

DESI Doubts

By South Asian
Americans
For Change

EPISODE 2: TURMERIC WON'T FIX THIS ONE SUPPLEMENTAL RESOURCE PACK

Before we get started, let's breathe.

Working through change(s) whether big or small can be difficult. A good way to ground ourselves is breath technique called *box breathing*. It may feel a bit odd and funny to do at first, but this type of breathing regulates the autonomic nervous system, leading to feelings of calm. It has been practiced in eastern cultures for centuries (Balban et al., 2023) and is supported by modern science (Balban et al., 2023).

The first step is to get in a comfortable position and set ourselves up for success by removing distractions (we love DND mode on our phones if possible for you). Perhaps it feels good to put one hand on your heart and one hand on your belly.

- Inhale for 4 seconds, take one more sip of air at the very top.
- Hold your inhale for 4 seconds.
- Slowly exhale for 4 seconds
- Hold your exhale for 4 seconds.
- Repeat 5 times.

A brief reflection to see where we are.

It may be overwhelming to think about all the changes you could make in your life. Let's start by narrowing it down: **If you could wave a magic wand so that you woke up and your problems were solved, what would your life look like? What might someone else observe about you?**

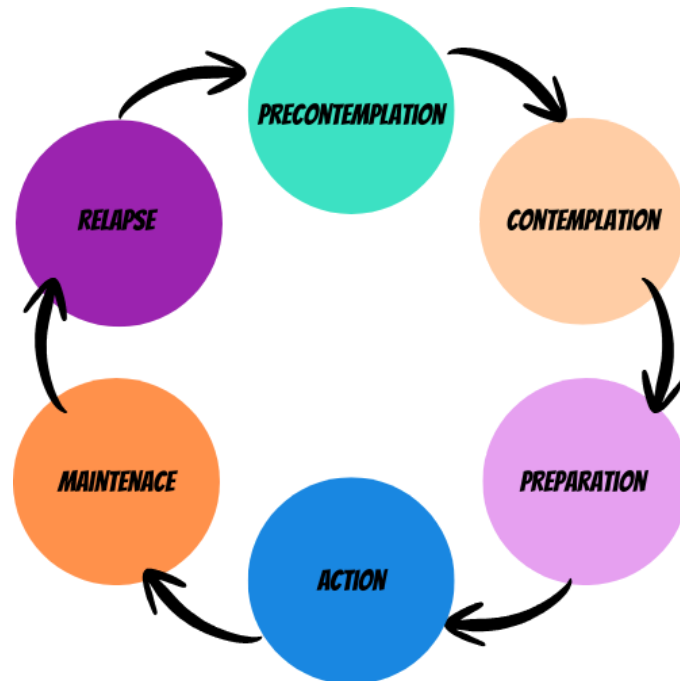
You may have a laundry list of answers in response to this question, but if you take a little time to reflect, you may find that one or two main themes stick out. These are the areas you may focus on for the next few sections. The good news is once you start applying skills to one growth area, you'll learn to apply them to other areas even faster in the future.

Kapil Nayar (Desi Doubts Volunteer, Age 41) reflects on a difficult change he had to make when working at a for-profit substance use disorder treatment center that was engaging in insurance fraud.

*"I knew I wanted to distance myself from the unethical practices of this organization but it was **difficult to know where to start**. Before I even took my first steps, I had to consult with my mentors and seek legal counsel. After much **preparation**, I was able to act in line with my values by providing a grand jury testimony and submitting all corroborating documentation as evidence to support my claim. The action didn't stop there, I **maintained** these changes by supporting the investigators*

through the end of the case and ensuring that I continued to defend vulnerable patients in my subsequent positions.”

Let's talk about the Stages of Change (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1983).



“You are here”

When you're planning a route on a map, **you start by figuring out where you are so that you can figure out where to go next.** The “Stages of Change” (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1983) is a model sometimes used by mental or physical health providers to help identify how ready a person might be to make a specific change. **We can orient ourselves the same way when making changes for our mental health.**

Note that the stages of change do not need to occur in any particular order and it's not just competition of one cycle. Actually, **it's not uncommon to oscillate among the stages many times over.** There is also no time limit for how long we may stay in one stage.

