



# Healthy Conversation Skills

To support health behaviour change



Practical advice for healthy eating habits  
from pregnancy to preschool



# What are Healthy Conversation Skills?

- “Healthy Conversation Skills” (HCS) enhance the existing communication and reflection skills of practitioners working with people from all backgrounds, in order to support them to make health behaviour changes.
- HCS provide practitioners with skills to support individuals to:
  - reflect on their lives and identify what they would like to change
  - prioritise changes to be made to improve their health and well-being
  - identify first steps to improve a specific health behaviour, including their diet and physical activity
  - make a plan to reach their goal
  - increase their self-efficacy and sense of control over their choices and behaviours





## Healthy Conversation Skills training supports you to:

**How...?**

- Use Open Discovery Questions to help someone explore an issue
- Reflect on your practice and conversations
- Spend more time listening than giving information or making suggestions
- Use Open Discovery Questions to support someone to make a SMARTER plan

**What...?**





# Healthy Conversation Skills

Watch Dr Wendy Lawrence introduce the Healthy Conversation Skills



<https://youtu.be/4VzNekXkg1I>



Practical advice for healthy eating habits  
from pregnancy to preschool

chat



## Challenging beliefs about change ...

How much do you agree or disagree with each of these statements?  
Where would you stand on this line for each statement?

**DISAGREE**



**AGREE**

1. I am responsible for the choices people make.
2. Being given information makes people change.
3. People come to us with solutions.
4. It is possible to persuade people to change their habits.





# How would you answer these questions?

1. How would you feel at the end of each day if you felt responsible?  
What would you have to do to ensure people make the right choices?  
What are you responsible for?
2. How much information is there in the world?  
How many people do you think have heard the 5-a-day message?  
How many eat 5-a-day?  
What stops change? What else do people need to help them change?
3. Who knows a person's own world best?  
Who is best-placed to work out what first step might fit into that world?  
How long might it take for you to find a workable solution for someone?  
What might be a better strategy? Who owns the solution?
4. What does a "habit" look like? What makes a habit difficult to break?  
What does "persuade" look like? How would you persuade someone?  
Whose agenda is it if you are persuading?

1. I am responsible for the choices people make.

2. Being given information makes people change.

3. People come to us with solutions.

4. It is possible to persuade people to change their habits.

By reflecting on these statements and your answers to these questions, you may understand more about your beliefs as they relate to supporting people to change and the way you practice. You might even shift a little on that line...





# Healthy Conversation Skills: Philosophy

- People have different beliefs and we should always respect those beliefs
- Beliefs can change
- By understanding people's beliefs we are better able to support them to make changes

These are the beliefs that underpin HCS training and our work in supporting people to change.

## Healthy Conversation Skills Philosophy

- I am not responsible for the choices people make
- Being given information alone does not make people change
- People come to us with solutions
- It is not possible to persuade people to change their habits





# Healthy Conversation Skills: Philosophy

Watch Dr Wendy Lawrence introduce the Healthy Conversation Skills Philosophy



Practical advice for healthy eating habits  
from pregnancy to preschool

<https://youtu.be/8TRmFpv0gSc>

chat





# Introducing Healthy Conversation Skills

How...?

## Healthy Conversation Skills

- Use Open Discovery Questions to help someone explore an issue
- Reflect on your practice and conversations
- Spend more time listening than giving information or making suggestions
- Use Open Discovery Questions to support someone to make a SMARTER plan

What...?



How...?

What...?

## Healthy Conversation Skills: response styles

### Open Discovery Question

When, where, who,  
which, why?

### Open Question (other)

A question that's  
answered with Yes  
or No

### Closed Question

For building  
rapport & showing  
understanding

### Empathy / Reflection

### In my experience

Sharing what's  
worked for you  
or other people

### Telling / Suggesting

Giving information,  
presenting options,  
signposting

What examples can you find to demonstrate these different response styles?

Which responses enable you to find out the most about someone and what steps they would like to take for change?

What is the first thing you could do? How can you fit that into your daily schedule? How will you feel when you reach your goal? What support do you need?

Why can't you fit in any exercise? Who can help you? When will you start? Where would you buy fresh vegetables? Which is the easiest option for you?

