

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

**Navigating Action Crisis: Identifying Effective Support
Types to Sustain Goal Pursuit**

By

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June 2025

A paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in the
Master of Arts Program in the Social Sciences

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Abstract

This research explores how individuals in different stages of goal pursuit respond to various types of social support, with a particular focus on those experiencing action crisis, a motivational conflict about whether to persist or abandon a goal. Across two studies (N = 200), participants evaluated six types of support (evidentiary, value-focused, active listening, efficacy, instrumental, negative validation) in terms of perceived genuineness, self-verification, and emotional response. Study 1 presented hypothetical goal scenarios and scripted support messages, while Study 2 increased personal relevance by asking participants to reflect on a real goal and imagine support from a trusted close other. In both studies, support type significantly influenced participants' perceptions, with efficacy support consistently rated favorably across outcomes. Contrary to hypotheses, empathy-centered support types, especially negative validation, were not rated more positively during action crisis. Negative validation was rated lowest in Study 1 but received more moderate evaluations in Study 2, suggesting the tone and relational context of support delivery may influence its reception. Goal pursuit condition (implemental vs. action crisis) did not significantly moderate the effects of support type in most outcomes, though Study 2 revealed a significant interaction for self-verification, suggesting subtle interpretive differences based on motivational state. These findings highlight that while empathy may contribute to positive support experiences, confidence-boosting strategies like efficacy support may be equally or more effective, especially when delivered by someone the recipient trusts. The results underscore the importance of support tone, delivery context, and relationship closeness in shaping support effectiveness.

Navigating Action Crisis: Identifying Effective Support Types to Sustain Goal Pursuit

Pursuing goals is often accompanied by moments of doubt and frustration, especially when progress stalls or obstacles seem insurmountable. This state of internal conflict, known as action crisis, can lead to negative emotions and increase the risk of goal abandonment (Holding et al., 2017). Although it seems intuitive to offer encouragement and emotional uplift to people in action crisis, research suggests that this type of support may exacerbate the problem (Light & Chodos, 2022). By exploring how different forms of support affect people in action crisis, the current study seeks to identify the specific types of support that can motivate people in action crisis to continue pursuing their goals.

1.1 Typical Stages in Goal Pursuit: Deliberation, Implementation, and Disengagement

Goal pursuit involves three key stages: deliberation, implementation, and disengagement (Milyavskaya & Werner, 2018). People begin with goal deliberation, where they decide on whether a goal should be pursued based on its desirability and feasibility. Desirability is high when the goal's value is high, while feasibility is high if the likelihood of achieving the goal is high (Locke & Latham, 2002). Essentially, deliberating on whether a goal will be pursued involves pitting its desirability against its feasibility, such that people will only commit to those with a reasonable value-to-expectancy ratio.

Once an individual is committed to a goal, they enter the implementation stage, which involves a range of actions and cognitive processes aimed at goal achievement. This stage not only includes planning, where broader objectives are broken down into smaller manageable steps, but also feedback monitoring, such that adjustments can be made along the way (Gollwitzer, 1999; Harkin et al., 2016). Self-regulation is also critical during this stage since individuals need to resist temptations that hinder goal achievement (Werner et al., 2016).

However, not all aspects of goal pursuit need to be conscious and regulated. Some processes can become automatic or habitual, such as exercising at the same time every day without needing external motivation or reminders (Wood & Neal, 2007).

When a goal is no longer perceived as desirable or feasible, disengagement occurs when people abandon the goal (Milyavskaya & Werner, 2018). However, the decision to disengage is not always immediate or straightforward. Many individuals experience a period of internal conflict, known as action crisis, before ultimately deciding whether to persist. Understanding this critical phase of goal pursuit sets the foundation for the present research, which seeks to explore how different types of social support can help individuals navigate action crisis and sustain their efforts.

1.2 A Unique Stage in Goal Pursuit: Action Crisis

Goal pursuit and disengagement can happen simultaneously during action crisis, the stage where people experience significant internal conflict about whether to continue striving toward the goal or to abandon it. Action crisis is characterized by decreases in goal desirability and attainability, often resulting from recurring setbacks and obstacles, as well as sudden changes in life circumstances that deplete personal resources (Holding et al., 2017). Inability to address action crisis properly can lead to many affective, physiological, and cognitive consequences. For instance, intense action crisis in personal goals predict decreased life satisfaction and reduced positive affect (Holding et al., 2017). Action crisis is also related to increased health complaints, greater stress, and decreased running performance in marathoners (Holding et al., 2017). To mitigate the adverse effects of action crisis, this study seeks to explore the types of support that are effective in helping people overcome this challenging state.

1.3 Types of Support

Support during goal pursuit can take various forms, often overlapping in their focus on rebuilding confidence, validating emotions, or enhancing motivation (Hsu et al., 2021; Slotter & Gardner, 2014). Some support types, such as affirming one's abilities or highlighting past successes, aim to restore confidence and resilience. Others focus on emotional understanding by listening attentively or acknowledging negative feelings without pressuring for optimism, fostering a sense of autonomy and alignment with the individual's self-concept (Itzhakov et al., 2018; Muraven et al., 2008). Practical guidance and resources can also help individuals feel capable of breaking down and tackling their goals, while emphasizing the value and purpose of the goal can renew motivation (Koestner et al., 2012; Lee & Ybarra, 2017). Understanding different support types' unique and overlapping contributions can help people identify what makes support effective during action crises, particularly in helping individuals sustain their efforts and maintain emotional well-being. The current study identified and examined six types of support to compare their effectiveness in motivating individuals experiencing an action crisis.

Evidentiary Support. Evidentiary support helps the support recipient restore confidence by providing evidence of their capability, reminding them of their past achievements, and stabilizing their threatened self-concept (Slotter & Gardner, 2014).

Efficacy Support. Efficacy support involves the expression of affirmation through language or other nonverbal cues, which can help increase people's confidence in their ability to achieve their goals, also known as self-efficacy (Hsu et al., 2021). Higher self-efficacy is associated with stronger intentions to persist and greater resilience in the face of obstacles (Hsu et al., 2021).

Negative Validation. Negative validation involves acknowledging someone's negative feelings and unique perspective, without excessive control and pressures for optimism (Koestner et al., 2012). Such support is effective at restoring goal motivation by promoting a sense of autonomy (Muraven et al., 2008).

Active Listening. Simply receiving high-quality listening can increase someone's attitude clarity by reducing their anxiety and increasing their awareness of attitude-relevant knowledge (Itzhakov et al., 2018).

Instrumental Support. Instrumental support is when the supporter provides the recipient with concrete guidance, knowledge, and resources that aid goal achievement, such as outlining the necessary steps to achieve a goal, or sharing advice based on personal experiences (Koestner et al., 2012).

Value-Focused Support. Since goal pursuit involves the constant evaluation of value and expectancy, value-focused support can enhance motivation by emphasizing the goal's inherent importance, rather than the potentially exhausting process of pursuing it (Lee & Ybarra, 2017; Sun et al., 2014).

Different support types have different effects on three key variables: the goal pursuer's perception of the support, whether the support seems aligned with their self-concept, and their emotional reactions. These variables not only indicate people's receptiveness to various support types, but also predict the support's effectiveness in facilitating continued goal pursuit. People are more receptive to support when they perceive the supporter as genuinely caring and wanting to help (Kappes & Shrout, 2011). Additionally, support that fosters positive emotions enhances both receptiveness and resilience during crises (Frederickson et al., 2003). Support that aligns with the goal pursuer's self-concept is also received more favorably, whereas support

conveying overly positive beliefs may lower receptiveness by clashing with the goal pursuer's self-concept (Light & Chodos, 2022). Given that our study examines how different types of support affect people's emotional responses and self-verification during action crisis, understanding the role of support perception, self-concept alignment, and emotional positivity is critical for predicting which support types will be most effective.

