

## A Brief History of Motivational Interviewing

Motivational Interviewing (MI) is a way of talking with people about change related to things we often have mixed feelings about – exercise, diet, alcohol and other drug use, relationship issues, risky sexual behaviors, school and job related concerns, spiritual practices, certain attitudes, and other issues we face in our lives.

The MI approach grew out of William R. Miller's work with problem drinkers. In the past, it was believed that people who drank too much were unable to see how their use was harming themselves and others. They were said to be in denial. Counselors and others who wanted to help would try to break through this denial by using "in-your-face" tactics such as confrontation and shame to try to convince people of their need to change. As you can imagine, this approach didn't work very well. None of us like it when other people think they know what's best for us or try to *get* us to change. We want to decide for ourselves how to live our lives.

In 1991, William R. Miller and Stephen Rollnick wrote a book titled *Motivational Interviewing: Preparing People to Change Addictive Behavior*. It explained how to talk with people about their alcohol and drug use in ways that respected their ability to decide for themselves whether they wanted to change. In the book, the authors described the spirit (core attitudes and beliefs) of this approach and the specific skills and strategies of MI.

A second edition, *Motivational Interviewing: Preparing People for Change*, was published in 2002. It further explained how MI works, the research behind it, and how to get better at using MI. It also described the spread of MI to other areas beyond substance use disorders including health care, mental health, corrections, and school settings.

A third edition, *Motivational Interviewing: Helping People Change*, 2013, expanded on the MI approach and included some new ideas such as the four processes of MI conversations: engaging, focusing, evoking, and planning.

MI is defined as **"a collaborative conversation style for strengthening a person's own motivation and commitment to change."** MI can also be described as "a way of helping people talk themselves into changing." This approach embodies "a mind-set and a heart-set" that includes partnership, acceptance, compassion, and evocation.

Motivational Interviewing is a guiding style that invites people to examine their own values and behaviors and come up with their own reasons to change. It doesn't try to convince people or argue with them. Instead, it draws out people's own hopes, experience, and wisdom about themselves including whether or not to change. As William R. Miller says, "You already have what you need, and together let's find it."

People who are used to confronting and giving advice will often feel like they're not "doing anything." But, as Miller and Rollnick point out, the proof is in the outcome. More aggressive strategies often push people away. MI, on the other hand, increases the odds that people will give change a chance

# The Spirit of MI: Partnership, Acceptance, Compassion, and Evocation

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“MI is done *for* or *with* someone, not *on* or *to* them.”  
*Motivational Interviewing, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition*

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Imagine taking a drink of a carbonated beverage that has gone flat. It still tastes vaguely like itself, but the fizz has gone out of it. It’s no longer worth drinking, and you’ll probably pour it down the drain. The spirit of MI is the fizz of a helping conversation. It’s what shows you that a person truly cares about you and isn’t just pretending to care.

In describing MI spirit, Miller and Rollnick note: “When we began teaching MI in the 1980s we tended to focus on technique, on *how* to do it. Over time we found, however, that something important was missing. As we watched trainees practicing MI, it was as though we had taught them the words but not the music... This is when we began writing about the underlying *spirit* of MI, its mind-set and heart-set.” (*Motivational Interviewing, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition*)

The spirit of MI is communicated in our body language, facial expressions, tone of voice, and attitudes. It comes from inside us and can’t be faked. It has to be real. Spirit is about the way we are with people, not just what we say.

Miller and Rollnick identify four parts of the spirit of MI: partnership, acceptance, compassion, and evocation. Each of these is related but also unique.

**PARTNERSHIP** – showing real respect for the other person; assuming both of you have important input; dancing rather than wrestling

**ACCEPTANCE** – meeting people “where they’re at” without judging them; believing in them; trying to understand where they’re coming from; shining a light on the good stuff you see in them instead of pointing out what’s wrong with them

**COMPASSION** – hanging in there with people when they’re hurting or struggling with an issue; doing whatever is in the person’s best interests

**EVOCATION** – “calling forth” or asking people about things such as what makes them tick, what they already know, what’s important to them, how would they like their lives to be different

*Adapted from Motivational Interviewing, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition by Miller & Rollnick, 2013*

