



# Practical Guide

to Gain Framing Messages in PrEP Counseling  
for Men Who Have Sex with Men  
and Transgender Women



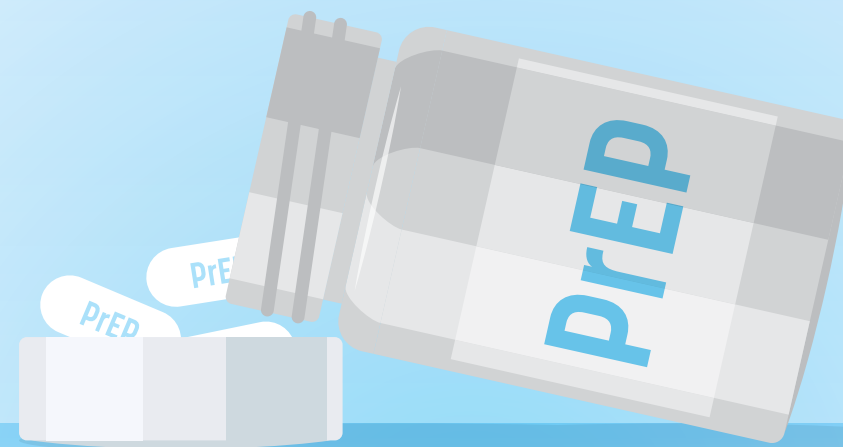
## Gain Framing and the Stages of Change

Message framing is an approach used in motivational interviewing. In this approach, the content of health messages corresponds to an individual's prevailing concerns and is communicated in a manner that maximizes its impact on a client's thoughts and behavior. A client's readiness to change is identified using the Stages of Change from Prochaska, DiClemente, and Norcross's Transtheoretical Model. Framed messages in each stage then help the client recognize the personal relevance of health information and initiate or maintain healthy behavioral practices.

Gain-framed messages refer to both the good things that will and the bad things that will not happen if the target behavior is adopted. Loss-framed messages refer to both the bad things that will and the good things that will not happen if the target behavior is not adopted. A message's framing does not alter its meaning. For example, the gain-framed message "If you take PrEP, you're protected from HIV" is semantically equivalent to the loss-framed

message "If you don't use PrEP, you're not protected from HIV." Framing should not refer to whether a choice or outcome is good or bad. Instead, it should refer to whether an option or possibility is communicated in terms of its positive or negative consequences. Various studies have shown that gain-framed health messages are more effective when targeting prevention behaviors. In contrast, loss-framed messages are more effective when targeting behaviors that detect the presence of a disease when clients acknowledge their risk.

Gain-framed messages protect the client's self-efficacy in making decisions, commitment to those decisions, and ultimately better adherence. Conversely, loss-framed messages may become prescriptive without appropriate practice, making the client feel like they are being told what to do by the counselor. This tool provides examples of gain-framed messages that correspond to the client's readiness (stage of change) to adopt PrEP as a prevention strategy.



\*This practical guide was developed based on lessons learned at the Tangerine Clinic and other key population-led health clinics in Thailand. The example messages may be adapted to the local context or to other counseling topics, such as same-day antiretroviral therapy (SDART)

## Stage of change



### Pre-contemplation



The client is not considering taking PrEP.

I have not heard of PrEP

Am I at risk of HIV?

I am concerned about the HIV test results every time I come here because it is difficult to use condoms all the time



## Stage specific messages



### Risk assessment:



- ✓ Assist the client in assessing their risk of HIV infection.
- ✓ Explore the impact of behaviors on health and wellbeing from the client's perspective.
- ✓ Provide personalized information about health problems (or other problems) that could result from their behavior.
- ✓ Discuss client's behavior in relation to their self-image.



### Offer alternatives and provide information:



- ✓ Discuss behavioral risk and/or harm reduction strategies.
- ✓ Provide information on protection provided by condoms.
- ✓ Provide information on protection provided by PrEP.
- ✓ "PrEP is highly effective for preventing HIV."
- ✓ "PrEP provides almost 100% protection against HIV."
- ✓ Provide information on combination prevention.



### Messages:

- ✓ "Condoms should be used just the same. But if the condom breaks or slips off, we still have PrEP to protect us."
- ✓ "PrEP and condoms together prevent HIV and STI. In situations where it may be difficult to use condoms, PrEP alone provides assurance that you are protected from HIV."
- ✓ "Although we detected gonorrhea/chlamydia today, PrEP can give you confidence that you are protected from HIV when you have sex."
- ✓ "Planning for sex is not always possible. Taking PrEP means you are always prepared."



