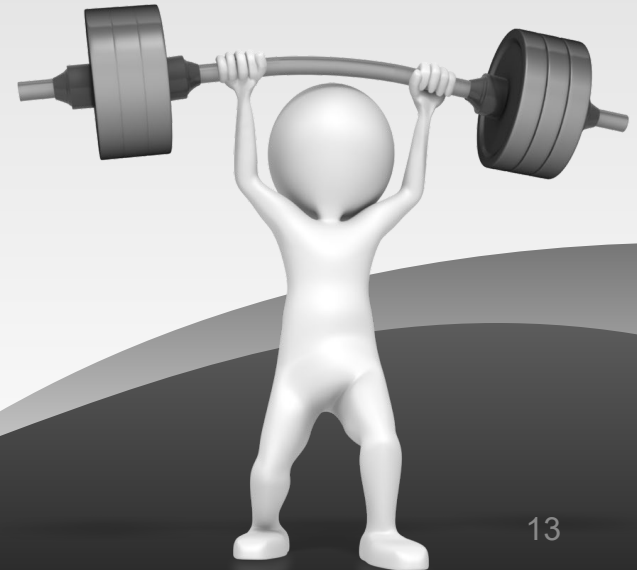


BHV-6: Improving Skills

Example:

Client: *I felt better at first when I went for a walk. Later that day I felt very lonely. I'd like to invite a friend to walk with me but I'm afraid I might sound needy.*

Counselor: *Let's talk about some different ways to ask a friend to walk with you and then practice an invitation that doesn't sound needy.*

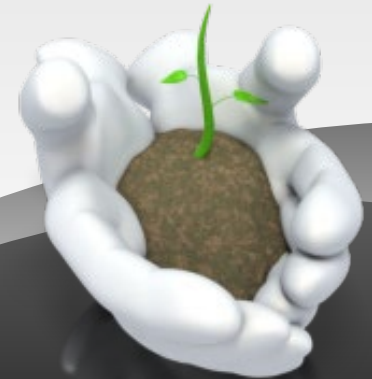


BHV-7: Generalizing Effective Actions

***Generalizing effective actions to new environments
outside of psychotherapy***

Strategy Marker

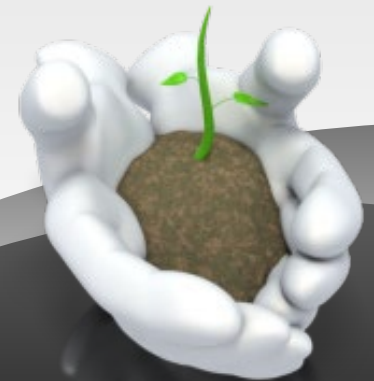
As clients learn to schedule and structure effective activities in session, it may be helpful for the therapist to begin to teach them how to do so on their own outside of sessions.



BHV-7: Generalizing Effective Actions

Theoretical Context

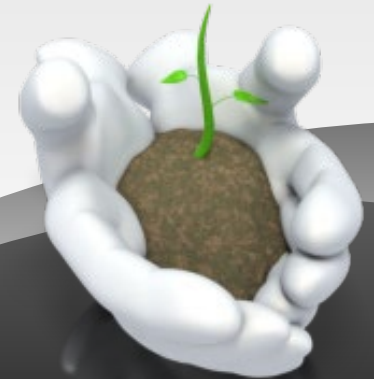
Martell and colleagues (2010) suggest that, “Instilling the ability to transfer what’s been learned in one context to another is a critical component...It enables clients to respond effectively when presented with new situations” (p. 21).



BHV-7: Generalizing Effective Actions

Suggestions for Use

In order to help clients generalize effective actions, the therapist may teach clients to structure and schedule activities that follow a plan, not a mood. The therapist may explain to clients the benefit of an “outside-in” approach: engage in a pleasurable activity, and positive feelings will follow.



BHV-7: Generalizing Effective Actions

Expected Consequence

When a psychotherapist works with a client to generalize effective actions, the expected consequence is a more general pattern of proactive behavior that results in positive reinforcement. When clients learn to activate their own behavior and identify situations that will result in reinforcement, they are more likely to maintain positive gains on their own.

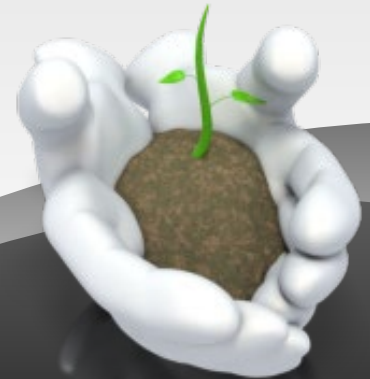


BHV-7: Generalizing Effective Actions

Example:

•**Client:** *I've made some important changes in my life recently. Things were bad for awhile, but I got myself moving and I'm starting to feel better.*

•**Counselor:** *Good! One of the ways we can learn from your experience is to identify specific ways that your mood might be vulnerable in the future and what you can do about it. Do you want to make a list of these? Maybe you can write them down.*

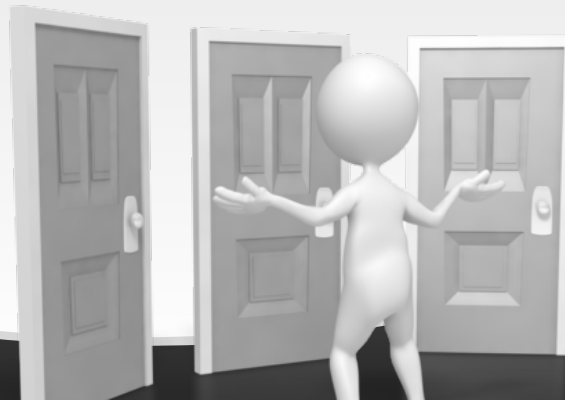


BHV-8: Assessing Change and Impact

***Assessing behavioral change,
looking at multidimensional impact,
and considering a shift in focus***

Strategy Marker

Once behavioral activation has taken place, it may be important to measure the impact of change to a client's actions, thoughts, and feelings; thereby signifying whether further therapy or a shift in therapeutic focus is required.



BHV-8: Assessing Change and Impact

Theoretical Context

Martell and colleagues (2010) describe this process as “troubleshooting,” and explain that, “Troubleshooting helps to make the best use of any client efforts aimed at activation and keeps therapy moving in the direction of the client’s goals” (p. 185).



BHV-8: Assessing Change and Impact

Suggestions for Use

When therapists determine that a client has either made significant gains or is unable to make further progress by focusing on actions, it may be helpful to discuss a shift in focus to thoughts or feelings. The therapist may begin by explaining the potential benefits of shifting focus and presenting cognitive or emotion-focused strategies to the client.



BHV-8: Assessing Change and Impact

Expected Consequence

It is predicted that clients who are finished with behavioral activation sessions but not ready for termination may benefit from additional work focusing on thoughts or feelings.



BHV-8: Assessing Change and Impact

Example:

- Client:** *Therapy has been helpful. I am more active, but I still think people don't like me.*
- Counselor:** *Now that you've made some changes in your actions, it may be helpful to switch our focus to thoughts.*



Strategies for Change



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