



Youth AOD Service
Bay of Plenty District Health Board

Cycle of Change Explained

Pre-Contemplation- not interested

Your young person is not interested in changing anything to do with their substance use. The goal is to get them thinking about making a change. The emphasis should be on providing harm reduction information, discussing risks about their use and trying to identify discrepancies in their thinking – sowing the seeds for change.



Contemplation- thinking about it

Your young person is thinking about making some changes regarding their substance use. The emphasis should be on enhancing thoughts about change and moving towards action. It is important not to rush too quickly into action but explore reasons for change, tipping the balance towards change.



Preparation- how do I change?

Your young person has been thinking about making changes and is now ready to look at how they do that. The emphasis should be on cementing reasons for change and planning how to make these changes. It is important to set a SMART goal (Specific, Measureable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-framed) and then look to identify what might get in the way of the goal and what can be done to minimise these risks (e.g. avoiding certain people or places, keeping busy at a certain time of day).



Action- doing it

Your young person is working on achieving their goal regarding their substance using behaviour. A goal may be to stop use altogether but most often for young people it is to reduce use in some way, whether this leads on to stopping or not. The focus of work is to provide encouragement, review strategies for achieving the young person's change goal and provide practical support where able.



Maintenance- keeping going

Your young person has achieved their goal regarding changes they wanted to make to their substance using behaviour. The focus of work will be about preventing lapse/relapse, identifying what things might lead to lapse and how to minimise these risks. It is important to look to fill whatever gaps might now be left by the changes to their substance use (i.e. substance use can take up a lot of time, consider how to fill this time up differently now).



Lapse- slip up, and Relapse- back to the start

A lapse is a one-off 'slip-up' where the young person has reverted to previous substance using behaviour. A Relapse is where the young person has gone back to the original behaviour and is once again pre-contemplative (i.e. 'what's the point I can't do this'). The focus of work after a lapse is to cement motivation again and review what happened, making strategies for next time. After relapse it may be important to provide some space (the young person may feel guilty) and then start again.

