

Week 14: From intention to action: The psychology of behaviour change

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Introduction

Insert Figure 1 and Figure 2



Figure X.1 Include image information here – make sure to include screenshot of actual image in drafts/handovers

Behaviour change is part of everyday life. People often set intentions and make decisions about the way they want to live: to sleep earlier; revise more regularly; or reduce screen time, to name a few. Sometimes these intentions lead to sustained lasting change, but all too often they do not, creating what psychologists call an ‘intention-behaviour gap’ (Sheeran, 2002). Psychological research has examined why this gap occurs and has consistently found that intentions alone are rarely enough to drive behaviour (Webb & Sheeran 2006). Everyday habits, competing goals, emotional demands, and the many different contexts in which behaviour occurs all play a powerful role in shaping what people actually do (Wood & Neal, 2007; Baumeister & Vohs, 2007).

This week explores why behaviour change can be challenging and what psychological research can contribute to explaining these difficulties. You will examine behaviour at several interacting levels: Individual (such as intentions, habits, emotion, and self-control); Social (including group-based identities, shared norms and expectations that shape how people behave in family, community, workplace, and other social contexts), and; Environmental (such as the places people live and work, their everyday routines, access to resources and services, and the wider constraints that shape what behaviours are possible or likely). Together, these levels help to explain why everyday behaviour that may seem simple in theory, can be challenging to achieve and sustain in practice.

In Chapter 6 ‘Understanding behaviour change’ you will be introduced to key theories and models used to explain how and why behaviour changes. As you move through

Commented [JT1]: Jumping in before anyone says the title is a bit long to say that I like it. Nice hook before the colon, clear indication of what’s covered after the colon.

Commented [JT2]: My quick headline is that there’s a clear narrative through this, with good examples, that will work well with the chapter content. It felt like a relatively ‘easy’ read as well, which given how complex this topic could get is a nice thing to be able to say!

There are a few structural things to clear up - although some of those are module-wide, rather than just this specific week, like how we’re doing independent study suggestions.

Commented [GB3]: My over-arching view of the draft is that it is definitely going in the right direction, but that we need quite a bit more in terms of discussing theory and research findings and extending student learning beyond what is covered in the chapter. There are some really nice activities which link to what students have learned, but it would be good to extend that further to different applications as investigated by research. Don’t be afraid to discuss specific research studies/findings in detail and encourage students to link that new knowledge to some of the core theory covered in the chapter. A key area for this could be research-based interventions which are underpinned by TPB. This would allow you to critique the theory and interventions based on it, as well as highlight issues of individual and collective behaviour change in more detail. It would also seed the focus in the methods section on evaluation too.

Commented [SH4]: <https://www.istockphoto.com/photo/big-yellow-arrow-opposite-direction-with-white-arrows-on-asphalt-road-gm2223242568-639462431?searchscope=image%2Cfilm>

Commented [A5R4]: There is a very similar photo in Chapter 6 and I’d suggest not repeating the same time of image on the VLE

Commented [JT6R4]: There’s something to be said for having a shared visual language though. That said, I wouldn’t use this image for a different reason: it seems to be illustrating one (albeit important) aspect of the week’s topic, rather than being more general. Also, it looks like a political logo (disturbingly close to the Reform UK PLC logo, in fact).

Commented [JT7]: Ordinarily I would suggest swapping the order of these first two para’s, so the intro. begins by saying what the week is about (as current para. 2 does), without introducing any specific research or theories. However, I do quite like the opening hook (especially the first part up to ‘intention-behaviour gap’). I’m therefore inclined to leave it this way round, even though I’ll almost inevitably argue for the opposite in other weeks! Interested to know what others think about ‘cold open’ para’s in the week intro’s.

Commented [GB8]: Feedback on other VLE drafts has mentioned sticking to one or two examples in instances such as this, so it might be best to do that here too

Commented [GB9]: Societal?

Commented [SH10R9]: Socio-environmental-> Environmental & Contextual? My worry with societal is it doesn’t capture the physical, spatial, or material aspects of the environment - but agree maybe environmental is too broad / ecological?

Commented [SH11R9]: Camilla comment - I agree. There is also some confusion around the term environment in cases like this, as environment can mean people’s lived ‘space’ and the wider environment - as we discuss both in this module, we need to make sure the students know what we mean when we use the term.

Commented [JT12R9]: I’d say that ‘environmental’ includes ‘societal’ but not vice versa, and by this point in the module students *should* know that environment includes socio-cultural factors. However, maybe say explicitly just in case, for example ‘... and environmental (both physical and socio-cultural environments, such as the places...’.

Commented [Ca13R9]: I agree. They should know by now, but as this week and Trudi’s cover environmental stuff as well, it would be good to be explicit here.

the week, you will apply these ideas to practical, real-world examples. You will consider how stress and mental health can influence behaviour, how identity, place and community can both positively and negatively shape people's responses to change, and how behaviour change interventions are evaluated in applied settings such as, health, well-being, and environmental action. You will also develop your academic writing skills to produce clear, evidence-based explanations of behaviour.

Aims

After studying this week's material, you should be able to:

- Describe key psychological factors that influence behaviour change at individual, social, and systemic levels.
- Apply concepts from chapter 6 to examples of everyday behaviour.
- Explain how stress, emotional demands, and mental health can affect people's ability to carry out intended actions.
- Describe how social identity, group norms and connection to place can shape behaviour in social and environmental contexts.
- Evaluate simple behaviour change interventions using appropriate questions and evidence.
- Produce clear, concise written explanations of behaviour that link examples to relevant psychological concepts.

Activity Planner

To help you plan your studies, the table below outlines the activities you will undertake this week. In addition to the activities listed, you will need time to read and reflect on the module materials.

Activity	Allow around
Watch a video XXX	XXX minutes
Read Chapter XX 'Title' in Book XX	6 hours
Learn about XX	XX minutes
Analyse XX	XX minutes

(The Activity planner is required and should include all of the major tasks that students will be required to complete for the week. Please try to be generous in the time allotment as well and make sure you are not putting in too much work.

Workload = VLE only weeks - 12 hours (~10k words)

VLE+print weeks = 6 hours print (10-12k words)/6 hours VLE (5k words))

1. Why behaviour change is difficult

Before beginning the core reading for this week, this section invites you to think about behaviour change at a practical, everyday level. Rather than trying to change a behaviour, the aim is simply to notice how behaviours unfold in real contexts.

The short activity below will help you anchor the ideas you encounter in Chapter 6 in a concrete example from your own experience. You will return to this example later in the week, after working through the chapter and online materials.

Commented [GB14]: Nice 😊

Commented [JT15R14]: Agree

Commented [JT16]: This is part of the Intro section, not a new section, so doesn't take a section number. Alexi can tidy all that sort of thing up after handover, of course, but it'd be easier if we can give her as close to a structured HO doc as possible.

Commented [JT17]: Needs to be something that students can demonstrate, not just do - suggest 'describe'

Commented [JT18]: 'Produce'

Commented [SH19]: Are we adding these? I cant remember what the outcome was?

Commented [GB20R19]: I think it is still up for debate!

Commented [A21R19]: These are required now by the Module Design Toolkit per Learning Design, just FYI - the design of the Activity Planner can be tweaked a bit, but we do need to have something that includes a list of what students will be doing along with the time allotted for each activity (this is different from the Aims/Learning Outcomes)

Commented [JT22R19]: See my grumble on Camilla's Week 2. These are not helpful and we should not include them. Unless we can actually find a way to make them useful, which at present they are not.

Commented [AL23]: The Activity planner is required and should include all of the major tasks that students will be required to complete for the week. Please try to be generous in the time allotment as well and make sure you are not putting in too much work.

