

Motivational Interviewing

What is motivational interviewing (MI)?

It is similar to a person-centred approach in that it combines elements of warmth, empathy and acceptance to help people prepare for behaviour change.

MI is most often used with people who are in the pre-contemplation or contemplation stage of change. It is designed to help people:

- Explore and resolve their ambivalence
- Enhance their intrinsic motivation
- Build confidence in identifying their own reasons for change

In MI, the therapist is:

- Non-judgmental
- Respectful of individual autonomy
- Focused on the person's strengths

The question has shifted from Why is this person not motivated? to What is this person motivated for?

Using motivational interviewing as a communication method when engaging with someone helps you to:

- Express empathy.
- Develop discrepancy.
- Sustain talk and avoid arguments.
- Support self-efficacy.

You can explore a person's ambivalence and develop discrepancy about change in a few ways:

- Discuss a plan.
- Communicate the person's free choice.
- Discuss the consequences of action and inaction, including possible outcomes and fears.
- Provide information and resources.
- Involve other supports, including friends and family members when appropriate.

Handling resistance

A person in treatment may:

- Not follow the therapist's suggestions
- Express resistant behaviours within treatment (such as arguing, interrupting, sidetracking, defensiveness, and denying a problem)

These responses interfere with the therapeutic relationship and the person's treatment outcomes. There are a few things you can do to address these issues.

Avoid:

- Arguing, disagreeing, judging or blaming
- Warning of negative consequences
- Trying to persuade with logic or evidence
- Interpreting or analyzing the reasons for resistance
- Confronting the person with authority
- Being sarcastic or incredulous

Instead, try:

- Simple reflection or with amplification
- Double-sided reflection
- Shifting the focus
- Rolling with resistance

(These techniques are described in more detail in the [Comprehensive Interventions](#) chapter of this toolkit.)

Treatment dissatisfaction

- Acknowledge their expression of their feelings.
- Confirm that they have the right to quit at any time, or seek help elsewhere or work independently.
- You can encourage the person to give it a try for a planned period and see what happens.
- Ask for ongoing feedback and re-evaluate regularly.

Missed appointments

- Clarify reasons for missed appointments.
- Acknowledge when appointments are attended.
- Express eagerness to see the person again.
- Explore ambivalence, frustration or anger.

Motivational interviewing skills and examples

The basic skills of motivational interviewing include the following, known as **OARS**:

- Open-ended questions
- Affirming
- Reflective listening
- Summarizing

Motivational interviewing skills	OARS Examples
Ask open-ended questions	<p>Use this:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• I understand you have concerns about your concurrent disorder. Can you tell me about your substance use and how this has been affecting your mental health?• Tell me what you like about your [drinking, drug use, risky behaviour].• In what ways does your situation with substances concern you?• In what ways does this situation impact your overall mental health?• How would you like things to be different? <p>Not this:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Are you concerned about your substance use and how it is affecting your mental health?
Make affirmations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• You must have a lot of strength/courage/resolve to come today.• I appreciate this is not an easy topic for you to discuss. Thanks for hanging in there.• I think it's great that you're strong enough to recognize the risk here.• You've been through a lot together, and I admire the kind of love and commitment you've had in staying together through all this.• You've taken a big step today, and I really respect you for it.
Use reflections	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What I hear you saying is that your substance use is really not much of a problem right now. What do you think it might take for you to change in the future?
Summarize	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Let me check out that I understand everything we've discussed today. You've been worried about your substance use in recent months because it's impacting your relationships your health. You have tried to stop and you are worried you can't stop? How am I doing? Does this sound right?

Suggested activity

With a partner, practice the basic skills of motivational interviewing using open-ended questions, affirmations, reflective listening and summarizing:

1. Sit across from each other and choose one partner to be the person seeking treatment, and the other to be the clinician.
2. Select a topic to discuss and practice motivational interviewing for five minutes. For example, your vacation, your alcohol use, or your job.
3. Switch roles and select a new topic to discuss and practice motivational interviewing.

Reflection questions

Each person should answer the following questions:

1. What was your experience as the interviewer using the skills for motivational interviewing?
2. How did it feel to be the person who was asked the open-ended questions?