

5 Tips for Using Behavior Change Theories:

Theories help us understand and impact behavior.

Behavior change theories help us understand human behavior as well as what motivates and hinders behavior change. No one theory fully explains human behavior. Some describe how behavior change progresses. Others describe the factors that influence change. Others describe how decision-making influences behavior change. Put theory into practice with these tips.

Learn the stages of behavior change.

Behavior change theories focusing on the process of behavior change help us understand the stages people progress through when changing behaviors. The first stage describes the absence of an awareness of needing to change, followed by awareness and gaining knowledge, forming an intention and preparing for change, and finally performing and maintaining a new behavior.

Recognize the many factors influencing behavior.

As nutrition communicators, we can become positive influencers of behavior change when we understand the many and varied behavioral influencers in an audience's life including their personal characteristics as well as factors in their social and physical environments. We can accentuate the positive influencers and minimize or overcome the negative influencers.

Understand how people make behavior change decisions.

Behavior change theories describing health-related behavioral decisions include the Health Belief Model, the Integrated Behavioral Model, and the Social Cognitive Theory. All three illustrate and describe how various factors exert influence on each other and result in a particular action or inaction.

Combine theoretical constructs for greater understanding.

To fully understand behavior change requires the use of both stage-based theories and decision-based theories. Each one answers part of the questions about behavior change but not all. Merging the stage-based precaution-adoption model with key constructs of the most commonly used decision-based theories forms the Polytheoretical Framework.