# The role of psychology in fitness and wellness

The role of psychology in fitness and wellness is extremely important. It can deal with several topics, including the way exercise participation affects someone’s mood in both the short and the long term, the effect of weight loss on self-esteem, the motivations to become physically active, and how social influences affect overall exercise behaviour. One of the most important things about psychology and its relationship with fitness and wellness is the role it plays in the behavioural change process. Since an alarming number of people don’t participate in regular physical activity, there is an ongoing need for interventions that address behavioural change, specifically in helping people transition from a sedentary lifestyle to an active one.

Generally speaking, psychology influences the decision to either be physically active or not active on any given day. People must value and prioritize exercise in the midst of busy lifestyles, including demands from family, work, and other competing interests, such as leisure time. Exercise participation is influenced by several factors, including motivation, goals, barriers, self-confidence, and a variety of social influences. When working with someone who is new to exercise or returning to exercise, behavioural change can be guided by the fitness professional finding out why these clients want to participate now and what has stopped them in the past. Uncovering this information will help ensure an exercise program can be tailored to the specific needs of each client, with an additional understanding of the challenges faced by clients regarding exercise adherence.

The role of psychology can also extend to some clinical issues, such as exercise addiction or poor body image issues associated with eating disorders, which are beyond the scope of practice for a Certified Personal Trainer. Overall, fitness professionals can better serve their clients by using many tools related to psychology. In particular, excellent communication skills should be practiced, because both listening and explaining are critically important in making sure that an accurate exchange of information has taken place.

STRETCH YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Communication is a very important aspect of psychology; the right questions need to be asked and answers need to be heard. Other important aspects of communication are nonverbal cues, which can include body language, body position, overall appearance, eye contact, tone of voice, facial expressions, and gestures. Nonverbal cues are very powerful because if a person’s nonverbal cues indicate that they are not interested or are bored or defensive, regardless of what is being said, then it is likely that a message hasn’t been effectively conveyed or received.

**The science of psychology**

Psychology is an area of science that focuses on people; in particular, it is focused on how the mind and feelings may influence different behaviours. Psychology examines the relationships between brain functionality and human behaviour and the environmental effect on behaviour. The people who specialize in the science of psychology are either psychologists or psychiatrists. These licensed individuals are highly educated and trained to observe behaviours, listen to patients, and help people adjust their behaviours or cope with a variety of situations.

Psychologists and psychiatrists are employed in many areas such as the healthcare industry, educational settings, counselling, law enforcement, and even athletics. They can work as consultants to different industries with an interest in human behaviour, or with individuals struggling with mental health issues such as depression or anxiety, or an athlete who has difficulty focusing. All fitness professionals need to remain within their scope of practice; they should not attempt to diagnose, assess, or analyse an individual with mental illness as only a qualified medical professional can do, such as a psychologist or psychiatrist. However, some aspects of psychology may be helpful when working with people who are trying to change behaviours. Having a firm understanding of a client’s concerns and reasons for wanting to exercise will go a long way toward providing excellent service to clients.

GETTING TECHNICAL

Psychologists and psychiatrists have similar duties, because both professionals are focused on counselling individuals with mental illness. The main difference is the type of education obtained by each professional and the ability to prescribe medications. Depending on the country, psychologists have earned at minimum a master’s degree and, in most cases, a doctorate and can assess patients with mental illness, but they are limited to treating with psychotherapy in most cases. By contrast, a psychiatrist has a medical degree, is trained in general medicine, and has completed a four-year residency in psychiatry. After obtaining a medical degree, a psychiatrist can also prescribe medications in addition to administering psychotherapy.

There are countless subtopics within the field of psychology including clinical, developmental, social, health, and sport and exercise psychology. Sport and exercise psychology focuses on aspects such as understanding participants’ motives and barriers to physical activity, ways the environment affects exercise behaviour, social influences on exercise, psychological benefits of exercise, and the psychological factors that affect long-term exercise adherence. Applying some of the psychological principles associated with successful behavioural change will help clients adjust to a more active lifestyle.

CRITICAL

Fitness professionals should be aware of the psychological variables that affect behavioural change, such as motivation and social influence, but should never attempt to counsel individuals with mental disorders. Only trained and licensed healthcare professionals (e.g., physicians, psychiatrists, psychologists) are qualified to treat these individuals.

**Motivation**

In the context of psychology and behavioural change, motivation is a term used to describe the intensity and direction of someone’s effort, whereas *intensity* refers to the amount of effort expended, and *direction* refers to whether or not someone seeks out a behaviour. In general, individuals who seek out a certain behaviour typically put forth an effort toward success, therefore intensity and direction are often related. For example, if someone has a strong desire to lose weight, they will be drawn toward behaviours, such as regular exercise and diet modification, and will likely put forth an intense effort to achieve results.

Understanding the motivation to exercise is an area of interest for most fitness professionals, because it allows for a personalized approach when coaching clients toward their goals. Research has shown that motives differ between populations. For example, men and women tend to have different motivations to exercise than do younger versus older adults. Differences in motivation may also be observed based on culture, socioeconomic status, or the surrounding environment. It is important to assess motivation on an individual basis because it can vary greatly. Also, motivation is a dynamic variable, meaning it can change both in the short and the long term.

Someone may start an exercise program to lose weight, but as participation continues, the motives may shift to include reducing stress, increasing strength, or developing camaraderie with other exercisers. Motivation can also change abruptly based on receiving information, such as a newly revealed health concern, or an upcoming event like a wedding or family reunion. Sometimes motivation comes instantaneously from the fitness professional; for example, if a client is feeling tired and therefore not putting in a typical effort, words of encouragement from the fitness professional can inspire motivation to increase intensity and effort.

When people are not motivated to do something, it is referred to as amotivation. When people are amotivated to exercise, they may not participate at all, or they will participate by only going through the motions without any intensity or belief in the positive outcomes that exercise may yield. For example, some clients may be exercising only because a significant other or a physician said they must be more active, otherwise they are amotivated to exercise. In such in-stances, it is important to dig deeper to try and help the client realize the value in participating, or at least believe in possible outcomes, to help establish some motive that can be used as a building block.

When comparing active and inactive people, it’s not surprising that a mixture of motives exists with active individuals, who tend to be more motivated by physical fitness, improved psychological health, enjoyment, appearance, mastery of skills, and social interactions. With the knowledge that active individuals have a variety of motives, fitness professionals can help clients determine their personal motivations about exercise and help shape their exercise program.

When learning about a client’s motivations, a fitness professional should be aware of two categories: (1) extrinsic motivation and (2) intrinsic motivation. People are not motivated exclusively by one or the other and will likely have motives represented by each. Either way, it is important to understand the difference between the two and when they may overlap.

Extrinsic motivation

Extrinsic motivation focuses on doing an activity for some type of recognition, such as earning a trophy or award; it relies on looking forward to something if a specific behaviour is achieved. Rewards can be large or small but should match the achievement. For example, exercising 3 days a week for 1 month could be rewarded with a new pair of shoes, whereas completing a marathon that required months of training might be rewarded with a vacation.

Extrinsic motivation to exercise may come in the form of social recognition, rewards from competitions, or the improvement of physical appearance. Achieving rewards brings about a sense of satisfaction that may not come from the day-to-day exercise routine. The concern with an emphasis on extrinsic motivation is that it may not sustain exercise adherence because once a reward is achieved, there may not be any further incentive to continue, therefore long-term exercise participation will likely be associated with some level of intrinsic motivation.

