

## Motivational Interviewing

Motivational interviewing (MI) is the counseling method that works on facilitating and engaging intrinsic motivation with an individual in order to change their behavior. It helps individuals explore and resolve their uncertainty around quitting.

In motivational interviewing, no one person tells the other what they should or shouldn't do. Nor do they try to convince or persuade them into taking action. Instead, this method is used to guide an individual in self-identifying and resolving what is preventing them from success.

How can you use motivational interviewing to address an individual's resistance to end their tobacco use?

- Respect the individuals ultimate responsibility for making a decision.
- Avoid arguing or confrontation, as this could push an individual in the opposite direction, away from a healthy change.
- Support an individual's confidence to change and learn how to change.
- Express empathy. Help the individuals see the discrepancy between their negative behavior and desired goals.

## Interaction Skills

In order to successfully use motivational interviewing with an individual, you must first establish four basic interaction skills.

- 1. Ask open-ended questions.** An open-ended question requires a full answer using the individual's own knowledge or feelings. If the answer can be "yes" or "no" or a single word answer, it is a closed ended question. Some examples of open-ended questions are "How do you feel about that?", "Could you share some of the health effects you've experienced from using tobacco?" or "Could you tell me what you look forward to most about quitting and what benefits you will experience?".
- 2. Provide affirmations.** Affirmations are statements and gestures that recognize the participants' strengths and acknowledge behaviors leading towards positive change. An example of an affirming response is, "You have a lot of great ideas on different alternatives to use when a trigger occurs." Or "I appreciate that you are willing to try the deep breathing exercise even though it isn't something you'd normally do."
- 3. Reflective Listening.** Reflective listening is where you are seeking to understand a speaker's idea and offering it back to them, to confirm the idea has been understood. It is a way to engage others in relationships, build trust and foster motivation to change. There are three basic levels:
  - a. Repeating or rephrasing:** Listener repeats or substitutes synonyms or phrases, staying close to what the speaker said.
  - b. Paraphrasing:** Listener makes a restatement in which the speaker's meaning is inferred.
  - c. Reflection of feeling:** Listener emphasizes emotional aspects of communication through feeling statements. This is the deepest form of listening.
- 4. Providing Summary Statements.** Summary statements help to ensure there is clear communication between the speaker and listener. They can provide a steppingstone towards change. When summarizing, begin with an opening letting the participant know you are summarizing what they've just told you. Use statements such as "Let me see if I understand so far" or "Here is what I've heard. Tell me if I've missed anything." Recap what they have told you in a clear and concise way. End with an initiation for them to correct you on anything you misunderstood or omitted. For example, "Anything you want to add or correct?"

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### Counseling Skills

The practice of motivational interviewing requires the individual (i.e. Tobacco Treatment Specialist, counselor, primary care physician, health educator, etc.) to develop five primary skills:

- 1. Express empathy.** Be non-judgmental; listen reflectively; accept ambivalence; see the world through the individual's eyes. Accurately understanding the individual's experience can facilitate change.
- 2. Develop discrepancy.** Help individual perceive difference between present behavior and desired lifestyle change. Individuals are more motivated to change when they see what they're doing will not lead them to a future goal.
- 3. Avoid argumentation.** Gently diffuse individual defensiveness. Confronting individuals' denial can lead to drop out and relapse. When individual demonstrates resistance to change, counselor changes strategies.
- 4. Roll with resistance.** Reframe individual's thinking/statements; invite individual to examine new perspectives; value individual as being their own change agent.
- 5. Support self-efficacy.** Provide hope; increase individual's self-confidence in ability to change behavior; highlight other areas where individual has been successful.

Motivational Interviewing can be utilized with the [Stages of Change](#)<sup>1</sup> model in counseling, and working with tobacco-dependent individuals. The goal is to help individuals move toward being ready to change behavior, NOT to get someone to quit using tobacco. The benefit in using motivational interviewing techniques is that the motivation to change is determined by the individual, not externally imposed by the counselor. The individual owns the responsibility to resolve his ambivalence. This key strategy directly aligns with American Lung Association's "facilitate" don't "instruct" philosophy as the individual/counselor relationship is seen more as a collaborative and friendly partnership than as an expert/recipient or teacher/student relationship.

**To learn more about Motivational Interviewing,  
visit [Lung.Training](#) and complete the free educational  
course, [How to Help People Quit](#).**

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**For more information about quitting tobacco use,  
visit the American Lung Association website at [Lung.org](#)  
or call the free Lung HelpLine at 1-800-LUNGUSA (1-800-586-4872).**

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<sup>1</sup> Prochaska & DiClementi, 1983; Boston University School of Public Health, 2019. [Stages of Change](#)