

PARENT HANDOUT: MAKING TIME FOR FUN



Depression Skill 2

WHAT IS MAKING TIME FOR FUN?

- ▶ If your child is struggling with sadness or depression, they may stop doing things that they used to enjoy. They may engage in more passive activities (e.g., screen time) reduce the amount of active choices (e.g. sports, hobbies) they engage in, or spend less time with others. Or you may find that they aren't doing many fun activities at all, or report that activities they usually enjoy are less fun than they used to be. These changes in activity and motivation are common symptoms of depression.
- ▶ **Behavioral activation** is a method for increasing the amount of enjoyable activities that are a part of your child's day. It is a great tool for helping your child improve their mood and increase their active coping skills. Since your child may feel unmotivated right now, activities are scheduled ahead of time in order to help with consistency and planning.
- ▶ Your child may not be in a good mood at the start of an activity, but they may notice a significant improvement in mood once they get going! Keeping track of their moods before and after the activity will help them notice which activities make a big positive difference in their mood. In the future, they can return to these activities to cope with low mood.

HERE'S HOW TO USE BEHAVIORAL ACTIVATION AT HOME

You can use the following script with your child:

- 1 Introduce behavioral activation.** "I've noticed that you've been feeling sad and down lately. When people feel down, they often stop doing things they used to love. That sometimes happens because they feel tired or uninterested in their hobbies and activities. This causes them to have less fun and feel even more down! Do you think this is happening to you?" Wait for an answer and provide encouragement in a way that feels comfortable to you. "Together, we are going to make an effort to plan for more fun in your daily life. Scheduling fun in your day to help you feel happier is called *behavioral activation*."
- 2 Introduce the Making Time for Fun worksheet.** "We are going to use the Making Time for Fun worksheet to organize your behavioral activation. Your job is to make a list of fun activities you'd like to do and then choose one activity for each day. We will try to put mostly everyday things on the worksheet that you can do daily (even on school nights!). However, we can also include the occasional bigger, special activity. We will also rate your mood before and after to see if the activity makes you feel better." We can use a scale from 1-10 where 1 means very down, and 10 means very happy. See Mood Tracking worksheets in Depression Skill 1 for additional support on feelings identification and expression.
- 3 Brainstorm and choose activities.** "Do you have any ideas about things you want to do? We will add them to the Fun Ideas List." Wait for your child to name activities; if they need help you can make suggestions based on activities you know they once enjoyed and/or the suggestions on the worksheet. Record the activities on the Fun Ideas List as you go.
- 4 Make the schedule:** "Great job! Now I'll read the list to you. Why don't you pick which day of the week you would like to do some of these things?" Write the activities down in the schedule according to your child's choices. Review the chart together once it's filled in.

CHILD WORKSHEET: MAKING TIME FOR FUN

1 Fun Activities Suggestions



Arts and crafts Play outside Play with a pet
 Exercise or practice a sport Journal Go for a walk
 Listen to music Play a game Watch a movie
 Read a book or listen to an audiobook

2 My Fun Ideas List

1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
6	
7	
8	
9	
10	



3 My Making Time for Fun Chart

Day of the Week	Fun Activity	Mood Before (1-10)	Mood After (1-10)
Sunday			
Monday			
Tuesday			
Wednesday			
Thursday			
Friday			
Saturday			

10 very happy

9

8

7

6

5

4

3

2

1 very down

PARENT HANDOUT: MAKING TIME FOR FUN TIPS



Depression Skill 2

HOW CAN MAKING TIME FOR FUN HELP MY FAMILY?

- ▶ When children or adolescents are struggling with sadness or depression, they often stop doing activities they once loved because they feel tired, think once enjoyable activities are boring, feel frustrated or irritable, or start withdrawing from friends. Unfortunately, the more your child reduces their pleasurable activities, the more their sadness may increase.
- ▶ Using the Making Time for Fun worksheet can help you organize and motivate your child to increase their positive activities through behavioral activation. It can reduce the need to nag your child to choose something to do when they seem sad or bored. The whole family can benefit from mood-boosting activities if you do them together. For example, physical activity as a family can make a big difference. In addition, spending time in nature can have positive and soothing effects on everyone's mood.
- ▶ Another benefit of the Making Time for Fun skill is that it helps your child increase their active coping skills. They will be able to keep track of which activities improve their mood the most. These activities, along with relaxation skills (see Relaxation Skills worksheets in Depression Skill 3), will be powerful tools that you can turn to for improving mood in a variety of circumstances.

COMMON PARENT CONCERNS

My child only wants to include video games on their chart.

Many children prefer screen time over other activities and it's okay to include a few of these activities in their plan. However, too much screen time can be passive and isolating, leading to more negative effects than positive ones. Try to help your child balance their Fun Activities List so that there is a mix of high and low energy activities and not too many activities with screen time. Explain to your child that physical activities can make a huge difference in their mood and that low key activities like reading or coloring can also help them feel calm. Praise your child for including activities with no screen time on the list.

My child has too many expensive activities on their list.

Help your child pick some simple and free activities and explain to them that these activities are beneficial and necessary because they are easier to access and can happen several times a week. Based on your family's practices and budget, decide if and when you would like to include some activities that have a cost and calmly but firmly explain this to your child. Decide together when to occasionally fit these activities in. You may even want to choose a special activity as a reward for your child's use of coping skills!

My child doesn't want to do their activities when I suggest them.

Ask specific questions to find out what could make doing behavioral activation more appealing. Have they decided that they want to change the order of activities, or do completely new ones? Edit your Making Time for Fun worksheets as needed. Encourage them to keep trying new things until they find something that is enjoyable and comfortable. Remind them that it's hardest to do fun things when they feel down, but that this is when doing fun things is actually most important!

My child still has a low mood, even after doing their fun activities.

Brainstorm with your child to see if trying different activities could be more impactful. Adjust the planned activities on the worksheet as needed. Discuss with your child whether negative thinking may be impacting their report of their mood. Are they reporting the facts? Would using a skill from Thinking Traps help (Depression Skill 4)? If your child's low mood continues, talk to your primary care provider. They can connect you to a behavioral health specialist who can help. If your child's mood causes you concern for their safety, seek emergency help.