

Key Concepts in Motivational Interviewing (MI)

1. Resist the righting reflex.

- The “righting reflex” is when the practitioner desires to fix what seems wrong with people and promptly set them on a better course.
- It is an example of a “directing” communication style.
- People who are ambivalent about change do not find motivation from the righting reflex.

2. Embrace the use of “competence worldview” rather than “deficit worldview.”

- **Competence Worldview:** People are competent, and they possess the self-knowledge, attitudes, and capabilities to effect change in their own lives.
- **Deficit Worldview:** People experiencing difficulties or who are unwell most likely do not have the resources, skills, or characteristics to effect change on their own.

3. Your communication style matters.

		
Directing	Guiding	Following
Administer Authorize Conduct Decide Determine Lead Manage Prescribe Steer Take charge Tell	Accompany Awaken Collaborate Elicit Encourage Inspire Lay before Look after Motivate Show Support	Attend Be responsive Be with Go along with Have faith in Listen Observe Shadow Stay with Take interest in Understand

4. Avoid traps that promote disengagement. (Miller & Rollnick, 2013, p. 40–45)

- The “Chat” Trap
- The Assessment (Question-Answer) Trap
- The Expert Trap
- The Premature Focus Trap
- The Labeling Trap

5. Motivation is critical to change.

- Motivation is a state of being ready, willing, and able; it is not a trait
- Motivation is interpersonal; what the practitioner says and does matters
- Motivation is a key to successful change

6. Ambivalence about change is normal.

- Ambivalence means feeling two ways about something
- Presents a significant barrier to change
- Must be explored and (hopefully) resolved

7. Change talk is motivational gold.

- **Change talk** is the language of change. It is any language used by the client that indicates thoughts of change regarding the change target.
 - Desire:** want, like, wish, hope to change
 - Ability:** can, could, able to change
 - Reason:** specific reason for change
 - Need:** need, have to, got to, must, it's important to change
 - Commitment:** I will, I'm going to, I intend to change
 - Activation:** ready to, willing, planning to change
 - Taking Steps:** specific actions or progress towards change
- **Sustain talk** is any language used by the client that indicates resistance to change or a desire to maintain the status quo regarding the change target. Sustain talk is the opposite of change talk.
- **Discord** signals dissonance within the therapeutic relationship.

8. The spirit of MI is a way of being with people which sets the PACE of the conversation.

PACE stands for partnership, acceptance, compassion, and evocation.

Partnership. MI is a collaboration between experts.

- People are the experts of their own lives
- MI is not done “to” or “on” someone, but “for” and “with” a person
- You must let go of the expert role while maintaining an awareness of the aspirations and convictions you bring to the conversation

Acceptance. We should express an attitude of unconditional positive regard.

- Absolute worth
- Accurate empathy
- Autonomy support
- Affirmation

Compassion. We conduct MI in the service of others.

- Deliberately promote the welfare of another
- Get ourselves out of the way
- Serve as a benevolent witness
- Distinguish between the communication style of MI vs. that of a “used car salesman”

Evocation. Motivation for change is not installed but is evoked.

- Motivation for change already exists within people
- Adopt the perspective that people truly have the wisdom and resources within themselves to determine and move towards their goals
- People are more likely to change if they identify the reasons to do so themselves

OARS: A Quick Guide

OARS stands for open questions, affirmations, reflection, and summary.

Open questions do the following:

- Elicit complex answers beyond “yes,” “no,” or other single word answers
- Allow for endless response possibilities
- Avoid asking “why?” to prevent others from feeling defensive about their responses

Examples of open questions:

Tell me about...	What was that like?	Tell me more about that
Say more about [x].	How does that fit with your life/work?	What was that experience like for you?
Tell about how that fits into your routine.	How does that compare with where you're at?	What would have to happen for you to make a change?

Affirmations do the following:

- Show appreciation for the other person's experiences
- Focus on “you” and avoid using “I” (e.g., *I think...*, *I'm proud...*, *I'm pleased...*, etc.)
- Seek opportunities to notice and affirm past successes, future hopes, current efforts, struggles, resiliency, humanity, character, strengths, and personal values.

