

Pine Tree Hospice

April 2020 Volunteer Bulletin

Greetings All,

I hope this finds you safe and well. Thank you for your commitment to Pine Tree Hospice. While our direct care work is limited, volunteers and staff are still making phone calls checking in with clients and families. Committees are connecting electronically. Bereavement support is needed more than ever as we continue to adjust to social changes that are necessary at this time.

If you are aware of individuals or families that need help identifying resources for food, clothing, shelter or support by phone; don't hesitate to encourage them to call the office and leave a message. We will call them. Pine Tree Hospice staff and volunteers continue to search online, search our resource directories in the office, and do our best to assist individuals identify options that are out there. Home visits are currently not an option, but support can be offered.

Staff are individually spending time in the office checking messages and managing to keep the processes in place. We are happy to hear what you are doing to manage the social limitations and serve those around you. Don't hesitate to call 564-4346.

Best Wishes,

Cheryl Crabtree

Coordinator of Volunteers & Client Services

“Anyone who has ever made and broken a New Year's resolution can appreciate the difficulty of behavior change. Making a lasting change in behavior is rarely a simple process and usually involves a substantial commitment of time, effort, and emotion.” (Sorry, this hyperlink isn't working, please cut and paste into your search bar for more information and references www.verywellmind.com/the-stages-of-change)

Change is something that is constant in our lives often in ways we hardly notice. Due to our current COVID-19 situation, changes have been sudden, radical, and continue as we ride the wave to whatever will feel like an “end”. In reaction to my own struggle with this, I found myself searching for a refresher on the Stages of Change Theory that I studied a few years ago. My first exposure to this theory helped me find new understanding of how challenging behavioral change can be for people. Personal reflection brought me increased self-acceptance and compassion for myself and others. Whether change is required due to an addiction, or evolves out of an important need to move on, or hits with force due to other people's choices; accepting and coping with change requires much more than simply “just getting over it”.

As we find ourselves in the midst of social changes due to this pandemic, perhaps you or someone you love may be experiencing emotional upheaval. For some, past experience successfully dealing with the unexpected may provide increased capacity to accept and move through these weeks with more ease. For others, who have experienced traumatic changes during their lifetime, the current “unknowns” may trigger high anxiety, anger, panic and more when recurrent trauma memories begin to echo around the new normal of social isolation or lack of personal control.

I am writing this for the Pine Tree Hospice Volunteer Bulletin not only due to a personal need to revisit this material, but also to offer information that might apply to your current experience. In addition, reading and reflecting on this information is an optional continuing education piece for indirect or direct volunteers. Finally, the stages of change contain components that apply to people facing life changes at any stage of life. As you consider life through the lens of the COVID-19 shutdown, perhaps you may find the information valuable as you reach out to others who may be struggling.

For this writing, I am using ideas from the Stages of Change Model to challenge the *Cheryl Crabtree Resistance to Change Personal Plan*. (Tongue in cheek disclaimer: All references to Cheryl's behavior are used to personalize and offer a bit of humor regarding the challenges faced at this time. Cheryl is far more pleasant, malleable, and patient than the exaggerated ideas that follow indicate.) In order for Cheryl to change her attitude and behavior around the current changes in the world and at home it is necessary for her to review the following:

The Elements of Change

To succeed, you need to understand the three most important elements in changing a behavior:

1. **Readiness to change:** Do you have the resources and knowledge to make a lasting change successfully?
2. **Barriers to change:** Is there anything preventing you from changing?
3. **Expect relapse:** What might trigger a return to a former behavior?
(www.verywellmind.com/the-stages-of-change)

Now, let us consider Cheryl's status regarding these Elements of Change:

