

ACT for Depression Guide

Values-based practice for living meaningfully when mood is low.

How to use this resource

Depression often pushes for withdrawal, delay, and self-criticism. ACT practice focuses on noticing those pushes, making room for difficult internal experience, and taking small actions connected to values.

A Different Approach to Depression

Depression often tells people to wait until they feel motivated, clear, or hopeful before taking action. ACT takes a different position: meaningful action can begin while mood is still low.

The goal is not to pretend depression is easy or to force positive thinking. The goal is to notice what depression is asking you to avoid, make room for difficult internal experience, and take small steps toward what matters.

- You do not need to feel better before taking one useful step.
- Depression is not a weakness or personal failure.
- Trying to force positive thinking often backfires.
- Small values-based actions can begin to reopen life.

The Depression-Avoidance Loop

Depression survives by narrowing behavior. Withdrawal, staying in bed, canceling plans, and avoiding responsibilities can bring short-term relief, but they also reduce contact with sources of meaning, mastery, connection, and pleasure.

What does depression usually tell me to avoid?

What short-term relief do I get from avoiding?

What does avoidance cost me later?

One small opposite action I can practice this week is:

Defusion from Depression's Voice

Depressive thoughts often sound like facts: 'Nothing will change,' 'I am failing,' or 'There is no point.' Defusion helps you identify these as thoughts rather than instructions.

- I'm noticing the thought that I cannot do this.
- There is the depression story again.
- My mind is predicting failure; I can still choose one small action.
- Depression says this is pointless. My values say this matters.

Micro-Actions Before Motivation

Behavioral activation works because action can create the conditions for motivation to return. Start smaller than your mind thinks is worth doing.

- Get out of bed within 10 minutes of waking.
- Open the blinds or step outside for two minutes.
- Send one short text to a safe person.
- Prepare one simple meal or drink water.
- Do five minutes of gentle movement.
- Tidy one small area.

Clinical note

The action should be small enough that it feels almost too simple. Consistency matters more than intensity.

Values and Next Steps

Before depression became loud, I cared about:

The kind of person I want to practice being is:

One relationship I want to move toward is:

One values-based action I can take in the next 24 hours is:
