MOTIVATIONAL INTERVIEWING IN CHILD WELFARE SERVICES
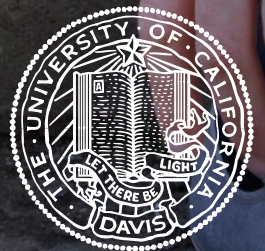
NORTHERN CALIFORNIA TRAINING ACADEMY

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CONTENTS

MOTIVATIONAL INTERVIEWING IN CHILD WELFARE SERVICES VIDEO STUDY GUIDE AND REFRESHER

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This guide provides an overview of the concepts and skills in Motivational Interviewing (MI) along with suggestions of where to use the various vignettes from the *Motivational Interviewing in Child Welfare Services* video. Suggestions for further reading are provided at the end, should you wish to learn more. For additional training in MI, trainers and training listings can be found at www.motivationalinterviewing.org.

A. Defining MI and Motivation

1. *Motivation:* Not a character trait but a stage in the change process that is easily influenced and changeable.

2. *Motivational Interviewing* (MI): A person-centered, directive method of communication for enhancing intrinsic motivation to change by exploring and resolving ambivalence (Miller & Rollnick, 2002).

   a. *Intrinsic motivation:* Wanting to change due to internal reasons or personal motivators. Lasting change is more likely to occur when we act due to our own internal value system.

   b. *Ambivalence:* Feeling two ways about a behavioral issue or problem; wanting to change and not wanting to change at the same time. Typically most people are ambivalent when it comes to making major or even small changes in their lives.

B. The Spirit of MI

1. MI is made up of specific communication skills + an approach or "clinical style" with clients that is based on three essential ingredients that make up the "spirit" of MI (Miller & Rose, 2009):

   a. *Collaboration:* All interactions with clients are collaborative in nature, not expert-led; clients are assumed to have the knowledge and resources to solve their problems. Clients are the experts on their lives.

   b. *Evocation:* Our goal is to "evoke" from clients their own reasons and ideas for change, not to instill them or provide them; we also evoke from clients their past attempts and personal characteristics that can support change; advice and suggestions may be given but with permission first and within a menu of options.

   c. *Autonomy Support:* We work to support clients' own autonomy around making choices and decisions at all times. We avoid the righting reflex—wanting to make the situation "right" for clients or fix situations/problems for them—by encouraging clients to make the choices that seem best for them.

2. Miller (1983) calls these *relational factors* which include how well the social worker/counselor exhibits *empathy* and acceptance of the client.

C. The Skills of MI

1. <u>OARS skills</u>: These are not necessarily used in this order. They are helpful for engaging clients, learning of their concerns, and demonstrating empathy—our clients know that we know what they are experiencing.

   O: *Open-ended questions:* These help us to get to know what our clients' concerns are. They are questions that can evoke a variety of answers, as opposed to closed-ended questions that a client can answer with a "yes" or "no." Examples of open-ended questions are, "How would you like to spend this time together?", "What concerns do you have about ____?", "Why is it important for you to work on your plan?"

   A: *Affirmations:* These are statements that acknowledge our clients' strengths, characteristics, and positive attempts at change or actual change. Affirmations are even stronger when we evoke them from the clients themselves: they tell us their positive aspects (Hohman, 2012). Examples of affirmations are:

   • "You worked hard to make sure you met all of your plan's requirements."

- "Being a good mother to your children is really important to you."

- "You were able to stay clean for 3 months."

- "You seem to know what you really want."

R: *Reflections:* Reflections are statements –not questions—that we reply to clients to indicate to them that we have really heard what they said. There are several types of reflections (Miller & Rollnick, 2002):