### Help client move to next stage of change:

- ✓ "How might adopting PrEP fit with your lifestyles?"

## Stage of change



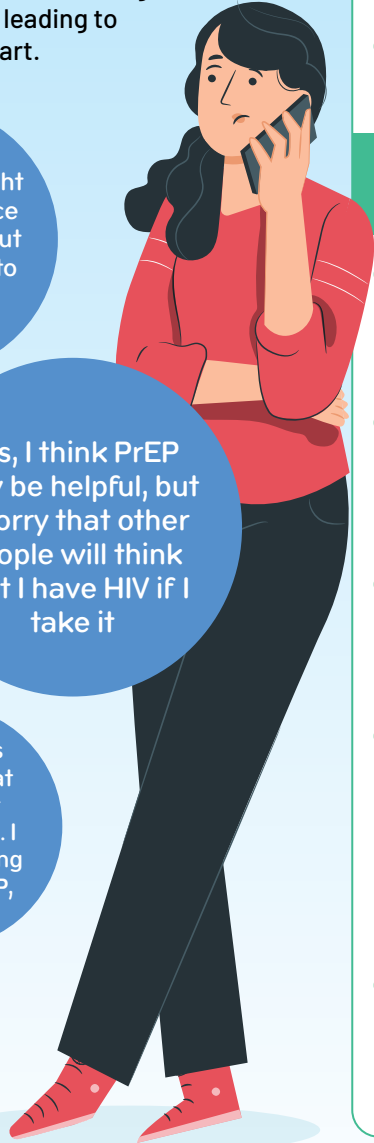
### Contemplation

The client sees the benefits of starting PrEP but also recognizes possible costs, leading to hesitation to start.

I think PrEP might be a good choice in prevention, but I am not ready to start taking medicine

Yes, I think PrEP may be helpful, but I worry that other people will think that I have HIV if I take it

I am always worried what my HIV test result will be. I am considering starting PrEP, but...



## Stage specific messages



### Explore ambivalence

Help the client to see why he or she is hesitant to take PrEP.

- ✓ "What are some of your concerns about taking PrEP?"



### Address concerns

- ✓ "Would you like to start PrEP today so you won't need to be anxious about HIV every time you have a blood test?"
- ✓ "Your visit to the health center shows that you care about your health and PrEP can help you maintain your health."
- ✓ "Sometimes it is difficult to use condoms every time but taking PrEP can prevent HIV and help relieve your worries."
- ✓ "Taking PrEP can prevent HIV when you may be at risk and you can stop when it is no longer needed. Taking PrEP when needed is better than getting infected with HIV and having to take medicine the rest of your life."
- ✓ "PrEP can be taken together with hormones. You can take them together every day."



### Identify and reinforce motivations:

Find out what will help the client make a decision more easily.

- ✓ "What do you think you can do to reduce your worries?"
- ✓ "You can rest assured that PrEP will not affect the hormones you are taking."
- ✓ "What for you would be some of the good things about taking PrEP?"
- ✓ "You can get PrEP and related health services for free."
- ✓ "Follow-up monitoring of liver and kidney functions is provided every six months to keep you healthy."
- ✓ "In addition to getting PrEP for free, you get free health check-ups every three months. And, if you should get an STI, you can get treated quickly as well."
- ✓ "Taking PrEP is not as scary as you think. Most people experience no side effects. However, if you ever have any concerns, we are here to help you, and you can stop if needed."
- ✓ "At some point, you may have unprotected sex or you may be unsure of your partner. PrEP can be a good option for HIV prevention in these situations."



### Discuss behavior in relation to self-image:

- ✓ "You told me you are very safe, but you also said you always worry about your HIV test result. What are the behaviors that have you worried about your test?"



### Increase self-efficacy:

- ✓ "Taking hormones, vitamins or nutritional supplements shows that you can take PrEP daily."
- ✓ "If you dislike taking pills, think of PrEP as a vitamin that will prevent HIV infection."
- ✓ "Let's explore what others have done to reduce their concerns about taking PrEP. Some of their methods may work for you too."
- ✓ "Unprotected sex is the major cause of sexually transmitted infections, like syphilis, gonorrhea, and HIV. PrEP will prevent HIV. PrEP together with condoms will prevent both HIV and other STIs."
- ✓ "PrEP enhances the power you have. You call the shots, make your own decisions, are independent and don't have to rely on your partner to prevent HIV."


