

# PNSAS

PENNSYLVANIA NETWORK for  
STUDENT ASSISTANCE SERVICES

## Guidance for Effective Conversations/Engagement with Students & Families

### Stages of Change Model

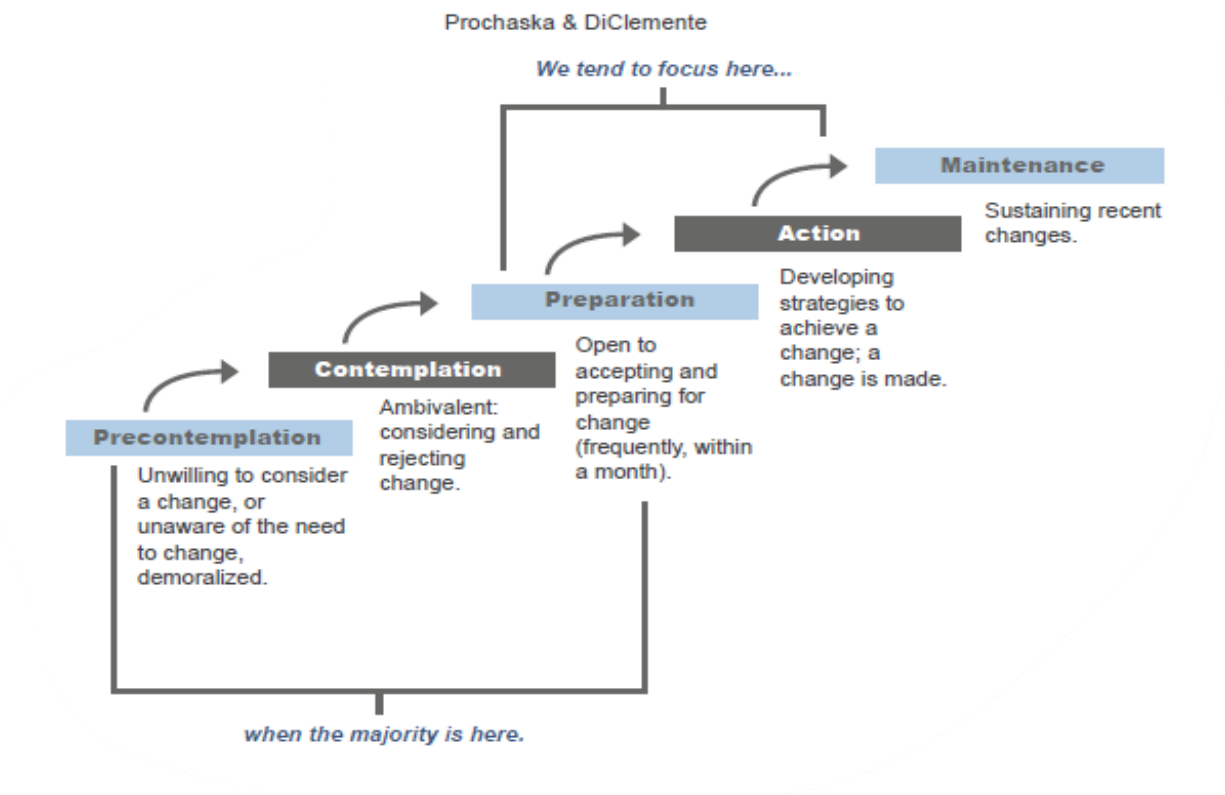


Figure 1<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Northeast and Caribbean Addiction Technology Transfer Center. (February, 2021). The Transtheoretical Model of Change: A Model for the Treatment of Substance Use Disorders. Institute for Research, Education and Services in Addiction, Universidad Central del Caribe, Bayamón, PR

### Strategies to Consider for Each Stage

|                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|-------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Precontemplation</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Validate lack of readiness (“I understand that you may not be ready yet.”)</li><li>• Clarify that the decision is theirs (“I realize that this is your decision.”)</li></ul>                   |
| <b>Contemplation</b>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Validate lack of readiness</li><li>• Clarify that the decision is theirs</li><li>• Encourage evaluation of pros and cons</li><li>• Identify and promote positive outcome</li></ul>             |
| <b>Preparation</b>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Identify and assist person in problem solving regarding obstacles</li><li>• Help identify social support</li><li>• Encourage small initial steps</li></ul>                                     |
| <b>Action</b>           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Focus on support</li><li>• Bolster self-efficacy for dealing with obstacles</li><li>• Combat feelings of loss and look at long-term benefits</li><li>• Provide positive affirmations</li></ul> |
| <b>Maintenance</b>      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Plan for follow-up support</li><li>• Reinforce internal rewards</li></ul>                                                                                                                      |

### Tips for Parent/Family Conversations

Strategies for **hesitant or conflicted parent/guardian** (not at the action stage)

- Use statements like:
  - I hear hesitation in your voice – are there things about this that concern you?
- Be prepared for concerns over logistics, transportation, childcare, insurance, school/parent conflict, family concerns, privacy concerns

Strategies for **angry or frustrated parent/guardian** (not at the action stage)

- Make sure you are grounded and take care of yourself (deep breaths)
- Remember this isn’t about your call (they may be responding to past trauma, fear, etc.)
- Give space and allow the parent to vent – hear their perspective
- See if there are any areas you can work together to move forward
- It’s ok to continue the conversation later and come back to this (“It sounds like... - is there a better day or time to discuss this? I can call tomorrow?”) – give them options
- Be patient – change will happen as the parent/guardian are ready

Strategies for **unresponsive parent/guardian** (those who have been unable to be reached)

- Have school staff ask the student for alternative ways to contact the parent/guardians
- Use school staff/resources with ways to reach out to homes or make home visits

Other Strategies

- Remember to **address language barriers** and have a plan to communicate in a way that is understandable and preferred by families – be prepared with translators or other resources
- **Validate and empathize** with their struggles
- **Don’t challenge or blame** but try to speak to their intentions

- “I know you care about your child and you’re trying hard to help him/her – We believe SAP could offer supports to help him/her be more successful.”
- “Do you have any suggestions for us when (insert child’s name) is struggling with challenges at school?”
- “What supports can we help you with right now?”
- Parents/guardians may ask who referred their child or why they were referred
  - Let them know students can be referred by teachers, other school personnel, peers, or themselves – Students are referred because someone is concerned about the child
  - Use any observable data collected to explain the school’s concerns – share data about the referral reason/concerns but also share strengths identified
- Parents/guardians may ask for time to think about it or talk it over with their spouse/partner
  - Make a plan to follow-up and ask for the best time and method to communicate
  - Normalize the need to ask questions later and offer ways for them to reach out via phone/email
  - Invite ongoing communication and let them know they will be engaged throughout the process
  - Thank them for their time