

Stages of Change

Precontemplation – May not be aware of the need to change. May not have experienced crisis or consequence as a result of their behavior. Does not view behavior as problematic or risky.

Contemplation – Aware of the problem or cause for concern but also sees reasons not to change. This client may still be using substances but considering the possibility of change.

Preparation – The client perceives the advantages of change and adverse consequences of substance use. The scales begin to tip in favor of change during this stage. Their commitment is strengthened. They may still be using but have the intention of stopping. Their frequency of substance use may have reduced or they have made attempts to stop.

Action – The client has chosen a strategy for change and begins to pursue it. They actively modify habits and environments. This is the “honeymoon period” before longstanding challenges.

Maintenance – Efforts to sustain the gains achieved during the action stage. The client works to sustain sobriety. Clients work to detect and guard against triggers.

Relapse/Recurrence – Relapse is the rule, not the exception and can hinder further progression. Clients may learn that certain goals are unrealistic, their current strategy is ineffective and certain environments are not conducive to recovery. Clients who relapse find themselves being “recycled” to an earlier phase.