

## Choice Point

### Values

 Intervention

 20-30 min

 Client

 No

Human behavior can be broadly categorized into two groups: 'towards' behavior and 'away' behavior. Towards behavior involves actions that move one closer to his or her values. People engaging in this type of behavior are acting in line with their values, behaving like the person they want to be, acting effectively, and doing things that make their life better. Contrary to this is away behavior, which involves actions that move one away from his or her values. People engaging in this type of behavior are acting in ways that are incongruent with their values, behaving unlike the person they ideally would like to be, acting ineffectively, and doing things that make their life worse.

A choice point is "a moment in time when it is possible to choose between values-consistent and values-inconsistent behavior" (Ciarrochi et al., 2016, p. 336). The choice point represents the present moment. In Ciarrochi, Bailey, and Harris' (2013) Choice Point model, choice points are suggested to give rise to the opportunity to act in a value congruent (towards) or value incongruent (away) manner. This tool aims to empower clients to choose to engage in behavior to live a more purposeful and meaningful life.

The Choice Point posits that in challenging situations, people who become fused with difficult thoughts and feelings are unable to connect with their values, skills, and strengths, giving rise to away behavior. Contrary to this, people who take a step back from their thoughts and feelings in challenging situations can connect with their values and choose to engage in towards behavior.



### Author

This tool was created by Lucinda Poole (Ph.D.).



### Goal

This exercise aims to introduce the notion of choice points to clients to give them more freedom and choice in their behavior.



## Advice

- This is a mindful, collaborative exercise. Therapists must guide clients through each step and explore each step in detail. For example, in Step 3, therapists must draw on their knowledge and resources of strengths and values to help the client identify 'helpers.' In this way, the exercise may take multiple sessions to complete.
- Step 3 requires insight into the client's skills and strengths. Separate tools in the Toolkit may provide helpful references, including "The VIA Classification of Character Strengths & Virtues."
- 'Towards' and 'away' behaviors are always considered from the client's, not the therapist's perspective. For example, if the client sees his or her behavior of going out and partying until late as life-enhancing, acting effectively and in line with the person he or she wants to be, then it would be a 'towards' behavior (even if the therapist sees it as destructive or dysfunctional).
- If certain 'towards' behaviors are self-defeating (e.g., addictions and eating disorders), the therapist should address this later in therapy. When introducing the choice point, the aim is for the client to begin to look at the functionality of his or her behavior.
- Look at the context of the clients' behavior. For example, mindfully drinking a glass of wine after a long day at work and savoring the experience could be a towards move, whereas mindlessly finishing the bottle while in front of the television might be an away move.
- This tool can be used to help you and your client keep track of where you are in a values-based intervention. Different areas of the model can be applied at different points of intervention. For example, the 'situation' part of the choice point (bottom) can be a focal point where situation selection and modification require attention. The values and skills section (bottom right) can be followed when clients need help identifying and using strengths.



## References

- Ciarrochi, J., Harris, R., & Bailey, A. (2015). *The weight escape: Stop fad dieting, start losing weight and reshape your life using cutting-edge psychology*. Hachette.
- Ciarrochi, J., Zettle, R. D., Brockman, R., Duguid, J., Parker, P., Sahdra, B., & Kashdan, T. B. (2016). Measures that make a difference. In R. D. Zettle, S. C. Hayes, D. Barnes-Holmes, & A. Biglan (Eds.), *The Wiley Handbook of Contextual Behavioral Science* (pp. 320-346). John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.



# Choice Point

## Instructions

In challenging situations, difficult thoughts and feelings emerge for us. When this happens, we tend to be caught up or 'hooked' by these thoughts and feelings and start to engage in away behavior. That is, behavior that moves us away from our values and the person we want to be. The opposite of away behavior is towards behavior, which is behavior that moves us towards the person we want to be and the life we want to have.

Consider the current difficult situation in your life. Perhaps you have experienced a break-up, the loss of a job, the death of a loved one, or you are nervous about an upcoming public speaking event. Once you have something in mind, work through the following six steps to explore the different ways in which you could manage it. You might like to look at the example below as a reference. Write your answers directly onto the blank Choice Point model provided in the Appendix.

### Step 1: State the challenging situation

What challenging situation are you facing? Describe the situation under "Challenging Situation" in the blank Choice Point model (see Appendix).

### Step 2: Identify hooks

What difficult thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations have shown up regarding this situation? Perhaps close your eyes for a moment, thinking about your situation. List all the problematic thoughts, feelings, and bodily sensations, or so-called "hooks," in the dedicated section of the blank Choice Point model.

### Step 3: Identify helpers

What skills and strengths can you use to help you live your values? List them under "Helpers" in the blank Choice Point model.

### Step 4: Consider away behavior

What actions would move you away from the person you want to be or the life you want to have? List these actions under "Away" in the blank Choice Point model.



### Step 5: Identify towards behaviors

What actions would move you towards the person you want to be or the life you want to have? List these actions under “Towards” in the blank Choice Point model.

### Step 6: Make a choice

You have now arrived at your Choice Point, and there are two directions you can take in from here: you can either move towards or away from your values. Take a moment here to STOP, that is, slow down; take note of what you are thinking and feeling in this moment; open up to whatever thoughts and feelings are present; then pursue your values.

**Appendix: Blank choice point model**

