

## Clinical Tips: Eliciting Change Talk

**Change talk (i.e. a person's statements that favour change) is predictive of future behaviour change. It is possible to elicit change talk while taking a drug history, and part of your role as a clinician is to try to elicit these statements through the use of motivational interviewing. There are six kinds of change talk.**

The first five kinds of change talk can be remembered by the acronym DARN-C: Desire, Ability, Reasons, and Need. These have something in common. **They are pre-commitment forms of change talk.** They are leading in the direction of change, but by themselves, they do not trigger behaviour change. To say "I want to" isn't to say "I am going to." To say "I can" is not the same as "I will." To express reasons for change is not the same as agreeing to do it. To say "I need to" is still not saying "I intend to."

### 1. Desire

Statements about preference for change:  
"I *want* to...." (I want to reduce/cut down...)  
"I would *like* to..." (I would like to use less..)  
"I *wish*..." (I wish I could go out without using...)  
(Desire statements tell you about the person's preferences either for change or for the status quo.)

### 2. Ability

Statements about capability:  
"I *could*..." (I could smoke less before bed...)  
"I *can*..." (I can imagine making this change)  
"I *might be able* to..." (I might be able to cut down a bit)  
(The ability-related change talk also signals motivational strength. "I definitely can" reflects much stronger confidence than "I probably could" or "I might be able to".)

### 3. Reasons

Specific arguments for change.  
"I would probably feel better if I....." (I'm sure I'd feel better if I exercised regularly.)  
"I need to have more energy to focus on school"  
"Using keeps me from doing well at school"  
"Quitting smoking would be good for my health."

(Change talk can express specific reasons but reasons can occur along with desire verbs)

### 4. Need

Statements about feeling obliged to change.  
"I *ought* to....." (I ought to make better choices)  
"I *have* to....." (I must get some sleep)  
"I *really* should...." (I really should get more exercise)

### 5. Commitment

Statements about the likelihood of change. When it comes to commitment the quintessential verb is *will*, but commitment has many forms.

Some statements of strong commitment are:  
"I *promise*.....", "I *will*...." "I *intend* to..." "I *am ready* to...."

But, don't miss lower levels of commitment because they are steps along the way too- People signal an opening door with such statements as  
"I will *think* about it", "I'll *consider* it", "I *plan* to", "I will *try* to".

### 6. Taking Steps

Statements about an action taken.

"I *actually* went out without using....."  
"This week I cut down by half....."  
"I quit smoking for a week, but then started up again."  
"I walked up the stairs today instead of taking the elevator."  
"I went all last week without seeing my dealer."

Your role is to try to elicit these statements through the use of motivational interviewing. These statements indicate the young person has taken, even if haltingly, some step toward change. He or she has done something that moves him or her in the direction of changing.

You elicit 'change talk'.

See the video: [Listening to Change Talk – Cannabis Use](#)