**Information Supported by Motivational Interviewing by William R. Miller and Stephen Rollnick**

**Motivational Interviewing is a collaborative, goal-oriented style of communication with particular attention to the language of change. It is designed to strengthen personal motivation for and commitment to a specific goal by eliciting and exploring the person’s own reasons for change within an atmosphere of acceptance and compassion (W.R. Miller & S. Rollnick, 2013, p. 29).**

**Core Skills:**

**Asking open ended questions:** Motivational Interviewing emphasizes the use of open questions. Open questions help the phone counselor understand the caller’s internal frame of reference, strengthening a collaborative relationship and finding clear direction. Open questions also play a key role in evoking motivation and planning a course toward change.

**Affirming:** MI advocates relying on the caller’s personal strength, efforts, and resources. It is the caller, not the phone counselor who produces change. The phone counselor honors and respects the caller by showing that she is capable of growth and change as well as her choice whether to do so. It is important that the phone counselor acknowledges the caller by commenting on particular strengths, abilities, good intentions and efforts. Affirmation is a way of thinking: the phone counselor is consciously looking for the caller’s strengths, good steps and intentions. Focus on the positives!

**Reflective Listening:** AReflective statement is a guess about the caller’s meaning and it has the important function of deepening understanding by clarifying whether the guess is accurate. Reflective statements also allow the caller to hear again the thoughts and feelings that they are expressing. Good reflective listening serves to keep the caller talking, exploring, and considering. Reflective listening involves responding to a caller with a statement. Often the subject of the sentence is the pronoun you. Reflective listening statements should constitute a large proportion of the phone counselor’s responses. Reflection is particularly important following open-ended question.

**Summarizing:** Summaries are reflections that pull together several things that the caller has communicated. Summaries help callers to hold and reflect on the experiences they have expressed. This requires that the phone counselor stay focused and take notes of key points that the caller has expressed.

**Integrity:** To live with integrity is to behave in a manner consistent with one’s core values. What is the best way to approach a caller with a discrepancy between her stated goals or values and her actions? Often the phone counselor’s first inclination is to help the caller by fixing the perceived problem using a direct approach toward what the phone counselor perceives as a better course of action. Since the phone counselor is empathetic and desires to help, it seems perfectly reasonable to simply direct the caller to a better course of action that is more in line with her stated values or what the phone counselor believes is in the caller’s best interest. Such a direct approach with a caller, however, is likely to result in the caller becoming defensive. MI research has shown that when people are invited to reflect on their values and actions within a safe, nonjudgmental environment, they are usually well aware of discrepancies. Within a supportive and affirming context, without threat or judgment, the caller is invited to reflect on her own behaviors, attitudes, and values. If the phone counselor uses focused and reflective listening with empathy and nonjudgment, the caller is more likely to feel safe to explore discrepancies between their stated values and behavior. Reflective listening involves trusting that the callers are experts on themselves, want to be healthy, and can reach their own conclusions. The phone counselor’s role is not to direct, correct, or take control but instead to reflect what is communicated from the caller and provide a safe environment with empathetic emotional and spiritual support.

**Principles of Good Practice**

1. While the phone counselor has some knowledge and expertise, the callers are the experts on themselves. The phone counselor views the information exchanges as a collaborative search to understand the caller’s challenges, strengths and information needs. The Core skills of affirmation and reflection are used to highlight the caller’s strengths. This enhances engagement. The phone counselor takes time to learn what the caller already knows, ask permission to provide information, and encourages the caller to consider the implications herself.
2. It is important for the phone counselor to find out what information the caller wants and needs. This will avoid telling the caller what they already know. Good reflective listening will elicit more information from the caller for narrowing down the heart of her concern.
3. Having identified an information need through affirmation and reflection, the phone counselor leaves it to the caller to determine how it will be utilized. The phone counselor’s goal was to empower the caller to clarify the problem and seek a solution if and when they are ready to do so.

It is often difficult for phone counselors to interact with repeat callers that appear to be stuck on the same issues and problems. There is a desire to have the caller experience change that will improve their lives. Contemplating change involves the caller weighing the pros and cons of change. Ambivalence means that the caller has both motivations within herself simultaneously. As indicated above, it is important for the phone counselor to remember that if she voices an argument for change, the caller will likely respond by expressing a counter-change argument from the other side of her ambivalence. By continuing to argue against change, the caller can talk themselves out of changing.

**MI has four fundamental processes:**

**Engaging**: This involves establishing a relationship through open-ended questions, reflective listening, empathy, acceptance, compassion, nonjudgment and affirmation.

**Focusing**: This is an ongoing process of seeking and maintaining direction towards the caller’s agenda and achievable goals through conversation about change. In a following style of focusing the phone counselor tries to understand the caller’s issues and allow the direction, momentum, and content of the conversation to follow accordingly. A following style can enhance engagement, which is itself beneficial to the caller. In a truly nondirective caller centered approach, focus comes entirely from what the caller brings, and the phone counselor follows wherever the caller leads. Focusing, if it does occur, involves moving toward clearer goals for change that are raised by the caller.

**Evoking:** This involves eliciting the caller’s own motivations for change. It occurs when there is a focus on a particular change and the phone counselor facilitates by harnessing the caller’s own ideas and feelings about why and how she might do it. A good starting point is to understand what the caller wants by exploring the caller’s goals and hopes for the future. Listen for points where current behavior may conflict with important goals or values and where change may facilitate reaching those goals. There is a period of ambivalence (contemplation) where the balance begins to turn in favor of change. The perceived advantages of changing begin to outweigh the disadvantages. Change talk from the caller is any self-expressed language that is an argument for change. MI identifies four subtypes of preparatory change talk: **desire, ability, reason,** and **need.**  Desire talk often begins with (I want, I would like, I wish, I hope). Ability talk often begins with (I can, I am able to, I could, I would be able to). Reason talk often begin with (I would be better off if, I would be happier if, I would feel better about myself if,). Need talk often begins with (I need to, I have to, I must, I’ve got to, I am willing to give it a try). Change talk is a sign of readiness or a signal of mental preparation, commitment, activation, and taking steps. The more that a caller describes her desire, ability, reasons and need for change, the more that she is open to consider how it may occur.

