

Motivational Interviewing: Supporting Weight Management with OARS

(Adapted from handouts by David Rosengren and from Miller & Rollnick, Motivational Interviewing, 2nd Edition, 2002)

Motivational Interviewing (MI) is an empathic, person-centered counseling approach that helps individuals explore their ambivalence about change, build intrinsic motivation, and enhance confidence to make sustainable health-related changes. This is especially relevant for supporting individuals in the Fit 5 program and other weight management initiatives.

The foundational skills of MI are summarized by the acronym **OARS**:

- **Open Questions**
- **Affirmations**
- **Reflective Listening**
- **Summaries**

OARS: Open Questions

Open-ended questions encourage clients to express their thoughts and feelings about their health, lifestyle habits, and goals. These questions allow for deeper conversations about the challenges and successes they experience in their weight management journey.

Examples of Open Questions for Participants:

- What goals would you like to achieve with your health plan?
- What changes have you tried before, and what worked well for you?
- What makes managing your weight important to you?
- How do you feel about the progress you've made so far?
- What obstacles have made it difficult to stick to your plan?
- How can I best support you in making these changes?

OARS: Affirmations

Affirmations recognize and validate clients' strengths, efforts, and successes. Offering genuine, positive feedback encourages confidence and reinforces motivation to continue making progress.

Examples of Affirming Responses:

- You've shown real dedication by making healthier food choices.
- It's impressive that you're paying attention to how your body feels after meals.
- You're taking an important step by seeking support through this program.
- It's great that you're thinking about ways to incorporate movement into your day.
- You handled that challenging situation really well.

OARS: Reflective Listening

Reflective listening ensures that clients feel understood and heard. It involves repeating, paraphrasing, or reflecting on the client's words to deepen the conversation and validate their feelings.

Examples of Reflective Listening:

- *It sounds like you're proud of the changes you've made so far.*
- *You're concerned that it's difficult to find time to prepare healthy meals.*
- *You're wondering if the changes are really making a difference.*
- *It seems like staying motivated when progress is slow has been tough.*

Using reflective statements instead of questions can encourage clients to explore their thoughts further. This also reduces the likelihood of clients feeling interrogated.

OARS: Summaries

Summaries are an effective way to consolidate what the client has shared, highlighting both their successes and their concerns. This can build momentum and facilitate goal setting.

Structure of a Summary:

1. **Start with a Statement:**
 - "Let me see if I understand so far..."
 - "Here's what I've heard, let me know if I've missed anything."
2. **Highlight Key Points:**
 - Emphasize the client's goals, strengths, and concerns.
 - Reflect on any ambivalence expressed.
3. **Invite Clarification and Next Steps:**
 - "Does that sound right?"
 - "What do you think would be a good next step?"

Example Summary: "From what you've shared, you're committed to making healthier food choices and incorporating more movement into your day. You've faced challenges with managing stress and staying consistent, but you've also noticed that small changes, like meal planning, have made a difference. It sounds like you're motivated to keep going, especially since you're feeling more energetic. What would you like to focus on next?"

By consistently applying OARS in conversations, clinicians can foster a collaborative and supportive environment that empowers Fit 5 participants to achieve their weight management goals.