1.4 Overview of Current Studies

Action crisis is a unique phase in goal pursuit where individuals experience inner conflict about whether to persist or give up. Although people in most phases of goal pursuit respond positively to encouragement, Light and Chodos (2022) found that those in action crisis often view morale-boosting efforts unfavorably, leading to increased negative emotions. This exploratory research aims to address this question: what types of support are more likely to be positively received by people in action crisis? To answer it, we conducted two studies to examine the effect of support type during action crisis on three dependent variables: the goal pursuer's perception of whether the support seems genuine, the extent to which the support aligns with their self-concept, and their emotional responses. In Study 1, goal pursuit condition (implementation vs. action crisis) and support type were manipulated through detailed hypothetical scenarios, where participants imagined themselves as a college student pursuing a fitness goal and receiving scripted support messages from a hypothetical friend. In Study 2, participants reflected on a real goal they were currently pursuing and imagined receiving support from a real close other, guided by brief prompts rather than scripted wording.

We hypothesized that during action crisis, empathy-centered support like active listening and negative validation would result in greater perceived genuine intentions, stronger self-verifying perceptions, and more pleasant emotions than support focused on restoring confidence

or providing practical aid. Compared to other support types, empathy-centered support emphasizes emotional connection and non-coercive reassurance, which are more closely linked to perceived genuineness, alignment with one's self-concept, and positive feelings of relaxation and stress relief (Frederickson et al., 2003; Light & Chodos, 2022; Marigold et al., 2014). If findings do not support this hypothesis, it would suggest that individuals in action crisis may prioritize different support needs than anticipated, such as valuing confidence restoration over emotional empathy, or that effective support may be more universally appreciated across goal pursuit stages, rather than being unique to action crisis.

2. Study 1

Study 1 examined how people respond to different types of support in controlled, hypothetical scenarios where both the goal and the support message were scripted.

2.1 Method

2.1.1 Participants

Participants were 100 adults recruited through Prolific, $M_{\text{age}} = 37$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 13.1$, 65% females. The inclusion criteria were: 1) age 18 or older, and 2) residence in one of four English-speaking countries: the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, or Ireland.

2.1.2 Procedure

Data was collected via an online survey developed in Qualtrics and distributed through Prolific. Participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions, Goal Implementation or Action Crisis, using a between-subjects design. Each participant read a condition-specific prompt intended to induce either an implementation or action crisis mindset.

Following the initial prompt, participants read six support scenarios, each depicting a different type of support provided by a hypothetical close friend, Alex. After each scenario,

participants completed questionnaires indicating their perception of the support's genuineness, their sense of self-validation, and their own emotional reactions. This within-subjects procedure exposed participants to all six support types, allowing them to serve as their own controls.

2.1.3 Measures

Goal Pursuit Condition Manipulation. The between-subjects manipulation (implementation vs. action crisis) involves two hypothetical scenarios, both centered on a hypothetical exercise goal related to fitness and health (see Appendix A). These scenarios depict similar contexts, except for the goal pursuit phase they are intended to evoke. Each scenario invites participants to imagine themselves as a college student striving to maintain a fitness routine amidst their busy work and education schedule. The implementation scenario focuses on evoking participants' motivation and commitment to the goal. In contrast, the action crisis condition highlights self-doubt and hesitation about pursuing the goal due to challenges and the lack of desired results.

Support Message Manipulation. The within-subjects manipulation includes six different scenarios in which the hypothetical close friend, Alex, provides support in six distinct ways (see Appendix A).

Action Crisis Scale. The Action Crisis Scale assesses the level of action crisis someone experiences by measuring rumination and feelings of being torn and trapped. In this study, the scale served as a manipulation check.

Support and Relationship Assessment. Dependent variables were measured using the Support and Relationship Assessment, the Self-Verification scale, and the Affect Grid. The Support and Relationship Assessment, adapted from Marigold et al. (2014), is a 7-point Likert scale with eight items assessing the extent to which the support is perceived as genuine.

Self-Verification Scale. The Self-Verification scale, a single-item 7-point Likert scale created for this study, measured whether the participant perceived the support as aligned with their self-view and goal.

Affect Grid. The Affect Grid, adapted from Light and Chodos (2022), is a 9x9 grid measuring energy level (increasing bottom-to-top) alongside emotional positivity (increasing left-to-right). Participants indicated their emotional response to each support scenario by selecting a specific square on the grid, which represents a unique combination of energy and positivity.

2.2 Results

2.2.1 Manipulation Check

An independent samples t-test comparing action crisis scale scores between the two between-subjects conditions confirmed that the manipulation was successful, $t(98) = -2.09$, $p = .039$. Participants in the action crisis condition reported significantly higher levels of action crisis ($M_{ac} = 5.33$, $SD_{ac} = 0.74$) than those in the implemental condition ($M_{im} = 4.99$, $SD_{im} = 0.89$).

2.2.2 Support and Relationship Assessment

We conducted a 2 (goal pursuit condition: implemental vs action crisis) x 6 (support types: evidentiary, value-focused, efficacy, active listening, instrumental, negative validation) mixed-design repeated measures ANOVA, with support type as a within-subjects factor. It was conducted to examine how the six support types affected support perception in the implementation and action crisis conditions, respectively. Support type had a significant main effect on support perception, $F(5, 445) = 32.85$, $p < .001$. Negative validation received the lowest ratings across support types ($M_{im} = 4.73$, $M_{ac} = 4.89$), significantly lower than all other support

types according to Tukey post hoc comparisons ($ps < .001$). In contrast, no significant differences were found among the other support types ($ps > .05$): evidentiary ($M_{im} = 5.84$, $M_{ac} = 6.00$), value-focused ($M_{im} = 6.00$, $M_{ac} = 5.95$), efficacy ($M_{im} = 5.98$, $M_{ac} = 5.96$), active listening ($M_{im} = 5.35$, $M_{ac} = 5.76$), and instrumental ($M_{im} = 5.77$, $M_{ac} = 5.89$), all of which were rated moderately to highly positive.

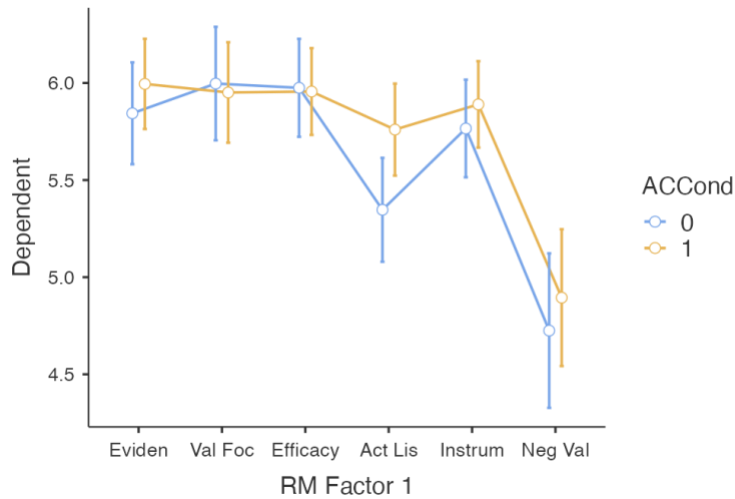
Table 1

Study 1: Support and Relationship Assessment Means (Support Type x Goal Pursuit Condition)

Estimated Marginal Means - RM Factor 1 * ACCond

ACCond	RM Factor 1	Mean	SE	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower	Upper
0	Eviden	5.84	0.132	5.58	6.11
	Val Foc	6.00	0.147	5.70	6.29
	Efficacy	5.98	0.127	5.72	6.23
	Act Lis	5.35	0.135	5.08	5.61
	Instrum	5.77	0.126	5.51	6.02
	Neg Val	4.73	0.200	4.33	5.12
1	Eviden	6.00	0.117	5.76	6.23
	Val Foc	5.95	0.130	5.69	6.21
	Efficacy	5.96	0.112	5.73	6.18
	Act Lis	5.76	0.119	5.52	6.00
	Instrum	5.89	0.112	5.67	6.11
	Neg Val	4.89	0.177	4.54	5.25

Note. ACCond = Goal Pursuit Condition (0 = Implemental, 1 = Action Crisis); RM Factor 1 = Support Type.

