

Motivational Interviewing for Patient and Family Engagement

Carolyn J. Swenson, MSPH, MSN, RN
SBIRT, MI and Suicide Prevention Consultant

April 9, 2026

Goals

1. Explore how motivational interviewing can enhance patient and family engagement in health behavior change.
2. Describe basic motivational interviewing skills.
3. Explore how to respond to low motivation.

What is Motivational Interviewing (MI)?

"MI is a collaborative, goal-oriented style of communication with particular attention to the language of change. It is designed to strengthen personal motivation and commitment to a specific goal by eliciting and exploring the person's own reasons for change within an atmosphere of acceptance and compassion."

(Miller & Rollnick)

When is MI useful?

- 1. Ambivalence is high:** a person has mixed feelings about change
- 2. Confidence is low:** a person doubts their ability to change
- 3. Desire is low:** a person is uncertain about whether they want to change
- 4. Importance is low:** the benefits of change and disadvantages of the current situation are unclear

What motivates a person to change?



Ambivalence is normal!



The “spirit” of MI

Compassion

- Avoid shaming/blaming/judgment
- Extending compassion *helps cultivate self-compassion*

Partnership

- Figure out next steps *with* the patient
- Honor the *patient’s expertise on their life*: wisdom, strengths, resources, past successes
- *Ask permission* to share information, concerns, and advice

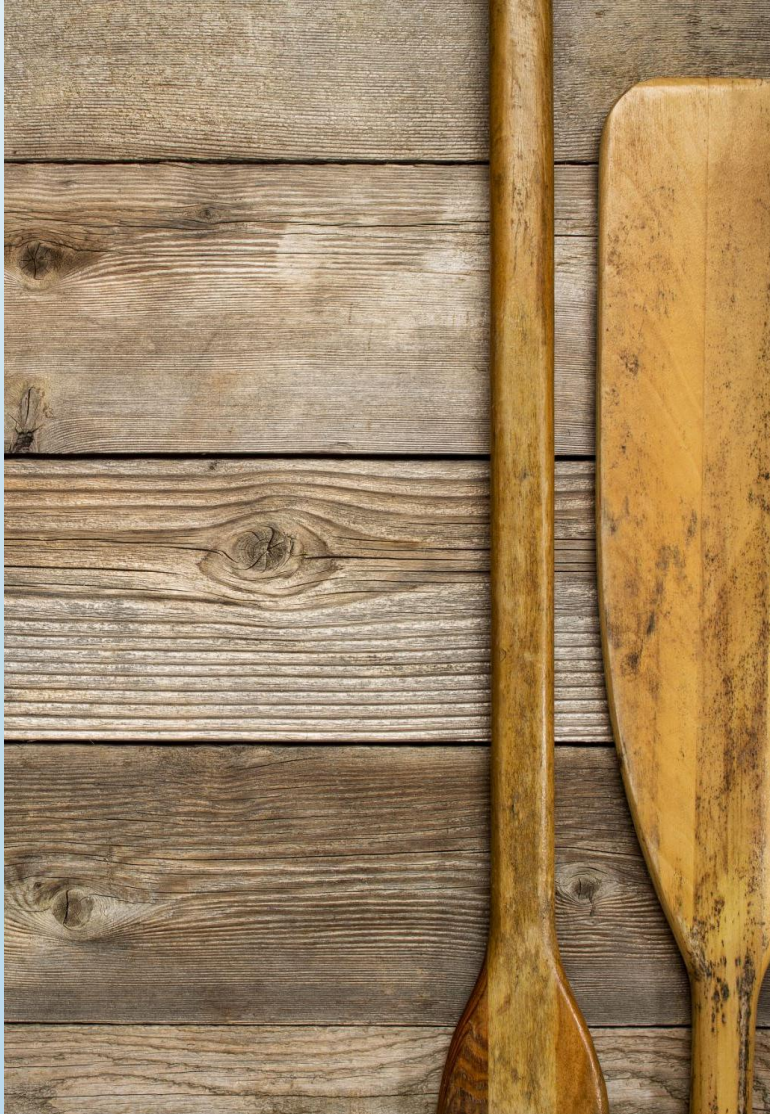
Acceptance

- *Autonomy*: the patient’s freedom to choose to change/not change
- Show *genuine curiosity about how the patient views the issue* (empathy/accurate understanding)
- *Affirm* strengths, values, goals, intentions, efforts

Empowerment

- Elicit *intrinsic motivation*: the *patients’* insights about the benefits of change
- Enhance *self-efficacy*: the belief that change is possible

MI skills: OARS



- 1.** Open-ended questions
- 2.** Affirmations
- 3.** Reflections
- 4.** Summaries

Open-ended questions

1. "What do you already know about how diet and physical activity affect a person's blood sugar?"
2. "What concerns you most about your child receiving vaccinations? I would genuinely like to understand your perspective."
3. "There are multiple options to treat depression including lifestyle, counseling and medications. What are you most interested in exploring?"
4. "I'm curious, what is preventing you from getting screened for colon cancer?"
5. "You recognize that smoking is affecting your health. How do you feel about getting support to help you quit?"

