

Counseling Skills

- Motivational Interviewing
- Brief (Solution-Focused) Therapy

Motivational Interviewing is defined as a “directive client-centered counseling style for eliciting behavior change by helping clients to explore and resolve ambivalence”. It is client-centered because all of the benefits and consequences of making a change are elicited from the client. Since motivation to change can fluctuate, this state can become influenced by interacting with skilled staff. Motivational Interviewing is most effective at intake and can be used in conjunction with other counseling styles throughout treatment.

You can tell when a client is becoming motivated when they begin to engage in Change Talk. Change talk is when the client tells the counselor some of the reasons why change is necessary, desired or imminent or the client begins to discuss all the downsides of staying the same.

Motivational Strategies. Motivational Interviewing utilizes specific strategies to engage the client in the process of change. They include the following:

- 1) **Open-Ended Questions** – questions that facilitate exploration and elaboration and cannot be answered in one or two words. Requires the recipient to reflect and respond with a coherent thought. Preferably, the question will move the client in the direction of talking about his or her need to make a change (change talk).
- 2) **Reflecting** – Statements (not questions) that the counselor makes to reflect back to the client what they just said using the client’s own words. Sometimes client’s can’t hear themselves clearly because of their internal resistance. Reflecting their statements back to them allows them to potentially come to their own individualized commitment to change versus feeling coerced into treatment and therefore resentful and rebellious.
- 3) **Summary Statement** – The counselor uses this technique periodically during the counseling session to be sure both parties agree on what has been stated so far and to remain clear on the content of the interview. The counselor links together several of the topics or ideas that have been discussed in the interview. For example, “okay Donna, today when you came in you said you really don’t want to quit drinking but then you said you are concerned that if you don’t quit, you might impact your daughter and you said that your daughter has recently had some problems at school. Is that right?” This summary is to be delivered without judgment and in the Spirit of Motivational interviewing which includes collaboration, evocation and autonomy. A skilled interviewer will deliver the summary in a way that motivates the client away from resistance and toward change. At the end of a session the counselor uses a summary statement to summarize the key points that were addressed during the session, highlighting any change talk that took place.

Brief Therapy is also known as Solution-Focused Therapy because rather than focusing on the problem or past history, it focuses on specific goals. It also focuses on enhancing client's coping abilities. Some time will be spent in session gathering information about the problem whereas the main therapy 'work' may happen outside the sessions, during the clients' day-to-day lives. Counselors are teaching clients to be their own therapists

The therapist interacts with the client on a "human-to-human" basis and refrains from acting like an authority. The therapist is active and direct, intervenes promptly and early, focuses on the here and now and sets specific time-limited goals.

This therapy helps a client come up with strategies and answers that are logical and realistic for the client. Clients with severe, chronic pathology, history of treatment failure, problems with reality and poor motivation would not benefit from this short-term form of therapy.

Brief Therapy strategies include The Miracle Question and the Scaling Question.

The Miracle Question

Miracle question is a question that makes the client aware of solutions and helps him/her to explore what it would be like if change occurred. Even though some of the answers to a miracle question may seem too "miraculous" to be true, this type of question elicits creative thinking and reflection and takes the focus off of the problem. With help from the counselor, the client can come up with realistic strategies to achieve change. Begin the miracle question with the words, "If a miracle occurred...." For example:

- "If a miracle occurred and somehow your problem was solved in the middle of the night and you woke up tomorrow and your problem was gone, what would be different?"
- "If a miracle occurs tonight while you are asleep and the problem is eliminated, how will you know the next morning?"
- If a miracle occurs tonight while you are asleep and the problem is eliminated, what will you be doing differently or saying differently?

Scaling Questions

Scaling question uses scales (i.e., 1-10) to help the client get an approximate measure on where he or she stands on the issue at hand. Knowing this information, both the client and the counselor have a point of reference on the starting point and what work needs to be done. Begin the scaling question with the words, "On a scale of 1-10..." For example:

- "On a scale of 1-10, 1 being not at all and 10 being very much, how willing are you to commit to a residential treatment program at this time?"
- "On a scale of 1-10 with one being no anxiety and 10 being panic attack, where are you now?"
- "On a scale of 1-10 with one being no interest and 10 being very interested, how interested are you in getting clean and sober now?"