Workload = VLE only weeks - 12 hours (~10k words)
VLE+print weeks = 6 hours print (10-12k words)/6 hours VLE (5k words)

Activity 1.1 Reflecting on everyday behaviour

Before you begin, you may find it helpful to think of one small behaviour from your own daily life that you intended to do differently in this past week or so. You will not be asked to monitor it longer term, but having an example in mind may help you make connections between theory and everyday experience. For example, you might find that the first thing you do when you wake up in the morning is check your phone: you want to stop, but it's something you automatically reach for when you open your eyes. Think of one small behaviour that you have recently noticed yourself doing automatically, even if you have thought about doing it differently. This does not need to involve long-term observation or deliberate change.

For example, you might notice that the first thing you do when you wake up is check your phone, even though you would prefer not to.

Briefly note:

What the behaviour is

When or where it tends to occur

Whether it feels intentional or automatic

Keep this example in mind as you read Chapter 6 and work through the online materials. You will return to it in a short reflection activity at the end of the week.

2 Studying Chapter 6 'Understanding behaviour change'

This part of the week focuses on reading Chapter 6, 'understanding behaviour change', which introduces a range of key theories and research evidence that explain how and why behaviour changes across different contexts.

As you work through the chapter, consider how these ideas help explain both successful behaviour change and situations where change does not occur. You may find it useful to return to the everyday example you identified in Activity 1.1 to help with noticing how different concepts and models relate to everyday behaviour.

When you have completed Chapter 6 return here, to the module website, to continue with this week's work.

3 Identity, place and behaviour in social and environmental contexts

Commented [SH24]: Camilla comment: This could be a nice pre-chapter activity maybe.

Commented [SH25R24]: I had this as an activity initially, but I think it was suggested this type of reflection is not great as an activity as - Observing behaviours over a long time means they might get distracted or not get the opportunity to return to, so they might skip these activities altogether.

Commented [A[26R24]: I guess I'd disagree, from an editorial perspective, since we often recommend short/reflective type activities at the beginning of the week and then we can have students look back at the end of the week to sorta see what they've learned (we have a way to add in what they've written in a previous activity into a new one) - but that's only if you feel it's still useful at this point.

Commented [JT27R24]: I think it could be useful to have - just a few things about it (mostly practical):
1) It shouldn't be in the Intro, but rather Section 1 after the Intro. On the plus side, that gives a home for the title that's currently sitting next to the word 'Introduction'.
2) I'm wondering if 'the past week' is a big enough window. Particularly as many of our students work, and quite a lot a FTI, so for many of them mid-module could just be a case of 'get through the day', rather than 'make life changes'.
3) As Alexi says, if we do include this then it would be good to have a specific follow-up activity reflecting back on it at the end of the week. It needn't take up a lot of time/words, but it would close the loop neatly.

Commented [SH28]: This para needs changing to activity intro

Chapter 6 introduced the idea that behaviour is shaped not only by individual intentions and habits, but also by the social and environmental contexts in which people live. Here, environmental refers to the different places and settings people experience in everyday life, including built and natural environments (such as neighbourhoods, towns, coastlines, and landscapes).

Research across social and environmental psychology highlight two key influences on behaviour that are especially important:

- 1) social identity (who we understand ourselves to be in relation to others), and
- 2) place attachment (our emotional connection to particular locations).

Together, these help explain why the same behaviour-change message or intervention can work well in one setting but struggle in another.

3.1 Social identity and “people like us”

People do not always think of themselves only as individuals (“I”). Often, they also think of themselves as members of social groups (“we”), such as families, friendship groups, communities, or online networks. Social identity refers to this group-based understanding of who ‘we’ are. For example, an avid football fan may say “we Manchester United supporters never give up”, a neighbourhood resident might explain that “we look out for each other on the street”, or children in a playground might proudly say “in Year 4 ‘we’ always include everyone in our games”. In these moments, personal behaviour becomes tied to the norms and expectations of that particular group: what *I* do is shaped by what *we* - people like me - do.

As introduced Chapter 6, when people see themselves as part of a group, they are more likely to adopt that group’s values and norms, and act in ways that maintain a positive image of “us”. For example, Haslam and colleagues (2021) reviewed research examining how shared social identity can support cooperation, mutual support, and well-being during periods of adversity, such as illness, social disruption, or crisis. These benefits come not simply from being around others, but from feeling part of a meaningful group, that is, when they experienced a sense of “we are in this together”.

This insight helps to explain why community-focussed behaviour change messages (such as public health campaigns or emergency preparedness efforts), can be more effective when they appeal to shared values and collective outcomes, rather than focusing only on individual responsibility. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic in the UK, messages such as ‘stay at home, protect the NHS, save lives’ emphasised collective consequences and a shared responsibility for others, rather than individual risk alone. While not designed as a formal behaviour change intervention, such messaging illustrates how framing behaviour in terms of shared values and collective consequences (e.g. protecting a shared healthcare system or vulnerable others) can make behaviour change feel more meaningful and manageable.

Importantly, social identities can operate at different levels, ranging from small groups such as families or neighbourhoods to broader groups such as towns or countries. Which level feels most relevant can shape how people respond to behaviour-change messages. You will return to social identity theory in more depth later in the module. For now, the key point is that shared identity doesn’t just

Commented [Ev29]: avoid the ‘we’ talk!

Commented [JT30R29]: I think here it’s fine, but I’d put bunny-ears around ‘we’ (i.e. “...understanding of who ‘we’ are .”), as what we’re talking about here is each individual’s construction of their identity group.

Commented [JT31]: Should this be ‘people like me’ or ‘people like us’, or both?

Commented [Ge32]: suggest this addition as it is covered in the section Evangelos wrote in the chapter, so isn’t entirely new to students at this point in the study week

Commented [Jo33]: resilient?

Commented [Ge34]: you could reference some campaigns students might be aware of here? The most obvious would be covid, but I’m not sure that the UK campaigns (‘hands, face, space’) actually based any of its work on models of behaviour change :-)

Commented [JT35R34]: ‘hands, face, space’ wouldn’t illustrate the ‘us’ thing, but ‘stay home, save lives, protect the NHS’ might? Bit of a stretch, perhaps, because it doesn’t explicitly position either ‘lives’ or ‘the NHS’ as ‘us’. Hmm... we should include examples but I’m drawing a mental blank at the moment.

influence what people do, but can also shape whether behaviour change feels relevant, supported, and worth sustaining.

Activity 3.1 Spotting “I” and “we” in behaviour change messages

Allow around 10 minutes for this short pause and digest activity.

When it comes to behaviour-change interventions, messages often use small language cues to signal who the message is referring to. Some messages focus on personal responsibility, while others emphasise shared action or collective responsibility.

This short activity is designed to help you practice spotting these cues.

Match each statement below to the category that best describes the level of group being referred to.

Statements:

- 1) “Make a plan so your household is ready for extreme weather”
- 2) “Looking after our neighbours keeps everyone safe”
- 3) “People who work here pull together when deadlines are tight”
- 4) “By working together now, we can protect future generations”

Categories:

- A) Local community / neighbourhood focus
- B) Wider society focus
- C) Workplace focus
- D) Individual / household focus

Discussion

Statement 1: D. individual / household focus

Statement 2: A. Local community / neighbourhood focus

Statement 3: C. Workplace focus

Statement 4: B. Wider society focus

These examples highlight how behaviour-change messages can refer to different levels of identity, from households and workplaces to wider collectives. Messages are often more effective when they align with a group that people strongly identify with. For example, for people who strongly identify with their work team (e.g. ‘us’ nurses), may be more motivated by messages framed around ‘People who work here’.