Figure 1*Study 1: Support and Relationship Assessment Means (Support Type x Goal Pursuit Condition)*

Contrary to expectations, goal pursuit condition had no significant main effect on support perception, $F(1, 89) = 0.98, p = .324$, nor was there a significant interaction between goal pursuit condition and support type, $F(5, 445) = 1.09, p = .366$. Participants responded similarly to different support types regardless of whether they were in an action crisis. Negative validation remained consistently ineffective, while the other support types were rated as moderately to highly effective across both goal pursuit conditions.

2.2.3 Self-Verification Scale

A similar 2 x 6 mixed-design repeated measures ANOVA was conducted to examine how the six support types affected self-verification in the implementation and action crisis conditions, respectively. Similar to patterns observed for support perception, support type had a significant main effect on self-verification, $F(5, 490) = 12.25, p < .001$. Negative validation received the lowest ratings across support types ($M_{im} = 5.14, M_{ac} = 5.25$), significantly lower than all other support types according to Tukey post hoc comparisons ($ps < .001$). In contrast, no significant

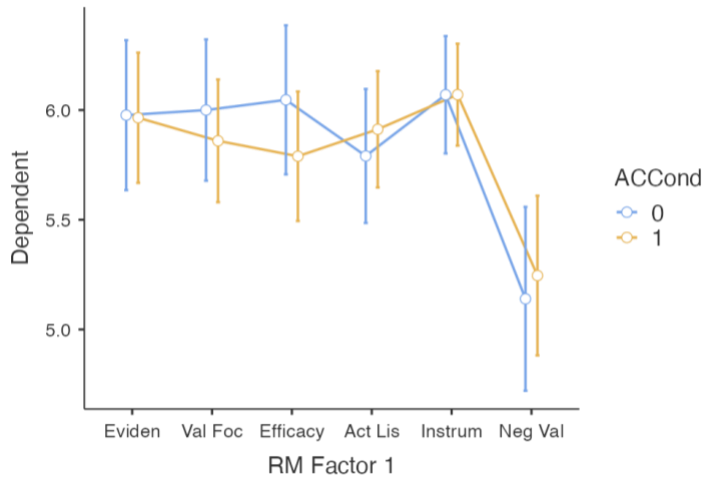
differences were found among the other support types ($ps > .05$): evidentiary ($M_{im} = 5.98$, $M_{ac} = 5.96$), value-focused ($M_{im} = 6.00$, $M_{ac} = 5.86$), efficacy ($M_{im} = 6.05$, $M_{ac} = 5.79$), active listening ($M_{im} = 5.79$, $M_{ac} = 5.91$), and instrumental ($M_{im} = 6.07$, $M_{ac} = 6.07$), all of which were rated moderately to highly positive.

Table 2

Study 1: Self-Verification Means (Support Type x Goal Pursuit Condition)

Estimated Marginal Means - RM Factor 1 * ACCond

ACCond	RM Factor 1	Mean	SE	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower	Upper
0	Eviden	5.98	0.172	5.64	6.32
	Val Foc	6.00	0.162	5.68	6.32
	Efficacy	6.05	0.171	5.71	6.39
	Act Lis	5.79	0.154	5.49	6.10
	Instrum	6.07	0.135	5.80	6.34
	Neg Val	5.14	0.211	4.72	5.56
1	Eviden	5.96	0.150	5.67	6.26
	Val Foc	5.86	0.141	5.58	6.14
	Efficacy	5.79	0.149	5.49	6.08
	Act Lis	5.91	0.134	5.65	6.18
	Instrum	6.07	0.117	5.84	6.30
	Neg Val	5.25	0.183	4.88	5.61

Figure 2*Study 1: Self-Verification Means (Support Type x Goal Pursuit Condition)*

Again, goal pursuit condition had no significant main effect on self-verification, $F(1, 98) = 0.04, p = .842$, nor was there a significant interaction between goal pursuit condition and support type, $F(5, 490) = 0.65, p = .661$. These results suggest that different support types had similar effects on self-verification across both goal pursuit conditions, with most support types consistently rated as moderately to highly effective, except for negative validation which was rated poorly.

2.2.4 Affect Grid

Two 2 x 6 mixed-design repeated measures ANOVAs were conducted to assess how the six support types influenced participants' emotional energy and positivity across goal pursuit conditions. Support type had a significant main effect on both energy, $F(5, 490) = 26.83, p < .001$, and positivity, $F(5, 490) = 23.64, p < .001$. Similar to patterns observed for support perception and self-verification, negative validation scored lowest on both emotional energy ($M_{im} = 5.14, M_{ac} = 5.28$) and positivity ($M_{im} = 4.84, M_{ac} = 5.16$), corresponding to

depressing emotions. Meanwhile, other support types generally showed high energy and moderate positivity. For example, efficacy support ($M_{im} = 7.44$, $M_{ac} = 7.21$ for energy; $M_{im} = 7.05$, $M_{ac} = 6.58$ for positivity), value-focused support ($M_{im} = 7.23$, $M_{ac} = 7.26$ for energy; $M_{im} = 6.88$, $M_{ac} = 6.40$ for positivity), and evidentiary support ($M_{im} = 7.09$, $M_{ac} = 7.54$ for energy; $M_{im} = 6.44$, $M_{ac} = 6.26$ for positivity) seem to elicit moderately pleasant emotions.

Table 3

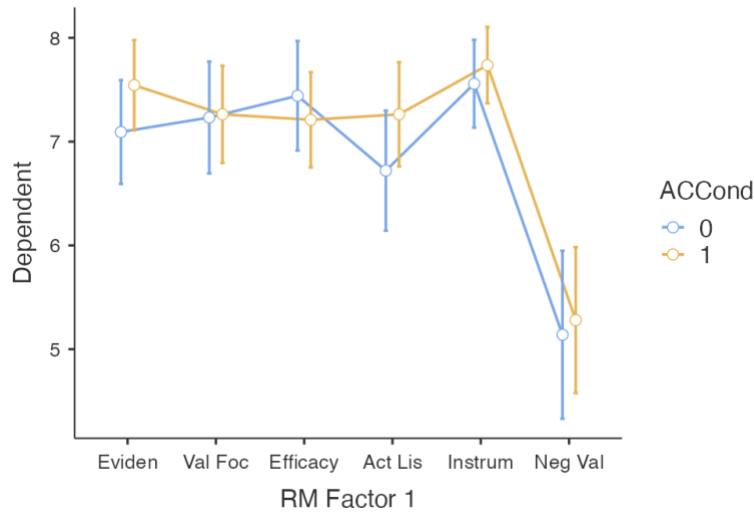
Study 1: Emotional Energy Means (Support Type x Goal Pursuit Condition)

