

The Stages of Change

A map for understanding how lasting change actually happens

Based on the Transtheoretical Model of Behavior Change (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1983)

Change does not happen in a straight line. Most people move through several phases before a new way of living becomes stable, and many circle through them more than once. Knowing the stage you are in helps you pick strategies that match where you actually are, instead of pushing for something your system is not yet ready for.

1 Precontemplation

Change is not on the radar. You may not see a problem, or you may feel pushed by others to change.

Helpful here: Gentle curiosity. Information. Non-judgmental conversation.

2 Contemplation

You see both sides. There are reasons to change and reasons to stay the same, all at once.

Helpful here: Weighing pros and cons. Exploring what matters most.

3 Preparation

You have decided. You are lining up small supports so the change can actually land.

Helpful here: Concrete steps. Accountability. A start date.

4 Action

You are doing the new thing. It takes energy, and early progress is real, even when it is messy.

Helpful here: Coping skills. Support system. Tracking what helps.

5 Maintenance

The change is part of your life. The work is keeping it steady through stressors and seasons.

Helpful here: Relapse prevention. Self-compassion. Adjusting as life shifts.

On relapse. Slipping back into an earlier stage is part of how change happens. It is information, not failure. What you learn in a relapse becomes fuel for the next pass through the cycle.

The Cycle of Change

Most people move around this cycle more than once. That's not a setback. It's how change actually takes hold.

