

A PRINTABLE SELF-HELP PACK

Depression Support Toolkit

Small, doable steps for heavy days — built for low energy and zero shame.

INSIDE THIS PACK

- Learn why depression is not laziness (and why it is not your fault)
- The Minimum Viable Day — a heaviest-days checklist where any 3 items is a win
- An activity menu, tiny steps planner, and 7-day activity and mood log
- Worksheets that answer the inner critic with evidence and kindness
- A connection plan with word-for-word texts for zero-energy days
- A hard-day cut-out card, an early-warning plan, and pocket encouragement cards

A printable self-help pack based on behavioral activation and cognitive behavioral (CBT) principles.

How to Use This Toolkit

If you are reading this through the fog of a low stretch, one thing first: opening this took effort, and that effort counts. This toolkit was built for exactly the days when everything feels heavy — which means it is designed to be used in small pieces, at low energy, with zero pressure to do it "right."

If you are having thoughts of hurting yourself, or of not wanting to be here, this workbook is not the tool for that moment. Please call or text 988 (Canada and the US) — free, confidential, 24 hours a day. These pages will still be here for you afterward.

This pack is built for low energy

1. **Start with one page.** Not the whole pack. One. If today that is only this page, you have used the toolkit correctly.
2. **Read the education pages when you have a little room.** "Depression Is Not Laziness" comes first for a reason — understanding what is happening takes a surprising amount of the shame out.
3. **On the heaviest days, skip everything and go to the Minimum Viable Day.** That page is the whole toolkit compressed into one checklist.
4. **Print extra copies of the worksheets.** The planners, logs, and thought records are meant to be reused.
5. **Fill in the Hard-Day Plan on an okay day.** Future-you, mid-fog, will be very glad the deciding is already done.
6. **Lower the bar. Then lower it again.** A half-filled page beats a blank one. A crossed-out mess beats a perfect page that never got started.

A few honest reminders

- Depression makes everything cost more energy than it should. That is a symptom, not a character flaw.
- You do not have to feel motivated to use these pages. With depression, doing tends to come first and wanting follows — the pack will explain why.
- These tools are self-help, not therapy. If low mood is seriously affecting your life, please also reach out to a qualified mental health professional. That is not a backup plan — it is a strong move.

I am starting this toolkit on (date):

One small thing I hope will feel different:

Depression Is Not Laziness

What is actually happening — and why it is not your fault

Here is something worth noticing: lazy people do not lie awake feeling terrible about everything they did not do. If you are exhausted by guilt over undone tasks, unanswered messages, and days lost to the fog — that is not laziness. That is depression, and the difference matters.

Depression is a common health condition that affects the very systems you would normally use to fight it: energy, motivation, concentration, and the ability to feel pleasure. Telling someone with depression to "just try harder" is like telling someone with a sprained ankle to "just walk it off" — the trying-harder machinery is the part that is injured.

What depression can feel like

In your body:

- Exhaustion that sleep does not fix; heavy limbs; everything in slow motion
- Sleeping much more or much less than usual
- Appetite changes — forgetting to eat, or eating for comfort
- Unexplained aches, tension, or a hollow feeling in your chest

In your mind:

- A gray filter over everything — things you used to enjoy feel flat
- A harsh inner voice: lazy, worthless, a burden
- Trouble concentrating, deciding, or remembering
- Hopelessness — a sense that nothing will change or help

In your behavior:

- Withdrawing from people; letting messages pile up
- Tasks stacking up while you watch, unable to start
- Staying in bed or on the couch for large parts of the day
- Dropping hobbies and activities that used to matter to you

Two facts worth keeping

Depression is extremely common. Hundreds of millions of people live with it worldwide. You are not weak, rare, or uniquely broken — you are experiencing one of the most widespread health conditions on the planet.

Depression is very treatable. Talking therapies — including the behavioral activation and CBT skills in this pack — have decades of research behind them. Lifestyle supports help. For some people, medication helps too; any questions about medication belong with your doctor.