Examples of affirmation openers:

That took a lot of...	This shows...	You're really...
It must have taken a lot of work to...	What about you would make this possible?	You demonstrated [x] about yourself.

Summaries do the following:

- Combine the important aspects of what someone has said. This shows we are listening
- Shine a light on what's most important
- Provide another chance to reinforce change talk

Types of Summaries

- **Collecting summaries:** list items discussed in the order they were spoken
- **Linking summaries:** incorporate previously shared info with the current discussion
- **Transitional summaries:** Wrap-up a topic or session by highlighting important details
- **Recapitulating summary:** Include all the change talk gathered through evocation, and partner with the client to confirm everything has been included, ask for agreement, and end with an open question.

Note: You should signify to the client you are going to provide a summary by saying something like: “*I want to be sure I have this right...*,” “*Let's makes sure we're on the same page...*,” “*What you said is important and I want to make sure I've got it all...*”

Examples of how to end a summary with an open question:

Have I got that right?	What did I miss?	Where does this leave you?	What's next?
------------------------	------------------	----------------------------	--------------

Reflections do the following:

- Offer the other person's content back to them in a non-threatening way
- Invite the other person to continue speaking on a topic or delve deeper
- Help the person to organize their thoughts
- Help the person recognize his/her own change talk

Note: In general, you will elicit more of the kind of response that you are reflecting. If you reflect sustain talk you will receive more sustain talk; if you reflect change talk you will receive change talk.

Examples of reflection openers:

You're wondering if...	You want...	You're feeling...
You're hoping...	It's almost as if...	You need...
For you, it's a matter of...	In other words, you're saying...	From your point of view...
You're finding...	It seems to you that...	You're wondering if...

There are two kinds of reflections: **Simple Reflections** and **Complex Reflections**.

Simple Reflections: A reflection that simply repeats or rephrases what the person has said. Simple reflections are useful for clarifying what was said or to reflect back specific change talk.

Complex Reflections: A style of reflection that is nuanced, affirming, and encourages change.

Types of Complex Reflections

Paraphrase: A restatement which includes an educated guess or inference to add meaning to what the person said.

Amplification: Use strategically to soften sustain talk by exaggerating, overstating, or increasing the intensity of the client's statement—it must be said without sarcasm!

Client: I'm not interested in quitting drinking at this time.

Staff: There's no way it makes sense to even consider it.

Double-Sided: Contains both sides of ambivalence (cons/pros) are in a single reflection. You must end the reflection with the change talk to keep the emphasis on the change.

Staff: On one hand, you don't like the medication side effects; on the other hand, it has helped you achieve more stability in your life.

Feeling: A reflection of implied underlying feeling (name the feeling). This is useful for softening sustain talk and cultivating change talk.

Client: If I keep smoking marijuana, I know you are going to put me in jail.

Staff: You're worried about the possible consequences.

Metaphor: A reflection using "picture language" to evoke sentiment and understanding.

It's like a dam finally broke this week and everything is flooding out.

You hit a wall trying to figure this out.

Coming Alongside: A reflection that articulates the side of no change (the negative). This is useful for softening sustain talk or responding to discord.

Client: I can't give up drinking; it's how I socialize. Staff: Drinking is a part of your life.

Client: You people aren't helpful. Staff: You don't feel we're working for you and your needs.

Continuing the Paragraph: Anticipate the next statement that has yet to be said. You will begin this kind of reflection with a conjunction (*and, because, etc.*) to make a guess about future change. It's important that you reflect back more than the person said, but not more than a person meant to say. This is useful for cultivating change talk.

Client: I have to get my kids back. Staff: ...and you're ready to take a step toward change.

References

Miller, W. R., & Rollnick, S. (2013). *Motivational Interviewing: Helping People Change* (3rd ed.). New York, NY: The Guilford Press.