Estimated Marginal Means - RM Factor 1 * ACCond

ACCond	RM Factor 1	Mean	SE	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower	Upper
0	Eviden	7.09	0.252	6.59	7.59
	Val Foc	7.23	0.272	6.69	7.77
	Efficacy	7.44	0.266	6.91	7.97
	Act Lis	6.72	0.291	6.14	7.30
	Instrum	7.56	0.213	7.13	7.98
	Neg Val	5.14	0.408	4.33	5.95
1	Eviden	7.54	0.219	7.11	7.98
	Val Foc	7.26	0.236	6.80	7.73
	Efficacy	7.21	0.231	6.75	7.67
	Act Lis	7.26	0.253	6.76	7.77
	Instrum	7.74	0.185	7.37	8.10
	Neg Val	5.28	0.354	4.58	5.98

Figure 3

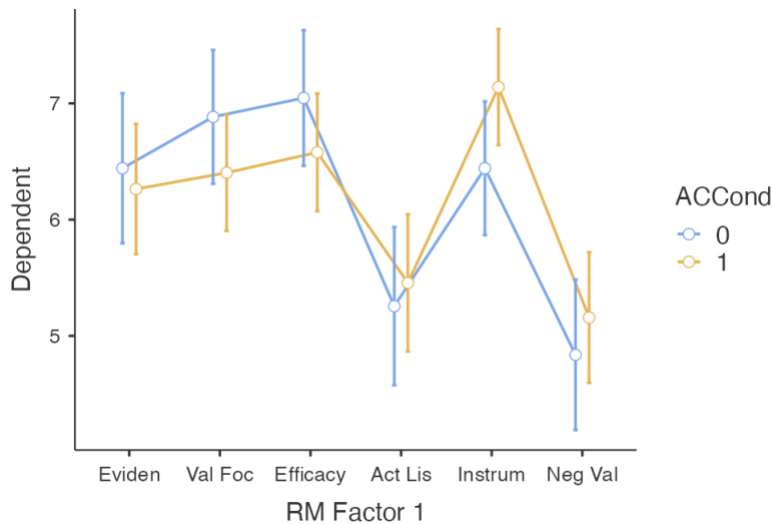
Study 1: Emotional Energy Means (Support Type x Goal Pursuit Condition)

**Table 4**

Study 1: Emotional Positivity Means (Support Type x Goal Pursuit Condition)

Estimated Marginal Means - RM Factor 1 * ACCond

ACCond	RM Factor 1	Mean	SE	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower	Upper
0	Eviden	6.44	0.325	5.80	7.09
	Val Foc	6.88	0.290	6.31	7.46
	Efficacy	7.05	0.294	6.46	7.63
	Act Lis	5.26	0.342	4.58	5.94
	Instrum	6.44	0.290	5.87	7.02
	Neg Val	4.84	0.326	4.19	5.48
1	Eviden	6.26	0.282	5.70	6.82
	Val Foc	6.40	0.252	5.90	6.90
	Efficacy	6.58	0.255	6.07	7.09
	Act Lis	5.46	0.297	4.87	6.05
	Instrum	7.14	0.252	6.64	7.64
	Neg Val	5.16	0.283	4.60	5.72

Figure 4*Study 1: Emotional Positivity Means (Support Type x Goal Pursuit Condition)*

Goal pursuit condition had no significant main effect on emotional energy, $F(1, 98) = 0.67, p = .414$, or emotional positivity, $F(1, 98) = 0.003, p = .957$. Likewise, there were no significant interactions between goal pursuit condition and support type for emotional energy, $F(5, 490) = 0.69, p = .634$, or emotional positivity, $F(5, 490) = 2.12, p = .062$. Thus, the emotional impact of different support types remained consistent across goal pursuit conditions, with most support types eliciting moderately pleasant emotions, except for negative validation, which was associated with more depressing emotional responses.

2.3 Discussion

Study 1's results did not support the specific hypothesis that empathy-centered support would be rated more positively in action crisis than in implementation. First, goal pursuit condition had no significant main effect or interaction with support type on any of the dependent variables, indicating that participants responded similarly to different support types regardless of motivational state. Second, the empathy-centered support types, negative validation and active

listening, were not rated most positively. Negative validation was consistently rated the lowest across outcomes. Although active listening was perceived as moderately effective, it was not significantly more effective than the other support types.

In Study 1, goal pursuit condition's lack of significant main effect may be attributed to the goal scenarios' hypothetical nature, which may have reduced personal relevance for participants. To address this limitation, Study 2 prompted participants to reflect on a real goal they were currently pursuing, thereby increasing personal relevance and motivational salience. In addition, we refined the operationalization of the support messages to examine whether differences in support effectiveness across goal pursuit conditions would emerge under more ecologically valid conditions.

Finally, although empathy-centered support such as active listening was perceived as relatively genuine, self-verifying, and emotionally pleasant, the consistently low ratings for negative validation complicate the interpretation. Both active listening and negative validation were designed to convey empathy, yet only active listening was consistently rated positively. This discrepancy may reflect differences in tone. The active listening prompt used neutral, reflective phrasing ("Do you think you're putting too much pressure on yourself to see results fast?"), whereas the negative validation prompt conveyed a heavier sense of hopelessness ("It's really hard, and it sucks..."). Such negativity may have crossed the line from empathy into emotional overwhelm, making the supporter appear less attuned to participants' self-views. To address this issue, Study 2 incorporated a refined operationalization of negative validation to better distinguish supportive empathy from emotional negativity.

3. Study 2

Study 2 examined how people respond to different types of support in a more personally meaningful context, so that participants reflected on a real goal they were currently pursuing and imagined receiving support from a close other based on general prompts.

3.1 Method

3.1.1 Participants

Participants were 100 adults recruited through Prolific, $M_{\text{age}} = 38.2$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 11.7$, 67% females, 2% non-binary individuals. The inclusion criteria were: 1) age 18 or older, and 2) residence in one of four English-speaking countries: the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, or Ireland.

3.1.2 Procedure

The data collection procedure was similar to Study 1. Participants completed a Qualtrics survey distributed via Prolific and were randomly assigned to one of two between-subjects conditions: Goal Implementation or Action Crisis. Each participant read a condition-specific prompt intended to induce either an implementation mindset or an action crisis mindset. Unlike Study 1, however, the prompt in Study 2 asked participants to think about a real goal they were currently pursuing that matched the assigned condition.

After reading the prompt, participants were asked to provide the name of someone they trust. The Qualtrics survey was JavaScript-coded so that this name appeared throughout the survey in the six support scenarios. Each support scenario described a different type of support imagined as coming from the close other with that name. Unlike Study 1 which presented participants with scripted statements, Study 2 used more open-ended prompts, such as “Imagine if [close other] motivated you by reminding you of a time you showed resilience and strength.”

After each scenario, participants completed the same outcome measures as in Study 1: the Support and Relationship Assessment, the Self-Verification Scale, and the Affect Grid.

3.2 Results

3.2.1 Manipulation Check

An independent samples t-test on Action Crisis Scale scores confirmed the success of the manipulation, $t(99) = -6.40, p < .001$. Participants in the action crisis condition reported significantly higher levels of action crisis ($M_{ac} = 4.88, SD_{ac} = 0.92$) than those in the implemental condition ($M_{im} = 3.56, SD_{im} = 1.15$).

