

Behavioral Activation

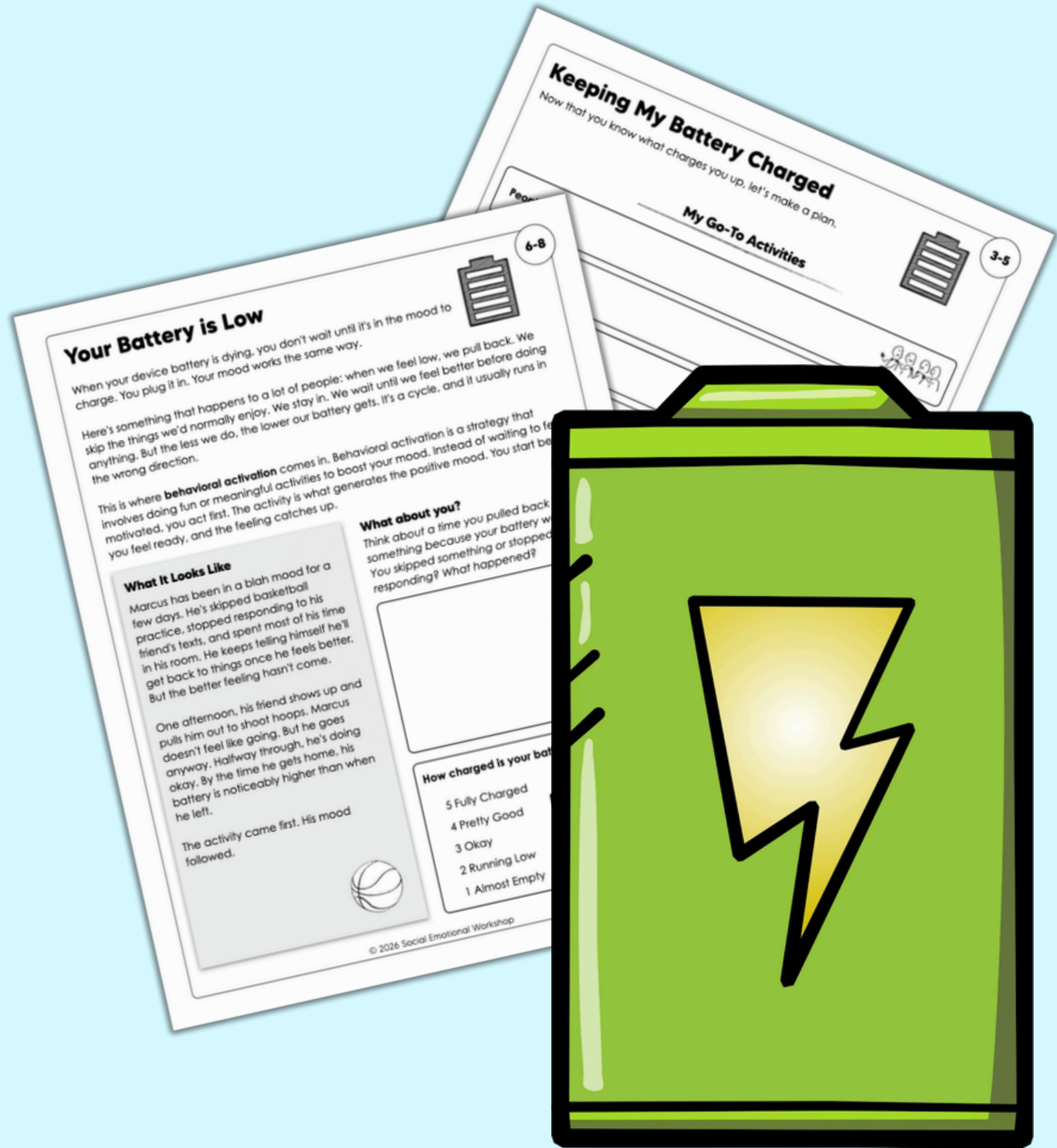
Charge Up Your Mood



Counseling Activities



3-5 and 6-8 versions



What is Behavior Activation





Behavioral activation (BA) is a **CBT-based** strategy that targets the **avoidance-withdrawal cycle** common in low mood, depression, and anxiety. The core idea is that positive activities are what help students feel better.

The cycle often looks like this: feel low → pull back from activities → feel worse → pull back more. Behavioral activation **interrupts that cycle** by encouraging intentional engagement.



What's Included?

