

Stages of Change

Behavior change can be conceptualized into five progressive stages: precontemplation, contemplation, preparation, action and maintenance (below). Research states that in a given population, 40% of people who use tobacco are not ready to quit, 40% are thinking about quitting, and 20% are ready to quit. The Transtheoretical Model, otherwise known as Stages of Change, gauges where an individual may be in their willingness to lead a tobacco-free life.

The stages of change are:



As an individual progresses through their own stages of change, it can be helpful for them to re-evaluate their progress in moving up and down through these stages. (Even in the course of one day, an individual may go through several different stages of change). Remind people that it is normal and natural to regress, to attain one stage only to fall back to a previous stage. This is just a normal part of making changes in your behavior.

Pre-Contemplation

Pre-Contemplation is when an individual has no intention of quitting tobacco within the next six months. Discussions with this person should focus on understanding where they are in the process. Let them know there are resources available if and when they think about making change.

Contemplation

Contemplation is when a person becomes aware the problem exists and is seriously considering a change. These individuals are still using tobacco but do intend to quit within the next six months. Discussions should encourage and reinforce the decision to quit, highlighting or focusing on the reasons for the change and its importance.

Preparation

Preparation is when people are ready to take action within the next 30 days towards behavior change.

Action

Action is when an individual has quit using tobacco for less than six months. The patient is generally dealing with feelings of anxiety and should focus on relapse prevention. Discussions should be around reinforcing the decision to quit using tobacco products, reviewing health benefits of quitting and learning to cope with feelings in a healthy way.



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Maintenance

Maintenance is when the individual has remained tobacco-free for six months or longer! Discussions with this person should be around emphasizing that beginning to use tobacco products again (even one puff) will increase urges and make quitting more difficult. Emphasize on focusing on the positive, learning about yourself, finding alternative outlets/ways to handle problems and never taking recovery for granted will make a huge difference in the process.

Termination

Termination is when the person's former problem behaviors are no longer perceived as desirable. They live as a permanent tobacco quitter.

Stages of Change in Practice

As you work with individuals through the stages of change, it is important to understand and respect where they are in the process. Through motivational interviewing you can facilitate and engage in conversations that elicit behavior change and help individuals explore and resolve ambivalence. By using open ended questions, and through the use of Assess Readiness to Quit Scaling, you can help them further identify their reasons for going tobacco-free and support them in achieving their goal.

**To learn more on the Stages of Change visit [Lung.Training](#)
and complete the module, How to Help People Quit.**

For more information about quitting tobacco use,
visit the American Lung Association website at [Lung.org](#)
or call the free Lung HelpLine at 1-800-LUNGUSA (1-800-586-4872).