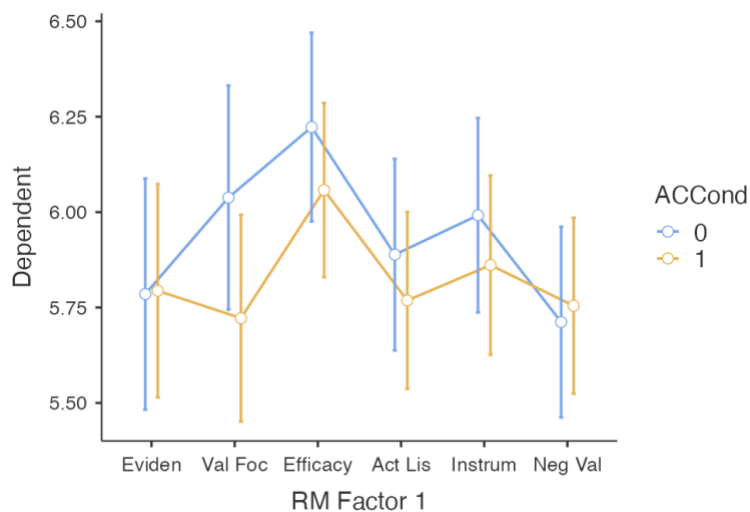
3.2.2 Support and Relationship Assessment

A 2 x 6 mixed-design repeated measures ANOVA was conducted to assess the effect of support type on support perception across goal pursuit conditions. In line with results from Study 1, support type had a significant main effect on support perception, $F(5, 490) = 4.29, p < .001$. Despite this significant main effect, Tukey post hoc tests in Study 2 revealed no significant pairwise differences between individual support types. This pattern may be explained by the relatively large error bars compared to the small differences between means, indicating high variability among participants. In contrast to negative validation's low ratings in Study 1, Study 2 saw negative validation clustered with the other support types at moderate levels, while efficacy support was rated modestly higher ($M_{im} = 6.22, M_{ac} = 6.06$).

Table 5*Study 2: Support and Relationship Assessment Means (Support Type x Goal Pursuit Condition)*

Estimated Marginal Means - RM Factor 1 * ACCond

ACCond	RM Factor 1	Mean	SE	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower	Upper
0	Eviden	5.79	0.153	5.48	6.09
	Val Foc	6.04	0.148	5.74	6.33
	Efficacy	6.22	0.125	5.98	6.47
	Act Lis	5.89	0.127	5.64	6.14
	Instrum	5.99	0.128	5.74	6.25
	Neg Val	5.71	0.126	5.46	5.96
1	Eviden	5.79	0.141	5.51	6.07
	Val Foc	5.72	0.137	5.45	5.99
	Efficacy	6.06	0.115	5.83	6.29
	Act Lis	5.77	0.117	5.54	6.00
	Instrum	5.86	0.118	5.63	6.10
	Neg Val	5.75	0.116	5.52	5.99

Figure 5*Study 2: Support and Relationship Assessment Means (Support Type x Goal Pursuit Condition)*

The goal pursuit condition had no significant main effect on support perception, $F(1, 98) = 0.72, p = .397$, nor was there a significant interaction between goal pursuit condition and support type, $F(5, 490) = 0.87, p = .498$.

3.2.3 Self-Verification

A 2 x 6 mixed-design repeated measures ANOVA was conducted to assess the effect of support type on self-verification across goal pursuit conditions. In contrast to results from Study 1, support type had a non-significant effect on self-verification that approaches significance, $F(5, 490) = 2.03, p = .073$. Moreover, the ranking of support types differed. In Study 1, negative validation was rated the least helpful. In Study 2, all support types clustered around means between 5.6 and 6.0, with efficacy support being rated slightly higher in self-verification than others ($M_{im} = 6.22, M_{ac} = 5.98$). However, efficacy support also exhibited slightly larger error bars compared to other types, indicating greater variability among participants' ratings. These findings suggest that participants may have perceived support types differently when imagining support from someone they personally know.

Table 6

Study 2: Self-Verification Means (Support Type x Goal Pursuit Condition)

Estimated Marginal Means - RM Factor 1 * ACCond

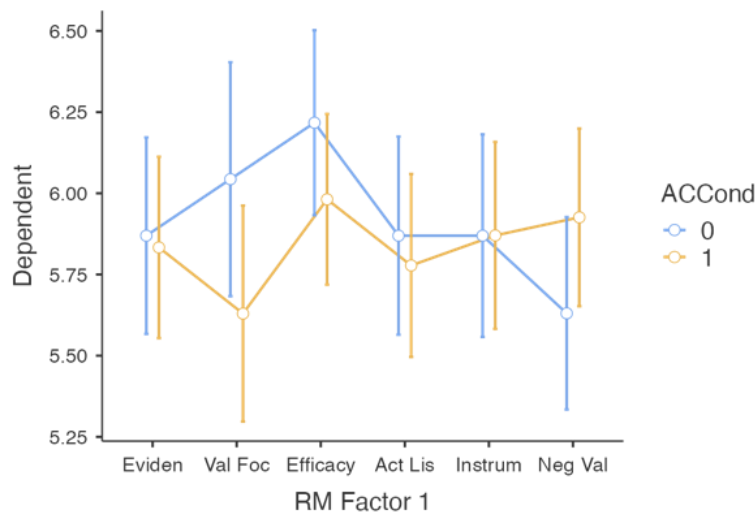
ACCond	RM Factor 1	Mean	SE	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower	Upper
0	Eviden	5.87	0.152	5.57	6.17
	Val Foc	6.04	0.182	5.68	6.40
	Efficacy	6.22	0.143	5.93	6.50
	Act Lis	5.87	0.154	5.56	6.17
	Instrum	5.87	0.157	5.56	6.18
	Neg Val	5.63	0.149	5.33	5.93
1	Eviden	5.83	0.141	5.55	6.11
	Val Foc	5.63	0.168	5.30	5.96

Estimated Marginal Means - RM Factor 1 * ACCond

ACCond	RM Factor 1	Mean	SE	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower	Upper
	Efficacy	5.98	0.132	5.72	6.24
	Act Lis	5.78	0.142	5.50	6.06
	Instrum	5.87	0.145	5.58	6.16
	Neg Val	5.93	0.138	5.65	6.20

Figure 6

Study 2: Self-Verification Means (Support Type x Goal Pursuit Condition)



The goal pursuit condition had no significant main effect on self-verification, $F(1, 98) = 0.26, p > .05$, but there was a significant interaction between goal pursuit condition and support type, $F(5, 490) = 2.25, p > .05$.

3.2.4 Affect Grid

Two 2 x 6 mixed-design repeated measures ANOVAs were conducted to assess how the six support types influenced participants' emotional energy and positivity. Support type had no significant effect on energy, $F(5, 490) = 1.53, p = .180$, but had a significant effect on

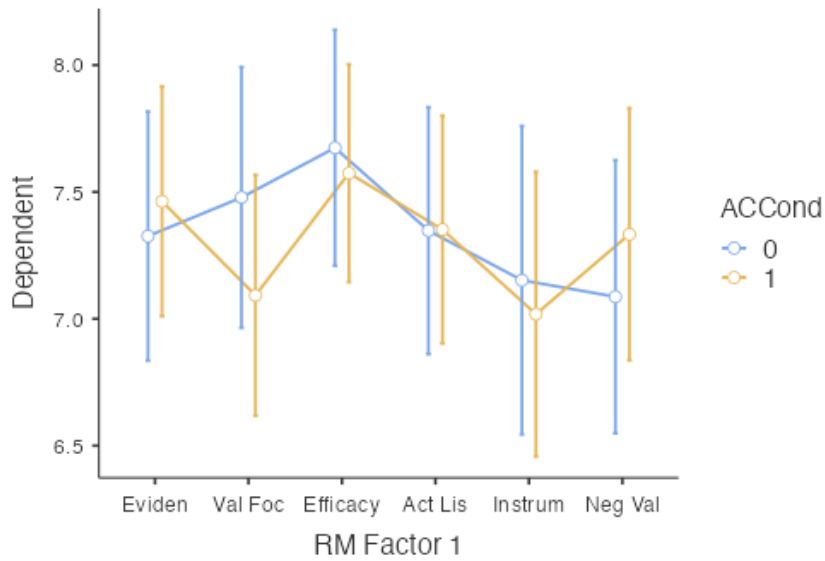
positivity, $F(5, 490) = 8.34, p < .001$. Emotional energy and emotional positivity showed similar patterns across support types, with mean ratings clustering closely together. For emotional energy, ratings for negative validation ($M_{im} = 7.00, M_{ac} = 7.08$), active listening ($M_{im} = 7.08, M_{ac} = 7.08$), and efficacy ($M_{im} = 7.67, M_{ac} = 7.57$) were comparable. For emotional positivity, ratings for negative validation ($M_{im} = 5.67, M_{ac} = 6.09$), active listening ($M_{im} = 5.96, M_{ac} = 5.85$), and efficacy ($M_{im} = 7.09, M_{ac} = 6.52$) also clustered within a similar range. Error bars were relatively large across both outcomes, indicating substantial variability in participants' responses.

