

Working with Smokers

There are a number of ways of thinking about smoking and stopping smoking which can inform the way in which you work with smokers. Outlined below are some ideas for helping people wanting to quit smoking.

(A) The Stages of Change Model

The Stages of Change Model can be a useful tool to guide your work with smokers. It describes the stages that people go through from being a 'contented smoker' to a 'confident ex-smoker'.

Consider which of the stages below best describes your client. The Guide to Using the Cycle of Change on page 18 describes approaches to take with smokers at each stage, and suggests some of the issues you may wish to encourage them to think about.

'Contented' smokers or pre-contemplation stage - 'Not interested in change'

This stage of change comes before entry into the cycle of change. At this stage, smokers do not view their smoking as a problem. The perceived benefits of continuing to smoke outweigh any disadvantages it may have.

Thinking about change - contemplation

In this stage, people's perception of the negatives of smoking starts to grow. They feel a growing sense of ambivalence about their smoking:

'On the one hand I would like to stop, but on the other....'

By the end of this stage, smokers have decided that stopping smoking is important enough to them (for whatever reason/s) to make a quit attempt.

Preparing to change

During this stage, the smoker (who has previously decided that it is important for them to try and stop smoking) needs to build up confidence in their ability to quit successfully. This is the stage at which plans for quitting are made and people seek out any information they may need (e.g. what help is available, the approaches others found useful etc.)



Quit attempts are most likely to be successful when the smoker feels both that it is important to them to try quitting and confident enough to have a chance of succeeding.

Making changes

This stage starts on the client's quit date. The plans made during preparation are now put into practice. High levels of 'mental energy' are needed to maintain this new and unfamiliar behaviour. Cravings may be frequent and often intense.

Maintaining Change

This stage starts from around a month after the quit date. People's new smokefree lifestyle is starting to become more habitual. Cravings become less frequent. Some ex-smokers feel that they are in maintenance for the rest of their lives. This is when they experience occasional cravings, for example, in highly stressful circumstances.

Relapse

Relapse is a normal part of behaviour change for many people. On average, it takes quitters between 3 and 8 times around the cycle before successfully quitting for good.

It is also common for people to experience minor 'lapses' when quitting smoking. This refers to a partial reversion back to smoking (for example for a night or a few days), but not back to the old levels. It can be useful to discuss the concept of lapse as opposed to full relapse with clients to encourage them to 'get back to it' after a minor lapse but before a complete relapse has taken place.

The following questions can be a useful way of building motivation and identifying issues to look at in more detail:

On a scale of 0 - 10, how important is it to you to stop smoking?

On a scale of 0 - 10, how confident do you feel in your ability to stop smoking?

What makes your score(s) this high?

How high would they need to be to make an attempt to stop smoking?

What would increase your scores?

