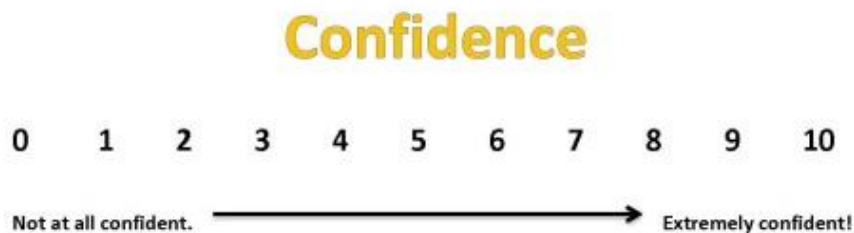




The term “self-efficacy” is one that does not receive much attention outside of the world of behavior change research. As a result of this, many people mistake self-efficacy for self-confidence. While the two terms are often related, they are not synonymous with one another. Self-confidence is relating to a person’s perception of their overall abilities and qualities (“I think I’m a great person”). Self-efficacy is a person’s belief in their ability to accomplish a specific task or goal (“I think I can quit smoking”).

Self-efficacy is crucial for any kind of behavior change, because if a person doesn’t believe they can achieve the behavior change, they are unlikely to be successful. After all, if you don’t think you’re going to succeed, why even try? Because of this connection between self-efficacy and success, it can be very valuable to spend time evaluating and addressing this topic in order to help your participants succeed.

One simple way to measure self-efficacy is by evaluating your participant’s confidence around a specific behavior change. You may use a scaling question similar to those available on [this assessment](#) ruler if you’re not sure how to present this question to a participant. “On a scale of 0-10, how confident are you that you will have accomplished (insert goal) by our next appointment.” The higher they rate their confidence around quitting smoking or staying alcohol free, the more likely they are to succeed.



If your participant has low confidence about making a specific change, there are a number of things you can do to help raise your participant’s self-efficacy. One way you can do this is by highlighting any progress they have already made toward their goal, as well as any success they may have had in the past. Bringing up these points may help the participant realize that they are closer to success than they originally thought.

Another action you can take, if your participant’s self-efficacy is low, is to simplify and specify what task they are to accomplish. “I will try not to smoke in the car” is a vague goal, but it could be improved with more specific wording such as “I will put my cigarettes in the trunk so I can’t smoke in my car”. We have

higher self-efficacy around goals we can visualize, and it is much easier to visualize specific goals over vague ones.

Also, if your participant's confidence around a goal is low, it may be beneficial to try to help them scale back the task. Let's say that they first set the goal of being smoke free by their next appointment, but when you measure their confidence they only come in at a 2/10. Try to help them scale back to a task they are more confident with. "So this is a task you really want to accomplish, but you're not feeling too confident at the moment. What if we changed it up a little bit? How confident are you that you can be cut down halfway by the next time we meet?" It is better to set small goals to build up your participant's self-efficacy, than to aim too high and end up lowering it if they don't succeed.

A third action you can take in order to help build up a participant's self-efficacy is to help them troubleshoot specific roadblocks that come in their way. For example, if their boyfriend isn't willing to quit with them, so they don't think they can quit at all anymore. Find out a smaller goal they're still interested in working towards, like cutting back. As always, any solutions that your participant comes up with are going to be more effective for them, so work hard to elicit ideas from them, and hold yourself back from throwing out suggestions.

One other valuable point to consider with self-efficacy is that it can be too high. There was a [recent study](#) in the Journal of Health Education and Behavior which found that if an individual's self-efficacy is too high, that they are less likely to accept assistance with behavior change. In terms of our programs, these are the women who turn down First Breath and My Baby & Me because "they can do it on their own". If this happens, a great way to delve a little deeper is to ask the participant about her confidence in specific situations (abstaining while she's with another smoker, while she's out with friends, while driving). Many times, our confidence comes down a little bit when we remember how tempted we are in those specific moments.