



Behavior changes need commitment and plan of action

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During the holiday season, we often reflect upon the past year and create goals for the New Year. However, these goals never seem to lead to long lasting, sustainable change.

Families are often frustrated by loved ones self destructive behavior and attempt confrontational methods to hopefully evoke motivation for change. However, these “interventions” often do not create long lasting change and lead to more frustration.

External motivating factors are often the factors we rely on for change (family pressure, financial pressure, job pressure, seasonal pressures of the New Year).

However, external factors only lead to short lived change. Once those outside pressures are removed, old patterns of behavior emerge.

It is internal factors that will lead to long lasting change. We will not create sustainable change unless we have interest in change, and concern that our current behavior isn't working for us. Change must be important to us and have intrinsic value. We have to be ready, willing, and able.

Readiness is recognition of the need for change, and the mental preparation to change.

We must both recognize a problem and be prepared to do something about it.

However, in mental health, being ready for treatment does not necessarily mean being ready for change. Coming to appointments with mental health professionals only demonstrates a willingness to talk about a problem, not necessarily a readiness or preparedness to do something about it.

Ambivalence is a normal phase in the process of change. Not being ready for change, or not feeling 100% clear about

something is not unusual.

Often we feel like we “can't live with it, but can't live without it.” This is normal, and the key to creating change is to resolve this ambivalence. One helpful tool to help resolve ambivalence is to create a pros and cons list for change, and also a pros and cons list for staying the same.

Willingness is the perceived importance of changing. As long as our present reality is perceived with our desired limits, no change will be indicated.

We must feel like it is important to change, and also have the desire to change.

If willingness is lacking, it is important to discover if there is a discrepancy between the status quo (current reality) and our future goals. If there is, there may be more importance to changing than we originally thought.

Finally, we must be able to change. Often we are ready and willing to change, but don't know how, or don't have the confidence to change. Sometimes we engage in the same pattern of behavior for so long, we might not know how else to behave, or may not feel we have the ability to change.

So, when do people change? When there is a desire or interest in changing that comes from within, when we are convinced that change is in our best interest, when we have an organized plan we are committed to, and when we begin taking actions necessary to make and sustain change.

If you feel like there is something you would like to change in your life, and you are ready, willing, and able, but don't know where to start, it may be

beneficial to seek help from a trained mental health professional.

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