

Motivational Interviewing Handout

Jennifer Baity, LCSW, LAADC

Spirit of MI

The spirit of MI is critical to the implementation of the MI counseling style. If the other core clinical methods and strategies are conducted in a way that is inconsistent with the spirit, they are not considered to be MI. The spirit of MI includes the following key elements:

- **Collaboration.** Using a collaborative approach to working with clients, which involves a partnership that honors the client's experiences and views. The emphasis is on creating an environment that is conducive to change, as opposed to convincing or coercing clients to change.
- **Evocation.** Eliciting the knowledge and perceptions of clients about their own situations. This involves drawing out resources, strengths, reasons for change, and intrinsic motivation to change that already exist in the client.
- **Autonomy.** Respecting the client's autonomy by affirming the client's right and capacity to choose whether or not to change in every situation.

Four General Principles

The four general principles provide areas for focus in motivational interviewing. Like the MI spirit, they guide the strategies and methods used for facilitating change in clients.

- **Express Empathy.** Using a counseling style that conveys understanding and acceptance of, though not necessarily agreement with, the client. Considered to be fundamental to MI, an empathic style is critical for understanding the client's perspective without judging or criticizing. Reflective listening is the primary skill used to communicate empathetically with clients.
- **Develop Discrepancies.** Helping clients recognize discrepancies between their current behavior and their values

and long-term goals. This helps clients explore both sides of their ambivalence, and contributes to clients' belief in the importance of change.

- Roll with Resistance. Adjusting strategies so that resistance such as “I want to keep smoking marijuana” or “You don't know what you're talking about” is not opposed. This is based on the idea that a clinician arguing for change, while the client argues against it, may move the client farther away from making a change.
- Support Self-Efficacy. Noting client strengths, and affirming client successes in making other similar changes or changes in other areas of life. This increases clients' belief that they are capable of making and maintaining successful changes.

Five Early Methods

These methods are designed to help clients explore and resolve their ambivalence about making changes.

- Open Questions. Using questions that cannot be answered with one or two words. This keeps the focus broad and invites clients to explore topics extensively. Open questions are viewed as door openers, providing opportunities to use other early methods. Over-reliance on questions, even open questions, is discouraged.
- Reflective Listening. Responding to what the client says in a way that conveys understanding of the client's feelings or the meaning of the client's statements. This is considered to be one of the most important and sophisticated skills in MI; it includes paraphrasing what the client said, or guessing about the emotional impact on the client. Reflective listening is used to test the accuracy of the counselor's understanding. It is used to explore both sides of a client's ambivalence. It is also used to reinforce change talk and confidence talk.

- **Affirming.** Voicing support for the client's strengths and personal efforts, within the context of societal and cultural norms. This increases the client's confidence and self-efficacy.
- **Summarizing.** Using longer reflections to summarize what the client has discussed over a period of time. This is often used to reinforce important parts of the discussion, to link ideas with previous discussions, or to suggest a transition to another topic.
- **Methods for Evoking Change Talk.** A variety of strategies used to elicit "change talk" from the client. Change talk includes statements supporting or indicating desire for change, ability to change, reasons for making a change, and reasons not to stay the same. Strategies include but are not limited to eliciting from the client discussions of personal values, goals, strengths; the "good and the not so good" ideas about changing or not changing; and looking forward or backward to compare life with and without changes.
- **Methods for Evoking Confidence Talk.** A variety of strategies used to elicit "confidence talk" from the client. Confidence talk includes statements from the client indicating their belief that they can change – either now or in the future. Strategies to evoke confidence talk include: affirming the client's strengths – focusing on ones they may use to change their current problem; brainstorming possible solutions and having the client pick ones that seem most viable; reviewing past successes to remind client of their strengths; and reframing what the client views as past "failures" or "shortcomings" as possible "preparation for success".