

# The Four Stages of Change

This article will help you understand better in which stage of change you are currently. Keep in mind, you can be in different stages for different changes you're making. Also, it's not linear. Although once you've left Stage One, you can never again lower your consciousness and "go backward," the other stages are much more fluid.

## Stage One: Unconscious Incompetence

Description of how it feels:

*"I am unaware that there is a problem but even if I knew about it, I wouldn't know what to do with it."*

Guiding Feeling: *Intuition*

How to know if you're in this stage:

Your intuition is tapping on your shoulder, telling you that there's something wrong. You feel uneasy. You have trouble focusing. You are depressed and can't quite put your finger on why. You might find yourself angrier and more upset more often and without "apparent reason." You have a general sense of unease.

As the issue starts to become harder to deny, you might excuse it because you are convinced that the situation is out of your control and there's nothing you can do about anyway.

Question to ask yourself:

*"What is nagging at me?"*

How to get to the next stage:

Trust your intuition. Accept that something is off-kilter. Go within. Ask yourself, "If I could change anything right now, what would I do differently?" Understand that you are not the problem but accept that you do have control over how you handle it.

Thought to remember:

*There is always another choice.*

## Stage Two: Conscious Incompetence

Description of how it feels:

*"I accept that something is not how I want it, but I don't have a damn clue in the world about what to do about it."*

Guiding Feeling: *Acceptance*

How to know if you're in this stage:

You have either realized or it has been pointed out to you from someone else's behaviors or comments that you have a problem. You might feel lost, scared, overwhelmed, powerless, frustrated and doubt your abilities. You might be inclined to beat yourself up for not realizing it earlier or even for having the problem. You feel a great deal of stress.

Be aware that once consciousness has been raised, it can never be lowered again

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Question to ask yourself:

*"What am I trying to change that is frustrating me?"*

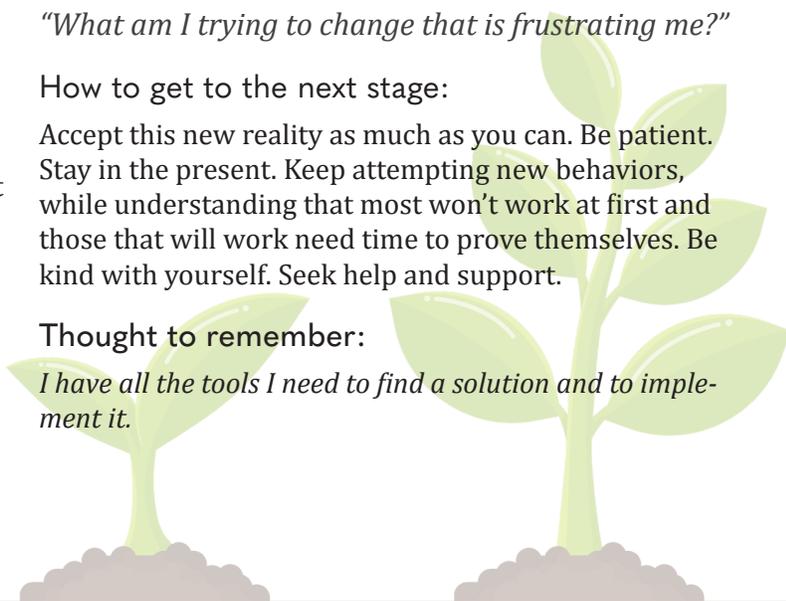
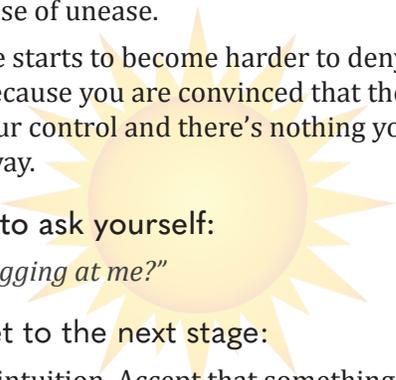
How to get to the next stage:

Accept this new reality as much as you can. Be patient. Stay in the present. Keep attempting new behaviors, while understanding that most won't work at first and those that will work need time to prove themselves. Be kind with yourself. Seek help and support.

Thought to remember:

*I have all the tools I need to find a solution and to implement it.*

Change is not linear, but does follow a pattern. Learn to recognize the stages and you will be better able to handle it.



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## Stage Three: Conscious Competence

### Description of how it feels:

*“Through trial and error, and hopefully the support of others, you have persevered and developed some patterns that – more times than not – move you in the direction of what you want. However, these behaviors are not automatic, nor are they often very efficient. You must continually and consciously remember to utilize them.”*

### Guiding Feeling: *Empowerment*

### How to know if you’re in this stage:

You have “thrown so much against the wall that something is finally ‘sticking’” and you are feeling less frustrated than in Stage Two. At times, you might feel like you’ve found a magic formula and therefore are excited about wanting to share it with others who might be experiencing what you are. You see progress in your goals — but not as quickly as you would prefer.

However, because you feel like you are constantly thinking about what you have to do, you are mentally exhausted a great deal of the time, and might have the urge to give up. You can bounce from euphoria as you see the changes taking shape - to anger, immense frustration, or sadness when they don’t seem to be working. These mood changes can take place at the drop of a hat.

### Question to ask yourself:

*“What am I doing well - even though I have to think about it all the time?”*

### How to get to the next stage:

Stick with it. Congratulate yourself for small successes. “Fake it until you make it.” Remember, you’re probably programming yourself from the “outside in,” meaning that you are engaging in behaviors that seem incongruent with how you feel inside. The dissonance theory of psychology says that if you continue to act in a certain fashion, even if you don’t believe it, your thoughts will soon adjust to match the behaviors. That is what you’re looking for.

### Thought to remember:

*There is no such thing as failure, there is only feedback.*

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## Stage Four: Unconscious Competence

### Description of how it feels:

*“You have found patterns that work for you so often that they have become ingrained and you no longer have to think about them. The Thought-Feeling-Action loop is now automatic. This is when you have achieved a new habit.”*

### Guiding Feeling: *Relaxation*

### How to know if you’re in this stage:

You no longer feel stressed about the change. You can see changes that you wanted. You no longer have to think about what to do; it just comes naturally.

You can look back at when you were just beginning the process and see clear, positive changes in yourself.

### Question(s) to ask yourself:

*“What do I now automatically do well that I didn’t before? What could mess this up?”*

### About this particular stage:

Whereby it feels like you’ve “made it,” be aware that times change and what works now might not work later. Your old habit worked at one point also, but as situations changed, the side effects became more painful than the habit. Remember to be on guard and stay fluid in your thoughts. There is a danger of Reverting to Stage One.

### Thought to remember:

*Said Thomas Paine, “The price of liberty is eternal vigilance.”*

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