

Addressing Client Resistance and Increasing Engagement in Behavioral Health

Subtitle



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Learning Objectives

- Define client resistance and distinguish it from noncompliance.
- Identify common causes of resistance.
- Describe the Stages of Change model.
- Apply Motivational Interviewing techniques to reduce resistance.
- Demonstrate communication strategies that increase engagement.
- Develop an action plan for immediate implementation.

Think About Your Most Challenging Client

- What behaviors made engagement difficult?
- What emotions did you experience?
- What strategies worked?
- What did not work?

Understanding Resistance

Resistance is often a protective response. It may reflect:

- Fear
- Trauma history
- Shame
- Hopelessness
- Ambivalence
- Loss of control
- Previous treatment failures
- Distrust of providers

Why Clients Resist

Internal Factors

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Substance use
- Low motivation
- Trauma
- Cognitive distortions



Why Clients Resist

External Factors

- Transportation
- Financial stress
- Housing instability
- Childcare
- Cultural barriers
- Family conflict
- Previous negative healthcare experiences



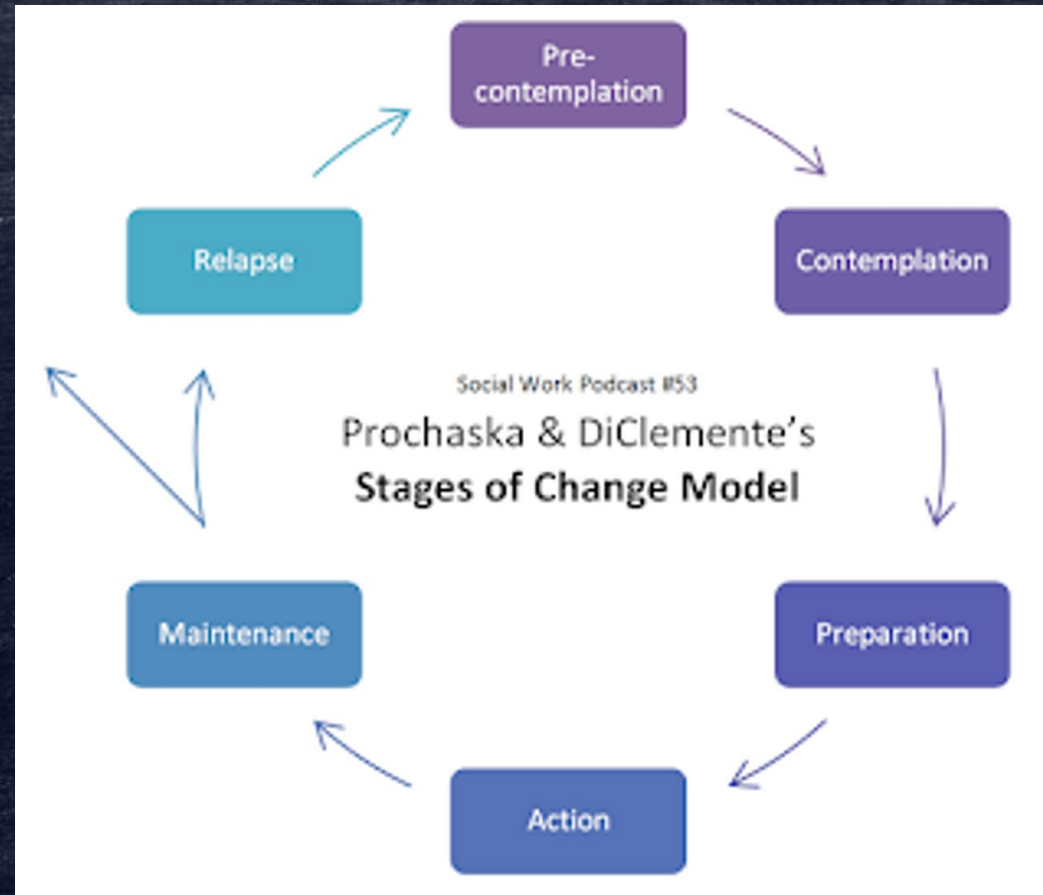
Why Clients Resist

Provider Factors

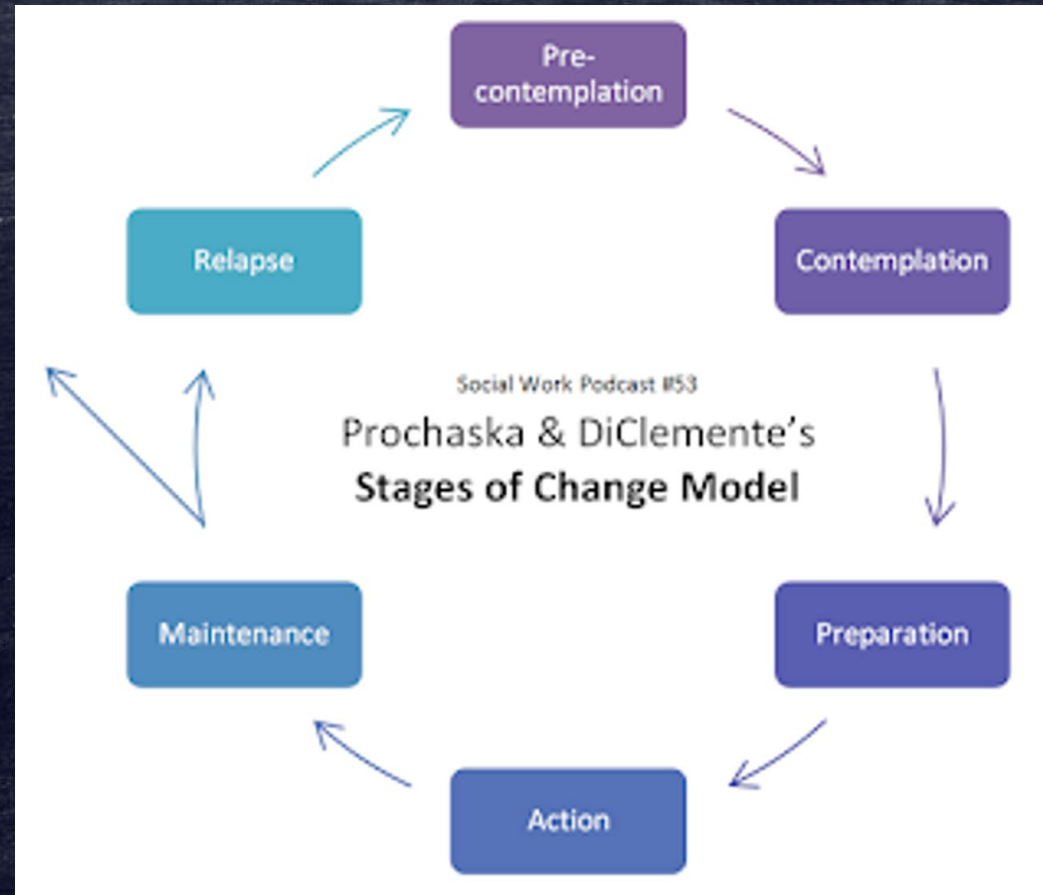
- Giving advice too quickly
- Judgmental language
- Limited collaboration
- Power struggles



Stages of Change



Stages of Change



Avoid the Righting Reflex

The "Righting Reflex" is the urge to fix, persuade or convince.

Instead of: "You need to attend treatment."

Try: "What concerns do you have about treatment?"

Instead of : "You should take your medication."

Try: "What has your experience with medication been like?"

Motivational Interviewing (OARS)

OARS Communication Skills

