

# Motivational Interviewing (MI) Tips

Provided by the Minneapolis Community and Technical College.

## MI Tip # 1 Affirmations

Self-efficacy\* (believing in one's self) is one of the things that can help participants and ourselves be successful in what we attempt to do. Everyone has strengths and genuine affirmations help people feel proud and more confident. One of the ways to bring out skills in our participants is to ask what they have already done towards solving the problem, figuring out a child care solution, navigating transportation, etc.

Example:

*Participant: It was so hard finding my way here today. I hope I can get home.*

*Counselor: Those bus schedules can be hard to navigate in the beginning and you also had to transfer. You were able to overcome your fears of public transportation and being around strangers. You also got here early which I know is hard with getting small children ready to go.*

\*Research puts self-efficacy high on the list of traits that help people through with heal care, school work, etc. We can help participants strengthen their self-efficacy through affirmations.

## MI Tip # 2 Empathy and Complex Reflections

We need to listen to do a reflection and show our participants we are listening. We need to really listen to do a complex reflection and be accurate. Accurate empathy can predict up to 2/3 of the variance in participant outcomes.\* Think of the empathy scale as a ruler marked at one end by poor listening (the counselor misses the participant's meaning) to deep listening at the other end. Deep reflections are those that make a guess as to what the participant means beyond what they have not yet stated. A simple reflection is restating or paraphrasing what the participant has said, and a complex reflection is a 'good listening' guess as what more they mean beyond what's stated. Wild guessing does not count.

Example A:

*Participant: I'm feeling very stressed today.*

*Counselor: You're robbing a bank today.*

Accurate Empathy – No

Complex Reflection – Doubtful

Example B:

*Participant: I'm feeling a little uneasy today.*

*Counselor: You have two job interview this week.*

Accurate Empathy – Yes

Complex Reflection – Yes

\*Truax/Carkhuff rating scale for accurate empathy as used by Miller, one of MI founding fathers. The above was based on comments by Bill Miller.

## MI Tip # 3 Rulers

Many times our participants are overwhelmed with all they have to do. It was suggested on the MINT website that if a participant feels overwhelmed with conflicting goals to ask them to give the top two a number of importance from 1 to 10. Recently I had the example of a participant who wanted a job but wanted a job she would enjoy. I asked her to give a number of importance to each. Wanting a job she would enjoy was a 9 on the scale of importance. Getting a job was 10 on a 10 scale as that would make things improve the most for all her family. If they are both given the same number of importance, I found it helped to ask which one do they feel more confident about, in other words, which one felt more doable.

Another participant felt torn between focusing extra time with her separated husband to try to repair the marriage or focus on finishing her training course. She gave her schooling a 10 on the 1 to 10 scale of importance and time with separated spouse as a 10 on the 1-10 scale of importance. She felt more torn because she was lonely and overwhelmed being a single mom. She felt more confident about doing well in school and finishing her course in 6 months. This may just give someone a slightly different perspective so they can prioritize which goal to give more focus.

## **MI Tip # 4 The Spirit of MI**

Our participants will open up if they feel safe and respected.

Sometimes taking the time to relax and not appear hurried will help make them also relax and see you are ready to listen to them. Think about how you build rapport and make it safe for participants to share before you start asking questions to fill out paperwork or setting goals. Everything you do from the time you meet and greet them to walking to your office start setting the ambiance. Putting the paperwork down and turning to face them instead of the computer invites them to open up.

Our state of mind is important to any movement toward building rapport. The MI spirit encourages us to be genuinely curious about them, relax and take the time for them to feel you are all ears! When I am crabby, tired or having an off day it helps me to think about how I would want to be treated if I were sitting in their chair. Their success depends on how we set the tone for them to feel safe to let us collaborate with them.

How do you stay in the MI spirit to help them feel they are the priority when we sit down together?

## **MI Tip # 5 Recipe for MI**

When I think about MI and its complexities I second guess myself and break the flow between the participant and myself. I like to think of MI as a process that makes conversation better at bringing out the participant's motivation to change. I listen, and listen some more keeping my talk to a minimum, affirm their strengths and go with the flow of the process. I do not need to figure out what they need to change or how. My job is to collaborate/with them to get them to where they want to go.

My recipe for Motivation Interviewing - I take a quart of positive regard, 3 cups of listening, 1 cup of affirmation, a teaspoon of asking permission, stir in ample open ended question and reflections, sprinkle the top with goals and summaries and let the participant set the time and temperature for baking. This is based on an exercise by Dr. Claire Lane of the UK.

What's your recipe for MI?

