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## Supporting People to Move More: Starting the Conversation

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**Regular movement can help people live longer, healthier and happier lives.**

How we talk about physical activity can influence whether people feel it is for them, and how achievable it is. The way people think about movement will depend on their current activity levels and past experiences with physical activity through their life.

Most people know that being active is good for their health. However, there are many reasons why people can find it difficult to start thinking about increasing their physical activity level.

- Having a disability or long-term health condition
- Negative experiences of physical activity
- A lack of information and resources
- Life events e.g. becoming a teenager, moving to a new area, divorce, retirement, pregnancy, menopause, ill-health.

Each person will have a unique experience throughout their lifetime that will affect their relationship with movement. Having a person-centred conversation can support people to overcome existing barriers so they are more likely to make a behaviour change.

## What do we mean by physical activity and being active?

Physical activity is any movement that uses your muscles and requires more energy than resting. This includes sport and exercise, but also includes activities that we do in our daily lives such as walking, cleaning, playing with children and gardening.

For people who are inactive, it can simply mean moving more and sitting less. For people who already do small amounts of light activity, it can mean introducing more moderate intensity activity and trying to do something active every day.



## Why is being active so important?

The many benefits of being active are well established. As well as helping people live longer in better health, physical activity is also shown to help in the management of many long-term physical and mental health conditions. Although the fear of increasing symptoms or worsening their condition commonly stops people with a health condition from moving more, research shows it is safer for people with long-term conditions to be active, compared to being inactive<sup>1</sup>.

Doing a range of activities that are not too stressful or too easy, can help people feel better about themselves and the world around them, creating a positive impact on their energy, mood and overall wellbeing. Sharing positive experiences of physical activity, can help build a positive relationship with movement which will significantly improve their likelihood of being active throughout life.



During routine appointments and contacts, you may have opportunities for non-judgmental conversations with service users to boost their understanding, confidence and motivation to become more physically active and make a real difference to their health and wellbeing.

**How long do you have  
for a conversation?**

**Just a few minutes**



**10 minutes or longer**



# If you are short on time



We understand that time can be a huge barrier to talking about physical activity. However, **everyone can play a part in supporting someone to be active**, even if they only have 1 minute. Any conversation can be useful if the individual leaves feeling empowered to consider making a behaviour change.

**Very Brief Advice**<sup>2</sup> aims to utilise the millions of day-to-day interactions that organisations and individuals have with other people and supports them in making positive changes to their physical health, mental health and wellbeing.

Using good communication skills, even in a brief chat, can increase the likelihood that a person will engage in the chat about their health and wellbeing with you. In every contact there may be an opportunity to prompt change.

**Here is one example of a 3-step approach that you can use:**

**1. Ask**

**2. Assess**

**3. Assist**



# 1. Ask

Recognise an opportunity to discuss health and wellbeing and ask questions to explore the issue. You can use it to introduce a topic not specifically mentioned e.g. raise topic of physical activity for someone who is looking for support with their mental health.

How are you feeling?

Could we take a few minutes to talk about daily movement?

Have you thought about how physical activity might help with your mental health?

Are you managing to take time for things you enjoy and keep you well?

We know that regular movement can help manage symptoms related to \_\_\_\_\_. Is this something you would like to explore?



## 2. Assess

Continue to explore the issue to jointly understand the support the person needs. You might give messages about healthy lifestyle change and tips to achieve them.

It is not about you giving advice or telling someone what to do. It is about asking questions, listening and responding in a person-centred way. This will give you a better understanding of the type of support a person needs.

It's important that you find a way to be active that is right for you. What types of things do you enjoy?

Some people in a similar position to you find \_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_ helpful. What do you think about that?

How confident are you that you would be able to increase your activity levels? What help do you need to make this easier?



### 3. Assist

Support them to identify an action - whether that's helping them find information, signposting to a service or prompting them to find their own solutions.

You may also point people towards experts for further support, such as helping them find information, or signposting to a service. If you can, you might help make arrangements for them such as making a referral or setting up an appointment.

Would you like some information about LiveWell Dorset, a free service that could help you with that?

Would you like me to help you look for some opportunities in your local area?  
We could have a look at Dorset's Activity Finder.

Would you like to speak to a health coach to explore this a bit more?

What is one first step you could take to make this happen?



# If you have time for a longer conversation



Motivation is highly complex and individual. A longer person-centred conversation can help to explore an individual's personal situation, beliefs and barriers that will influence their readiness to become more active.