1. **Readiness to change:** Cheryl wasn't prepared for the social lockdown and never considered that there would be a time in society requiring no hugs, no handshakes, and no social banter at the office. The necessary changes to “normal” work life, social life, and religious life are sudden and drastic for someone who likes to be out there mixing it up with people. Cheryl has been feeling overwhelmed by so much change and reminded of previous experiences when change that “felt” as sudden and dramatic as this meant depression down the road. So factor in a little fear, self-doubt, frustration, anger, and anxiety to calculate Cheryl's “**Readiness to change**”.
2. **Barriers to change:** Now we are going to get serious with part of what keeps Cheryl from improving her readiness to accept the necessary changes. Good old stubbornness and need for control would be the over-arching factors. (If you have known Cheryl for very long you may be **absolutely shocked** by this.) I assure you resistance to accepting that which cannot be changed at this time, brings out a level of personal rebellion that requires the kind, compassion of every more introverted acquaintance in Cheryl's life. Her resistance to accepting this “new normal” is the greatest **barrier to change** in her life during the COVID-19 pandemic.

3. **Expect relapse:** Every morning is a trigger to resist accepting change, because the development and modification of social norms due to COVID-19 are in flux. Cheryl expects relapse into periods of fear, self-doubt, frustration, anger, and anxiety. Reports have surfaced that relapse involves stomping, moaning, and hours of intense house cleaning. I believe even the refrigerator interior is spotless. Will the hall closet be next? Best to avoid asking too many questions during these fits of “bringing order to chaos”. Ask around. It is Not a pretty picture.

The actual Stages of Change Model

The Stages of Change or Transtheoretical Model was introduced in the late 1970s by researchers James Prochaska and Carlo DiClemente who were studying ways to help people quit smoking. The model has been an effective aid in understanding how people go through behavioral changes. (Cut and paste the following link into your search bar for more information and a list of references.)

www.verywellmind.com/the-stages-of-change

Here are the stages taken from the website sited above:

Stage	Characteristics	Strategies
Precontemplation	Denial Ignorance of the problem	Rethink your behavior Self-analysis Assess risks of current behavior
Contemplation	Ambivalence Conflicted emotions	Weigh pros & cons of behavior change Confirm readiness and ability to change Identify barriers to change
Preparation	Experimenting with small changes Collecting information about change	Write down goals Prepare a plan of action Make a list of motivating statements
Action	Taking action toward goal	Reward your success
Maintenance	Maintaining new behavior Avoid temptation	Develop coping strategies for temptation Remember to reward yourself
Relapse	Disappointment Frustration Feelings of failure	Identify triggers that lead to relapse Recognize barriers to success Reaffirm your goal and commitment to change

The Saga of Cheryl the Resistant *Will she move forward through the Stages of Change?*

Stage 1 Precontemplation

Characterized by: Denial and ignorance of the problem

Denial has always been a comfortable nothingness that has kept Cheryl whistling down the road of life. The brick wall of the COVID-19 world crashed its way through denial after the first seven days of reports regarding the virus. Cheryl admits a pattern of clinging to 10% denial in most circumstances during her life. This new normal does not allow for **ignorance of the problem** to support any level of denial. **Drat!!** Begrudgingly Cheryl finds herself moving on to Stage 2 Contemplation.

Stage 2 Contemplation

Characterized by: Ambivalence and conflicted emotions

Ambivalence (had to look this one up) is “simultaneous attraction and repulsion”, according to Merriam-Webster 3rd edition. Cheryl thinks “Yay! Working from home. No long drives. Working while wearing comfy clothes.” At the same time she thinks “I like my co-workers. I like separation between work space and home space. I need a reason to get moving. I like a schedule. I like visiting people.” On a more visceral level Cheryl feels the lingering notes of denial that suggest to her gut **conflicting emotional reactions** from “this is no big deal”, which is immediately followed by “how are we going to...who will...won't someone....I am old.....people will die... EEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEKKK”. Details of what followed the **conflict of emotions** is best left to your imagination. Cheryl recommends caution in considering this and requests compassionate thoughts for her kind, gentle, seasoned companion Dave. After a long night of medicated sleep, Cheryl is ready for Stage 3 Preparation for change (Dave is contemplating a small cabin to be built somewhere away from the house on our four acres.)