## MI Tip # 6 Resistance

There are 2 kinds of resistance. The first is when the participant lets us know they are not ready to change. Change is hard and we need to know whether they are ready or not. The second is when the participant is not feeling rapport with us. Whether the resistance is with us or they are not ready to change, it is our job to roll with resistance and make it right.

A reflection is a good way to handle the resistance to change. “You are afraid if you make this change it may be too overwhelming at this time.” This reflection gets them talking about their fears, barriers and allows them to move towards change talk.

If the resistance is to me I may say “I think I jumped way ahead. Let’s back this up and tell me where you are and what I need to know.” This gets me out of their way and they are free to get back to what they want to work on. We are human and I believe my participants appreciate when I admit to a mistake. Who amongst us hasn’t been lost and had to backtrack to get on the right road!

## MI Tip # 7 When MI is most useful

The spirit of MI can be used to enrich all our relationships. I know it helped me be quiet and listen better when my daughters were in college and struggling through hard situations on their own. Actually the Tools of Motivation Interviewing are best used when the following are included as in this recent participant situation.

- A behavior change is indicated: *Participant: I don’t have the money to cover all my bills.*
- There is a clear target: *Participant: I don’t think I can afford to smoke anymore.*
- There is ambivalence to the change: *Participant: I am afraid I will be really irritable with my kids and fail.*

## MI Tip # 8 Change talk D.A.R.N. – C.

Change talk is participant talk that leans in the direction of change. It sounds easy, but sometimes we don’t hear it. Sometimes I get so focused on other tasks, filling out paperwork that I miss it. The acronym DARN-C helps us recognize change talk.

- Desire – *I want, I wish...*
- Ability – *I can...*
- Reason – *If I can... Then I can...*
- Need – *I have to...*
- Commitment – *I will...*

## MI Tip # 9 Sustain Talk

Sustain talk is not change talk. It is when the participant is talking about the change, but mainly talking about why they can't do it. Sometimes we confuse sustain talk for change talk. Recently I had a participant who clearly wanted to quit smoking. I didn't hear it and encouraged her to talk about what she got out of smoking. She then proceeded to talk about what she got out of smoking and the desire to change dropped way down because I got her focusing on the good things about smoking!

Example:

*Participant: I really want to quit smoking, but there are times when smoking is really great.*

*Sustaining counselor: Tell me more about what you get out of smoking?*

*Counselor hearing change talk: You really want to quit smoking, say more about that.*

## MI Tip # 10 How do you evoke change talk?

Drawing out, eliciting, calling, inviting or evoking change talk, pick the words or image that fits best for you. Your own words can enable you to use it more effectively. Many people report that they have favorite ways of inviting change talk.

What have been your most successful or favorite ways to draw out change talk? Here are some examples, add your own, try some new ones.

- Open Ended Questions (Evocation/Inviting): *What can we work on today? How can I help you today?*
- Reflection: *You have put out a lot of effort to get this far.*
- Change Ruler: *How important is it to you to make this change? What might happen to move you from a (#) to (higher #)?*
- Query Extremes: *What are the worst things that might happen if you don't make this change? What are the best things that might happen?*

## MI Tip # 11 Helping participants be successful

Many of my participants are not feeling very successful when they come in for help. We can direct them to their successes in the following ways:

- Seek information about past successes: *Tell me about a time when you worked out a conflict in the past at work.*
- Draw out strengths: *What positive things would your friends or neighbors say about you?*
- Help participant build strategies around skills: *You enjoy meeting and talking to people. Getting along with others and your friendliness are both very important skills in an interview. They are very important for being successful on the job.*

## MI Tip # 12 Using the MI tool box

For those of us who see participants all day long we can sometimes get in a rut and use only 1 or 2 OARS tools. Sometimes I challenge myself to make sure I use all of them in a session. It usually flows using them in that order: Open questions, Affirmations, Reflections, and Summaries. The summary is the tool that feels the most awkward at times for me.

How do you practice and expand your MI tools?

## MI Tip # 13 When participant confidence is low

A participant has just told us that her confidence is 3 on the 10 high confidence ruler. We can help them build that confidence by the following:

- Draw out what confidence they have: *Why are you at a 3 instead of a zero?*
- Ask open questions that evoke ideas/kernels that build confidence: *What would it take for you to be at a 4?" or "What/who could provide support?*
- Put them in the role of helper: *What would you tell a friend in your spot?*

## MI Tip # 14 Giving MI bouquets

I have a participant who has been afraid of losing her job for 6 months and interviewing for the one or two openings she's found. Her boss is very critical and has given her a very negative review after 5 years of fairly good reviews. She is feeling very incompetent and felt she blew the last interview. Towards the end of the session she said her confidence was way up. She said I should see you right before my next meeting with my boss or job interview. We discovered that the summary I had made of all her skills I saw and heard her talk about had just been summarized, a "bouquet of affirmations." With her permission I repeated them again and she wrote them down to take with her and look at the list when she needed a lift she could smell one of the flowers she drew on the list.

