

The Transtheoretical Model of Behavior Change

Over 30 years of research in the area of “self-change” has revealed that people can and do successfully make challenging life changes on their own. Although individuals will change in different ways and at different rates, research has shown that they go through a set of five stages in making changes.

Stage 1: Precontemplation or Unaware: Some people have not begun to move through the stages of change. These individuals are in the unaware stage. They do not see that they have a problem. They may be in denial that any problem exists despite evidence to the contrary. Individuals in this stage will actively resist change or any discussion of the problem behavior at hand.

Stage 2: Contemplation: In this stage, people begin to acknowledge that their behavior and choices may be causing problems and they begin to think about solving them. Coupled with the will to change however, is the fear and anxiety of change that pulls these individuals in conflicting directions. Some people get stuck in this stage as they wait for a “magic moment” for change. Others look for a way to maintain their current behavior while simply lessening the severity of the consequences.

Stage 3: Preparation: Individuals in this stage begin to focus less on the past and more on the future. Alternatives and solutions are the primary concern. Some anxiety may still persist, but the individual possesses a growing confidence in the decision to change. It is important to take time preparing for change before diving in. Individuals will want to consider a variety of options and evaluate the benefits and consequences of each before making a decision about what course of action to pursue.

Stage 4: Action: At this stage, people make a commitment to a specific change plan and implement it. The focus of this stage is on effective countering – finding healthy alternatives to old ways, problem-solving tough situations and focusing on the benefits of change.

Stage 5: Maintenance or Stick With It: This stage allows individuals the opportunity to reevaluate their plans and make adjustments. Change rarely happens without some mistakes. Mistakes do not equate with failure. This stage encourages individuals to continue to work on their change plan despite frustration or “slips.” The support of others and the benefits of change will help sustain motivation.

Recommended readings:

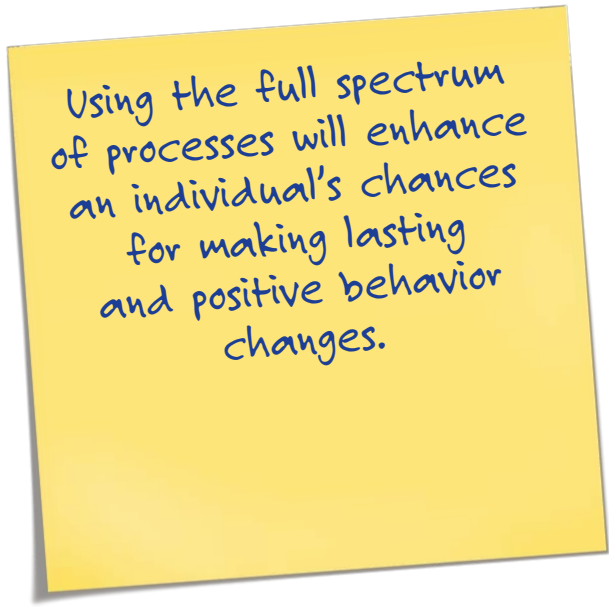
Changing for Good by James Prochaska, Ph.D., John Norcross, Ph.D., and Carlo DiClemente, Ph.D.

Motivational Interviewing, Helping People Change (Third Edition) by William Miller and Stephen Rollnick

The Transtheoretical Model of Behavior Change *(continued)*

One of the most valuable components of the change model is use of the 10 processes that support change. These processes can be implemented through hundreds of techniques or methods. The key is to recognize that many processes are available to support a person's change efforts.

There are 10 processes of change that can generally be broken up into two categories. "Pre-action" processes are best used to assist individuals in the precontemplation, contemplation and preparation stages of change. These processes focus on guiding the individual toward the intention to change and include:



Using the full spectrum of processes will enhance an individual's chances for making lasting and positive behavior changes.