An illness that drains your energy is not a character flaw. You are not lazy. You are carrying something heavy — and carrying heavy things slowly is still carrying them.

The Depression Spiral

Why doing less makes you feel worse — and how to reverse it

Depression runs on a loop, and understanding the loop is the key to the whole toolkit.

1. **Low mood arrives.** Everything feels heavier, flatter, more pointless.
2. **So you do less.** You cancel, withdraw, put things off, stay in. This is a completely understandable response to having no energy.
3. **Doing less means fewer good moments.** Less accomplishment, less connection, less pleasure, less movement — fewer of the small experiences that naturally feed your mood.
4. **Starved of good moments, your mood drops further.** Which drains more energy. Which leads to doing even less. The spiral tightens.

No step in this loop is your fault. But there is one place where the loop can be pried open — and it is probably not where you think.

The key that feels backwards

Most of us wait to *feel like it* before doing something. With depression, that wait never ends, because depression suppresses the feeling-like-it system itself.

With depression, action comes before motivation — not after.

This is the core of behavioral activation, one of the best-researched approaches to depression. You do a tiny thing *without* feeling like it. The tiny thing produces a tiny lift — often barely noticeable. Tiny lifts, repeated, slowly give your mood something to stand on. Motivation shows up late, after the actions have been happening for a while. It is the caboose, not the engine.

How to reverse the spiral

- **Start insultingly small.** Smaller than feels worth doing. One dish. One text. One curtain opened.
- **Schedule it, don't wait to feel it.** "Tuesday after breakfast" beats "when I have energy."
- **Collect your own evidence.** The 7-Day Activity and Mood Log in this pack tracks your mood before and after — so you can see the lifts your gray filter would otherwise delete.
- **Count everything.** With depression, a 2-minute walk is not a failed 30-minute walk. It is a successful 2-minute walk.

One activity that has quietly dropped out of my life:

Depression's Favorite Lies

The thinking traps of low mood — and one honest answer to each

Depression does not just drain your energy. It narrates — in a calm, confident, utterly convincing voice. That voice uses a predictable set of distortions. They are symptoms, not insights. Learning to name them is the first step to loosening their grip.

The all-or-nothing lens. *"If I can't do it properly, there's no point doing it at all."*

Honest answer: a 10-minute effort is not a failed 60-minute effort. Partial counts. Partial is how everything gets rebuilt.

The gray filter. It deletes every positive — the task you did finish, the person who was glad to hear from you — and keeps only the negatives.

Honest answer: my brain is filtering, not reporting. The good things still happened, whether or not I can feel them right now.

Mind-reading. *"They're annoyed with me. They'd be better off without me around."*

Honest answer: I do not actually have that information. Feeling like a burden is a depression symptom — it is not a message from other people.

The hopeless forecast. *"It will always be like this. Nothing will help."*

Honest answer: depression always predicts more depression — it is a biased forecaster. It has been wrong about "always" before.

The name-calling voice. *"Lazy. Weak. Pathetic. Worthless."*

Honest answer: those are labels, not facts. I would never accept "worthless" as a diagnosis for someone I love — it is not a valid one for me either.

The should hammer. *"I should be over this by now. Other people manage."*

Honest answer: "should" is measuring me against someone who is not carrying this weight. Carrying it changes the math.

You do not have to win the argument with these thoughts — that is what the worksheets later in this pack are for. For now, the skill is simply spotting them: *"Ah. That is the gray filter talking."* Naming a lie, even without answering it, takes some of its power away.

The lie my depression tells most often:

The Minimum Viable Day

For the days when everything is heavy

Some days, the normal to-do list is simply not happening — and treating those days as failures only feeds the spiral. A heavy day is not a failed day. It is a day that needs a different list.

