

Questions Asked During Live Webinar Broadcast on 4/10/19



Less is More: A Breakthrough Method for Lasting Change

Presenter: David Mee-Lee, MD, DFASAM and
Deborah Teplow, PhD

What part of the brain, is motivation found?

A:

The neuroscience of motivation is complicated and much is unknown. There has been some work on looking at dopamine and changes in the reward center.

“The Behavioral Neuroscience of Motivation: An Overview of Concepts, Measures, and Translational Applications” is a book chapter on motivation (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4864984/>) in a book series published by Springer (<https://link.springer.com/bookseries/7854>). It gives a great overview on the recent science of motivation.

According to the authors, Eleanor Simpson and Peter Balsam, “Neuronal activity in several brain regions including orbitofrontal cortex, anterior cingulate, and basolateral amygdala has been shown to correlate with reward prediction...The central hypothesis in these analyses of addictions of drugs and gambling (as well as addiction to food and other things) is that an aberration in reward processing and/or in the control by cues associated with these rewards underlies the problematic nature of addictive behavior and its resistance to change..... the emerging understanding that there are multiple systems driving motivation on an organismal level will lead to the development of treatment schemes that are more comprehensive than those that have been developed in the past.”

Can you give an example of how to use this process for someone who has food addiction issues, and severe medical issues related to overeating, and who doesn't want to give up poor eating habits?

A:

Tiny habits is designed to make desired behaviors easy to do so that they become automatic.

For this case, a fundamental question to ask is what health-promoting behavior(s) would this person be interested in starting to do? For example, does the person want to even work on overeating? Or are they still not even convinced that their eating is a problem?

We start with where the person is “at” and what their preferred future is. What are the outcomes they want? If the person is interested in not overeating, what would they do instead? Some options might be to use a plate that is designed to show healthy portion sizes, weigh and measure their food before they eat, serve from the stove instead of putting platters of food on the table, etc.

A few examples of Tiny Habits that apply are:

“After I wake up and open my eyes in the morning, I will imagine myself eating just one serving of food and saying, ‘That’s enough!’”

“After I close the cabinet after putting away the last dinner dish at night, I will write down one positive thing about eating normal-size portions.”

“After I brush my teeth, I will look at myself in the mirror and tell myself that I can do it (stick to eating healthy-portion sizes of food).”

“After I serve myself normal-sized portions, I’ll think about the kind of role model I am for my kids.”

“After I recognize the desire or thought to eat more food after I have finished what’s on my plate, I will stand up and stretch my arms overhead, take a deep breath, and tell myself I’ve had exactly the right amount of food to be healthy.”

Note that each tiny habit immediately should be followed by a celebration that feels good, victorious, and happy.

Are you saying that motivation and willpower are the same thing? The poll question lumped them both together...

A:

Motivation is wanting to do the behavior and willpower is the ability to resist immediate temptations in pursuit of long-term goals or objectives.

We lumped them together because in general conversation (vs scientific research), people conflate them. For purposes of designing for behavior change, it’s important to note that both motivation and willpower are personal factors that contribute to behavior. Two other equally important factors are social and environmental. Without taking into account social norms and support, intrinsic and extrinsic motivators (ie, rewards and disincentives), and environmental cues, tools, signals, and structures, the personal factors may not be enough to support lasting change.

Is there a difference in how the B=MAP works when it is internal motivation versus external motivation, ie. determination as a prompt versus disease?

A:

There is no difference in how the model works based on whether the motivation is internal (ie, intrinsic) or external (ie, extrinsic). Behavior is the result of a convergence of motivation, ability, and a prompt.

However, there is a difference how internal vs external motivations affect how much the behavior change “sticks.”

Behavior change is easiest and most sustainable when motivation is intrinsic/internal and results in a feeling of personal satisfaction, mastery, and achievement rather than extrinsic/external in which the result is earning a reward or avoiding punishment.

What is the process for becoming certified in Tiny Habits? Cost and time involved?

A:

Find out about certification here: <http://tinyhabitsacademy.org/coachcertification/>

What is our way for framing a discussion with clients about when circumstances don’t allow for a tiny habit that day (couldn’t do 2 push ups bc had stomach flu that day)

A:

The purpose of tiny habits is to make desired behavior automatic so that as when motivation, ability, and prompt converge, behavior happens.

When sick, motivation, ability, or the prompt to exercise may diminish or disappear (as you point out); therefore, behaviors that normally occur automatically may get derailed. Without the presence of any one of the three factors (motivation, ability, or prompt) behavior simply won't happen.

The key is to get back to the normal (tiny habits) routine as soon as possible.

One idea is to maintain the structure of the tiny habit and modify the target behavior (push-ups) instead of letting it fall by the wayside:

"After I [prompt], I will tell myself that I'll do 2 push-ups when I feel better."

"After I [prompt], I will remind myself of how good I feel after I do my push-ups."

"After I [prompt], I will name one way that doing push-ups helps me."

Another idea is to keep motivation fueled by using tiny habits to prepare for returning to health. Here are a few examples:

"After I open my eyes in the morning, I'll name one benefit I enjoy about exercising."

"After I get out of bed by putting my feet on the floor, I'll think about the good feeling I get when I do push-ups."

"After I get into bed and close my eyes, I'll imagine myself doing my push-up tiny habits."