# DARN CATs: A Guide to Understanding Client Language and Encouraging Change

This document outlines the DARN CATs framework, a tool that helps clinicians understand client motivation and facilitate change.

It explains each category of language, provides practical examples and techniques, and offers strategies for responding to resistance.

AT **by Annette Tonkin**

Made with Gamma

# The Importance of Each Category

**DARN CATs** is a framework develo

ped by Miller and Rollnick in their book Motivational Interviewing.

It's a valuable tool for clinicians to understand a client's readiness for change by recognising specific types of language that indicate different stages of motivation.

DARN refers to **Desire**, **Ability**, **Reason** and **Need** — statements that reflect a client's thought process about change.

CATs represents **Commitment**, **Activation** and **Taking Steps** statements that indicate readiness to act.

- **Desire (D):** Indicates the client wants to make a change. Examples: "I want to...", "I wish I could...", "I hope to...". **Clinician Tip**: Use desire statements to explore motivations and deepen the conversation. Example response: *"Tell me more about why this change is important to you."*

- **Ability (A):** Shows the client believes they are capable of making the change. Examples: "I can...", "I could...", "I might be able to...". **Clinician Tip:** Reinforce these statements by building confidence. Example response: *"It sounds like you have some confidence that you can do this. What strengths will help you?"*

- **Reason (R):** Provides reasons why the client should make a change. Examples: "If I get help, then I can...", "If I could afford it, I would...". **Clinician Tip:** Highlight these reasons to strengthen motivation. Example response: *"Those sound like important reasons to move forward. How can I make this easier for you?"*

- **Need (N):** Expresses a necessity for change. Examples: "I need to...", "I must...", "Something has to change." **Clinician Tip:** Use need statements to emphasise the urgency of change. Example response: *"You mentioned that something has to change—what would be the first small step you could take?"*

Made with Gamma

# CATs: Moving Towards Action

Understanding and appropriately responding to these types of statements can help clinicians effectively guide clients from contemplation to action, improving treatment adherence and outcomes.

The **DARN** statements are important for helping your clients understand their motivations, but the **CAT** statements demonstrate that they are actually ready to act.

- **Commitment (C):** Indicates a readiness to take action. Examples: "I promise to...", "I intend to...", "I give my word." **Clinician Tip:** Reinforce commitment by making the plan tangible. Example response: *"That's great! What steps can we put in place to help you follow through?"*
- **Activation (A):** Shows that the client is ready to begin taking steps. Examples: "I'm ready to...", "I'm prepared to...", "I'm willing to..." "I'm already doing..." **Clinician Tip:** Encourage the client by focusing on practical next steps. Example response: *"What can you do today to get started?"*
- **Taking Steps (T):** The client has already started taking action towards change. Examples: "I have bought new shoes for walking", "I booked a Pilates class." **Clinician Tip:** Celebrate progress and build momentum. Example response: *"That's fantastic progress! How did it feel to take that step?"*



Made with Gamma

# Real-Life Example Dialogues

Here are some real-life examples of how DARN CATs statements might play out in a clinical setting. Use these examples to understand how to respond to each type of statement from your client.

### Desire Example

Client: "I wish I could exercise more."

Clinician: "Tell me more about why exercising more is important to you."

### Commitment Example

Client: "I promise to start doing my stretches this week."

Clinician: "That's great! What steps do you think you'll take to make sure this happens, even when things get busy?"

### Activation Example

Client: "I'm ready to try something new."

Clinician: "That's excellent! What's the first thing you're going to do to get started?"

# Techniques for Eliciting Change Talk

Eliciting change talk from your client can help them articulate their own reasons for making a change. This can make them more motivated to take action.

- **Ask Evocative Questions:** Use open-ended questions to draw out change talk. Examples: "Why is this important to you now?", "What would be the best outcome if you made this change?"

- **Reflective Listening:** Reflect back what the client says in a way that encourages further discussion. Example: *"It sounds like you're feeling overwhelmed, but you also see the benefits of making this change."*

- **Affirm Strengths:** Affirm the client's strengths to build confidence and motivation. Example: *"You've already taken steps by researching your options —that shows a lot of dedication."*

Made with Gamma

# Reflective Prompts for Clinicians

Use these prompts to enhance your understanding of client statements and your response strategy.

These can help you identify which type of statement you're hearing and how to move the conversation forward.

| |
|---|
| Which type of DARN CAT statement am I hearing from the client? |
| How can I use the client's expressions of desire or need to move the conversation towards action? |
| What commitment or activation language is the client using, and how can I reinforce it to build momentum? |

# Responding to Resistance

Resistance is natural during change.

Here are strategies to handle resistance and reframe it into productive dialogue.

It's important to be sensitive to your client's feelings and recognise that they might be hesitant to make a change for many reasons.

- **Identify Resistant Statements:** Recognise resistance, such as "I don't think I can do this."
- **Reframe Resistance into Exploration**: Use reflections to shift focus. Example: *"It sounds like you're uncertain about your ability to stick with it. What might help you feel more confident?"*
- **Avoid Direct Confrontation:** Instead of arguing, explore the client's concerns and validate their feelings.

Made with Gamma

# Key Takeaways for Clinicians

Use the DARN CATs framework to better understand your client's motivation and encourage them to take action.

By recognising and responding to these different types of language, you can create a supportive environment that encourages lasting change.

- **DARN CATs Framework:** Recognise and respond to different types of client language to better facilitate change.
- **Move Clients from Contemplation to Action:** Use the language of commitment and activation to move clients towards taking concrete steps.
- **Elicit and Reinforce Change Talk:** Use evocative questions, reflections and affirmations to draw out and reinforce the client's motivation for change.



Follow me on LinkedIn: **Annette Tonkin** | Facebook: **Thinking Physio** | Instagram: **Thinking Physio**

Website: **thinking.physio**

Transform patient care with bespoke coaching and workshops—contact me to **book a call!**

Made with Gamma