Below are seven basics that protect your body and mind when everything else is too much. You do not do all seven. **Pick any 3. Three is a win.** Seven is not the goal — it is not even the point.

The basics menu

- ☐ **Water** — one full glass. Depression forgets thirst; your brain still needs it.
- ☐ **One real food** — anything beyond snacking. A piece of toast counts. A banana counts.
- ☐ **Daylight** — five minutes outside, or sitting by a window with the curtains open.
- ☐ **Shower or face-wash** — the full shower, or just water on your face. Either one counts completely.
- ☐ **One message to a human** — a text, a meme, a single "hey." Sending is what counts, not the reply.
- ☐ **Ten minutes of movement** — a slow walk, stretching on the floor, pacing while music plays.
- ☐ **One small tidy** — one dish, one surface, or the trash out. One. Then stop.

Today's pick

My three for today:

1.

2.

3.

If I finish those and have anything left, one bonus item:

On a Minimum Viable Day, three checkmarks are a full day's work. You did those three things while carrying depression — that is the hard version, and you did it anyway.

Activity Menu

Small doses of the four things depression starves you of

Behavioral activation works by putting back small doses of what the spiral has been cutting out: **pleasure, mastery, connection, and movement**. Check the ones you might be willing to try. Then — this matters — **put a star beside anything that used to bring you something**, even if it sounds flat right now. Depression dulls your ability to predict enjoyment, so "it used to work" is more reliable data than "it sounds good today."

Pleasure (small joys)

- ☐ Play one song you loved as a teenager
- ☐ Make a hot drink and drink it while it is still hot
- ☐ Sit in the sun for five minutes
- ☐ Ten minutes of a show or book that asks nothing of you
- ☐ Pet an animal — yours or a friendly one

Mastery (small wins)

- ☐ Wash three dishes — just three
- ☐ Answer one message you have been avoiding
- ☐ Make the bed
- ☐ Open one envelope or pay one bill
- ☐ Water a plant

Connection

- ☐ Text someone a meme — no words required
- ☐ Say hi to a neighbor, barista, or cashier
- ☐ Call someone while you both do chores
- ☐ Sit in a cafe or library, just to be around people
- ☐ Send a voice note instead of typing

Movement

- ☐ Walk to the corner and back
- ☐ Stretch on the floor for five minutes
- ☐ Move to one song, however you like
- ☐ Step outside and take five slow breaths
- ☐ Climb your stairs one extra time

Two starred items I will try this week:

1.

2.

Tiny Steps Planner

Any task can shrink until it fits inside five minutes

Depression turns ordinary tasks into mountains, then shames you for not climbing them. The way through is not more willpower — it is smaller mountains. Do not schedule the task. Schedule the **smallest first step**, and make it so small it takes under five minutes. If it still feels heavy, shrink it again. "Do the laundry" becomes "put the socks in the basket." That is not cheating. That is the technique.

Example: The task: "Deal with the kitchen." Smallest first step: "Move the cups to the sink." When: "Right after I brush my teeth." Done? "Yes — and I washed two of them, which was a bonus, not the assignment."

My tiny steps

The task (the mountain)	Smallest first step (under 5 min)	When I will do it	Done?

If a step did not happen

No shame — just shrink it. The even-smaller version of the step I skipped:

The first step's only job is to be started. Anything that happens after it is extra credit — momentum often shows up once you are moving, but it is never required.

7-Day Activity and Mood Log

Collect your own evidence

Depression predicts that nothing will help. This log lets you check that prediction against your own data. Each day this week, plan **one tiny activity** — from your Activity Menu or Tiny Steps Planner. Rate your mood before and after, 0 to 10. You are not trying to reach a 10. You are looking for small differences: a 3 that became a 4 is real evidence, and it is exactly the kind your gray filter deletes.

A partial attempt counts as a Y. Two minutes of a ten-minute walk is a Y.

