

Pittsburgh Employment Readiness Screen (PERS)

These statements will help us learn about your employment needs. Each statement describes how you might feel about getting a job. Please mark if you agree or disagree with each statement. Make your choices based on how you feel right now, not what you have felt in the past or what you would like to feel in the future.

	Statement	Agree	Disagree
1	If I don't get a job soon, my problems are going to get worse.		
2	I have thought about what kinds of jobs I would like to apply for in the next few weeks.		
3	It frustrates me that I am unemployed.		
4	I started applying for jobs, but I could use some help.		
5	It is really hard to get a job. Sometimes I think it's not worth the effort.		
6	I am actively doing something to find a job (such as: making a resume, learning new skills, looking at job posting boards).		
7	I have been wondering if there are steps I could take to get a job.		
8	I am really working hard to get a job.		
9	I might be ready to look for a job.		
10	I'd rather not look for a job.		
11	I have not applied for jobs yet, but I know what I need to do to prepare for applying.		
12	Getting a job will not help me.		

	Statement	Agree	Disagree
13	I am looking forward to getting a job. I am ready to start looking.		
14	As far as I'm concerned, I don't need to get a job right now.		
15	I'm not just thinking about getting a job, I'm already doing something about it.		
16	I am ready to take the next steps towards getting a job.		
17	Even though I don't have a job now, I am working on getting one.		
18	I do not feel the need to work.		
19	I plan to apply for employment within the next few weeks.		
20	It might be time for me to find a job.		

SCORING:

For the statements where the participant marks 'agree,' circle the corresponding statement number below. Count the number of circles for each stage and write that number on the blank lines to the right. The stage with the highest number of circles indicates which stage the participant is in.

Precontemplation: 5 10 12 14 18 _____

Contemplation: 1 3 7 9 20 _____

Preparation: 2 11 13 16 19 _____

Action: 4 6 8 15 17 _____

If there is a tie, the participant is placed in the "higher" stage.

PERS is an experimental instrument under review, designed to assess employment readiness based on the Transtheoretical Model of Change.

For questions, please contact:

Sara Lessem

Communication Liaison

sara.lessem@gmail.com

1. PRECONTEMPLATION



WHAT?

- No intention to change behavior in the foreseeable future
- Unaware or under aware of their problems

WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR THE PARTICIPANT?

- The participant has no intention to look for or obtain a job
- The participant is under aware that being unemployed is problematic (*i.e.* “*Before I can even think about looking for work, I need to address ...*”)

YOUR ROLE: “Supportive Mentor”

- The role involves joining with a potentially resistant participant who is both drawn to and repelled by the prospects of becoming employed.

2. CONTEMPLATION



WHAT?

- Aware that a problem exists, but have not yet made a commitment to take action
- Seriously considering changing the problem behavior in the next 6 months

WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR THE PARTICIPANT?

- The participant understands that they should get a job but is not ready to do anything about it
- The participant considers moving towards getting a job in the next 6 months

YOUR ROLE: “Socratic Teacher”

- The role is *similar* to a Socratic teacher who encourages participants to gain insight into their situation by using inquiry and questioning.

3. PREPARATION



WHAT?

- Combines intention with behavioral criteria
- Intending to take action in the very near future (*i.e. one month*)

WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR THE PARTICIPANT?

- The participant wants to get a job and has started to take baby steps towards getting a job (*i.e. preparing a resume, browsing jobs*)
- The participant is ready to take action, but not just yet

YOUR ROLE: “Experienced Coach”

- The role is more like that of an experienced coach who can assist with developing a game plan or can review the participant’s own plan.

4. ACTION



WHAT?