**Motivational Interviewing**<sup>3</sup> is an extremely useful behaviour change technique which can be used for these longer conversations. It includes the use of open questions to uncover more of these underlying factors that might not come up in a shorter conversation.

The flow and direction of the conversation will be set by the people involved. Here we have highlighted some things you may want to consider, to support effective conversations. In addition, you should also consider **Health Literacy**<sup>4</sup> principles and techniques such as 'Chunk and Check'.

## Open the conversation

Set the scene in a non-judgemental way and ask permission to open a constructive conversation around behaviour change.



## Identify their starting point and values

Ask open questions about how they normally spend their time – get them to tell you about a typical day and make sure you keep focused on what is important and enjoyable for that person. Find out what they do and don't like to do and how they feel about how they spend their time.

Actively listen and find out what matters most to them.

What activities are important? What do they need and want to do in their life?

Who are the important people in their life?

How do you feel about how active you are at the moment?

What activities or hobbies do you take part in?  
What is it you like (or dislike) about them?

What things do you enjoy that help you to move more?

## Acknowledge barriers

Allow them to talk about their barriers to being active – make sure to acknowledge these. Reflect back positively if they share any times when they have been able to overcome them, even if it was only for a short time – this can help them to feel more capable of making a behaviour change.

Celebrate all achievements, no matter how small.

What helps you to be active?  
What gets in the way?



## Encourage positive reflection

Encourage them to think about what benefits they might see from becoming more active. Explore the benefits that matter most to them based on their values.

Speak about physical activity in a positive manner relating to fun, enjoyment, and social connection rather than solely about health outcomes. Share evidence-based information about the benefits of being active that are relevant to your conversation.

If you were able to be more active, what differences do you think you might notice?

What would be the most important reasons for you becoming more active, if you decided to?

## Tailor the conversation to their activity level

If people aren't doing much activity, make sure not to make them feel bad about what they are doing. This could reduce motivation even more. Explain that the biggest health benefits are seen when someone goes from doing nothing to doing something, so moving a little more really can make all the difference. Remember being active doesn't have to mean sport and exercise.

If they are doing small amounts of activity or only light intensity activities, ask them how they might be able to gently increase the amount of activity or introduce moderate intensity activity.



## Explore confidence and motivation

Ask questions to explore how confident and motivated they feel.

Use this to highlight some positives and get them to reflect on what might help them to take the next step.

On a scale of 1 to 10, how important is it for you right now to increase your activity levels?

How confident are you that you would be able to increase your activity levels?

Why did you pick that number and not a lower one?

What would you need to move to a higher number?

## Help them to build a plan

Ask them if they would like to set any goals in relation to being active or help them to identify their next step. Support them to set achievable and manageable goals that will be motivating and provide a sense of achievement.

Share information, resources or services you think might be useful based on what they decide. You might also want to help them to make a plan for what they will do if they have a setback – this will help them not to give up.



# Signposting resources for service users



**LiveWell Dorset** is a free healthy lifestyle support service for people living in Dorset, offering health coaching, advice and guidance.



**Dorset's Activity Finder** can help people to find a variety of activities and groups in their local area.



**We Are Undefeatable** is a campaign supporting people with a range of long-term health conditions to find a way to be active that is right for them.



**Active Pregnancy Foundation** provides advice and guidance about being active during pregnancy and after childbirth.



**Our Dorset App Library** can help you to recommend a health and wellbeing app.



**More useful resources to learn more and support effective conversations**



For more information and signposting resources visit [www.activedorset.org](http://www.activedorset.org)

# Further information for professionals



**Moving Medicine** is an online tool to support healthcare professionals integrate physical activity conversations into routine clinical care. A range of **consultation guides** for different health conditions are provided, tailored to how much time you have. The **patient information** section contains a range of worksheets and leaflets to support your conversations and patient goal planning.



The **Chief Medical Officer Guidelines** outline evidence-based recommendations for the intensity, duration and type of activity which is recommended for health.



**A Movement for Movement** is the physical activity strategy for Dorset. It sets out a collective approach to enable more movement for everyone.



Training opportunities can be found on the **Active Dorset Training Hub**.



## Learn more about:

- <sup>1</sup> [Risk Consensus Statement](#)
- <sup>2</sup> [Very Brief Advice / Making Every Contact Count](#)
- <sup>3</sup> [Motivational Interviewing](#)
- <sup>4</sup> [Health Literacy](#)

For more information or to discuss how physical activity could be embedded into your organisation email [info@activedorset.org](mailto:info@activedorset.org)

Active Dorset  
[www.activedorset.org](http://www.activedorset.org)