Behavioral activation counseling activities
Counselor guide plus grade-specific student activity packs
built around the battery charging metaphor.


-  2 versions: grades 3-5 + 6-8
-  CBT-based exercise
-  Counselor guide
-  Activity trackers

About Behavioral Activation

Student pages explain behavioral activation using the battery metaphor.

6-8

Your Battery is Low



When your device battery is dying, you don't wait until it's in the mood to charge. You just do it. You power through the process.

Here's some tips to skip the frustration of anything. You're going in the wrong direction.

clear explanation

This is where **behavioral activation** comes in. Behavioral activation is a strategy that involves doing fun or meaningful activities to boost your mood. Instead of waiting to feel motivated, you act first. The activity is what generates the positive mood. You start before you feel ready, and the feeling catches up.


What It Looks Like

Marcus has been in a blah mood for a few days. He's skipped basketball practice, stopped responding to his friend's texts, and spent most of his time in his room. He keeps telling himself he'll get back to things once he feels better. But the better feeling hasn't come.

One afternoon, his friend shows up and pulls him out to shoot hoops. Marcus doesn't feel like going. But he goes anyway. Halfway through, he's doing okay. By the time he gets home, his battery is noticeably higher than when he left.

The following

scenario




What about you?

Think about a time you pulled back from something because your battery was low. You skipped something or stopped responding? What happened?

How charged is your battery right now?

- 5 Fully Charged
- 4 Pretty Good
- 3 Okay
- 2 Running Low
- 1 Almost Empty



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Session Plans & Guide

About behavioral activation

2 or 3 session pacing

Scripted opening language

How to respond to resistance

How to Use This Resource

Two-sessions

- Session 1 (~30 min): Introduce the concept and build list of charging and draining activities. (Pages 1-3)
- Session 2 (~20-30 min): Review the tracker + build the charging plan. (Pages 4-6)

Three-sessions

- Session 1: Pages 1-3 concept + activity list.
- Session 2: Pages 4-5 charge check + tracker introduction.
- Session 3: Page 6 charging plan + barrier problem-solving.

Differentiation Notes

Upper Elementary (Grades 3-5)

- Spend more time on Page 2; younger students often need more prompting to generate their list.
- Use the more open-ended tracker before using the daily schedule tracker.
- Keep the Charging Plan concrete. One go-to activity per category is plenty.

Middle School (Grades 6-8)

- Students often engage more readily with the expectation-versus-reality framing.
- The charge-level rating on Page 2 can open up a useful conversation about what students value vs. what they avoid.
- Normalize that the most-avoided activities are often the ones that help the most.
- Frame the tracker as data collection; it fits the middle school mindset better than homework.

A note on severity: For students with more significant avoidance or depression, behavioral activation works best when activities are small and specific, scheduled at a set time, and tied into existing routines. Start with one activity per day and build from there.

What the student says	What to say back
"I don't feel like it"	"That's the point. We act first, and then we feel better."
"I don't have time"	"Start with 10 minutes. One small thing counts."
"Nothing sounds good"	"Pick the least-terrible option. It doesn't have to feel exciting to help."
"I always forget"	"Let's attach it to something you already do. Say right after school or after dinner."

Building a Personal Activity List

Students brainstorm activities that charge them up across 4 categories with examples to help them get started.

What Charges You Up?

3-5



We can put activities that make you feel good and charge you up into four categories. What activities are in each category is different for each person. Read the examples in each box, then add your own ideas.

People

Spending time with friends, family, pets.
Ex: playing with your pet, Facetiming a friend, eating dinner together, playing a game together, making a card with a friend, going to the park with a friend.

My Ideas

Getting Things Done

Finishing something, practicing a skill, working towards a goal.
Ex: practicing an instrument, finishing a puzzle, building something, working on a collection, completing a project.

My Ideas

4 categories

Fun

Activities you enjoy just because they feel good.
Ex: watching a show, playing a game, reading, drawing, listening to music, riding your bike, baking something.

My Ideas

Helping

Doing something kind or useful for someone else.
Ex: feeding a pet, helping a sibling, doing a chore without being asked, watering plants, helping your neighbor.

My Ideas

Understand What Drains You

Students reflect on draining activities, times, places, people, and warning signs.

What Drains Your Battery?

6-8

Some activities drain your battery. A lot of them are unavoidable: a hard day, a stressful test, an argument with someone. That's normal. Knowing what drains you helps you plan to recharge afterward.



Write a few activities you know tend to drain your battery. Remember, these activities are a normal part of life. The goal is to balance them out with ones that charge you back up.



