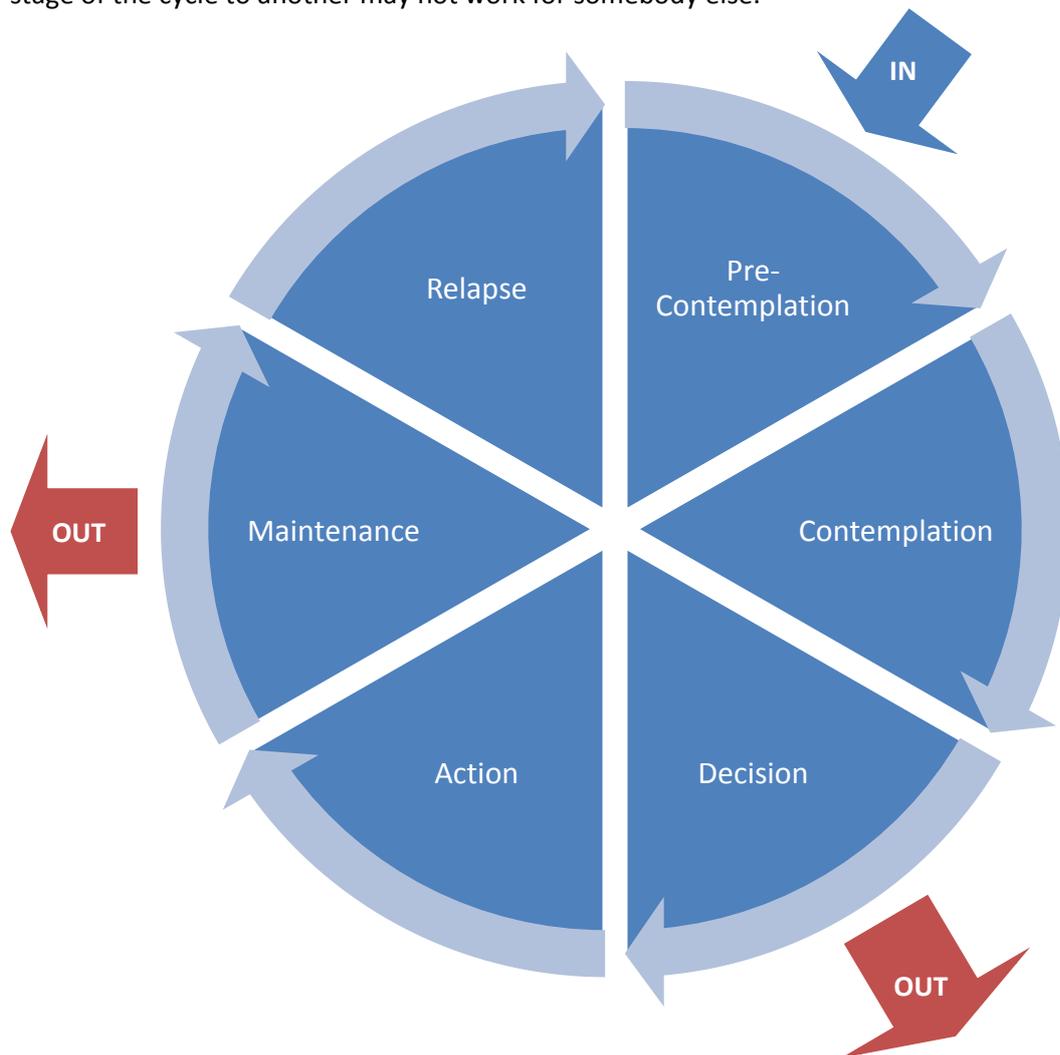


## Change as a Process

### *Prochaska and Diclamente's Cycle of Change*

Change is a process, not an event – this does not only apply to addiction. People can pass through the process very quickly (like when we make a decision to do something different in an instant) or may take a long time.

The Cycle of Change can be a useful model for analysing and understanding change and making sure that our actions are appropriate and tailored to where a person is in the process. Different things are helpful for people at different stages of the cycle, and what will help one person move from one stage of the cycle to another may not work for somebody else.



### **Stage 1 – Pre-contemplation**

Pre-contemplation means “before you are even thinking about it”. The person is not thinking about change and is happy with the way they are at present. Someone can remain in this stage for a long time unless there are external or internal things that move them towards thinking about change. Everybody starts the process of changing from this point.

## **Stage 2 – Contemplation**

The person has, for some reason, begun to consider change. The things that move somebody to start to think about changing can be from inside the person or from something or somebody else. This is a stage that everybody passes through. For some people this stage can be very short – for others it takes longer.

## **Stage 3 – Decision**

The person has thought about change and now has to make a decision. Does he or she decide not to make a change, and therefore leave the change cycle, or to make a change and therefore move to the next stage in the cycle of change? Some people decide not to change, but this does not mean that they have stayed in one place on the process. It is important to recognise if somebody has been through part of the cycle and decided not to change.

## **Stage 4 – Action**

The person has made a decision to change and needs to put this decision into action. This can be with or without external help and support. Not everybody will get as far as this in the process of changing.

## **Stage 5 – Maintenance**

A change has been decided upon and action has been taken. However, the change needs to be maintained. If the change is maintained on a permanent basis then the process is considered to be complete and the person leaves the cycle of change.

## **Stage 6 – Lapse or Relapse**

If the change is only maintained for a short period of time before the person returns to the previous behaviour or thought patterns then we talk about lapse or relapse. If someone has been through a process of change and then lapses it can be an easier and quicker process to go through the process again and successfully maintain the change. Some people take a number of attempts at change before they manage to maintain the change.

## **Example**

Let's look at an example of change that is not related to addiction or life-controlling behaviours. We will consider the process that a woman who decides to change her hair-style goes through. This is useful as hair naturally "relapses"! The next page takes us through each stage of the Cycle of Change.

Stage in the Cycle	What is Happening	Outward Appearance
<b>Pre-contemplation</b>	The woman is content with her current hair-style.	
<b>Contemplation</b> 	The woman sees a photograph in a magazine of someone with a different hair-style and thinks that it might suit her. A friend says the same. She begins to think about a change.	
<b>Decision</b> 	After some time of thinking about it, the woman decides to change her hair-style.  Note: We are now half-way through the cycle, but there is no change in the woman's outward appearance! Just because change is not obviously happening it does not mean that somebody is not in the process.	
<b>Action</b> 	The woman goes to the hair dresser and has her hair cut in the new style. This is the first point in the process where there is a clear demonstration of change.  Note: A decision to change without action is no different to a decision not to change.	
<b>Maintenance</b> 	The woman continues to have her hair cut in the new style at regular intervals.	
<b>Relapse</b> 	Eventually the woman cannot be bothered to go to the hair dresser as regularly and lets the style grow out.	

**Questions:**

1. Can you work through an example related to an addiction or life controlling problem?
2. Is there a difference between lapse and relapse?
3. What can you do to help someone move from each stage of the process to the next?
4. Which stages in the cycle of change are you currently helping people with?