



Stage-Matched Support

We often hear the saying that child welfare professionals should “start where the client is”, or, “meet the client where they are.” But what does that really mean? It means we need to identify where a person is with their motivation for change, meet them at that stage, and use stage-matched support skills and strategies to help them move forward.

This resource is a sort of ‘map’ to help you identify where the person is on their journey of making a change. Each stage has corresponding resources and strategies, specifically designed for child welfare professionals. By selecting from these stage-matched support resources, you will be better equipped to meet the person where they are and effectively guide them toward making and sustaining positive change.

When we can spot, understand, and respond effectively to these stages, we can better support caregivers in their recovery and the families with whom we work.

It is important to remember that a person can be in different stages of change for different behaviors at the same time. For example, they might be ready to take action on managing their stress but may be in the contemplation stage around stopping their substance use. To best support them, match your support strategy with their stage of change for each behavior.

The Person’s Stage of Change	How You Can Support Them	Stage-Matched Resources
<p>Precontemplation</p> <p>The person is not acknowledging that there is a problem behavior that needs to be changed. They may feel discouraged and without hope. Despair may be expressed as lack of motivation, anger, defensiveness, or denial that a problem exists.</p>	<p>Engagement</p> <p>Focus on building rapport by identifying strengths, what is important to them, and what they want or are willing to work on. Collaborate on ways to reduce potential harm.</p> <p><u>AVOID:</u> Advice giving, highlighting negative consequences of their behavior(s).</p>	<p>Resources for this Stage</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Strengths Card Sort 2. Powerful Questions, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What makes your life meaningful?</i> • <i>What really matters to you?</i> • <i>What are your greatest strengths?</i> 3. What Matters to Me
<p>Contemplation</p> <p>The person’s awareness is growing that a problem exists, but they are not taking action yet. They are experiencing ambivalence. They have glimpses of hope and possibility that change is possible. Their sense of hope and confidence may fluctuate. Excitement may be mixed with anxiety or fear of failure.</p>	<p>Persuasion</p> <p>Focus on strengthening their sense of hope that change is possible, enhancing their confidence and their motivation to take action. Identify and praise incremental change accomplishments.</p>	<p>Resources for this Stage</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Exploring Pros and Cons Tool 2. Let’s Explore Scaling Tool 3. Powerful Questions, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What things have had a negative effect on your wellbeing?</i> • <i>When did you become aware that this was a problem?</i> • <i>What have you done in the past that has helped even a little bit?</i>
<p>Preparation</p> <p>The person may be at a turning point and intent on taking action to address the problem, so they begin to make plans to change. Even though they can see benefits to making a change and are determined, they may still be experiencing some ambivalence about changing.</p>	<p>Planning</p> <p>Continue to build rapport and support a person’s determination and sense of hope and possibility. Gather information to collaborate on creating a change plan with clear, realistic steps and SMART* goal(s).</p>	<p>Resources for this Stage</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Taking a Step Toward What Matters to Me 2. Powerful Questions, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What would you like to be different?</i> • <i>What do you think will help improve things?</i> • <i>How does change usually happen in your life?</i> • <i>What have you tried? What works?</i>

Map continued on back.

* <https://practicetransformation.umn.edu/practice-tools/guide-to-goal-setting-and-tracking/>

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<p>Action</p> <p>The person is actively engaged in taking overt steps toward making a change and rebuilding their life. They are trying out new skills and strategies to support their wellbeing.</p>	<p>Active Goal Setting and Steps</p> <p>Help implement change strategies. Bolster self-efficacy for dealing with challenges, obstacles and making changes. Reinforce hope, normalize ambivalence. Praise action steps and progress. Use setbacks and challenges as opportunities for the person to learn or try something different.</p>	<p>Resources for this Stage</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Taking a Step Toward What Matters to Me 2. Powerful Questions, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Who can support you in making this change?</i> • <i>What could you start doing? What is one thing you will do?</i> 3. Meeting Guides - Select the meeting guide that supports the change they want to make: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Refusal Skills</i> • <i>Preventing Stress</i> • <i>Asking Your Provider Questions</i> • <i>Being Aware of Warning Signs</i> • <i>Solving Problems</i> • <i>Managing Stress with Muscle Relaxation</i> • <i>Asking for Help</i> • <i>Managing Stress in the Moment</i> • <i>Managing High Risk Situations</i> • <i>Wise Mind</i> • <i>Strengthening Ourselves with Affirmations</i>
<p>Maintenance</p> <p>The person remains committed to maintaining their gains and enhancing their wellbeing by continuing to engage in behavioral change.</p>	<p>Relapse Prevention</p> <p>Continue reinforcing what is working and the positive changes they have made. Help them identify skills and strategies that can support them when they experience future challenges. Encourage them to maintain and strengthen their support network. Encourage continued growth and change, which includes identifying new goals.</p>	<p>Resources for this Stage</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Powerful Questions, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Of all the things you have done, what has worked best?</i> • <i>What makes it possible for more of this to happen?</i> • <i>Who can support you in sustaining this change?</i> 2. Meeting Guides - Select the meeting guide that supports the change they want to make: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Refusal Skills</i> • <i>Preventing Stress</i> • <i>Asking Your Provider Questions</i> • <i>Being Aware of Warning Signs</i> • <i>Solving Problems</i> • <i>Managing Stress with Muscle Relaxation</i> • <i>Asking for Help</i> • <i>Managing Stress in the Moment</i>

Powerful Questions has a lot of open ended questions to help you empower the person and support you in being an agent of positive change. The questions included here are just a small sampling.

Stage of Recovery	Stage of Change	Stage of Treatment
Overwhelmed / Despair	Precontemplation	Engagement
Glimpsing Hope / Awareness Grows	Contemplation	Persuasion
Turning Points / Determination	Preparation	Planning
Living with Illness / Rebuild	Action	Active Treatment
Growth and Living Beyond the Illness	Maintenance	Relapse Prevention

To learn more about the stages of recovery and stage-matched support, please see: *CASCW Practice Tip #5: Understanding Changes of Recovery for Caregivers with Co-occurring Disorders in Child Welfare, (Fall, 2021).*