Intrinsic motivation

Intrinsic motivation has received more attention because it relates to long-term exercise adherence; it is described as the motivation that comes from within a person. In contrast to extrinsic motivation, it is not about rewards but more about pursuing activities that are interesting or meaningful to that individual. Intrinsically motivated individuals enjoy the process and see value in the journey. People who are intrinsically motivated to exercise likely enjoy being physically active and appreciate all the physical and psychological benefits that exercise can bring. Intrinsic motivation may include exercising for stress relief, increasing energy, and finding new ways to be challenged physically.

This type of motivation has also been associated with people who strongly identify with exercise, where there is a satisfaction that comes from regular participation. Individuals who are intrinsically motivated to exercise will likely experience some enjoyment with regular participation, which may be due to a genetic predisposition toward intrinsic motivation. Also, for intrinsic motivation to occur, people need to have knowledge and some ability to make choices about how to proceed. It has been demonstrated that when people are engaged in the process of changing their behaviours, they are more successful in achieving outcomes.

For example, a physical activity intervention revealed that individuals who were specifically exposed to information on intrinsic motivation were more active and more intrinsically motivated after 12 months compared with a group who received standardized information. Additionally, when individuals were guided to identify the importance of exercise for them and their confidence in their abilities to exercise, they were enabled to choose tailored exercise plans to be physically active. Further, they remained more active over time compared to a group that was not provided the same level of interaction.

GETTING TECHNICAL

Intrinsic motivation is strongly rooted in the self-determination theory, which is a commonly used theory of behavioural change. It proposes that people will implement change when they feel (1) competent, which is mastering tasks or skills; (2) a sense of belonging to other people, which is referred to as relatedness; and (3) a sense of autonomy, which is feeling a sense of control over their actions and goals.

There are situations when motives are both extrinsic and intrinsic. Some examples include times when individuals are extrinsically motivated to avoid failure but the desire to avoid failure is related to their overall self-esteem or when individuals want to lose weight because they know they will be healthier and feel more energized. Regardless of the reason(s) why someone is motivated to exercise, it is crucial to understand individual motives, and reassess motives over time, to provide a tailored program that continues to meet the needs of the client.

HELPFUL HINT

When trying to differentiate between the two types of motivation, just remember that intrinsic motivation is something that comes from within and is considered internal to a person. Extrinsic motivation is something that is external to the person.

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Understanding how motivation differs

Motivation to exercise will be unique to everyone; however, understanding how motivation may differ for certain demographics may be useful when establishing and growing a client base. While there are always exceptions, younger adults tend to be motivated by competitive situations, a feeling of being part of a social group, or the improvement of physical appearance. As people age, motives shift toward more health-related variables such as lowering blood pressure or avoiding other chronic health conditions.

Motivation also plays a role in the types of exercise that people seek out: extrinsically motivated people seek opportunities that emphasize physical transformation or competition, and intrinsically motivated people tend to seek opportunities focused on health and wellness. Therefore, learning what motivates individuals will go a long way toward providing them with the opportunities they prefer, which will ultimately lead to client satisfaction.

STRETCH YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Helping clients determine their motivation to exercise can go beyond simply asking them why they want to participate. Validated surveys are available that can be distributed to help clients objectively identify motives. One of these surveys is the Exercise Motivation Inventory-2. This survey identifies 14 subscales of possible motives with higher scores on any given motive indicating its potential importance to an individual. The Exercise Motivation Inventory-2 survey can be found by performing a quick internet search. It is designed for exercisers and nonexercisers alike, making it ideal for new and existing clients. Another benefit of using an objective scale is that it will be easier to reassess motives over time, since motivation to exercise may change for some people. Tracking these changes will help fitness professionals adjust their personal programs.

## Common barriers to exercise

Despite the overwhelming evidence showing that regular exercise is associated with many physical and psychological benefits, barriers to participation are often cited by sedentary or infrequently active individuals. Barriers to exercise are common for nearly everyone at one time or another due to busy lifestyles that include family responsibilities, work obligations, and social commitments. In fact, barriers are often in direct competition with motivations to exercise. A barrier is anything that prevents someone’s ability to exercise, whether it is a one-time or regular occurrence.

Some barriers are physical, such as illness, injury, lack of transportation, or a lack of a safe place to exercise. Other barriers are based in perception, such as the belief of not having enough time or energy to exercise. People with perception barriers may feel like they are physical, and in some situations they can be (e.g., a single parent balancing a career and raising children), but many can be addressed with better time-management skills and setting a daily priority on health.

The role of the fitness professional is to help clients determine their personal barriers and help them strategize ways to overcome them. Clients also need to have a plan to deal with unexpected barriers that may occur, such as needing to stay late at work, forgetting to pack workout attire, or not having childcare. Barriers will be a constant battle for some, so helping clients determine their personal barriers and how to overcome them will help with overall exercise adherence.

Barriers will also change as people age and as responsibilities shift. For example, young adults may not have children or significant job responsibilities; as people age, demands on their time may shift after having children and taking on more responsibilities at work. Women, in particular, have indicated that parenthood is a major barrier to exercise; its significance grew along with an increasing number of children. By contrast, older adults may be facing barriers such as health issues, availability of appealing facilities, and cost of participation. Fitness professionals should check in frequently with their clients to reassess barriers and strategize ways to overcome them.

**Time**

Time is often cited as a barrier against many healthy behaviours, including exercise, proper food intake, and overall stress management. Balancing work, family, social obligations, healthy eating, and regular exercise comes as a challenge for most people. Fitness professionals can help individuals manage their time by finding ways to prioritize exercise. It is often stated that everyone has the same 24 hours in a day and that exercise simply needs to be a higher priority. While this is technically true, it is helpful to assess exactly how time is spent and determine the amount of physical activity that can realistically occur when setting attainable goals and managing expectations for results.

Time is often a top barrier to exercise, which is evident among adults of all ages. When someone is new to exercise, finding time to participate on a regular basis is one of the toughest challenges, especially when other activities may have to be limited. People have competing interests, and oftentimes, they find value in doing something other than exercise. For example, most people value their jobs because their job provides the income they need to sustain their lifestyle; therefore, time spent working is easily justified. Many individuals also have responsibilities to a significant other or children, or they provide care for other family members. Additionally, people value their social interactions and time spent simply relaxing.

One way to overcome the perceived barrier of a lack of time is to help clients address their approach to time management. Some ways to reclaim time for exercise can include rearranging schedules so that exercise becomes more of a priority. Committing to exercise as the first activity in the morning or immediately after work is one way for clients to put exercise ahead of competing activities. The fitness professional should help clients identify areas of life where there is no room for adjusting the schedule and then design a program that maximizes a client’s real ability to commit. When lack of time continues to be a barrier to physical activity, overall goals and the timeline to reach those goals need to be reassessed.

TRAINING TIP

Whenever clients are unsure about their specific barriers, ask them to keep a log of how their time is spent over the course of a week. This will help identify their average sleep patterns and time dedicated to working, childcare, household chores, meal preparation, exercise, and leisure activities, such as watching television, spending time on a computer, reading, or just relaxing. By seeing a snapshot of an average week, it becomes easier to identify areas of improvement for time management so that priorities like exercise are always on the schedule.

