

Five Strategies for Change

Pummel is metaphorically “knocking” someone over the head with what they must do. Its premise is that people change if they recognize that the consequences of not changing are more onerous than if they do change, and so they are fearful enough to make the change. Pummeling does tend to induce fear, but it tends to produce only short-term change. Usually clients will revert to the original behaviors once the pummeling has stopped or once they figure out that the consequences can be lived with. The person may comply as long as pressure is applied, but is only waiting to sabotage the worker, because the pummeling actually promotes rather than reduces resistance.

Examples: Worker uses only the authority of her position to demand change. For example, “You have to stop using drugs because you will wind up in jail.” “I will call the police if I ever see any drug paraphernalia in your house.” “If you don’t comply with this family service plan, the judge and I will both consider this a sign that you do not want your kids back.”

Pamper is catering to and treating with indulgence; we often think of the words “coddle,” “baby,” and “spoil.” The premise of pampering is that people will change if they don’t have to exert much energy and they feel “sweet-talked.” It is a change method adults commonly use with children, hence the synonym “to baby.” Workers who use it often do so because they are fearful of their ability to use a more potent method, fearing that the client might respond with anger or defiance. Generally, pampering creates only complacency or chaos and rarely results in real change. Often the worker who pampers engages in pleading and whining and sometimes using herself as a reason for this. (For example, “Please just do this, even if it’s just for me. We’ll be able to move things along better if you just get this one thing done.”) The worker often also begins to create excuses for the client that further undermines the chance of change. (For example, “I know that he really wants to attend the parenting classes, but his schedule just makes it so hard for him.”)

Examples: “The whole team agreed this was best; you agreed, too. So, please, just do this do this!” “I know this is really, really hard, and I can help you make it a lot easier. Let’s say you don’t really have to go to all the parenting classes; let’s say just half of them.” “No wonder you couldn’t make it to that job interview. I understand—you are addicted to nicotine and you just had to use the money to buy cigarettes!”

Push is metaphorically standing behind the client and pressing him forward, despite his resistance. Often the worker who pushes tries to do so by creating anxiety around possible loss if change doesn’t occur. Pushing can help with the change process because anxiety does help motivate people IF it is

accompanied by pulling. Alone, pushing rarely accomplishes long-term change, because the client never moves forward under his own locomotion.

Examples: The worker shares information about ASFA with a family to set the stage for creating anxiety by indicating what the consequences could be if change does not occur. “We need to work together, but we have this ASFA law, so if we don’t work together, I may need to take your child.”

Pull is drawing the client along with you. There is symbolic importance to the image of pulling by holding the person’s hand—it represents the commitment to support as well as guide the client. Pulling is often done by helping the client to envision what he wants, and then leading him to resources and pathways to achieve the desired outcomes. Its premise is that change will occur if people can be helped to envision a better outcome and are helped to find resources and avenues to reach it. Pulling tends to tap the client’s internal motivators and reinforces them by small successes along the way.

Examples: “How would you like your relationship with your son to be?” “A year from now, where would you like to be in terms of your use of drugs?” “Here is a list of drug treatment programs—we can go over them and see what you think. I can accompany you to your first appointment.”

Promote is a proactive form of allowing self-directed decision-making. It is stepping aside from the forceful nature of pummel, pamper, push, and pull in order to empower the client to make a decision, and then to act on it. The premise is that change occurs when people commit to it. Generally, for this to happen in Child Welfare situations, the worker and other helpers, as change agents, have also engaged in some amount of push and pull.

Examples: “What do you think is the best path; tell me how you can use your abilities to get all the way down it.” “It appears you have several choices here; what are you thinking that you will do?”