- Active steps to modify behaviors, experiences and environment to overcome their problems
- Overt behavioral changes that require considerable commitment of time and energy

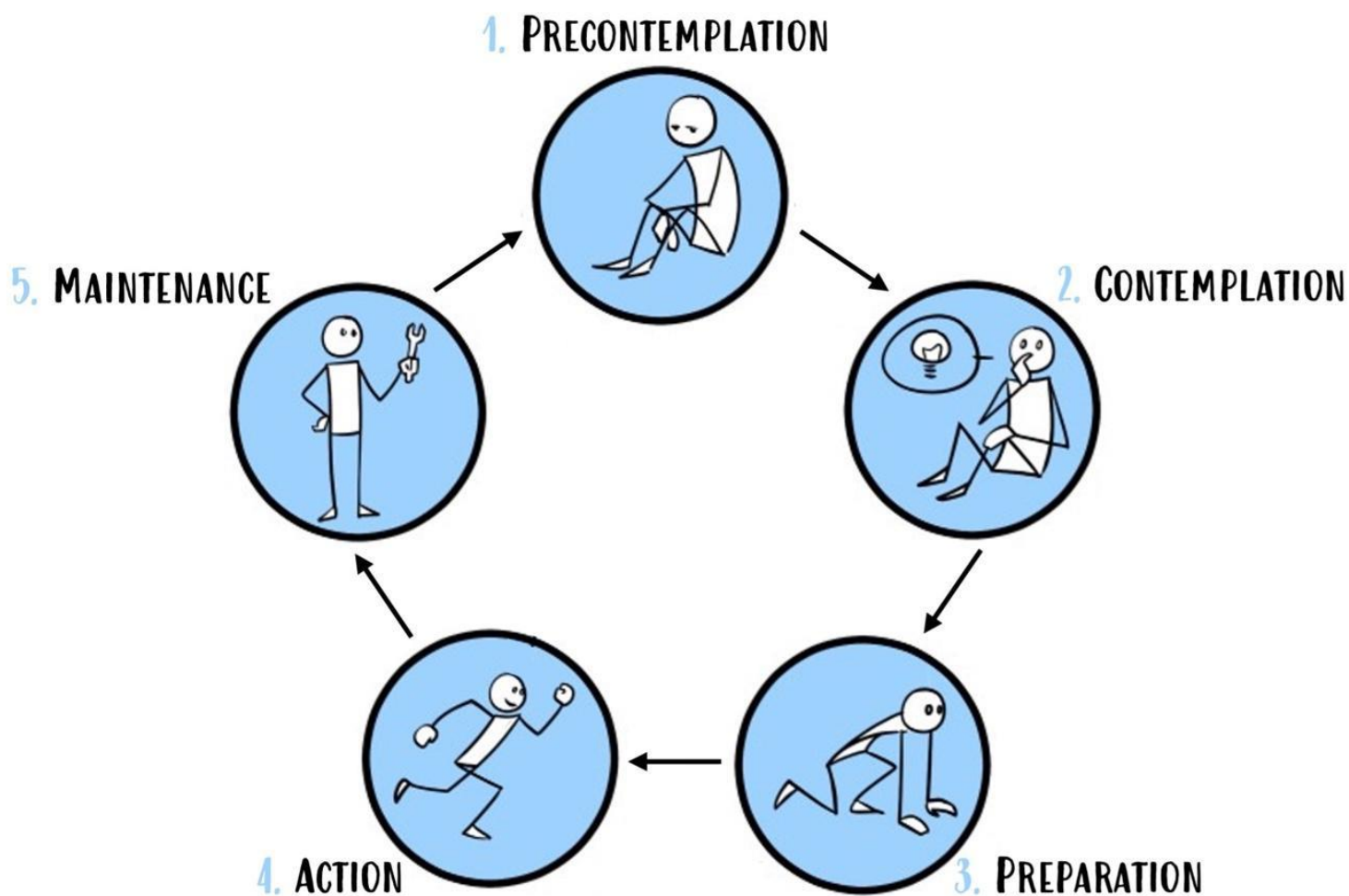
WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR THE PARTICIPANT?