Would you like some information about that? Do you like swimming? Can you make a plan? Is this something you'd like to do? Are you happy with your goal?

That must be very difficult for you. You're doing so well. So it sounds like you are ready to make a change. Oh dear, I can see that you're upset about that.

I buy my vegetables at the market where they're cheaper and fresher. I've lost weight by changing my diet. Other people like you find it difficult too.

You could start off by walking a bit more. How about eating just one more portion of fruit each day. Tell me about your daily routine. Here's a leaflet.



# 1. Asking Open Discovery Questions (ODQs)

- What ODQs could you ask to support a client to explore their own situation and prioritise potential areas for change?

Examples: What is your biggest concern at the moment? How important is it for you (on a scale of 1 to 10) to address this? What's stopping you making a change? What would you like to do? How can I help you?

- What ODQs could you ask to help them identify possible solutions and their first steps towards change?

Examples: What do you think you could do differently? What have you tried before? What has been successful for you in the past? What is the first small thing you could do? How confident do you feel (on a scale of 1 to 10) that you can make this change? What do you need to do to make this happen?

- By asking ODQs, what are you prompting the client to do? How is that helpful in your aim to support them towards positive change?

Think about their own world and possible solutions; reflect on how important the change is to them; identify something small they feel confident they can achieve; feel more positive going forwards.

By supporting them to come up with their own solution, they are more likely to put it into action. By empowering them to feel more confident about taking a first step, they are more likely to make a change. If they identify themselves what is possible for them, they are more likely to be successful.



What...?



How...?



## 2. Reflection

- How can you reflect on your own practice and conversations ? What could you do better?
- When can you discuss your reflections and experiences with a peer/buddy to enhance skill use and share best practice?
- How can you plan your own changes, personal or professional, to provide ongoing insight into the processes and challenges of change, and maximise your own health and well-being?

*What went well?*

*How do you feel the conversation went?*

*How easy was it to ask Open Discovery Questions?*

*What do you think you could have done differently?*

*What would you like to do differently next time?*

*What did you do to support the person to plan change?*



### 3. Listening

- How do you feel when someone listens to you?
- What do you think it shows your client when you listen to them?
- How can you convey that you are genuinely curious and sincere in your desire to support someone towards better health and well-being? What does that look like in your body language?
- After you've asked ODQs to explore someone's world, what types of responses might you use to demonstrate your active listening and empathy?

#### Reflection/Empathy:

Reflecting back and clarifying what you think they have told you (eg "So it seems like you are ...");

Expressing concern or sympathy may be helpful in establishing rapport and trust (eg "That must be very hard for you");

Giving praise or encouragement may boost someone's self-esteem or self-efficacy (eg "You're doing really well").

- What ODQs could you ask to demonstrate that you have been listening and that you genuinely want to help them?

Examples: What did you mean by ...? How do you feel about your situation? What would it mean to you (& your family) if you were able to change things? What support do you need? What can I do to help you make things better?





## 4. Supporting SMARTER planning for change

What ODQs (or other Open Questions, eg. when, who, where, which) could you ask someone to support them to make a SMARTER plan, ie achieve each of the steps from Specific to Reviewed?

Examples:

**SPECIFIC** – What exactly would you like to change? What will your first small change be?

**MEASURABLE** – How often do you want to do this? How often/much/many ... currently/future?

**ACTION-ORIENTATED** – What will you have to do to make this happen? What actions do you need to take? What is the actual behaviour you are changing to achieve your goals?

**REALISTIC** – How confident are you (on a scale of 1-10) that you can achieve this change? What might get in the way? What will you do if that happens? What's worked before? How important (on a scale of 1-10) is it for you to make this change? What support do you need?