Affirmations

- Different from praise.
- Pertain to a person's character
 - ✓ Goals, values, intentions, efforts, past successes

To explore goals and values ask:

- *"What things are especially important to you at this time in your life?"*

Reflections

- To express **empathy** (*accurate understanding of **their** perspective*)
- To allow the patient to **hear their own voice talking**
 - ✓ Especially statements in favor of change



Types of Reflections

Simple

- Repeats word for word or slightly rewords

Complex

- Paraphrases
- Reframes
- Continues the paragraph (takes a guess at what they might say next)

Reflection of Feeling

- Emphasizes the emotional dimension
- Gets at deeper meaning/values

Examples of Reflections

1. "Smoking helps you manage stress and life feels too stressful right now to try to quit."
2. "Getting screened for colon cancer sounds inconvenient *and*, at the same time taking steps to prevent cancer might be worth it."
3. "It's no fun when someone nags you about what you eat, *and* I wonder if your kids really care about you and want you to avoid future problems related to diabetes."
4. "It's been a really difficult time for your family, and you are doing your best right now to take care of your health."

Summaries

- Move from the *why* to the *how* of change
- Restate desire and intentions to change
- Summarize next steps

*You **are** concerned about your blood pressure, and you plan to make some changes to your diet and get more physical activity to see if you can avoid starting a second medication.*

Our nurse will meet with you before you leave today and provide information that can help you take these next steps. We agreed that you will check your blood pressure every morning and keep a record and then we discuss how it's going after one month.

Did I miss anything?



“Change Talk” and “Sustain Talk”

Change Talk: DARN CAT



Preparatory

Desire

Ability

Reasons

Need

Mobilizing

Commitment

Activation

Taking steps

Change Talk and Sustain Talk

Change Talk

Desire: "I want to change..."

Ability: "I can change..." "This is how I would change..."

Reasons: "One good reason to change..."

Need: "Changing ... *is* important because..."

Commitment: "I plan to change..."

Activation: "I'm ready/willing to try..."

Taking steps: "I started to change by..."

Sustain Talk

"I don't want to change..."

"I'm not able to change... "It's too hard to change..."

"One reason I do *not* want to change..."

"Changing...*is not* important to me"

"I do not plan to change..."

"I'm *not* willing to try anything right now"

"I'm not taking steps to change..."

Examples of “change talk”

1. “My mom had many diabetes complications and suffered a lot.”
2. “Two years ago, I quit for 3 months.”
3. “I feel less depressed when I walk every day but some days it’s too hot to be outside.”
4. “I need to be here for my kids.”
5. “I decided that trying a medication might help me get through this depression.”
6. “I think that program you mentioned to help a person quit smoking might be good for me.”
7. “I cut back on how many drinks I have after work and I am sleeping better.”
8. “It’s so frustrating, nothing seems to work to get my blood pressure lower.”

How to elicit “change talk”

1. Ask evocative open-ended questions:

- a) “Why might you want to change/get help for ____?”
- b) “If you decide to change ____, how would you do it in order to be successful?”
- c) “What is one good reason you can think of to change ____?”
- d) “How will your life be better if you change ____?”
- e) “How would you know if ____ was becoming a problem for you?”

These questions help a person identify and state the benefits of change in their own words.

How to elicit “change talk” (cont.)

2. Ask about importance and confidence (on a 0-10 scale):

- “On scale from 0-10, how important is it to you to schedule the screening test, where 0 is not at all important and 10 is very important?”

THEN ASK:

“What made you choose 5 and not a *lower* number?”

- “How confident are you that you will be able to take this next step, where 0 is not at all and 10 is very confident?”

“What made you choose 3 and not a *lower* number?”

“What could help you feel more confident about taking the next step?”

Readiness to change = Importance + Confidence

Responding to “change talk”: EARS

- **E**xplore it: how will life be better; first steps; when will they start
- **A**ffirm it: Tie the change to values and goals; note that changing is worth it even if it's difficult
- **R**eflect it: Restate it, paraphrase it; take a guess at the importance
- **S**ummarize: Their reasons for change; note that they are choosing to change; next steps including support you will provide.



Responding to “sustain talk”

- Affirm autonomy: it *is* their decision to change or not change.
- Affirm their expertise on their life: “*You will know best if changing ... is important at some point.*”
- Communicate that they will not be judged or forced to change.
- Communicate that they will receive ongoing care even if they do not change.
- Show understanding of their needs and priorities.
- Show understanding of the potential losses that would come with change.
- Focus on something you can agree to discuss. “*What other concerns would you like to discuss during your visit today?*”

Elicit – Provide -Elicit

Elicit

1. Find out what they already know or would like to know.

“What do you know about steps you can take to help manage diabetes?” [LISTEN]

Provide

2. Provide information in a neutral manner.

“Even small changes to diet and physical activity can help control the blood sugar along with medications. I could refer you to our diabetes educator to learn more.”

Elicit

3. Ask what they think about the information and how it might apply to them.

“What next steps are you interested in taking?”

Elicit – Provide -Elicit

Elicit

1. Find out what they already know or would like to know.

“I understand that the health of your child is your top priority. What concerns do you have about childhood vaccinations?” [LISTEN]

Provide

2. Provide information in a neutral manner.

“Thank you for sharing your concerns with me. As you noted, vaccines have helped reduce serious diseases like measles. Also, extensive research has demonstrated that there is no link between vaccines and autism. The frequency of autism is the same in vaccinated and unvaccinated children.”

Elicit

3. Ask what they think about the information and how it might apply to them.

“What do you think about this information?” “What additional information might be helpful as you consider next steps for your child?”

No-Cost MI training from the SBIRT in Colorado Program

Monthly 1-hour sessions:

- Motivational Interviewing Core Components
- Motivational Interviewing Beyond the Basics
- Motivational Interviewing with Adolescents

OR

Request a customized training sessions for your organization

<https://peerassistanceservices.growthzoneapp.com/eventcalendar>



Thank you very much! Questions?