

Transfer and maintenance of gain

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"The transition to the community should be a carefully planned, gradual process that focuses on preparing young people for increased responsibility and freedom."

When the treatment program is over and the kids return to their regular lives, subsequent problems are usually related to maintaining the progress made. It is tempting to assume that progress will occur by itself. However, this is rarely the case; on the contrary, relapse into old behaviors is a norm rather than an exception. Young trainees will encounter new situations and challenges and for the vast majority, the problems will reappear. One must be prepared for a return to old habitual patterns of behavior.

Often there is gradual reverting back to a point where behavior is as it was before the treatment began. When the young people return to their regular lives, they will come in contact with all the stimuli and consequences that previously created and perpetuated their problems. They often get too little reinforcement for the new skills they have acquired during training. It is then typically very easy to fall back into old habitual patterns.

One of the cornerstones of ART is transfer training. Homework is the first step to incorporate skills into daily life. Homework consists of specific tasks to be carried out between meetings. The ultimate goal is to transfer the skills and content of the training to everyday life. There is strong research that supports the premise that homework improves the outcome of treatment, and that adherence to homework assignments predicts a better outcome. (Kaztansis, N. & Labate, L. 2006).

Generalization (transfer of change)

Successful generalization means that behaviors are being transferred from the treatment environment to the young person's life. It is in this context the behavior change should be realized and maintained.

To acquire new skills during a session or in a therapy room often works well. The big challenge lies in transferring the new behavior to other situations and environments causing the change to be maintained.

Newly learned behaviors are fragile and will disappear if they are not stimulated and become functional. During treatment, trainees get a lot of support and encouragement. When treatment is finished, the trainees get significantly less support. As therapists, we need to actively plan for this transition.

Barriers to generalization

There are some learning barriers for generalization to take place (Sundel & Sundel, 2005).

1. Behaviors that have been trained may not work in the home environment. Unaware of the training, the home environment may not sufficiently reinforce the desired behaviors and then they could therefore be extinguished. Also, for example, buddies may not provide reinforcement for social behaviors.
2. The youngster's old problem behaviors become reinforced in the home environment. The client falls back into old habits.
3. The difference is too large between the treatment setting and the youngster's natural environment. Therefore it is possible that there are no stimuli that trigger the behavior and as a result, there is no clear reinforcer in sight.
4. The skills and strategies have not been sufficiently developed in the training environment. The kid might have said that he / she understands, but insight is insufficient for generalization..

Increase the chances of generalization

The physical and social environments have a significant impact on behavior. Unfortunately, we have a tendency to ignore this fact. The treatment is seen more or less as a vaccination for difficult situations in the future. When young people begin to function socially, it is tempting to end treatment in the belief that the change is constant. Follow-up studies show that the generalization of treatment effects often does not take place. We should consider that behaviors learned in the therapy room will not be automatically transferred to the natural environment. Procedures for generalization and maintenance need to be built into the ongoing treatment.

Arnold Goldstein felt that this was a crucial issue. In the book *Aggression Replacement Training* (Goldstein et al., 1998) 16 comprehensive strategies to increase the chances of generalization and maintenance are highlighted. Make use of these principles! In the book *"Lasting Change"* (Goldstein & Maartens, 2000), this topic is explored further.

Maintenance of gain

Establish a plan for maintenance

How can you, as an ART practitioner, help your client to maintain and perhaps even improve their performance after the treatment? This is the great challenge!

The key is to identify the factors that have contributed to success and to ensure that these continue after the training program. What elements of the treatment have led to the most significant changes? The goal of a plan for maintenance is to identify, generalize and integrate the new skills and strategies in the young person's everyday life. This seems to be especially important when it comes to lifestyle changes. Young people have to manage their new lifestyle at the same time as the regular environment reinforces the original problem behavior.

To carefully plan how progress should be maintained is an important part in the final stage of treatment. The plan should be followed up in a number of follow up meetings. The important thing is that the youth feels that there is a sustainable plan for the future when the program's completion is approaching. It should be noted that the youth should be very active in developing their own plan for the maintenance! Maintenance programs have good scientific support and can help reduce the risk of relapse. Establishing a maintenance plan follows a number of steps which are detailed in the remaining text.

