

Online CBT Resources

Decision balance

Use the decision balance worksheet to weigh up the pros and cons of making an important change in your life or behaviour.

From time to time we all need to consider whether or not we need to change something in our lives. There is often a sequence of events that leads us to think about making a change. We might have spent some time thinking that things are fine as they are, even though other people might have expressed some concern - we're not yet ready to contemplate the idea that change is desirable or necessary. As feedback starts to accumulate that tells us that all is not well, we might come to the conclusion that change is a possibility, but we may still not be convinced that it is necessary, desirable or even possible.

We can use the decision balance worksheet to take stock of the reasons for maintaining the status quo or for making a change - it's a simple but powerful tool for uncovering the factors that might keep us stuck, even when we are struggling with how things are. First, we identify the specific area of change, whether it concerns health and fitness, drug or alcohol use, family and relationship issues, work and study, social interactions, socialising, or self-care.

Then, when we have identified both the desired change and the status quo, we ask ourselves what would be all the advantages, pros, or pluses about making a change. Then, we ask what would be all the disadvantages, cons, or minuses of keeping things as they are. Next, we list all the advantages, pros or pluses of keeping things as they are, and all the corresponding disadvantages, cons and minuses of trying to make a change. Once we have those four areas filled out, as best we can, we ask: given what I know, what information do I lack that I need to make an informed decision? What skills would I need to develop? What resources would I need to add, and whose support would I need to obtain, in order to give myself the best chance of success, if I choose to change.

Finally, we look at the summary of factors and ask ourselves whether there is an alternative to both the status quo and the option for change that would allow us to keep more of the positives from both columns and fewest of the negatives: what might that third option be? When you have completed the decision balance you will be in a better position to weigh up your options before deciding to keep things as they are or developing an action plan.

What is the current situation that is causing you concern?

Your answer...

What changes are you considering making?

Your answer...

What would be the main advantages of the changes you are considering?

Your answer...

What are the main disadvantages of trying to keep things as they are?

Your answer...

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Decision balance (p2)

In contrast, what would be the main advantages of trying to maintain the status quo?

Your answer...

What would be the main disadvantages of trying to make the changes you are considering?

Your answer...

What information do you lack to make an informed decision about change?

Your answer...

What skills would you need to learn or practise?

Your answer...

What resources would you need to develop to make change a success?

Your answer...

Whose support would you need to obtain?

Your answer...

Looking at your summary of reasons for and against either option, what other possible courses of action could you consider that would maximise the advantages and minimise the disadvantages of either trying to keep things as they are or making the changes you are considering?

Your answer...