



### ACTIVITY: Habit Change

### Facilitator's Notes

#### Purpose

The purpose of the activity is:

- to stimulate discussion about how we can make small, positive steps towards better self-care by changing our habits.
- provide simple strategies for supporting successful habit change

#### ESTIMATED TIME

**5** minutes

#### MATERIALS

**Required:**

Pen and paper

#### Background

Habits are beneficial because they allow us to operate on auto-pilot. Once something is a habit we can do it without really thinking about it and this frees up our brains to focus on other concerns. Practicing self-care is easier when we have habits in place that support our physical, emotional, and spiritual health.

Changing habits can be incredibly difficult - research shows that when faced with a difficult choice or decision we tend to stick with the "default" behavior, because this will take the least energy.

Luckily, scientific research has also pointed the way to some effective strategies for creating new habits. Habits form when repetition of an activity actually causes our brain to change – so if we want to create a new habit we need to set the stage to make it as easy as possible to repeat the activity until it becomes a habit.

In this activity we'll discuss two strategies that can help support habit change. The first strategy is to identify your motivation for change. The second is figuring out how to minimize barriers that get in the way of change.



### Activity

- 1) Ask participants to think of one habit they would like to change. Start with something small and well-defined (for example, I want to stop eating candy after lunch, or I want to start drinking water during the day).
- 2) Ask them to write down why they want to change the habit. What is their motivation? If the habit is part of a larger change they want to make (e.g., eat better, lose weight), write the motivation for the larger change as well.
- 3) Ask them to think about what they could do to make it easier to change the habit. For example:
  - *If you want to start exercising in the morning, lay out your exercise clothes the night before.*
  - *If you want to stop spending money online, cancel any saved credit cards online and put your credit cards somewhere they are hard to obtain.*

This is their strategy for **minimizing the barriers to change**. Have them write this down.

- 4) Explain that if they are trying to stop a behavior, they should decide upon a replacement behavior – something they can do instead of the original behavior. For example:
  - *If you are in the habit of going to buy coffee and a cookie after lunch, replace it with a trip to the coffee bar or lunch room to get ice water or hot tea.*

Have them write down their replacement behavior (if applicable).

- 5) Instruct them that they should place the paper with their motivation and plan somewhere they will see it every day as they work to change your habit.
- 6) Tell participants that sharing goals with others has also been shown to increase our success. Ask if anyone would like to share their plans with the group.

### Discussion Questions/ Key Points

- What are some steps people came up with to remove barriers to habit change?
- What are examples of replacement behaviors we can use?
- Do the replacement behaviors you came up with offer any type of "reward"?

### Follow-up

Encourage the team to follow-up with each other to see how they are doing with their plans and to offer support.

Follow up after a month at your next meeting and discuss how everyone did. Were people successful? If not, what were the barriers?