

# Motivational Interviewing Skills & Techniques

Motivational Interviewing is a non-confrontational approach to help people change behaviors. Below are some skills and techniques of motivational interviewing that will:

- Help individuals recognize their high-risk behavior.
- Enable individuals to evaluate how problematic their current behavior is for them in relation to other issues in their life.
- Empower individuals by assisting them recognize their personal strengths and by affirming their value.

People without a vision will perish.

## The OARS of Motivational Interviewing

Motivational Interviewing works by:

- Identifying the discrepancy between where a peer is now and where they want to be.
- Helping a person acknowledge and resolve their ambivalence or conflict in making the necessary changes to reach their goals

This is achieved with four basic skills that can be remembered with the acronym 'OARS':

1. Open-ended questions
2. Affirmations
3. Reflective listening
4. Summary statements

**DBHDS Vision & Mission**  
**Vision:** A life of possibilities for all Virginians.  
**Mission:** Supporting individuals by promoting recovery, self-determination, and wellness in all aspects of life.

**1. Open-ended questions.** Asking open-ended questions helps individuals investigate and explore their thinking and moves the Peer Recovery Specialist away from giving or offering advice.

Open-ended questions can't be answered with a yes or no. They encourage participants to do most of the talking. The goal is to help a person identify where they are now and where they want to be. People tend to believe what they hear themselves say; you can elicit these self-motivating statements with well-chosen open-ended questions.

**Examples:**

- *Who is the most important person in your life and why?*
- *How does being on probation affect your home or work life?*
- *How will getting off probation affect your home or work life?*
- *What are the five most important things in your life?*
- *How can I help you with \_\_\_\_\_?*
- *What was the best five minutes of your day? What was the worst five minutes of your day?*
- *How would you like things to be different?*
- *What are the good things about your addictive behaviors? What are the things you like least about your addictive behaviors?*
- *When would you be most likely to \_\_\_\_\_?*
- *Where would you be most likely to \_\_\_\_\_?*
- *What do you think you will lose if you give up \_\_\_\_\_?*
- *What have you tried before to make a change?*
- *Who are those in your life that will support your changing of this behavior?*
- *What do you want to do next?*
- *How does \_\_\_\_\_ affect your family?*
- *What do you know about the risks of doing \_\_\_\_\_?*

### Recovery Pathways

- o Hope
- o Choice
- o Empowerment
- o Recovery Environment
- o Spirituality

Probing ?'s e.g. , 'Would you be interested in setting up a safety plan?'

**2. Affirmations.** Affirming statements help an individual acknowledge their positive behaviors and strengths, which then builds confidence in their ability to change. Use affirming statements to recognize difficulties and support strengths and to let a person know their concerns and issues are valid. Affirmations convey respect, understanding, and support. **Affirmations must be genuine and appropriate.**

**Examples:**

- *I appreciate that you're willing to share that with me.*
- *You're clearly a resourceful person.*
- *You handled yourself really well in that situation.*
- *That's a good suggestion.*
- *Congratulations on the successful completion of \_\_\_\_\_.*
- *If I were in your shoes, I don't know if I could of managed nearly as well as you did.*
- *I've really enjoyed this discussion today.*
- *You're very courageous to be so open about this.*
- *You've accomplished a lot in a short time.*
- *You've tried very hard to quit \_\_\_\_\_.*
- *Let's see if we can take \_\_\_\_\_ you've exhibited in dealing with \_\_\_\_\_ and apply that in dealing with \_\_\_\_\_.*

**Recovery-based Words** (Use in reference to people's actions:)

- o Resourceful
- o Talented
- o Creative
- o Capable
- o Hopeful
- o Practical

**3. Reflective listening.** You can paraphrase an individual's comments by repeating back what you think you heard them say. This lets the peer know that you heard them. In addition, the individual hears again what they said, which will help them understand their thoughts better.

**Examples:**

- *So, you feel.....*
- *It sounds like you.....*
- *You're wondering if.....*
- *So, what I hear you saying is.....*
- *This is what I am hearing; please correct me if I am wrong....*

You don't always have to have the answer. It's okay to say you don't know how to respond.

**4. Summary Statements.** Summary statements pull together everything that was said, allowing for the transition to the next topic. In addition to making a summary statement, you might ask what the peer learned from the discussion. This is similar to reflective listening.

**Examples:**

- *Here's what I've heard. Tell me if I've missed anything.....*
- *What you've said is important.*
- *I value what you say.*
- *Did I hear you correctly?*
- *We covered that well. Now let's talk about.....*

OARS emphasizes personal choice and control. If you tell someone what to do, it's likely they'll perceive it as being confrontational, which will probably evoke unwanted and unneeded resistance.