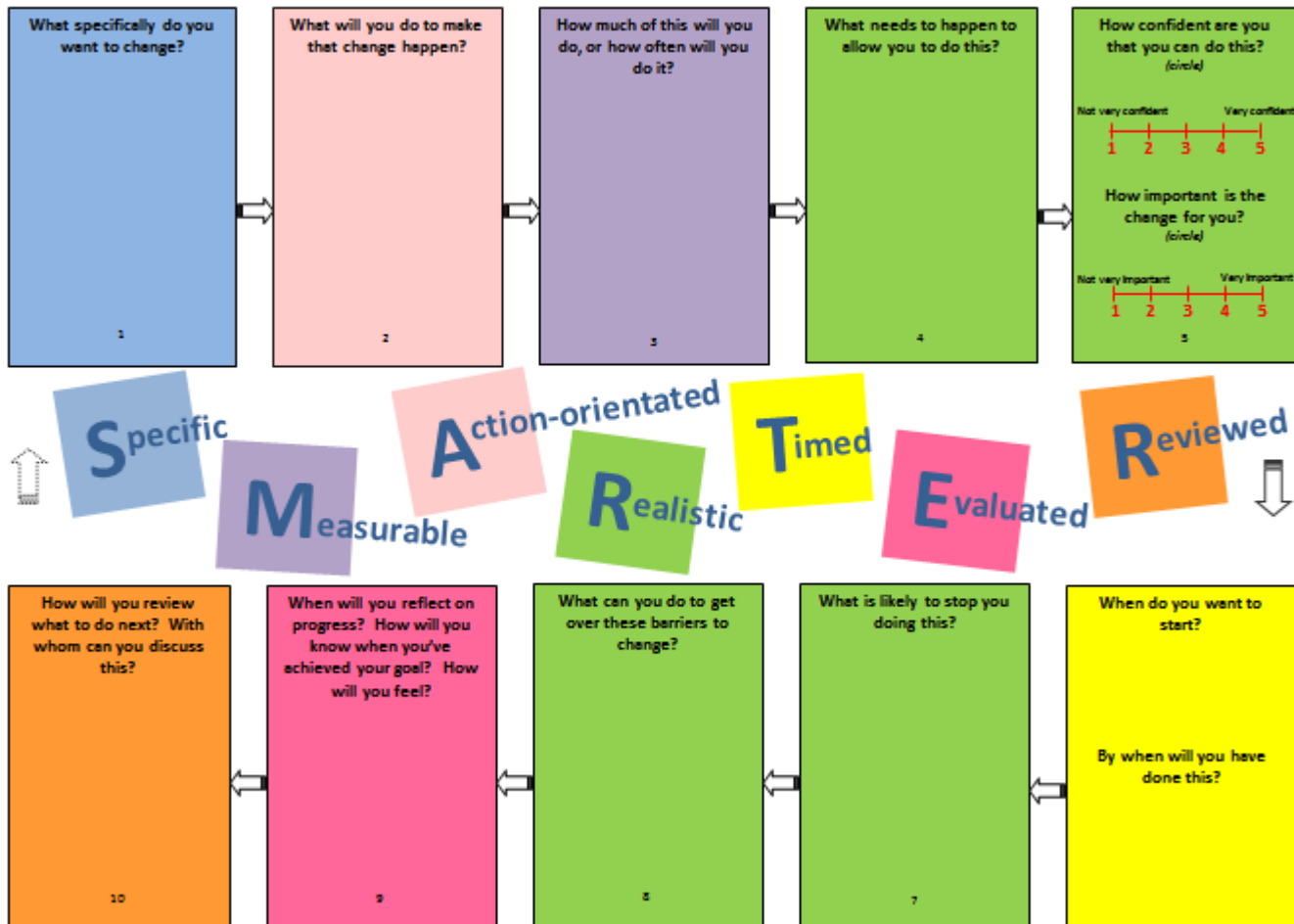
**TIMED** – When is a good time for you to start this plan? What is your time-scale for achieving your first goal/ultimate goal?

**EVALUATED** – When will you check your progress? How will you know you've been successful? How can you identify the things that went well and where you went off track?

**REVIEWED** – When will you review your plans and goals to see if you need to make any changes to these? Who can support you with your Evaluation and Review? What will you do next?



## SMARTER planning for change



What do you notice about this sheet?