**Unrealistic goals**

Setting goals is an important aspect of working with clients so that expectations are both realistic and somewhat challenging. New exercisers often fall into the trap of setting unrealistic goals and then becoming frustrated when goals are not met. Unrealistic goals can be anything from expecting to see extreme weight loss results in a short amount of time to completing a marathon before even attempting a 5K race. Goals need to have some flexibility so that adjustments can be made based on progress. Additionally, they need to be progressive so that smaller achievements along the way can help guide the client toward long-term goals.

When goals are unrealistic, they can become a barrier by causing frustration and disappointment. Young males indicated unrealistic goals were a barrier to exercise due to perceived expectations of a young male’s physical ability. For example, if they attempt to exhibit a certain level of fitness and do not succeed, then goals are viewed as unrealistic, and they give up. If an individual believes that they are not making sufficient progress, the exerciser may start to feel defeated and eventually discontinue the practice of exercise. The fitness professional has the expertise to assist clients with setting realistic outcome goals, such as appropriate body fat reduction or strength increases, but it is also important to set realistic and achievable process goals, like being physically active for a certain number of days per week or reaching a certain number of active minutes each day.

| **Goal Type** | **Example** |
| --- | --- |
| Outcome goal | Place in top 10 in a 10K race |
| Process goal | Jog for 45 minutes, starting at 6:30 a.m. Monday–Friday |

Goals can become unrealistic when they are not objective, when too many goals are set at one time, when goals are not adjusted, and when people are forced to set goals. These pitfalls can be avoided by setting specific goals and avoiding vague statements like “get more fit” or “be more active.” When people are new to goal setting, fitness professionals should limit them to one to two short-term goals in the beginning. Also, they should explain to clients that adjusting goals, both up and down, is part of the process, so that changes are not viewed as failures. Finally, they should not force clients to set goals if they are resistant. Helping clients set realistic goals will go a long way toward setting them up for success.

**Lack of social support**

Social support refers to the intentional actions taken by people to assist others in achieving a specific behaviour. A lack of social support can make it difficult for some people to participate in regular exercise, depending on the types of support that they need. People who do not have support may not be able to overcome other barriers to exercise, or they simply cannot participate regularly. Individuals without social support may lack the following advantages:

* Encouragement to participate in exercise
* Someone who can discuss the challenges of exercise
* Transportation to a fitness facility
* The ability to find accurate information on health and fitness
* An exercise partner.

**Social physique anxiety**

Social physique anxiety is when individuals feel anxiety about their physical appearance or are insecure about how they look to others or how they believe others perceive their body. Fitness facilities are places where individuals who have never felt anxious about their appearance might suddenly feel physically inadequate. Reasons for this issue may be due to the social comparison they believe is taking place or the specific attire that many people wear during exercise, including tight-fitting clothes and/or clothing with minimal coverage.

Individuals with social physique anxiety may make comments similar to the following statements:

* I’ll start working out when I lose a little weight.
* I would work out, but I don’t have anything comfortable to wear.
* I feel self-conscious working out in front of people.
* I feel like everyone is staring at me.

Any comments that suggest a person’s discomfort with the way they may be viewed may indicate some level of social physique anxiety.

Social physique anxiety may prove a difficult barrier to overcome because it can also be related to body image issues. Some ways to overcome this barrier include matching clients to types of exercise that can be done outside of a fitness facility or using discreet areas of a facility to train clients. It should also be emphasized that clients should wear comfortable clothing and that activities that require specific attire, such as swimming or water aerobics, are optional.

It is known that, in general, women experience higher levels of social physique anxiety compared to men; however, men experience some level of it as well. Social physique anxiety has also been found to be lower with individuals who have a lower body mass index. When social physique anxiety is a barrier to exercise, fitness professionals should make an effort to provide alternative ways to participate and use care when integrating individuals into more mainstream options.

**Convenience**

Convenience in life is something that nearly everyone prefers, and convenience to exercise is no different. Most people will avoid an inconvenient activity, whether the inconvenience includes the time it will take, the distance to get there, the attire that is required, or the cost to participate. For example, if a fitness facility is located on the way to or from work, it may be viewed as convenient; however, other factors should be considered if people are exercising before work, such as locker rooms or proximity to home. Convenience will be subjective, meaning that two people may view the same factor in different ways. Driving 5 miles to a facility may not bother one person, whereas someone else may see it as highly inconvenient and, therefore, a barrier.

Many clients will travel for what they view as exceptional experiences such as a specialty group exercise class, clean facilities with current equipment, or the ability to work with a specific fitness professional. One way to help clients overcome this barrier is to provide excellent customer service, which includes individualized exercise programming. Another way to help clients maximize their physical activity is to help them identify ways for them to exercise at home, during a lunch hour, or in between other responsibilities. The bottom line is that there are always options available to make exercise possible for those who want to participate.

**Ambivalence**

Ambivalence happens when someone has mixed feelings about a situation. There is usually a positive and negative component to the way something is perceived. When it comes to exercise, people may believe that it is an overall good idea, but it will cut into time spent with family, at work, or at social gatherings. People who are ambivalent about exercise might easily find excuses as to why it just won’t fit into their lifestyle. Informing clients about all the benefits of exercise and the negative effects of sedentary living on the overall quality of life may be a good place to start. However, ambivalent people may be aware of the benefits but also struggle with the drastic way in which regular exercise may affect other aspects of their life. When people see both sides of an argument, they can often weigh the pros and cons along with assessing the benefits versus the effort it will take or what must be sacrificed to participate. For ambivalent clients, it will be necessary to probe further to find out the other significant barriers and also what might motivate them to take action.

TRY THIS

Take some time to identify barriers that prevent participation in exercise and strategize ways to personally overcome these barriers. This will allow you to relate to the struggles that clients face while providing solutions. Clients will appreciate that they are not the only ones facing barriers and will benefit from the personal connection.

**Social influences on exercise**

There are a number of possible social influences on overall exercise behaviour, which vary among individuals. Determining which social influences are meaningful to a client will help explain the role that these influences might play in terms of exercise behaviour. In general, influence means having an effect over the behaviour of a person or group. Social influences are constantly present in exercise behaviour, and these influences can lead individuals both toward and away from structured exercise. It is important to recognize that not all social influences are positive, and in such cases, they become a barrier to overcome. Social support has two main components: who or what is providing the support and what type of support is being provided. Support from family and friends may seem like the most likely source, but it can come from anyone, including coworkers, healthcare providers, fitness professionals, or fellow exercisers.

Social influences have also grown well beyond personal interactions, with people using social media for inspiration, information, and support. Social media can provide several outlets for people who may not have a supportive face-to-face network. For example, some people maintain blogs, websites, or a social media platform where they track their fitness journey; there are online support groups for any number of behavioural changes. Fitness professionals should ask clients which online sites they use to gain a better understanding of possible social influences. Fitness professionals should help evaluate the information, such as whether or not a source has reliable information and if healthy habits are being encouraged, so that clients are not receiving mixed messages. Additionally, information on social media platforms should be evaluated regarding its realistic or unrealistic nature. For example, images that depict extreme physiques, such as bodybuilders or fitness models, may negatively impact the way someone feels about their own body.

