

Motivational interviewing

Interaction Techniques

Motivational interviewing is a semi-directive, client-centered counselling style for encouraging behaviour change by helping clients to explore and resolve ambivalence.

Interaction Techniques

The basic approach to interactions in motivational interviewing is captured by the acronym OARS:

(1) Open-ended questions

(2) Affirmation

(3) Reflective listening

(4) Summary

Open-ended questions are those questions that clients cannot answer with a "yes", "no" or "I just can't".

An open-ended question allows the client to create the impetus for the forward movement we need to help the client explore change. For example, "*So what makes you feel that it might be time for a change?*" or "*What do you think you would gain from returning to work?*"

Affirmations are statements of recognition about client strengths. Some clients come to us demoralized or at least suspicious of the assertion that work is possible. This condition means that as employment specialists, we must help clients feel that change is possible and that they are capable of implementing that change. One method of doing this is to point out client strengths, particularly in areas where they observe only failure. Explore prior attempts at change. For example, "*So you worked before you became ill; what did you enjoy about that job?*"

We also use resistance as a source for affirmations. For example, "*You're not sure that you want to work, but you came today. I'm not sure, but it seems like you have reached a point where you want to consider your options.*"

Reflective listening is the key to this work. The best motivational advice is to listen carefully to your clients. They will tell you what has worked and what hasn't. What moved them forward and shifted them backward. Whenever you are in doubt about what to do, listen. But remember this is a directive approach. You will focus

on their change talk and provide less attention to non-change talk. For example, *"You are not quite sure you are ready to work, but you appear to feel isolated and without a purpose."*

You will also want to vary your level of reflection. Keeping reflections at the surface level may lead to that feeling that the interaction is moving in circles. Reflections of affect, especially those that are unstated but likely, can be powerful motivators. For example, *"You were dismissed from your last job; that seems to have had an impact on your confidence in your own abilities."* If you are right, the emotional intensity of the session deepens. If you are wrong or the client is unready to deal with this material, the client corrects you and the conversation moves forward.

The goal in MI is to create forward momentum and to then harness that momentum to create change. Reflective listening keeps that momentum moving forward.

Summary. This is really just a specialized form of reflective listening where you reflect back to the client what he or she has been telling you. Summaries are an effective way to communicate your interest in a client, build rapport, call attention to prominent elements of the discussion and to shift attention or direction. Personal preference will determine how often you do these, but do them relatively frequently as too much information from the client can become unwieldy to digest and feedback. Also, if the interaction is going in an unproductive or problematic direction (e.g., reinforcing status quo talk, encountering resistance), the summary can be used to shift the focus of the intervention.

The structure of the summary is straightforward.

- Begin with an announcement that you are about to summarise
- List selected elements
- Invite them to correct anything missed
- Make a related open-ended question.

If ambivalence was evident in the interaction that proceeded the summary, this should be included in the summary. Here's an example,

"Let me stop and summarize what we've just talked about. You're not sure that you want to be here today and you really only came because you have been moved off ESA. You lost your job during your illness and that felt very painful, however you feel isolated and miss the structure of work. Did I miss anything? I'm wondering what you make of all those things."

The goal is not to acquire ammunition, which is then turned on the client in a

defense-overwhelming manner, but instead is a reflection of what the client has said and where the client is encouraged to supply the meaning. This is an area where you need to watch that your wisdom and experience doesn't keep you from listening to your client's understanding of the problem. It is this understanding that will guide their efforts at change or maintaining the status quo.

The goal is to move the person forward by eliciting change talk, or self-motivational statements. Change talk involves statements or affective communications that indicate the client may be considering the possibility of change. The talk needs to lead the client through:

- problem recognition
- concern about the problem
- commitment to try work
- belief that work is possible

Essentially, any statement oriented toward the present or future, either in the cognitive or emotional realm, may represent a self-motivational statement. For example, "I think that not working makes me feel worse" (present-cognitive); "I feel that I have nothing to offer a job" (present-emotional); "I'm definitely going to do something about considering work" (future-cognitive); "You know, I'm starting to feel like this just might work out" (future-emotional).

More on Reflections, Rolling with Resistance, Reframing

The following section focuses more on specific interaction techniques for employment specialists to try in order to reduce client resistance once it occurs.

Simple Reflection

One way to reduce resistance is simply to repeat or rephrase what the client has said. This communicates that you have heard the person, and that it is not your intention to get into an argument with the person.

Client: *But I can't work. I sleep all day!*

Employment specialist: *Returning to work feels nearly impossible because you struggle to get out of bed.*

Client: *Right, although I am able to get up in the late afternoon.*

Amplified Reflection

This is similar to a simple reflection, only the employment specialist amplifies or exaggerates the point to the point where the client may disavow or disagree with it. It is important that the employment specialist not overdo it, because if the client feels mocked or patronized, he or she is likely to respond with irritation.

Client: *But I can't work. I sleep all day!*

Employment specialist: *Oh, I see. So you really couldn't work because you are unable to get out of bed?*

Client: *Well, I can get out of bed, it's just I struggle with getting up in the mornings.*

Double-sided Reflection

With a double-sided reflection, the employment specialist reflects both the current, resistant statement, and a previous, contradictory statement that the client has made.

Client: *But I can't work. I sleep all day!*

Employment specialist: *You can't imagine how you could work as you struggle to get up in the mornings but you spend a lot of time alone and don't like feeling so isolated.*

Client: *Yes. I guess I have mixed feelings.*

Shifting Focus

Another way to reduce resistance is simply to shift topics. It is often not motivational to address resistant or counter-motivational statements, and employment goals are better achieved by simply not responding to the resistant statement.

Client: *But I can't work. I sleep all day!*

Employment specialist: *Don't get ahead of yourself. We are not talking about going into full time employment, we are just looking what you might enjoy doing so you don't feel so isolated.*

Client: *Well I just wanted you to know.*

Rolling with Resistance

Resistance can also be met by rolling with it instead of opposing it. There is a paradoxical element in this, which often will bring the client back to a balanced or opposite perspective. This strategy can be particularly useful with clients who present in a highly oppositional manner and who seem to reject every idea or suggestion.

Client: *But I can't work. I sleep all day!*

Employment specialist: *And it may very well be that when you find a job that you will still struggle to get up in the mornings. You may decide that it's not worth working and it is better to carry on as you are. It may be too difficult to make a change. That will be up to you.*

Client: *Okay.*

Reframing

Reframing is a strategy in which you invite clients to examine their perceptions in a new light or a reorganized form. In this way, new meaning is given to what has been said. For example, if a client reports a spouse or loved one as saying, "*You really can't work you aren't well enough,*" the client may view this as "*confirmation that they can't work.*" The employment specialist can reframe this as "*this person must care a lot about you to try and protect you in this way.*"