Cyclical nature of goal-setting (arrows)

Colour of each box relates to one letter

Text is all ODQs or Open Questions

More boxes for Realistic – very important

Space to write

Boxes in different order to letters – better flow

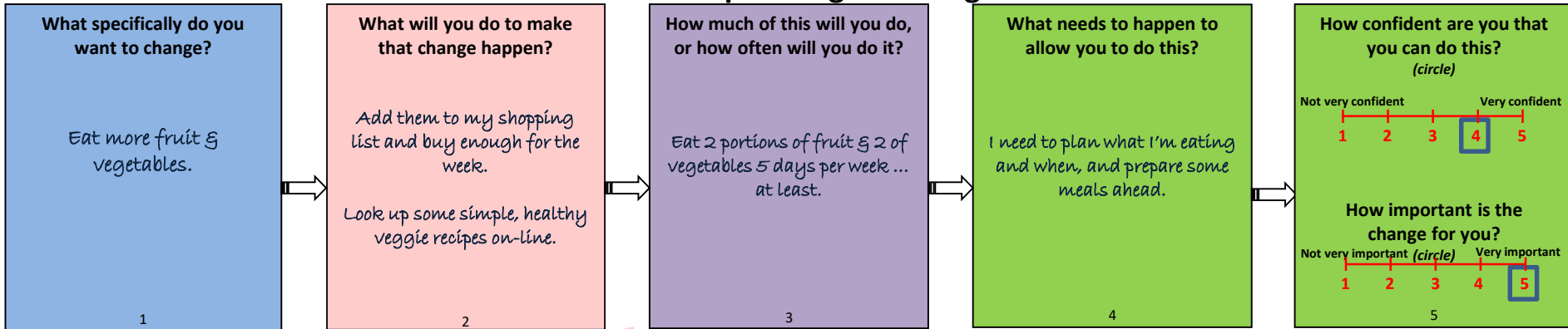
How could you use this sheet to make your own plan for change?

How would you use it with others to support them to make their plan for change?



# An example

## SMARTER planning for change



**S**pecific

**M**easurable

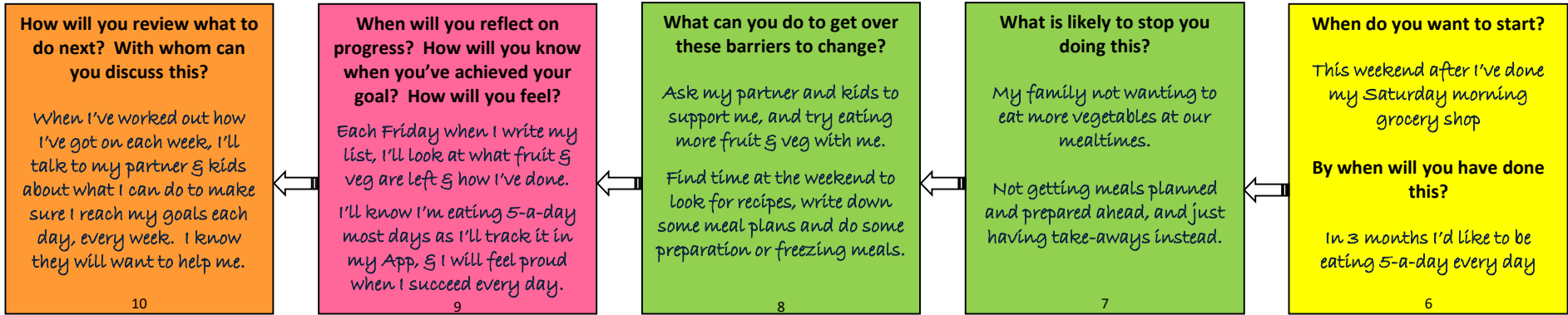
**A**ction-orientated

**R**ealistic

**T**imed

**E**valuated

**R**eviewed







## What should you avoid doing?

- Telling people what to do, making suggestions, offering solutions, signposting, and giving information or advice – UNLESS and UNTIL this seems to be appropriate and warranted as a result of the exploratory healthy conversation.
- Asking closed questions to which the answer can just be “yes” or “no”, which can quickly shut a conversation down and lead you to do most of the talking.
- Using ‘why’ questions that require the person to explain themselves. This can come across as judgemental or confrontational, and may cause them to become defensive.
- Making any assumptions about the client you are aiming to help.
- Pushing your own agenda.
- Trying to persuade someone to do something.

How do you feel about this “Healthy Conversation Skills” list of what-not-to-do?

What in your routine practice might you want to change?

How will you put those first small changes into practice... and when will you start?





## Watch a Healthy Conversation in action

In each video, watch Dr Wendy Lawrence have two styles of conversation with the same person.

