

## **Guide to Motivational Interviewing for Practitioners & Health Coaches**

### **What is Motivational Interviewing (MI)?**

Motivational Interviewing is a client-centered, directive method for enhancing intrinsic motivation to change by exploring and resolving ambivalence. MI is built on the premise that the client is the expert in their own life, and the coach's role is to guide and support the client in discovering their motivations for change.

### **Core Principles of Motivational Interviewing**

#### **1. Partnership:**

- MI emphasizes collaboration between the coach and the client rather than a top-down approach. You are partners working together to explore the client's goals and values.

#### **2. Acceptance:**

- This includes respect, understanding, and compassion. Acknowledge the client's autonomy and the fact that they are responsible for their own decisions.

#### **3. Evocation:**

- MI believes that motivation is within the client. The goal is to evoke the client's own reasons for change rather than imposing external reasons. Help the client find their own voice in the process.

#### **4. Compassion:**

- Actively promote the client's well-being and support them in achieving their goals, even when it might be difficult.

## **Key Strategies and Techniques of MI**

### **1. Open-Ended Questions:**

- Asking open-ended questions encourages clients to elaborate on their thoughts and feelings. This facilitates deeper conversation and self-reflection.
- Examples:
  - “What motivated you to seek coaching?”
  - “How would your life be different if you made this change?”
  - “What are the benefits of this behavior for you?”

### **2. Affirmations:**

- Affirmations are positive statements that recognize the client’s strengths and efforts. They help build self-efficacy and strengthen the client’s belief in their ability to change.
- Examples:
  - “I can see you’ve really thought about how to make this work for you.”
  - “That was a big step you took last week, and I’m proud of your efforts.”

### **3. Reflective Listening:**

- Reflective listening involves rephrasing or summarizing what the client has said to show understanding and to prompt further exploration.
- Example:
  - Client: “I just don’t have the time to exercise, even though I know it’s important.”

- Coach: “It sounds like you're really committed to staying healthy, but finding time to exercise feels like a challenge.”

#### 4. **Summarizing:**

- Summarizing involves capturing key points of the conversation to help the client focus on their reasons for change. It shows that you are actively listening and helps consolidate important information.
- Example:
  - “So, today we’ve discussed how you want to feel more energetic, how exercise could help you, and some of the challenges you’re facing in making it happen. Would you agree with that summary?”

#### 5. **Eliciting Change Talk:**

- Change talk refers to any client statement that expresses the desire, ability, reason, or need for change. As a health coach, you should encourage and amplify these statements to enhance motivation.
- Examples:
  - “What would life look like for you if you were able to make this change?”
  - “What are some reasons you’d want to prioritize your health right now?”

#### 6. **Developing Discrepancy:**

- Highlighting the gap between the client’s current behavior and their values or goals can prompt them to reflect on the need for change.
- Example:

- “You mentioned that you want to have more energy to keep up with your kids, but you also told me that you often skip meals. How do you think this affects your energy?”

## **7. Rolling with Resistance:**

- Resistance is a natural part of the change process, and it’s important to avoid arguing with the client. Instead, listen to their concerns and explore them further. Often, resistance signals that the client is ambivalent about change.
- Example:
  - Client: “I don’t think I need to cut out sugar completely.”
  - Coach: “It sounds like you’re not ready to make that change right now. What would need to happen for you to feel more comfortable with it?”

## **8. Supporting Self-Efficacy:**

- Self-efficacy refers to the client’s belief in their ability to achieve their goals. As a coach, your role is to encourage small wins and help the client develop confidence in their ability to succeed.
- Example:
  - “You’ve made some great progress with your meal planning this week. What’s something small you can do this week to keep that momentum going?”

## MI Framework: The OARS Model

The OARS model is a helpful framework for applying MI in a health coaching setting:

1. **O - Open-Ended Questions:** Use questions that allow clients to express their feelings and thoughts openly.
2. **A - Affirmations:** Acknowledge and reinforce the client's positive behavior and strengths.
3. **R - Reflective Listening:** Listen actively and reflect the client's thoughts, helping them understand themselves better.
4. **S - Summarizing:** Provide summaries that capture the essence of the conversation and highlight key points.

## Handling Ambivalence and Resistance

- **Ambivalence** is when a client feels torn between wanting to make a change and feeling unsure about it. MI helps resolve this ambivalence by exploring the pros and cons and eliciting reasons for change.
- **Resistance** often signals that the client is struggling with the idea of change. It's important to avoid confronting or arguing with the client directly. Instead, roll with the resistance by acknowledging it and exploring it further.

## **Practical Tips for Health Coaches Using MI**

### **1. Create a Safe, Non-Judgmental Environment:**

- Build trust by ensuring the client feels comfortable sharing their concerns and challenges without fear of judgment.

### **2. Focus on the Client's Autonomy:**

- Remember, the client is in control. Your role is to guide, not dictate. Help them explore their values, motivations, and goals.

### **3. Be Patient and Allow Time for Change:**

- Change is often a gradual process. Give clients time to reflect, process, and commit to action.

### **4. Practice Active Listening:**

- Listening is as important as asking the right questions. Be fully present and attentive to the client's verbal and non-verbal cues.

### **5. Adapt Your Approach to Each Client:**

- MI is flexible and can be tailored to the client's readiness to change. Adjust your approach based on whether the client is in the contemplation, preparation, action, or maintenance stage.

## **Conclusion**

Motivational Interviewing is a powerful technique that can help health coaches facilitate lasting behavior change in clients by focusing on their motivations and strengths. By using the OARS model, reflecting actively, and rolling with resistance, you can help clients resolve ambivalence and move toward their health goals with confidence and autonomy.

Remember, MI is not about convincing clients to change—it's about helping them explore and connect with their own motivations for change in a supportive, empathetic way.