



# Scottish Families

Affected by Alcohol & Drugs

## Understanding drug use How do people change?

Stopping or reducing drug use can be a difficult process. As well as your loved one's drug use, there will be other areas in their life they may have to change. The 'cycle of change' (below) is commonly used in drug treatment services to show people the process of change. It illustrates that it can be difficult to conquer addiction.

The cycle illustrates a process of change. There is no timescale for each stage, as this depends on the individual. Positive progress may be made or lapses backwards can occur. It is normal to go round the cycle several times to achieve lasting, stable change.

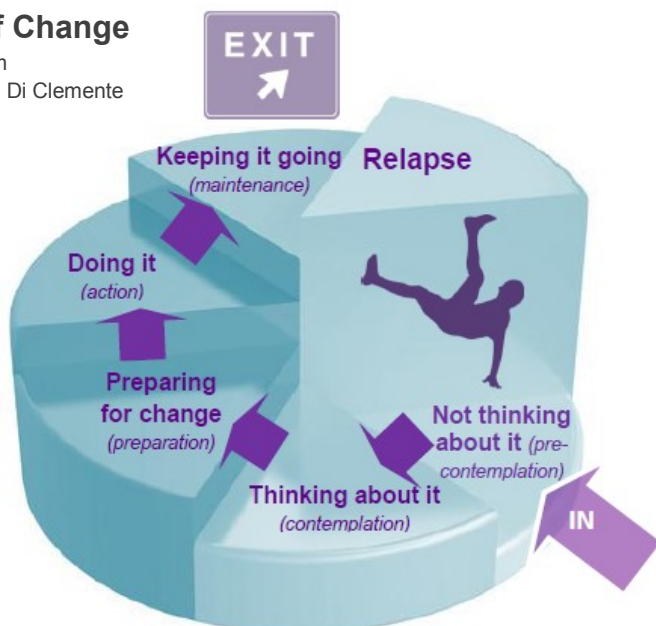
For someone to stop or reduce their drug use they need to believe that the positives of changing outweigh the negatives. You cannot force someone to make changes.

Someone's motivation to change can be influenced by:

- Knowledge about situation and their options;
- Their skills and/or their support network;
- Self-belief that they are able to make changes;
- Belief that things will improve if changes are made;
- Self-esteem (feeling of self-worth and value).

### Cycle of Change

Adapted from  
Prochaska & Di Clemente



### Stages of change:

**Pre-contemplation:** Here we have a 'happy user' not aware or concerned that their drug use is an issue. It would appear to them to be under control or purely recreational. There is no desire to change and they don't see their use as problematic, even if others do.

**Contemplation:** They're thinking about change. On the one hand they enjoy using drugs, and on the other they are starting to experience problems. There are consequences of drug use - legal, financial, medical or family problems.

**Preparation:** They are ready and determined to change, the negative consequences of drug use may now outweigh any benefits. They prepare to make changes.

**Action:** Practical steps taken to change their drug use, such as cutting down or stopping using altogether.

**Maintenance:** Keeping new behaviour going, having cut down or quit drugs. When this has continued over a long-term period, they say they no longer have a problem or they are in 'recovery,' they exit the cycle.

**Lapses and relapses** are common when trying to give up dependent drug use. People can **lapse** back a step at any stage of the cycle, briefly returning to previous drug misuse.

A **relapse** is when they fully return to their previous drug misusing behaviour and need to go through the cycle of change again.



# Scottish Families

Affected by Alcohol & Drugs

## Understanding drug use How do people change?

### Understanding the process of change: how you can help

Change is a process and it takes time. Believing that change is possible in the longer term is a great source of hope. By identifying where a loved one is in the cycle, you may better understand what support to offer, and what support you need for yourself.

**Not thinking about it** (*Pre-contemplation*) There is no desire to change and they may just ignore anyone who suggests that what they are doing is dangerous or harmful.

- *You can speak to them about your concerns and feelings, and how their drug use is affecting you. It is important they become aware of the consequences of their drug use and associated behaviour.*

**Thinking about it** (*Contemplation*) Some negative consequences of their drug use may cause them to consider making changes.

- *You can highlight they do have choices and help them to explore their options. Prevent your loved one from avoiding responsibility for any negative consequences of their drug use.*

**Preparing for change** (*Decision and preparation*) A crucial step. They have decided they want to make changes. (A word of warning: some may only say they are stopping or reducing their drug use to avoid confrontation with the family.)

- *You can support their decision and acknowledge their worries about being able to make changes.*

**Doing it** (*action*) They do what they have decided. This can involve reducing drug use, starting treatment, changing their environment, or abstinence (no drug use).

- *You can recognise what they are doing and encourage them to believe they can change.*

**Keeping it going** (*Maintenance*)

- *You can continue with support and encouragement, let them know how far they've come.*

**Lapse and Relapse** Lapses are common and can occur at any time in the cycle and are normally temporary. A relapse is when they revert back to an earlier pattern of drug use and need to go through the cycle again. Triggers such as a stressful event or being in a tempting environment can make someone vulnerable to relapse, even after years of abstinence.

- *You can be positive, encourage them to feel they can try again.*



### Cycle of change

Adapted from Prochaska & Di Clemente

### Further sources of information and support:

**Know the Score** [www.knowthescore.info](http://www.knowthescore.info)  
Information and advice on drugs and the health risks associated with drugs.  
Confidential helpline: **0800 587 5879**  
(open 8am - 11pm, 7 days)

**Drinkline Scotland**  
[www.drinksmarter.org](http://www.drinksmarter.org)  
Alcohol advice, information and support for anyone concerned about their own or someone else's drinking.  
Confidential Helpline: 0800 7 314 314  
(Open 8am - 11pm, 7 days)

**Scottish Drugs Services Directory**  
[www.scottishdrugservices.com](http://www.scottishdrugservices.com)  
Online search for local services, including treatment and harm reduction services.

**Scottish Families Affected by Alcohol & Drugs helpline:**  
**08080 10 10 11**  
[helpline@sfad.org.uk](mailto:helpline@sfad.org.uk)  
Information and support for anyone affected by someone else's alcohol or drug misuse. Information on local support services including family support groups.