## Stage of change



### Determination/ Preparation



The client is ready to start PrEP.



I want to prevent HIV by taking PrEP

## Stage specific messages



### Getting started/ make a plan:



Inform the client of the steps in preparing to take PrEP and follow-up monitoring.

- ✓ "We monitor your progress in taking PrEP and support your efforts by periodically monitoring your liver and kidney functions as well as STI and HIV status."
- ✓ "How do you think you will include PrEP into your daily routine?"
- ✓ "What method of PrEP, daily or event-driven, do you think would suit your lifestyle?"
- ✓ "Let's make a plan that will help you take PrEP effectively.  
(Note: The counselor should use Life Step Counseling, which is counseling to help the client develop a plan for taking PrEP. This includes the client identifying both potential barriers to taking PrEP and their solutions before they occur.)
- ✓ "You can choose a time of day to take PrEP that is convenient for you."



### Build self-efficacy, confidence, and practice skills:



- ✓ "Let's take a look at some applications that can help remind you when to take PrEP."
- ✓ "You now have a plan for taking PrEP. On a scale of 1 to 10, how confident do you now feel about taking PrEP? What makes you feel confident?"
- ✓ "You can contact us through your preferred social media application if you have any questions about taking PrEP."
- ✓ "You can carry doses of PrEP in a pill fob so that you can take it at the appointed time if not at home."
- ✓ "If you are traveling to your home province or abroad, remember to pack a supply of PrEP with you."
- ✓ "Friends, family members, or even your partner may not understand why you are taking PrEP. Or perhaps you are not ready to disclose taking PrEP. Let's role-play giving reasons for taking medicine in different situations."



### Support:

- ✓ "PrEP side effects are rare but easy to manage. If you experience any side effects, contact us by telephone or through LINE. We are here to help."
- ✓ "If you need treatment for STI, you can be treated while taking PrEP."
- ✓ "If you have already started PrEP but feel that you are no longer at risk, you may stop PrEP with a cessation plan."
- ✓ "PrEP doesn't need a lifetime commitment. If your sexual activity changes and you wish to stop taking PrEP, inform us when you come back for an HIV test before you stop."
- ✓ "Taking PrEP every day is simple. You can take it at the same time you take hormones or vitamins – easy to remember and no hassle."

## Stage of change



### Action

The client is taking PrEP



### Continued support:



- ✓ "PrEP provides assurance and peace of mind that you are protected from HIV."
- ✓ "You can contact us at any time if you need any assistance in taking PrEP or have any questions. We will send you a reminder about your follow-up visit."

## Stage specific messages



### Offer alternatives:



#### Promote PrEP together with condoms

- ✓ "PrEP will prevent HIV infection. But PrEP together with condoms will prevent HIV, STI and hepatitis."
- ✓ "PrEP gives you the power to prevent HIV, even if your partner refuses to use a condom."
- ✓ "PrEP will provide reassurance in situations in which you may have multiple partners."



### Follow-up:

#### Monitor the client's efforts to take PrEP

- ✓ Affirm the client's efforts in taking PrEP. "The way you are sticking to your PrEP regimen shows you really take your health seriously."
- ✓ "Let's review your recent experience in taking PrEP to see if there is any way that we can make it easier for you."  
(Note: The counselor should use Life Step Counseling to explore the client's experiences in taking PrEP and engage them in problem-solving to address any identified barriers to effective use.)
- ✓ "What would help you continue to take PrEP?"

## Stage of change



### Maintenance

The client anticipates triggers for relapse and identifies coping strategies.

Taking PrEP is now part of my sexual health routine

## Stage specific messages



### Recognize relapse as part of the change process:

- ✓ "You have been taking PrEP effectively, but is there still anything that may prevent you from taking PrEP along when they travel to another province or country. Others forget their follow-up appointments and run out of PrEP. We can make a plan to prevent these unforeseen obstacle to taking PrEP."



### Identify rewards:

- ✓ "Remember to reward yourself for using PrEP effectively. How do you usually reward yourself for a job well done?"
- ✓ "Continued use of PrEP can reassure you that you will not get HIV."



