Self efficacy guidance material for Health Trainer Services

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Overview

This document provides guidance material to assist Health Trainer Services and Health Trainer personnel in assessing clients’ confidence and beliefs in their ability to achieve their health goals - that is, their ‘self efficacy’. A measure of self efficacy is currently integrated into the Health Trainer Assessment process and recorded on the National Data Collection and Reporting System (DCRS).

Section 1 presents a brief exploration into the psychological literature surrounding the meaning of self efficacy. Section 2 presents a rationale for measuring self efficacy in clients supported by Health Trainer Services and guidance material for Health Trainers to use the self efficacy measure during the client consultation process.
Section 1: Defining and conceptualizing self efficacy

What is self efficacy?

Self efficacy refers to individuals’ judgments about whether they have the capability to perform a particular activity. Put another way, it is an individual’s belief or level of confidence about what he or she can and cannot do across different tasks and situations.

Self efficacy makes a difference in how people feel, think and act (see Table 1; Schwarzer & Fuchs, 1996).

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<tr>
<th>Self efficacy makes a difference to how people...</th>
<th>Description/Comment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Think</td>
<td>Self efficacy levels can make people more motivated to take action. Individuals with high self efficacy tend to choose to perform more challenging tasks, set themselves more ambitious goals and persevere in pursuing these goals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feel</td>
<td>Individuals with low self efficacy tend to have low self-esteem and often think negatively about their accomplishments and personal development. Low self efficacy is also associated with depression, anxiety and helplessness.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Act</td>
<td>People with high states of self efficacy put more effort and persistence into pursuing their goals than do those with low self efficacy. When setbacks occur, persons with high self efficacy recover more quickly and maintain the commitment to their goals.</td>
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Types of self efficacy

Self efficacy can be general or be specific.

- **General self efficacy** relates to beliefs in one's general capacity to perform tasks.
- **Specific self efficacy** refers to beliefs in one's ability to perform specific tasks (e.g., reducing smoking, increasing healthy eating)

Some academics have argued that specific self efficacy is more useful than general self efficacy for understanding how people think, feel and act. For example, somebody might feel confident in their general abilities, but may not have the specific self efficacy needed to, for example, stop smoking or reduce their alcohol intake. It is possible, for example, that someone who has high self efficacy for playing football to have low self efficacy for e.g. eating a healthy diet.

On the other hand however, some people argue that general self efficacy is a more useful concept because it incorporates a general sense of confidence in one’s abilities, which can easily be
measured across different people with different goals. For this reason, general self efficacy is measured in the Health Trainer Assessments.

**How does self efficacy differ from other ‘self’ concepts?**

As Table 2 outlines, self efficacy differs from other ‘self’ constructs such as self confidence and self esteem in the following ways:

- *Self-confidence* refers to a general sense of confidence
- *Self efficacy* relates to a general sense of confidence in one’s abilities to achieve a desired outcome
- *Self-esteem* is a general feeling about self-worth

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self concept constructs</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self confidence</td>
<td>A general belief in yourself</td>
<td>Do I feel confident in myself?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self efficacy</td>
<td>Belief in one’s capacity to handle and succeed in performing tasks</td>
<td>Can I do this task?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self esteem</td>
<td>Refers to general feelings of self worth or self value</td>
<td>How do I feel about myself?” Am I worthy?</td>
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**What defines people with high and low self efficacy?**

Researchers have argued that people with high and low levels of self efficacy tend to have distinct characteristics, as Table 3 shows.
Table 3 - Characteristics of people with high or low self efficacy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics of people with high levels of self efficacy</th>
<th>Characteristics of people with low levels of self efficacy</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• View challenging problems as tasks to be mastered.</td>
<td>• Avoid challenges</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Develop deeper interest in the activities in which they participate.</td>
<td>• Believe that difficult tasks and situations are beyond their capabilities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Form a stronger sense of commitment to their interests and activities</td>
<td>• Focus on personal failings and negative outcomes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Recover quickly from setbacks and disappointments</td>
<td>• Quickly lose confidence in personal abilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Have better health</td>
<td>• Often believe that things are tougher than they really are, a belief that fosters stress, depression, and a narrow vision of how best to solve a problem</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**How is self efficacy relevant to health behaviour?**

Evidence suggests that perceptions of self efficacy are important for all major health-related behaviours.

**Self efficacy and physical activity**

Perceived self efficacy has been found to be very important in causing people to form intentions to perform and maintain physical exercise for an extended time (Feltz & Riessinger, 1990; McAuley, 1992). Researchers have also found a relationship between self efficacy and moderate physical activity (Kaplan et al, 1984).

**Self efficacy and healthy eating**

Dieting and weight control have been found to be governed by self efficacy beliefs (Glynn and Ruderman, 1986; Slater, 1989).