The point of empowering ourselves with this information is **not to push ourselves** through the various stages or shame ourselves into thinking we should be moving faster or slower than we are. It is to understand and meet ourselves *where we are at*. Aspects of perfectionism, obligation, and commitment may cause us to be deficit-oriented. Comparing ourselves to others, entertaining aspects of FOMO (fear of missing out), may cause us to feel that we aren't doing 'enough.' **Lean into grace and try to find resources that help you nourish yourself in this process.**

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Stage of Change	Definition	Behavior Clues	First Step
Precontemplation	Not thinking about or resistant to change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Denying that a problem exists Arguing that the status quo is better for you Anger towards loved ones who may point out a problem 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Take a nonjudgmental look at pain points and their causes For loved ones, listen and offer support without judgment
Contemplation	Aware of the problem, considering changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not yet ready to act, but can reflect on the idea of change Discuss the idea of change with loved ones 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make a list of pros and cons for making a change Discuss the identified pros and cons with a loved one
Preparation	Getting ready to take steps to consider change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organize a list of actionable steps and goal setting Take small steps to enact a change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Verbalize intention and set attainable goals Take small steps to achieve said goals
Action	Change the behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use small rewards to stay motivated while changing Develop plans to handle triggers and prevent relapse 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Notice your own gains Accept and reflect on when others notice your progress Track how long you maintain the changed behavior
Maintenance	Continue with new behavior	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Remind yourself of the progress made Reflect how long you've kept change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintain changes Adjust as needed Integrate coping skills when necessary
Relapse	A window for growth, never failure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reassess for change Evaluate what worked and/or did not work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Integrate additional support systems Continue working towards the desired change

Some more guidance to help you think critically about changes you may want to make.

In the South Asian diaspora, we may have been conditioned to make changes in our lives due to external pressures or motivations. We have operated from a place of survival because the stakes of not making changes felt incredibly high. **If not survival, then guilt may have been our motivator.** Through the model minority myth, we may have believed that we were supposed to conform to a stereotype of achievement or take advantage of the “better life” our immigrant parents or grandparents wanted for us. While these narratives may have motivated us in the short term, the **research shows that there are much more important factors motivating sustainable, long term changes:**

Past behavior likely influences what we will do in the future (Albarracín & Wyer, 2000). This doesn't mean we're incapable of change, it means that we can pay attention to and build on our prior experiences. What is one change you have made in the past year in service of your growth? How did you make that happen?



Goals and changes tied to our intrinsic values are more likely to stick in the long term than goals we set for external reward or approval (Deci & Ryan, 1985). What values are tied to the goal you are hoping to set? How will this goal help you become the person you want to be long term?



When identifying a goal, the way we frame it is important (Bailey, 2017)

Goals are often framed as behaviors we want to stop (avoid) or start (approach). Evidence suggests that approach-oriented goals promote more positive outcomes. How can you frame your goal in terms of behaviors you want to promote?



Counterintuitively, we tend to adhere to challenging goals more than we stick with easy ones. There's some nuance to this: how can we frame our goal so that it is possible to achieve, but still pushes us just outside our comfort zone?

We cannot always anticipate roadblocks or barriers to achieving our goals, but sometimes we can make a plan to head them off. If we know resources, energy, or knowledge are barriers to a goal, it is important to frame our goals around those barriers. What barriers can you think of?

Social support promotes goal adherence and self efficacy (Riccio et al., 2019). Bottom line? You do not have to make these changes alone. Who can you recruit on to your team as you're making these changes? What type of support do you feel would assist?

A gentle challenge to end.

Set a reminder for 1 month, 3 months, 6 months, and 1 year. Invite yourself to check in and gauge your progress on what it was that you wanted to change. Are you where you saw yourself when committing to change? If so, what more would you need to support your growth? If not, what stage of change do you feel like you have surpassed? Feel free to journal your experiences for reflection

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