What drains your battery?

Are there times of day or year when your battery feels low?

Are there places or people who seem to drain your battery?



What are some warning signs that your battery is getting low?

When your battery feels low, what do you usually do?



2 Versions

Middle school version uses the same framework and sequence, but has less scaffolding and more opportunities for reflection.

Keeping My Battery Charged

6-8



Use what you've learned so far from your tracker to build a plan that works for you.

When I notice my battery getting low, my go-to activities are:

People



Getting Things Done



Fun



Helping



Troubleshooting

Activities that I've been skipping that I know help:

One barrier I might run into

How I'll handle it:


My goal this week

I will try _____ when my battery is low this week.

Two Activity Trackers

My Charging Log - Weekly

Try at least one charging activity each day this week. Write the activity, the category, and your battery level before and after. The Notes column is for anything worth remembering; what worked, what surprised you, what you'd do differently.


6-8


Day	Activity	Category	Before 1-5	After 1-5
M				
Notes				
Tu				
Notes				
W				
Notes				
Th				
Notes				
F				
Notes				
Sa				
Notes				
Su				
Notes				

7 day tracker

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My Charging Log

Keep track of the activities you try. Write the activity, the category, and your battery level before and after. The Notes column is for anything worth remembering; what worked, what surprised you, what you'd do differently.

