

Stages of Change

Stage 1: Pre-contemplation

The participant is either **unaware** of problem behavior or is **unwilling** or **discouraged** when it comes to changing it. She needs to feel listened to and move towards **verbalizing the inappropriateness** of her behaviors. Often, this leads to tension between the reluctance to change and the possibility of a different future.

The counselor needs to **listen** and resist giving advice. The goal is to **provide basic information** to the participant about the risks involved in her behavior that may raise doubts within the participant.

Stage 2: Contemplation

This participant **acknowledges** that she has a problem and begins to think seriously about solving it. She might gather information but not act on it. She knows where she wants to be but is **not quite ready** to make a commitment.

The counselor works with the participant to **consider the pros and cons** of her behavior, developing discrepancy within the participant and decreasing the desirability of the current behavior. The counselor should focus on strengthening the participant's self-efficacy.

**** Pre-contemplation and Contemplation are the stages where many WIC participants are when they come for their certification appointments.**

Stage 3: Preparation

The participant is ready to change in the near future. She may have tried and failed to change in the past. She has learned valuable lessons from her past attempts to change. She needs to **develop a plan** that will work for her.

The counselor's task here is to help the participant think creatively about her **options for change** and determine **which steps are best** given her personal life circumstances. Providing a menu of suggestions can help the participant choose her own next steps.

Stage 4: Action

Participants at this stage are **actively engaged in change**. They stop smoking, walk 20 minutes every day, eat three vegetables a day, or wean their child from the bottle. The action stage **requires the greatest commitment** of time and energy.

The counselor is **supporting** the participant by being empathic and helping the participant adopt the strategies and choices necessary for success. The participant also needs **affirmation** for what she has accomplished and **assurance** that she can continue to make the desired changes.

Stage 5: Maintenance

The participant works to take stock of the gains attained during the Action stage and **struggles to prevent relapse**.

The counselor can help the participant **identify problem areas** and ways to prevent relapse. If relapse does occur, the participant needs to re-contemplate and initiate the process again. The counselor can then **support** the participant and help her learn from the experience. The counselor helps the participant see relapse, not as failure, but as an opportunity to learn, adjust the plan, and renew the attempt at behavior change.