

INTRODUCTION TO MOTIVATIONAL INTERVIEWING FOR THE CLINICAL SETTING.

Motivational interviewing (MI) is an evidence-based counselling method that helps clients reflect on their current situation, and as a result, to think about making a positive change. It is particularly effective for clients who are stuck, resistant to change, and/or in the early stages of behaviour change. The aim of motivational interviewing is to help clients explore and resolve their ambivalence around making a change. As part of this exploration, clients begin to present their own arguments for and against change, including identifying enabling factors and barriers.

Benefits of MI

- Build client rapport quickly
- Resolve ambivalence and prepare the client for change
- Increase motivation and confidence to make a positive lifestyle change
- Reduce client anger and resistance

Five key skills in MI

1. Expressing and showing empathy

A crucial skill of motivational interviewing is showing empathy in conversation. By accepting and listening to the client's story without judgement and without imposing the practitioner's view, the client feels heard and validated, and as a result, is more open to exploring the possibility of change.

2. Develop discrepancy

Exploring and developing the client's discrepancy between their current situation (or behaviour) and the desired one, helps to strengthen their motivation for change. Explore this with your client by asking them to reflect on the pros and cons of making a change. As part of this, also encourage your client to reflect on their concerns and barriers, as well as how it would feel to achieve the desired change. The below "decisional balance" tool can be helpful to guide this conversation.

	Advantages/positives	Disadvantages/negatives
Staying the same	1. →	2. ↓
Making a change	4. ←	3. ↓

3. Avoid arguing

Arguing enhances the defence mechanism. The practitioner is not telling the client what to do, but rather encouraging them through motivational interviewing to come to the decision that making a change is right for them. “No one can decide this for you...” “You can decide to continue [behaviour] or change. The decision is up to you...”

4. Supporting self-efficacy

Confidence is crucial when supporting clients to change. Through MI, we’re providing hope that change is possible and achievable. To do this, start by asking the client what they could do, or what they’ve tried before, or what they think about a suggestion that you’ve made. How might your suggested idea fit into their current situation?

5. Rolling with resistance

It’s important to not take a client’s resistance personally – the decision to change is about them, not the practitioner. Acknowledge the client’s thoughts and ideas and invite them to consider a different perspective. Present the idea in a different way and invite them to reflect on this new possibility. This is very helpful when working with clients who are in denial or resistant to change.