End of activity

3.2 Place attachment and behaviour

Alongside social identity, the places people live in or feel connected to can also play an important role in shaping behaviour change. Place attachment refers to the emotional bonds people form with meaningful places, such as a favourite beach, a long-term neighbourhood, or a local park. These bonds often develop through

Commented [Ge36]: this might need more specific tying back to behaviour change here, rather than response to change?

memories, routines, relationships, and a sense of continuity over time (For example, ‘this is where I grew up’, or ‘this is where my children were born’). When people feel strongly attached to a place, they often describe it as feeling like “home” or a part of “who I am”.

Research in environmental psychology shows that place attachment can support behaviour change when change is experienced as protecting the place that people value. For example, De Dominicis *et al.*, (2015) examined how place attachment, perceptions of environmental risk, and preventative coping behaviours were related in communities facing environmental hazards (such as flooding or pollution). They found that people who felt strongly attached to their local area, and who also perceived higher levels of environmental risk, were more likely to engage in protective or adaptive actions, such as preparing their homes or supporting local risk reduction measures. In these cases, caring deeply about the place strengthened motivation to act in ways that safeguarded it.

However, strong place attachment can also create barriers to behaviour change. When proposed changes are perceived as threatening to the character or meaning of a place, highly attached residents may resist them. Studies of flood risk management and coastal adaptation show that residents may oppose flood defences or relocation schemes that they believe spoil valued landscapes, community identity, or a sense of continuity, even when they recognise the underlying risks (Clarke *et al.*, 2018; Wozniak, 2021). In such cases, resistance does not necessarily reflect denial of risk, but rather a conflict between competing measures and goals. This reflects a key idea introduced in Chapter 6: behaviour change often involves balancing multiple, sometimes competing, priorities rather than simply acting on information or intention alone.

Taken together, these findings show that place attachment can both support and constrain behaviour change. Whether it motivates action or generates resistance depends on how change is understood in relation to what a place means to the people who live there.

Activity 3.2 How place attachment can support or constrain behaviour change

Allow around 15-20 minutes for this activity

Place attachment can motivate action in some contexts and create resistance in others. This reflects the ideas in chapter 6 that behaviour change often involves competing motivations and goals.

For this activity, you are not expected to find ‘correct’ answers. Instead, the aim is to practice applying theory to real-world situations, that is, the idea that emotional connections to place can influence how people respond to proposed changes.

Task

For each of the situations below:

1. Decide whether place attachment is more likely to support behaviour change or constrain it, in this context.

Commented [Jo37]: Think this might have been mentioned before but students use this and we tell them it has to be *et al.* Do we have to have this in the text?

Commented [A38R37]: We use this from an editorial perspective because CTR Harvard and OU House Style differ on the formatting of *et al.* within module materials - one includes italics and one doesn't, so to avoid the inconsistency, we replace *et al.* with 'and colleagues' - if we want to include *et al.* instead of 'and colleagues', we need to decide if we want to italicize to follow CTR Harvard or allow for the inconsistency.

Commented [Ge39R37]: I think we should be using *et al.* - that's what students will encounter in published psychological research, and that's what we expect them to do when referencing. In terms of italics or not, I'd say not - publishers don't all do this, and I don't think we expect students to either, so I think we should model what we expect students to do in their own work.

Commented [A40R37]: That's fine and I can put in our module style guide, but we do have to italicize *et al.* in the in-text references since there we follow CTR Harvard, so as long as we're fine with the inconsistency, then I'm fine with that.

Commented [JT41R37]: I agree with using 'et al.' when referring to specific work (as here), and it should be italicised. However, 'and colleagues' can be appropriate when referring to, say, a research group in general rather than a specific publication (e.g. 'Vicki Bruce and colleagues at the University of Stirling').

Commented [Ev42]: This is all good, but we also need some activities and not just new content. Activities only appear at the end of 4.3 so it might be good to have something earlier as well

Commented [JT43R42]: If we structure the reflection earlier into an activity, that will help. Could maybe also include an activity in 4.2 about place connection (or was there already one in the chapter)?

2. Identify two competing goals or motivations that may be influencing people's responses (for example, protecting safety versus preserving the character of a place).
3. Briefly note one way a behaviour change intervention could acknowledge these competing goals, rather than ignoring them.

Situations

- A local community campaigns to reduce litter in a park used by families
- Residents oppose the introduction of new flood defences because they believe the structures will spoil the appearance and character of the local coastline
- A neighbourhood group supports home flood-proofing measures after repeated flooding

Interaction free text box

Discussion

- Reducing litter in a park:
 - 1) Place attachment is likely to support behaviour change.
 - 2) One motivation is keeping the park clean for families, while another is pride in the local area.
 - 3) A behaviour-change approach could emphasise protecting a shared space that people value.
- Opposition to flood defences:
 - 1) Place attachment may constrain behaviour change.
 - 2) One motivation is increasing safety from flooding, while another is preserving the appearance and character of the coastline.
 - 3) An intervention could acknowledge concerns about appearance while explaining how safety can be improved with minimal impact.
- Supporting home flood-proofing:
 - 1) Place attachment is likely to support behaviour change.
 - 2) Residents may want to protect their homes and remain in the neighbourhood they value.
 - 3) Behaviour-change approaches could frame flood-proofing as helping people stay safely in their community.

3.3 Identity, place and the intention behaviour gap

Social identity and place attachment are often discussed as separate influences on behaviour, but in everyday life they are closely interconnected. People's sense of "who we are" is often closely tied to "where we belong". Neighbourhoods, towns, landscapes and even countries are not just physical settings, but social spaces shaped by shared histories, relationships and group norms. As a result, identity and place often work together to influence how people interpret change, whether they trust those promoting it, and whether new behaviours feel acceptable, meaningful or threatening.

In many of the examples discussed in Chapter 6, behaviour change is framed as something individuals intend to do themselves (e.g. forming a new habit or following a health recommendation). However, in social and environmental contexts, behaviour change is often initiated by organisations or authorities in response to shared risks,

Commented [Ge44]: As this is talking about change which is imposed, often for very good reasons, I wonder if this should be explicitly spelled out? The chapter talks about individual and group behaviour change/motivation, and there's some stuff on nudging, etc., but this is a further aspect of collective behaviour change, with a specific application, so perhaps explicitly mentioning the differences and similarities might help?

such as flooding or climate change. In these situations, the psychological challenge is not simply whether people recognise the risk, but whether they are willing to engage with the specific form of change being proposed.

A good illustration of this comes from a programme of interdisciplinary research across coastal communities facing increased flood risk in the UK, Ireland and Ghana (Abu et al., 2024; Quinn et al., 2015). Through interviews, surveys and community-based research, the authors examined how residents respond to proposed climate adaptation measures such as flood defences and planned relocation. Drawing on psychological ideas about identity, place attachment, threat and meaning-making, the studies show that communities often respond very differently to the same environmental risks.

Across these contexts, responses were shaped not only by awareness of flood risk, but by how strongly people identified with their community and how attached they felt to their local environment. For some residents, strong community identity and place attachment supported preparedness and collective action, with people describing a shared responsibility to protect “our town”. For others, however, the same attachments made adaptation feel threatening to the character and continuity of the place. In these cases, proposals such as relocation were experienced as challenges to ‘who we are’ and ‘where we belong’, leading to anxiety, scepticism and resistance.