> <u>Simple:</u> A repeat or rephrase of what the client has said. They provide no additional meaning but move the conversation along.
>
> > Client: "I went to see about getting that job, but the man there said that he wasn't hiring."
> >
> > Social Worker: "There were no jobs available at this time."
>
> <u>Complex</u>: These reflections provide more meaning to what the client has said or has not even said yet. They can be a paraphrase, or what is called "continuing the paragraph" (Moyers, Martin, Manuel, Miller, & Ernst, 2010).
>
> > Client: "I went to see about getting that job, but the man there said he wasn't hiring."
> >
> > Social Worker: "And that really disappointed and frustrated you, as you know getting a job is important to keeping your benefits."
>
> <u>Double-Sided</u>: These reflections allow the client to hear both sides of his or her ambivalence.
>
> > Client: "I know that I have to find work, but on the other hand I worry about putting my kids in child care and also about the cost of transportation."
> >
> > Social worker: "You worry about how your kids will do in child care and if getting to and from work will cost you a lot; on the other hand, you know that this job is important to keeping your benefits and making you independent."
>
> <u>Amplified</u>: An overstatement of what the client has said.
>
> > Client: "There are no jobs out there that will take someone like me on. I mean, who would hire me?"
> >
> > Social worker: "Even with your past work history and job skills, it all seems like there is no one who will want to hire you."

> Note: Amplified reflections have to be used carefully and without sarcasm. The benefit is that they sometimes cause the client to argue the other side:
>
> > Client: "Well, it is true that I did work for awhile and know how to work a cash register. And I am good with people."

S: *Summaries*: Summaries are really long reflections. They allow us to pull together all of the various aspects of a concern that clients have talked about. In this way, clients get to hear themselves again, in a more organized manner. We can use summaries as transitions or to begin to work toward a commitment for change from clients.

> Social worker: "So let me summarize all that we have talked about. You are willing to look for work and you have had some good experience and reviews in the past. You are worried about how much you'll have to spend on child care and the bus. One thing that might help you is a bus pass, which I can arrange for you."

VIDEO Suggestion: Chellie and Lelani, Scene 4
How does the social worker communicate with the client? What kinds of reflections does she use here?

2. <u>Recognizing and Responding to Change Talk</u>: Using our OARS skills, we draw out from clients their concerns and perspectives. We also want to listen for and respond to change talk, which are statements clients make regarding possible or actual change. The mnemonic DARN-CAT helps us remember the different types of change talk to listen for:

D: *Desire* to change: "I want things to be different. I am tired of living this way."

A: *Ability* to change. "I stayed clean for three months the last time."

R: *Reasons* for change: "If I want to get my kids back, then I know I have to go to drug treatment and show the judge that I mean business,

N: *Need* for change: I need to stay on my meds in order to prevent a relapse."

C: *Commitment* to change: "I am going to look for work."

A: *Activation* of change: "I looked up 3 A.A. meetings and I know when they meet."

T: *Taking* steps in change: "I went to that parenting class last night."

3. Responding to change talk when we hear it: I'm all EARS:

E: *Ask* elaboration questions: "Why is staying on your meds so important to you?"

A: *Affirm* clients' attempts or statements about change: "You were able to quit drinking in the past and you were successful at telling your friends 'No'."

R: *Reflect* what you hear: "You really want to show the judge that you can do this."

S: *Summarize*: "You looked up some meetings and you were able to attend all of them. You have stayed clean this whole time and are working to take treatment seriously."

VIDEO suggestion: Ali and Steve: Scene 5
How do complex reflections change the conversation?
What kinds of change talk statements does Steve make? How does Ali respond?

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4. Eliciting Change Talk: Sometimes clients get stuck in what is called "sustain talk"—telling us why they can't or won't change. They are hearing themselves describe themselves as unable or unwilling to change. The more we can get them to talk about change, the more likely they are to change (Apodaca & Longabaugh, 2009). Here are some ideas of how to elicit change talk from clients, especially when it isn't occurring naturally:

a. *Importance/Confidence Rulers.* Scaling for importance and confidence allows us to discover together where the client is at in terms of the components of readiness for change, and also allows the client to talk themselves into moving forward with strengthened willingness and ability. For example, we might ask:

  • "On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being low and 10 being high, how important is it to you to make changes around parenting?"

  • Let's say our client responds with "3." We might follow up with, "What is it that makes it as high as a 3 for you?" and "If it were a 4 or 5 in terms of importance, what would you see yourself doing differently?"

