

STAGES OF CHANGE IN CSEC COUNSELING

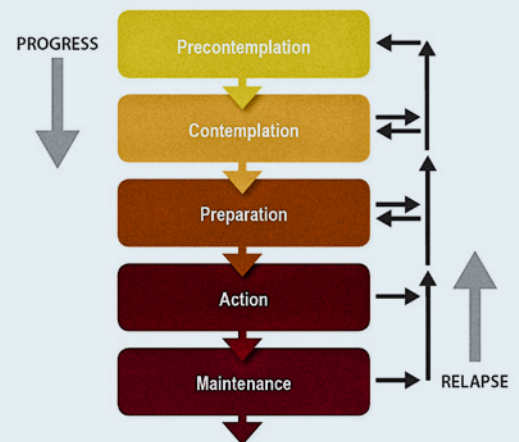
GEMS created the following handout based on the Stages of Change Model. The Stages of Change Model (SCM) was originally developed in the late 1970s and early 1980s by James Prochaska and Carlo DiClemente. Although the model was created in the context of working with addicts, it has been utilized in a variety of fields to help service providers understand and respond to the process of behavior change. “The idea behind the SCM is that behavior change does not happen in one step. Rather, people tend to progress through different stages on their way to successful change. Also, each of us progresses through the stages at our own rate... Each person must decide for himself or herself when a stage is completed and when it is time to move on to the next stage. Moreover, this decision must come from inside you—stable, long term change cannot be externally imposed” (Kern, 2008).

GEMS connected this theory to advocacy-based counseling methods used with child victims of commercial sexual exploitation (CSEC) and included the valuable addition of direct quotes from victims with whom they have worked, making this handout a useful advocacy tool. Building rapport with survivors of CSEC requires that advocates be conscious of where survivors are at and where they want to go. This tool can help advocates to identify what stage a survivor might be in, while also providing a valuable reminder that being nonjudgmental and patient is extremely important when working with this population.

Developed by Girls Educational and Mentoring Services

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Girls Educational and Mentoring Services (GEMS) is an organization based in New York State whose mission “is to empower girls and young women, ages 12–24, who have experienced commercial sexual exploitation and domestic trafficking to exit the commercial sex industry and develop to their full potential. GEMS is committed to ending commercial sexual exploitation and domestic trafficking of children by changing individual lives, transforming public perception, and revolutionizing the systems and policies that impact sexually exploited youth” (from <http://www.gemsgirls.org>).



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STAGE OF CHANGE: PRE-CONTEMPLATION

- Denies being sexually exploited
- Discloses involvement in the life, but does not present it as a problem
- Is defensive
- Does not want your help, wants you to “stay out of their business”

WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE WITH CSEC VICTIMS

- Not ready to talk about abuse
- Will defend or protect abuser
- Does not want help or intervention
- *“I love my daddy. He takes care of me.”*
- *“I’m happy making money.”*
- *“I’m good with the way things are.”*
- *“I make money doing what other people give away for free.”*

COUNSELOR’S GOALS

- Validate experience/lack of readiness
- Encourage re-evaluation of current behavior
- Encourage self-exploration, not action
- Explain and personalize risk
- Get legal identification documents
- Set up appointments for healthcare and mental health
- *“I can understand why you feel that way.”*
- *“Is there anything about your relationship with him that you don’t like?”*
- *“How do you feel when . . . ?”*
- *“I’m proud of you. You’re taking big steps right now. Be proud of yourself!”*

STAGE OF CHANGE: CONTEMPLATION

- Acknowledges that being in the life is painful and probably not what they want for themselves
- Not yet ready to leave but processing the abuse and the effects of the abuse
- Ambivalent about actually leaving
- Open to self-reflection, weighing consequences, and talking about feelings

WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE WITH CSEC VICTIMS

- Often an external event, or “reality,” has confronted the pre-contemplative stage.
- Incidents can include violence, rape, assault, getting pregnant, diagnosis with an STD, new girls in the house, getting arrested, not getting bailed out
- Fear of the consequences of leaving: violence, retribution, threats to self and family, being homeless, having no money
- Thinking of leaving but feeling isolated from the “square” world
- *“I didn’t think it was going to turn out this way.”*
- *“I feel like I don’t deserve this.”*
- *“I don’t want this for my daughter.”*
- *“I’m afraid that if I try to leave he’ll just track me down and find me. There’s no point.”*
- *“This is what I’m good at. I’m not good at anything else.”*

STAGE OF CHANGE: CONTEMPLATION [CONTINUED]

COUNSELOR'S GOALS

- Listen!!!!
- Encourage client to list out the pros and cons
- Reflect change talk
- Affirm processing of problems
- Validate ability for client to make changes
- Identify and assist in problem solving/obstacles
- Help identify sources of support
- *“When are the times you feel really good? When are the times you feel really bad?” (make lists)*
- *“What do you feel is holding you back the most?”*
- *“I think you should be proud of yourself for . . .”*
- *“I’m proud of you. You’re taking big steps right now. Be proud of yourself!”*

STAGE OF CHANGE: PREPARATION

- Has made a commitment to leave
- Has thought a lot about leaving, now begins to “test the waters”
- Exhibits signs of independence by taking small steps to be able to leave
- Researches and is open to resources available

WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE WITH CSEC VICTIMS

- Regularly attends events/groups/counseling at agency
- Stashes money
- Brings clothes or belongings to the agency
- Doesn’t answer cell phone every time exploiter calls
- Starts GED classes
- Thinking about a part-time job
- Exploring housing/shelter options
- *“I would really like to finish school.”*
- *“I still love home and want to be with him, just not with all the other stuff.”*
- *“I want to leave, I just want to save some money first.”*

COUNSELOR'S GOALS

- Create a safety plan
- Case management: find housing, education, employment, regular therapy
- Encourage small initial steps
- Validate fear of change
- Introduce client to new experiences where he/she can gain new skills and increase self-esteem
- Affirm underlying skills for independence
- *“You should be really proud of yourself for doing _____, you are doing something healthy for yourself.”*
- *“It’s normal to be nervous about the changes you’re making.”*
- *“What kinds of things are you interested in? What are your dreams for the future?”*
- *“I’m proud of you. You’re taking big steps right now. Be proud of yourself!”*

STAGE OF CHANGE: ACTION

- Leaving the life

WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE WITH CSEC VICTIMS

- There are often stages of exiting (may feel the need to rely on a few regular “johns” until financial situation is stable)
- Goes through intake at a youth shelter
- Placement at a residential treatment center
- Staying with relatives
- Starts part-time job
- Cuts off contact with pimps/johns
- Moves from area of exploitation
- *“It’s so hard and it’s taking so long to get everything together.”*
- *“I’m so glad I left. I hate him...but I miss him.”*
- *“I can see myself going to college and getting a good job.”*
- *“It’s so weird being in the ‘square’ world.”*
- *I feel different from everyone else.”*

COUNSELOR’S GOALS

- Support & validate the effort it takes to leave
- Address safety concerns
- Focus on restructuring environment and social support
- Discuss self-care
- Create system with youth for short-term rewards he/she can give to him/herself
- Process feelings of anxiety and loss
- Reiterate long term benefits of change
- *“It’s going to take a while to get things in your life in order. Try to be patient and not do everything at once.”*
- *“It’s completely normal to love and hate your ex at the same time. Let’s talk about your feelings before you act on them.”*
- *“I’m proud of you. You’re taking big steps right now. Be proud of yourself!”*

STAGE OF CHANGE: MAINTENANCE

- Remains out of CSEC
- Develops new skills for a new life
- Successfully avoids temptations and responding to triggers

WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE WITH CSEC VICTIMS

- May maintain job/school
- Living in stable environment
- Develops new relationships (intimate and social), often struggles with this
- Develops network of support
- Begins to address trauma of experiences
- *“I can’t believe I wasted so many years.”*
- *It’s like I never had a childhood.”*
- *“I could never go back to the track/club.”*
- *“I feel bad for other girls/boys who are still in it.”*
- *“Sometimes I’m bored and kinda miss the drama.”*
- *“It’s hard starting relationships because they only want one thing.”*

STAGE OF CHANGE: CONTEMPLATION [CONTINUED]

COUNSELOR'S GOALS

- Plan for follow-up support
- Reinforce internal rewards and self care
- Discuss coping with relapse
- Discuss triggers and temptations, creating coping strategies
- Continue to help look for opportunities to develop new skills and invest in supportive communities
- Recognize progress and validate strengths
- Be patient and realistic
- *“Can you tell me the times you most feel like going back? What do you miss the most?”*
- *“How can you find ‘excitement’ and ‘attention’ in other ways?”*
- *“What kinds of people are you attracted to? Why do you think that is?”*
- *“I’m proud of you. You’re taking big steps right now. Be proud of yourself!”*

STAGE OF CHANGE: RELAPSE

- Returns back to the life

WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE WITH CSEC VICTIMS

- Runs away from program
- Re-establishes contact with exploiter (exploiter gets out of jail, runs into exploiter or someone from the life on the street, seeks exploiter out to reconnect)
- Returns to strip club or escort agency
- Begins to see “johns” regularly
- *“He really loves me.”*
- *“I’m always going to be like this. This is who I am.”*
- *“I’m so ashamed. I don’t want to come back.”*
- *“You don’t understand. I missed him and besides, it’s different now.”*
- *“It was too hard. I just couldn’t do it.”*

COUNSELOR'S GOALS

- Address feelings of failure
- Reassure that most people experience relapse
- Revisit subsequent stages of change (hopefully preparation or action, but sometimes contemplation)
- Evaluate the triggers that resulted in relapse
- Reassess motivation to leave again and barriers
- Plan stronger coping strategies
- *“It’s ok. It’s normal to struggle with making really big changes. You’re still welcome here.”*
- *“What did you feel like you needed that you weren’t getting?”*
- *“Perhaps we can talk about why it was so hard.”*
- *“Are things better this time? Why do you think that? What changed?”*
- *“I still support you and believe in you.”*

The Stages of Change model is viewed as a cycle, one that may be repeated, albeit not always in a linear fashion. After the “relapse” stage, the hope is that the victim you are working with will restart the cycle at the “contemplation” or “preparation” phase, and eventually will have the support and skills they need in order to stay in the “maintenance” phase. According to Kern (2008), “eventually, if you ‘maintain maintenance’ long enough, you will reach... the stage of ‘transcendence,’ a transcendence to a new life.”

* Kern, M. (2008). Stages of change model. Retrieved from: <http://www.addictioninfo.org/articles/11/1/Stages-of-Change-Model/Page1.html>