

Motivational Techniques and skills

December 2023

Affirmative statements made by practitioners can be used to recognise strengths, successes and efforts to change; they can help to increase confidence in their ability to change.

- “You showed a lot of (insert person’s strength here) by doing that”
- “It’s clear that you are really trying to change your (risky/problem/unhealthy behaviour)”
- “In spite of what happened last week, you’re coming back today reflects that you are concerned about changing your (risky/problem/unhealthy behaviour)”

TIP avoid expressions that could sound insincere such as “Wow that’s amazing”! And use affirmation sparingly and ensure genuineness.

Advice/feedback

Ask permission to talk about someone’s behaviour and try to come prepared with relevant handouts, research etc.

- “Do you mind if we spend a few minutes talking about...”
- “What do you know about how your cannabis affects your ...”

Followed by:

- “Are you interested in learning more about...”
- “What do you know are the benefits of quitting/reducing cannabis...”

Follow up question could be: “So you said you are concerned about not sleeping if you stop using cannabis”

~ People often have incorrect information about their behaviours. Research shows that telling people what to do does not work. People like to be given choices in making decisions to change behaviours. By being neutral and non-judgemental, this empowers the person to make informed decision about quitting or changing a risk/problem/unhealthy behaviour.

Normalising

- “A lot of people are concerned about changing their (risky/problem/unhealthy behaviour)”
- “Most people report both good and less good things about their (risky/problem/unhealthy behaviour)”

~ Normalising helps to communicate that having difficulties changing is not uncommon for many

Open ended questions:

- “What makes you think it might be time for a change?”
- “What brought you here today?”
- “What happens when you ... (risky problem unhealthy behaviour here)”

~ Open ended questions allow people to tell their stories and do most of the talking. It gives you time to respond with reflections or summary statements to express empathy. Back-to-back questions such as how often do you over eat, how many years have you been smoking tend to sound like interrogation

Reflective listening

Examples of generic statements:

- “It sounds like ...”
- “It seems as if ...”
- “What I hear you saying ...”
- “I get the sense that this has been difficult”
- “I get the sense that”

Examples of reflective listening:

- “It sounds like you are concerned about your (risky/problem/unhealthy behaviour”
- “I get the sense that you want to change, and you have concerns about your (risky/problem/unhealthy behaviour)”
- “What do you think it might take for you to change in the future”
- “I get the feeling there is a lot of pressure on you to change and you are not sure you can do it because of difficulties you had when you tried in the past “

~ Reflective listening allows practitioners to carefully listen and then paraphrase back - it helps to build empathy, to encourage the person to state their reasons for change, confirms you understand what person is feeling and doing

Summaries

- “It sounds like you are concerned about your (risky/problem/unhealthy behaviour) because it is costing you many negative consequences. Where does that leave you?”
- “On the one hand you feel you need to quit cannabis smoking for your health but on the other hand that will probably mean not associating with your friends anymore. That doesn’t sound like an easy choice. “
- “Over the last three months you have been talking about changing your cannabis use. It seems you have started to recognise the less good things about smoking. And your partner said she would leave if you don’t do something about it. It’s easy to understand why you are now committed to working on your cannabis use.”

~ Summaries require careful listening and are a good way to end the session; good for a talkative person to help them to move on.