
Information for Behavioral Health Providers in Primary Care

Stages of Change: Key Features

“It’s not that some people have willpower and some don’t. It’s that some people are ready to change and others are not.”

~James Gordon, M.D.

Change is not a concrete process, but rather, a fluid process. Individuals tend to move through different “stages of change” in the management of medical problems. These stages include: 1) precontemplation, 2) contemplation, 3) preparation, 4) action, and 5) maintenance.

Precontemplation

- People in this stage have no intention to take action to change a behavior in the foreseeable future.
- Often individuals in this stage are not aware of the importance of a change or may deny the negative impact of their current behavior.
- Few benefits to change can be seen by the person.

Contemplation

- People in this stage intend to take action to change in the foreseeable future, but not right away.
- Typically, they desire to change sometime in the next 6 months.
- Individuals in this stage see the benefits of change, but they do not outweigh the difficulties of change.
- Some individuals will get “stuck” in this stage – always knowing they should change, seeing the benefits, but not moving towards action.

Preparation

- People in this stage are intending to take action within the next 30 days.
- They are ready to change, see the benefits of change, and are actively making a plan to change.

Stages of Change- Key Features (Continued)

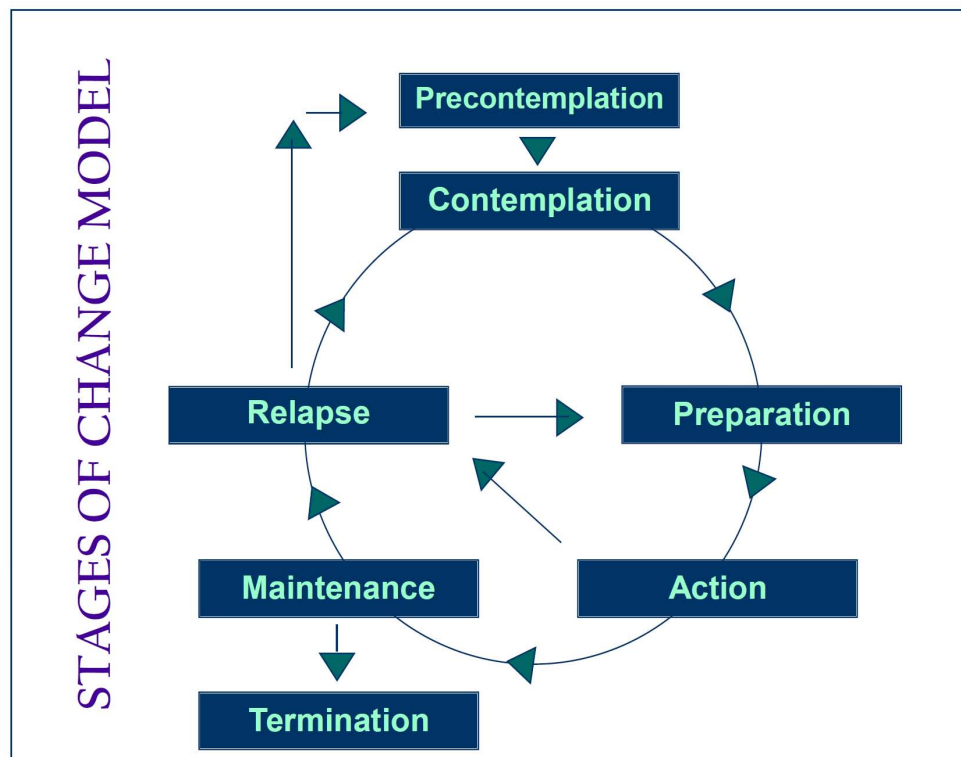
- For example, such individuals trying to change their exercise behavior might be researching different gyms to join, buying walking shoes, or getting an exercise partner.

Action

- Individuals in this stage have successfully made a change in their behavior within the past 6 months.
- To truly be in this stage, a person must have achieved the behavior at a level sufficient to reduce the targeted health risk.

Maintenance

- Individuals in this stage have successfully continued a desired behavior for at least 6 months.
- People in this stage are usually confident they can maintain their new behavior and likely experience few temptations to return to previous behaviors.



The Center for Integrated Healthcare gratefully acknowledges the work of Lisa Kearney, PhD in preparation of this summary.