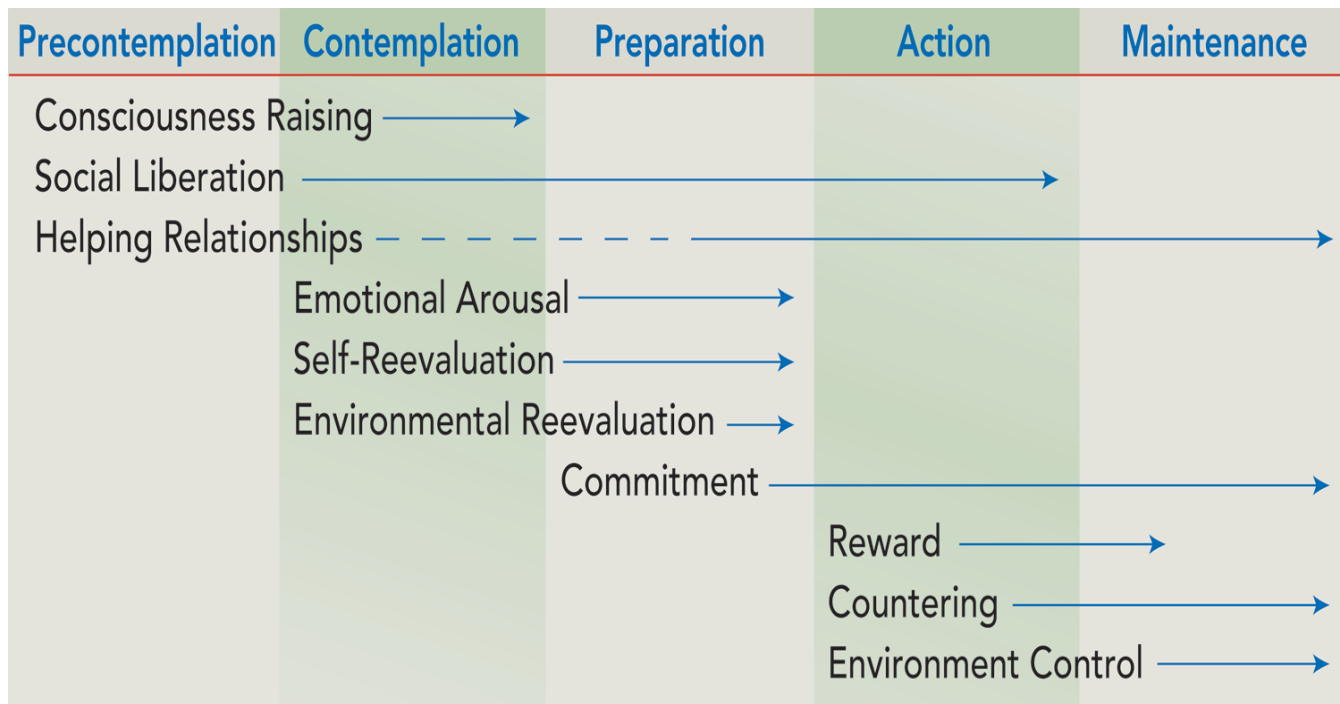
- ◆ **Consciousness Raising:** Gathering information to allow an individual to better assess and make decisions about a problem behavior.
Example of use: This may include going to a local library and researching the behavior, watching a video or program about it or asking a professional for help in understanding it.
- ◆ **Social Liberation:** Taking advantage of social structures that support the plan for change. Looking for people and places in the community that support and promote positive life change.
Example of use: Individuals may choose to join an organization, attend self-help meetings or become involved in other community support activities for individuals who are working on similar issues.
- ◆ **Emotional Arousal:** Experiencing and expressing feelings about problems and solutions. Increasing awareness and depth of feelings about the changes an individual wishes to make.
Example of use: This may include exploring feelings about past mistakes and choices an individual has made due to a problem behavior and exploring the positive feelings an individual hopes to gain by making changes.
- ◆ **Self-reevaluation:** Examining one's own attitudes and behaviors.
Example of use: This may include taking a serious look at problem behaviors and how they match or do not match up with an individual's values.
- ◆ **Environmental Reevaluation:** Recognizing the effect one's behavior can have on others and acting as a positive role model for others who wish to change.
Example of use: Individuals may look at how their behavior has affected their relationships with family members and friends.

The Transtheoretical Model of Behavior Change (continued)

“Action” processes are best used in the action and maintenance stages of change. They include:

- ◆ **Helping Relationships:** Asking for and receiving help from others.
Example of use: This can include forming relationships with people who support their new behaviors.
- ◆ **Commitment:** Choosing to take action and believing in one's ability to change.
Example of use: Individuals can explore their options for change and share their goals for positive change with others.
- ◆ **Countering:** Identifying healthy alternatives to a negative behavior.
Example of use: This may involve learning how to replace negative thoughts, feelings and behaviors with positive, responsible ones and refocusing energy on what will help a person to become happier and healthier (e.g., physical exercise, practicing relaxation techniques).
- ◆ **Environment Control:** Avoiding people, places and things that may encourage the behavior the individual wishes to change.
Example of use: Individuals may consider changing their routine and daily patterns or developing the skill of being aware of cues that lead to negative or irresponsible behaviors.
- ◆ **Reward:** Receiving rewards for making wise choices.
Example of use: This may include doing something special when an individual achieves a positive goal. Rewards can be positive self-statements (for example, "Way to go," "Good job" or "Keep up the good work") or material treats.

Studies of successful self-changers indicate that certain processes work best during certain stages of change. The chart below demonstrates at which stages each process is most effective.



Adapted from *Changing for Good* by James Prochaska, Ph.D., John Norcross, Ph.D., and Carlo DiClemente, Ph.D.