For confidence, we might scale similarly:

  • "On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being low and 10

being high, how confident are you that you could make changes that you desire or see reasons for?" and follow up with:

  • "What strengths and abilities do you have that support your (client's) number?" and "What might it take for you to feel more confident?" and "How confident would you need to be in order to take action for these changes?" and so on.

b. *Querying Extremes.* Asking our client to verbalize their vision of the extreme often helps the client consider movement toward change. For example, we might ask:

  • "What's the best thing that could happen if you made some changes around your parenting?" or

  • "What's the worst thing that could happen if you made some changes around your parenting?" or

  • "What's the best thing that could happen if you didn't make changes?" or

  • "What's the worst thing that could happen if you didn't make changes?"

c. *Looking Back; Looking Forward.* Sometimes evoking from clients their vision of the future or recollection of the past stirs up momentum toward change. For example, we might ask:

  • "Looking back to a time when you feel you were relating more successfully with your children, what were you doing well?" or

  • "Looking forward, what would you like to see happening in your relationship with your children? How would you get there? What would the steps be? How would you go about it? What would be rewarding about creating that future?"

d. *Evocative Questions.* Distinct from some of the other strategies described in this section is this "magic" or evocative question approach. Here, we are working with our client to create specific kinds of change talk. We may have some or none of the DARN-CAT already present in the conversation, and with evocative questions we are intentionally calling forth different aspects of the DARN-CAT. We ask questions that target distinct pieces of the DARN-CAT.

  D: *Desire*: "What change do you most want or most desire?"

  A: *Ability:* "In what ways are you already able to make these changes?"

R: *Reason:* "What are your most important reasons for making these changes?"

N: *Need*: We might consider scaling for the expressed urgency of the change, "On a scale of 1 to 10, how important or urgent is it to you to make these changes?"

C: *Commitment*: "What are you willing to do to begin these changes?"

A: *Activation*: We might consider scaling for readiness, "On a scale of 1 to 10, how ready are you to begin these changes?"

T: *Taking Steps*: "What steps do you see yourself taking in order to be successful with these changes?"

The beauty of evocative questions is that the client's response most often is in the specific form of change talk or commitment language.

e. *Decisional Balance.* The decisional balance strategy is an exploration of pros and cons of change as well as not changing:

- "What would be the downsides of not changing?"

- "What would be the positives of not changing?"

- "What would be the downsides of changing?"

- "What would be the positives or the benefits of changing?"

Ordinarily, we think of working with the client to discover the benefits of changing as the final step of the decisional balance strategy, principally due to the tendency for people to remember most strongly the last things they recall themselves saying. It makes sense, then, that we would want to leave the "change talk" emphasis or momentum last in the exploration process favoring as MI does the movement toward change.

f. *Goals/Values Discussion.* An exploration of goals and values is often highly evocative and supportive of movement toward change; it is an exploration of what is really central to a person, what really makes them "tick." You might ask:

- "Tell me about some of your most important goals as a parent." Or,

- "If it's ok with you, let's discuss your top three values as a parent, how you see your current parenting fitting those values and some things you might consider doing that better fit those values."

A more involved session might include a list of values for the client to consider and discuss, or even cards labeled with values to sort into various piles of "very important," "important," and "not important" and discuss.

g. *Elaboration.* Elaboration questions recognize that change talk is on the table and we are trying to further or strengthen it. A client might say "I think I have some skills for this challenge," and we might respond with, "Great! Such as…?" in an effort to facilitate the client's continuing change talk. Elaboration questions are ordinarily brief: "Such as…", "In what ways…", "What else…", "Say more…"

D. Rolling with Resistance

In MI, "resistance" is framed somewhat differently; according to Miller and Rollnick (2002) it is a signal from clients that we have done something in our interaction that makes them argue, challenge, or withdraw. Resistance is seen as a social worker problem, not a client problem. Many times resistance comes when we violate the spirit of MI. For example:

- We say something to take away clients' autonomy by telling them what to do;

- We label clients;

- We act as the expert by providing unasked-for education or information;

- We ask too many questions;

- We confront clients;

- We move the conversation along too quickly toward change or our own agenda;

- We don't take the time to evoke from clients their perspectives, ideas, and methods to facilitate change.

Clients can also be resistant due to having a loss of their autonomy from being in a mandated situation with court requirements, etc. Being challenging or argumentative is one way of exerting one's autonomy and personhood (Hohman, 2012).