Watch and consider which style you think uses Healthy Conversation Skills.



<https://youtu.be/DLV1rLOEgZ4>



<https://youtu.be/HXEbA9rWopI>



Practical advice for healthy eating habits  
from pregnancy to preschool

chat



In each video, it is the second conversation  
which uses Healthy Conversation Skills

Return to slide 7 to review the Healthy Conversation Skills



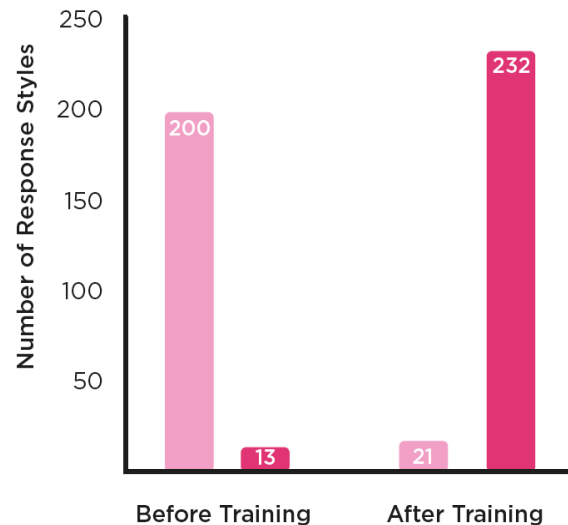
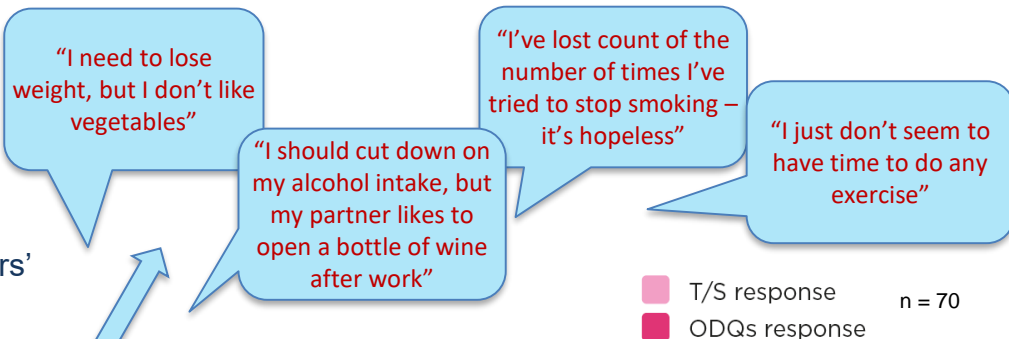
Practical advice for healthy eating habits  
from pregnancy to preschool





## Case Study

- In a two-hour training course, 70 early years' staff were introduced to Healthy Conversation Skills.
- Before and after the HCS training each attendee wrote down their responses to four clients' quotes about difficult behaviour change situations.
- A positive change in response style is one that goes from a Telling/Suggesting style to asking Open Discovery Questions (ODQs).
- After HCS training, there were significant shifts from Telling/Suggesting and other types of responses to asking Open Discovery Questions in response to all four quotes.





## Case Study

- The 70 early years' staff were also asked to score out of a possible 10 marks:
  - Their confidence in having 'change' conversations
  - The importance of having these conversations
  - The usefulness of current conversations in supporting change (T1) and of using HCS in future conversations (T2)
- After training all scores increased significantly

Confidence:

6.2 → 8.5  
after HCS training

Importance:

7.7 → 8.8  
after HCS training

Usefulness of conversations/HCS:

6.6 → 8.9  
after HCS training

- On average, the value of the training was rated by attendees as:

9/10





## Feedback for Healthy Conversation Skills training

*"By asking the right questions, I can get more out of parents and empower them more"*

*"Will be more aware of techniques when talking with parents"*

*Made me see things in a different light & encouraged me to implement this into my practice"*

*"The training really showed me how to initiate a meaningful, fruitful and insightful conversation"*

*"Practical exercises & demonstrations were useful"*





## Quiz

- Now test your understanding of Healthy Conversation Skills and take the [quiz](#)!
- Enter your contact details to be sent a certificate if you pass!

