

PUBLIC COMMITMENTS

People are far more likely to follow through on public commitments than private ones. So we usually ask the client to say out loud exactly what he's committing to. As many people feel awkward making public commitments, I like to give a rationale, something along these lines:

Therapist: What I'm about to ask you may seem a bit odd, but research shows that when people make public commitments, they're far more likely to keep them. So, if you're willing to, I'd like you to say out loud exactly what it is you're committing to—and as you say it, just notice any thoughts and feelings that arise.

Client: You mean, tell you what I've written?

Therapist: Yes, please. Say it out loud, like you really mean it. And notice what shows up in your mind and your body.

Client: I commit to taking the kids to the park on Saturday afternoon to play baseball.

Therapist: Great. You looked a bit uncomfortable as you said that. What feelings showed up?

Client: My stomach. It knotted up.

Therapist: And did your mind have anything unhelpful to say?

Client: You bet. I'm too busy with work. I don't have time. It's a hassle. Leave it till next month.

Therapist: So are you willing to make room for those thoughts and feelings in order to do what matters?

Client: Yes.

When clients speak their commitments out aloud, they commonly experience uncomfortable thoughts and feelings. It's useful to inquire about their private experiences and ensure that they're willing to make room for them.