Stage 3 Preparation

Characterized by: Experimenting with small changes and collecting information about change

Sigh....Cheryl has gathered the facts about the virus and has accepted the need for social distancing. She realizes as the month of April begins that perhaps she could consider this month to be a chance for rest and appreciation for every **small joy** that can be found each day. Maybe an opportunity to do things that will matter in preparation for the time when strict limits are modified. She begins to write down long term goals and short term goals. The most helpful work was a list of everything good about her world at home followed by a list of who in her sphere of influence could be assisted by simple acts that fit within the temporary restrictions to social coming and going. Cheryl created a printed reminder that some of these limits are **Temporary**. Cheryl took many deep breaths and decided to make some plans to **meet little goals and figure ways to create new rewards**. Cheryl has a warrior spirit, some have said. Once she identifies the battle. Adaptation is the path toward victory!

Stage 4 Action

Characterized by: Taking action toward goal

Cheryl **begins** a pattern of daily rituals that bring some order and predictability to each day. She is free to walk on the back country road where she lives. Spring is arriving! The birds are singing! The sunshine feels magnificent on her face. She is limiting exposure to social media, **making a plan** for each week including options to adjust things one day at a time. Cheryl increases her awareness of many small and simple acts that make each day remarkable, less hurried, less demanding, and far more

creatively focused. She is also practicing future-oriented thinking by making a list of activities, gatherings, and plans for whenever we can go out and play in groups again. Cheryl is **taking action** allowing herself to slow down, breathe, look around, and find simple joy.

Stage 5 Maintenance

Characterized by: Maintaining new behavior and avoiding temptation (to stop trying to adapt)

Maintenance! Not Cheryl's favorite idea. Maintaining forward progress requires a dose of patience, long suffering, more patience, practice, and reasonable expectations. Cheryl needs reminders that **adjustments take practice**. New plans feel awkward. There is **some grief going on** (a reminder, lest Cheryl tries to deny that!). The **temptation** to expect that so much change won't require a lot of adjustment is important! Daily expectations need to be **reasonable** and compassionately considered. Rewards need to include moderate amounts of comfort *chocolate....I meant to write food*, walking, yoga stretches, sewing, and finding reasons to laugh. A gratitude journal can be a sweet way to start the day. Cheryl likes to write. Cheryl plans to write some letters. She has made a plan to write someone each day a real letter....those old fashion pen and paper letters that the postman brings. Cheryl bought more stamps while wearing her homemade mask to the store. Cheryl is making progress. Cheryl just had facetime with a friend and hugged her laptop. Aaaaaaaarrgh! I sense she is heading into Stage 6 Relapse.

Stage 6 Relapse

Characterized by: Disappointment, frustration, and feelings of failure

Cheryl does not easily accept that disappointment and frustration are expected during such a time as this. It is best if Cheryl expects that there will be times when she just wants to pout, cry, stomp and give up trying to make the best of this situation. Reasonable expectations may help her avoid **feelings of failure**. After all, **change is a process not a moment in time**. Decisions about coping with change are made in moments. Difficult feelings about changes that are beyond Cheryl's control are **valid**. Cheryl tries to expect that some days will be difficult. She will try to remember that it has taken a lifetime to accept that disappointment and frustration are part of the experience. Feelings of failure only come if one stops trying to do things differently in small and simple ways. Carry on! When thoughtfully done, we can carry on with a sincere smile and real hope. As for Cheryl, when things seem too much she curls under a blanket and reads a good book. Finished three last week.

There is hope for Cheryl the Resistant!

Continuing Education:

Pine Tree Hospice Indirect, Direct, and Bereavement Volunteers: To receive half an hour of continuing education use two or more of the prompts below, write a one page (double-spaced) response to this reading, e-mail to ccrabortree@mayohospital.com with copy to lwhite@mayohospital.com

- What new information did you find helpful?
- How are you moving through the Stages of Change during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- How does this information apply to clients and families dealing with end of life issues before and during the shutdown?
- Does anyone have a good blueprint for a small cabin to be built on the back end of Dave's four acres? (seriously, won't count for continuing ed, but Dave may offer \$\$\$)