

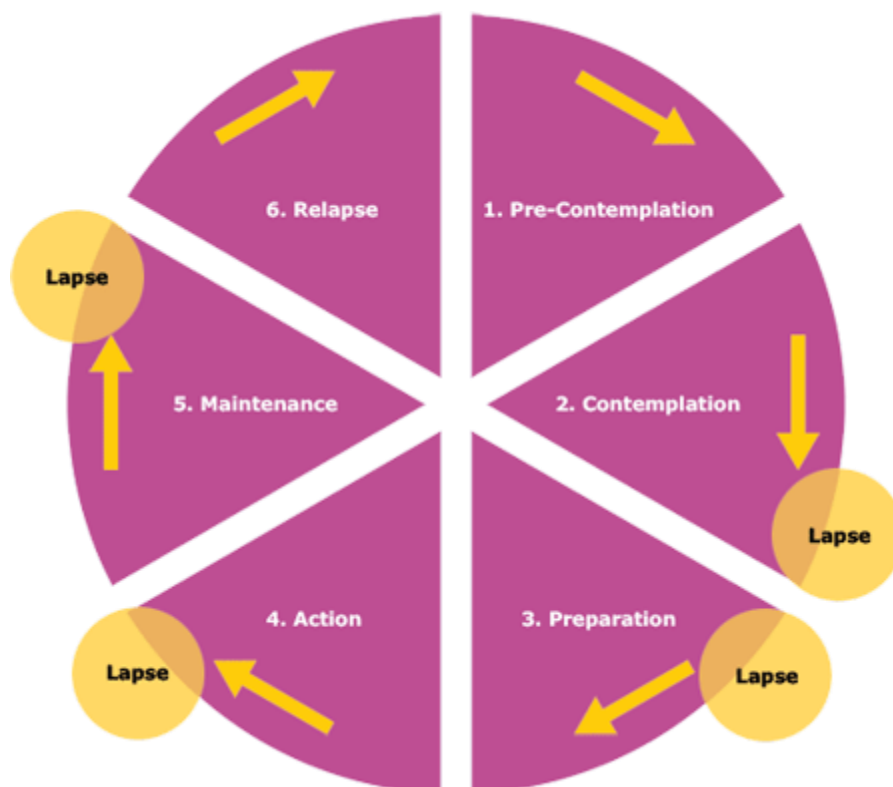
The Cycle of Change

(note: for this section alcohol is included in the category of drugs)

How do people make change?

In order to provide support for a drug user, it helps to understand their behaviour and the motivations behind it. A popular model for explaining the stages a user goes through is the **Cycle of Change**. A user typically goes through the cycle several times as part of their recovery journey; the model helps explain that lapse and relapse are a common part of the journey for people trying to give up any substance.

The Cycle of Change is presented in the diagram below:



1. PRE-CONTEMPLATION

In this stage the individual using drugs has no desire to change. They do not see their using as problematic, even if others do.

How to help in the pre-contemplation stage: As the user doesn't see there is anything to change, the most appropriate support is limiting the impact and harm of their drug use to them and to everyone else. As people at this stage are often not wishing to connect with drug services it is important that others across the health and care system are able to help the person to become aware of the consequences of their use and associated behaviour.

2. CONTEMPLATION

At this stage the individual using drugs starts considering their situation and whether they want to change. They are more aware of their situation and may want to get out of it. However, they are still using at this stage.

How to help in the contemplation stage: support at this stage continues to be about minimising the impact and harm of drug use. In addition, support can be given by helping to motivate the individual to change, such as exploring with them the choices they have and offering them information to better inform their choice. As is the case for those at the pre-contemplative stage, these individuals are often not wishing to connect with drug services at this time so it is important that others across the health and care system are able to help the person to become aware of the support that is available to them and how to access it. Services also provide 'softer' experiences for people who just want to see what the service is about without commitment to accessing more formal support. This can take the form of things like breakfast clubs, social activities, clothes banks.

3. PREPARATION

Here the individual using drugs makes a decision to change their drug using behaviour and starts to prepare themselves to do so.

How to help in the preparation stage: this support is provided by local drug services and involves helping and encouraging the user to make the changes they want to make, whilst acknowledging their anxiety about changing.

4. ACTION

At this point the individual using drugs takes practical steps to bring about a change to their substance using behaviour, such as using less or deciding to give up completely.

How to help in the action stage: this support is provided by local drug services and is about encouraging the positive changes the individual is making in their behaviour.

5. MAINTENANCE

When someone reaches maintenance they have achieved a change in their drug using behaviour. An individual who uses drugs may have either stopped using drugs, or moved to a more controlled, less harmful way of using and is maintaining that change. As everyone can appreciate, sticking to the changes we make in our behaviour can be the hardest part of the process.

How to help in the maintenance stage: services continue to provide support to individuals during this phase to acknowledge the excellent work that individuals will be putting in to maintain the changes that they have made and to discuss known and new triggers and how to remove them from their lives.

6. LAPSE AND RELAPSE

A lapse is when an individual who has been using drugs briefly returns to their previous drug using behaviour. It is possible for people to go from lapse back to any stage of the cycle. However, a relapse is when the individual fully returns to their previous drug using behaviour and then needs to go all the way through the Cycle of Change again.

It's common for a person to relapse, but relapse doesn't mean that treatment doesn't work. As with other chronic health conditions, treatment should be ongoing and should be adjusted based on how the individual responds to the care and support

they are receiving. Treatment plans need to be reviewed often with the individual and modified to fit changing needs.

How to help in the lapse and relapse stages: drug services will continue to provide support to the individual and host relapse prevention sessions as well as offering mutual aid groups (such as AA or NA) and when required will help the individual re-engage with treatment, so a lapse doesn't become relapse.