For callers that are discussing change but are still ambivalent or contemplating the pros and cons of change, it may be helpful to suggest making a written list of the pros and cons regarding moving forward with the change. This may facilitate by having the caller have a visual of what contributing factors are involved in the ambivalence.

Pros of changing Cons of changing

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Disadvantages of not changing Disadvantages of changing

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**Planning:** The caller is more likely to follow through with a change when she has a specific plan and expresses it to another person. That is the essence of the planning process in MI. The planning stage can be less challenging than the other processes leading up to it, but it is important to remember that it is a collaborative process where the phone counselor evokes the caller’s ideas, and that ultimately the choice is the callers to make and carry out. Ambivalence is likely to reappear if the change plan is one that the caller does not own. Clarity of planning depends on the goal. It helps to have a more specific goal because this can clarify steps toward it, which also makes it easier to see progress and affirm the caller. Change is often not a linear process; motivation to initiate and persist in change fluctuates over time regardless of the caller’s stage of readiness. Client-centered skills of accurate empathy, unconditional warmth, and genuineness have been positively albeit modestly linked to client change. Rather than falling into a directing approach when the caller experiences difficulties with change, the phone counselor should continue to evoke the caller’s own wisdom and solutions. Affirmation and self-affirmation can bolster the caller’s confidence and persistence. Imperfection can be reframed as partial progress, affirming headway that has been made. Phone counselors can support repeat callers throughout the change process by providing empathy, nonjudgment, compassion, affirmation, asking open ended questions and using reflective listening. It is important to support the repeat caller’s ownership of the change process in order to remember whose plan is being implemented, the resources or support required to implement the plan, the skill level of the caller for implementing the plan, and what are reasonable steps toward the goal. This information can be utilized to support and facilitate change. The phone counselor serves to support and facilitate change but the caller is in control of the plan.

As callers go through the process of contemplating change, the phone counselor can facilitate by helping the caller identify their core values and discrepancies between their core values and their behavior. The Phone counselor can facilitate by assisting the caller in identifying goals aligned with her core values. The phone counselor can facilitate by assisting the caller in considering the advantages and disadvantages of not changing verses changing. Phone counselors can facilitate the caller by determining resources or support required for a plan for change, the skill level of the caller for implementing the plan, and reasonable steps toward the goal. Remember that the caller is in charge of whether or not to change. If they change, it will occur according to their timeline, not the phone counselors. Throughout the four fundamental processes of MI the caller must be received with respect and dignity. They have the most knowledge about themselves and the freedom to decide on whether or not to change. Phone counselors should consistently utilize the core skills of asking open ended questions, reflective listening, summarizing and affirmation. Create a safe and receptive environment by listening carefully, reflecting what the caller shares, showing compassion, empathy, and non judgement.

It is important to consider that callers with mental illness, with disabilities and those that have experienced abuse and repeated rejection will likely consider the process of change to be more difficult. For these individuals if change occurs it will likely be in small steps over an extended period of time. It will require patience on the part of the phone counselors.

**Activities to support callers in the Planning stage**

The task is to elicit a change plan (and related change talk) from the caller because it is ultimately the caller who must own and implement the plan. Clarity of planning depends on clarity of the goal. It is helpful to specifically define the goal in order to measure steps toward achieving it and to affirm the caller for each small step along the way. The phone counselor may facilitate by working with the caller in exploring resources or support for the plan, the skill level of the caller for implementing the plan, and reasonable small steps toward the goal. Change typically consist of successive approximations or a series of small steps in the right direction. Callers can easily become overwhelmed when thinking about a larger change goal, but can readily entertain one small step. Of course, ultimately it is up the caller whether to take a step. Remember to continue to utilize the core skills of open-ended questions, reflective listening, affirmation and summarizing. Receive the caller with compassion, empathy, nonjudgment and patience. The caller must be treated with dignity, respect and given freedom of choice.

The following steps reviewed above may be helpful for repeat callers that are considering a change.

\*Establish and maintain a relationship through open-ended questions, reflective listening, empathy, acceptance, compassion, non-judgment and affirmation. This is important for all callers. This provides a welcome and supportive environment where callers may feel safe to share and begin self-exploration.

\*Listen for what the caller wants to explore based on her goals or hopes for the future.

\*Listen for discrepancies between the stated goals and the caller's behavior.

\*Listen for ambivalence or contemplation where the caller is weighing the pros and cons of change. (Having the caller list the pros and cons of change in writing may be helpful.)

\* Listen for change talk involving desire, ability, reason and need. Change talk is a signal of possible mental preparation for change.

\* When the caller makes the decision to make a change, the phone counselor may facilitate by working with the caller in establishing a clear goal aligned with her values and broken down into small, measurable steps.

\* In establishing a plan, the phone counselor may help the caller explore her skill level, resources that may be needed, and the first steps toward the goal. Provide affirmation for each small step towards the goal.

\*Remember that it is up to the caller to decide whether or not to change and if she decides to change, it must be her plan.

Miller, W. R, Rollnick, S. (2013) Motivational Interviewing Helping People Change (The Guilford Press, Third Edition).

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