

Motivational Interviewing “Stages of Change”

Pre-Contemplative

During this stage people are not thinking about making a change. This may be because they have never thought much about their situation or they have already thought things through and decided not to change their behavior. People in this stage might find it useful to get more information about their situation.

Contemplative

During this stage, people are “unsure” about what to do. There are both good and not-so-good things about their present situation. People in this stage also struggles with the good and not-so-good things that might come with change. During this stage people often both want change and yet want to stay the same at the same time.

Preparation

During this stage, people begin thinking about how they can go about making the change they desire, making plans, and then taking some action toward stopping old behaviors and/or starting new, more productive Behaviors. People often become more and more “ready” and committed to making changes.

Action

During this stage, people begin to implement their “change plans” and trying out new ways of being. Often, during this stage people let others know what’s happening and look for support from them in making these changes.

Maintenance

During this stage, people try to sustain the changes that have been made and to prevent returning to their old ways. This is why this stage is also known as the “Holding Stage.”

Relapse

Many times the person is able to keep up the changes made and then makes a permanent exit from the wheel (or spiral) of change. During this stage it is also common for people to have some “slips” or “lapses” where old habits return for a short time.

When a person has a relapse, he or she typically returns to the pre-contemplation or contemplation stages: the person's task is to start around the wheel of change again rather than getting stuck. Keep in mind that relapses, slips, and lapses are normal as a person tries to change any long-standing habit. Often, people go around the wheel of change 3 or 4 (or more) times before permanent change takes hold.

There is some pretty good evidence that people shouldn't skip stages. Someone that jumps right into the action stage may not spend enough time preparing for change. The result is they have trouble in keeping the changes they've made. For this reason, it is important for you to know which stage you're in and what things you need to do to move to the next stage.