

Stages of Change: Helping Others in the Change Process

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Introduction

The Stages of Change Model describes the process of change in five stages: pre-contemplation, contemplation, preparation, action and maintenance. Relapse is also part of the model. Preventing relapse to maintain changes is important to success.

This model can be helpful when trying to change your own behavior. It can also guide efforts to help others adopt healthy behaviors or quit unhealthy behaviors.

Stage 1: Pre-contemplation

To encourage those in the pre-contemplation stage, leave the door open for communication.

Those in the pre-contemplation stage may seem:

- Naive
- Impatient
- Closed-minded

To help people in pre-contemplation move to contemplation, try to ask questions, listen and provide unbiased information. They may also benefit from activities that build awareness of a need for behavior change. Such activities include educational campaigns, community-based programs and social marketing.

Stage 2: Contemplation

To help those in the contemplation stage, provide information to assist in decision-making. Discuss the benefits and drawbacks of behavior change, with an emphasis on positive aspects. Give them information to take home.

Those in contemplation stage may seem:

- Unsure or may go back and forth on making a decision to change
- Willing to listen, but describe barriers or reasons why change is not possible



Stage 3: Preparation

Those in the preparation stage may need help implementing a plan to change behavior. Support them by discussing barriers, providing referrals to others who can help and helping them form strategies to overcome obstacles.

Those in the preparation stage may:

- Start planning
- Set dates
- Look for support



Stage 4: Action

To help those in the action stage, provide encouragement, congratulate success and offer reminders of the overall goal of change. Assistance with managing tempting situations and helping improve coping skills can also support those in the action stage.

Those in the action stage may:

- Struggle with habits and the change process
- Reach goals but need help continuing to master the desired change



Stage 5: Maintenance

In the maintenance stage, people may need reminders of support systems in place. They may also need encouragement to stick with their plan. Allow them to discuss their successes and challenges. Listen and provide support. Address the possibility of relapse, how to avoid it and ways to cope if relapse occurs.

Those in the maintenance stage may:

- Feel like they have everything under control
- Have an improved quality of life
- Benefit from sharing their change experiences with others

Identifying a Slip

Slips do not necessarily indicate a relapse. Nearly everyone has an occasional slip from time to time. It is important to identify slips when they occur and to resume new, healthy habits as soon as possible.

Slip Examples:

- I missed a dose of my medication.
- I puffed a cigar at the wedding.
- I ate an extra slice of cheesecake.
- I did not complete my exercise routine this week.

Relapse

Relapse is a part of behavior change and does not mean that the individual has done anything “wrong.” Relapse can happen in any stage. It is natural to feel disappointed when relapse occurs. Sometimes people experience low self-esteem and need reinforcement and support. Some people may need to discuss what has happened to figure out what triggered a relapse, how to overcome relapse and how to get back on track. Those who have relapsed may need help in progressing from their current stage.



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