**Self efficacy and addictive behaviours**

Godding and Glasgow (1985) found that efficacy beliefs to resist temptation to smoke predicted a reduction in the number of cigarettes smoked. Similarly, Mudde et al (1989) found that individuals who remained successful quitters in a one year period had the highest levels of self efficacy.
Section 2: Self efficacy and Health Trainer Services

The Health Trainer Service is designed to train people with the skills they need to set their own health goals and manage and change their behaviour (British Psychological Society, 2006, p.4). This section outlines why the measurement of self efficacy is important to the Health Trainer Services, and provides Health Trainers with guidance material for each of the self efficacy questions assessed within the Health Trainer Service. Guidance materials include:

- Description, aim and rationale for every self efficacy question
- A selection of prompts to help Health Trainers during the client assessment process
- A selection of hypothetical examples to further help Health Trainer and clients understand the questions posed
- A series of alternatively phrased questions, to be used should clients experience difficulty in understanding self efficacy questions.

Why should Health Trainer Services measure self efficacy?

The concept of self efficacy is central to the Health Trainer Service, because behavioural change is facilitated by a personal sense of control. Schwartz & Fuchs (1995) found that a number of studies demonstrated relationships between self efficacy and specific health behaviours such as physical activity, healthy eating, and (reduction of) smoking and alcohol consumption. Self efficacy is therefore relevant for Health Trainer Services as it may influence the likelihood of clients continuing with their primary goal and is important in promoting behavioural change.

A person who believes they are able to cause an event are better able to control their life course, and this ‘can-do’ thought process is important for promoting behavioural change. Health Trainer Services focus on changing specific health behaviours, and so identification of factors which influence behavioural change – such as self efficacy – will be important in assessing whether clients are benefiting from the service.

In sum, measuring self efficacy is important for the following four reasons:

1. Measurement of self efficacy is helpful for planning client programmes because the identification of areas with low self efficacy helps with targeting self-management education to the individual client

2. Measurement of changes in self efficacy over time is important to evaluate the impact of the health trainer services.

3. Measurement of self efficacy is useful to detect individual differences between clients

4. Measurement of self efficacy may be an indicator to predict particular client outcomes.
**How is self efficacy measured through the DCRS?**

The self efficacy measure currently used by the Health Trainer Service is an eight-item questionnaire (see Appendix 1). Clients rate their self efficacy by indicating their (dis)agreement with each efficacy-related statement, with five possible response options (‘Strongly agree’, ‘Agree’, ‘No preference’, ‘Disagree’, ‘Strongly disagree’). These responses can be translated into scores, with a score of 5 assigned to ‘Strongly Agree’, and a score of 1 representing ‘Strongly Disagree’, and so on. These scores can then be summed to produce a global score (which ranges from 8 to 40), with higher scores indicating higher self efficacy.

The questions which make up this measure are as follows.

**Question 1. I will be able to achieve most of the goals that I have set for myself.**

**Description** *(Health Trainer Guidance)*: The aim of the health trainer service is to focus on improving the clients self efficacy or confidence levels in achieving particular goals.

- **Physical goals**
  - e.g. ‘Today I aim to exercise at home’.
- **Social interaction goals**
  - e.g. ‘Today I aim to spend time with my family and/or friends’
- **Emotional tasks**
  - e.g. ‘This week I aim to do something that makes me feel good about myself’
- **Specific behavioural goals**
  - e.g. ‘I am to visit the gym three times a week’

**Prompt** *(Health Trainer Guidance)*: Encourage the client to think about when they last set goals for themselves. How successful did the client feel that they achieved their goals? Focus on any goals set by the client, not just health behaviour goals.

**Prompt: An example**: Last year, I made the New Year’s resolution that I would stop eating chocolate and start visiting the gym more regularly. At the end of last year, I had achieved my goal in going the gym, and although I’ve struggled a bit with giving up chocolate, I’ve generally stuck to it quite well. So I think, in general, I’m able to achieve my goals.

**Prompt** *(Assist client consultation/ alternative phrasing of the question)*: To what extent do you agree that you’re able to achieve most of the goals that you’ve set?

**Question 2. When facing difficult tasks, I am certain that I will accomplish them.**

**Description** *(Health Trainer Guidance)*: The aim of this question is for the client to think about potential challenges and obstacles and whether the client feels they have the necessary resources to cope with a difficult task in order to achieve their set goals.

**Prompt** *(Assist client consultation)* If a client asks what do you mean by ‘difficult tasks’ or if the client cannot think of ‘difficult tasks’. Examples of potentially difficult tasks include:

- **Physical tasks**
- Jogging a particular distance
- **Social interaction tasks**
  - Trying to talk when people are talking over you or ignoring you
- **Emotional tasks**
  - Learning how to handle upsetting situations, i.e. loss of a loved one
- **Specific health behaviour tasks**
  - Increasing the portions of fruit or veg consumed from 1–2 per day

**Prompt: An example:** I’m certain that I will always be able to accomplish difficult tasks, no matter what they are. In the past, I’ve tackled some tough and difficult tasks, but I’ve always managed to succeed.

**Prompt: (Assist client consultation/ alternative phrasing of the question)** Think about when you face difficult tasks or barriers in your life. Do you feel that you’re certain that you will accomplish them?

