

## WHAT IT IS

One approach addressing the often frustrating and challenging process of encouraging a student in crisis to change their current behavior lies in the work of Prochaska, Norcross, and DiClemente. Their book *Changing for Good* is powerful, with universally helpful concepts when answering the question, “Why is it so hard for students to change their behavior?” Their approach outlines how people move through various stages before becoming ready to make lasting changes in their lives. This can help give a sense of perspective and understanding about why a student may repeat difficult or frustrating behaviors. Transtheoretical change theory is often taught as part of alcohol educational classes to help students make the connection between wanting to change and accomplishing this change in their lives.

This process focuses on five stages of change: pre-contemplation, contemplation, preparation for action, action, maintenance, and relapse prevention, as described below. At this point, stop and think about a behavior you tried to change in your life, perhaps smoking, watching too much TV, or not getting enough exercise. Consider how you progressed through the stages of change.

## WHO TO USE IT WITH

Students struggling with making changes in their lives, perhaps those who have tried to change their behavior but became frustrated when they could not change bad habits as quickly as they would like. This approach is most helpful for students already at the contemplation or action stage, as they will be more receptive to following the approach and creating change in their lives.

## QUESTIONS TO ASK

1. Think about something you want to change in your life. What stage of change are you currently in?
2. What obstacles have gotten in your way when you have tried to change a behavior and have been unsuccessful?
3. Have you had success changing a behavior? What helped you be successful in making that change?

## TEACHING INSIGHTS

For each stage of change, understand your task to help the student.

1. **Pre-contemplation:** Faculty and staff can help the student increase their awareness of their need for change through discussion. They can help the student understand how their behaviors may impact their life.
2. **Contemplation:** Motivate the student and encourage them to think in detail about how their behavior negatively impacts their life. They should explore ways to plan for change and what resources could help implement it.
3. **Preparation for Action:** Plans and goals should be focused, short-term, and designed to be updated and altered to ensure success. Plans should be measurable and something the student can monitor and understand if they are moving forward, static, or moving backward. Faculty can help the student brainstorm and update their plans to ensure a better chance of success.
4. **Action:** Faculty and staff can support the student in trying out these action steps and encourage them to keep trying despite setbacks and the potential failures they may encounter.
5. **Maintenance and Relapse Prevention:** Staff and faculty can help bolster the student’s success and develop an awareness of potential obstacles that could lead to relapse.

Think about a behavior that you would like to change in your life. This could be related to eating healthier, reading or studying more for class assignments, showing up on time, getting to the gym, or addressing unhealthy behaviors in a dating relationship.

Change theory helps us understand the process of change and how we can successfully achieve change in our lives. The five steps of this approach are outlined here:

1. **Pre-contemplation:** You are unaware that there is a problem or thing to change, and you haven't thought much about change.
2. **Contemplation:** This is the most common stage of change. You have thought some about changing a behavior and are getting ready to take steps to change soon. You realize your current behavior is not good for you, but you aren't quite ready to begin to take steps to change.
3. **Preparation for Action:** You are aware of a problem and ready to actively create goals to change your bad habit or behavior.
4. **Action:** You have put your plans into action. You are actively trying to alter your negative behaviors and develop new positive behaviors to replace them.
5. **Maintenance and Relapse Prevention:** You are either successful or need to re-evaluate your plan. If things are working well, you are in maintenance. Continued success depends on repeating those action steps that work while adjusting things that don't. If change is slow or difficult, look for ways to overcome obstacles and reduce the risk of falling back into bad habits.

When you think about the behavior you have tried to change (or are trying to change), think about the stages above and write where you currently are in the change theory steps.

