

Building Motivation – ‘What’s important to *you* about this?’

Context

Coaching for Health is a set of conversational skills to support clients and patients towards behaviour change and self-management. One key aspect of the approach is checking and building motivation, as stated in a core Coaching for Health principle: *‘If it’s not desired, it’s not possible.’*

In the limited time we have in our conversations, it’s very easy to move straight to solutions (Options) to health problems that we see (e.g. poorly controlled diabetes, inactivity, poor diet) without checking if the client cares about the situation and what they want. In this handout and the accompanying animation, we use the TGROW structure to describe the different stages of the conversation:

- T – Topic
- G – Goal
- R – Reality
- O – Options
- W – What next?

Eliciting values

One way of building motivation and identifying our clients’ goals is to elicit their values at the Goal stage. Having identified the Topic (i.e. what the conversation is about), we can ask:

*‘What’s important to **you** about this?’ ... about your diabetes, your medication, your health?’*

Not all clients will answer immediately as not everyone has been asked about their values before. You may need to ask a few times, but eventually, with enough trust and rapport, they’ll have an answer. You may hear things like ‘not getting a stroke’, or ‘being able to care for my children’, or ‘avoiding medication’.

As with many coaching questions, it’s useful to elicit as many values as possible by asking:

‘What else is important to you about this?’ and ‘What else?’

Until you have a full list. Generally, the more values a client identifies, the more their motivation builds.

If a client says there’s nothing important to me about my condition, you can ask:

‘What’s important to you more generally, in life?’

They may say things like ‘family’ or ‘living independently’ and you can then ask the client about connections they can see between these values and their health. And you can offer your own suggestions if they get stuck.

Next step – effective Goal setting

If we are able to support a client to identify the values associated with managing their health, they're more likely to be motivated for the rest of the conversation. We can then help them to build an effective Goal as part of TGROW. Useful Goals are SMART Goals, and a client's values are a part of them being Relevant. The other dimensions are:

- Specific – exactly what do they mean?
- Measurable – are there milestones on the way to a larger goal?
- Achievable – is it possible to achieve?
- Relevant – do they care about it? *'What's important to you about this?'*
- Timed – is it for the next few weeks (not months or years)?

Having identified a SMART Goal, identifying Barriers (in Reality) or Options and then actions at What next should be much more straight forward.

For more details on Coaching for Health courses – see www.coachingforhealth.org