That was an "AHAH" moment and I am now being more aware of giving bouquets. I have written down the strengths or skills for a couple of participants and asked if they wanted to take them with them to remind themselves of their strengths when they are struggling. I asked them to let me know if it was helpful.

## MI Tip # 15 Learning from the pros

One of the places we can see live interviews in action is watching talk shows. David Rosenberg in his book, *Building MI Skills*, has a suggestion to consider watching talk shows. We can practice our MI skills by identifying them in these interviews. If you are willing to watch, pay attention to how they make their guests feel comfortable. What kind of questions do they use to keep the conversation flowing? Pay attention to reflections and what kinds are effective. If they don't use reflections, what happens?

If you watch a political interview and they are of different political persuasions, what triggers off defensiveness or resistance? What role do closed questions play? Are they respectful, genuine and empathic? It can be kind of interesting to see how some interviewers and interviewees are not dancing with one another as we attempt to do with MI, but are wrestling.

## MI Tip # 16 Trying to set an agenda

Sometimes we have a participant who is a fast talker. They might seem to hardly take a breath and it can be hard to respond. When this happens we can't guide to any one topic. How do you get in a reflection without seeming rude or uninterested?

Here are a few examples that came up in a staff meeting:

- *Could I stop you so we can write down these topics so we don't lose any you want to work on and see what's on the top of the list for today?*
- *It sounds like the main thing that's bothering you is...*
- *You've said/have so many interesting comments, ideas. Maybe you can pick one we can focus on today?*

## MI Tip # 17 Elicit, Provide, Elicit

Sometimes we give information that the participant knows and it can feel condescending. Every one of us has experience going to the dentist and talking about teeth care, brushing and flossing.

Here is a rather simplistic version that can be applied to almost any topic:

*Hygienist: What do you know about the value of flossing? (this is eliciting)*

*Patient: I believe it is good for my teeth and prevents cavities.*

*Hygienist: Yes, good, It also keeps your gums healthy. (provide)*

*Hygienist: What else do you do to keep your gums healthy? (elicit)*

Whether we are talking about finding one's way around the city, caring for teeth, job interviewing, etc. Finding out what they know about the topic before we give them information is more respectful.

## MI Tip # 18 Agenda setting

Agenda setting may seem very basic, but it can get tricky. Sometimes a participant will come in and talk about a new stressor, mom's in the hospital, etc. A great many participants have many, many stressors going on at the same time. We may start problem solving with them as they are so stressed and yet this is not their main goal. Our time may be limited and we may have something to cover also.

Example:

*Let's make sure our time doesn't run away from us. It sounds like you want to talk some about mom being in the hospital, and we need to go over your activity logs, etc. What do you want to make sure we cover today?*

Sometimes someone will have a list of things and I may write them down on an "agenda sheet" I use that has numerous circles on it. We list all the concerns, each one in a circle, such as daily schedule, job search, daycare, conflict with supervisor scheduling, etc. The participant tells me which is most urgent for today and which ones can be tabled for a later time. This visual can be a way to see them put in some order that can reduce stress for many people especially when only one and/or two concerns are focused on.

## MI Tip # 19 Voicing concern

The MI spirit is one of acceptance, non-judgmental, and participant centered. Just because it is a form of counseling that is nonjudgmental and we accept the participant's view of the situation, does not mean we agree with them. We don't try and convince them with facts of another point of view as we know that will increase resistance.

We try and pull in any comments they have made themselves about the situation such as the following:

*Counselor: You have been late 2 times to work recently and 3 can be enough for losing your job during the probationary period. I know you like to stay up late to have your own time and relax when the kids are in bed. You worked hard to get this job so it concerns me that your late nights might be jeopardizing your job.*

*Participant: That's what I've been thinking.*

*Counselor: What do you think about what I said?*

The participant may or may not get defensive. If they do get defensive go back to using OARS which usually will re-establish the collaborative relationship.

## MI Tip # 20 Practicing Ruler

Dr. Fabring, one of our Swedish MINT trainers, has a ruler that he gives out to people. It is like the 1 to 10 Readiness Ruler Scale that we use in MI. This one however is given to the participant so they can:

- Rate how helpful the collaboration with us has been, and
- Please tell me if there is something I could do that would make our collaboration more helpful?

