

## Managing Change: Resolving Ambivalence

*“Decision is the bridge between wishing and acting.” — Irvin Yalom*

Have you recently acknowledged that you have a problem behavior that you need to change? Maybe you have been considering for several months that you will quit smoking. You have bought the nicotine patch ... but it lays unopened in your medicine cabinet. Maybe the notion of “losing a few pounds” is generally at the forefront of your mind. In fact, you’ve bought a treadmill ... but it is now shoved into the corner and covered with clothes.

You have decided that you will change your problem behavior; you just haven’t yet mustered up the motivation. Maybe you have been in this stage for months or even years—wishing that you could make a change: stop overeating, stop gambling, stop drinking, etc.

### Stages of change

Recent theories of change have focused on the process of change as just that: a process. Change is not a single event; it does not occur overnight, but rather, change occurs through defined stages.

The second stage of change, contemplation, is defined by the experience of ambivalence. You know you are contemplating changing a problem behavior if you:

- can acknowledge that you have a problem behavior
- wish that you could change the behavior
- feel stuck by fear or ambivalence

All in all, you are no longer content with the status quo. It might not feel like it, but this is a positive place to be—because your denial is gone.

So, how can you commit to finally changing that problem behavior? This article will address some of the ambivalence you may have, and offer some tips to move you forward.

### Ambivalence

The contemplation stage of change is filled with ambivalence. You are being pulled in two opposite directions—your wish to change and your fear of changing.

Fear about change can take many forms. Some people fear the prospect of failing. Some fear the prospect of doing something new. And some fear that the changes they make won’t be accepted by their close friends and family members. Even though you know you want or need to change a problem behavior, it is still very scary to change.

All of your fears are real, and you should take a considerable amount of time to contemplate your fears during this stage. But be careful. Your fear could overtake you, and you could become “stuck” in this stage of considering changing and never make the decision to change.

## Questions to ask yourself

There are several things you can do at this stage of change. Most important is to take an inventory. Your goals are to:

- consider the advantages of changing your problem behavior
- develop resolve in your intention to change
- develop optimism that you can change your problem behavior

Make this an actual inventory by writing down your responses to the following questions in a contemplation journal entry.

### *Advantages of change:*

1. If you changed, what would your new life be like?
2. If you changed, what would your life be like five years from now?
3. If you could make this change immediately, by magic, how might things be better for you?

### *Optimism about change:*

1. What encourages you to think that you can change if you want to?
2. When else in your life have you made significant change like this? How did you do it?
3. What personal strengths do you have that will help you succeed?

### *Intention to change:*

1. What do you want to have happen?
2. How important is this to you? How much do you want to do this?
3. What would you be willing to try?

## Moving on

The contemplation inventory might help you resolve your ambivalence about changing. If so, then you are one step closer to making that change! Congratulations!

**Source:** *Changing for Good: A Revolutionary Six-Stage Program for Overcoming Bad Habits and Moving Your Life Positively Forward* by James O. Prochaska, John C. Norcross and Carlo C. DiClemente. William Morrow and Co. Inc, 1994.

By Frances Hughes, PhD, LPC  
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