

The stages of Change Model was developed over thirty years ago by researchers James Prochaska and Carlo DiClemente while studying individuals who were successfully able to change addictive behavior. Studying these stages, and applying mindfulness practices where appropriate, can give us more confidence and greater motivation to change. There are six stages of change. We may move up and down the list as we move toward permanent change.

Pre-Contemplation - This stage can be considered the “pre-mindful” stage. Here we have not consciously examined behavior as troublesome and are not considering change. This is the stage where people around us may be mindful of the problematic behavior, but we ourselves are unaware or unwilling to examine the troubling behavior.

Contemplation - In this stage we have become aware that the behavior is causing us trouble in some aspect of our lives. However, at some level we still believe the benefit of the behavior outweighs the cost.

Ambivalence is the key word in this stage. We are becoming mindful that the behavior may be unhealthy and causing problems in our relationships, but fully examining the cost of the behavior may bring up too much guilt and shame. Mindfulness can play an important role in this stage. Through mindfulness, we can learn to develop a sense of loving kindness toward ourselves. Dropping the shame and guilt surrounding the behavior helps us face it head-on, and start preparation for change.

Preparation - Here we are getting ready to take the leap. Mindfulness can facilitate preparation for change by helping us come up with creative ideas to change behavior. Every time we sit in mindfulness, we are strengthening areas of the brain that foster self-control (“I can ride out this craving”), creativity (“I can come up with a healthier, alternative behavior.”), and self-efficacy (“I think I can do this”). It can help to remember the acronym D.A.R.N while preparing for change. The D stands for desire - how badly do I want to make the change? A stands for ability - mindfulness can help us remember past successes. R stands for reason - mindfulness helps us remember our deeply held values which can facilitate change, and Need - what are the natural consequences I am bound to face if I don't make this change?

Action - Using mindfulness as part of your new routine will continue to build new pathways in your brain, encouraging positive emotions that will enforce healthier behaviors. During the Action phase, mindfulness will help you to continue to think before your act. A regular mindfulness practice will help you reset your nervous system when changing behavior becomes stressful and cravings threaten to overwhelm you.

Maintenance - Once the cravings for the old habits have diminished, mindfulness can help you by continuing to strengthening areas of the brain that allow you to stay flexible during stressful times, and enhance moral reasoning. **Discipline is the key word here.** Mindfulness helps us remember that what we do matters not only to us but those around us. At the same time, mindfulness is not preachy. You will remember to be kind to yourself as your new habits become as second-nature as brushing your teeth.

Relapse - To err is human.... sometimes old habits sneak back. In times of relapse, mindfulness can help remind us to be patient with ourselves. At the same time, simple breathing and stress reduction practice can be the first step out of relapse and back into action.

For more information on starting a mindfulness practice, visit mindfulhub.com

We wish you twenty minutes of mindfulness every day!