From a psychological perspective, this reflects processes of identity threat. Resistance in these settings does not necessarily indicate denial of risk or lack of concern. Instead, it reflects a conflict between competing motivations and goals. Research from Ghana highlights this particularly clearly: planned relocation intended to reduce flood risk was often experienced as a disruption not only to housing, but to livelihoods, social networks and place-based belonging (Abu et al.). This reinforces a key idea from Chapter 6 — behaviour and engagement are shaped by multiple, sometimes competing priorities, rather than by information or intention alone.

These examples help clarify how the intention-behaviour gap operates in collective contexts. Individuals and communities may agree that change is necessary and may even support risk reduction in principle, but still resist particular measures if they conflict with valued identities, trusted relationships or the meaning of place. Here, the gap is not between having good intentions to change and failing to act, but between recognising a problem and accepting a specific solution. This is important when addressing largescale, group based change, such as climate adaptation strategies or national health messages: when proposed changes align with shared identities and valued places they become a part of “who we are as a group”, and “what people like us do here”, making engagement more likely, and interventions more successful. Conversely, when change is experienced as imposed or identity-threatening, resistance is more likely, even in the presence of strong evidence and well-intentioned policy goals.

The activity below invites you to apply these ideas about identity, place and the intention-behaviour gap to a practical, real-world example.

Activity 3.3 Exploring Behaviour in context

Commented [Ev45]: these titles are a bit vague - can become a bit more 'alive' and explain what students are expected to do

Commented [JT46R45]: Could just add a verb, e.g. 'Exploring behaviour in context'?

Allow around 25 minutes to complete this activity

Commented [A47]: Before the scenario, I'd suggest adding a brief instruction that says something like 'Read the following the scenario, then answer the questions that follow'

Task

Read the scenario below, then answer the questions that follow.

You do not need to write more than 150–200 words in total.

There are no correct answers. The aim is to practise applying ideas about identity and place to a realistic community example.

Commented [Ca48]: I think here you would have a separate text box for each question so that the students have to think about each individually. You could even have a reveal for each question so that students can use your reveal to help them with the next question.

Scenario

A local council introduces a programme encouraging residents across different neighbourhoods to prepare for extreme weather events, such as heatwaves or flooding. The programme provides information mainly through council-branded letters, emails and website posts. It focusses on checking on neighbours, creating household plans, and using local support services during emergencies.

Initial engagement is mixed: some neighbourhoods respond enthusiastically, while others show very little participation, despite receiving the same information.

Neighbourhood profiles:

- Neighbourhood A: strong community groups; recent experience of flooding; high levels of local volunteering and mutual aid.
- Neighbourhood B: high population turnover; fewer shared spaces; low participation in local activities; residents describe the area as “just somewhere to live”.
- Neighbourhood C: strong local identity but long-standing frustration with the council; residents feel decisions are “done to us, not with us”.

Questions

- 1) Identify two factors related to social identity or connection to place that could help explain different levels of engagement across neighbourhoods.
- 2) Suggest one way the programme could be adapted to make it more relevant or meaningful in areas with lower engagement.
- 3) Briefly note how your suggested change might influence willingness to take part.

Interaction

Free response box for student answer

Discussion

One factor that may explain higher engagement in Neighbourhood A is a strong sense of community identity and shared experience of flooding, which may make preparedness feel relevant to “people like us”. In Neighbourhood B, weaker local identity may reduce engagement because residents feel less connection to the area. In Neighbourhood C, low trust in the council may limit participation, even though community identity is strong.

One way to adapt the programme could be to work with trusted local groups or community leaders rather than relying only on council-branded communication. This could make the message feel more relevant to local priorities and less imposed.

This change might increase willingness to take part by helping residents feel that preparedness supports their community, rather than being an external demand.

End of activity

The scenario you explored in activity 3.3 shows how identity, group norms and connection to place can shape the way communities respond to proposed change. These influences are not limited to hypothetical examples, they also appear in real-world situations where people face difficult decisions about their homes, safety, and future.

The podcast below extends this discussion by drawing on qualitative research from communities on the North Wales coast who are experiencing climate-related changes in their local environment. The research explores how residents make sense of proposed adaptation measures (including managed retreat and flood risk planning), and how these responses are shaped by identity, belonging and emotional attachment to place.

Commented [JT49]: Nice 😊

Activity 3.4 Identity, place and climate adaptation in practice

Allow around 20 minutes to complete this activity

This activity gives you a chance to apply the ideas about identity and place attachment to a real example from community research.

Task

Listen to the podcast featuring me and Trudi Macagnino, which discusses research with communities on the North Wales coast facing climate-related change and proposed adaptation plans.

As you listen, you may notice ideas from Chapter 6 (such as the theory of planned behaviour and cognitive dissonance), as well as ideas developed in this section (such as identity, group norms, or reactions to threat), appearing in residents' accounts. Make brief notes on how these psychological ideas are reflected in what people say about their experiences.

Then answer the questions below. You do not need to explain theories in detail, instead, focus on how residents describe their responses to proposed changes.

Questions

1. Identify two examples from the podcast that show how identity or place attachment influence the ways in which residents respond to adaptation plans.

Interaction

Free response box for student answer

2. Briefly explain one psychological reason why some residents resist proposed changes, even when they are aware of environmental risks.

Interaction

Free response box for student answer

3. Suggest one way that adaptation programmes could be designed to work more effectively with community identity and attachment to place in similar settings.

Interaction

Free response box for student answer

Discussion

- 1) Two examples from the podcast
 - One example is residents rejecting being described as “victims waiting to be rescued” and instead emphasising “this is our home”. This shows that proposed adaptation is experienced as connected to identity and belonging, not only practical risk.
 - A second example is residents questioning why their town is being singled out as “at risk” and comparing themselves to neighbouring towns. This suggests that how a place is labelled can affect how residents interpret the message and who they see as “us” versus “them”.
- 2) One psychological reason for resistance
 - One reason is that adaptation proposals can feel like a threat to identity and continuity. Even when residents recognise flooding risk, being told that their community is unsafe or must change can feel like a challenge to who they are and what their town represents, leading to defensiveness or resistance.
- 2) One design improvement

Adaptation programmes could involve communities more directly in decision-making and framing. For example, rather than focusing only on risk and danger, programmes could focus on protecting what matters most to residents about their place (such as community ties or

local ways of life), which may reduce defensiveness and increase engagement.

End of activity

Together, the activities in this section have shown how social identity, group norms and emotional attachment to place shape how people respond to collective challenges. However, even when people develop a strong identity with a community and care deeply about their environment, this does not guarantee that behaviour change will be sustained in everyday life.

The next section turns to another set of psychological influences that help explain why behaviour change can be difficult: stress, mental health and everyday pressures.

Commented [Ge50]: nice summary and signposting :-)

4 Stress, mental health and everyday behaviour

Insert Figure 3



Figure X.2 Title and information about image.

Commented [SH51]: <https://www.istockphoto.com/vector/mental-health-concept-illustration-trendy-color-gm1433429677-475351856?searchscope=image%2Cfilm>

Commented [A52R51]: Similar to Figure 1, there is a similar image in the print chapter

Commented [JT53R51]: At least it's not a 'head-clutcher'! 😊

Chapter 6 introduced how intentions, habits, social expectations and environmental cues shape behaviour. Another important set of influences relates to how people are feeling and the psychological demands they are under at a given time. Stress, low mood, fatigue, uncertainty, and competing pressures or disrupted routines can all affect attention, memory, self-control and motivation - the psychological processes that support or hinder everyday behaviour change.

