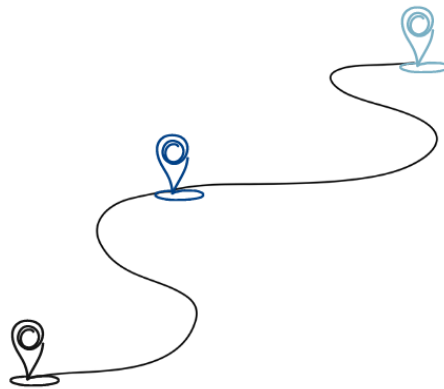


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# Sustaining Motivation

Uncovering What Moves You Forward



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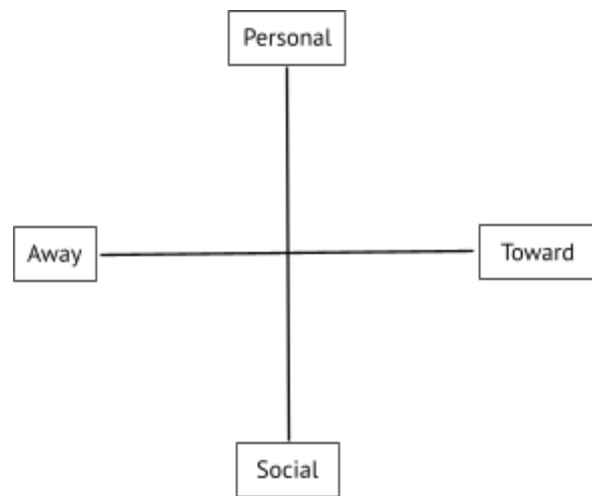
## Chapter Goals

- Learn what motivation is and why it is important
- Clarify what your goals are, that is, why make changes
- Increase motivation for change and find ways to work around low motivation

## What Is Motivation?

**Motivation** has to do with what drives us forward, how we wish to act, and what we want to accomplish. It is *what* we are trying to get out of change. Not only does motivation provide us with a guide for where we are going, it can also help us through challenging moments. It is a lot easier to be willing to make a difficult change if we are connected to why we are making the change.

There are a couple features of motivation worth discussing. We can be motivated to move away from something we don't like, such as decreasing depression, stress, pain, or conflicts (Eder et al., 2013). We call this **moving-away** motivation. Moving-away motivations can initiate change, such as making a call to initiate therapy, but it can also get us into trouble—say when we use unproductive coping strategies to avoid inevitable pain.



We can also be motivated to move towards something we like, such as increasing happiness, spending more time with loved ones, or fulfilling our social duties (Eder et al., 2013). We call this **moving-towards** motivation. Moving-towards motivation keeps us moving forward, especially when confronted with difficult challenges. For this reason, we tend to emphasize moving-towards motivations in

therapy. Regardless, we will get a sense of these two motivations for you later in this chapter.

Another dimension of motivation is where the motivation is directed. You may be motivated for personal reasons—things you personally want to get out of change—without social pressure (Koestner, 2008). We call this **personal-autonomy** motivation and there is a body of literature that suggests it is linked to better goal obtainment; however, this research is predominately done within individualistic cultures (for example, Milyavskaya et al., 2015) and is likely not applicable to everyone or all circumstances.

You may also be motivated for social reasons, things you want for the greater good of your friends, family, or community (Naeem et al., 2023). We call this **social-harmony** motivation. It is more common to see people from collectivistic cultures reframe personal motivations, such as eating better or working harder, in terms of other people, for example, “eating better to be around for my family.” This “harmony” between motivations can be quite effective (Wang & Fishbach, 2023). There isn’t a one-size fits all with motivation and our cultural backgrounds and current circumstances are important to consider.

## Your Change Goals

Using the ideas above, let’s flush out your goals for therapy. One point of clarification, **goals** are considered desired outcome states, for example, go to three volunteer events this month. Before we set specific goals, let's think more generally

for a moment. First, focus on the things that you hope to be different. What would you like to have decreased in your life?

What would you like to have increased in your life?

Now, let's try to turn these motivations into goals for change as you work through therapy. Let's think about what your goals are for therapy. Consider: What do you want to get out of therapy? How would you know that therapy is helping? What would you see yourself doing differently if therapy was successful?

It is helpful to come up with goals that are as specific as possible because they give us a sense of what we need to do (Locke, 1996). **Specific goals** have specific actions in mind—for example, running—and include at least one place, time, or

person—for example, three times a week. For instance, a goal like “be happy” isn’t very specific. If you were to think about what it means to be happy, you could come up with a list of things that could make you happier than you are now, such as socializing more, improving your health, and feeling safer. For socializing more, you might decide that a more specific way to work towards this goal is to call your friends more. However, this still isn’t specific as it doesn’t say exactly what you are going to do to complete this goal. Take a minute and look at the following table of example goals and see how each goal can become more and more specific, to the point that you know exactly what you need to do.

<b>General Goals</b>	<b>Intermediate Goals</b>	<b>Specific Goals</b>
Socializing more	Call my friends a couple times a week	I will call Cara on Tuesday at 6 pm after work and Tom on Saturday afternoon at 3.
Improving my health	Lose 20 pounds in three months	I will start by walking for 30 minutes on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday mornings from 7:00 to 7:30 AM before work, and get a calorie counter for my phone.
Feeling safer	Enroll in a self-defense class	I will start by walking for 30 minutes on Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings from 7 to 7:30 am before work, and get a calorie counter for my phone.