### Offer alternatives:

- ✓ "You can use the express service at the health center when you need a refill on PrEP, or you can use the telehealth service, then your refill will be sent directly to you."
- ✓ For MSM: "As your sexual behavior changes, you may change the way you take PrEP - from daily PrEP to event-driven PrEP and back again"



### Identify support:

#### Help the client identify peer support

- ✓ "Who among your friends has experience in taking PrEP that can remind and encourage you to take PrEP?"



### Become a role model:

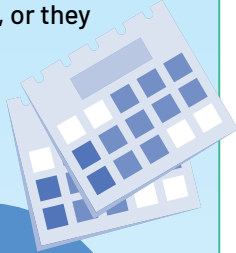
- ✓ "Do you have any friends who are considering PrEP or who have just started taking PrEP?. How might your experience in taking PrEP help them?"

## Stage of change



### Relapse

The client may have had a time when they didn't take PrEP, or they wish to stop taking PrEP.



I forgot to take PrEP this time, but I still want to take it

I don't want to continue taking PrEP



## Stage specific messages



### Recognize what leads to relapse:

Help the client to identify and understand circumstances that led to the missed dose(s) and/or wanting to stop taking PrEP.

- ✓ "A missed dose doesn't mean failure. It means that we have to review how you are taking PrEP."
- ✓ "Missing one dose will not likely affect the level of protection PrEP offers from HIV, but let's see what can help you not miss too many."
- ✓ "If you feel you need to stop PrEP, PrEP provides the flexibility to start and stop taking it as your lifestyle changes. What has changed for you?"



### Highlight triggers/ barriers:

Review the plan and encourage confidence that the client can continue taking PrEP as recommended.

- ✓ "Some clients carry PrEP with them in a pill fob when they are out of the house. How would this work for you?"
- ✓ "Others need not know you are taking PrEP. Let's review your plan when you take it."
- ✓ "When in situations where it may be difficult to take PrEP, condoms are effective in preventing HIV too, and they protect against STIs as well."



### Review and modify plan:

Identify what has worked and what has not.

- ✓ "You may have missed a dose, but all the doses you took before show how committed you are to protecting yourself."
- ✓ "What might help you avoid missed doses in the future? ... What has worked for you before?"
- ✓ "It's possible to switch between PrEP daily and event-driven PrEP as your lifestyle changes."



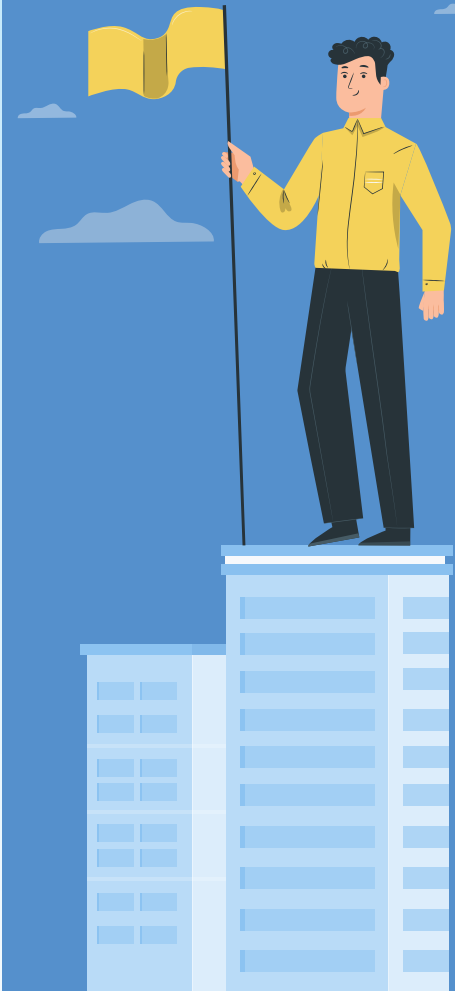
### In the event the client decides to discontinue PrEP

- ✓ "The effort you made to start PrEP shows how much you care – please make sure you come back for your final monitoring visit so you can continue to protect your health."
- ✓ "Condoms are effective in preventing HIV too, and they protect against STIs as well. We can provide you with some."
- ✓ "Using a personal, new needle and syringe when you inject helps prevent HIV infection. We can provide you with some."
- ✓ "If PrEP should fit your lifestyle again in the future, we can help you start again."



## Stage of change

### Termination



## Stage specific messages

The client is **100%** confident in all trigger situations or PrEP may no longer be needed. Remind the client to test regularly and that you are available for continued follow-up.