When clients are behaving in this manner, we can "roll" with resistance by using:

1. *Simple reflections.* Here, we repeat or rephrase some or all of the words a client expresses, showing that we understand the client's words.

> Client: "I don't think this is fair."
>
> Social Worker: "This doesn't seem fair to you."

2. *Amplified reflections.* Here, we emphasize by over- or under-stating the client's words, which have the effect of magnifying some aspect—typically the resistant element—of the client's meaning. In this, we express understanding as well as facilitate the continuation of the conversation to better refine a common understanding of the client's meaning.

> Client: "I don't think this is fair."

> Social Worker: "None of this seems fair to you." Or, "this seems completely unwarranted."

3. *Double-sided reflections.*

> Often clients feel or think two or more ways about something. For example, a client may express a desire to make a change, and also express a lack of confidence to make the change. Here, we express understanding of the ambivalence the client is experiencing. In doing this skillfully, we often join the ambivalent client expression through a joining word such as "and," "while," or "on the one hand…and on the other hand…" rather than using disjunctive words like "but." Joining words ("and," "while" and so forth) allows the client to know you are hearing the complexity of their position and invites them to work through their ambivalence.

> Another strategy with double-sided reflections is to leave the change talk last in the client's ears. This has a way of emphasizing differentially and selectively the client's change talk and thus, the direction the client may favor.

> Client: "I want to attend parenting classes, but I don't see how I can with all my other commitments."

> Social Worker: "While your confidence is low to balance things, attending parenting classes is something that's very important to you."

4. *Shifting focus.* Here, we acknowledge the client's concerns or resistance, and we follow this by inviting a consideration of another direction that may be more productive or solution-focused. This has the effect of going around an obstacle, rather than over it or through it or getting stuck on it.

> Client: "None of this should have happened to me and I shouldn't be sitting here having to talk to you."

> Social Worker: "I understand that it feels overblown to you. Since you are here, though, what would be valuable for us to talk about? How do you see us working together?"

5. *Coming alongside.* Here, we simply do not oppose in any way the client's position and overtly express that the truth of their position may just be so. We need to be somewhat cautious with this strategy; it may be more appropriate in some instances than others. We want to be careful not to condone a position against change or offer agreement with some positions, and we need to balance this with offering understanding through acknowledgement.

> Client: "I don't think I can do all this. I think it's impossible."

> Social Worker: "And that might be."

6. *Providing an agreement with a twist.* With this strategy, we express agreement and offer a twist or a different point of view.

> Client: "I've tried too many times, I think it's hopeless."

> Social Worker: "Yes, it seems hopeless. Yet, it must be so important to you that you keep trying."

7. *Using reframing.* With reframing, we acknowledge the validity of the client's position yet we follow that by inviting a different point of view.

> Client: "I have a drink at night, but that doesn't impact my ability to watch my kids."

> Social Worker: "And that could be the case, yet often people find that their attention and reaction time is impacted by alcohol."

8. *Emphasizing personal control.* This is an especially effective strategy with clients who feel pressured by their situation, forced into change or disenfranchised by happenings around them. Here, we are acknowledging explicitly that clients have choice and make choices and that their choices are theirs to make. In doing this, we emphasize autonomy and invite clients to take direct personal responsibility for their solutions.

> Client: "No one has taken my point of view into account; I don't want to do any of this."

> Social Worker: "You're feeling really pushed around right now. And really, you're the only one who can decide whether to make these changes or not. It's really your decision, even if others wanted to make it for you, they can't. What do you see as your options here?

E. Commitment toward Change and Change Planning:

We can ask clients about their commitments to change after we have discussed the topic under concern, as well as reflected, elicited and reflected some more of the client's change talk. Typical questions can include, "What is your next step?" or "Where do you go from here?" If clients are not ready to take the next step, we respect that desire and try not to convince or argue with them (Moyers, Martin, Manuel, Miller, & Ernst, 2010).

- Ask for barriers to change or roadblocks that clients may find challenging. For example, a social worker may ask, "How will you deal with your user friends when you see them and they ask you to get high with them?"

- Generate a variety of methods for change or for addressing barriers from clients; they will tell us what works best for them.

- Provide ideas only with permission to do so.

- Writing down the change plan can be helpful for clients.