In the space below, try to write a few goals that are as specific as possible. We say “as specific as possible” because we understand that this can be challenging for those experiencing psychological distress (Dickson & MacLeod, 2004) and you always have your therapist to help you refine them. Your goals should be (1) related to your work in therapy—for example, what you hope to get out of therapy—and (2) are reasonable to accomplish within the next few months.

<b>Change Goals for Therapy</b>

## Increasing Your Motivation

Goals are great, but how motivated are you for change in the service of your goals? Let's get a sense of how motivated you are for change. Below you will see a row of numbers between 0 and 10: 0 equals *not motivated* and 10 equals *very motivated*. Mark how motivated you are to change at this moment in time.

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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Take a moment to reflect on your answer. For instance, if you marked a 5, what made you answer a 5 and not something higher? What made you answer a 5 and not something lower?

We can unpack your answer a bit. Bear with us...We like to use a metaphor to describe what change is like for people, why it is easy to stay the same, and why it can be hard to change. Imagine for a moment that you have an old coat. This coat represents your old habits; the stuff that is keeping you stuck. You know this coat well. You know how it fits and how to move around in it. You've broken this coat in. You just automatically put the coat on when it is time to leave. However, the coat is



a bit tattered and torn and doesn't quite do the job any more. This is much like your current unhelpful patterns of responding; at one point they were helpful, but now they aren't quite doing the job. You

are thinking about getting a new coat. So, you go to a store and try on some new coats. This is like going to therapy and learning new responses to various events. At first, the coat is a bit stiff and it's a little hard to move around in. You may not even be sure if it'll protect you from the elements. But you give it a shot and with time, you break it in. This is much like therapy, there is uncertainty around whether any of this will be helpful but the more you practice new skills the easier they are to use.

You may have noticed a couple themes in this metaphor. There are pros and cons to staying the same *and* making change. Listing the pros and cons will help you identify barriers to change and reasons to change (Hall et al., 2012). Take a moment to list out the pros and cons in the table below.

	<b>Pros</b>	<b>Cons</b>
<b>Stay The Same</b>		
<b>Make Change</b>		

After listing your pros and cons, how has your motivation level changed from when you first rated it?

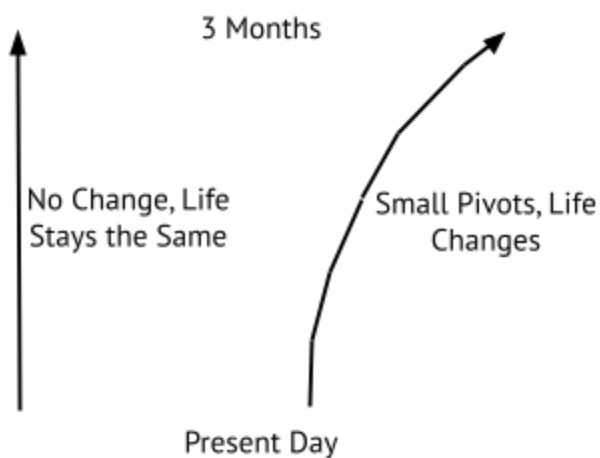
0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
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If it is still low, consider what you would need to know or do for your motivation to be higher. You can always talk with your therapist about this. It's important to discuss.

We often experience low motivation and find it hard to get going. We can meet you where you are at. There are a couple things you can do to help work around low motivation. First, start small. Try to find the smallest thing you are willing to do in the face of low motivation. This can be something as simple as opening a book you've been wanting to read. Oftentimes people will find that once they start, they are likely to keep going. We call this **behavioral momentum**. Second, try to restructure your surroundings in a way that makes change easier. Think of this as removing **behavioral friction**. For instance, someone who wants to run more frequently might consider putting their running shoes right next to their door. You should experiment with this to see what works.

Even the smallest changes, or what we call **pivots**, can lead to large differences as time goes on. It's similar to seeing yourself in the mirror everyday versus a photo of yourself a few years ago. You may not notice a difference from day-to-day, but what about year-to-year? As you start to

make changes, try to connect with the positive outcomes of change, even if they are small. These positive outcomes are going to make your new responses more likely to occur again in the future.



## Putting It Into Practice

To get the most out of your change journey, it's important to put the things you learn into practice. In fact, the more people do, the better their outcomes (Kazantzis & Lampropoulos, 2002). Sustaining is an ongoing practice and you may find that you need to revisit this chapter. See the next page for another "Change Task," which will help you solidify your motivation for change even more. It involves a little imagination. The nice thing about this is that you can recall it at any time that you need additional motivation.



## Change Task

Imaging Your  
Future Life

In the next week or two, take a moment to really solidify your future life, the life after change. We know you already thought about this earlier, but now we want you to write it down. Writing this down in as much detail as possible can be helpful. If you are more visual than verbal and artistically inclined, feel free to draw your future life. So, in six months from now, how would your life be different if you continue to make changes? Here are some helpful questions to ask yourself: How would you be feeling differently? How would you be thinking differently? What would you be doing differently? Who would you be doing it with? Feel free to use the worksheet on the next page. If you want to go a bit further, read what you wrote to yourself and try to connect with any images and feelings that show up. This is commonly referred to as, “success visualization.”



# Future Visualization Worksheet

## Chapter Summary

You have learned quite a bit in this chapter. You learned:

1. that motivation can be either moving away or towards something,
2. that motivation can come from personal wants or oughts from others,
3. your own pros and cons for staying the same and making change,
4. how even small changes can lead to large differences,
5. to restructuring your surroundings to aid in change, and
6. how your future life could look with ongoing changes.

Your **change task** for the week is to write down how your life could look differently if you continue to make even small changes in your life and try to connect with any images or feelings that arise.

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