CRITICAL

Fitness professionals can help clients determine if a website is providing reliable information or not. First, look at who is responsible for the information. There should be an easily identified source with contact information such as colleges and universities, government agencies, and well-known organizations (e.g., the World Health Organization). Also, if a product or service is being advertised, such as a product for weight loss, caution should always be used. Helping clients sort through fact versus fiction will ensure their safety and ultimately their success.

When first meeting with clients, one priority should be to determine the types of social influence in their lives and whether or not these influences are supportive of the exercise behaviour. For example, do they have an exercise partner, or do they have a strong emotional support system? Most often, past success or failure with exercise can be connected to the amount of social support for the behaviour. Helping clients differentiate between someone’s support for their desire to exercise versus someone who is indifferent or unsupportive will help determine the influence level regarding the types of support received by certain individuals.

A client may also have conflicting influences, which cause them to be torn between time to exercise and other obligations. Regardless of the type of social influence that touches a person, changing behavior will likely be due to (and with the assistance of) some type of influence or support. When clients do not have adequate social support available, fitness professionals can play a key role in making the fitness facility an inviting place where clients feel they are supported. This can be done by introducing clients to the staff and members, finding group exercise classes that appeal to the client, or providing small group training sessions for people with common interests or goals. The important thing is to provide additional opportunities for people to connect and build a healthy community, especially for those who do not have strong support systems.

**Types of support**

Social support can come from a variety of sources, including family, friends, and fitness professionals, and the several types of support can include instrumental, emotional, informational, and companionship support. Due to the individual nature of social support and the way it relates to exercise behaviour, it is a topic that is still not fully understood by practitioners. The source and type of support considered as useful and meaningful will differ among individuals; it can change based on phase of life, proximity to family and friends, and the overall environment.

| **Type of Support** | **Example** |
| --- | --- |
| Instrumental | Providing transportation to a fitness facility  Paying for someone’s gym membership  Watching children to allow a parent to exercise |
| Emotional | Encouraging someone to exercise  Providing positive feedback  Listening to someone when they are frustrated with exercise  Being empathetic by communicating an understanding of how someone feels |
| Informational | Giving sound advice about how to achieve optimal health and fitness  Providing education about the current recommendations for physical activity  Educating people about the risk of poor health accompanying a sedentary lifestyle |
| Companionship | Exercising with someone  Accompanying someone during an exercise session  Finding physically active options for social gatherings |

While the role of the fitness professional as a source of social support is not well documented, based on client expectations, some forms of social support (such as informational and companionship) should be assumed for the trainer–client relationship. The phase of life has a strong influence over the origin of social support. For example, children and adolescents are most influenced by parents and other family members, while the emphasis shifts to friends for young adults, and older adults rely on family members for support to exercise.

Instrumental support

Instrumental support describes the actual actions of a person that help another person engage in a behaviour. These actions directly facilitate the behaviour, such as removing a barrier. For some individuals, this type of support is crucial for exercise adherence because if help is not provided, a physical barrier may not be overcome. This includes transportation to the gym or health club, childcare responsibilities, and financial considerations.

HELPFUL HINT

When recalling the purpose of social support, keep in mind that there are always two components to consider: who and what. Who is providing the support? This can be a significant other, family member, friend, coworker, healthcare provider, or fitness professional. What type of support is given? This can be instrumental, emotional, informational, or companionship.

Driving someone to a fitness facility, babysitting, or paying for someone’s gym membership are all ways of providing instrumental support. Additionally, with lack of time often cited as a top barrier, anything that helps create more available time would also be instrumental. Examples of this would be doing things for someone such as grocery shopping, transporting children to events, or cooking. It can also be gestures like taking someone shopping to find proper workout attire or packing a gym bag for a significant other. Regardless of the type of instrumental support, it will likely have a positive impact for someone who is trying to exercise regularly.

Emotional support

Overall, emotional support is considered very important for people to start and continue with an exercise program. It refers to the encouragement and positive reinforcement that is provided and includes being caring and empathetic and showing concern. Some examples are telling individuals that they are doing great with exercising, asking how their workouts are going, or allowing them to vent when they are frustrated with their progress.

Empathy, an important component of emotional support, happens when someone identifies with the way another person feels. A simple way to describe being empathetic is the ability to put yourself in someone else’s shoes. Empathy helps people relate and connect and ultimately helps them feel that they are understood. Exercise can be a very rewarding experience that people thoroughly enjoy, but it can also be frustrating when results are not evident, or when exercise is uncomfortable; emotional support can be the one thing that keeps someone going.

Routinely communicating with clients, asking how they are doing and how they feel their program is going, is a way to foster relationships. Fitness professionals should also demonstrate empathy by indicating their understanding of how a client feels. Emotional support may be important to some clients daily while others only need it occasionally. Taking the time to get to know clients and learning about their preferences will ensure that individual needs are met.

STRETCH YOUR KNOWLEDGE

Empathy and sympathy are two different concepts. Sympathy typically involves pity and feeling sorry for someone else. Conversely, empathy is a deep understanding and recognition of how someone feels. Empathy does not involve judgment.

Informational support

Informational support is when someone receives accurate information about a behaviour or topic. This is the most common type of support provided by a fitness professional. Finding information about exercise and fitness has become easier with countless online platforms, but the accuracy of information is sometimes questionable based on the source. A client might first receive informational support regarding exercise from a healthcare provider, family member, friend, coworker, or social media influencer. However, seeking out additional and more specific informational support may be one of the top reasons for a person to hire a Certified Personal Trainer.

Clients rely heavily on fitness professionals to have the most accurate and up-to-date information as well as the ability to answer questions. Informational support includes providing general fitness advice and programming, providing specific feedback on progress with program adjustments, providing new and interesting information about the benefits of exercise versus the drawbacks of inactivity, and being able to dispel and correct myths and inaccurate information. Therefore, it is imperative for fitness professionals to have a strong foundation regarding general exercise science, as well as the habit of continually seeking out correct information to pass along to clients.

Companionship support

Companionship support describes the way that someone engages in a behaviour with another individual. This type of support is often observed in an exercise setting where people exercise with a friend or partner. Companionship support can have several positive influences on exercise behaviour. As a form of accountability, it can encourage consistency, create a friendly competition, foster social relationships, and serve as a distraction to the discomforts caused by exercise.

Exercising with a partner also requires people to plan because schedules must be coordinated and time needs to be blocked off. This can help eliminate excuses that could have encouraged a person to skip a workout. Companionship support is a key component of face-to-face personal training, with the fitness professional present for the entire exercise session.

When a client hires a Certified Personal Trainer, there is an expectation that companionship support is built into the experience. Fitness professionals need to stay focused on the client, push the client to work at an appropriate intensity, and keep the client on task. Finally, companionship support might simply make exercise more fun to do, regardless the partner.

TRAINING TIP

When training clients, it is very important to avoid distractions and keep the focus on the person who is paying for your service. During a session, avoid getting into in-depth conversations with other health club members or coworkers, do not look at your phone during a session, and do not let small distractions shift your attention away from your client. By keeping your focus on your client, you will provide significant companionship support and also provide excellent customer service.

**Group influences on exercise**

Group influences play a key role in many decision-making processes. As previously described, support can be given to a person in countless ways, but equally important is the person who provides that support. For example, young adults may be more influenced by their peers, while those in a mid-life stage might prefer support from a spouse or family member. Also, the source of information can be important; for instance, advice on overall health and well-being might be well received from a healthcare provider, but that same advice could be resisted when coming from a family member. Groups that may have a regular influence on physical activity are significant others, family members, peers, and exercise leaders. Regardless of the origin and the form of the support, a client needs to be open to taking that support for it to become effective.

