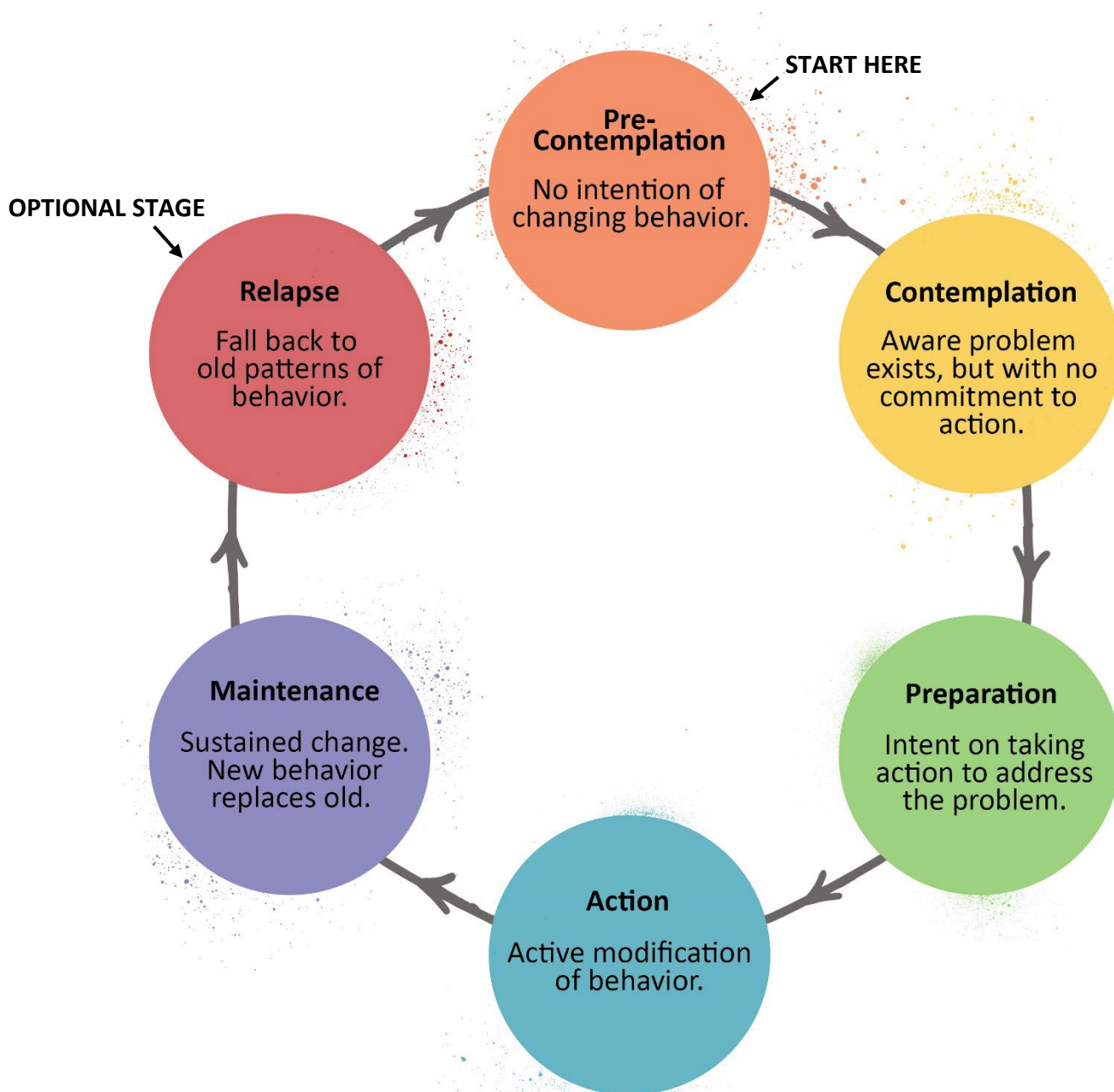


# Stages of Change



**STAGES OF CHANGE:** A series of stages, that people go through when they are modifying their behavior. Each stage includes specific tasks that must be completed to move to the next. This process may be linear, but often is not. Determine the stage of change of youth and their parents before making counseling or intervention recommendations. Remember, youth and their parents may be in different stages.

For youth and their parents, motivation to change may fluctuate often. Poor problem acknowledgment and low motivation to enter therapy can be obstacles. Although necessary at times, forcing youth into treatment can backfire and lead to reduced attentiveness and involvement. They may form an attitude of oppositional defiance and a negative impression of those trying to help them. This interferes with forming working alliances with counselors.



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# Stages of Change



Matching communication to fit a youth's and their parent's stage of change honors their right to self-determination and improves chances of motivating them to make positive choices. Tailor your communication to fit their stage of change according to the guide below. Remember to use ample validating statements.

Counselors can teach parents to match their communication to their youth's stage of change, still disagree with the behavior and set firm limits and expectations. Help parents understand that changing their communication will help increase motivation and preserve the integrity of the relationship with their child. Use the table below to tailor your communication to the appropriate stage of change.

Pre-Contemplation	<p>Validate their feelings and lack of readiness. Encourage self-exploration and set appropriate limits.</p> <p>SCRIPT: 'You have strong feelings about using marijuana and do not want to stop. The school and your parents do not allow it, but I am really interested in your point of view. Tell me why you use.'</p>
Contemplation	<p>Validate that they are thinking about making a change. Encourage exploration of the pros and cons of change. Set limits.</p> <p>SCRIPT: 'Sounds like you are considering stopping. What would be the downside to stop using marijuana? What would be the benefits? Most likely you would get out of trouble at home and at school?'</p>
Preparation	<p>Praise the decision to change and any steps toward change. Ask open-ended problem-solving questions. Set limits.</p> <p>SCRIPT: 'Wow! I am really impressed with your decision to stop using. Why did you make that choice? What steps do you need to prepare for stopping? Will it be easy or difficult to follow the school's and your parent's rules?'</p>
Action	<p>Support, encourage, and praise new behaviors.</p> <p>SCRIPT: 'Your choices are paying off! I am really proud of your change. How does it feel? The decision to make new, non-using friends seems to be helping support your decision. How has this affected school and your parents?'</p>
Maintenance	<p>Support, encourage, praise, and let go.</p> <p>SCRIPT: 'Your decision to stop has become a part of you! Keep up the good work! Do you get cravings or triggers to use? How do you deal with them?'</p>
Relapse	<p>Analyze triggers, reassess motivation, boost coping skills, and set appropriate limits.</p> <p>SCRIPT: 'I am sorry to hear that you are using again! I know you really wanted to make that change permanent. How motivated are you to stop again? Do you need to enter counseling or go to rehab in order to follow the school's or your parent's rules about no drug use? What else can we learn to help?'</p>

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