- The participant is actively seeking employment (*i.e. interviewing for jobs, attending job skills classes*)
- The participant is dedicated to looking for a job

YOUR ROLE: “Consultant”

- The role is like a consultant who is able to provide expert advice and support when action is not progressing as smoothly as expected.

Pittsburgh Employment Readiness Screen (PERS) Resource Guide



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INTRODUCTION

The *Pittsburgh Employment Readiness Screen (PERS)* was developed by Occupational Therapy Doctoral students at the University of Pittsburgh in conjunction with the Allegheny County Department of Human Services.

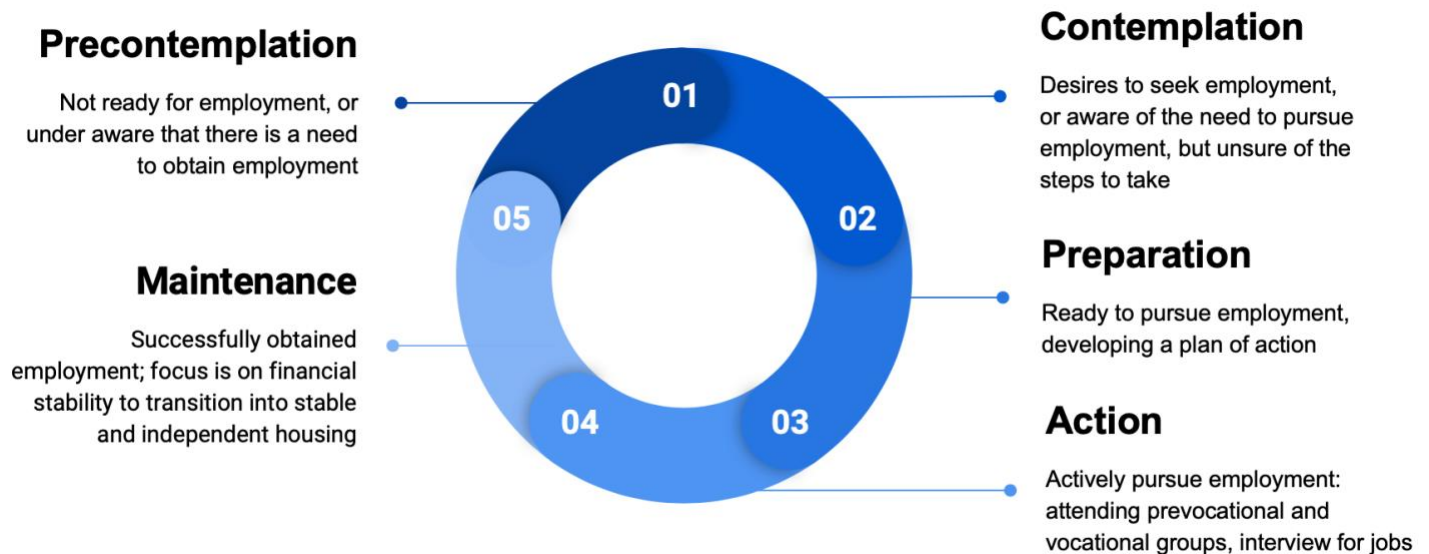
Within this guide you will find:

- Explanation of each stage
- Description of actions the participant may be exhibiting in each stage
- Your roles as a provider
- Strategies to work with the participant

The PERS tool and resource guide are designed to be used with participants who are unemployed or underemployed. You can use these tools during intake or at any time while the participant is in the program for reassessment. It may be useful to complete the tool at multiple time points to identify any potential changes.

The resources included may be used independently or in conjunction with each other. You may decide to use one or all of the handouts within a stage depending on the participant's needs.

Stages of Change^{2, 4, 5, 6}



What is it?

- A conceptual model of how people progress through behavior change
- Based on the idea that change occurs in stages over time

How does it work?