This section focuses on how these emotional and psychological pressures shape whether people are able to act on their intentions in practice. Research on self-regulation, cognitive load and health behaviour consistently shows that behaviour change is especially difficult to sustain under conditions of stress and high mental demand (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007; Mullainathan & Shafir, 2013; Hennessy et al., 2020). Later in the module, you will build on these ideas by exploring how people cope with change over time. Here, the focus remains specifically on how stress influences the success or failure of intended behaviour change.

Understanding how stress and mental health shape behaviour is therefore not only important for explaining why people struggle with everyday behaviour change, but also for evaluating whether behaviour change interventions are working as intended.

If stress, fatigue or emotional strain limit people's psychological capacity to act on their intentions, then even well-designed interventions may appear ineffective unless these pressures are taken into account.

Commented [JT54]: Nice set-up for this section

4.1 Why stress disrupts behaviour change

Stress affects behaviour through several well-established psychological mechanisms:

- Reduced cognitive resources: stress increases mental load, leaving fewer resources available for concentrating, planning and remembering intended actions (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007; Hennessy et al., 2020).
- Attention narrowed towards immediate demands: Under stress, attention is drawn toward what feels urgent or pressing in the moment, often at the expense of longer-term goals. This applies not only to short-term stressors, but also to longer-term, ongoing or chronic pressures that repeatedly pull attention toward day-to-day demands (Mullainathan & Shafir, 2013).
- Weakened self-regulation: Stress and fatigue make it harder to resist distractions, inhibit impulses, or sustain new habits, increasing reliance on existing routines (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007; Inzlicht & Friese, 2019).

Commented [JT55]: Naïve question: is this also true of long-term stressors, not just stressors that are themselves immediate?

Commented [Ca56R55]: Good point. I would say yes - if you can find suitable research.

Commented [Ca57R55]: An aside. This also links (in my mind) to understandings of things like PTSD, which is usually conceived of as a one off or reasonably short-lived traumatic experience, with less focus on, or understanding, that PTSD symptoms are also experienced when people endure long periods of distressing experiences.

Commented [SH58]: Can this be linked to another week? I mean can I signpost here - e.g. see chapter 2 or week 21)

These effects are supported by research on the biological stress response. When people experience stress, the body releases stress hormones (such as cortisol) that help prepare the body to deal with immediate demands. While this response can be adaptive in the short term, sustained activation of the stress response can interfere with attention, working memory and emotion regulation — psychological processes that are important for carrying out planned behaviour change (McEwen, 1998; Lupien et al., 2009; Shields et al., 2017). This helps explain why people under ongoing stress may understand what they intend to do yet struggle to carry out those intentions in everyday situations.

From this perspective, difficulties with behaviour change under stress do not reflect poor willpower or a lack of intention. Instead, they reflect limits on psychological capacity. In everyday terms, it is often not that people will not follow through on intended change, but that they cannot do so while managing competing pressures. This links closely to the intention-behaviour gap discussed earlier in the chapter, where strong intentions do not reliably translate into action (Sheeran, 2002).

Research on self-regulation provides further support for this view. Across a range of experimental studies, participants asked to regulate emotions, suppress impulses, or sustain attention show reduced persistence on subsequent tasks (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007). For example, participants who completed demanding attention or emotion-regulation tasks were less able to persist with later tasks requiring effort or self-control. Although debates remain about how best to interpret some findings in this area, converging evidence shows that stress and fatigue reliably make effortful, goal-directed behaviour harder to sustain in everyday life.

Taken together, these findings help explain why people often revert to established habits or abandon planned changes during demanding periods, even when their intentions remain strong (Hennessy et al., 2020).

Activity 4.1 Behaviour under pressure

Allow around 15 minutes to complete this activity

This activity gives you an opportunity to consider how stress, distractions, and competing demands can interact with behavioural processes introduced in Chapter 6. Scenario

Haider intends to revise for an upcoming assessment by studying for an hour each evening. However, during a week with several work and family commitments, Haider finds it difficult to concentrate, becomes easily distracted by messages from colleagues, and postpones revision until late at night.

Task

Below are several statements describing Haider's situation. Have a look at the statements below and sort them into the most appropriate category. Some statements may reasonably belong in more than one category.

Categories:

1. Stress / emotional load
2. Environmental cues / distractions
3. Competing demands / routines

Statements:

- Haider feels tired and mentally drained after work, making it difficult to concentrate.
- Family commitments shift Haider's sense of what feels most urgent.
- Haider postpones revision until late at night, when his energy is low.
- Revision is a newer habit competing with established routines.
- Work pressures increase mental load during the week.
- Haider receives frequent notifications from colleagues that draw his attention away.
- Notifications trigger established habits around response times.

Briefly note down why you placed certain statements in specific categories.

Interaction

Free response box for student answer

Discussion

Stress / emotional load

Statements describing tiredness, low energy or mental strain fit here. For example, feeling mentally drained after work, experiencing increased work pressure, or studying late at night when energy is low all reduce concentration and make effortful behaviour more difficult.

Environmental cues / distractions

External triggers such as message notifications belong here. These cues capture attention and activate habits around checking and responding, pulling focus away from intended tasks.

Competing demands / routines

Commented [SH59]: Maybe as a table?

Commented [A[60R59]: We may be able to do a sort of drag/drop with categories - not sure we can add it into a table as well, but we can see what's possible at handover

Commented [JT61R59]: As there are only three categories to manage, drop-downs or radio buttons might work just as well as drag-and-drop.

Commented [JT62]: I'm fairly confident I could put most, possibly all, the others into their correct category, but I'm not sure about this one. I think maybe it's 'stress / emotional load' but tiredness isn't an emotion or, at the end of the day, a stress response. [Ah yes, the discussion says 'tiredness' goes in that category]

Commented [JT63]: This one is, in my think, supposed to go into 'Environmental cues / distractions' but isn't it also a 'competing demand'?

Family commitments and existing routines shift what feels most urgent or expected. Revision competes with long-standing evening patterns and responsibilities, making it harder for a new habit to take hold.

Some statements fit more than one category. For example, message notifications are both an environmental cue and part of ongoing work demands. Recognising this overlap reflects the complexity of real-world behaviour change.

When combined, these factors help explain why Haider struggled to carry out his planned revision: his intentions were challenged simultaneously by emotional strain, powerful cues and competing demands.

End of activity

This activity illustrates how the intention–behaviour gap described in Chapter 6 can arise even when motivation is strong. Stress, distractions and competing routines interact to limit psychological capacity in the moment, increasing reliance on existing habits. Understanding these interacting pressures helps explain why behaviour change often breaks down under everyday stress, and why interventions that ignore mental load may struggle to produce sustained change.

This section has shown how stress, fatigue and everyday pressures shape what people are able to do in practice, even when their intentions remain strong. Behaviour change is therefore not only about motivation, habits or social influence, but also about the psychological capacity available in the moment.

Section 5 now turns to the skills and methods used to evaluate behaviour-change interventions, exploring how psychologists assess whether interventions work in real-world contexts where stress, competing demands and social connections are always present.

Commented [GB64]: I think this works well as an activity, but we need something more after it to relate back to core theory/research, and which extends upon stuff that students have learned about in the chapter. Perhaps after this you could have a written section which discusses research in this area and how it has helped identify the impact of the different categories used in the activity?

5 Methods: Evaluating behaviour change interventions

Understanding why behaviour occurs is only part of the story psychology. Researchers also **apply** psychological theory and evidence to design, test and evaluate interventions intended to support behaviour change in real-world settings. In this context, applying psychology means using established theories and evidence (such as habits, social norms, self-regulation or perceived control) to design interventions that target specific behavioural processes, and evaluate whether those interventions lead to meaningful change in everyday life (such as public health campaigns, digital behaviour-change tools, school-based programmes, and community or environment sustainability initiatives). Evaluation matters because interventions vary wildly in effectiveness, and approaches that succeed in one context may fail in another. Even when an intervention is grounded in strong theory and evidence, success is never guaranteed.

