

Lifestyle Changes and Your Mental G.I.F.T.S.

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Exercising more, eating right, stopping smoking are just some of the lifestyle changes that individuals may consider pursuing. Everyone can learn to use their mental GIFTS to help them make lifestyle changes and enjoy activities more. Integrating your mental GIFTS into the daily routine is an important part of that process.

Goals

Goals provide direction and a sense of purpose. It is important to set a clear path for lifestyle change but more importantly to set little goals each day to enable the change to happen.

Here are some suggestions for making goals a regular part of your path to change:

- Set a clear action oriented goal at the beginning of each day and write it down in a journal. Be sure to make it something that is realistic and achievable by the end of the day. For example, if you want to start exercising, you should begin a program that starts at your level of fitness and progresses slowly and safely. Maybe you are going to walk to the store and back today. Maybe you are going to garden for 1 hour or maybe you are going to start a fitness program of walking and running for 30 minutes.
- Evaluate your goals at the end of the day. Note what went well today and any challenges and distractions that may have arisen. Consider what you can do tomorrow to help you achieve your goal. Be sure to write down your responses.
- Keep a goal chart. Post your daily goals each day on a chart or calendar and put a check mark, stamp or sticker for what you achieve it day. It may sound silly but it helps you celebrate your accomplishments each day and that helps build your belief that you can make the changes you desire.

Imagery

Imagery can enhance lifestyle change if individuals use it to mentally rehearse how they would like their day to unfold. Imagery can also be a powerful tool if individuals use it to anticipate feelings of excitement or enjoyment related to an upcoming activity or to see themselves moving toward and achieving their goals.

Here are some suggestions for making imagery a regular part of your path to change:

- Periodically throughout the day, imagine the actions you would like to see yourself doing. For example if you are going out for lunch, imagine yourself choosing healthy options. The imagery prepares you to make the choices that will help you achieve your daily goal.
- For 1-2 minutes each day, you can imagine yourself as the fit and healthy person you are becoming. For example, if you are quitting smoking you can imagine yourself having more energy and enjoying the healthy sensations of feeling fitter.

Feelings

Change takes time and sometimes if goals are not being achieved quickly enough, it may cause individuals to get frustrated or be negative. Lifestyle change is a process and at times it is normal to feel frustrated or overwhelmed. The key is to learn to ride out these times with strategies that can help manage feelings on a day to day basis.

Here are some suggestions for integrating feeling management into your path to change:

- Recognize signs of frustration or stress and acknowledge them as part of your path. Have some reminder statements as to why you want to make these changes and what the benefits are. These reminders focus you on the positive elements of the change you are undertaking.
- Devise a reward system for yourself. At the end of each week when you have achieved your goals, reward yourself with something tangible. Go to a movie, buy yourself a piece of clothing. These incentives at the initial stages of change can make the hard times seem more worthwhile.
- Talk with someone. Find a source of support with whom you can discuss your feelings and feel validated.

Thoughts

Sometimes individuals may doubt their ability to make the change. These negative thoughts can have a big impact on feelings and on the ability to accomplish the desired goals. Often these thoughts can be so powerful that individuals need to address them specifically. This is especially the case when the thoughts involve putdowns or self-criticism. Negative thinking can damage self-confidence and the ability to achieve lifestyle changes.

Here are some suggestions for integrating thought management into your path to change:

- Monitor your thoughts for one day and write down the thoughts that you have. Beside each thought, see if you can come up with an alternative statement that is more positive and helpful and that moves you toward your goal.
- Wear an elastic band on your wrist and each time you have a negative thought that prevents you from moving toward your goal, snap the band and try and focus on something more helpful.
- At the end of each day, look for your highlights for the day. Identify the positive things that happened and the things you were able to achieve. Write them down.

Support

Lifestyle can be supported by developing personal routines, strategies, and triggers that create the best possible chance for the goals to be achieved.

Here are some suggestions for integrating support strategies into your path to change:

- Write a schedule for each day and incorporate the details related to your lifestyle change. For example, if you want to eat healthier, plan your meals for each day out in advance and write your meal plan into the daily schedule
- Identify the biggest challenges to making the change you want to make and then develop strategies for dealing with those situations. For example, if you find it difficult to workout at the end of the day, then plan your workout in the morning or during lunch. Meet a friend to workout to make sure it happens.

Integrating mental strategies into your path to change can help you feel more in control of your choices and your belief that you can accomplish your goals. There are numerous strategies that

can be used to support your lifestyle change. Contact drlaura@mindinmotion.ca for more information.