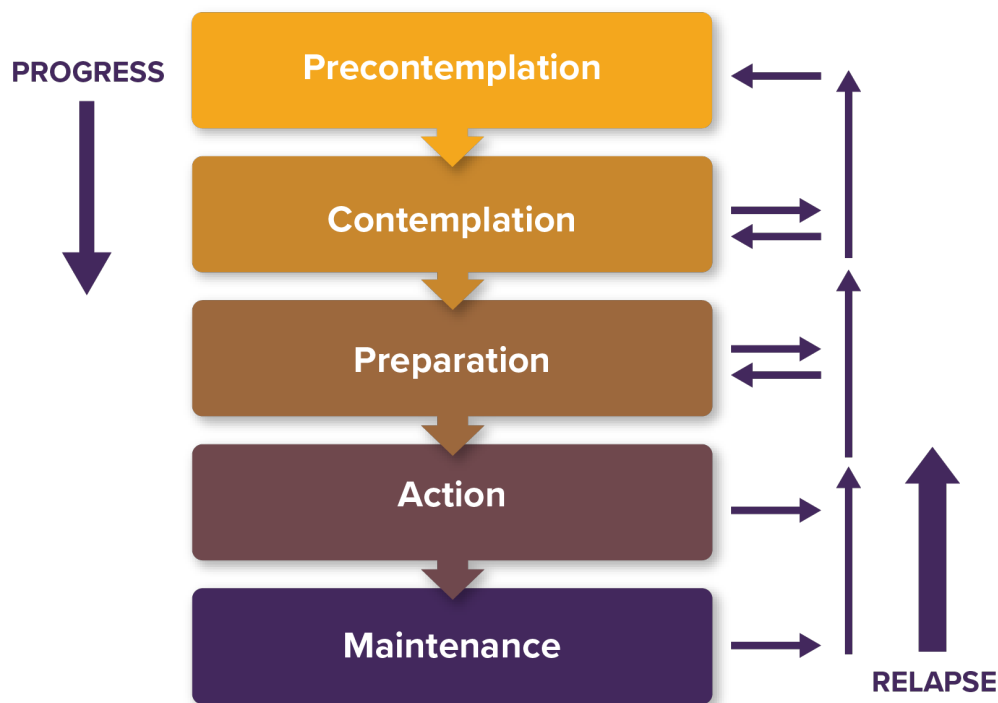




Stages of Change

The addiction recovery process goes through different “Stages of Change.” When a person does not seem to be recovering in the time frame that we want them to show progress, it may be that they are in an early stage of change (pre-contemplation or contemplation).

Fundamental to assisting individuals in Behavioral Health is working with them to identify where they are in the stages of change. Knowing this, allows everyone involved to develop a plan of care that will demonstrate the need for change and outline a process to enhance the likelihood of success. Understanding that individuals go through different “stages of change” is very helpful to knowing that people can and do recover and that moving towards recovery comes in different stages.



The Stages of Change Model was developed by Prochaska and DiClemente in the late 1970s.¹ There are five official stages as described in DiClemente and Prochaska's Stages of Change Model, including pre-contemplation, contemplation, preparation, action and maintenance.

- **Precontemplation.** In this stage, people do not intend to take action in the foreseeable future (defined as within the next 6 months). People are often unaware that their behavior is problematic or produces negative consequences. People in this stage often underestimate the pros of changing behavior and place too much emphasis on the cons of changing behavior.
- **Contemplation.** In this stage, people are intending to start the healthy behavior in the foreseeable future (defined as within the next 6 months). People recognize that their behavior may be problematic, and a more thoughtful and practical consideration of the pros and cons of changing the behavior takes place, with equal emphasis placed on both. Even with this recognition, people may still feel ambivalent toward changing their behavior.
- **Preparation (Determination).** In this stage, people are ready to take action. People start to take small steps toward the behavior change, and they believe changing their behavior can lead to a healthier life.
- **Action.** In this stage, people have recently changed their behavior, and intend to keep moving forward with that behavior change. People may exhibit this by modifying their problem behavior or acquiring new healthy behaviors.
- **Maintenance.** In this stage, people have sustained their behavior change for a while (defined as more than 6 months) and intend to maintain the behavior change going forward. People in this stage work to prevent returning to earlier stages and often incorporate wellness activities into their lives. (the act of practicing healthy habits on a daily basis to attain better physical and mental health outcomes, so that instead of just surviving, you're thriving. . . . Social Connectedness Connecting with friends or loved ones is a great way to help improve your physical and mental health).

¹ Prochaska, J. O., & DiClemente, C. C. (1983). Stages and processes of self-change of smoking: Toward an integrative model of change. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 51(3), 390-395. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0022-006X.51.3.390>

An interesting attribute of the *Stages of Change* model is that even though there may be a recurrence or continuance/reduction (in harm reduction), the individual rarely returns to the Pre-contemplation stage.

It is important to understand that no one can force a person to move from one stage of change to another. Recovery is self-directed.

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