

# TIPS FOR ASSESSING READINESS TO CHANGE

**Objective:**

To assess the level of a person's readiness to make changes in behaviors, especially high-risk behaviors.

**Intended Use:**

This tool is used to determine readiness to make changes in negative behaviors.

**Audience:**

- Family worker: To informally assess family readiness to change

**Outcome:**

- The use of this tool will help a worker determine how receptive a person is to changing his or her behavior, allowing the worker to move them toward changing those behaviors. Often, the process of assessing readiness in and of itself can help the person see problems more clearly.

**Context:**

People engaged in high-risk behaviors fall across a continuum of readiness to change. Some may not know their behaviors are problematic, or may not care too much even if they do know. Others know they should change, yet have reasons not to. The people most likely to make changes are those who know they should and are ready to do so. Workers often want people to make changes regardless of readiness. Resistance is likely to occur when someone who is not ready is told to make changes.

Readiness to change is a complex issue, as there are many ways for a person to stay comfortable, even if engaged in difficult or dangerous behaviors. These tips can help workers successfully assess how comfortable a person is and move them into enough discomfort so change makes sense.

There are two basic techniques used to make the assessment: Look for signs and ask open-ended questions and follow-up inquiries. During supervision and consultation sessions, scenarios and role-playing can be used to practice the skills of assessing readiness.

As important as it is to identify an individual's readiness for change, the worker should also engage the rest of the family in discussion, to assess how ready they are. The best situation is when an individual and the rest of the family all see the need and ability to make changes.

### Tips

- Use only open-ended exploration and follow-up questions
- Affirm comments and behaviors that show signs of increased interest in change
- Explore both the benefits of the behavior and the drawbacks
- Reinforce the drawbacks
- Have the person envision a dream for the future, then ask if it can be achieved the way things are now

### The Process

A worker uses this tool in the belief that the individual is thinking about making changes. A person may say things directly, or there may be behaviors that indicate the person is considering change. The tool is a guide for the worker to assess the person's readiness.

The tool has two sections. The first is a set of behaviors to look for that might indicate movement toward seeing the need to make changes. The second is a set of questions for the worker to use to elicit information from the individual and family that help assess readiness. Workers should be familiar enough with the tool to conduct the assessment without the forms in front of them. There is no scoring of the tool; it is used simply to open discussion and to elicit the person's readiness for change.

## TIPS FOR ASSESSING A FAMILY MEMBER'S READINESS TO CHANGE

### Look for signs of readiness to change:

- The person becomes less resistant and “on edge” in their interaction with you.
- The person seems to have “talked through” the area of concern and becomes more quiet and thoughtful.
- The person seems to have reached some resolve about the issue and may seem more peaceful or settled. Others might be feeling some of the loss associated with the situation and could be tearful or resigned.
- While the resistance decreases, talk about making the change increases (reason for changing, intention to change, problems with the way things are, etc.).
- The person may start asking questions about change, such as what he or she could do about the problem, how other people change, etc.
- The person starts talking about how things might be if they made the change: both the positive outcomes and the challenges of making the change.
- The person tells you about trying out some new behaviors related to changing, e.g., cutting down on alcohol use.

(Miller & Rollnick, 2002)

### Ask directly about the person's readiness to change:

- Ask an open-ended question about readiness to change such as, “How ready do you feel to make some changes in this area?”
- Listen and reflect back what you hear. In general, people fall somewhere along the line of being “Not Ready,” “Unsure,” or “Ready.”
- Ask for more information: “What are some of the things that have got you thinking about making a change?” “What would have to happen for you to be more ready to consider making a change?” “What are some of the things that make you unsure about making a change?”
- Listen and summarize what the person says.
- If appropriate, ask a key question: “Where does this leave you now?”
- If the person does not appear to be ready for change, reflect this back to him or her and leave the door open for future discussion. Consider approaching the issue through one of the methods described above.

