

HARM REDUCTION APPROACH TO THE STAGES OF CHANGE

There are many different ways to visualize the Stages of Change Model. The Harm Reduction Training Institute has created the following grid that connects the stage that a client is in (“where they’re at”) and the response or intervention(s) with greatest potential to be effective.

Stages	Characteristics	Interventions
Precontemplative	Defensiveness	Engagement
	Resistance	Trust Building
Contemplative	Ambivalence Help	Explore Ambivalence
	Problem Awareness	Pass information
Ready for Action (Preparation)	Ready to Do	Support client
	Experimentation	Emphasize options
Action	Practice of new behavior/avoiding old	Follow-up Reach out
Maintenance	Sustaining behavior	Reinforcement

ELICITING SELF-MOTIVATIONAL STATEMENTS

At the heart of behavior change theory and the charts above lies the question: “How can we as counselors help clients resolve their ambivalence about change?” One way is to assist the client in eliciting his or her own reasons, concerns and obstacles. What follows are a series of questions and statements to assist you in the process.

Ask Open-Ended Questions: What and how a counselor asks a question can demonstrate positive regard and a genuine interest in learning from the expert—the client—about the contextual factors that influence both behavior and feelings about change.

- What has been difficult about protecting yourself from HIV when you’re having sex or doing drugs?
- Which are the good things and which are the difficult things about not using condoms?
- What do you think will happen if you continue sharing works?
- What would be the advantages of [doing less drugs, having less unprotected sex, not sharing equipment as often]?
- What has moved you to start thinking about change?

Use “What Else” Statements: “What Else” statements offer clients a chance to reveal additional areas of concern, which they may have kept protected until being explicitly asked. “What else” statements also reveal more of the client’s context and enable clients to explore further possibilities for behavior change. Reinforcing “what else” statements with nonverbal and reflective-listening helps clients feel heard without interrupting their disclosure.

- What else have you noticed about your situation?
- What other concerns have you had?
- What else have you thought about your behavior?

Decisional Balancing: A client’s decision to change behavior relies on the benefits of change outweighing the benefits of no-change. Decisional balancing can help contemplative clients deepen and clarify their motivation to change by encouraging an honest exploration of both the pros and cons of their current behaviors.

- Compare the benefits and costs of continuing a behavior versus the benefits and costs of changing the behavior.
- Discuss the positive and negative aspects of a current behavior, beginning with the positive ones.

Use Elaboration: Elaboration deepens both the client’s and the counselor’s understanding of context, which is key to motivating change and developing a realistic, incremental, harm reduction step to reduce HIV risk.

- Once counseling elicits a motivational statement from a client, ask the client to elaborate more fully.
- Ask the client for specific examples, including clarification as to why, how much, and in what way each motivational statement reflects a concern.

Ask Provocative Questions: Provocative questions reinforce a client's motivational statements by eliciting his or her deeper concerns about change.

- What concerns you the most about changing?
- Do you have any fears about what might happen if you don't change?

Looking Back/Looking Forward: The process of looking back and looking forward helps clients uncover any discrepancies between where they are now and where they would like to be in the future.

- Do you remember a time when things were going well for you?
 - What has changed?
 - How would you like things to turn out for you in the future?
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