Open-ended Questions - "What worries you most?"

Affirmations - "You've shown a lot of resilience."

Reflections - "It sounds like you're exhausted."

Summaries - "Let me summarize what I've heard..."

Practical Engagement Strategies

Build Trust

- Listen more than talk
- Validate emotions
- Normalize ambivalence

Promote Autonomy

- Offer choices
- Ask permission before giving advice

Practical Engagement Strategies

Identify Motivation – Ask:

- “What matters most to you?”
- “What would success look like?”

Celebrate Progress

- Every positive step counts.

Responding to Resistance

Client Statement

- "Nothing Works."
- "I don't care."
- "I don't trust therapists"
- "My family made me come."
- "I'm fine."

Effective Response

- "Tell me about what you've already tried."
- "Part of you feels discouraged."
- "It sounds like trust has been difficult."
- "What would make today worthwhile for you?"
- "Help me understand what 'fine' means today."



Key Communication Phrases

Instead of:

- "You need to..."
- "Why didn't you come?"
- "That's not true."
- "You have to."

Try:

- "What feels realistic?"
- "What got in the way?"
- "Help me understand."
- "What options would you like to consider?"

Personal Action Plan

Complete the following:

One thing I will stop doing:

One communication skill I will begin using:

One client I will practice this with is:

Key Takeaways

- ✓ Resistance is communication.
- ✓ Ambivalence is normal.
- ✓ Engagement begins with trust.
- ✓ Collaboration is more effective than confrontation.
- ✓ Motivational Interviewing improves outcomes.
- ✓ Small successes create momentum for change.



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Thanks to my
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Gus



Thank You!

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