

Bros & Sis

Stages of change:

Where is your brother or sister at?

If your brother or sister is addicted to drugs or alcohol their situation and attitude to their drug use will probably change over time. Identifying the stage that your brother or sister is at can help you to understand their behaviour. We'll also give you a few tips on how you or your parents can best respond to help your brother or sister.

Stage 1: Pre-contemplation

In this stage the person has no reason or plan to change their pattern of drug use. Threats from family members, friends, and the courts have no effect on them.

Helpful responses:

- Friendly and open communication can help you keep a good relationship with your brother or sister, but conversations about change will push them away
- Try to help them use the drug as safely as possible (have a read of the drug-specific fact sheets or ring DirectLine/ADIS for some ideas).

Stage Two: Contemplation

In this stage the person is feeling uncertain. They are torn between wanting to change and wanting to stay the same. They start to think about the good and bad sides of their drug use

and to consider change.

Helpful responses:

- Help them to explore their thoughts
- Try not to say what you would prefer
- Acknowledge that they are thinking about change and that you think this is a good idea

Stage Three: Preparation

In this stage your brother or sister has decided that they want to change. They begin to think about action: 'What do I want to change? How am I going to achieve this?'

Helpful responses:

- Talk to them about what they want to do
- Support them to contact services and get information

Stage Four: Action

In this stage they carry out their plan. Such a plan might mean that they reduce their drug use, start treatment, change their environment, or stop using drugs or alcohol at all.

Helpful responses:

- Recognise any action and encourage your brother or sister to stick to their plans
- If they slip back, don't focus on the negative
- Encourage them to believe they can change
- Help them find other things to occupy their time (e.g. Hobbies, kicking a footy, listening to music)

Stage Five: Maintenance

In this stage your brother or sister works to keep the changes they have achieved.

Helpful responses:

- Support them in keeping to the changes they've made
- Believe that they can manage and be in control
- Acknowledge and support other areas of their lives

Stage Six: Relapse/lapse

In this stage they return to an earlier pattern of drug use, for instance beginning to use drugs again. This is very common. Relapses can occur at any time and can be temporary. Triggers, such as a stressful event or being in a tempting environment, can make a person vulnerable to relapse even after years of not using drugs. Think of the difficulties ex-tobacco smokers can have when hanging around other smokers.

Helpful responses:

- Try not to panic
- Think of the relapse as short-term
- Try not to get frustrated and recognise that your brother or sister can often learn important lessons and strategies each time they relapse
- Support them as before, according to the stage to which they have relapsed.