

DARN-CAT

Change talk in Motivational Interviewing refers to anything clients say that favors movement in the direction of change. The opposite of change talk, sustain talk, favors the status quo (not changing). Examples of sustain talk include: “I’m not interested in changing”; “I don’t see any need to change”; “I don’t think I could change so why try.”

When clients express ambivalence about changing, they are offering both sustain talk and change talk. “I’m sure I’d be better off if I exercised more, but I just don’t have the time.” The first part of this statement is change talk; the second part, sustain talk.

As health coaches, we want to attune our ears to listen for change talk since it is a predictor of people actually changing. The more people talk in genuine and specific ways about changing, the more likely they are to take action to change.

Change talk comes in various types. Some of the most common types form the acronym DARN-CAT, as noted below. DARN change talk indicates getting ready and building motivation to change. CAT change talk indicates readiness for taking action.

Preparatory Change Talk – “thinking about changing”

Desire – I want to, I would like to, I wish, I hope

Ability – I can, I could, I am able to

Reasons – It would help me, I’d be better off if

Need – I need to, I have to, something has to change

Mobilizing Change Talk – “taking action”

Commitment– I will, I promise, I give you my word

Activation – I’m willing to, I am ready to, I am prepared to

Taking steps – I cut back on my weekend drinking