Dr. Fabring feels we should be asking our participants for feedback as we go to increase the therapeutic alliance. I have been using it for some time but it feels a little awkward for me yet. It would feel easier to ask the participant, "if there is something that I can do that would make this feel more comfortable for you?"

Now I have been able to ask participants whenever I thought something didn't seem to go smooth. Try asking your participants for feedback and use rulers to get a more realistic number of how helpful you were.

When I ask participants to tell me how it went for them after meeting with me for the first time, they typically will say "ok," just to be nice.

I sometimes say instead, "So how was it for you getting sent to a stranger to talk about some very difficult issues?" This brings out much more personal and open responses since I acknowledge this is hard and I'm a stranger.

Find a way that feels comfortable to you because it can really improve your skills with your participants.

## MI Tip # 21 When importance is low

Occasionally I will get a participant who tells me they could quit smoking any time and their confidence is a 10 on the 10-high scale. But the importance is at a 5 or below. How do we increase their level of importance to move towards change?

Decisional Balance - Have participants answer the pros and cons grid of these 4 things:

- Cost of staying the same
- Cost of changing
- Benefits of staying the same
- Benefits of changing

Hypotheticals - The what ifs! are also helpful.

- *How would things be different if you made this change?*
- *What would have to happen for you to be able to...?*
- *If things don't change what do you think might happen?*

## MI Tip # 22 Putting yourself in reflections

Putting yourself in reflections is using an "I" statement before the reflection. "I hear you saying or I see that you...." There has been a discussion on the MI website about what is more helpful. Reflections are very important and are one of the main tools that we use to move towards change talk so anything that can make them more useful is good for us counselors.

*Participant: I just have so much swimming around in my head.*

*Counselor 1: You are so stressed you can hardly think.*

*Counselor: I hear the stress is so high that you can hardly think.*

Some MI folk believe that counselor 1 is more participant focused and will help the discussion deepen more smoothly. Other MI folk believe counselor 2 lets the participant know they are listening. Others believe it doesn't matter as both Carl Rogers and Bill Miller use "I" reflections and they work very well. I think for me it doesn't matter, but, I am trying to pay attention to what feels more natural and if it makes a difference with a particular participant. When I am more confident, I skip the "I". Pay attention in your reflections which way seems to feel more natural and which one works the best.

## MI Tip # 23 What's unique?

So much of what we do in counseling and MI is attributable to Carl Rogers and his participant centered style with unconditional regard for participants. What is unique to MI is the focus on 'change talk'. Try to "tip" your sessions towards change by ending with change talk if possible.

Example:

*Counselor: Darcy your children are adjusting nicely to a little longer daycare time. What do you think you might be ready to fit in for yourself this week?*

## MI Tip # 24 Awesome affirmations

Affirmations play a role in positive outcomes in counseling. They work on 2 levels, the psychological and the physiological. Psychologically affirmations reinforce the participant's confidence and their belief in their ability. Physiologically affirmations raise one's feel good chemical in the brain called oxytocin. We cannot tell ourselves good things and raise our oxytocin level in the brain. This increase of feel good chemicals in the brain comes from the positive social interaction with another person. This oxytocin increase also aids in social bonding and trust. Hence your participants will trust you more if you are supportive and genuine. Affirmations work doubly well!

## MI Tip # 25 Equipoise

Equipoise is a term that has been discussed extensively with MI in the last year. Clinical equipoise means that there is genuine uncertainty over whether a treatment or change will be beneficial. When we are with participants in a non-judgment, caring and compassionate way we can usually be in a state of equipoise, meaning we don't know what is best for them or what will work for them and when, only they do.

There are times when we cannot be in equipoise. That is when we are concerned about their safety. Here are some of those times: when one is or may be suicidal, is in a violent situation at home, or is drinking too much and driving, etc.

We want to tip the balance towards change for sure when their safety is at stake. A double sided reflection or "Assessing the status quo" are both effective in this situation.

Double sided reflections can be good at a time like this:

*You really want things to work out with your partner and yet you fear for your safety and have been injured in the past.*

*I know you are a good mom and want to be there for your children and yet you drive and drink and put your life in danger and therefore theirs also.*

Assessing the status quo examples are when you use only 2 of the 4 of the Pros and Cons grid:

- Tell me the good things about your relationship.
- Now tell me the not so good things about your relationship.
- Tell me the good things about your drinking.
- Now tell me the not so good things about your drinking.