- Participants can move back and forth through these stages during the behavior change process - **change is not always linear**
- This is **not** a specific counseling method, but a framework that can help you tailor specific strategies to participants in different stages

Your task is to evoke and enhance motivation

- Your role is to help participants recognize when a behavior is inconsistent with their values or stated goals, feel competent to change, develop a plan for change, begin taking action, and continue using strategies

** For the purposes of this Resource Guide, the maintenance stage has been omitted **

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	Statement	Agree	Disagree
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2	I have thought about what kinds of jobs I would like to apply for in the next few weeks.		
3	It frustrates me that I am unemployed.		
4	I started applying for jobs, but I could use some help.		
5	It is really hard to get a job. Sometimes I think it's not worth the effort.		
6	I am actively doing something to find a job (such as: making a resume, learning new skills, looking at job posting boards).		
7	I have been wondering if there are steps I could take to get a job.		
8	I am really working hard to get a job.		
9	I might be ready to look for a job.		
10	I'd rather not look for a job.		
11	I have not applied for jobs yet, but I know what I need to do to prepare for applying.		
12	Getting a job will not help me.		

	Statement	Agree	Disagree
13	I am looking forward to getting a job. I am ready to start looking.		
14	As far as I'm concerned, I don't need to get a job right now.		
15	I'm not just thinking about getting a job, I'm already doing something about it.		
16	I am ready to take the next steps towards getting a job.		
17	Even though I don't have a job now, I am working on getting one.		
18	I do not feel the need to work.		
19	I plan to apply for employment within the next few weeks.		
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SCORING:

For the statements where the participant marks ‘agree,’ circle the corresponding statement number below. Count the number of circles for each stage and write that number on the blank lines to the right. The stage with the highest number of circles indicates which stage the participant is in.

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Preparation: 2 11 13 16 19 _____

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If there is a tie, the participant is placed in the “higher” stage.

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EXAMPLE

Pittsburgh Employment Readiness Screen (PERS)

These statements will help us learn about your employment needs. Each statement describes how you might feel about getting a job. Please mark if you agree or disagree with each statement. Make your choices based on how you feel right now, not what you have felt in the past or what you would like to feel in the future.

	Statement	Agree	Disagree
1	If I don't get a job soon, my problems are going to get worse.	X	
2	I have thought about what kinds of jobs I would like to apply for in the next few weeks.		X
3	It frustrates me that I am unemployed.	X	
4	I started applying for jobs, but I could use some help.		X
5	It is really hard to get a job. Sometimes I think it's not worth the effort.	X	
6	I am actively doing something to find a job (such as: making a resume, learning new skills, looking at job posting boards).		X
7	I have been wondering if there are steps I could take to get a job.	X	
8	I am really working hard to get a job.		X
9	I might be ready to look for a job.	X	
10	I'd rather not look for a job.		X
11	I have not applied for jobs yet, but I know what I need to do to prepare for applying.	X	
12	Getting a job will not help me.		X

	Statement	Agree	Disagree
13	I am looking forward to getting a job. I am ready to start looking.		X
14	As far as I'm concerned, I don't need to get a job right now.		X
15	I'm not just thinking about getting a job, I'm already doing something about it.		X
16	I am ready to take the next steps towards getting a job.	X	
17	Even though I don't have a job now, I am working on getting one.		X
18	I do not feel the need to work.		X
19	I plan to apply for employment within the next few weeks.	X	
20	It might be time for me to find a job.	X	

SCORING:

For the statements where the participant marks 'agree,' circle the corresponding statement number below. Count the number of circles for each stage and write that number on the blank lines to the right. The stage with the highest number of circles indicates which stage the participant is in.

Precontemplation: (5) 10 12 14 18 _____1

Contemplation: (1) (3) (7) (9) (20) _____5

Preparation: 2 (11) 13 (16) (19) _____3

Action: 4 6 8 15 17 _____0

If there is a tie, the participant is placed in the "higher" stage.



PERS is an experimental instrument under review, designed to assess employment readiness based on the Transtheoretical Model of Change.



