



Behaviour-First Model for Change™

Change starts in the body. When your nervous system feels overwhelmed or unsafe, your brain will always choose behaviours that bring short-term relief, even if they keep you stuck. That's why knowing what you 'should' do isn't enough - your body has to feel safe enough to move first.

The Behaviour-First Model shows how protective patterns form, why they repeat, and how tiny, safe shifts in your physical state begin to update your brain's evidence of what 'safe' feels like. Through micro-choices and micro-movements, you gently move from protective behaviours into proactive ones that support your wellbeing and align with your values.

Repeated micro changes will build a new behaviour ladder for lasting change: Micro → Small → Medium → Large → Habit → Identity

Trigger & Protective Behaviour	What the brain thinks (short-term safety)	What actually happens (long-term impact)	Why your brain repeats it	Proactive Behaviour Choice (Micro)	Proactive Behaviour Choice (Small)
Stress	"This distracts me. My body feels less overwhelmed."	Nervous system stays dysregulated, stimulation increases anxiety, the real stressor remains.	The body gets brief relief, so the brain tags scrolling as "helpful."	Move your eyes away from the screen for 5 seconds, look into the distance and relax your shoulders.	Physically move away from the screen and take 3 slow breaths.
Scrolling your phone/screen					
Loneliness	"I feel less alone for a moment."	No real connection, isolation increases, mood drops.	Temporary soothing teaches the brain that TV reduces discomfort.	Turn your head slightly and look around the room to orient yourself to safety.	Message a friend or arrange a short social interaction.
Binge-watching TV					

Overwhelm	“Stopping protects me from danger. My body feels calmer.”	Tasks pile up, stress increases, self-criticism grows.	Avoidance reduces bodily tension immediately, reinforcing the loop.	Touch one object near you and name its texture.	Do one small, manageable action to reduce the task load.
Procrastination					
Social anxiety	“My heart rate drops when I cancel. That means I’m safer.”	Confidence decreases, isolation increases, anxiety strengthens.	The body exits threat mode instantly, so the brain predicts “cancel = safety.”	Place both feet flat on the floor and lengthen your spine by 1–2 cm.	Attend for a short time or set a clear arrival/exit plan.
Cancelling plans					
Emotional discomfort	“Food changes my internal state. I feel soothed.”	No emotional processing, guilt may follow, health can be impacted.	Dopamine hit creates a strong “this works” prediction.	Place your hand on your chest or stomach for one breath.	Use a grounding technique or choose a nourishing snack.
Comfort eating					
Feeling unsafe	“Stillness lowers threat signals. I feel calmer.”	Mood worsens, energy drops, problems remain.	The nervous system gets relief, so the behaviour is reinforced.	Move your hands or feet, or shift your position slightly.	Sit up or place both feet on the floor.
Staying in bed					
Conflict fear	“Avoiding conflict keeps me safe. My body feels less tense.”	Boundaries erode, resentment builds, authenticity decreases.	Avoiding the spike of threat reinforces the behaviour.	Relax your jaw or unclench your hands and take 3 breaths.	State one small boundary or express one honest preference.
People-pleasing					

Feeling out of control	“Doing more reduces panic. This keeps me safe.”	Burnout, dysregulation, health impacts.	Sense of control gives temporary relief, reinforcing overworking.	Pause for one breath and soften your shoulders.	Pause for 2 minutes, check in with your body, and set a realistic stopping point.
Overworking					
Fear of failure	“Perfecting reduces threat. My body feels less anxious.”	Paralysis, exhaustion, avoidance of risk.	Relief from anxiety teaches the brain that perfection = safety.	Exhale slowly and drop your shoulders by 1 cm.	Aim for “good enough” and complete the task without over-editing.
Perfectionism					
Distress or disconnection	“This changes my internal state. I feel less distressed.”	No real regulation, long-term harm, increased dysregulation.	Rapid shift in bodily state creates a strong safety prediction.	Place your feet firmly on the floor and notice one sensation.	Use a regulating activity such as breathing, movement, or talking to someone.
Alcohol/ substance use					

The brain treats feelings as facts, and it chooses behaviours that regulate the body, not behaviours that solve the problem.

- Knowing what you need to do is not enough to make you do it.
- Willpower alone can not change your behaviour.
- Motivation as a driver to getting started is a myth – movement **must** come first, then motivation to continue to move will follow.
- You must change your physical state, in a safe way, before your brain will update it’s evidence and allow you to make different, more positive choices, in the future.

Using Micro-Movements to initiate Action

Micro-movements gently activate your nervous system, particularly if you feel ‘stuck’ and just can’t get going or get started.

They work because they shift your body first, not your mind. They create a tiny spark of activation that the your brain can ‘catch’ and build on.

Below are practical examples you can try that are small enough for your nervous system to say ‘yes’ to while still feeling safe.

Micro-Movement	Activity Description
Finger Wake-Ups	Tap your fingertips together, drum lightly on a table, or rub your thumb and forefinger together. This creates sensory input that nudges your brain out of ‘freeze’.
One-Breath Shoulder Drop	Inhale once, exhale, let your shoulders fall. This interrupts tension and signals ‘safe enough to move’.
Micro Lean Forward	Shift your torso forward by 1–2 cm. Your brain will often activate when your body moves toward action.
Foot Press	Press one foot gently into the floor for two seconds. Grounding + activation = a tiny readiness cue.
Object Touch	Touch the nearest object to you (mug, pen, sleeve). This breaks the ‘static body = static brain’ loop.
Micro Stand	Shift weight as if <i>about</i> to stand, even if you don’t. This ‘pre-movement’ is often enough to trigger the next step.
One-Step Walk	Take a single step forward or sideways. Not a walk, just one step. Momentum often follows.
Tiny Stretch	Lift one arm 5cm, rotate wrist, or tilt your head slightly. Micro-stretching wakes proprioception and increases readiness.
Micro Reach	Reach your hand toward something by a few centimetres. The brain interprets reaching as ‘we’re doing something’.
The 2-Second Tidy	Move <i>one</i> item: pick up a sock, close a drawer, stack one paper. This is the smallest possible “task initiation”.

As micro proactive changes and micro-movements becomes a natural part of your daily life, your brain will start changing it’s evidence for what ‘safe’ feels like. You will be able to ‘ground’ yourself more easily. You will notice and name what’s happening in your body and your nervous system.

Your brain will drawn on this new information each time it tries to predicts what’s happening and keep you alive!