Family

Family is one of the most important influences for most behaviours in life, especially for children and adolescents, but family influences are likely to remain strong throughout life. In research, the term *family* often refers to any family member, whether or not that person lives in the household, and individuals who live in a household but are not related. As stated previously, depending on the individual’s phase of life, the family influence can be quite different; younger people tend to be more influenced by parents, while mid-life and older adults are more influenced by a significant other. Social support for physical activity from family is particularly important for older adults as demonstrated by studies where family members were available to walk with and encourage exercise.

Family support differs from other sources of support because family members are typically more permanent. If someone does not care for an exercise leader or group, they can simply discontinue, but the same is not true regarding family, whose behavioural influences could be positive or negative. Living with family members who are inactive and do not value exercise can be a source of constant barriers. Fitness professionals should get a sense of whether or not family members are supportive of exercise and if they can provide any support. It should be acknowledged when family members are not supportive so that other sources of support can be identified.

Parental

The influence of parents on exercise behaviour is particularly important for children and adolescents. If parents have a positive relationship with exercise, then their children will be more likely to have a positive outlook on regular exercise, which can carry on into adulthood. Parents typically provide emotional and instrumental support, with the main type of instrumental support coming from providing transportation and paying for activities. For adolescents, this type of support, even more than emotional support from family and peers, can explain long-term exercise adherence.

Research has also shown that parental support for physical activity is important for adolescents, including the transition to adulthood, indicating that parental influence goes beyond children and adolescents. Parental influence over physical activity is apparent at a very young age; evidence shows that there is a positive relationship between the physical activity of mothers and their preschool children, meaning if mothers were active, then so were their children. Parents can also provide informational support to children by talking about the importance of regular exercise and all the benefits it brings. It is also beneficial for children to try a variety of physical activities (e.g., sports and recreational activities) so that they can naturally find which activities they do well or simply enjoy the most. Having an early and consistent exposure to exercise and physical activities will help create habits that are long-lasting.

Exercise leaders

Group exercise comes in many forms, including formatted classes taught to music and small group personal training, such as boot camps or sport-specific training. It can be found in large fitness facilities and small boutique studios, and some businesses are structured around only offering group exercise experiences. While not everyone will consider a group setting appealing, it does remain a popular way for many people to regularly engage in exercise. The exercise leader plays a crucial role with the overall tone and flow of the experience. Generally speaking, this is the person who should greet all members, make everyone feel welcome, ensure that participants have the right equipment and attire to safely engage, and use a variety of techniques to motivate and energize a group.

The exercise leader can also go a step further and learn participant’s names, introduce new members to the existing group, and try to connect with members before and after class to provide encouragement and get feedback. The idea of providing leadership in an exercise setting may not be a common expectation when professionals enter the fitness industry, but leadership plays a key role in determining whether a participant adheres to exercise or drops out. It is often noted that there is not a single best approach to leadership, but there are recognized components for effective leadership: the leader’s qualities, leadership styles, situational factors, and follower’s qualities.

| **Leadership Component** | **Examples** |
| --- | --- |
| Leader’s qualities | The leader should offer a great example in how to lead a healthy and balanced life, which includes being optimistic, empathetic, and knowledgeable. |
| Leadership styles | The different styles of leadership include a participant-centred approach that encourages feedback and input or an autocratic approach where participants are told what to do in a task-oriented environment. Leaders should be able to adjust their style based on the situation. |
| Situational factors | These factors include group size, whether it is a large or small group, and potential adjustments for style; for example, larger groups may need a more autocratic style. |
| Follower’s qualities | Leaders should consider the qualities of the followers, including age, gender, and exercise experience. |

An exercise leader has a unique opportunity to make a positive impact on large or small groups of people and to help foster a cohesive group environment. Aside from bringing a group together, the exercise leader should also be able to reach individual participants with simple gestures like making eye contact, smiling, and giving positive verbal feedback. With the goal of making everyone feel included, it is also necessary to demonstrate exercise modifications so that people with varying skills can all be challenged within a single session. The exercise leader is an important person for clients to emulate because that person demonstrates the exercises, helps set goals, and shows that exercise can be done consistently. Exercise leaders should be aware that because members pay close attention to what they are doing and how they approach exercise, it is important to be a positive role model and send appropriate verbal and nonverbal messages.

TRY THIS

Certified Personal Trainers may be expected to provide recommendations for clients regarding which group exercise classes are the best to attend. Consequently, Certified Personal Trainers should be knowledgeable about different class formats and the instructors who teach them. All fitness professionals should consider taking a variety of classes to learn more about various exercise formats and instruction styles. This will help match clients to classes and instructors that best suit their needs and personalities.

The exercise group

The idea of an exercise group has become common in the fitness industry along with the growing popularity of exercise sessions coached by certified professionals. The exercise group consists of the participants who are present for a given class or session. With many people drawn to certain types of exercise and who follow consistent schedules, it is common to see the same faces for group exercise sessions. Oftentimes, a good exercise leader will develop a following, and an exercise group will form. One aspect of an exercise group is feeling distinct from others; fitness professionals can encourage this simply by having participants wear the same colour shirt or having the group come together at the end of a session for a group cheer or any other ritual that is specific to that group.

While the overall influence held by a group over exercise behaviour is still not fully understood, there is a general consensus that being a part of a group has a positive effect. People simply exercising together may not necessarily identify as a group, because groups have distinct characteristics and the members often have formal or informal roles. A formal role would be held by the exercise leader or coach from whom instruction and organization are expected.

Informal roles may include those who tend to inspire the group, provide mentorship to new members, or plan social gatherings. It has been noted that for intact exercise groups that strongly identify as a distinct group, those members also perceive a social connection with each other and group cohesion. However, the process by which individuals in an exercise environment actually become a group is not well understood. People are drawn to group exercise for many different reasons and often for more than one reason.

| **Reason** | **Benefit** |
| --- | --- |
| Accountability | Being part of an exercise group brings accountability for regular attendance, both from members of the group and the exercise leader. |
| Comparison | Participants have people they can compare themselves against; the ability to see what others can do and achieve can serve as further motivation. |
| Competition | Group environments can bring about friendly competition among participants or within individuals to reach their personal best. |
| Comradery | Individuals can form connections with people who are attempting to achieve similar results, while experiencing feelings of friendship, closeness, and loyalty. |
| Consistency | Having a schedule that allows participants to anticipate the experience will help form habits. |
| Energy | Most group exercise classes are designed to be high energy, making it an attractive environment to which people are drawn. |
| Intensity | Participants are encouraged to try the best they can, and they may work harder in the presence of the group. |
| Mindless | Since the exercise session is planned, participants just need to show up and follow instructions without thinking about designing their own workouts. |
| Motivation | Exercising with a group can by itself be a form of motivation to regularly participate. |
| Sociability | When a group or situation is warm and inviting, it brings people together; when people feel welcome, they are likely to return. |

TRAINING TIP

Joining an intact exercise group may be intimidating for some clients. Fitness professionals can help identify groups that share similar characteristics or goals and encourage clients to participate. If clients are unsure of their ability to fit into a group, one way to help them adjust is to attend an exercise session with them, which may help reduce insecurities about trying something new.

