

The Six Stages of Change

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Stage 1. Precontemplation

Precontemplators have no current intention to change. They may have tried to change a particular behavior in the past and given up, or they may deny the reality of the problem. They may be demoralized, having dismissed the possibility of ever changing.

Stage Indicators:

- People at this stage have no intention of changing behavior, and typically deny having a problem.
- Other people may see the problem clearly, and are putting pressure on them for change.
- They would rather change others than to think about changing themselves.
- They engage in denial.
 - a. They lack information about their problems and try to maintain ignorant bliss.
 - b. They place responsibility for their problems on factors such as genetic make-up, family, society.
- They secretly feel demoralized, seeing the situation as hopeless.
- Even people in this stage will progress toward change if they are given the proper tools at the proper time.

Stage 2. Contemplation

Contemplators acknowledge they have a problem and are willing to think about their need to change. While they are open to information and feedback, they may remain in this stage for years, realizing they have a problem but unable to generate the energy to change.

Stage Indicators:

- People at this stage acknowledge that they have a problem and begin to think seriously about solving it.
- They struggle to understand their problem, to see its causes, and wonder about possible solutions.
- They have indefinite plans to take action within the next six months or so.
- They may be far from actually making a commitment to action.
- They may know their destination and even how to get there, but are not ready to go.
- Some people become chronic contemplators—eternally substituting thinking for action.
- Two types of thinking signal readiness to move to the next stage.
 - a. They begin to focus on the solution rather than the problem.
 - b. They begin to think more about the future than the past.
- The end of the contemplation stage is a time of anticipation, activity, anxiety and excitement.

Stage 3. Preparation

People in this stage are on the verge of action. They are generally developing action plans and may even have made small changes.

Stage Indicators:

- Most people in this stage are planning to take action within the very next month, and are making the final adjustments before they begin to change their behavior.
- They make their intended change public.
- They may still be somewhat ambivalent, needing to convince themselves that taking this action is what's best for them.
- They have already instituted a number of small behavior changes.
- They play carefully, developing a firm, detailed scheme for action, and making sure that they have learned the change processes they need.

Stage 4. Action

People in this stage are following the action plan they have developed. *The better developed this plan is and the more attention they have given to the work of the contemplation and preparation stages, the more successful they will be* (my emphasis).

Stage Indicators:

- People in this stage overtly change their behavior and their surroundings; they make the move for which they have been preparing.
- This is a very busy period requiring the greatest commitment of time and energy.
- This stage receives the most recognition and encouragement from others.
- As important as it is, this stage is neither the first nor last stage of change.

Stage 5. Maintenance

Maintainers have been continuously engaged in their change process for at least six months. While “just doing it” feels more natural in this stage, overconfidence and life stresses can lead to relapse.

Stage Indicators:

- At this stage, people must:
 - a. Work to consolidate the gains attained during the action and other stages;
 - b. Struggle to prevent lapses and relapse.
- This stage can last from as little as six months to as long as a lifetime.

Stage 6. Termination

In this stage, the new behavior has become an integral part of daily life, so much so that the likelihood of relapse is essentially nonexistent. Some professionals question whether people ever reach this stage, although Prochaska and colleagues say it is possible for a small percentage of individuals.

Stage Indicators:

- At this stage (when and if it exists), the former problems no longer presents any temptation or threat.
- There is complete confidence that one can cope without fear of relapse.

* Adapted from *Changing for Good* by James Prochaska, John Norcross and Carlo DiClemente. New York, NY: William Morrow and Co. 1994