

Stages of Change

James Prochaska and Carlo DiClemente's trans-theoretical model of behavior change, called the "Stages of Change," suggests that most people proceed through a predictable process of change that can be broken into stages. The stages include seven steps¹:

1. Pre-contemplation

The individual remains unaware that the behavior is problematic and has no intention to change.

2. Contemplation

The individual is becoming aware that their behavior is problematic and may explore possible strategies for making change.

3. Preparation

The patient intends to act in the near future, and makes plans for their behavior change.

4. Action

The individual has made specific and noticeable changes in their problematic behavior.

5. Maintenance

The patient has sustained the behavior changes and tries to prevent relapse.

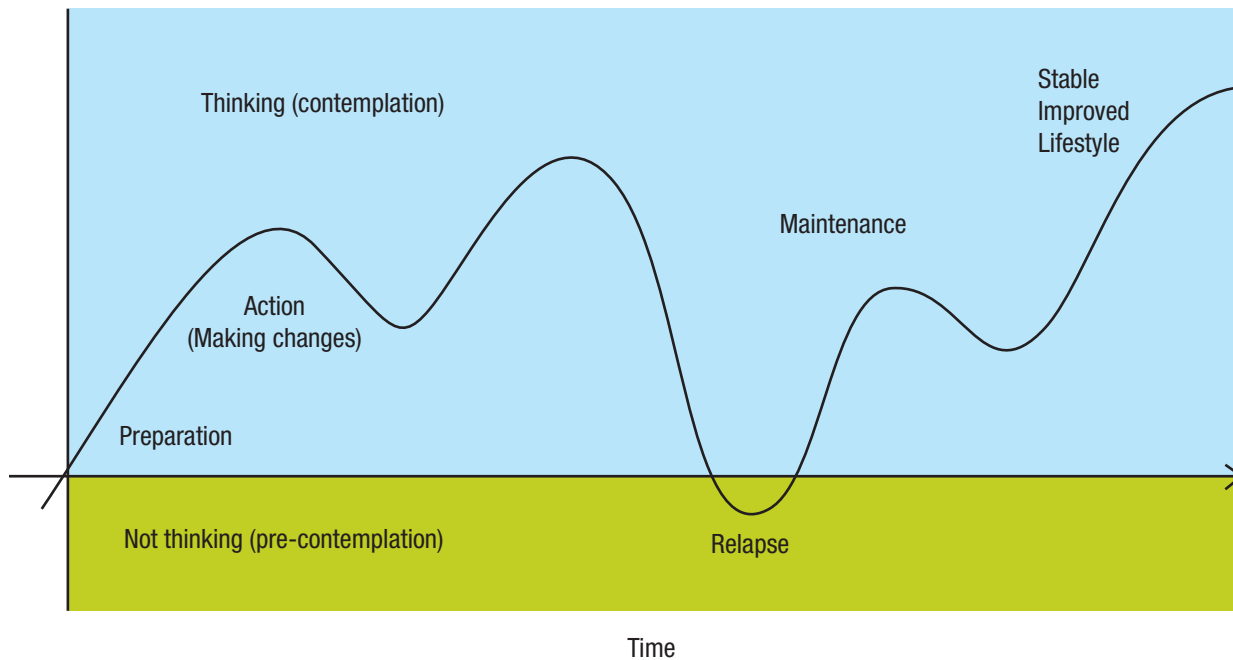
6. Termination/Stable Behavior

The individual has sustained the change for an extended period and reports no desire to return to earlier behaviors.

7. Relapse

Not actually a stage within the model, the "relapse" phase refers to the patient who successfully made the change, but later reverted to their problematic behavior.

The Stages of Change Model



While motivational interviewing does not have a single theoretical backbone, the strategies are most closely aligned with the stages of change model. Both stages of change and motivational interviewing follow the same principles:

- The change process is often non-linear
- An individual's level of readiness to change is fluid, and may come and go even in the course of a discussion
- Ambivalence about change is a normal part of the change cycle

Miller and Rollnick applied the stages of change model to concrete actions that a provider can take during a session with a patient to help them move along in the change process.

Stage	Patient Characteristics	Provider's Task
Pre-Contemplation	Unaware that the behavior is problematic and has no plans for change	Increase awareness of need to change, encourage self-reflection
Contemplation	Becoming aware that the behavior is problematic and may be exploring possible strategies for making change	Develop the discrepancy, increase the patient's confidence in their ability to change
Preparation	Intending to take action in the near future and is making concrete plans for their behavior change	Partner with the patient to negotiate a plan of action, assist in problem solving
Action	Has made specific and obvious changes in their problematic behavior	Reaffirm the patient's commitment, periodically follow-up to ensure the patient remains on track
Maintenance	Actively working to sustain the behavior changes and is trying to prevent relapse	Remind the patient of their goal and reasons for that goal, problem solve around potential barriers
Termination	Has sustained the change for an extended period and reports no desire to return to earlier behaviors	Reinforce personal rewards, plan for follow-up support, discuss potential relapse
Relapse	Successfully made the change, but later reverted to the problematic behaviors	Assist the patient in coping, reassess motivation and barriers

References:

1. Rollnick S, Miller W. (2010, June). Motivational interviewing procedure and stages of change. *Motivationalinterview.org*. Retrieved Feb 10, 2013, from www.motivationalinterview.org.
2. Connors G, Donovan D, DiClemente C. (2001). *Substance Abuse Treatment and the Stages of Change*. Guilford Press.