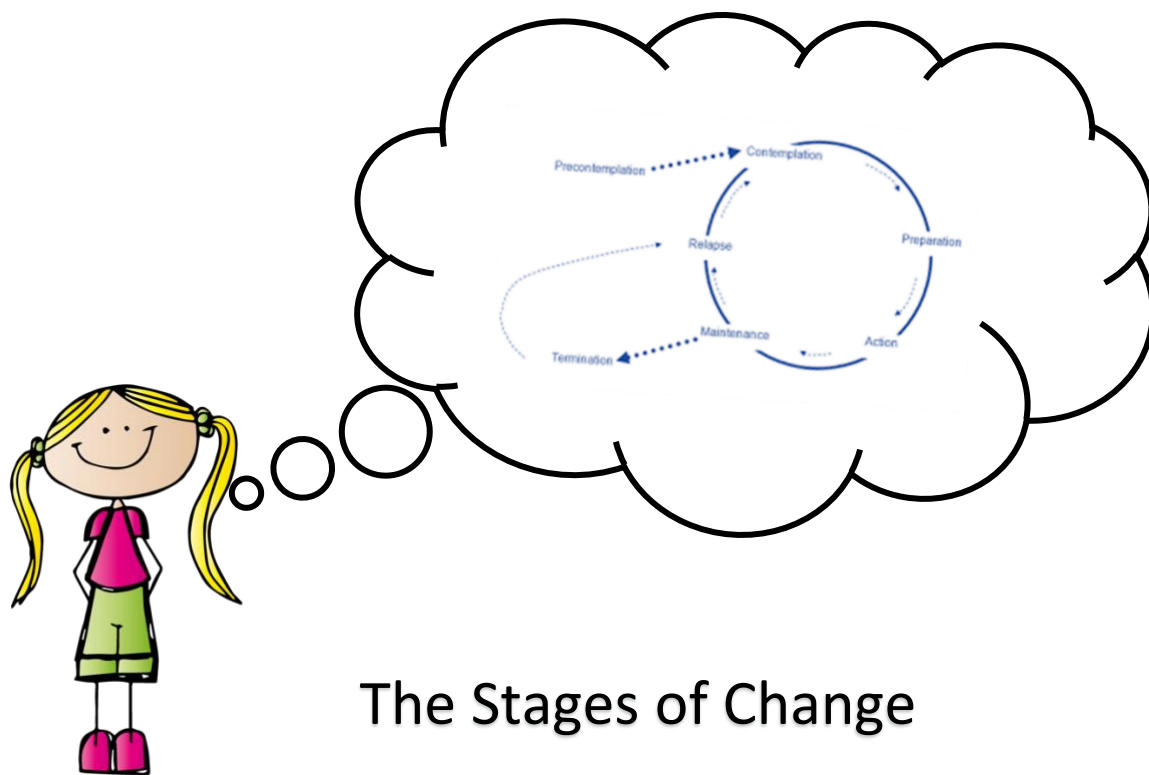




Children's National

How to Support Your Child in Each Stage of Change

As a parent you notice potential problematic behaviors that your child may be partaking in that they don't always realize. It can be difficult trying to get your child to stop this behavior that may have become a habit. Especially when they don't see it as a problem. Understanding the stage of change your child is in can make a big difference in the ways you can best support them and bring about positive change. Below are some suggestions on how to best support your child no matter which stage of change they are in!



The Stages of Change

Precontemplation

Your child does not see that there is a problem and therefore has no motivation to change. Your child lacks insight into consequences of the problem that you see. Your child may have the thoughts "I don't really think I need to change. Everything is fine..."

How you can support your child during the precontemplation stage:

- Identify the problem with your child
- Educate them about what you see as a problem
- Apply the potential consequences and relevance of the problem to real life
- Gauge your child's understanding of the problem and consequences in their life and in family life



Contemplation

Your child is aware of and acknowledges the problem but does not know if it is worth changing due to lack of understanding, maturity, care, etc. your child may be thinking “It may not be too bad if I start doing things differently.”

How you can help your child during the contemplation stage:

- Identify pros and cons of changing the problem
- Apply these pros and cons to the child's and family's life
- Gently nudge your child towards change in light of the pros of making the change

Preparation

Your child realizes problem and acknowledges the pros of change outweigh the cons. Your child is seeking information about how to make a change and may be thinking things like “What do I need to do to make this change happen?”

How you can help your child in the preparation stage:

- Present and encourage information about how to make change and the steps that it will take
- Offer your child options for change (i.e. counselling, diet, exercise, surgery)
- Support your child in their decision to make change
- Encourage your child to stay committed and willing to change
- Work with your child as they decide how to make the change and aid in preparation for change

Action

Your child is actively making a change and steps to fix problem are being taken by the child and family. You are supporting your child in their efforts. Your child may be thinking “I am doing it! I’m making a change to reach my goal.”

How you can support your child in the action stage:

- Encourage attainable small goals
- Celebrate every win and track your child’s progress
- Track setbacks and support your child not to lose confidence when things aren’t perfect



Maintenance

Your child is committed and continuing the change behavior. Your child and family are starting to form habits for the future to prevent the problem from persisting. The maintenance stage can go on for months to years. Support during this stage is extremely important especially as time goes on and life changes. Your child may be thinking “All I need to do now is keep doing what I am doing.”

How to support your child through the maintenance stage:

- Continue to track and encourage your child’s progress as needed
- Identify possible triggers to your child successfully continuing the change behavior
- Assist in hard times and acknowledge highs and lows along the way
- Reinforce a sense of personal pride in your child for getting to this place and continuing to make change

Relapse of problematic behaviors may occur throughout any change journey. Know that you may need to revisit the preparation, action, and maintenance phases multiple times before lasting change can be made. Your child deserves credit and recognition for each stage they encounter. During the normal changes of a child’s life, deciding to make a positive change for their health can be challenging and become overwhelming at times. Remember that each step in the right direction is progress!

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Raihan N, Cogburn M. Stages of Change Theory. [Updated 2021 Mar 3]. In: StatPearls [Internet]. Treasure Island (FL): StatPearls Publishing; 2021 Jan-. Available from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK556005/>