The community

The community plays a unique role in exercise behaviour based on the opportunities available for people to be physically active. There is evidence that the physical surroundings, also known as the built environment, has a strong influence over activity levels in a community.

The number of sidewalks and walking and biking paths available can impact people’s activity levels. It is important to note that communities vary quite a bit in terms of resources, safety, transportation, and social norms. Active communities will likely have more green space, walking trails, playgrounds, sidewalks, and biking trails, as well as an emphasis on safe public transportation and neighbourhoods. Being aware of the opportunities or challenges of participating in exercise outside of a fitness facility will help clients make decisions about how to best maximize an active lifestyle.

## Psychological benefits of exercise

The positive benefits of exercise go far beyond a physical transformation. The psychological benefits of exercise are well established and can be experienced over both the short and long term. Some of the known psychological benefits to exercise include improved mood, increased self-esteem, increased positive body image, better sleep, and decreased levels of depression and anxiety. Conversely, sedentary behaviour has been linked to an increase in depression. This relationship can be partially explained by sedentary people experiencing limitations with their movement, problems with sleep and low energy, some levels of pain and discomfort with movement, and higher levels of anxiety.

What may not be as clear is whether sedentary behaviour leads to increased depression, or whether depression leads a person toward sedentary behaviour, which leads to poor health status. There is also growing evidence that physical activity of moderate intensity may be the most effective approach. In one study, aerobic exercise of moderate intensity improved self-perceptions of strength and muscular development and improved feelings of autonomy and well-being. Many of the psychological benefits from exercise are experienced together; for example, depression may improve along with better sleep and improved social interactions. In general, there is an association between being physically active and having a greater sense of well-being. For example, inactive people rated their health and satisfaction with life lower than those who exercised. Regardless of the reason why someone decides to exercise, psychological benefits will inevitably occur and may help reinforce the behaviour.

**Promotes positive mood**

The term *mood* refers to how someone feels; it is considered a more long-term state of mind, unlike emotion, which is a short-term reaction to a situation. People will often define their mood as “good” or “bad” based on the way they generally feel. Many factors affecting mood can include being fatigued, experiencing success or failure, and hearing good or bad news. Many people express mood with their nonverbal communication: body language, tone of voice, and eye contact. Mood can also help foster relationships and social interactions, because people will often be drawn toward others who regularly demonstrate a good mood or positive energy. Researchers are often interested in the way that a single bout of exercise affects mood in the short-term and how long-term participation influences overall mood. Exercise has demonstrated a generally favourable effect on various mood profiles with durations anywhere from 10 to 60 minutes, making even short bouts of exercise effective in improving mood.

**Improves self-esteem and body image**

Self-esteem and body image are psychological variables associated with a number of health concerns, including depression, eating disorders, and exercise addiction. The serious implications of these conditions make these variables important to monitor, especially in populations that may be at a higher risk of developing habits that could lead to poor mental and physical health. Self-esteem and body image have long been connected to each other due to the reciprocal nature of the two, meaning that people with low self-esteem may also have body image issues and having body image issues can lead people to having low self-esteem.

Self-esteem refers to the way someone evaluates their own self-worth; it has different domains such as physical, emotional, and social. Physical self-esteem has subdomains that include people’s self-perception of their own fitness levels, the attractiveness level of their physiques, their physical strength, and their competence level at sports. Body image, generally defined as the way people view their physical selves, can be based on the way people visualize their bodies or how they feel in their own skins. Body image may not match reality; people may view their bodies in a negative way and evaluate themselves inaccurately. These variables and the way they relate to fitness will vary among populations because body ideals are different for men and women and between cultures.

For example, muscular strength has historically been important for men and their self-esteem, but not as much for women. While body image has been studied extensively, there is still some confusion within the general population, where body image is viewed only as a “women’s problem” of negativity. In light of this, another study found that both aerobic and resistance training improved overall body image in women with preexisting body image concerns, which demonstrates that appropriate exercise can improve these variables. But regardless of biological sex, weight loss and weight management are related to both self-esteem and body image. For example, in a long-term study, both self-esteem and body image were positively influenced when previously obese adolescents lost weight in their young adult years.

HELPFUL HINT

Body image and self-esteem are related. In many cases, they have a mutual relationship, meaning that as body image improves, self-esteem will also likely improve. This is also true in the other direction; for example, if self-esteem decreases, body image will likely become more negative and vice versa.

**Improves sleep**

Sleep is an important part of everyone’s day in terms of how a person will function. As our most restorative tool, it is necessary for nearly every physical, physiological, and psychological function. Sleep, or lack thereof, plays a significant role in physical and mental health, overall quality of life, and even one’s safety. Sleep has many restorative functions and is vital for proper growth, development, healing, and learning. Sleep-deficient individuals are at a greater risk of heart disease, stroke, high blood pressure, and obesity. When someone is sleep-deprived, they are also at risk for making poor decisions and not thinking properly, which can cause problems with work or relationships.

Exercise has been shown to improve sleep. Moderate amounts of exercise, in terms of frequency, duration, and intensity, are associated with significantly lower disturbances in sleep compared to sedentary behaviour. This suggests that exercise needs to reach a certain threshold to be beneficial, but excessive physical activity may not improve sleep quality. People diagnosed with chronic sleep disturbances may benefit from all types of regular exercise. In fact, increasing physical activity to at least 150 minutes per week at a moderate intensity can decrease symptoms of insomnia.

Resistance training has also been shown to improve sleep for people with chronic insomnia. Exercise is also believed to be beneficial for people with more serious sleep disturbances. In patients being treated with exercise for sleep apnoea, symptoms were shown to improve with increased physical activity. Overall, the relationship between regular exercise and improving sleep is positive.

**Reduces depression and anxiety**

According to the World Health Organization, depression is a common mental health issue that afflicts approximately 300 million people worldwide. Anxiety can be experienced with depression but can also occur by itself. Research on the effects of exercise on depression and anxiety has been conducted for decades and continues to be an area of interest among health professionals, including physicians, psychologists, and exercise scientists.

Much of the interest in this area surrounds exercise as a treatment option for depression. One of the challenges is that people with depression tend to participate in low levels of physical activity, and they are less likely than their nondepressed counterparts to meet current physical activity guidelines. The evidence also shows that exercise may be effective in offering a preventive effect against the development of depression across all ages regardless of geographic area.

The intensity of exercise may be important when addressing depression. One study showed that both moderate-intensity exercise and high-intensity exercise decreased depression; however, the high-intensity exercise also increased perceived stress, suggesting that moderate-intensity exercise may be best. For some individuals, even a simple approach to physical activity can lead to psychological improvements. For example, a monitored walking program performed three times per week resulted in reduced anxiety in a group of previously inactive overweight and obese individuals. While depression and anxiety are common, a person’s mental health should always be taken seriously. The inclusion of exercise as a way to reduce or prevent symptoms has promise, but a treatment plan must always originate from a qualified healthcare provider.

CRITICAL

While exercise is known to reduce feelings of depression and anxiety, a fitness professional should never attempt to diagnose any mental illness or prescribe exercise to clients as a form of treatment. Only a licensed medical provider can diagnose illnesses and prescribe treatments. Therefore, if any mental illness is suspected, clients should be referred to their primary care physician for further evaluation.