## MI Tip # 26 Asking permission

Giving advice unsolicited will generally not be listened to even if it looks as if they are listening. It can annoy people as if we are talking down to them. They are more apt to take it in if we ask for permission to give it.

Three forms of Permission:

- Participant asked for information.
- You ask for permission to give it.

*Counselor: There's something here that worries me. Would it be all right if I...*

*Counselor: I could tell you some things that other participants have done if that would be okay...*

- You preface your advice with permission to disregard or disagree.

*Counselor: I don't know if this will make sense to you...*

*Counselor: Tell me what you think of this idea...*

*Counselor: Let me know what you think of...*

## MI Tip # 27 Ambivalence

Lack of motivation can be ambivalence. We can have both the desire to change and not to change at the same time. We may want the outcome but not want to do the work. We need to remember it is always easier not to change. I can be more compassionate if I relate to how I fight change.

A friend asked me recently to go to the gym to take a fun class 2 days per week to prevent holiday weight gain. Sure I want to prevent the weight gain, but, it looks like so much work, going after work, I want to do other things like holiday shopping, the cold, changing clothes, coming out after to a cold car, 2 nights out of my week etc.!!!

I don't know if this will be helpful, but think about times you have been ambivalent about change. It may help you be more compassionate to your participants.

## MI Tip # 28 MI Spirit evolving

Motivational Interviewing continues to evolve. At the last international conference in England the evolution of spirit was discussed. This spirit is made up of:

- Collaboration – It means working with participant.
- Autonomy – Participants are the experts about themselves.
- Evocation – The answers are within our participants.

Compassion may be added to enhance the caring for our participants so that we not only work with them, respect them and their ideas but care for and love them as fellow human beings. Mother Teresa epitomized this in her work with others the world over. It would certainly do away with the counselor judging or being in a one up position. Some Europeans have concerns as this has a religious connotation for them. We will see what comes out in the next Miller and Rollnick book on Motivational Interviewing. Stay tuned.

## MI Tip # 29 Raising tough issues

Most practitioners face this dilemma from time to time, some much more often. It is a challenge to face problematic behavior without increasing resistance. Problematic behaviors can be severe in the criminal justice system and child welfare. It is also present for the rest of us in showing up for appointments, coming to groups and classes on time, etc.

How do we discuss these issues while doing our best not to inflame resistance?

- MI addresses these issues directly and openly in an atmosphere that feels safe to the participant.
- MI avoids labeling them such as non-compliant or having a problem unless they talk about their “problem.”
- Use open ended questions and reflections to get them doing the talking.

*Counselor: Angie, I know this is a tough issue and you have been trying to get here on time, but, unless you show up regularly for your appointments you will need to take a break from training. Tell me what you think of this?*

*Counselor: Frank you didn't follow through on your plan, I'm wondering what you make of that?*

## MI Tip # 30 The Foundation processes of MI

In the next book (MI 3) by Miller and Rollnick, the evolution of MI continues. These are the 4 processes that form MI. They are linear and non-linear at the same time.

- Engaging – setting the relational foundation, and of course we may need to go back to this again and again, especially, if the collaboration gets fractured. The engagement arises out of spirit and OARS.
- Focusing – identifying changes or goals. Focusing is about developing a clear direction and goals.

*Participant: I would like to have a full time job and feel more in charge in my life.*

- Evoking – evoking goes from the more general to specific.

*Counselor: What would that look like to be more in charge?*

- Planning – is about how to get there. We are ready for planning when there is sufficient engagement, a clear shared change goal and sufficient participant motivation for change.

## MI Tip # 31 Recapitulation

The recap begins with a summary without totally overwhelming the participant. Rosengren uses the acronym (I CAN) to help trainees remember all the pieces.

Indicate that this is a summary and include

Change talk

Ambivalence and then

Next step

*Counselor: Let's sum up what you've said. The depression has really overwhelmed you and makes it difficult to get to work on time and feel hopeful at times. You want to feel better. You really want some help with the depression but you are nervous about anti-depressant medication. Where do you think you'd like to go from here?*

## MI Tip # 32 Negotiating a treatment plan

In the recap (see Tip # 31) we summarized their main issues, their change talk, and their ambivalence. We then got up to the key question of what's your "Next Step?" in the recapitulation. Treatment planning is a collaborative process. We have to be a good guide as they work and think through the steps of change. Sometimes the change will not be specific enough and sometimes it is way too elaborate.

Example:

*Counselor: What's your plan? What specific steps do you need to take?*

*Participant: I'll figure out someone to see.*

*Counselor: Do you have a name of a specific doctor or psychiatrist you to about medications? I can get you some names if you'd like.*