## Navigating Your Way through the Stages of Change


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| **Pre-contemplation** |  • The person does not see the attitude or behavior as a problem.  
  • Prefers to change those around who are pointing to the problem. Transition to the next stage comes through growing self-awareness.  
  • Denial is Barrier to self-understanding |  • Become aware of how your defenses stop you from hearing information from those who could be most helpful to you.  
  • Seek out positive influences.  
  • Ask others to identify your defenses.  
  • Be open and yet protect yourself from the push to move too fast.  
  • Join a self-help group.  
  • Know who is on your side.  
  • Ask – if you could free others who have the same behavior as yours, would you?  
  • Increase your perception of the pros of changing. |  • Maintain a nonjudgmental attitude.  
  • Give information about the behavior patterns and the impact you witness.  
  • A caring attitude is critical.  
  • Rather than pushing, give information that helps the person to consider change.  
  • Do not enable continuance of the problem behavior. |
| **Contemplation** |  • The person has opened their eyes to the existence of a problem.  
  • Experiences the desire to change and yet is resistant to change.  
  • Chronic contemplators are “stuck” in their behavior. Others act too soon and cannot sustain the momentum.  
  • Now is the time to fully understand the problem. |  • Chose activities that will engage your emotions. (Movies, books, etc.)  
  • Ask the right questions about your patterns and the impact of your behavior.  
  • Learn what triggers the behavior. Conduct an appraisal of the consequences of and reactions to change by self and others. |  • The person is not ready for change. They need support; someone to listen and understand.  
  • Express belief in ability to change and acceptance of person regardless of speed of change.  
  • Give more information that leads to self-awareness and motivation. |
### Stages of Change

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| **Preparation** | - Moving from the decision to change to the specific steps to take.  
- Focus now is on the most suitable steps to take.  
- Creating a multi-faceted, practical action plan.  
- Making a public commitment.  
- Planning for rewards and handling the pressure. | - Time to get ready for making the change; create your plan of action.  
- Take a look at the cons, are they lessening? If not, you are still at the contemplating stage.  
- Plan small steps. Set a date.  
- Go public (with at least one other person).  
- Make a Contract. | - Remember that the action stage will be intense and at times overwhelming. Ask what you can do now and at the time of action.  
- Ask how you will know when support is needed. |
| **Action** | - Most noticeable stage.  
- Can be confused with successful change.  
- May lead to quick relapse if the need for vigilance is not understood. | - Refocus your energy. Avoid situations that bring temptation.  
- Pay attention to what triggers behavior.  
- Use helpful reminders.  
- Take walks or some other activity.  
- Practice relaxation techniques.  
- Recognize and free yourself from rigid thinking.  
- Keep guilt trips to a minimum.  
- Learn and practice assertiveness.  
- Use positive means to deal with pressure. | - Participate in positive activities together. Exercise together. Rearrange the old patterns of relationships to help with avoidance.  
- Give steady appropriate reinforcement. |
| **Maintenance** | - Work to pull together the positives gained from previous stages and to prevent relapse.  
- Acknowledge vulnerability to old problem even while building a life in which the old behavior has no value. | - Keep a healthy distance from trigger.  
- Create a new lifestyle.  
- Revise your contract based on what you have learned.  
- Ask a helper to be on call.  
- Practice confronting temptations.  
- Help someone else.  
- Patience and persistence are key. | - Be on call for that person.  
- Ongoing relationship based on honesty and mutual support. |

### Relapse

Change is most often like an upward spiral. When you experience a relapse consider where it is best to reenter the cycle of change. You can always recycle after a relapse rather than give into defeat. If this becomes a pattern where the spiral looks more like a circle that goes nowhere, it may be time to consider professional help.