The log

Day	Planned tiny activity	Did it? (Y/N)	Mood before (0-10)	Mood after (0-10)
Day 1				
Day 2				
Day 3				
Day 4				
Day 5				
Day 6				
Day 7				

End of week

What do you notice? (Even a one-point lift, even once, is information.)

Which activity gave the most lift for the least energy? That one goes on next week's plan.

Missed days are data too, not failures. If most days were too heavy for the planned activity, next week's activities simply need to be smaller. Shrink, don't quit.

Catching the Inner Critic

A thought record for the harsh voice

Depression's inner critic speaks with total confidence: *worthless, burden, always, never*. It sounds like the truth. It is actually a symptom — and symptoms can be written down and examined. Fill in this page whenever the voice gets loud. Print a fresh copy each time; it gets faster with practice.

Step 1: The moment

What was happening when the critic spoke up? (Just the facts.)

Step 2: The critic's words

What did the critic say, word for word?

How much do I believe it right now?

Step 3: Name the lie

Which of depression's favorite lies is this? (all-or-nothing / gray filter / mind-reading / hopeless forecast / name-calling / the should hammer)

Step 4: The friend test

Picture someone you love sitting across from you, saying these exact words about themselves — same situation, same tired eyes.

What would I say back to them? (Write it as if speaking to them directly.)

Step 5: Turn it around

Now read your answer again — out loud if you can — addressed to yourself.

How much do I believe the critic's words now?

One word for how that felt:

You would never accept the critic's verdict about a friend. You are allowed the same defense lawyer you would give anyone else.

The Evidence Check

Put one heavy thought on trial

Pick one recurring thought — often the one that showed up again and again on the previous page: "*I'm a burden.*" "*Nothing will ever change.*" "*I ruin things.*" Instead of arguing with it or obeying it, put it on trial like a fair judge would: real evidence on both sides, then a verdict. One rule of this courtroom: **feelings are real, but they are not evidence.**

The thought on trial:

How much I believe it going in:

The evidence

Evidence FOR this thought <i>Verifiable facts only — not feelings, not the critic's opinion</i>	Evidence AGAINST this thought <i>Facts that don't fit; exceptions; kinder explanations that cover the same facts</i>

Helper questions : "Am I confusing a feeling with a fact? Has this thought been wrong before? What would I say to a friend who showed me this exact evidence? Is the gray filter deleting items from the right-hand column?"

The verdict

A fairer, more balanced thought — one I can actually believe:

How much do I believe the original thought now?

Note box: "The goal is not forced positivity — depression can smell fake from a mile away. The goal is accuracy. A balanced thought earns its keep by being true."

The Self-Compassion Break

A 60-second practice for the hardest moments

Research on self-compassion points to something surprising: people who treat themselves kindly during hard times recover faster and stay more motivated — not less. Self-compassion is not letting yourself off the hook. It is taking the hook out so you can actually move.

This is a three-step practice you can do anywhere, in about a minute. Say the steps silently or out loud. Some people rest a hand on their heart or cheek while they do it — physical warmth helps the message land.

Step 1 — Name the moment (*mindfulness*)

Say: **"This is a moment of suffering. This is really hard right now."**

Not drama, not denial — just accurate.

My own words for step 1:

Step 2 — Remember you are not alone (*common humanity*)

Say: **"Struggling is part of being human. Right now, millions of people are under this same weight. I am not uniquely broken."**

My own words for step 2:

Step 3 — Offer yourself kindness

Say: **"May I be kind to myself in this moment. May I give myself what I actually need."**

My own words for step 3:

Make it concrete

Something kind I would do for a friend having a day like mine — that I could also do for myself:

If the kind words feel false at first, that is normal — the critic has had years of practice and this voice is new. Say them anyway. The tone you take with yourself matters more than how much you believe it yet.

The Connection Plan

Isolation feeds depression. Connection starves it — even in tiny doses.

