Motivational Interviewing in Obesity Management

Motivational interviewing (MI) is a counseling technique for engaging people in making behavioral changes[1-4]

- In MI, people focus on discrepancies between behavior changes they would like to make (eg, *I want to eat better to lose weight*) and factors that are barriers to change, like perceived limitations (eg, *I haven't been able to change my diet before*)
- By helping a person resolve conflicts between desired changes and barriers to change, MI reinforces the person's own motivation for change

Components of MI[2-4]

Core Elements: The Spirit of MI

Partnership

- Collaboration
- Shared investigation (eg, values, goals)
- Patient autonomy
- No pressure

Compassion

- Genuine interest in patient's well-being
- Guiding actions, not directions
- Dedication to understanding
- Support actions for the patient's benefit

Acceptance

- Empathy
- Affirmation: patient's strengths, resources, efforts
- Support of patient autonomy

Empowerment

- Reinforce patient's confidence, sense of power
- Focus on patient's resources, motivation, independent decisions and actions
- Patient-initiated change, developing empowerment

Core MI Interview Skills (O.A.R.S.)

Actions	Goals	Examples
Open questions	Open and guide the conversation by eliciting the patient's experience and participation; avoid "yes/no" questions	How do you feel about your weight?
Affirmations	Highlight patient's strengths, efforts, positive actions to reinforce self-worth and capacity for change	It's great that you're here today to take care of your health.
Reflections	Confirm understanding and encourage patient consideration of their statements	It must be frustrating when a healthcare professional assumes you're not trying to manage your weight.
Summaries	Review the conversation, highlighting the patient's motivation and progress to support change planning	So let me summarize: Today we discussed your knee pain and starting weight management with a food diary.

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MI Processes

Engaging
- Establish rapport
- Build a trusting and safe relationship
- Foundation for MI processes

Focusing
- Together, determine the direction of the conversation
- Focus on the patient
- Identify topics of change, priorities, and goals

Evoking
- Elicit patient's motivation for change
- **Focus on "change talk"** - highlight changes instead of current situation
- Support patient's decisions

Planning
- Identify steps and change strategies
- Set realistic goals
- Reinforce patient competence, control
- **This step links motivation to action**

How can I get started with motivational interviewing in my practice?[1-4]

Determine your patient's willingness to make changes

- *"Would it be OK to talk about your weight?"*
- *"On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is not ready to change and 10 is absolutely ready to change, how ready are you to change?"*

Leverage conversational techniques

- In addition to O.A.R.S., Ask-Offer-Ask and FRAMES are conversational techniques that are consistent with MI
- It is also important to use unbiased, nonstigmatizing language (eg, patient-first, preferred terms); see the resource on language choices in obesity care for more information

Ask-Offer-Ask
- **Ask** for the patient's thoughts
- **Offer** advice, with permission
- **Ask** for patient's thoughts on the advice

FRAMES
- **Feedback:** provide information about risk
- **Responsibility:** emphasize patient's choice
- **Advice:** offer recommendations
- **Menu:** offer a range of strategies
- **Empathy:** supportive, nonjudgmental approach
- **Self-efficacy:** affirm patient's ability to succeed

Be prepared to provide guidance on planning

- Provide counseling on techniques to achieve behavioral goals, like managing environmental cues, self-monitoring (eg, activity, meals, weight), cognitive restructuring (eg, reframing negative thoughts), goal setting, and using reinforcement and rewards
- Also be aware of the range of interventions (eg, behavior modification, obesity medication, surgery) appropriate for your patient; see the resource on treatment options for more information

References:
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3. Nowak. Nutrients. 2026;18:123.
4. obesityalgorithm.org.

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