
RESISTANCE TO CHANGE

Conversations about change are challenging, and sometimes it feels like you are working very hard to help your patient, and nothing is changing; and it seems like the patient is resisting change.

What am I hearing? Is it sustain talk or discord?

SUSTAIN TALK

"I don't want to exercise. I hate it – I always have. I'm too old to start that now."

DISCORD

"I don't see why I have to talk about this at all. You really couldn't understand."

Sustain Talk is any statement that supports the status quo; it is the flipside of change talk, for example: "I don't want to..." "I can't..." "I don't need to..." "It's not that important..." or "I won't..."

Discord is about the relationship between you and your patient. It can sound like defensiveness, arguing, interrupting, disengaging or challenging responses.

Patient: *"I've been this way for so long, that I don't know any different. I keep getting told by you people to eat better, but I'm not living off salad! I feel a bit better when I cook for myself, but getting organised to do it is too hard most days. I don't want to talk to some stranger about how I feel – I don't care if they've got a degree in psychology – I feel like it's none of their business. I don't know if there's any point in talking to you either, you're telling me all the same stuff, and I'm really not stupid, you know."*

Reflection

Showing that you have understood can assist.

"You feel like you've been battling this for a long time."

"You're a very private person."

"You feel like you're stuck, and people aren't really listening."

Emphasise autonomy

"Deciding if you want to talk to anyone, including me, is really up to you."

"What you choose to do is absolutely your business."

Apologise

If you think you've got off on the wrong foot, or have misunderstood each other, apologising can be helpful:

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean to offend you or tell you things you already know."

How do I respond to my patient in a helpful way?

Double-sided reflection

"You've had quite enough of health professionals, and you're wondering if talking to me will be helpful."

"It sounds like salads aren't really your thing, and at the same time you notice that you feel better when you eat better."

Shift focus

...away from topics that do not seem helpful at the moment

"You're not interested in talking to a psychologist at the moment, so that's off the table, what do you think would be helpful?"

Come alongside

(agreeing with the sustain talk can sometimes elicit change talk)

"You're not ready to make a change right now."

"You can't see how things will improve, especially with talking."
