

Change Talk vs. Sustain Talk – Quick Reference Guide

✦ *A practical tool for recognizing and responding to readiness for change*

What is Change Talk?

Change Talk refers to **statements a peer makes that express a desire, ability, reason, or commitment to change**. Recognizing and reinforcing Change Talk increases motivation and helps peers move toward action.

- ✓ **Desire:** “I want to be healthier.”
- ✓ **Ability:** “I think I could quit if I had support.”
- ✓ **Reason:** “My family would be happier if I stopped using.”
- ✓ **Commitment:** “I’ve decided to go to a meeting this week.”

💡 **Key Insight:** The more a peer engages in Change Talk, the more likely they are to take action. **Your role is to encourage and reinforce these statements.**

What is Sustain Talk?

Sustain Talk refers to **statements a peer makes that reinforce staying the same**—it often reflects doubts, fears, or resistance to change. Sustain Talk is a normal part of ambivalence.

- ✓ **Desire to Stay the Same:** “I don’t really want to change.”
- ✓ **Inability to Change:** “I’ve tried before, and it never works.”
- ✓ **Justification for Staying the Same:** “I don’t see why I need to change.”
- ✓ **Lack of Commitment:** “I might quit someday, but not now.”

💡 **Key Insight:** Sustain Talk should not be argued with or ignored. Instead, use **MI techniques to explore ambivalence and shift the conversation toward Change Talk.**

How to Respond to Change Talk

When you hear Change Talk, **reflect and reinforce it** to encourage further exploration.

- ✓ **Reflection:** “It sounds like you really want to be healthier.”
- ✓ **Amplify Motivation:** “What would that change mean for you?”
- ✓ **Ask for More:** “Tell me more about why that’s important to you.”
- ✓ **Summarize & Encourage:** “You mentioned that quitting would help you feel better and improve your relationships—what’s the next step that feels right for you?”

💡 **Pro Tip:** The more you highlight and reflect Change Talk, the stronger a peer’s motivation becomes.

How to Respond to Sustain Talk

When you hear Sustain Talk, avoid arguing or persuading. Instead, **reflect and explore their concerns.**

- ✓ **Acknowledge Ambivalence:** “It sounds like part of you wants to change, but another part is hesitant.”
- ✓ **Explore Pros & Cons:** “What are some benefits of staying the same? What concerns do you have about change?”
- ✓ **Avoid the Righting Reflex:** Instead of “You should quit smoking,” try “What would have to be different for you to consider quitting?”
- ✓ **Reframe Challenges as Opportunities:** “You’ve tried before, which means you’ve learned something. What worked, and what didn’t?”

💡 **Pro Tip:** When a peer expresses Sustain Talk, meet them where they are. Exploring resistance without judgment helps **reduce defensiveness and increase openness to change.**

Quick Reference Table: Change Talk vs. Sustain Talk

ADVOCATE. ACT. ADVANCE.

Type of Talk	Example Statement	Best MI Response
Change Talk (Desire)	"I really want to quit drinking."	"It sounds like this is something that matters to you—what would be different if you quit?"
Change Talk (Ability)	"I think I could stop if I had support."	"What kind of support do you think would help you the most?"
Sustain Talk (Doubt)	"I've tried before, and I always fail."	"It sounds like this has been a tough journey. What have you learned from past attempts?"
Sustain Talk (Justification)	"I don't think I need to change."	"What do you like about how things are now? What concerns do you have about staying the same?"

Final Takeaways

- ✓ **Change Talk signals readiness for change—reinforce and encourage it.**
- ✓ **Sustain Talk reflects hesitation—explore it without pushing.**
- ✓ **Reflections, open-ended questions, and affirmations help shift the conversation toward Change Talk.**
- ✓ **MI is about guiding, not persuading—let peers explore their own motivations at their own pace.**

 **Use this guide in your peer support conversations to recognize and respond to Change Talk effectively!**