As you have seen across this week, behaviour is shaped by stress, habits, identity, social expectations and environmental constraints. These same factors also influence whether an intervention succeeds or fails. For this reason, psychologists use multiple methods to evaluate behaviour change, rather than relying on a single outcome (Michie et al., 2014; Hennessy et al., 2020).

Common approaches include:

- Behavioural measures – tracking behaviour directly, such as attendance, purchasing data, app usage, or frequency of a target behaviour. These measures are often prioritised because they assess what people do (the behaviour itself), rather than just what people intend to do.
- Psychological indicators – measuring processes involved in change, such as attitudes, confidence, perceived control or motivation. Many interventions aim to change these underlying processes (for example, using the Theory of Planned Behaviour introduced in Chapter 6), and measuring them helps assess whether the intervention influenced the intended mechanisms.
- Qualitative approaches – interviews, focus groups, open-ended surveys or observations that explore people’s lived experiences of change, any perceived barriers they may face, and how interventions fit with everyday life.

Because these methods produce different insights, they also have different strengths and limitations. Behavioural data provide strong evidence of real-world change but can be challenging (both practically and ethically), or costly to collect. Self-report measures are easier to administer but vulnerable to social desirability bias and may show changes in attitude that do not translate into behaviour. Qualitative methods offer insight into why an intervention worked or failed, but cannot estimate how widespread the effects are. For this reason, in practice, mixed-method evaluations are often the most informative.

Commented [JT65]: Suggestion to reinforce what we mean by 'applying' psychology.

Commented [JT66]: I really like this methodological overview here 😊

Another key issue is timeframe. Many interventions focus on short-term change, but longer-term follow-up can provide insight into whether behaviour is sustained over-time, or whether it weakens once habits, routines and social pressures reassert themselves (Sheeran, 2002; Hennessy et al., 2020). Reviews of behaviour change interventions repeatedly show that initial improvements in behaviour, attitudes or intentions often decline once active support, novelty or prompts are removed (Webb & Sheeran, 2006; Gardiner et al., 2012). This highlights why evaluation needs to consider not only whether behaviour changes, but whether it is maintained over time, and under what conditions. Without longer-term follow-up, interventions may appear effective even when behaviour change is fragile or short-lived.

Commented [GB67]: I think this is an important point to elaborate on, particularly if you look at specific applications. For example, in my work on road safety, the organisation who run speed awareness courses base all of their educational interventions on various models of behaviour change, and claim that they 'change hearts and minds', but there's actually very little evidence that long term changes occur in participants. I think some kind of application like this would help students to understand that not only is change hard at the individual level, but change at scale is also a challenge. This also perhaps opens the door to thinking about more creative ways of trying to change behaviour, based on theory, above and beyond telling people the benefits of a change and helping to break habits.

As you move into the activity below, keep these questions in mind:

- What behavioural processes does the intervention target?
- What evidence would demonstrate change?
- How might everyday contexts influence whether change is maintained?

Activity 5.1 Evaluating behaviour change interventions

Allow around 25 minutes to complete this activity

Intervention

Visit the NHS Healthy Swaps [webpage](https://www.nhs.uk/healthier-families/food-facts/healthier-food-swaps/), which is part of the NHS Better Health behaviour-change campaign: <https://www.nhs.uk/healthier-families/food-facts/healthier-food-swaps/>

This page provides practical suggestions for swapping common foods for healthier alternatives. The aim is to help families reduce sugar, salt and saturated fat intake with simple, everyday changes.

Commented [A[68]: I know this seems pedantic, but we may want a content warning here for students who may suffer from eating disorders

Commented [JT69R68]: I would only include a warning mid-content if we were directing students to something high-risk (e.g. a research paper on offenders that had graphic descriptions of violent or sexual offences), which I don't think this qualifies as.

Commented [A[70R68]: Fine to include something at the beginning of the week

Commented [JT71]: I like using a real campaign for the evaluation activity, just thinking about accessibility for SISE. Will we be able to specify this as something to include in the printed packs? I'm not sure who this is a question for - @Tom.Duckworth maybe?

Commented [To72R71]: Yes, that's me. I'll note this now, but I'll be confirming all supplementary materials for the blueprint in the new year at some point with authors.

Questions:

1. What does this intervention appear to aim to change, and which psychological mechanisms does it rely on (e.g. habits, cues, routines, social norms, motivation, simplification, framing)?

Interaction

Free response box for student answer

2. What evidence could be gathered to evaluate whether it is effective?

Interaction

Free response box for student answer

- Identify one contextual factor that might influence whether people are able to adopt the swaps (e.g., affordability, food access, cultural norms, routines).

Interaction

Free response box for student answer

- Suggest one realistic modification that could improve the intervention and explain why it may help.

Interaction

Free response box for student answer

Commented [Jo73]: Like this - example that is relatable

Commented [Ca74R73]: Me too. I wonder if we could tie it into Sinead's VLE week too. I think she's now going to include some content on eating. It might be worth the two of you having a very quick chat.

Discussion

The NHS “Healthy Swaps” page aims to support families in managing calorie and sugar intake by encouraging simple, achievable substitutions. The intervention relies on habit change by creating easy cues that encourage people to replace existing food routines with healthier alternatives (e.g. “swap X for Y”). It also uses positive framing to present healthier options as normal, achievable alternatives, rather than restrictions. These features reflect principles from behavioural science showing that reducing effort and friction can support behaviour change (Michie et al., 2014; Hennessy et al., 2020).

Evidence of effectiveness could include behavioural data (e.g. purchasing patterns, frequency of swaps), self-report data on confidence or perceived ease, and qualitative feedback about the practicality of implementing the swaps in real life.

Contextual factors such as food affordability, cultural food practices or access to supermarkets may influence uptake.

A helpful modification might be providing tailored swaps for different budgets or cultural dietary patterns. This could increase relevance and ensure that the suggested swaps feel accessible and realistic across different households.

End of activity

Commented [JT75]: I'm wondering if we could separate this bit out into its own activity and go into it in more depth or, if that's too difficult for where the students are at the moment methods-wise, just expand on it in text after this activity. We had that really nice bit earlier outlining behavioural measures, psychological indicators and qualitative approaches and we could build on that here with some worked examples.

Commented [Ca76]: Sorry. Stuck record time! Ask Sinead. This would tie nicely into her week.

Commented [GB77]: As per the comment above, I think we need more in this section. In terms of methods focus, I think we need to be clear what we want students to get out of this too - as you mention three different types of evaluation above the activity, it would make sense to return to them here to discuss what the pros and cons of each approach are. You could, for example, focus on how a survey/interview might show clear attitude change which links to intention, but what does that mean in terms of actual behaviour? This could then be a good place to discuss longitudinal data to track endurance of any behaviour change, as well as how we can link a change in intention to any meaningful change in behaviour. By this point, students will have encountered self-report data too, so it might be nice to mention issues with that in terms of measuring changed behaviour too?

Commented [JT78]: Writing about it would be skills (e.g. as TMA prep.), but the section doesn't seem to be about that. Instead, it seems to be a continuation of the methods evaluation (which is good, let's keep it), so this should be section 6.1.

Commented [JT79R78]: Given that, do we need a skills section for this week as well, or is this one where we're in the grey area between methods and skills, and we're fudging it by calling 'reading a research paper' skills rather than methods on purpose?