Depression gives you two convincing reasons to disappear: "I don't have the energy to talk" and "I don't want to burden anyone." Both feel true. Both keep the spiral turning — isolation is one of depression's main food sources, and contact with other people is one of the strongest natural mood supports there is.

Here is the good news: connection does not require energy you don't have. **A sent text counts as connection the moment you send it** — before any reply, with no conversation required.

Copy-paste texts for zero-energy days

Use these word for word. They are designed to need nothing from you afterward.

- "Hey. I'm in a low stretch. Nothing to fix — just wanted to say hi."
- "Low battery today. Could you text me something good from your day?"
- "I don't have talking energy, but I miss you. Meme exchange?"
- "Could we be on the phone while we both do our own thing? No real conversation required."
- "If I go quiet this week, it's the low mood, not you. A check-in text helps more than you'd think."

My three people

Person 1 — easiest to reach:

Person 2 — good at sitting with hard stuff:

Person 3 — reliably makes things feel lighter:

The bar is one sent message. You do not owe anyone a performance of being okay.

People who care about you would rather get a low-energy text than silence. Letting someone show up for you at your actual level is not being a burden — it is how closeness works.

Small Wins Log

Two weeks of receipts the gray filter cannot delete

Depression's gray filter quietly erases the evidence that you are trying: by evening, the thing you managed this morning has vanished from the record. This log keeps the receipts. One line a day, however small. "Got up." "Answered one text." "Showered." "Went outside." On this page, nothing is too small to count — smallness is the point.

The log

Day	One thing I did (however small)	One word for how it felt
Day 1		
Day 2		
Day 3		
Day 4		
Day 5		
Day 6		
Day 7		
Day 8		
Day 9		
Day 10		
Day 11		
Day 12		
Day 13		
Day 14		

After two weeks, read the middle column like a stranger would. What does the evidence say about the person in this log?

Missed a day? Leave it blank and keep going. Fourteen days with gaps still beats zero days without them.

My Hard-Day Plan

Decide now, while you have a little light

On the hardest days, the heaviest part is often the deciding — what to do, who to contact, whether anything is worth it. This card takes deciding off the table by doing it in advance. Fill it in on an okay day. Cut it out. Put it somewhere your hard-day self will actually see it: the mirror, the fridge, the nightstand, your phone case.

On a hard day, I will...

Step 1 — Lower the bar. Today is a Minimum Viable Day. Three basics. That is the entire job.

Step 2 — Do my pre-chosen tiny actions. No deciding required — past me already chose.

Action 1 (under 5 minutes):

Action 2 (under 5 minutes):

Step 3 — Say my phrase.

The sentence I most need to hear on a day like this:

Step 4 — Reach one human.

I will text:

The exact words I will send:

Step 5 — If hopeless thoughts get loud: that is the symptom at its peak, not the truth about my life. I can call or text 988 (Canada and US) — free, confidential, 24/7.

Hard days pass. Not because you earn it or fix them — because passing is what they do. Your only job today is to be gentle with yourself and outlast this one.

Early Warning Signs and Support Plan

Catch the slide early — and know when to call in reinforcements

Depression rarely arrives all at once. It slides in, and the early signs are personal: meals start getting skipped, texts sit unanswered, sleep goes strange, the same show plays for hours. Naming *your* signs turns them from invisible drift into a signal you can act on — and deciding now who you will tell makes acting far more likely.

My early warning signs (what changes first for me):

What has helped before, even a little:

Who I will tell when I notice the signs:

My professional supports (doctor, therapist, clinic, work or school program, walk-in options):

When self-help is not enough

This toolkit is built for the daily weight of low mood. Some signals mean it is time to step up beyond a workbook — not as a failure, but as the plan working exactly as designed:

- Hopelessness that does not lift, or any thoughts of self-harm or suicide
- Being unable to manage basics — eating, hygiene, work or school — for days or weeks at a time
- Leaning on alcohol or other substances to get through the day
- The people around you saying they are worried

If hopelessness or thoughts of self-harm appear, this page is not enough — and reaching past it is not a failure, it is the strongest move on this page. Talk to a doctor or mental health professional, and call or text 988 (Canada and the US): free, confidential, 24 hours a day.