Precontemplation

“I don’t think I need to get a job”

What is precontemplation? ⁶	What does it mean for the participant?
No intention to change behavior in the foreseeable future	The participant has no intention to look for or obtain a job
Unaware or under aware of their problems	The participant is under aware that being unemployed is problematic <i>(i.e. “Before I can even think about looking for work, I need to address ...”)</i>

Your Role: “Supportive Mentor”

The role involves joining with a potentially resistant participant who is both drawn to and repelled by the prospects of becoming employed.⁶

What to do with the participant?

Ask questions like⁷

- “What are your thoughts and/or concerns about employment?”
- “What is keeping you from seeking employment?”
- “What have you done in the past to try to get a job?”

Resources

- Motivational Interviewing (OARS)
 - [See Handout #1](#) (pg. 15)
- Columbo Approach
 - [See Handout #2](#) (pg. 17)
- Confidence/Importance Ruler
 - [See Handout #3](#) (pg. 20)

Contemplation

"I have been thinking that maybe I should get a job"



What is contemplation? ⁶	What does it mean for the participant?
Aware that a problem exists, but have not yet made a commitment to take action	The participant understands that they should get a job but is not ready to do anything about it
Seriously considering changing the problem behavior in the next 6 months	The participant considers moving towards getting a job in the next 6 months

Your Role: "Socratic Teacher"

The role is *similar* to a Socratic teacher who encourages participants to gain insight into their situation by using inquiry and questioning.⁶

What to do with the participant?

Ask questions like⁷

- "Why do you want to get a job at this time?"
- "What are the barriers today that keep you from change?"
 - *Ask participants about possible strategies to overcome barriers and support a commitment to pursue one strategy before the next meeting*
- "What things (*people, programs and behaviors*) have helped in the past?"
- "What would help you at this time?"

Resources

- Motivational interviewing (OARS)
 - [See Handout #1](#) (pg. 15)
- Columbo Approach
 - [See Handout #2](#) (pg. 17)
- Confidence/Importance Ruler
 - [See Handout #3](#) (pg. 20)
- Extrinsic/Intrinsic Motivators
 - [See Handout #4](#) (pg. 23)
 - Values Card Sort, [Handout #5](#) (pg. 24)

Preparation

“I think I am ready to look for a job soon.”



What is the preparation stage? ⁶	What does it mean for the participant?
Combines intention with behavioral criteria	The participant wants to get a job and has started to take baby steps towards getting a job <i>(i.e. preparing a resume, browsing jobs)</i>
Intending to take action in the very near future <i>(i.e., one month)</i>	The participant is preparing to become employed

Your Role: “Experienced Coach”

The role is more like that of an experienced coach who can assist with developing a game plan or can review the participant’s own plan.⁶

What to do with the participant?

Ask questions like⁷

- “What industries are you interested in?”
- “What job-specific skills do you have?”
- “What motivates you to get a job?”
 - *(i.e., passion for a certain industry, financial reasons)*

Resources

- Change Plan Worksheet
 - [See Handout #6](#) (pg. 25)
- Goal Setting
 - [See Handout #7](#) (pg. 27)
- O*NET Interest Profiler
 - *Helps you decide what kinds of careers you might want to explore*
 - <https://www.mynextmove.org/explore/ip>

Action

"I am really working hard on getting a job"



What is the action stage? ⁶	What does it mean for the participant?
Active steps to modify behaviors, experiences and environment to overcome their problems	The participant is actively seeking employment <i>(i.e. interviewing for jobs, attending job skills classes, attending job training)</i>
Overt behavioral changes that require considerable commitment of time/energy	The participant is dedicated to looking for a job

Your Role: "Consultant"

The role is like a consultant who is able to provide expert advice and support when action is not progressing as smoothly as expected.⁶

What to do with the participant?²

Inform participant about **social support in the community** (groups, peer-to-peer) to stay motivated and involved in the process

Work with participant to **brainstorm and explore solutions to common issues** that may arise in the employment process

Help participant **create a plan** for meeting their employment goals

Evaluate the plan: Questions to ask

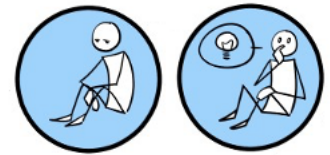
- "What's working?"
- "What's not working?"