## **OARS: Open Questions**

As used in MI, open questions are invitations for choice, reflection, and elaboration on a particular issue. They invite people to choose the focus of conversation based on what is most important to them, to reflect more deeply on that matter, and to expand upon it further. Open questions provide a doorway to better understand a person's internal frame of reference. Examples include:

*What brings you here today?*

*Tell me more...*

*What was that like for you?*

*How would you like things to be different?*

*If you were to change, what would be your reasons?*

*What do you think you'll do next?*

Closed questions, in contrast, limit the conversation. They are most often used to gather specific information or to elicit a brief response. For example:

*What is your date of birth?*

*Do you use tobacco?*

*How long has this been going on?*

*Would you like to meet again in one week or two weeks?*

Open questions are used throughout the four processes of MI and are variously used to engage with the person, increase understanding, strengthen collaboration, find a focus, evoke motivation, and develop a plan for change. As a general guideline, open questions should be used more than closed ones. However, open questions should be used less frequently than reflections in MI practice.

## **OARS: Affirmations**

Affirmations are statements that shine a light on what is good about a person. They recognize and acknowledge a person's innate talents, personal virtues and traits, strengths, knowledge, and skills. They also provide support and encouragement. Affirmations can facilitate the engagement process, reduce defensiveness, and build confidence in one's ability to change.

Statements of affirmation must be genuine and speak to what is indeed true about the person. They are different than praise. Praise statements tend to imply a "one-up" position for the one doing the praising. When forming affirmations, avoid starting with "I" and instead center the comment on "you." Some examples of affirmations are below:

*Even though it didn't turn out as you hoped, you made a tremendous effort.*

*You are a very courageous person.*

*You showed a lot of patience in the way you handled that situation.*

*I noticed that you...*

*Thank you for taking the time to talk with me today.*

*Adapted from Motivational Interviewing, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition by Miller & Rollnick, 2013*

## OARS: Reflective Listening

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"What people really need is a good listening to." – *Mary Lou Casey*

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"Good listening is fundamental to MI. The particular skill of reflective listening is one to learn first because it is so basic to all four processes of MI. It takes a fair amount of practice to become skillful in this way of listening so that reflections come more naturally and easily." [p. 48]

Reflective listening is the skill of "bending back" to people what we hear them saying in an effort to understand "where they're coming from." In other words, to see the world through the other person's eyes. This kind of listening means giving a person your full attention. We do this with our words, actions, and body language. Reflective listening is a special gift we can offer to others in both our work and personal lives.

Reflective listening takes the conversation to a deeper level. This is especially true of reflective statements that go beyond repeating what was said by making a reasonable guess about the person's meaning. Such statements "have the important function of deepening understanding by clarifying whether one's guess is accurate. Reflective statements also allow people to hear again the thoughts and feelings they are expressing, perhaps in different words, and ponder them. Good reflective listening tends to keep the person talking, exploring, and considering. It is also necessarily selective, in that one chooses which aspects to reflect from all that the person has said." [p. 34]

Forming reflections requires the ability to *think reflectively*. Since words can have multiple meanings, and people don't always say exactly what they mean, it is useful to regard people's statements as a "first draft." In other words, rather than assuming what someone means, check it out. Because reflections are statements, not questions, the inflection usually turns down at the end. For example, notice the difference between:

*"You don't think your drinking is a problem?"*

*"You don't think your drinking is a problem."*

Some reflective statements basically repeat or slightly rephrase what a person has said. These *simple reflections* can convey basic understanding and help the flow of the conversation. However, they add little or no meaning to what the person said, and can stop the conversation from going to a deeper level. For example:

Statement: *I'm feeling pretty depressed today.*

Response: *You're feeling depressed./You're feeling kind of down./Pretty depressed...*

*Complex reflections* add meaning or emphasis to what someone has said by making a guess about what is unspoken. Complex reflections tend to help people think more about their situation. When first learning to use complex reflections, it can feel a bit strange. However, when you get used to it, such reflections communicate real understanding. For example:

Statement: *I'm feeling pretty depressed today.*

Response: *You're not feeling like your usual self./You wish you had more energy and interest in doing things./It sounds like something has happened since we last talked.*

Adapted from *Motivational Interviewing*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition by Miller & Rollnick, 2013

# Motivational Interviewing: A Guided Conversation

Here is an outline of how a model MI conversation might flow. In this case, drinking is the focus. Of course, real life conversations rarely play out in such a straightforward manner. Note that the spirit and core skills of MI are applied throughout the four processes of MI. As a general guideline, it is useful to follow a basic rhythm of asking an open question followed by one or more reflections, before asking another question.

