


**How to Engage and Motivate Adherence
with Public Health Guidance**

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Objectives

- To review the basic principles of effective behaviour change
- To demonstrate a framework for several behavior change techniques that focus on enhancing motivation and confidence to change

2

Findings from our recent large-scale study

- There is a large gap between people's awareness of and adherence to the major behaviour-based public health policies
- Engaging in these behaviours ***dropped significantly*** during the summer across Canada - adherence is getting worse

3

WHY TALK ABOUT BEHAVIOUR CHANGE?

- Despite the availability of effective preventive measures, there are issues with uptake
 - People are not always motivated or willing to follow medical advice, even when there appear to be obvious benefits
- Successful behaviour change is the cornerstone of pandemic management
- Adherence to public health guidance involves a complex interaction between communication style and public motivation to adopt a particular behaviour

PROBLEMS WITH THE “Teach and Tell” APPROACH

- Public Health officials generally try to promote behavior change by giving “persuasive” information and advice
- Weak evidence for this approach, with overall effectiveness 5-10%^{1,2}
- Further, people become resistant to advice when it is provided in a style that is perceived as being ‘told what to do’^{2,3}

¹ Kotke et al, JAMA, 1988; ² Britt et al, Pat Educ Counsel 2004; ³ Stott et al, Fam Pract, 1990

Normalize peoples’ ambivalence about change

“It’s normal to feel two ways about whether or not to (wear masks/distance/self-isolate). On the one hand you worry about your/other people’s health, and on the other hand it is (a burden/a constant reminder of that the pandemic isn’t going away.”



Eliciting/Responding to Change Talk

Open questions

- You: "If you did decide to self isolate, what would be the best reasons to do it?"
- You: "What was that like for you?"
- You: "How might you go about it in order to succeed?"

Affirmation

- Them: "I was planning to buy some masks online."
- You: "It's clear that you're really trying to change you (insert risky/problem/behavior)."
- You: "A lot of people are concerned about mask wearing, staying at home"
- You: "Most people report good and less good things about..."

Reflective listening

- You: "It sounds like you have some concerns about your (insert problem behavior)"
- You: "It sounds like there is a lot of pressure on you to change, and you are feeling frustrated."
- You: "What do you think it might take for you the change in the future?"

Summarize

- You: "It sounds like you are concerned about (insert problem behavior) because it's costing you many negative consequences. Where does that leave you?"
- You: "On the one hand you feel you need to physically distance, but on the other hand that will mean fewer social interactions with friends. That's not an easy choice."

Busting COVID-19 myths...

- It's no worse than the regular flu.
- Masks don't help / masks increase your risk.
- It only affects old people, so I'm fine.
- I'm healthy, so I don't need to practice social distancing.
 - Simply throwing statistics can be ineffective.
 - People may get defensive or easily dismiss the information.
 - The key is to get to the why—the real reason they have these opinions.

Beware of Arbitrary Decision Rules

- Messaging Problems related to a lack of nuance
 - Communication problems may result from binary planning
 - Masks
 - Asymptomatic transmission
- Legitimacy Crisis
 - Risk for credibility, creating confusion, and alienating people
- Recommendation?
 - Acknowledge uncertainty and validate that this is unsettling

Summary

- People do not respond well to information, the use of fear and strong argumentative messages, financial or behavioral consequences, or shaming and other devaluing messages.
 - These tactics may contribute to stronger resistance
- Instead:
 - Express empathy, Avoid argumentation, Help individuals articulate the discrepancy between the way things are and the way they would like them to be, Address ambivalence about the desired behaviour
- Acknowledge uncertainty in messaging and policy

10

Thank-you

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11