Questions to ask if a plan is not working:

- "What now?"
- "What else might work?"
- "What's your next step?"
- "What can I do to support you in this?"

Resources

- Goal Setting
 - [See Handout #7](#) (pg. 27)



Handout #1

Motivational interviewing (OARS)^{1, 7}

STEPS:

Open-Ended Questions

Affirmations

Reflections

Summaries

Open-Ended Questions

- Purpose
 - Cannot be answered with a 'yes' or a 'no'
 - Produce less-biased data because they allow participants to 'tell their story'
 - Elicit information that otherwise might not be asked
- Examples:
 - "How do you feel talking about employment topics with me?"
 - "Tell me about the last time you applied for jobs or worked."

Affirmations

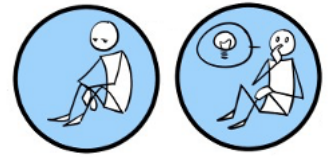
- Purpose
 - Important for building and maintaining rapport
 - Acknowledge efforts to make change, no matter how large or small
- Examples:
 - "Thank you for coming today."
 - "You took a big step meeting with me today."

Reflective Listening

- Purpose
 - Involves taking a guess at what the participant means and reflecting it back, restating their thoughts or feelings in a slightly different way
 - Moves the interaction away from a power struggle and toward change
- Examples:
 - *Repeating* - used to diffuse resistance
 - Participant says: *"I don't want to get a job."*
 - You say: *"You do not want to get a job."*
 - *Rephrasing* - slightly alter what the participant says to provide them with a different point of view
 - Participant says: *"I want to get a job, but it's hard."*
 - You say: *"Getting a job is important."*
 - *Reframing* - help the participant think differently about their situation
 - Participant says: *"I have tried looking for a job, but I can't get anyone to call me back."*
 - You say: *"You are persistent even in the face of discouragement. Getting a job is really important to you."*

Summaries

- Purpose
 - Used to transition to another topic, highlight both sides of a participant's ambivalence, or provide a recap at strategic points to ensure understanding
- Example:
 - "You have identified several reasons for why you need to get a job; you say _____, _____, _____. On the other hand, you say _____. Is that about right?"



Handout #2

The Columbo Approach²

What Is It?

- A method to guide the participant towards recognizing discrepancies between their stories and their behaviors

Why Is It Used?

- This approach is a staple piece of motivational interviewing
- It is useful for someone in the precontemplation or contemplation stage who needs to be in charge of the conversation
 - Guide them to lead the conversation, so they come to their own solutions

Your Role

- Focus on intrinsic motivation: help participants focus on how their behavior conflicts with their values and goals
- Convey understanding and seek clarification throughout the participant's story - without jumping to any solution
- Express confusion to allow the participant to take charge of the conversation and explain how conflicting thoughts fit together
- Guide participants to resolve discrepancies between their stated desires and their behaviors

Example:

Service provider plays the role of “a detective who is trying to solve a mystery” but is having a hard time because the clues don’t add up. A provider using the Columbo approach would encourage the participant to solve the mystery

Provider may say: *“Hmm...help me figure this out. You’ve told me that you want to be more independent, but you also told me that you don’t want or need to work. How does this fit with your goal? Help me understand.”*

Where to go after Columbo Approach: Ways to Facilitate Discrepancies

Identify personal values

- For participants who feel discrepancy between their values and actions, help them recognize what those values are - some participants may only have a vague understanding of their values or goals.
 - Please see the 'Values Card Sort' ([Handout #5](#)) for an activity to help the participant understand their values