7 Skills and Methods: Writing about behaviour change

The previous section showed that evaluating behaviour-change interventions involves more than simply asking whether they “work”. Psychologists must also consider how behaviour is measured, whose behaviour changes, over what timeframe, and under

what social, emotional and environmental conditions. Being able to critically read and write about such evidence is therefore a core academic skill in psychology.

Writing about behaviour change requires you to:

- identify the theoretical ideas underlying an intervention (e.g. habits, norms, motivation, self-efficacy),
- evaluate the quality of the evidence used to assess it, and
- consider contextual factors such as stress, routines, identity, and resources that shape whether change is sustained.

This section focusses on how to read behaviour-change research in a way that helps you do all three.

7.1 How to critically read behaviour-change research

When reading research on behaviour change, it is important to move beyond the surface description of “what was done” and focus on how claims are justified. Four core questions are especially useful:

1. What was the aim of the study?

This helps you understand whether the intervention was designed to change behaviour itself, or supporting processes such as motivation, self-efficacy, habit strength or intention.

2. What exactly was the intervention trying to change?

For example, some interventions target:

- habits (e.g. prompts, routines),
- motivation (e.g. rewards, feedback),
- social norms (e.g. peer comparisons), or
- environmental cues (e.g. default options, layout changes).

3. How was change measured?

Measures may include:

- behavioural data (e.g. step counts, phone usage logs),
- psychological self-report (e.g. intentions, confidence), or
- qualitative accounts (e.g. interviews, diaries).

Behavioural measures are often seen as stronger indicators of real-world change, but qualitative methods are essential for understanding why an intervention worked or failed; Michie & West, 2013).

4. Was behaviour change sustained over time? Many interventions show short-term success but limited long-term maintenance, especially when new behaviours compete with stress, habits and social pressures (Hennessy et al., 2020; Inzlicht & Friese, 2019).

Together, these questions help you evaluate both the strength of the evidence and the psychological explanations being offered.

7.2 Why cautious interpretation matters

Commented [JT80]: Seems to be conflating two things here: the aim of the study and the aim of the intervention. The latter is what question 2, below, is about. The aim of the study could be to see how well the intervention worked in general, identify who it worked for and who it didn't, explore reasons why it did or did not work, test whether an intervention that worked in a small-scale pilot still works when rolled out more widely, and so on.

Commented [JT81]: Being picky, this could be an answer to question 1: the aim of the study might have been to see if a short-term effect was sustained long-term.

Commented [Jo82]: I had put a comment at the start of this section saying - important - why? Would this be better at the start?

Commented [Ca83]: I like this activity that you have included. I agree with Jim about being more precise about the questions and answers, but it is shaping up nicely. It would be nice to give the students the summary of a real study for it, so that they can see what approaches the researchers used and have the questions as a multiple choice.

Psychologists are careful not to overstate what a single study can show. Even well-designed interventions can appear effective under controlled conditions but lose impact in everyday life due to emotional strain, competing goals, lack of social support, or environmental barriers.

For example, large reviews of health behaviour change consistently find that motivation and intentions alone are rarely sufficient for sustained change (Sheeran, 2002; Hennessy et al., 2020). This means that when you write about behaviour change, **strong answers need to:**

- avoid claiming that one strategy “solves” behaviour change,
- acknowledge the limits of the evidence, and
- link outcomes back to theory and context.

7.3 Applying skills

The questions above are not just for this week: you can use them whenever you read psychological research, regardless of topic (forensic, health, social, environmental, or cognitive). Over time, you are aiming to develop a flexible “toolkit” for reading:

- Aims: What is the study trying to find out **or change**?
- Methods: How is the phenomenon being studied (e.g. behaviour change) being measured, assessed or explored?
- Evidence: How **strong** are the findings?
- Context: Under what conditions does the effect occur (or fail)? How applicable are the findings to other situations or groups of people?

You may find it helpful to complete or revisit the OU Library activity on **reading academic research** (link) [[Developing critical reading in psychology | learn1](#)]. That activity focuses on the structure of academic articles, while this week shows how to apply those skills specifically to behaviour-change interventions.

In the next activity, you will apply these ideas to a short summary of a real research study.

Activity 7.1 Reading research on behaviour **change**

Allow around 20- 25 minutes to complete this activity

Below is an **extract summarising findings from a real behaviour change study by Olson and colleagues (2021), who evaluated a multi-step intervention to help students reduce their smartphone use.**

Study extract

Researchers tested a ten-step behavioural intervention designed to help university students reduce problematic smartphone use. Participants in the intervention group were introduced to a set of simple guidelines (for example, disabling non-essential notifications, keeping phones out of reach at night, and moving social media apps off the home screen). They chose which

Commented [Ge84]: this reads a little oddly, like essay writing advice

Commented [JT85R84]: Agree. As this section is about reading and evaluating, rather than writing, I'd frame it here more along the lines of what to watch out for when reading about interventions. For example, over-stated claims of a simple fix for a complex problem are a red flag.

Commented [Ca86R84]: If you include this section, you could adapt some of the content on flimsy interpretations from this OL course. The students could even be directed to this part of the course for their independent learning.
<https://www.open.edu/openlearncreate/mod/oucontent/view.php?id=221934§ion=5>

Commented [Ev87]: again i'd change the title for something that isn't too generic and vague

Commented [Ge88R87]: agreed - but here I also don't think we need so many subsections for this content

Commented [JT89]: Unless we're talking about action research, which I don't think we've talked about, studies aren't trying to effect change.

Commented [JT90]: 'clear'? I don't think we're talking about effect size here, because we've talked about a range of methods including quality approaches.

Commented [Sh91]: Is this the one you were thinking of?
[Developing critical reading in psychology | learn1](#)

Commented [GB92]: I think this is nice, but wonder if it might be better to get students to engage with some real research instead of a fictional example?

Commented [A93]: Instead of providing the excerpt from the article, since this is Week 14, could we have them actually go find the article in the OU library? Then, we don't have to clear the excerpt and then the direction above, about looking at the OU library resources, could be moved here and they could actually practice their 'finding and analyzing' skills

Commented [Ev94R93]: good idea!

Commented [Sh95R93]: I agree, it would be good for students to practice finding an article from a reference (reminder here: [Finding a journal article from a reference using Library Search | learn1](#)), and also practice navigating academic articles. Would it then work to signpost students to read the Abstract? I'm not sure if that's where this extract was taken from?

Commented [JT96R93]: I agree - as long as we *do* provide the article in the printed pack.

Commented [A97R93]: Jim, this would be required as part of the accessibility checks, but good reminder

Commented [Ca98R93]: Great idea everyone. Sorry, Stacey it was me that suggested a summary in an earlier review. At this stage of the module this would be a good activity. It would also feel up space to expand on some of the other content.

guidelines to follow and were encouraged to implement them for two weeks. A control group simply monitored their screen time without changing settings.

The researchers collected smartphone usage logs from the devices' built-in screen time monitoring features, as well as questionnaire measures of problematic smartphone use and sleep quality. After two weeks, students in the intervention group showed larger reductions in daily screen time (around an hour per day) and problematic smartphone use than the control group, and they reported modest improvements in sleep quality. At a six-week follow-up, some of the reductions in screen time and problematic use were still present, although effects were smaller and not all outcomes continued to differ clearly between groups.

Task

Answer the following questions (150–200 words in total):

1. What does the intervention aim to change, and which behavioural processes might be involved? (e.g. habits, environmental cues, competing demands, social expectations, routines)
2. What types of evidence did the researchers collect, and what methods do these represent? (e.g. behavioural / usage logs, psychological self-report scales, qualitative interviews)
3. Based on the extract, why might it be difficult for behaviour change to be sustained over time?
4. Suggest one realistic modification that could improve longer-term impact and explain why.