**Question 3: In general, I think that I can obtain outcomes that are important to me.**

**Description (Health Trainer Guidance):** Only focus on outcomes that the client considers to be important.

**Prompt: (Assist client consultation)** If the client asks you to define an outcome:
- **Definition of Outcomes:** These are actual impacts/benefits/changes for participants during or after a program or intervention. Examples of potential outcomes:
  - **Physical outcomes**
    - After help from a physiotherapist and doing a little bit of exercise, I’m able to lift my children with no problems.
  - **Social interaction outcomes**
    - After going to a local community group, I feel more confident in speaking to others.
  - **Emotional outcomes**
    - After seeking advice from my GP, I’m feel I’m less emotional round my family.
  - **Health behavioural outcomes**
    - After receiving help from a particular service,
      - I don’t smoke as much
      - I cut down on my drinking
      - I eat less junk food
      - I now exercise at least 5 times a week.

**Prompt: An example:** In general, although I sometimes a little to get to the gym, I am usually able to get some exercise when I pick up my children from school. So, I think in general, yes, I can obtain outcomes that are most important to me.

**Prompt (Assist client consultation/ alternative phrasing of the question)** I think I can generally achieve the outcomes that are most important to me.
**Question 4: I believe I can succeed at most any endeavour to which I set my mind.**

**Description: (Health Trainer Guidance):** Definition of ‘endeavour’
- “an effort or an attempt to do something or achieve a goal”

**Description: (Health Trainer Guidance):** Question 4 focuses on that he or she will **succeed in any endeavours** that the client sets their mind on.
- Question 4 therefore requires a more concrete assessment of success in response to services as the client will achieve any endeavours posed, whereas question 3 focused on a more general and vague estimation of success.
  - ‘In general I think’ in Question 3 is not as definite or absolute as ‘I believe I can succeed’ as stated in Question 4.
- Question 4 also implies that the client will succeed with all endeavours that the client sets regardless of whether the endeavour was important or not.
- A positive response to Question 4 is therefore applicable to clients who have high levels of self efficacy or confidence in themselves.

**Prompt: An example:** I’m a success. I’ve never once failed to reach a particular goal, attempt or endeavour that I’ve wanted to do and I don’t intend to start failing now. I’m very confident that I can succeed at all the endeavours I set my mind to.

**Prompt/ alternative phrase: (Assist client consultation)** If I set my mind to it, I believe I can succeed in achieving my goals.

**Question 5. I will be able to successfully overcome many challenges.**

**Description: (Health Trainer Guidance):** This question aims to explore whether the client feels they have the capabilities to overcome many challenges. Could integrate the use of ‘problem solve’ into this question- ie extent to which individuals are able to problem solve to meet their many challenges.

**Prompt: An example:** Despite not doing very well at school I still went on to achieve a qualification in child care. As a result, I feel I am able to successfully overcome many challenges.

**Prompt: (Assist client consultation)** I will be able to solve problems and successfully overcome many challenges.

**Question 6. I am confident that I can perform effectively on many different tasks**

**Description: (Health Trainer Guidance):** Client has the capability of performing effectively on a variety of tasks

**Prompt: (Assist client consultation):** I feel I am able to do well on many different tasks.
Question 7. Compared to other people, I can do most tasks very well.

**Description:** *(Health Trainer Guidance)*: This question relies on the individual’s ability to assess themselves, their own view of themselves and how this relates to how they see others. This question has relevance to a social comparison theory which explains how individuals evaluate their own opinions and desires by comparing themselves to others particularly with individuals with similar attributes or characteristics (Festinger, 1954).

**Prompt: An example:** To decide how good I am at running, I will compare myself with a competent friend rather than an Olympic sprinter or my 4-year-old niece.

**Prompt:** *(Assist client consultation)* In comparison with other people, I feel I can achieve most tasks very well

Question 8. Even when things are tough, I can perform quite well.

**Description:** *(Health Trainer Guidance)*: When individuals are familiar with the demands of a task or activity, they are likely to call on the self efficacy beliefs that have been developed as a result of previous experience with similar tasks. In these instances, confidence judgments are called *self efficacy for performance* because the efficacy beliefs correspond directly to their performance on similar tasks in the past.

When people are unfamiliar with the task that confronts them, however, they are not clear on precisely which skills will be required, and so their confidence cannot be based on past experiences with similar tasks. Self-beliefs must be inferred from past attainments in situations perceived as similar to the new one. These confidence judgments are called *self efficacy for learning* because they are, in essence, inferences made about one's capability to learn what is required to successfully accomplish the task.

A person’s experience of his/her performance is the most significant influence on the development of self efficacy. For example, a golfer who makes his putt on the last three holes, his belief that he can make the next putt is increased. However, if he did not make the last three putts, his belief in his ability to putt is decreased.

**Prompt: An example:** Even though my children have been playing up all day, I still managed to go for a jog around the park today.

**Prompt:** *(Assist client consultation/ alternative question)*: I feel able to do quite well under pressure or when things are difficult.
References


### Appendix:

**Self efficacy measure used in the Health Trainer Service**

*The “New General Self efficacy Scale” (Chen, Gully & Eden, 2001)*

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<tr>
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