

Tool 19. Patient goals

Many patients have trouble taking the actions they need to maintain their health. A clinician, outlines a step the patient can take to attain a larger health goal such as quitting smoking or losing weight. Action plans help patients integrate these steps or health behavior changes into their daily lives to achieve the goal, and they allow for patients to be actively involved in their own care. Research has shown that such plans are instrumental in bringing about behavior changes in patients.

Create action plans with patients.

- Motivation: If a patient does not express the motivation to change, then the patient is not ready for an action plan. The goal must be important to the patient for the plan to be successful.
- Created by the patient: The patient must determine the goal with the provider's guidance.
- Small and realistic: Brainstorm small, specific, and realistic steps the patient can take to achieve the goal that can be re-evaluated over a short time period, like a week.
- One step at a time: Have the patient pick one specific step that he or she is likely to implement.
- Outline what, how much, when, and how often they will do the goal or step.
- Assess confidence: Assess the patient's confidence by asking, "How confident are you that you can follow this action plan?" A patient should feel confident, stating a 7 or higher on a scale of 0-10 on confidence. If they are not, revise the goal so the patient feels confident they can achieve it.
- Ask the patient, "What might stop you from following this action plan?" Problem solve about how to overcome barriers.
- Utilize a tool such as the [Ultra Brief Personal Action Plan](#) to assist the patient in setting a goal.
- Document the patient's goal and action plan: Give a copy to the patient (see Tool 17 Patient Wellness Handout).

Provide Follow-up. Follow-up is very important; it lets the patient know that you are interested in helping them achieve behavior changes. Options for follow-up include a phone call or meeting during an office visit.

- If the goal was not achieved, the follow-up can help to redefine a goal that can be achieved and result in recognized progress for the patient.
- If goals were achieved, celebration and praise are in order! Work with the patient to make the next goal. Each small step gets the patient closer to the ultimate goal of eating healthier, quitting smoking, losing weight, etc.
- Track progress. Action plans can help clinicians track patients' progress over time and improve the likelihood that health goals will be discussed in follow-up visits.

Ultra-Brief Personal Action Planning (UB-PAP)

The Ultra-Brief Personal Action Plan has 5 core elements:

1. The plan must be truly patient-centered, that is what the patient himself/herself actually wants to do, not what the doctor told him/her to do.
2. The plan must be behaviorally specific – that is very concrete and specific about what, when, where, how long, etc.
3. The patient should re-state the complete plan (i.e. “commitment statement”).
4. The plan should be associated with a level of confidence (on a 1 to 10 scale) of 7 or greater. If the confidence level is <7, the clinician and patient should begin problem-solving on strategies to modify the plan.
5. There should be a specific date and mechanism for follow-up (or accountability).

Ultra-Brief Personal Action Planning is structured around 3 core questions:

1. Elicit patient preferences/desires for behavior change
Ask, “Is there anything you would like to do for your health over the next few days (weeks) before I see you again?”
 - What?
 - Where?
 - When?
 - How often?*Elicit commitment statement (e.g. “I will walk for 20 minutes, in my neighborhood, every Monday, Wednesday and Friday before dinner”)*
2. Check confidence level
Say, “That sounds like a great plan. But changing behavior and sticking with a plan is actually very hard for most of us. If you consider a confidence scale of 1 to 10, where ‘10’ means you are very confident you will carry out the plan and ‘1’ means you are not at all confident, about how confident are you?”

If confidence level <7, problem solve solutions
Say, “That’s great that you feel a confidence level of 5. That’s a lot higher than 1. I wonder if there are some ways we could modify the plan so you might get to a confidence level of 7 or more. Perhaps you could choose a less ambitious goal, ask for help from a friend or family member, or think of something else that might help you feel more confident about carrying out the plan”?
3. Arrange follow-up
Say, “Great, so let’s make a date for our next appointment, so we can check on how you’re doing with your plan.”