

Changing Your Behaviour

“Hang on a minute!” you may be thinking, “Why should I change? Isn’t it the other person who has the problem?”

It’s a valid point. However, there are probably things that you are doing that, without meaning to, may be making the situation worse - causing unnecessary stress and making your life unmanageable. While often done with the best intentions, these behaviours may also hinder the other person from facing the consequences of their actions.

Some examples of the sorts of things we are talking about include:

- **Keeping the person’s behaviour secret from family and friends** – thereby isolating yourself and denying yourself potential support.
- **Covering over or “protecting” the person** – eg ringing their boss when they are too hung over to go to work and telling a “white lie”.
- **Being controlling** – eg trying to physically stop the person from using by doing things like flushing drugs down the toilet or tipping alcohol down the sink.
- **Supplying them to “keep them safe”** – eg buying them drugs or alcohol to have at home so that they don’t go out.
- **“Nagging”** – telling them over and over how terrible their behaviour is and that they need to stop.
- **Pleading with them to stop using** – especially when they are under the influence of drugs and /or alcohol and therefore not in a rational frame of mind.
- **Trying harder** – to be a better parent/partner/friend. Exhausting yourself by trying to be more giving and more understanding.
- **Obsessing over the addictive behaviour** – continually thinking about the other person, leaving no time for thinking about your own needs or that of other family members.
- **“Rescuing” them when things get tough** – eg giving them money or resources when they have run out due to their addiction.

Exercise:

Make your own list of all the things you have done to try to cope with the situation and get the person to stop using.

Once you have done this, reflect on the list and what has and hasn’t worked. Then write down everything that trying to control the other person has cost you in terms of your emotional and physical health, time, money and relationships.

Change is a process, not an event. It usually doesn't happen overnight and may take effort to achieve.

Psychologists have identified five stages that people go through when making changes. These stages can help to gain an insight into where you are in relation to making a change.

*Note: people do not necessarily move between these changes in a straightforward way. They often move forwards and backwards through these stages. You can think of them as being an upward spiral rather than a straight line.

Pre-contemplation (not thinking about changing)

At this stage you don't see a problem with your own behaviour. You may be completely focused on trying to change the behaviour of the other person and are unaware of the impact of this on your own life.

Contemplation (thinking about changing)

You are beginning to reflect on your responses and wonder if they are really helpful. You start to question some of your behaviours and think about alternatives.

Preparation (preparing to change)

You have reflected on your behaviour and the decisions you are making and have decided that these are not helpful. You begin to make plans, develop new strategies, think about supportive people and set goals.

Action (taking the first step)

At this stage you are putting these plans into effect. You are evaluating the new behaviour and working out what is working well and what is not working so well. You are actively working towards goals you have set for yourself.

Maintenance (keeping it going)

Things don't seem so difficult any more. Making helpful decisions is becoming more intuitive and you are beginning to see the benefits of the changes you have made.

Lapse/relapse (slipping up)

Sometimes, despite best intentions you slip back into old ways of responding. This is quite normal and can be part of the process. It's important not to beat yourself up, but to learn from your mistakes and get back on track.

Exercise:

By reflecting on the above stages, think about where you are in relation to making a change in the situation.

Once you have determined this, think about what would help you move forward.

An important point to consider:

In order to make a change, it's not only necessary to think that change is important, you also need to feel confident about being able to change.

Exercise:

On a scale of one to ten (where one is not important at all and ten is extremely important) how important would you rate making a change in your behaviour?

Now ask yourself, on a scale of one to ten (where one is not confident at all and ten is extremely confident) how confident would you rate yourself as being in being able to make the change?

Now have a look at these two scores. If the change is high on importance but low on confidence, it may help to remind yourself of other challenges you have successfully tackled in life and how you managed these.

If you feel ready to make a change, the following worksheet is a useful planning tool.

The Change Plan Worksheet

The changes I want to make are:

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The three most important reasons I am making these changes are:

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2.
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3.
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The steps I need to take to make these changes are:

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The ways other people can help/ support me are:

(Note - do not include the addicted other)

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Signs that my plan is working will be:

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Things that could get in the way are:

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