

# 10 Strategies for Different Stages of Change

Teachers come in to the classroom and program implementation at different stages of being ready to make change.<sup>1</sup> Matching your coaching strategy to a teacher’s stage of change can help you to customize and plan coaching sessions.

Stage of Change<sup>2</sup>

## 1 PRECONTEMPLATION

Teachers are not considering making changes in their practice.

What It May Look Like	Coaching Strategies
<p>Teachers overwhelmed by other issues in the classroom, surviving from one day to the next</p> <p>Sensitivity and resistance to being told to try new things</p> <p>Refusal to come to coaching meetings or teacher training</p> <p>Active refusal to implement, telling the coach it is not part of the job</p> <p>Inability to hear the coach, actively ignoring the coach, coach sharing things with teachers and seeing them “roll off”</p>	<p><b>Reducing sources of stress and highlighting the benefits of the new curriculum:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Share ideas or facts about the new curriculum, frame them as something teachers know and then leave them to think about it. (Try to avoid getting into a debate.)</li> <li>• Use empathy and collaboration to reduce defensiveness and create a safe learning environment.</li> <li>• Raise teachers’ awareness about the benefits of the new curriculum and point out ways teachers’ beliefs fit with the new curriculum.</li> <li>• Find informal opportunities get more information about teachers’ goals and explore with them how the benefits of implementing the new curriculum address those goals.</li> <li>• Gently try to raise questions about ideas that do not fit with the new curriculum.</li> </ul>

1 Shira M. Peterson, “Readiness to Change: Effective Implementation Processes for Meeting People Where They Are,” pages 43–64 in Tamara Halle, Allison Metz, and Ivelisse Martinez-Beck, (eds.), *Applying Implementation Science in Early Childhood Programs and Systems* (Baltimore, MD: Brookes Publishing, 2013).

2 James O. Prochaska and Carlo C. DiClemente, “Stages and Processes of Self-Change of Smoking: Toward an Integrative Model of Change,” *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* 51, 3 (1983): 390–395.

# 2

## CONTEMPLATION

Teachers are thinking about making changes in their practice.

What It May Look Like	Coaching Strategies
<p>Very little implementation, done in a cursory way when it does happen</p> <p>A lack of energy or investment in trying the new curriculum</p> <p>Teachers thinking, not acting</p> <p>Teachers listening to the pros of the new curriculum and examining the cons, but with a lot of reasons why it will not work</p> <p>A lot of “yessing” and listening, but no follow-through</p>	<p><b>Increasing teacher confidence:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Focus on helping teachers feel competent in one or two areas. Take small steps and focus on one thing if necessary.</li><li>• Acknowledge systemic challenges if necessary, but then focus on what is in teachers’ control by pointing out changes in children’s learning.</li><li>• Encourage them to talk to other teachers who have had success.</li><li>• Have other teachers talk about why it is such a great curriculum, giving examples.</li><li>• Help them to weigh the pros and cons—explore barriers (cons) try to reduce them and highlight/show the benefits (pros).</li><li>• Have teachers try out one small piece of the curriculum or one activity.</li></ul>

# 3

## PREPARATION

Teachers are actively planning to make changes in their practice, but may be ambivalent.

What It May Look Like	Coaching Strategies
<p>Testing the waters, doing some implementation, but not moving outside the curriculum guide</p> <p>Asking a lot of questions about the new curriculum, perhaps appearing to challenge ideas, but open to hearing about the new curriculum</p> <p>Wanting to implement the new curriculum, but not sure how to do it, needing help with the first steps</p> <p>Teachers looking to the coach for help, needing lots of assistance and encouragement, or attempting things on their own and pulling back if they think they are getting it wrong</p> <p>Trying out the curriculum, but inconsistently</p>	<p><b>Bolstering teachers’ commitment to the new curriculum:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Actively encourage teachers to try out different components of the new curriculum each week. The planning focuses on actions.</li><li>• Provide clear but sensitive, constructive feedback on what went well, and offer specific ideas of what else to try.</li><li>• Use coaching in the classroom as an opportunity to demonstrate activities and to point out children’s successes.</li><li>• Encourage teachers to learn from little failures and celebrate lessons learned from the experience.</li><li>• Have teachers talk specifically about their ideas and things they want to try.</li><li>• Remind teachers you are there to help and show it through your behavior (for example, help teachers look for missing materials).</li><li>• Focus on getting things organized so teachers can get going.</li><li>• Provide concrete strategies and celebrate successes.</li><li>• Help teachers to see how curricular activities or practices matter for children’s outcomes in their classrooms.</li></ul>

# 4

## ACTION

Teachers are actively making changes in their practice.

What It May Look Like	Coaching Strategies
<p>Taking more ownership for learning, being motivated to learn the new curriculum; coming to meetings with plans in hand and questions for coaches</p> <p>Teachers trying out different things and being flexible in their approach to implementation</p> <p>Enthusiasm for adapting and using new ideas</p>	<p><b>Advancing teachers' ongoing development and understanding of the new curriculum:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Suggest teachers reflect more deeply on how they are changing their practice and ideas of education.</li><li>• Use these reflections to help teachers try out new things or improve implementation.</li><li>• Encourage teachers to talk together about the changes and learning that have happened.</li><li>• Encourage them to keep going, cheerleading and asking them to point out the successes of children.</li><li>• Use constructive feedback as a back-and-forth dialogue. Coaches may provide feedback but can also get teachers to appraise their own performance, which makes problem-solving a joint process.</li></ul>

# 5

## MAINTENANCE

What It May Look Like	Coaching Strategies
<p>Teachers planning ahead, able to implement the new curriculum with minimal support</p> <p>Initiating things rather than waiting for the coach</p>	<p><b>Promoting teachers' independence in implementing the new curriculum and solving problems:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Use reflective questions rather than direct comments.</li><li>• Celebrate teacher creativity and risk-taking.</li><li>• Encourage lead teachers to help assistant teachers take more ownership of the curriculum and do some co-teaching.</li><li>• Promote the teaching team's joint responsibility for implementation.</li><li>• Help teachers plan for future barriers to implementation, and to identify resources in their program in preparation for overcoming them.</li><li>• Make coaching more about improving teachers' practice than learning the new curriculum.</li></ul>

# 6

## BACKSLIDING

What It May Look Like	Coaching Strategies
Loss of motivation in teachers who have been making progress in learning or implementing the new curriculum	<b>Helping teachers get back on their feet:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Identify barriers to implementation and advise teachers on how to overcome them.</li><li>• Show patience and give teachers time try to understand what is going on.</li><li>• Try to understand the whole story about what got in the way of implementation.</li><li>• Help teachers anticipate ways of continuing in the face of unexpected challenges each week.</li><li>• Help teachers advocate for themselves within the system so they can maintain their work.</li></ul>