Provide your answer in the box below.

Interaction

Free response box for student answer

Discussion

The intervention aims to reduce problematic smartphone use by disrupting habitual phone-checking and making passive screen time less convenient. It targets processes such as habits (e.g. automatic scrolling), environmental cues (e.g. notifications, phone within reach), and routines around bedtime, by increasing the effort required to use the phone and reducing prompts.

The researchers collected behavioural / quantitative evidence from smartphone usage logs (daily screen time) and psychological self-report data from questionnaires on problematic smartphone use and sleep quality. Usage logs provide objective evidence of behaviour change, while questionnaires capture how participants subjectively experienced their phone use and sleep.

The study found that behaviour change was strongest in the first two weeks and then diminished. This may reflect the fading of initial motivation and the re-emergence of existing habits, routines and social expectations once students were no longer actively focused on the guidelines.

Commented [JT99]: 'study found'

One realistic modification would be to add ongoing support, such as periodic “booster” prompts or brief check-ins that encourage students to review and adjust their guidelines. This might help maintain attention to the new habits over time and make it easier to sustain changes alongside everyday academic and social demands.

end of activity

Now that you have practised evaluating and writing about behaviour change in applied settings using theory, evidence, and context, the final section of this week invites you to apply these ideas independently. The optional activities below allow you to explore how behaviour change is approached in real-world settings, including climate communication, digital wellbeing and everyday self-regulation.

8 Independent study options

This section offers optional activities to help you explore behaviour change in applied settings. Aim for around one hour of independent study by selecting the activities that feel most relevant or interesting to you.

These options are designed to extend the ideas introduced in Chapter 6 and across the week, by showing how behaviour change operates in real-world contexts shaped by:

- Habits and routines
- Stress and self-regulation
- Social identity and norm
- Wider systemic factors

You do not need to complete all of these activities - choose one or two that appeal to you.

Option 1: Behaviour change and climate communication

(Allow around 45-60mins)

Psychological research shows that climate messages are more effective when they align with people’s group identities and moral values, rather than relying on information alone (Mols et al., 2015; Ntontis et al., 2021). This reflects on ideas from Section 4, which showed how identity and social norms shape behaviour.

Task:

Visit the Britain Talks Climate resource (<https://climateoutreach.org/britain-talks-climate/>) and explore one audience segment.

In 150-200 words, describe:

- How identity and social norms are used to understand behaviour in that group.
- Why this group may respond differently to climate messages than other groups.
- One implication for designing behaviour change campaigns based on what you observed.

Commented [GB100]: I think this section also needs something which allows students to generalise this skill across other topics, so it might make sense add some additional narrative text and then link to an existing library skills activity on reading academic research?

Commented [GB101R100]: We then need a summary section for the week too ahead of independent study options

Commented [JT102]: I brought this up in Week 2 as well: optional activities and independent study are different things. We’ll need to figure this out for the module as a whole, as it’s not specific to this week.

Commented [JT103R102]: Also, placement needs to be after the Summary section, as we can’t include independent stuff in the Summary (we don’t know what students will have done).

This option links to Sections 4 and 6 on identity-based behaviour-change and intervention evaluation.

Option 2: Digital well-being and everyday behaviour

(Allow around 45-60mins)

This option examines how habits, cues, self-regulation and stress shape everyday technology use, and how digital tools attempt to support healthier behaviour.

Task:

Choose one of the following resources:

- Smartphone built in wellbeing tools (e.g. screen time limits, focus modes, notification control, or bedtime routines).
- Internet matters guidance for families and young people which provides advice on managing screen time, sleep, gaming, and social media use:- <https://www.internetmatters.org/advice/>

From your chosen resource, identify two tools or strategies (e.g. quiet mode, app timers, focus modes, screen-free zones)

In 150-200 words, explain:

- what each tool or strategy aims to change in behaviour,
- which psychological processes it relies on (habits, cues, self-regulation, competing goals),
- and one reason why it might work well for some people but not others

This option links to Chapter 6 (Habits and cues), section 5 (stress and self-regulation), and section 6 (evaluating behaviour change interventions).

Option 3: Behaviour Change in Health Campaigns – What Actually Helps People Change?

(Approx. 45 minutes)

This option focuses on how behaviour change principles are applied in real public health campaigns, linking directly to habits and cues (section 1), motivations and self-regulation (section 3), stress and competing demands (section 5), and intervention evaluation (section 6).

You will explore how campaigns try to support behaviour change in everyday, realistic conditions.

Task: Visit one of the following UK public health behaviour-change resources:

- NHS Better Health ([link](#))
- NHS Every Mind Matters ([link](#))

Choose one specific tool, campaign, or advice area (for example: physical activity, sleep, stress management, smoking, or healthy eating).

Then complete the three short tasks below:

1. Identify the behaviour change focus - what behaviour is the resource trying to change and does it focus mainly on habits and routines, motivation and goal-setting, cues and environmental structure, or managing stress and competing demands.

2. Link to Psychological Theory from Chapter 6. Using ideas from the chapter, briefly explain which psychological processes the resource relies on, for example:
 - reducing cognitive load through simplification,
 - strengthening self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977),
 - disrupting habit loops (Gardner, 2015),
 - supporting goal-directed behaviour (Carver & Scheier, 2011),
 - acknowledging stress and fatigue as barriers (Baumeister & Vohs, 2007; Hennessy et al., 2020)
3. Identify one realistic reason why the intervention might work well for some people but not others, for example:
 - Time pressure,
 - financial constraints,
 - family routines,
 - workplace demands,
 - low confidence, or
 - ongoing stressLink this to the chapter's argument that behaviour change does not happen in isolation from everyday pressures.

9 Summary and looking ahead

This week has explored why behaviour change is often more difficult than it appears, even when people are motivated and have clear intentions.

You began by revisiting key ideas from Chapter 6, including the intention-behaviour gap, habits and cues, motivation, and the influence of group norms and systemic factors. You then applied these ideas to social and environmental contexts, seeing how identity and attachment to place can both support and hinder collective behaviour change, for example in communities facing climate-related risks.

Next, you examined how stress, mental health and everyday pressures shape people's capacity to act on their intentions in practice. Research on self-regulation and cognitive load helped to explain why new behaviours are particularly fragile when people are tired, overloaded or managing competing goals.

You then turned to the evaluation of behaviour-change interventions, considering different types of evidence (behavioural measures, psychological indicators and qualitative approaches), the importance of long-term follow-up, and the role of context in shaping effectiveness. Finally, you developed your academic skills for reading and writing about behaviour change, using structured questions to analyse interventions and link evidence back to underlying psychological processes.

Together, these strands emphasise that behaviour change is rarely a simple matter of "telling people what to do". Instead, it emerges from the interaction of individual intentions and habits, social identities and norms, and the wider environments and systems in which people live. As you move on in the module, you will continue to

Commented [Ge104]: ideally the summary needs to summarise the whole week which includes the chapter. This will only involve a small tweak here to do that. I think the summary can probably be a little briefer than what is here though, sticking to key concepts, models and critiques which have been covered across the week's materials

Commented [JT105R104]: Agree on needing to summarise the whole week, including the chapter. The bigger issue for me, though, is the same as the Week 2 Summary: it's just a run-through of 'you read about x, y and z', rather than drawing out the main themes in a narrative. The first sentence and last para. here have a narrative, but the three para's in the middle don't.

build on these ideas by examining how people experience change over time, and how psychological research can inform more realistic, context-sensitive approaches to supporting behaviour change in the real world.