Stages of Change

Precontemplation

1. The costs of the problem behavior (such as drug use) are not yet recognized. The individual is in denial and is not seriously considering changing their behavior. They may have made previous attempts to change, but have since given up.

Contemplation

2. The individual is experiencing ambivalence about change. They can see reasons to change their behavior, but they are still hesitant. The problem behavior continues.

Preparation

3. The individual has decided to change their behavior, and they begin to think about how to do so. During this stage they will begin to make minor changes to support their goal, but they might not have completely ended the unwanted behavior.

Action

4. Significant steps are taken to end the problem behavior. The individual might be avoiding triggers, reaching out for help, or taking other steps to avoid temptation.

Maintenance

5. The changes made during the action stage are maintained. The individual may continue to face challenges, but at this point they have successfully changed their behavior for a significant period of time.

Relapse

After making changes, some individuals will return to their previous problem behavior. This can happen at any time during the previous stages. Not everyone will experience relapse, but it is always a risk.
→ **Pre-contemplation** is a logical starting point for the model where there is no intention of changing behavior and the person may be unaware that a problem exists.
→ **Contemplation** is where the person becomes aware that there is a problem but has made no commitment to change.
→ **Preparation** is where the person is intent on taking action to correct the problem. This stage usually requires buy-in from the client (for example the client is convinced that the change is good) and increased self-awareness (meaning the client believes s/he can make the change).
→ **Action** is where the person is in active modification of the behavior.
→ **Maintenance** is where sustained change occurs and new behavior(s) replace old ones.
→ **Relapse** is where the person falls back into old patterns of behavior.

Finally, the **upward spiral** shows how each time a person goes through the stages of change they learn from each relapse and grow stronger so that the relapse is shorter and less devastating.