## The DEARS of Motivational Interviewing

In addition to the OARS of motivational interviewing there are five additional techniques to motivational interviewing, which you can remember with the acronym 'DEARS':

1. **D**evelop discrepancy
2. **E**xpress empathy
3. **A**mplify ambivalence
4. **R**oll with resistance
5. **S**upport self-efficacy

**1. Develop discrepancy.** This helps an individual recognize the gap between where they are and where they want to be. When the peer sees that their current behavior is not leading them towards their goals, they may become more motivated and open to change. The goal is to close the discrepancy gap by changing their behavior.

**Examples:**

- *Tell me some good things and not so good things about your behavior.*
- *How do you think your life would be different if you weren't \_\_\_\_\_?*
- *What do you see your life to be like if you don't make changes and continue to use?*
- *How does your \_\_\_\_\_ fit in with your goals?*
- *What do you feel you need to change to obtain your goals?*
- *How will things be for you a year from now if you continue to \_\_\_\_\_?*
- *Hypothetically, if you were to make a change in any area of your life, what would it be and why?*

**Recovery is possible for anyone!**

**2. Express empathy.** This is one of the most important elements of motivational interviewing. Listen to the peer to get an idea of the peer's concerns and their reasons for behaving as they do. Try to put yourself in the peer's place, view the world through their eyes, think as they think, feel as they feel, and experience their world as the peer does. To express empathy effectively, you must be able to look at things from another person's perspective.

When people feel understood, they're more likely to be open and share their experiences. The more an individual is willing to share their experiences, the better you'll be able to determine their needs for information and support. Empathic listening is *essential* to minimizing resistance. Your ability to demonstrate empathy --- to understand and feel what another person is experiencing --- has a major impact on their willingness and ability to change.

**Examples:**

- *I understand how difficult this is.*
- *Yes, making changes is hard work.*
- *I think I know where you're at with this.*
- *That must have been hard on you.*

**3. Amplify ambivalence.** Ambivalence to change is normal; however, it can become paralyzing, causing some peers to become stuck. Help the peer to acknowledge their ambivalence by exploring the uncertainty, which can help them work through it. If a peer remains ambivalent, they are less likely to establish long-lasting behavior changes.

**Examples:**

- *How has your behavior been a problem to you? How has it been a problem for others?*
- *What was your life like before you started having problems with your addictive behavior?*
- *If you keep heading down the road you're on, what do you see happening?*

**4. Roll with resistance.** Like ambivalence, resistance is a normal behavior that should be expected when people are trying to change. Resistance is a behavior people adopt to recover their power. Peer Recovery Specialists "go with" the person's resistance in order to increase their power -- the power they need to recover. Arguing with a peer or creating a power struggle by threatening or trying to assert control will only make matters worse.

Instead, seek to clarify and understand. By encouraging a peer to come up with solutions to their issues --- as *they* define them --- you invite them to examine new perspectives without badgering, lecturing, or imposing new ways of thinking on the peer. Emphasizing and allowing personal choice and control over their problems can minimize resistance. If you meet resistance, it's probably a sign you need to respond differently.

**Examples:**

- *It's okay if you don't want to quit; it's your choice.*
- *Maybe you aren't ready to quit.*
- *What do you want to do? How do you want to proceed?*
- *Where do you want to go from here?*

Safety First - Make a **CALM** Connection  
Connect -- Observe and inquire  
◦ What happened? What is happening?  
**Ask** -- Am I okay? Are you okay?  
◦ If you or the individual are not safe, take action!  
Listen and share lived experiences -- Use Empathy  
◦ Share lived experience  
◦ Authentically offer encouragement and reflect strength. What's strong?  
**Motivate**  
◦ Ask about resilience or ask permission to share resilience strategies. What helps?  
◦ Forward the action. What's next?  
◦ Self-care, support, crisis plan?

**Tactful Interruptions can be used to pull an individual back to the present moment.**

**5. Support self-efficacy.** A peer's belief that change is possible is an important motivator in making change. In motivational interviewing, there is no "right way" to change. If a person's plan for change doesn't work, they can come up with other plans. For this to occur, a person must believe that change is possible and that they're capable of making the changes necessary to improve their situation. As a Peer Recovery Specialist one of your "responsibilities" is to create a supportive space for them to explore their issues by engaging them in conversations that will help them believe change is possible and attainable.

**Examples:**

- *It seems as though you have put a lot of thought into your goals.*
- *You have a good plan of action.*
- *It sounds like you've had some success at making changes, and you're still struggling with some.*
- *It sounds like you've made real progress. How does that feel?*

**Nothing about us without us!**

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(The previous content was referenced from the [Virginia Department of Behavioral Health & Developmental Services Peer Recovery Specialist Training Manual](#), from the [Peer Activated Resilience - The Resilience Effect™ Participant Workbook](#) and from [SMART Recovery® Facilitator's Manual 2nd edition ©2015](#) which can be purchased at [www.smartrecovery.org](http://www.smartrecovery.org))  
Copies of these referral pages are accessible to be printed off at:  
[www.clem4shea.com/PRS-MI.html](http://www.clem4shea.com/PRS-MI.html)