## Introduction to behavioural coaching

Due to widespread failure to engage in, maintain, or achieve adequate amounts of physical activity, effective coaching techniques are needed to promote physical activity and structured exercise. How can successful Certified Personal Trainers work with clients to educate them on the advantages of exercise behaviour and long-term adherence? To map out a successful intervention for the client, some of the essential elements include identifying the determinants of exercise behaviour, understanding theory and techniques to drive behaviour change, identifying client needs in the initial session, and determining the most effective style of delivery (which includes effective communication skills). This chapter explores some of the essential elements needed to help identify client needs, motivate them, and help them with self-regulatory issues to assist in exercise adoption and adherence.

**Client expectations of a Certified Personal Trainer**

Certified Personal Trainers can have a significant influence on their clients’ health. Therefore, the fitness professional has a responsibility to design programs, give effective advice, and create environments that help their clients adhere to a fitness routine.

Making a good first impression is crucial for a client to see the fitness professional as both an ally and an authority in the gym. Certified Personal Trainers should have a positive attitude and strong communication and listening skills. They should help clients feel confident and competent while preserving their autonomy to do exercises that they enjoy, while avoiding ones they do not. A good first impression typically includes:

1. Making eye contact (if culturally accepted)
2. Introducing oneself by name and asking the client’s name
3. Smiling
4. Shaking hands with the client (if culturally accepted)
5. Remembering the client’s name and using it
6. Using positive body language

If the client has completed an online application where they supplied personal interests, such as medical history or hobbies, fitness professionals should ask about them. Clients appreciate when fitness professionals show they have invested time prior to the session to get to know them. Aside from having a positive attitude and effective communication skills, fitness professionals should work hard to exhibit the following qualities to create an inclusive environment that keeps clients coming back:

1. Look professional: neat, clean, and appropriately dressed.
2. Take time to build a trusting relationship with new clients.
3. Ensure that the client feels heard and understood.
4. Ensure the client’s safety when exercising.
5. Build community by making a client’s exercise routine a collaborative effort.

**Client expectations of the environment**

The training environment includes the actual facility as well as the people inside the facility. The training environment can either hinder or foster intrinsic motivation. Staff members who are friendly, caring, and supportive of clients’ goals can have a positive impact on whether a client continues to return. Therefore, the environment that Certified Personal Trainers work in reflects who they are and will ultimately determine the type of clients they attract. For this reason, the most successful health clubs work hard to create a third space environment for their members.

A third space is considered a special, communal space that is separate from home or work. It is a place where individuals can build relationships with others while still expressing their own sense of identity. Third spaces should elicit a playful mood, helping clients to feel like they are in a home away from home. Certified Personal Trainers should strive to do their part in making the gym or fitness studio feel like a third space for clients. Before a client joins a gym, they will likely consider the following:

* Are there a variety of training options to choose from?
* Is the training environment supportive?
* Does it look like they will fit in with the club’s culture?
* What is the cost of a membership and personal training?
* How convenient is the location?
* Are the facilities clean and neat?

**Introduction to behaviour change techniques**

To improve coaching interventions that change behaviour, Certified Personal Trainers need to identify appropriate behaviour change techniques (BCTs). BCTs are the active elements for intervention strategies that affect the determinants of. For example, self-efficacy is a well-established determinant of exercise behaviour; therefore, to promote changes that increase exercise adherence, a behaviour change technique that influences self-efficacy should be used.

| **Desired Outcome** | **Behaviour Change Technique** | **Definition** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Improved self-efficacy | Set specific tasks | Break down exercises or goals into easier-to-achieve tasks. Build the stepping stones for progressively more challenging exercises or behaviours. |
| Provide instructions | Provide instructions on how to perform the behaviour. This can be in person, in writing, or in video. |
| Practice for mastery | Encourage frequent practice of challenging tasks with adequate feedback to enhance learning. |
| Communicate positively | Use positive encouragement to help clients believe they have the ability to change for the better. |
| Positive outcome expectations and attitudes | Supply information | Present foundational science on the health benefits of exercise and the consequences of sedentary behaviour. |
| Prompt anticipated regret | Help clients imagine how their life would be different by changing a behaviour compared with the consequences of not changing it. |
| Apply motivational interviewing | Use guiding questions that prompt clients to engage in critical thinking that helps resolve ambivalence about change. |
| Manage social influence | Encourage social support | Ask clients how they plan to gain social support from friends and family. |
| Foster discipline | Help clients build skills for resisting social pressure. |
| Promote self-regulation | Make a plan | Provide detailed planning on when and where clients will engage in exercise. |
| Identify coping responses | List potential barriers and make plans to overcome each one. |
| Set SMART goals | Set both short-term and long-term goals that are specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and timely. |
| Promote self-monitoring | Encourage clients to keep records of the specific behaviour they want to change to help enhance adherence to the program. |

HELPFUL HINT

Behaviour change techniques, by nature, are generic. Self-efficacy, for example, may be enhanced with several different behaviour change techniques, which can be delivered through several different channels. Fitness professionals cannot always deliver behaviour change techniques in person. The use of technology, such as text message reminders, email lists, and social media interactions, can help considerably with adherence to a routine while a client is outside of the gym.

## Determinants of participation in exercise

Successfully changing fitness behaviours begins with a clear understanding of the contributing factors that influence whether people participate. Coaching works by changing one or more of these factors, which are called determinants of behaviour. Essentially, determinants of behaviour represent the generic modifiable variables that cause a behaviour. Participating in exercise has several determinants, including motivation, self-efficacy, self-regulation, exercise history, body weight, stress, social support, access, time constraints, and characteristics of the exercise behaviour. Once fitness professionals understand what contributes to participation in exercise, they need to understand the foundational theories to match BCTs to their client’s needs.

**Determinants of participation in physical activity and exercise**

Self-efficacy (i.e., self-confidence) is one of the strongest determinants of physical activity in adults. An individual’s stage of change and intention have also been identified as determinants of behaviour. Job strain and working hours were shown to have an inverse relationship with leisure-time physical activity. People are also more likely to engage in regular exercise when they have support from people in their home and work environments. Self-determination theory variables, including autonomous motivation and perceived competence, have also been found to be related to exercise behaviour.

Furthermore, planning—a self-regulatory strategy—has positive influences on physical activity. Regular exercisers report higher levels of self-monitoring as well. Additionally, one of the most recent reviews identified 40 psychological factors and 13 social factors as being related to physical activity. Cognitive and emotional factors, attitudes, intention, outcome expectations, stress, perceived behavioural control, and self-efficacy have all been identified as associated with physical activity as well.

**Determinants of participation in resistance training**

Resistance training is a unique form of exercise that is likely more challenging to start than aerobic exercise or recreational physical activity. It requires numerous participatory resources, including knowledge of how to design programs and the skills to execute complex movements.

Therefore, while many determinants are shared with exercise and physical activity, it is useful to address resistance training on its own.

There is evidence to support the relationships between resistance training participation and affective judgment, self-efficacy and perceived behavioural control, self-regulatory behaviours, and intention. In other words, people tend to engage in resistance training when they think it feels good, believe they can do the exercises correctly and overcome barriers, can self-monitor and makes plans, and have high levels of motivation. Intention is a direct predictor of behaviour, but planning has also been shown to help translate intentions and self-efficacy to behaviour. Subjective norms also have a small, positive relationship with resistance training.

