

# STRATEGIES FOR EVOKING CHANGE TALK

In Motivational Interviewing, change talk refers to the client's own verbal expressions that favor movement toward change. When clients begin to articulate their desire, ability, reasons, need, and commitment to change, they are more likely to take action. The role of the therapist is to evoke and strengthen this change talk through skillful conversation, rather than imposing direction or advice. Below are evidence-based strategies therapists can use to effectively elicit change talk during sessions:

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## Ask Evocative Questions

Use open-ended questions that invite the client to explore their own thoughts, feelings, and motivations about change. These questions should align with the **DARN CAT** framework (Desire, Ability, Reason, Need, Commitment, Activation, Taking Steps).

### Examples:

- What would be different if you made this change?
- What are some reasons you'd want to make this change now?
- What makes this change important to you personally?

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## Explore Decisional Balance

Help clients weigh the pros and cons of changing versus staying the same. This strategy is particularly useful in the contemplation stage, where ambivalence is common.

### Prompt:

- What are some of the good things about your current behavior? What are some of the not-so-good things?

### Goal:

- Gently guide the client to recognize the costs of staying the same and the benefits of change—on their own terms.

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## Use Importance and Confidence Rulers

Ask the client to rate the importance of change and their confidence in making it happen on a scale from 0 to 10. Then follow up with reflective questions to spark insight.

### Example:

- On a scale from 0 to 10, how important is it for you to make this change? Why that number and not a lower one?
- What would it take to move you up a point or two?

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## Ask for Elaboration and Examples

When clients express any change talk—even subtle—invite them to expand on it. This helps amplify their motivation and deepen their connection to their own reasons for change.

### Prompts:

- Tell me more about that.
- When has this worked for you before?
- What would that look like in your life?

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## Look Back / Look Forward

Help the client reflect on how things used to be before the problem began, or imagine what life could look like after change.

### Examples:

- What was life like before this became a concern for you?
- If you made this change, how might things be different in 6 months?

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## Explore Goals and Values

Connect the client's current behavior to their larger life goals or personal values. This helps create discrepancy between where they are now and where they want to be.

### Prompts:

- What matters most to you in life?
- How does this behavior fit with your values or long-term goals?
- What kind of person do you want to be?

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## Reflect and Reinforce Change Talk

Use reflective listening to highlight and reinforce any language that moves in the direction of change. Reflecting change talk back to the client shows you're listening—and encourages them to say more.

### Example:

Client: I know I need to start setting boundaries at work.

Therapist: You're beginning to recognize how important it is to protect your time and energy.

By using these strategies intentionally, you help clients discover their own motivation for change—one of the most powerful forces in the therapeutic process. Motivational Interviewing doesn't push change—it draws it out.