Practical support in everyday care

When someone feels low or withdrawn

Understand what may be happening

Withdrawal, low energy and reduced participation can have many causes, including physical illness, pain, fatigue, grief, medication effects, fear and personal preference. Ask what matters to the person rather than assuming they lack motivation.

Consider what can be changed

Address barriers to participation: inaccessible activities, lack of materials, transport, pain, excessive expectations or unsuitable timing. Make room for rest and privacy. Being quietly present can be enough; do not require activity to demonstrate progress.

Offer practical support

Offer companionship, help with food and drinks or ordinary routines, and support contact with trusted people if wanted. Make familiar interests easier to access without setting participation targets. Let the person decide what is meaningful, including when they prefer rest.

Explore something together

Offer a small, personally meaningful option: preparing a drink, listening to chosen music, gardening, creative work, time outdoors or accessible movement. Participation might mean choosing, watching, helping briefly or simply being present.

Choice and safety

Do not treat refusal as failure or participation as proof of improvement. Marked changes in functioning, inability to meet basic needs, concerning physical symptoms or self-harm and suicide concerns require appropriate assessment and response.

Possible invitation: “Would you like some company, or is there something small you'd like us to do together?”

Evidence note: Structured behavioural activation has evidence for depression (NICE NG222; Cochrane Uphoff et al., 2020), but informal shared activities are not equivalent to therapy. Helsedirektoratet and Canadian recovery-oriented guidance support meaningful activity and personally defined goals.