## The Stages of Change Model

The Stages of Change model (also known as the Transtheoretical Model of Behaviour Change) views change as a process that involves progression through a series of stages. These stages are precontemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, and maintenance. The model was originally conceived as a means to help people quit smoking, but it can be applied to virtually any situation where a person is trying to break bad habits and form new positive ones. In regard to personal fitness, the stages of change reference a person’s readiness to begin and adhere to an exercise program:

1. Precontemplation stage: the individual does not exercise and is not planning to start exercising within the next 6 months
2. Contemplation stage: the individual does not currently exercise but is planning to start within 6 months
3. Preparation stage: the individual is planning to begin exercising soon and has taken steps toward it and may even be sporadically exercising
4. Action stage: the individual has been exercising for less than 6 months
5. Maintenance stage: the individual has been exercising consistently for 6 months or more (Glanz et al., 2008; Spencer et al., 2006)

GETTING TECHNICAL

A sixth stage of the original Transtheoretical Model, called termination, also exists but has little to no application to exercise adherence. For smoking cessation, the termination phase represents the point at which an individual no longer has any desire to smoke ever again with no risk of relapse. When it comes to exercise, busy lifestyles make it virtually impossible to stick to a dedicated exercise plan forever. For that reason, even the most dedicated athletes will shift between preparation, action, and maintenance.

The Stages of Change model also includes processes of change, self-efficacy, and decisional balance. People move through the stages of change by using behavioural and cognitive processes of change strategies. For example, fitness-promoting behaviours are influenced by self-monitoring strategies, along with enhanced confidence and perceived benefits of resistance training. Decisional balance refers to the process of weighing the positive and negative outcomes of engaging in or increasing exercise behaviour. As benefits increase and negatives decrease, people move toward the maintenance end of the stages of change continuum.

Processes of change provide strategies on how to apply BCTs. In early stages, clients may apply cognitive processes to progress through stages. In later stages, they rely more on behavioural processes for progressing toward maintenance. For example, an individual in the contemplation phase may benefit more from information about the health benefits for exercise (a cognitive process) than they would from adding cues or prompts to engage in exercise (a behavioural process). Certified Personal Trainers need to work differently with clients who are in different stages of change. They will need to tailor their use of BCTs and recommendations to the clients’ readiness to make positive changes in their lives.

**Precontemplation**

Individuals may be in the precontemplation stage because they are not informed about the consequences of inactivity or they do not know about the health benefits of exercise. Alternatively, they may have tried before, failed to feel confident or maintain consistency, and have become demoralized by their inability to stick with an exercise routine in the past. These people may be categorized as being ambivalent to exercise. Cognitive strategies may be the best option for those in the precontemplation stage.

Additionally, gaining knowledge and education may be exactly what some individuals need to increase their perceived value of exercise. Certified Personal Trainers should work to understand any perceived negatives surrounding exercise and help clients dispel any myths. For example, some clients may think resistance training requires hours spent in the gym each day, so the fitness professional can teach them that only 30 to 60 minutes of focused resistance programming 2 to 4 days per week to gain significant health benefits are needed.

That said, Certified Personal Trainers will not usually work with people in the precontemplation stage as it pertains to beginning exercise from a sedentary state. The simple act of walking into the gym means a person is at least already thinking about making healthy life changes. However, a client could still be in precontemplation as it pertains to a progression in their program. For example, a potential client could be in the maintenance stage for the goal of exercising two times per week, but they could be in the precontemplation stage for a progression to exercising three times per week to better meet goals.

Similarly, a client could be in precontemplation for starting resistance training but already be in the action stage for aerobic exercise and recreational physical activity.

**Contemplation**

Because individuals in the contemplation stage are considering becoming more active, fitness professionals can have a great deal of influence on what they choose to do. Certified Personal Trainers need to be able to listen to the needs and desires of those in the contemplation stage and help them connect those goals with exercise-based solutions. People in contemplation begin to see more value in exercise participation, but misconceptions may still be present. In fact, an equal balance between benefits and negatives (i.e., being of two minds about something) may produce ambivalence. These individuals may not be ready to act immediately, so Certified Personal Trainers need to support them in any way that they can.

Similar to precontemplation, education is one of the best strategies to use with people in contemplation, because they sometimes just need more information to boost their perceived value of an exercise program. For these individuals, it is important to discuss ways to deal with their perceived negatives surrounding exercise. Individuals in this stage of change are also low in self-efficacy; they may want to do it but are not sure they can, so they hesitate to start. Small achievable goals help people in contemplation build self-efficacy and gain momentum.

**Preparation**

People in the preparation stage are working on their plan to change. They may have already joined a gym, or they may already exercise sporadically but are planning to start a formal weekly exercise plan within the next month. This is a stage where fitness professionals will most likely meet the most individuals. They know they want to start exercising, and they are making the right moves to join a club and potentially even attend a personal training consultation. Individuals in this stage may already partake in multiple forms of physical activity, just without any form of structure or consistency.

Fitness professionals can help clients plan when, where, and how to fit exercise into their schedule. The preparation stage is all about establishing a plan that clients feel confident they can follow. Building intrinsic motivation for exercise is also important for developing consistency in this group. For that reason, motivational interviewing, which is discussed later in this chapter, can be a highly beneficial BCT to use with all new potential clients, helping to uncover their underlying desires and turn a plan into action.

**Action**

Action is the stage in which clients have been consistently exercising for up to 6 months. In this stage, it is important to not allow short-term slip-ups to turn into a departure from the exercise program. Fitness professionals should continue to discuss barriers to exercise and help clients anticipate any potential roadblocks that could arise. To help with this, specific plans should be put in place in advance if a client misses a scheduled session with suggestions for maintaining progress, such as supplying preplanned “emergency” workouts that they can do from home.

TRAINING TIP

If a client happens to cancel a session, the fitness professional should do at least one of the following two things:

1. Ask the client when they would like to reschedule the session.
2. Prompt the client to make a plan for continuing to exercise in the interim, if the rescheduled session is not soon (within 24–48 hours).

**Maintenance**

Maintenance is the stage in which clients are consistently working to maintain their active lifestyle, sticking to their exercise plans for 6 months or more. These individuals do not use cognitive change processes as frequently as they would have in the action phase, and they are less tempted to relapse. At this stage, their self-efficacy levels are generally high. Individuals in the maintenance stage may use certain behavioural strategies, such as inviting other people to exercise with them or making plans to make up missed sessions, to avoid relapsing back to earlier stages.

## Importance of effective communication skills

Before considering specific techniques to improve adherence, the Certified Personal Trainer should understand that the BCTs that help improve exercise adherence are equally as important as the style of delivery used and the relationship the fitness professional has built with each client. In other words, it’s not only *what* fitness professionals say, but *how* they say it.

Effective communication skills are crucial to further understand client needs and build a trusting relationship. Good communicators should strive to do the following:

* Create a safe environment where challenging and emotional issues can be discussed.
* Clear away distractions such as cell phones and focus on the client.
* Ask questions to understand the meaning of what the person is saying.
* Observe nonverbal cues such as body language.
* Provide empathy and validation.

Certified Personal Trainers should strive to achieve each of these communication strategies, because their use can minimize disagreements that may make the relationship with a client uncomfortable. By maximizing support and minimizing disagreements, fitness professionals will build rapport with the client, which can help contribute to adherence to an exercise program.