If I notice the serious signals above, the first call or message I will make:

Weekly Reflection

A weekly page that counts what depression discounts

Once a week — ideally the same day each week — sit with this page for a few minutes. Print a fresh copy each time. On a bad week, filling in half of it is the win.

Week of:

1. This week, overall

My mood this week, on average (circle one): 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Compared to last week, this week felt (check one): [] Heavier [] About the same [] A little lighter

2. Tools I used this week (check all that apply)

- ☐ Minimum Viable Day
- ☐ Activity Menu or Tiny Steps Planner
- ☐ Activity and Mood Log or Small Wins Log
- ☐ Inner critic worksheet or Evidence Check
- ☐ Self-Compassion Break
- ☐ A Connection Plan text
- ☐ Hard-Day Plan card

3. Reflection prompts

One thing I did this week even though I did not feel like it:

A moment that felt even slightly lighter:

My hardest day — and one thing that got me through it:

4. Next week

One tiny activity I will plan, with a day and time:

The bar for a good-enough day next week is:

A heavier week does not erase a lighter one — recovery moves in waves, not straight lines. Showing up to this page while depressed is the practice. And if several heavy weeks stack up, that is real information worth bringing to a professional.

Pocket Encouragement Cards

Cut them out. Keep them where the fog can find them.

No toxic positivity here — just six things that are true and very hard to remember mid-fog. Cut along the dashed lines. Keep one in your wallet, tape one to the mirror, leave one on the nightstand for the mornings that start heavy.

<i>"Doing this with depression is doing it on hard mode. Whatever you managed today counted double."</i>	<i>"Motivation is not coming first today. That is okay. Action first, feeling later — that is how this actually works."</i>
<i>"Depression says nothing will help. It has said that before, and it has been wrong before."</i>	<i>"You do not have to fix your life today. One glass of water. One open curtain. That is enough."</i>
<i>"That voice is an illness talking, not a truth about you. You are not lazy, broken, or a burden."</i>	<i>"Heavy days end. Not because you fixed them — because that is what they do. You have outlasted every single one so far."</i>

Cut along the dashed lines.

Please Read: Important Information

About this toolkit

This toolkit is an educational self-help resource. It shares general information and skills drawn from widely used behavioral activation and cognitive behavioral (CBT) approaches to low mood.

It is not psychotherapy, counselling, medical care, or mental health treatment. Using this toolkit does not create a therapist-client or any other professional relationship with its creator. It is not a substitute for assessment, diagnosis, or treatment by a qualified physician, psychologist, psychotherapist, counsellor, or other licensed professional, and it is not intended to diagnose or treat any condition.

Depression is very treatable, and effective help exists — talking therapies, lifestyle supports, and for some people, medication. **Any questions about medication — starting, stopping, or changing — belong with your doctor,** never with a workbook.

If low mood is significantly affecting your daily life — your sleep, appetite, work, school, relationships, or safety — please reach out to a qualified mental health professional or your primary care provider. Seeking help is a sign of strength. If any exercise in this toolkit feels distressing, please stop and consider speaking with a professional.

If you need help now

If you or someone else is in immediate danger, call 911 (Canada and the US) or go to your nearest emergency department.

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline (Canada and the United States)

- **Call 988** — free, confidential, available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week
- **Text 988** — if you prefer texting to talking

Additional support:

- **United States — Crisis Text Line:** text HOME to 741741 (24/7)
- **Canada — Kids Help Phone (for young people):** call 1-800-668-6868 or text CONNECT to 686868 (24/7)

You do not need to be in crisis to reach out. If you are struggling, these services are there for you.

You matter. Your struggles are real. And support is available.

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