

RM 2–FM: Process of Change: Tailoring Your Approach

Stage of Change	Cognitive and Behavioural Cues (with Explanatory Notes)
Pre-contemplation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ “Raise doubt” about resistance to physical activity. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Raise doubt about people’s resistance to changing physical behaviour by providing information and explaining why it is wise to adopt an active lifestyle. Simply providing pamphlets is not enough. People need to understand the real risks of being sedentary and that the risks apply to them personally, not only to others. ▪ Many people think they don’t have the time or the finances to become active. Cast doubt on the lack-of-time excuse by “talking a person through” a weekly schedule or calendar. With patience, a few hours will be found in almost everyone’s schedule for physical activity. When financial problems are cited as the reason for inactivity, it may be possible to illustrate either that someone does have the funds (e.g., by spending money on physical activities rather than on luxuries such as a new TV, car stereo, or game system) or that becoming active may not require a large amount of money. ▪ When people feel helpless, they may give up trying to be active. Support them by helping them to understand how they could do things they might enjoy by becoming active. Raise doubt about their helplessness by helping them to realize that they <i>can</i> change and that although it may take time to change, the benefits will be almost immediate. ▪ In providing information, be as factual and unbiased as possible, and encourage people to seek more information. ▪ Increase awareness of risks and problems of inactivity. ▪ Keep in mind that tolerance and patience are needed when resistance to change is high.
Contemplation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provide additional reasons to change. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ People often focus on one reason to make a change (e.g., “I’m going on a vacation and I want to drop 5 kg.” or “I want to run my first marathon.”). When people add other reasons why a change may be beneficial, they don’t need to rely on only one outcome to gauge success. Adding other reasons to engage in physical activity (e.g., strengthen bones, improve ability to do work or to keep up with others, learn to play a sport) can help individuals create new process goals (e.g., buy new running shoes, get a gym membership) or performance goals (e.g., keep a daily step-count log), which often aids them in feeling successful. Simply listing additional benefits of change is OK, but finding benefits that individuals “buy into” is important. ▪ Discover reasons for ambivalence to change. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The feeling that “something is holding one back” from acting derives from the coexistence of positive and negative feelings toward a new behaviour. To help someone move forward, it is important to discover what the holdback is and to identify whether there are enough positive feelings to outweigh negative ones (e.g., a concern about not having the right clothing is a common negative that can be overcome). ▪ Weigh the pros and cons. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ There are always positive and negative aspects to any new behaviour. It is important to recognize that negatives exist and that the positives, once weighed, will likely outweigh the negatives. Simply listing and discussing the pros and cons is helpful. ▪ Recognize when intent is high but desire to work is low. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Clearly, exercise is work. However, people almost invariably feel much better when they work out, and especially afterwards. As small increments in exercise or physical activity intensity and duration are recommended, encourage individuals to start small and work their way up (e.g., a 10% increase per week accumulates quickly).

Continued

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Preparation/ Decision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Assist in selecting the best options. ▪ Create a realistic action plan. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Make sure that goal setting is not simply based on outcomes (e.g., time in a race, placement in an event, weight loss). Establish process or performance goals (e.g., change in step counts per week, distance run, consistency in training). ▪ Plan for “blips” in the change process. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Deviations in plans often occur due to external and internal factors, so it is best to anticipate and plan for them before they occur, thereby minimizing the coping required (e.g., control the emotional reaction to the possibility of not succeeding at a goal). Blips in plans for physical activity may occur due to changes in seasons (e.g., transition from summer to winter), holidays, illness, or heavy stress in school. Set up activity goals that have minimums, normal values, and maximums (e.g., one workout a week is maintenance, two or three is very good, and four or more is excellent). Setting up “contingency plans” is as important as setting up the action plan.
Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Support decisions by eliminating doubt in actions. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ All of us have likely felt uncertainty about decisions we’ve made. When individuals experience doubt about their decision on a course of action, assure them that they “have done the right thing” and remind them of the future benefits of following this path. ▪ Establish goals using the SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and time-framed) goal approach. ▪ Establish a means of providing feedback on how something is working. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Self-monitoring is often a key to success. Set up accountability frameworks such as pedometer log sheets where individuals can record and identify process or performance changes. They can evaluate their log sheets and possibly report their progress. The act of reporting makes individuals accountable and indicates the importance of their physical activities. Other useful self-monitoring tools include training diaries, calendars, and exercise logs. ▪ Reinforce overt behavioural changes. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Use prompts to initiate a behaviour change (e.g., put up signs or posters at home as reminders to exercise). These prompts remind individuals to engage in the new activity and to work at it for some time before the effect of the prompts fades. ▪ Consider getting a training partner to help with reinforcement of and adherence to a physical activity plan. A training partner can be a person or a group, an animal (e.g., a dog), or a device (e.g., a pedometer). ▪ Having a close friend or family member “buy into” and help reinforce a change is also important. ▪ Find ways to make the activity experience a joy rather than a burden or a chore. ▪ Rewards or incentives can be helpful, if needed.
Maintenance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Support new behaviours. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Continued support through this time can help people avoid going back to thinking, “I don’t have enough time” and “I have more important things to attend to.” Remind people what their health is worth and that the steps they are taking are important. ▪ Diversify behaviours and explore new ones. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Adding to the repertoire of activities can be helpful so that a person is not entirely dependent upon one form of exercise (e.g., combining stationary cycling with bicycling outdoors adds a new dimension and the possibility of cycling through the change of seasons). ▪ Although structured physical activity plans are important, some variety in workouts can make the exercise more enjoyable and decrease boredom. ▪ Provide accountability frameworks. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Some form of continued self-monitoring is important. Individuals can change the self-monitoring tool they use (e.g., from a calendar to a diary to an exercise log). This form of feedback helps reinforce behaviour. ▪ Realistically examine the outcome goals (e.g., weight loss). Unrealistic expectations in terms of a rapid change in outcome can sabotage success at this stage.