Exploring others' concerns

- Explore the participant's understanding of the concerns that other people expressed about their unemployment
- The purpose is to invite participants to explore the impact of their unemployment on the people with whom they are emotionally connected
- Utilize genuine curiosity and ask clarifying questions during the conversation

Provide information - engage the participant in a process of mutual exchange

1. *Elicit readiness or interest in the information*

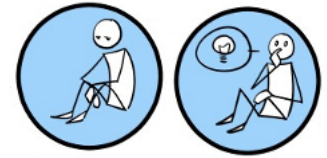
- Don't assume the participant is interested in hearing the information you want to offer; start by asking permission
 - Example: "Would it be okay if I shared some information with you about _____?"
- Don't assume the participant lacks knowledge; ask what they already know about the topic.
 - Example: "What would you most like to know about _____?"

2. *Provide information neutrally, without judgement*

- Prioritize what the participant has said they would like to know most
- Present information clearly and in small chunks - too much information at once can be overwhelming
- Invite the participant to ask more questions about the information you are providing

3. *Elicit participants' understanding of the information*

- Don't assume you know how participants will react to the information you have provided.
- Ask questions such as:
 - "So, what do you make of this information?"
 - "What do you think about that?"
 - "How does this information impact the way you might be thinking about _____ (i.e., future employment)?"



Handout #3

The Importance and Confidence Rulers²

Whatever the participant's response to these scaling questions, use it as an opportunity to begin a conversation about their confidence or perceived ability to move forward in the change process.

On both rulers, participants in precontemplation commonly score on the lower end, typically between 0 and 3

The Importance Ruler



Not Important

Extremely Important

Purpose:

- Elicit the importance of gaining employment for the participant right now
- Show discrepancies within the participant's answers to evoke change talk
- Identify and explore extremes in answers to influence participant motivation

Provider asks the participant

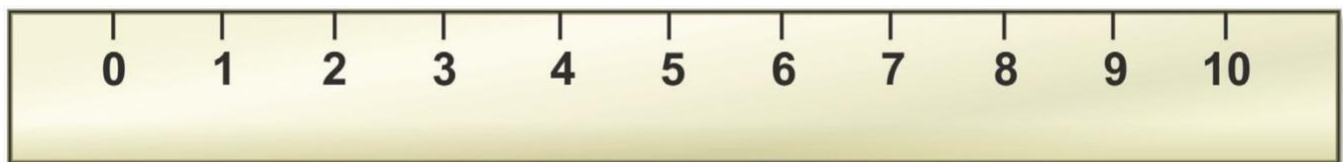
- Question 1: On a scale of 0 - 10 how important is it for you to get a job?
- Question 2: How are you at a (*fill in the number on the scale*) instead of a (*choose a lower number on the scale*)?"
- Question 3: What would help you move from a (*fill in the number on the scale*) to a (*choose a slightly higher number*)?
 - This question invites the participant to reflect on reasons to increase their readiness to become employed

Example

- When you use a **lower number**, you are inviting the participant to reflect on how they are already considering change
 - Provider: "You mention that you are at a 5 on the importance of getting a job. How are you at a 5 and not a 3?"

- Participant: “I am realizing that being unemployed is causing more problems now.”
- If you use a **higher number**, it will likely evoke sustain talk. Sustain talk includes statements that involve maintaining the current behavior without changing it. (*However, it may still be useful information and can be a good starting point to talk about job readiness/readiness to change.*)
 - Provider: “You mention that you are at a 5 on the importance scale. How are you at a 5 and not a 7?”
 - Participant: “I am just not ready to get a job now.”

