

IECMHC Cog 1: Stages of Change

The Stages of Change model provides a helpful tool for you to assess a group’s readiness to adopt or create the systems that will support IECMHC. For each of the five stages along its continuum—pre-contemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, and maintenance—the model provides concrete strategies to advance individuals to the next stage of readiness. In turn, an accurate assessment can guide how you form your message so that you can meet your audience where they are.

The chart below outlines the five stages of readiness for behavior change. Ask yourself which of the five definitions best corresponds to your intended audience’s readiness to adopt or create the systems to support IECMHC. Is your audience thinking about a change in the near future? If so, they’re in the contemplation stage. Is your audience already implementing a plan to enact change? Then they’re in the action stage. Once you’ve identified your intended audience’s stage of readiness, you can design a message that is likely to resonate with them. The chart also provides potential communications goals based on the stage of your intended audience. Leverage these potential goals to help guide your communications strategy.

Stages of Readiness for Behavior Change¹

Stage	Definition	Potential Communications Goals
Pre-contemplation	Individuals are unaware of problem, have not thought about change, and/or do not want to change	Increase awareness and personalize risks and benefits
Contemplation	Individuals are thinking about a change in the near future	Encourage and motivate people to make specific plans
Preparation	Individuals have made a plan to change	Help create a concrete plan of action and set short-term goals
Action	Individuals are implementing a specific plan to change	Assist with feedback, problem-solving, social support, and reinforcement
Maintenance	Individuals are continuing the desired behavior or repeating a periodic action or actions	Assist with coping, providing reminders, finding alternatives, and handling relapses

¹ From *Communicating Public Health Information Effectively, A Guide for Practitioners* by David E. Nelson, M.D., M.P.H., Ross C. Brownson, Ph.D., Patrick L. Remington, M.D., M.P.H., Claudia Parvanta, Ph.D. (Washington, DC: American Public Health Association, December, 2002).