

Motivational Interviewing Listening for CHANGE TALK

What is “change talk”?

People’s motivation for behavior change are different. Listen for six different themes.

Desire: Statements about preference for change.

“I want to....” (I want to get rid of this pain)

“I would like to...” (I would like to play more with my grandkids)

“I wish...” (I wish I could lose some weight)

Desire statements tell you about the person’s preferences either for change or for the status quo.



Ability: Statements about capability.

“I could...” (I could probably take a walk before supper)

“I can....” (I can imagine making this change)

“I might be able to....” (I might be able to cut down a bit)

The ability-related change talk also signals motivational strength. “I definitely can” reflects much stronger confidence than “I probably could” or “I might be able to”.

Reasons: Specific arguments for change.

“I would probably feel better if I.....”

“I’m sure I’d feel better if I exercised regularly.”

“I need to have more energy to play with my kids”

“This pain keeps me from playing the piano.”

“Quitting smoking would be good for my health.”

Change talk can express specific reasons but reasons can occur along with desire verbs.

Need: Statements about feeling obliged to change.

“I ought to.....” (I ought to make better food choices)

“I have to.....” ((I must get some sleep)

“I really should....” (I really should get more exercise)

D.A.R.N

Desire, Ability Reasons and Need

The first four kinds of change talk can be remembered by the acronym- DARN- Desire, Ability, Reasons, and Need. These have something in common. They are precommitment forms of change talk. They are leading in the direction of change, but by themselves, they do not trigger behavior change. To say “I want to” isn’t to say “I am going to.” To say “I can” is not the same as “I will.” To express reasons for change is not the same as agreeing to do it. To say “I need to” is still not saying “I intend to.”

Commitment: Statements about the likelihood of change. When it comes to commitment the quintessential verb is will, but commitment has many forms. Some statements of strong commitment are: “I promise.....”, “I will....” “I intend to...” “I am ready to....” But, don’t miss lower levels of commitment because they are steps along the way too- People signal an opening door with such statements as “I will think about it”, “I’ll consider it”, “I plan to”, “I will try to”.

Taking Steps: Statements about an action taken. “I actually went out and.....” “This week I started.....” You may encounter this particularly when you see patients repeatedly over time. These statements indicate the person has taken, even if haltingly, some step toward change. He or she has done something that moves him or her in the direction of change. “I quit smoking for a week, but then started up again.” “I walked up the stairs today instead of taking the elevator.” “I went all last week without stopping by McDonalds.”



(Adapted from Community Care of North Carolina)