The Confidence Ruler



Not Confident

Extremely Confident

Purpose:

- To evoke hope and confidence to support self-efficacy
 - *Self-efficacy is a critical component of behavior change, and it is crucial that you also believe in the participant’s capacity to reach their goals.*
- Indicates a participant’s sense of self-efficacy about making a change right now
- Use the confidence ruler to assess participants’ confidence level and evoke confidence talk

Provider asks the participant

- Question 1: “On a scale of 0 to 10, how confident are you that you could change (*name the target behavior, like get a job*) if you decided to?”
- Question 2: “How are you at a (*fill in the number on the scale*) instead of a (*choose a lower number on the scale*)?”
- Question 3: “What would help you get from a (*fill in the number on the scale*) to a (*choose a slightly higher number on the scale*)?”

Example

- When using a **lower number**, you are helping the participant reflect on how far they've come on the confidence scale.
 - Provider: *"You mention that you are at a 6 on your confidence of getting a job. How are you at a 6 and not a 3?"*
 - Participant: *"I realize that I am capable of getting a job one day."*
- If you use a **higher number**, participants may become discouraged, which can elicit sustain talk. Sustain talk includes statements that involve maintaining the current behavior without changing it. *(However, it may still be useful information and can be a good starting point to talk about job readiness/readiness to change.)*
 - Provider: *"You mention that you are at a 6 on the confidence scale. How are you at a 6 and not a 9?"*
 - Participant: *"I just can't do it."*



Handout #4

Extrinsic & Intrinsic Motivators²

What Are Extrinsic Motivators?

- External factors that may pressure a participant towards change
 - May be a spouse, family member, friend, or organization/agency
- May help bring participants towards change

What Are Intrinsic Motivators?

- Internal factors such as desires, needs, values and goals
- Vital for significant, sustaining change

How Can I Help a Participant Develop Intrinsic Motivation?

- Recognize discrepancies between ‘where they are’ and ‘where they want to be’
 - Ask participants to explore their values
 - See Values Card Sort ([Handout #5](#))
 - Encourage exploration through open-ended questions about their goals
 - “Where do you want to be in 5 years?”
 - “How will getting a job (or not getting a job) fit with your goals?”



Handout #5

Values Card Sort²

What is it?

- An activity used to identify personal values for a participant

Why is it used?

- In order for participants to be able to identify discrepancies between their values and their actions, they first need to recognize what their values are

How to use it?

- **At the end of this Resource Guide, there is the public domain version of the Value Card Sort activity.**
- Print and cut out the pages
- Invite the participant to sort the cards into separate piles based on importance
 - Pile 1: Very important to me
 - Pile 2: Important to me
 - Pile 3: Not important to me
- Ask the participant to pick 10 cards from the ‘very important to me’ pile
 - Converse about these topics
 - Utilize Motivational Interviewing techniques ([Handout #1](#))
 - Pay attention to discrepancies that you identify between the ‘very important to me’ values and the participants’ actions – reinforce those values



Handout #6

Change Plan Worksheet²

1. The most important reasons I want to make this change are:

2. My main goals for myself in making this change are:

3. I plan to do these specific things to reach my goals:

Specific Actions	When?

4. The first steps I plan to take in changing are:

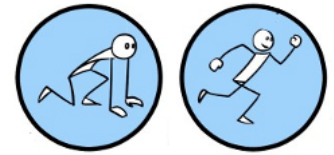
5. Other people could help me in changing in these ways:

Person	Possible Ways They Can Help

6. These are some possible obstacles I may encounter when I am working on getting a job and ways I could handle them:

Possible Obstacles to Change	How I Can Handle these Obstacles

7. I will know my plan is working when I see these results:



Handout #7

Goal Setting - SMART Goals³

Specific

- Define exactly what is being pursued

Measurable

- Is there a number to track completion?

Attainable

- Can the goal be achieved?

Relevant

- Doable
- Why is this goal significant to your life?

Timely

- Can it be completed in a reasonable amount of time?
- Set a timeframe for the goal to be achieved by

SMART Goal Example

In the next two weeks, I will find three jobs that I want to apply for.

By the end of the month, I will go to two job skills classes in preparation for applying for a job.

References

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