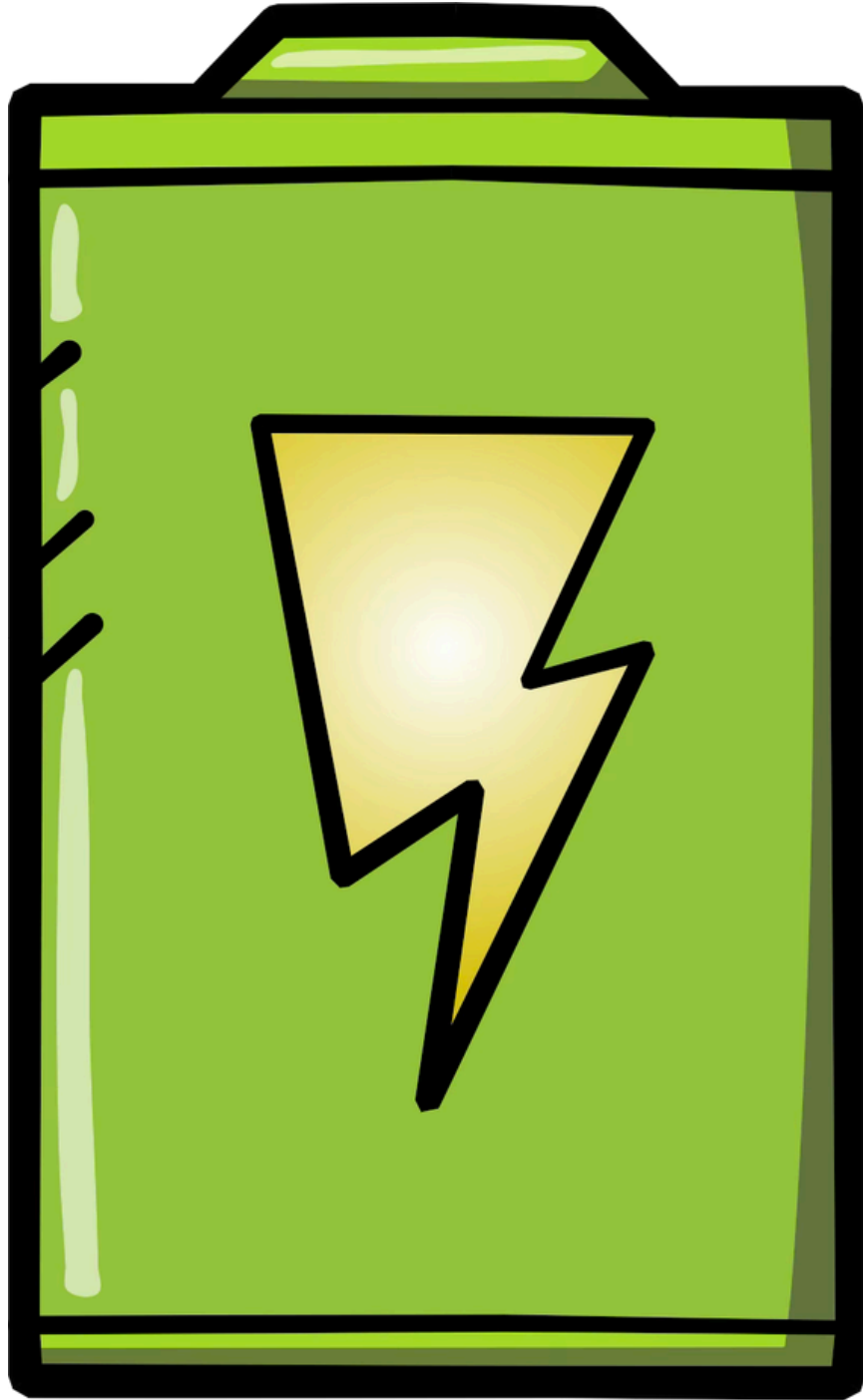

6-8

Activity	Category	Before 1-5	After 1-5
Notes			
Notes			
Notes			
Notes			
Notes			

open activity log

Categories
People, Getting Things Done, Fun, Helping.    

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How to Use

1. Introduce behavioral activation
2. Build list of charging activities
3. Identify draining activities
4. Track activities and their impact
5. Create a charging plan

What you'll love

Differentiated across grades 3-8

Straight forward counselor guide

Easy printing: student worksheets in BW

Two tracker formats



Practical Details



Grade Level

3-8



Made For

counseling



File Format

PDF



AND

No prep
CBT exercise



Printing

Black and White

More CBT Activities



CBT WORKSHEETS



school counseling tools

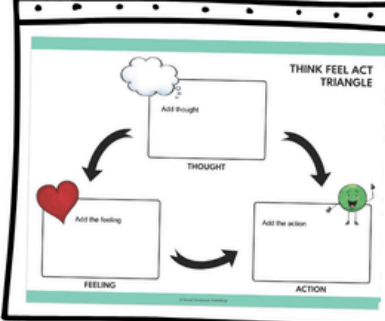
COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS



THOUGHTS FEELINGS ACTIONS

2-5

CBT COUNSELING ACTIVITIES



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NEGATIVE THINKING

counseling activities

Thought Traps

Marcus got called down to the principal's office.

"I must be in huge trouble. They're probably going to suspend me and call my parents, and everyone will know."

20

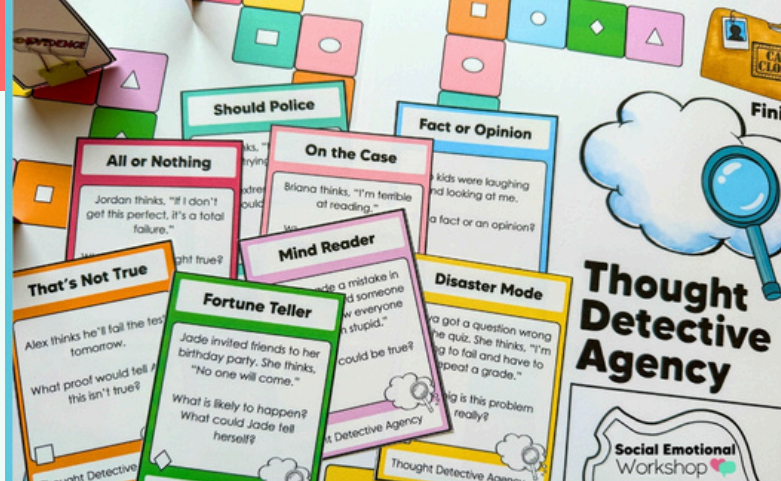
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3-5

THOUGHT DETECTIVE

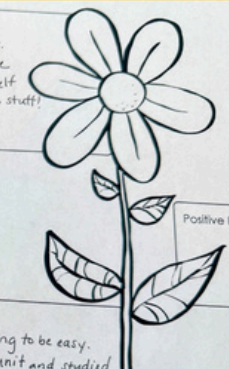
3-5

negative thinking game



Thought Detective Agency

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Positive Action

Try my best.
Take my time.
Remind myself
I know this stuff!

Positive Thought

This is going to be easy.
I liked this unit and studied

Hi! I'm Laura

I create research-driven, uncomplicated tools and resources designed to build students' social and emotional skills in counseling or the classroom.

During ten years as a school psychologist, I wore all the hats - but the one I never took off was supporting my colleagues.

Whether you're a first-year counselor or a seasoned teacher, I want you to have the tools you need to support each student.

Visit [my blog](#) for more ideas and [subscribe](#) for exclusive resources!

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