



Motivation Techniques for the Stages of Change

Change is a process, not an event. Precontemplation is often referred to as being in denial and there are still helpful ways to address a loved one in this stage too. During the change process, people often take a few steps forward and then can take steps backward as ambivalence (I want to change/I don't want to change) is common during this process. Although change involves hard work and missteps, it can eventually result in making life more manageable and lead to achieving desired goals.

Psychologists have identified five stages that people go through when making changes. The stages outlined below can help you gain insight for how you might respond based on the stage of change your loved one is experiencing.

Stage	Characteristics	Motivation Techniques
Precontemplation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not considering change • No perceived need to change • Unwilling or unable to change • "Ignorance is bliss" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask permission, establish rapport, and build trust. Validate lack of readiness • Clarify the decision is theirs • Ask "<i>What would be happening for you to consider this a problem?</i>"
Contemplation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initial awareness of problem • "Sitting on the fence" • In the planning process, determining what is needed, visualizing what the action will look like and trying to ensure everything needed is in place prior to beginning. • Ambivalent about change (<i>this is the "stage" of ambivalence</i>) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explore ambivalence; Encourage the evaluation of pros and cons of behavior change (<i>don't take sides</i>). • Consider and lower barriers to change. Discuss the steps that your child feels are needed to make the change. Have them repeat their goals and rephrase what they say. Using the statements, they previously change, etc.), help determine a change plan. • Clarify the decision is theirs • Identify and promote new, positive outcome expectations
Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some experience with change • Taking positive steps to change • "Testing the waters" • Have not yet reached stabilization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reinforce the importance of their commitment to the new behavior. Be supportive throughout. • Acknowledge the difficulties in early stages of change. • Identify and assist in problem solving, identification of high-risk situations, the development of appropriate coping strategies to overcome obstacles and creating a realistic plan. • Verify there are underlying skills for behavior change; Encourage small initial steps • Explore "<i>What if this doesn't work?</i>"

Action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Actively engaging in the process of practicing the new behavior 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus on social support and developing new skills. Bolster self-efficacy in dealing with obstacles; Combat feelings of loss, reiterating long-term benefits. Explore “<i>How is it working?</i>”
Maintenance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continued commitment to and is sustaining the new behavior Maintaining the accomplishment of completing their goal and in a daily routine of normalcy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Affirm their determination for both their positive lifestyle and continued accomplishments. Review long-term goals; Reinforce internal rewards Review and document the coping strategies being used to avoid a return to the unwanted behavior Develop a Relapse Prevention Plan supporting the lifestyle change

A Note about Relapse: Relapse is a resumption of old behaviors that can last for a short or longer period. Although not considered a “stage of change”, relapse can be – and often is - part of a process of recovery. Therefore, we will mention a few motivation techniques for addressing this:

- Assist in the understanding and reentering into the change cycle; reconsider positive change. Discuss the meaning of a lapse/relapse as a learning opportunity. Develop or update plan with new goals and plan of action.
- Support positive decision to get back on track. Offer encouragement.

For discussion:

- What stage of change is your child in right now? Do you see your child moving between a few of the stages?***
- Have you used any of the motivation techniques described above?***
- In terms of your helping your child, what stage of change are YOU in right now? Has that changed recently for you?***