

Motivational Interviewing

Motivational Interviewing is defined by its developers, William Miller and Stephen Rollnick, as a “collaborative, person-centered, guiding method designed to elicit and strengthen motivation for change.” There are over 160 randomized control trials and 750 publications in peer reviewed literature. In comparison to confrontational, educational, and authoritarian conversation styles, motivational interviewing is collaborative, evocative, respectful, and non-judgmental in nature. It respects the person’s autonomy and elicits the person’s own motivation and commitment for change. The provider may offer options, but the person makes the decision whether and how to change.

Principles

The principles of motivation interviewing include:

- Resisting the “righting reflex,” which refers to the practitioner’s impulse to use information and persuasion in an attempt to cause the person to change;
- Understanding the person’s own motivations, concerns, and values for change;
- Listening to the person by letting go of the “expert” role and being curious about what really matters to the person, how the person sees the issue, what the person wishes were different in their life, what the person feels hopeful or confident about, and how the person would change if he/she decides to change; and
- Empowering the person by building their confidence, respecting their autonomy, and helping the person explore how he/she can make a difference. Providers can be an active listener.

Skills

The following skills can be used to guide the conversation with the person:

- *Open-ended questions* can’t be answered with one word. They are strategically asked and phrased to probe for more information, draw people out, and create forward momentum to help people explore change.
- *Affirmations* are descriptive, specific, and sincere statements about a person’s strengths, struggles, achievements, values, and feelings.
- *Reflective Listening* repeats or restates statements from the person to express empathy, convey interest, increase the person’s confidence, diffuse resistance, organize the person’s thinking, and invite and reinforce the person to voice their own statements and reasons for change. This foundational skill of motivational interviewing also allows the provider to check whether he/she is actively listening to the person and understanding what the person is saying.
- *Summary* is a specialized form of reflective listening that reflects a larger collection of what the person said by restating select elements of what the provider heard and then inviting the person to correct anything that was missed or misinterpreted.

Strategies

Motivational interviewing includes a set of questions and activities that use the above skills to elicit, strengthen, and consolidate motivation for change. Some of the common strategies are summarized below.

The *Decisional Balance* strategy can be used to explore the pros and cons of a target behavior and strengthen the person's commitment to change. The provider uses open-ended questions to elicit statements from the person about the pros and cons of the behavior. Using reflective listening, the provider presents this information back to the person in a way that steers the conversation towards change. For example, the provider may reflect: "You like to drink because it is social, and you don't like to drink because you don't feel good the next day. Where does that leave you?" In this example, "and" is intentionally used instead of "but," and it also intentionally ends with the negative effects of the behavior to steer the conversation towards behavior change.

Change Talk is another strategy where providers use open-ended questions and reflective listening skills to elicit and listen for statements from the person about his/her desires, abilities, reasons, and needs to change. After these statements are elicited and reflected, the provider uses the summary skill to reflect a collection of these statement back to the person to move the conversation towards eliciting language from the person about commitment and taking steps.

The *Readiness Ruler* strategy assess the person's readiness to change. It also elicits and enhances motivational statements from the person. For example, the provider may say, "On a scale of 1 to 10, 1 being 'not at all' and 10 being 'extremely ready,' how ready are you to..." After the person responds, the provider replies, "So why did you say (number the person chose) and not (a lower number than the person chose)?" The person's response to this second question often results in change talk. Other versions of this strategy include the Importance Ruler and the Confidence Ruler.

Explore, Offer, Explore is a common strategy to share information. The provider: (1) asks what the person knows, has heard, or would like to know; (2) asks the person for permission to share information; (3) offers information in a neutral, non-judgment manner; and (4) asks the person about his/her thoughts, feelings, and reactions about this information.