

Module 2, Lesson 5 Handout:

Behavior Therapy Strategies in Weight Loss

Clients will often be overwhelmed when they have a large amount of weight to lose (and even if they have a small amount too.) It's important to understand that you have a big role here. You're a cheerleader, coach and educator and can have a big impact on your client. This is a good thing! Use it as motivation for yourself.

In order for most clients to lose weight you need to speak to their motivation, be supportive in their goals and implement behavior changes that can be maintained for the long haul. One of the most widely used approaches used in weight loss counseling is Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT). CBT focuses on changing how you think about yourself, how you act and circumstances like your environment that can influence your behaviors. Let's go through how to put this all into practice for a behavior therapy strategy that works.

Find the Motivation

Start by taking a minute to write down your client's motivation. What exactly does this person want to get out of your work together? It's important for you to truly understand your client's motivation so that you can speak to this motivation throughout your work. Write this down for each client:

My client _____ is motivated to lose weight because _____.

Set Realistic Goals

Start by making a list of behaviors that could use some adjusting. For example, skipping breakfast, drinking diet soda or not eating vegetables. Figure out with your client which behavior is going to be the easiest to change. Always start with the easy stuff. Write down a behavioral goal for each of the places that needs attention and how you recommend addressing it. Remember, these new behaviors can start with baby steps. Big goals can set someone up for failure, while small goals can be built upon. You also want to make sure each goal is specific and actionable. The more specific a goal, the more likely a person is to achieve it. Vague goals are less effective. Some examples of great (versus not so great) goals are:

Problem: Skipping breakfast

Ineffective goal: Eat breakfast before going to the gym

Effective goal: Set out 3 dried apricots and 15 almonds in a mason jar tupperware and leave it on the counter by your keys. Eat it on the way to the gym each morning

Problem: Drinking diet soda instead of water

Ineffective goal: Drink more water and less soda during the day

Effective goal: Replace all of the soda you drink with sparkling water

Problem: Not eating vegetables

Ineffective goal: Eat a vegetable every day

Effective goal: Add a side salad to dinner every night

The more specific and realistic you are, the more likely the person is to follow through on the goal. In your planning, make sure there's a timeline that's reasonable and when you'll readjust or build on the goals, and right from the get go have clients think of any potential barriers and ways to handle them before they come up in real life.

Encourage the Client to Self-Monitor

Self-monitoring requires that rather than people beating themselves up for not attaining a goal, they pay attention to their own individual experiences. When clients self-monitor, they begin to notice barriers, pay attention to physical cues and identify challenges to changing their behavior. Too often people rely on negative self-judgment to stay motivated and in so doing, fail to recognize and plan for real barriers. It can help to role play or plan for expected barriers when you work with your clients. Help them learn to self-monitor. **“What would work for you if you wind up at a pizza place for dinner on Friday night?”** Or, **“What was it like when the whole table ordered desserts to share and everyone was encouraging you to take a bite?”**

Be Positive

The power of positivity cannot be stressed enough here. Weight loss is possible. Success is out there. If you believe in your clients, it will help them to believe in themselves. We discussed starting with the easiest goals first because tackling an initial goal can be incredibly motivating. It's also important

to provide regular feedback, such as using the “I am a Rockstar” worksheet from Level 1, to acknowledge your client’s success.

You can also support your clients through appointments and by being accessible. Accountability with food journals or having to step on your scale can really help clients transition to independence in meeting and maintaining their goal behaviors. Through this you can also identify the clients who may need to lean on you. **“Send me a link or copy of your food journal on Friday morning and I’ll give you my feedback.”** This reinforcement is often motivating to a client to stay focused.

The use of incentives to support change in behavior has been extensively studied and works for many. A little incentive can really help in having a client stay positive. Incentives could be: **“If you meet your goal for having salad for lunch every day, treat yourself to a manicure on Friday.”** Or, **“If you keep your food journal all week long, let’s reward you with a new water bottle.”**

Environment

Have clients take a good look at their environment and identify what needs to be changed. Are there things currently there that don’t align with their health and wellness goals? For some, this could involve a clean out of the pantry or removing obesogens (discussed in another handout) from their homes. It could also be buying glass food storage containers and throwing away takeout menus to support their goal of prepping more meals at home. A client’s environment needs to be equipped with everything they need to set them up for success - and be rid of the stuff that’s holding them back.

Putting it Together

Weight loss can feel overwhelming and the work is never easy, but you’re in the position to help make the whole process easier for your clients. Many clients might be turned off from experiences in the past - ensure they don’t relive the same bad experience again! Listen to your clients, find their motivation, start with baby step goals and provide them with support and encouragement along the way.