An important first step is to understand how maintenance works (psycho-education). The youth may have beliefs that prevent the application of effective strategies and skills. It is easy to think that everything will resolve itself naturally, and you just can sit back without having to exert yourself. After a while, the trainee may no longer use the skills they've learned. This happens on a gradual basis. If the young person wishes to prevent future crises and setbacks he/she should instead:

- A. Identify the most important skills
- B. Be sure to retain competence in these skills
- C. Design a system to check on progress

- D. Be able to supervise and reinforce him/herself
- E. Repeat skills when needed
- F. Realize that life has its ups and downs, and have access to well-rehearsed strategies for dealing with setbacks and adversities

1. Pinpoint problem areas and behaviors

What does the problem scenario look like? In which areas and in what roles are there problems?

Ask the youth to list their most obvious problems. Are there skill deficiencies or problems in the form of behavioral excesses?

2. Identify successful elements of the training

Identify which parts of the training have resulted in improvements. What elements of the treatment have worked and been effective? Let the youth describe what skills and strategies have been helpful, such as problem solving, reminders, specific skills or stress management.

3. Develop a plan to keep progress alive

The assignment for the youth is to develop his/her own plan to maintain and also improve performance in the future. The starting point is identifying the successful parts identified in step 2. Give the youngster the homework to identify key skills and to develop a plan to keep them alive. Describe this strategy as a way to take control of themselves and their life situation. Often it helps develop a more healthy and balanced lifestyle.

4. Goals and values to work towards

What goals and values is it important to strive towards? Formulating long-and short-term goals. What values and character traits is it important to strengthen and manifest in action?

5. Obstacles that may arise

The youngster will definitely encounter difficulties. Identify obstacles that may cause the client not to follow his/her plan. Encourage the young person to develop a plan of how to deal with these obstacles.

6. Help along the way

Identify factors that may help trainees to stick to the maintenance plan. We need to build on the strengths and assets that exist. Take advantage of protective factors in as many areas as possible. It can be about people, clubs, recreational activities, their own talents and interests, and other resources. Involve and educate key people (parents, siblings, peers, teachers, etc..) in the youngster's life. Also practice of the skills that help to recognize and seek out positive reinforcement and supportive models.

7. How will the plan be kept alive?

Identify high-risk situations and warning signs. It is helpful to discuss what the first signs are that you are going to deviate from the plan. This may involve various types of difficulties, thoughts and feelings that need to be managed. Then develop skills ("coping skills") to deal with high risk situations.

What is important to keep activities going? Generating reminders and scheduling activities may be needed. Assignments (homework) that aim to perform or expose trainees to certain things in order to keep the skills alive may be required. Developing plans for dealing with setbacks are often necessary; reminders to return to the basic plan to get back on track.

Arrange so that there is positive reinforcement for desirable behaviors. At the same time, it is important to prepare the youth that reinforcement may not occur even if they do it right.

Help the youngster to build social support systems that perpetuate behavioral change. It can be both social media (web-based) and/or actual physical networks. Encourage the practice of recruiting positive social peer role models and people with strong influence.

8. Keep record of the plan

Come up with a way for the young person to check on how it is going. After treatment, no one will be there to remind or reinforce anymore. Then it will be important to independently keep track of how things are going and be able to guide and reinforce

oneself. It is important that the young person find a system (e.g., keeping a diary) to keep track of progress and ensure that what works continues to be a strategy.

The plan for maintenance is created both during physical meetings but also in the form of homework assignments. It is good if the youngster puts as much effort as possible in designing the plan and saves it for future use. At the end of treatment the coach and the youngster should agree that the plan contains an excellent and realistic strategy for success in the future.

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PLAN FOR MAINTENANCE OF GAIN

1. Problem areas and behaviors:

2. Successful elements of the treatment:

Strategies and skills that worked

3. Plan to keep progress in life:

4. Goals and values to work towards:

5. Obstacles that may arise:

6. Help along the way:

7. How do I keep the plan alive?

Early warning signs, coping with setbacks, important activities

8. Keep record of progress:

How to keep track of how things are going?