Understanding Change: Where Are You Right Now?

Research shows that change does not happen all at once. **Instead, people move through predictable stages when working on habits, behaviors, decisions, or goals.** This process is known as the **Stages of Change**, a model developed through decades of research in psychology and health behavior. According to this research, struggling to change does not mean a lack of motivation or ability. It often means a person is working through a different stage than they realize. Understanding your current stage can help you choose strategies that actually fit where you are right now, rather than forcing change before you are ready (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1983; Prochaska et al., 1992).

The Stages of Change at a Glance

Read each stage and circle or highlight what feels closest to your current experience.

Precontemplation
I might have thought about changing, but I am not seriously thinking about making a real change right now.

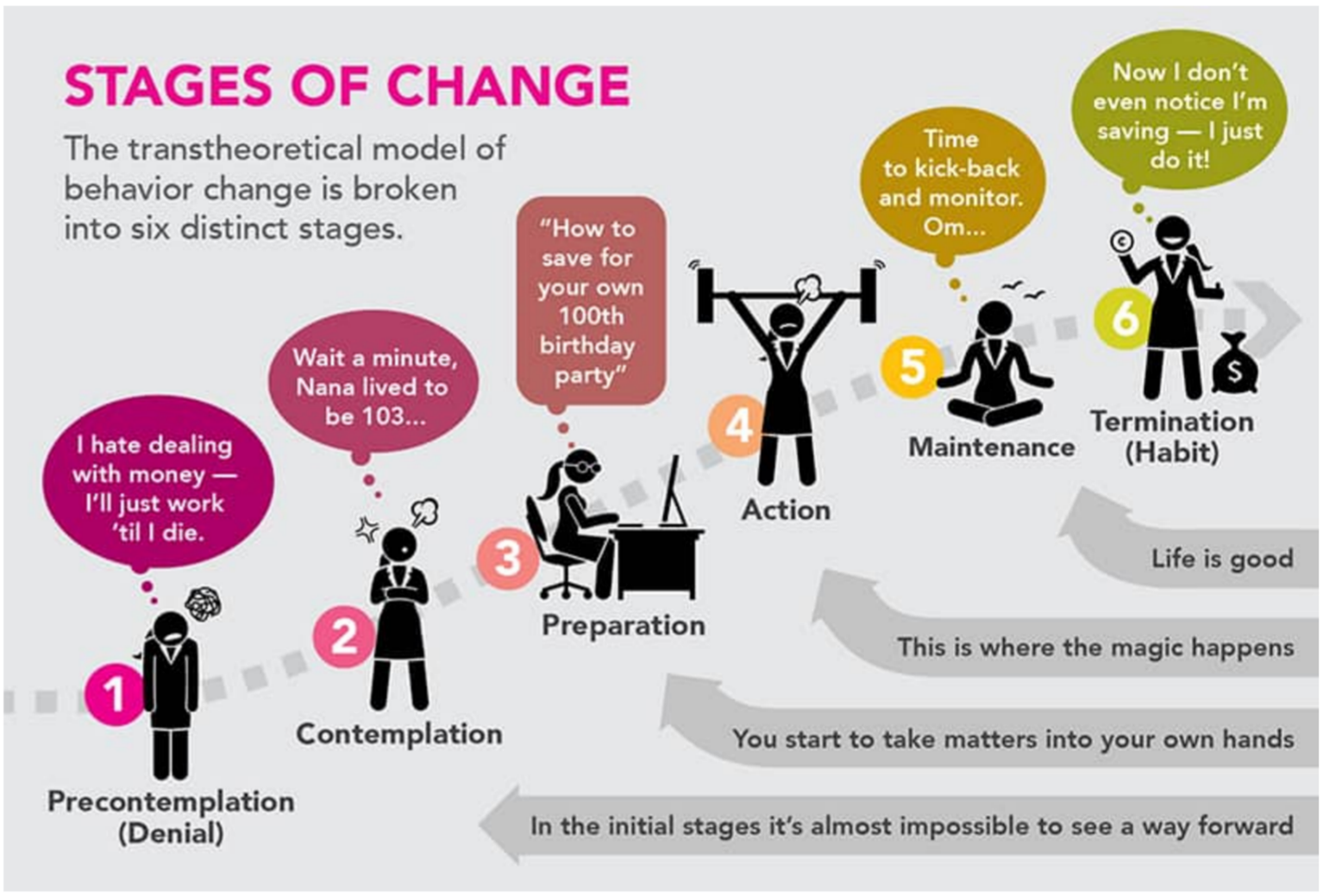
Contemplation
I am thinking about change, but I feel unsure or stuck.

Preparation
I intend to make a change and have started to plan.

Action
I am actively working on the change. I am building new habits that are identifiable.

Maintenance
I am sustaining the change and I am working and vigilent to not slip back into old patterns and habits.

Termination
The change feels fully integrated. I no longer feel tempted to return to old patterns, and the new behavior feels natural.



Name the Change

Choose one area to reflect on and finish the following prompt:

The change I am thinking about is...

_____

_____

Locate Yourself

Which stage best fits where you are right now on your journey to change?

Precontemplation **Contemplation** **Preparation** **Action** **Maintenance** **Termination**

What makes this stage feel accurate for you right now?

_____

_____

Prochaska, J. O., DiClemente, C. C., & Norcross, J. C. (1992). In search of how people change: Applications to addictive behaviors. American Psychologist, 47(9), 1102–1114. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.47.9.1102

What This Stage Needs

Different stages require different strategies. Using the wrong strategy at the wrong time can increase frustration or burnout (Prochaska et al., 1992).

STAGE	WHAT HELPS MOST
PRECONTEMPLATION	Awareness and reflection
CONTEMPLATION	Weighing pros and cons
PREPARATION	Planning and support
ACTION	Practice and accountability
MAINTENANCE	Consistency and flexibility
TERMINATION	Reflection and reinforcement

What support or strategy would you the most right now?

Take One Stage-Appropriate Step

Each stage of change comes with different challenges. What helps in one stage may not help in another. Understanding what your current stage needs can reduce frustration and help you use strategies that actually move you forward instead of forcing change before you are ready.

Choose one small action that fits your current stage.

One step that makes sense for me right now is...

When I will do this:

Recognizing Growth

Noticing progress helps reinforce change. When you recognize signs of growth or stability, you strengthen your confidence and make it easier to maintain or fully integrate the change over time. Reflection helps turn effort into lasting habits.

Complete the following sentence:

Reaching Termination would mean that: (What do you need to do to reach termination?)

or, if you are already there...

Signs that this change is fully part of my life include: