

Tip # 69 Change Talk

*Motivation is a fire from within.
If someone else tries to light that fire under you,
chances are it will burn very briefly.*
Stephen R. Covey

Celebrate what you want to see more of.
Tom Peters

A central concept in Motivational Interviewing is that clients use specific language that tells you where they are in the process of changing behaviors. You can practice listening for these statements in your sessions. They occur when clients express their **desire, ability, reasons and need to change**. When they are ready, they will also share their commitment or that they have already made a change.

Change language that you hear in the **contemplation and preparation stages of change** is especially important to notice and work with. It is in this stage that you have an opportunity to guide your clients forward. The acronym DARN helps you to remember the four types of early change talk.

Desire: Statements about preference for change.

“I want to...”

“I would like to...”

“I wish...”

Ability: Statements about ability.

“I could...”

“I can...”

“I might be able to...”

Reasons: Specific arguments for change.

“I would probably feel better if...”

“That would give me more energy to...”

“This keeps me from...”

Need: Statements about what is important.

“I ought to...”

“I really should...”

“I have to...”

When your client is in **contemplation and action stages of change** you will hear the final two types of change talk.

Commitment: Statements about likely change.

“I will...”

“I am going to...”

Taking Steps: Statements about action taken.

“I actually went out and...”

“This week I started...”

“I am now doing...”

You can train yourself to pick up key words and highlight them for your client. Begin searching for these statements and you will be amazed how many you will hear. Reflect them back when you hear them to reinforce the change process. (For more on how to reflect, see Tip #6, Mirroring.)

Many clients will say change talk easily. If you aren't hearing much, these **questions will elicit** the change thoughts that are in the client.

Desire: “What do you want, like, wish, hope...”

Ability: “What is possible? What could you do? What are you able to do?”

Reasons: “What would be the benefits? What would get better?”

Need: “How important is this change? How much do you need to do this?”

Commitment: “What are you going to do? What will you do?”

Taking Steps: “What have you done so far? How are you doing it differently now?”

For more on working with change talk, I recommend Motivational Interviewing in Health Care, Rollnick, Miller and Butler, 2008.