

The Process of Change

Think of an important change that you have made in your life. What motivated you to make that change? Were you seeking enjoyment or satisfaction, or ending something that was uncomfortable? Was it some of both, as is often the case? What helped you make the change? What made it difficult? How did you finally get yourself to do it?

Now, shift to thinking of an important change you are currently considering. If there is none, imagine one you would like to make. What seem to be the reasons to do so? What are your reasons not to? If you were to guess right now what decision you'll make, which would it be? What do you think about the choice you made? How do you feel having made it?

Think of a decision that you are currently facing and having difficulty making. What are the alternatives? Imagine that you already decided on one. It doesn't matter which one you do first. For the next few moments, that is what you are going to do. Pay attention to whatever feelings, thoughts, and wants come into awareness. Now switch to the other choice, and stay with that one for the same amount of time. Now compare the two experiences and see if you can recognize which one is stronger.

"Decision by sound"

Imagine you decide to change - create a sound that represents that decision. Now imagine you decide not to change - create a sound that matches this one. Compare the two sounds and observe their meaning. What do you conclude?

Aspects of Change

1. Content - What can be changed?
2. Timing - When does it occur? Are there prerequisites?
3. Process - How does it occur?
4. Resistance - What are the barriers or obstacles?

Content of Change

Awareness - often a first step in changing - alternatives, opportunities for choice

Behavior - habits, patterns of acting

Thoughts - opinions, judgments, beliefs, values, goals, viewpoints, attitudes

Feelings - anger, fear, sadness, guilt, shame, embarrassment

Wants - desires, choices, expectations, commitment

Situations - job, career, residence

Relationships - beginning, continuing, or ending

Communication - how we listen and how we speak

Meaning given to others' comments or behavior

Importance given to any of the above - focus on only one can miss other change

Timing of Change

Balance between motivation and hesitation - question about "ability" to change

"Readiness" - desire to change stronger than desire to stay the same; or discomfort of not changing greater than anticipated discomfort of changing

Process of Change

As a process changing is fundamentally similar to staying the same. Any pattern of behavior requires continued reinforcement, including the pattern of staying the same. It is an active, on-going practice. Therefore, it is not too different from changing, which is also an active, on-going practice. What is different is the content of the practice. Staying the same means continuing to respond in the same way as before. Changing implies responding in a different way than before. Therefore, since people know how to stay the same, they already know how to change. The question is whether the right conditions exist to respond with a different content than before.

Importance of beginning change – small step in the direction of change may be possible; comparing present situation with complete change may seem difficult.

Resistance to Change

Adherence to existing patterns – protecting against loss or anticipated threat.

Thoughts – “I’ll never be able to change” (behavior or feeling, not awareness). “change is not important” “it won’t solve the problem” “it won’t even help” “if it does work, it won’t last” “and it won’t prevent the problem from recurring” “it will be a mistake” “I’ll regret it because the consequences will be worse than the original problem.”

Feelings – Fear - failure; criticism, disapproval or judgment; inadequacy;

Anger - defiance or retaliation – if change is someone else’s agenda.

Guilt – if someone will be hurt.

Shame – if a hidden undesirable trait will be exposed.

Sadness – if the loss involved is too painful.

Wants – conflicting want may be stronger than wish to change.

- want to avoid discomfort greater than want to seek satisfaction.