Table 7

Study 2: Emotional Energy Means (Support Type x Goal Pursuit Condition)

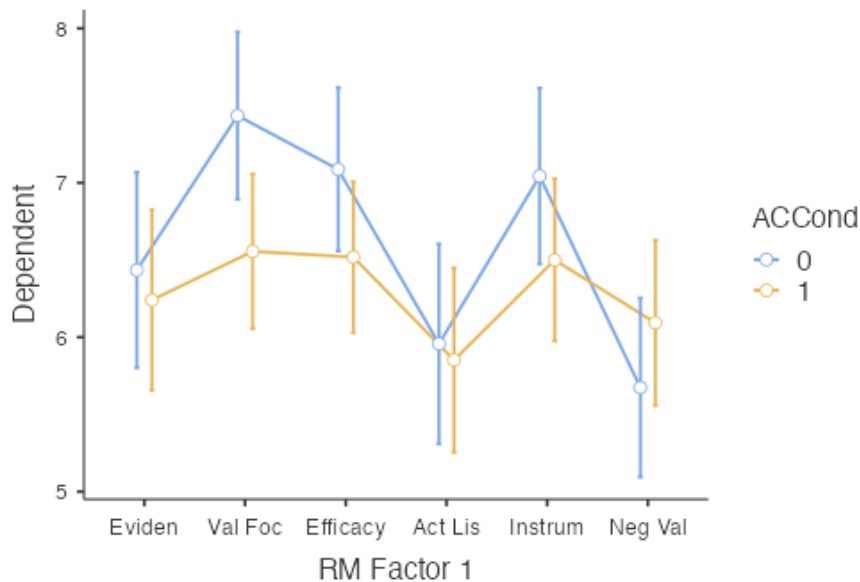
Estimated Marginal Means - RM Factor 1 * ACCond

ACCond	RM Factor 1	Mean	SE	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower	Upper
0	Eviden	7.33	0.247	6.84	7.82
	Val Foc	7.48	0.259	6.96	7.99
	Efficacy	7.67	0.234	7.21	8.14
	Act Lis	7.35	0.245	6.86	7.83
	Instrum	7.15	0.306	6.54	7.76
	Neg Val	7.09	0.271	6.55	7.63
1	Eviden	7.46	0.228	7.01	7.92
	Val Foc	7.09	0.239	6.62	7.57
	Efficacy	7.57	0.216	7.15	8.00
	Act Lis	7.35	0.226	6.90	7.80
	Instrum	7.02	0.283	6.46	7.58
	Neg Val	7.33	0.250	6.84	7.83

Figure 7*Study 2: Emotional Energy Means (Support Type x Goal Pursuit Condition)***Table 8***Study 2: Emotional Positivity Means (Support Type x Goal Pursuit Condition)*

Estimated Marginal Means - RM Factor 1 * ACCond

ACCond	RM Factor 1	Mean	SE	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower	Upper
0	Eviden	6.43	0.319	5.80	7.07
	Val Foc	7.43	0.273	6.89	7.98
	Efficacy	7.09	0.267	6.56	7.62
	Act Lis	5.96	0.326	5.31	6.60
	Instrum	7.04	0.287	6.47	7.61
	Neg Val	5.67	0.292	5.09	6.25
1	Eviden	6.24	0.295	5.66	6.83
	Val Foc	6.56	0.252	6.06	7.06
	Efficacy	6.52	0.246	6.03	7.01
	Act Lis	5.85	0.301	5.25	6.45
	Instrum	6.50	0.265	5.97	7.03
	Neg Val	6.09	0.270	5.56	6.63

Figure 8*Study 2: Emotional Positivity Means (Support Type x Goal Pursuit Condition)*

The goal pursuit condition had no significant main effect on emotional energy, $F(1, 98) = 0.03, p = .868$, or emotional positivity, $F(1, 98) = 1.42, p = .236$. There were also no significant interactions between goal pursuit condition and support type for emotional energy, $F(5, 490) = 0.56, p = .727$, or emotional positivity, $F(5, 490) = 1.86, p = .100$.

3.3 Discussion

Study 2 aimed to examine how people respond to different types of support in a more personally meaningful context, in which they imagined receiving support from a close other while reflecting on a real goal. Across outcomes, support type significantly affected support perception and emotional positivity, but not self-verification or emotional energy. For self-verification, although the overall effect of support type did not reach conventional significance, it approached significance, $F(5, 490) = 2.03, p = .073$. This suggests a possible trend in how different types of support were perceived in terms of self-verification, though the differences were not statistically robust. Participants rated efficacy support highest in promoting perceptions

of support genuineness and self-verification, although responses showed considerable variability. While the overall effect of support type on support perception was significant, Tukey post hoc tests did not reveal significant pairwise differences between specific support types.

In contrast to Study 1, negative validation no longer stood out as especially ineffective. It was rated similarly to other support types across support perception, self-verification, and emotional outcomes. Support types overall appeared more psychologically interchangeable in Study 2, possibly due to the increased personal relevance of imagining support from a close other. Negative validation also no longer evoked strongly negative emotional responses, but instead elicited moderately to highly pleasant emotions, similar to other support types. Although empathy-centered support like negative validation and active listening were perceived as moderately effective, efficacy support was descriptively rated the most effective. Thus, Study 2 did not support the hypothesis that empathy-centered support would be perceived most positively.

In Study 2, goal pursuit condition had no significant main effect on self-verification, indicating that participants, on average, perceived support types similarly whether they were in an implemental mindset or experiencing an action crisis. However, the presence of a significant interaction with support type reveals a more nuanced pattern. This suggests that while the overall level of self-verification did not differ by motivational state, the relative effectiveness of different support types may have shifted depending on whether participants were confident or conflicted about their goal. In other words, people may not have rated support as more or less self-verifying overall based on their goal pursuit condition, but they may have interpreted specific types of support differently depending on their psychological context. The greater realism and personal relevance of the task in Study 2 may have contributed to the higher

variability across participants, as imagining support from a close other likely encouraged more personalized interpretations of each support message.

Although Study 2 created a more personally relevant context than Study 1, the imagined nature of the support experiences remains a limitation. Future research could incorporate observed or recalled real-life support interactions to better capture the dynamics of self-verification and emotional responses to support. These findings highlight the importance of both support content and relational context in understanding how support is experienced.

4. General Discussion

Across two studies, this research explored how individuals in different stages of goal pursuit (implementation vs. action crisis) respond to six types of social support. Although we hypothesized that empathy-centered support like active listening and negative validation would be especially effective in fostering perceived genuineness, self-verification, and pleasant emotions during action crisis, results provide only partial support for this hypothesis.

