

# THE STAGES OF CHANGE

## Pre-contemplation

*"I don't see a problem, but I hope that going to this class will get everyone off my back"*

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 have decided not to change their behavior. Sometime people may want to change, but do not feel that they can successfully make the change they desire. People in this stage may find it helpful to get more information about their situation.

## Contemplation

*"I can see where quitting might help my marriage and/or help keep me out of trouble, but I can't imagine never doing it again."*

This is when people start thinking about their situation and are unsure of what to do. There are both good things and not so good things about their present situation. People in this stage also struggle with the good things and not so good things that might come with change. During this stage people often both want to change and want to stay the same at the same time. This can be confusing and stressful for people as they feel torn between these options.

## Preparation

*"I'm ready to try quitting, but I'm not sure that I can do it."*

At some point, when people have been thinking through whether or not to change, they may come to feel that the reasons for change outweigh the reasons not to change. As this weight increases on the side of change, the person becomes more determined to do something. This is the beginning of the "Preparation Stage." During this stage, people begin thinking about how they can go about 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

*"I've been clean for a few weeks and feel really good about it, but part of me wants to celebrate by getting loaded."*

In 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 is happening and look for support from them in making these changes.

## Maintenance

*"These last few months clean have made me feel real good that I'm progressing in recovery, but I'm still wondering if quitting completely is really necessary."*

Once people have succeeded in making and keeping some changes over a period of time they enter the "Maintenance Stage." 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 known as the "Holding Stage." Many times the person is able to keep up the changes made and then makes a permanent exit from the wheel of change. During this stage people also may have "slips" or "lapses" where old habits return for a short time.

## Relapse

Sometimes people also have "Relapses" which may last a longer period of 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 often happen when a person tries to change any long-standing habit. People sometimes go around the wheel of change 3-4 times (or more) before permanent change takes hold.

There is some pretty good evidence that people shouldn't skip stages. Someone that jumps right into that action stage may not have spent 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.