

Stages of Change

Stage	Characteristic	Technique
Pre-contemplation	Person is not considering change, is unable or unwilling to change. “What problem? I don’t have a problem.” Hallmark: Resistance	Validate Lack of Readiness. Establish rapport, build trust. Empathy. Open-ended questions. Reflective listening. Encourage re-evaluation of current behavior. Legitimize the cons. Address benefits of change. Explore barriers to change. Personalize the risk. Elicit significant emotion. Shift attention to costs of status quo and the benefits of change. Raise doubts/concerns.
Contemplation	Acknowledgement of problem. Thinking about change but hasn’t commit to change within next month. Hallmark: Ambivalence	Open ended questions. Reflective statements. Normalize ambivalence. Legitimize dilemma. Explore client’s reason for change (value). Summarize pros and cons. Use probing questions to amplify pros of change and consequences of client’s behavior and valued goals. Risk/Reward Analysis. Elicit clients’ self-motivational statement of intent to change. Instill hope that change is possible and identify positive outcomes.
Preparation	Has made a decision to change. Committed to and plans for change in near future. Hallmark: Steps towards change	Open ended questions. Reaffirm commitment to change. Generate change strategies and plan. Clarify their goals. Anticipate barriers and plans actions. Reinforce plan as experiment. Provide alternative information if client asks. Identify resources. Assess the strengths of the commitment. Help them articulate commitment and problem solve. Encourage small steps.
Action	Actively implementing change. Not yet at a stable state. Hallmark: Modified behavior happening	Collaborate to evaluate plan. Engage client in treatment. Support a realistic view of change through small steps. Help client identify rewards of new behaviors. Help find new reinforcers of positive change. Acknowledge feelings of loss. Help client identify what worked and why, or what didn’t and why. What are high-risk situations. Help client understand relapses are inherent to change. Frame plan as flexible and negotiable.
Maintenance	Achievement of initial goals. Focus on monitoring and maintaining gains. Prevent relapse/recurrence.	Process and support behavior changes. Renew reasons for change. Reinforce success. Help them attribute success to own efforts. Review long-term goals. Plan for follow-up supports. Help identify risk situations. Identify relapse prevention strategies and engage in these strategies. Discuss coping with relapse.
Relapse/Recurrence	Recurrence of old behaviors. Need to cope with consequences and decide what to do next.	Help them to re-enter the change cycle. Maintain supportive contact. Relapse as a learning experience. Evaluate the trigger for relapse. Reassess motivation and barriers. Assistance in finding alternative coping strategies.
Termination	New behavior has become habit. No urge for previous behavior.	Awareness that future crises or high stress may trigger urges for old behavior and plan for ways to manage them in a healthy way.