In both studies, support type significantly influenced participants' responses, suggesting that not all support is received equally. Study 1 found that active listening was rated moderately positively for all dependent variables, whereas negative validation was rated the least effective, despite both being categorized as empathy-centered. These findings lend partial support to the hypothesis, with active listening aligning with predicted outcomes. However, the low ratings for negative validation indicate that empathy alone does not guarantee effectiveness.

Study 2 extended these findings by shifting to a more personally meaningful context, where participants imagined receiving support from a close one they genuinely trusted regarding a real goal they were pursuing. In this context, efficacy support, which is focused on boosting confidence, was most well-received. Active listening and negative validation were no longer at

opposite ends of the spectrum, instead receiving more moderate ratings. This pattern suggests that the effectiveness of support may not only depend on its type, but also its relational context and perceived psychological realism. When imagining a close other offering support, participants seem more receptive towards concrete demonstration of trust and affirmation over pure emotional validation, possibly because such affirmation aligns more closely with how support is typically exchanged in real-life relationships. More research needs to be done to investigate whether this interpretation is valid.

One unexpected but consistent result across both studies was that goal pursuit condition did not significantly moderate the effects of support type. This finding counters the idea that people in action crisis need uniquely tailored forms of support. Instead, support preferences appeared stable regardless of motivational state. It is possible that the dependent measures used, especially those focused on perception and self-verification, reflect more stable preferences in communication style rather than context-specific needs. Alternatively, it could be that people in action crisis do not always recognize what kind of support they need most, and thus rate more familiar or traditionally helpful support, such as efficacy support, more highly even during moments of internal conflict. More research needs to be done to understand the extent to which people's personal preferences play a role in their receptiveness towards support.

Although goal pursuit condition had no significant main effect on support type, a significant interaction between support type and goal pursuit condition was observed in Study 2 for self-verification. This suggests that while motivational state did not affect overall ratings, it may have subtly influenced how participants interpreted different types of support. That is, the psychological context of being in an action crisis or implementation mindset may shape the

meaning drawn from specific support messages, even if it does not change the average level of receptiveness.

Based on the current study, support types like efficacy and active listening appear broadly effective at enhancing support perception, self-verification, and emotions, but their relative impact shifted based on context. These nuances complicate the idea of a universally "best" support type and suggest that support's impact could be influenced by factors other than the content of support. Since this study only examined the effect of support type, future research could explore how factors like tone, trust, and relationship dynamics affect people's receptiveness towards support.

5. Limitations & Future Directions

Although Study 2 aimed to increase ecological validity by involving real goals and relationships, the scenarios were still imagined. Future research should examine actual support exchanges to assess how people interpret and respond to live, unscripted support in real time. For example, researchers could conduct in-person studies where participants directly receive support from a close other for a real, ongoing goal.

Moreover, the operationalization of certain support types, particularly negative validation, may have unintentionally shaped participants' responses due to tone or intensity. Future studies should improve the wording of support scenarios to better reflect the intended support type. In the case of negative validation, for instance, using language that acknowledges struggle without reinforcing hopelessness may lead to different outcomes. Future studies should refine the tone and balance of support scenarios to ensure that support types are presented comparably. Moreover, the consistently high variability in participants' ratings suggests that

personal interpretation plays a large role, underscoring the importance of measuring individual differences in support preferences.

Additionally, the use of a single-item scale for self-verification may have limited the ability to detect subtle differences between support types. Expanding this into a multi-item measure could offer a more nuanced understanding.

Finally, although this study focused on participants' immediate perceptions of support, which are linked to motivation and behavior, it did not directly measure motivation, renewed goal commitment, or actual behavior change. Longitudinal or behavioral follow-up studies would be valuable for determining the types of support that not only feel helpful in the moment, but also lead to sustained goal pursuit over time.

6. Conclusion

This research contributes to our understanding of supportive communication during action crisis by highlighting the nuanced ways in which different types of support are perceived. Although empathy-centered strategies like active listening are generally well-received, their effectiveness may not be uniquely heightened during action crisis. In addition to empathy-based support, techniques like efficacy support that restore confidence in personal capability may be equally or more impactful, especially when coming from a trusted individual. These findings suggest that emotional validation alone may not be sufficient for effective support during challenging moments. Rather, effective support may also need to restore individuals' belief in their ability to persevere. Thus, combining empathy with efficacy may lead to the most constructive and affirming support experiences. Future research should explore whether this combined approach is most effective, as well as identify the best ways to convey support with both care and credibility.

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Appendix A: Study 1 - Hypothetical Goal Pursuit and Imagined Support Scenarios

Table 1

Study 1 - Hypothetical Goal Pursuit Scenarios: Implementation vs Action Crisis

Implementation	<p>Imagine yourself in this situation:</p> <p>You're in your third year of university, balancing your studies and a part-time job as an online tutor. In your limited free time, you usually relax by watching Netflix, playing video games, or scrolling through social media—it's an easy way to unwind after a busy day.</p> <p>However, all those hours sitting at the computer have started to affect how you feel physically. Your back and shoulders often ache, and you've noticed feeling more tired and irritable. You've also put on some weight, which has left you feeling less confident about your appearance.</p> <p>After visiting the doctor and chatting with friends who live more active lifestyles, you realized that regular exercise could really improve both your physical and mental well-being. Motivated by this, you made a plan to exercise four times a week, each time for 45 minutes, doing a mix of cardio and weight training at your apartment's gym.</p> <p>Now it's been three weeks since you started, and you realized that this exercise routine is harder to sustain than you think. Exercise is tough, and after a long day of studying and working, it's so tempting to just crash on the couch with Netflix or play some video games. However, you're determined to stick with your plan, so you sought help from those around you. You talked to your friend Alex, who you've known since high school—seven years now. Alex knows you really well and cares about you, and wants to help you stay on track, knowing how important it is to you.</p> <p>Alex can support you in a few different ways. How helpful do you think each method is?</p>
Action Crisis	<p>Imagine yourself in this situation:</p> <p>You're in your third year of university, balancing your studies and a part-time job as an online tutor. In your limited free time, you usually relax by watching Netflix, playing video games, or scrolling through social media—it's an easy way to unwind after a busy day.</p> <p>However, all those hours sitting at the computer have started to affect how you feel physically. Your back and shoulders often ache, and you've noticed feeling more tired and irritable. You've also put on some weight, which has left you feeling less confident about your appearance.</p> <p>After visiting the doctor and chatting with friends who live more active lifestyles, you realized that regular exercise could really improve both your physical and mental well-being. Motivated by this, you made a plan to exercise four times a week for 45 minutes, doing a mix of cardio and weight training at your apartment's gym.</p> <p>Now it's been three weeks, and reality has set in. The workouts are harder than you thought, and the results you were hoping for haven't appeared yet. You're still tired, you're still aching, and when you look in the mirror, nothing seems to have changed. The excitement that drove you at the beginning is fading fast, and you're starting to wonder if it's even worth continuing. After a long day of classes and work, the last thing you want to do is hit the gym. It's so tempting to just give up and fall back into the comfort of your usual routine.</p> <p>You're at a crossroads—feeling torn between wanting to keep going in hopes that things will improve and questioning whether you should just stop and save yourself the frustration. The goal that once felt motivating is now something you're not even sure you care about anymore. You talked to your friend Alex, who you've known since high school—seven years now. Alex knows you really well and cares about you, and wants to help you stay on track, knowing how important it is to you.</p> <p>Alex can support you in a few different ways. How helpful do you think each method is?</p>