## ENGAGING

Provide a warm welcome; offer a beverage; exchange small talk; make sure the person feels safe; show that you care; get to know the person as a person; be hopeful

- “Hi. It’s really good to see you. Would you like some juice or tea?” “How have things been going lately?” (*Respond with reflective statements*)

## FOCUSING

Agree on what to talk about

- “What’s on your mind?” “You mentioned several things. Where shall we start?” “Would it be all right if we took a closer look at you and drinking?” (*Reflect*)

## EVOKING

Explore ambivalence

- “What does drinking do for you? What concerns, if any, do you have about it?” (*Reflect*)

Elicit change talk

- *DESIRE (want, wish, like)*  
“How would you like things to be different than they are now?” (*Reflect*)
- *REASONS (specific reasons for change)*  
“If you *were* to cut back or stop drinking, what are some reasons you might do that?” (*Reflect*)
- *ABILITY (can, could, able)*  
“How might you go about it in order to succeed?” (*Reflect*)
- *NEED (have to or important to - without stating specific reason)*  
“How important is it to you to make this change?” (use 0-10 scaling question) (*Reflect*)

## PLANNING

- *TESTING THE WATER (readiness and confidence)*  
“How ready are you to make this change?” “How confident are you to make this change?” (or use 0-10 scaling question) (*Reflect*)
- *COMMITMENT (will, plan to, intend to, going to, willing, ready, etc.)*  
“What do you think you will do next?” “What is your plan?” “How can I help you with that?” (*Reflect*)

## MI Self-Appraisal

<b>In facilitating a conversation to help strengthen the person's own motivation and commitment to change, I...</b>	<i>0- not at all</i>	<i>5- extremely well</i>
1. Provided a <b>safe, welcoming</b> presence with my words and actions. <i>Example:</i>	0	5
2. Engaged with and showed <b>genuine interest</b> in the person, e.g., what she or he enjoys, needs, values. <i>Example:</i>	0	5
3. Found out and clarified what the person wanted to <b>focus</b> on currently. <i>Example:</i>	0	5
4. Helped explore <b>both sides of the person's dilemma</b> , e.g., what's working and what's not; upsides and downsides. <i>Example:</i>	0	5
5. Avoided trying to <b>"fix"</b> the problem or <i>get</i> the person to change by advising, confronting, warning, or teaching. <i>Example:</i>	0	5
6. Elicited what might be some possible <b>reasons</b> to change, <i>if</i> the person were to decide to change. <i>Example:</i>	0	5
7. Learned about <b>possible ways</b> that he or she might go about making this change. <i>Example:</i>	0	5
8. Asked <b>how important</b> it is at this time for the person to make this change. <i>Example:</i>	0	5
9. Asked <b>how confident</b> she or he feels to be <i>able</i> to make this change. <i>Example:</i>	0	5
10. Inquired about <b>what steps</b> , if any, the person might take next. <i>Example:</i>	0	5
11. Asked permission before providing <b>information or suggestions</b> . <i>Example:</i>	0	5
12. Used the <b>core skills</b> of MI (open questions, affirmations, reflective listening, summaries) throughout the conversation.	0	5
13. Consistently demonstrated the <b>spirit</b> of MI:		
> <i>Partnership</i>	0	5
> <i>Acceptance</i>	0	5
> <i>Compassion</i>	0	5
> <i>Evocation</i>	0	5

*Developed by Ken Kraybill based on Miller, W.R. & Rollnick, S., Motivational Interviewing: Helping People Change, 2013*

# MI Self Check for Case Managers

## Individuals I meet with would say that I...

- Believe that *they* know what's best for themselves
- Help them to recognize their own strengths
- Am interested in helping them solve their problems in their own way
- Am curious about their thoughts and feelings
- Help guide them to make good decisions for themselves
- Help them look at both sides of a problem
- Help them feel empowered by my interactions with them

*Adapted from Hohman. & Matulich. Motivational Interviewing Measure of Staff Interaction, 2008*

## Selected Resources

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Website: [www.motivationalinterviewing.org](http://www.motivationalinterviewing.org)

Zuckoff, Allan with Gorscak, B. (2015). *Finding your Way to Change*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.