F. Further Practice and Growth of MI skills:

You've had some MI training, you're back at work and things are going pretty well with your MI skills. What are some ways to continue learning to support your MI skill development? One thing that research has found is that people tend to lose their skill gain over time unless they receive some sort of coaching and feedback about their MI skills; clinicians are also likely to overestimate their own skill use so it is difficult for us to judge ourselves (Miller, Yahne, Moyers, Martinez, & Pirritano, 2004).

- The optimal situation would be for you to work with an MI coach. Many MI trainers are willing to provide supervision, with coding and feedback. You can find a coach at the MI Network of Trainers website, www.motivationalinterviewing.org.

- Another option is to work with your colleagues to develop an MI "community of practice" or a peer support group (see Cristine Urquhart's narrative in Hohman, 2012). In a group setting, you can take turns practicing and observing each other's MI skills and giving feedback. Videos of MI sessions can be utilized for discussion and as a springboard for practicing a specific skill. There are many good books that can be used, especially a workbook by David Rosengren (see Further Reading on page 8).

- We can also use our own clients as a gauge. The client we're working with is always the best barometer of whether what we're doing is effective, if it's MI Adherent… or if it isn't. Bill Miller, who defined MI, is fond of saying that practicing MI is unlike practicing piano on a silent keyboard. The client always provides us feedback, whether the keys we've touched were effective at rolling with resistance, whether we were effective at communicating the MI Spirit, or whether we were effective at eliciting and strengthening client change talk.

Let's consider some client feedback that can give us some guidance in our MI skill development:

1. **"Yeah, but…"** If we hear our client saying this, it may be a signal that we are giving advice without permission and/or providing solutions for the client that don't fit; it can also be a signal that there might be some things about the status quo that are important for the client, that they may need more confidence to change, that perhaps our ideas for them are not helpful, and possibly that we haven't really listened to their ideas first.

   Something to try: Elicit-Provide-Elicit. First, ask the client for their own insights, ideas and solutions around the target behavior. Then, ask permission to offer some information. If the client gives permission, you might say: "In addition to the options you are considering, some people find that x, y and z are useful." Then, ask the client what they make of the options they've generated as well as the ones you may have suggested, or what steps they may consider taking as a result of the discussion.

2. **Reflections fall flat.** If our reflections seem not to move the conversation forward effectively, perhaps we are over-relying on simple reflections rather than trying out complex ones.

   Something to try: Practice complexifying our reflections. Pause for a moment with a client and think, "What does this person really mean? What is underneath the words?" Let's say the client says, "I really want to get my finances

in order. I'm tired of relying on others," begin the reflection in our minds: "You mean that your independence is important to you." Then, we strike the prefatory words and the reflection becomes: "Your independence is important to you." Or, consider a reflection that contains a metaphor, such as: "You really want to be in the driver's seat around your finances."

3. **Client on the defensive when asked questions**
Maybe we want to consider whether the tone or context of our question expresses judgment. If we ask, "Why haven't you followed through yet?" then we've asked the kind of question that takes us down the judger path, which in turn encourages the client to take a status quo position, defending and justifying themselves.

Something to try: Follow the learner path. Ask instead a strength-focused, change-creating question, such as, "What are your plans for following through?" or "In what ways are you able to…?"

4. **Nothing seems to change.** The next time we see the client, things seem to be about the same. Are we mining effectively for change talk?

Something to try: Perhaps we can ask a key question or two at the end of each session, such as "What steps will you take to learn more about your options between now and the next time we meet?" or "When do you see yourself getting started on your plan to exercise more?" or possibly "What first steps will you take this week?"

5. **One-minute MI check-up.** Integrating new skills can take conscious, intentional effort, as well as awareness of efforts made.

Something to try: Take a moment near the end of the work day to ask and respond to a quick self-inventory. What MI skill did I use well today? What MI moment did I miss? What skill will I make sure I use tomorrow?

G. Learn to Learn.

While it is certainly great to continue learning MI in formal workshop settings, this isn't always an easy option in our busy work lives. One of the principle benefits of MI is that it really is a "learning to learn" model. We can continue to grow and learn in our practice when our eyes and ears are attuned to development opportunities. Every client interaction provides a wealth of information and valuable feedback to support and encourage our increasing effectiveness.

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