Table 2

Study 1 - Hypothetical Support Scenarios: Words from Alex

Evidentiary	<p>"Remember when you tackled that very hard project last semester? You didn't have to do it, and you had the chance to quit, but you didn't, knowing that it'll be beneficial for your grad school application.</p> <p>You were totally overwhelmed at first, but I remember how much time and effort you put into it—balancing your workload by waking up early in the morning to study, networking with lots of people to find help and guidance even though you don't like networking that much.</p> <p>It was tough, but you stuck with it because you knew how important it was. And in the end, you made it happen. You've proven you can take on challenges like this before, and I know you've got the strength to do it again this time."</p>
Efficacy	<p>"I know this feels hard right now, but you've got what it takes to see this through. You've already proven that you can stick to a plan—look at how far you've come in just three weeks! You're stronger than you think, and every time you push through, you're building up that strength even more. I trust that you have the grit and determination to go through with this goal of yours because you've always been perseverant and dedicated to what you want to do.</p> <p>You've done challenging things before, and I have no doubt you can handle this too. Just keep going—you're capable of making this happen."</p>
Negative Validation	<p>"I get it—this whole thing is really hard, and it sucks. It's exhausting trying to balance everything, and sometimes it feels like no matter what you do, it's just too much. I understand that it must be hard, and that you don't want to continue. This is really tough, and it's completely normal and understandable to feel this way.</p> <p>If I were you, I'd be thinking about quitting all the time too. Honestly, it makes total sense that you'd feel frustrated—it's a lot to deal with. It's totally okay to feel frustrated and tired—it's normal, and you're not alone in that."</p>
Active Listening	<p>You're sitting down with your close friend Alex, talking about how frustrated you've been feeling with your workout routine. You explain how you've been trying to stick with it, but the results you were hoping for just aren't there.</p> <p>As you talk, you notice that Alex is giving you their full attention. The phone rings a couple of times, but Alex doesn't even glance at it.</p> <p>Alex asks thoughtful questions, like, "Do you think you're putting too much pressure on yourself to see results fast?" You feel like you can be completely open, knowing that Alex isn't judging you, and you appreciate how they're helping you reflect on your feelings without pushing you in any particular direction.</p>
Instrumental	<p>"I know it's been hard sticking to your exercise routine, so how about we make this easier? I could help you plan out your workouts to fit better with your schedule. Or, if you want, we could exercise together a couple of days a week—it might be more fun that way.</p> <p>I also know an app called 'FitTrack' that can help you find the best exercises according to your goals, so you can do the most within the shortest amount of time. It tracks your routine, sends reminders, and even has videos showing how to do the exercises correctly. This should make things easier for you. Let me know what works best, and I'll help however I can."</p>
Value-Focused	<p>"Think about why you started this. You'll be happier, your body will feel lighter, and you'll have so much more energy. It's worth pushing through the discomfort to get to that place where you feel proud of yourself and how far you've come. You've always wanted to feel strong and confident, and this will get you there. The hard work now will pay off, and you'll feel amazing once you reach that goal.</p> <p>Remember when you started studying for finals last semester? You were totally overwhelmed at first, but you broke it down and stuck with your study plan, and you ended up doing great. This is kind of the same thing—sticking with your routine will pay off, just like it did with your exams."</p>

Appendix B: Study 2 - Real Goal Pursuit and Imagined Support Scenarios

Table 3

Study 2 - Inducing Goal Pursuit State: Implementation vs Action Crisis

Implementation	<p>What goals have you been working on?</p> <p>Please describe a goal which you are currently intending to achieve.</p> <p>This goal should also be something:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • that you intend to realize someday; • that you have decided to take action in this matter • that you feel determined to achieve the project. • This project should be complex and you should be able to achieve it within the next 3 months. <p>Please use a project for which you have already made a decision, do not invent one for the purpose of the exercise.</p>
	Now, please write about the implementation steps involved in completing this intended project. First, write the most important steps for achieving the project, such as what specific behaviors need to be executed.
	Finally, write about the implementation of these behaviors, such as where, when, and how they will be executed.
Action Crisis	<p>Not all goals that we're working on work for us!</p> <p>Please describe one personal goal that you are considering giving up on, quitting, or reducing effort on.</p> <p>This goal should also be something:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • that you have already decided to work toward • that you have been working toward for at least 1 month (please do not invent a new goal) <p>that you have invested a lot of time, energy, or resources into.</p>
	Now, please analyze the likelihood of the immediate and long term positive and negative consequences of continuing to pursue this goal.
	Next, please list the expected difficulties involved with continuing to pursue this goal.
	Finally, please analyze the likelihood of the immediate and long term positive and negative consequences of deciding to abandon this goal.

Table 4

Study 2 - Support Scenarios From Close One

Evidentiary	[Name] reminisces about a time that you acted in a way that demonstrated your strengths and values.
Efficacy	Imagine if [Name] told you about their trust for your capabilities and encouraged you to keep doing this.
Negative Validation	Imagine if [Name] wants to assure you that they understand what you're going through and that what you're feeling is normal.

Active Listening	Imagine if [Name] listened to you share your feelings and concerns very attentively, and reciprocated their understanding of your situation.
Instrumental	Imagine if [Name] offered you concrete advice and resources for achieving your goal.
Value-Focused	Why do you want to achieve this goal? What is its value? Imagine [Name] emphasized to you how amazing it would be to finally achieve that goal.

Appendix C: Scales

Manipulation Check: Action Crisis Scale (6 items)

“For the following questions, please answer based on how you would feel about the goal you wrote about on the previous page.”

- Lately I feel torn between continuing to strive for this goal and abandoning it.
- So far my goal pursuit has been smooth and unproblematic.
- I often feel stuck and unsure of how to continue pursuing this goal.
- I often ruminate about my goal.
- I have thought about giving up this goal.
- I find myself not having worked on my goal, despite my intention of doing so.

(1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Somewhat disagree, 4 = Neither agree nor disagree, 5 = Somewhat agree, 6 = Agree, 7 = Strongly agree)

Dependent Measure: Support and Relationship Assessment (8 items)

“Based on how Alex supported you, please respond to the following questions using the scale provided.”

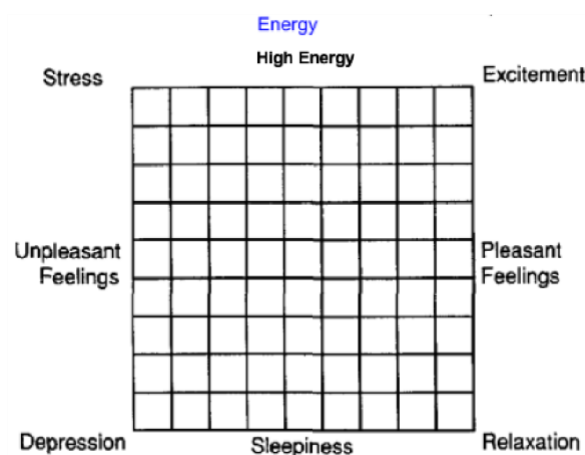
- My friend’s statement makes me feel worse.
- My friend’s statement is disappointing.
- My friend’s statement was intended to make me feel good.

- My friend's statement shows that he/she truly believes that I can do it.
- My friend's statement makes me more sure of myself.
- My friend's statement doesn't fit who I am.
- My friend's statement lets me know that he/she cares about me.
- My friend's statement shows that he/she understands me.

(1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Somewhat disagree, 4 = Neither agree nor disagree, 5 = Somewhat agree, 6 = Agree, 7 = Strongly agree)

Dependent Measure: Affect Grid

"Please indicate how you would feel after your friend supported you in this way, by choosing a square on this grid. Note: you can only choose one square that best fits how you would feel."



Dependent Measure: Self-Verification Scale (1 item)

"Based on how Alex supported you, please respond to the following question using the scale provided."

- This person understands where I am and how I'm feeling regarding this goal

(1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Somewhat disagree, 4 = Neither agree nor disagree, 5 = Somewhat agree, 6 = Agree, 7 = Strongly agree)