

Learning MI – Skill Building

The Spirit of MI Skills

PARTNERSHIP – You're in this together as a helpful guide, lending your mind to help them think and build on their existing strengths. Partners work together, yet each person must decide what to contribute. In this case you will contribute a respectful, autonomy-supporting conversation that frees the person to have clearer thoughts to make better decisions. They will contribute what they choose to and that has to do in part with how much they trust you. You will make sure that the talk about change comes out of their mouth and only after that you can reflect it (see core skills below).

Activity 1: Strength Shine – In the following situations, find the strengths of the student, so that you can help create a positive mindset for yourself to prepare to have a collaborative outlook with regard to them. These strength-based thoughts, if shared with them, are affirming and may be useful for the core skill of Affirmations (described below).

Jenny is angry at Trish, who took the liberty to post a picture that was not very flattering with a boy that she seems to like. Jenny thinks the picture makes her look fat and she doesn't like to have others see her with the boy. Thanks to Jenny's warm personality, conflicts are often short lived. Trish and Jenny have been friends since kindergarten and have had ups and downs in their friendship.

Strengths: _____

Henry, who is generally cheerful and funny and an excellent basketball player, often shows up to school late because he likes to stop at the store before school and buy Hot Cheetos (snacks). Reacting to being told he would have to serve a detention for being late he said a curse word about it in front of an administrator who promptly told him that he will need to bring in a parent the next day. He is furious as he walks into class and meets you.

Strengths: _____

ACCEPTANCE – Regardless of how similar or different you are to the student, you know the other person is equal in worth to you and has the right to choose their actions (consequences or not). Your task is withholding judgment and working on trying to understand things from their perspective, even if you personally may find it hard to think or feel that way. You know that when people are in a healthy situation, they will generally choose what is best for them based on their thoughts and prior experiences.

Activity 2: Bite you tongue – Our tendency to tell the person/student how to “fix” their problem, referred to as the “righting reflex,” is more often than not a sure way to undermine a student's decision to change. As Stephen Rollnick says, “it's the wrong mouth.” Think of something that you feel you would like to change or get better at and ask a colleague

(preferably with less experience than you) to tell you five ways to fix it. Notice the word “but” as you respond to some of them.

Welcome to the reminder that you are like everyone else (like students); you want autonomy and to own your own ideas about what would work for you regarding changing your behavior.

EVOKING – You intently want to draw out from them their thoughts and feelings and find out any hints of how they think life (the issue at hand) would be better.

Activity 3: Curiosity is in the Air – Look at another person. Now, imagine you are looking in a mirror and the person you are seeing is not you but that person. Your attention is focused on being curious about them, wanting to know their story. Pretend you are about to ask them about themselves, pay attention to your facial expression, to what the muscles around your eyes are doing when you are curious. What posture might you have that might show you are curious? How much eye contact would you have?

COMPASSION – You really want what is best for them and their future and empathize and want to do something. So, you know that this caring must be expressed by helping them make positive decisions for themselves.

Activity 4: Drawing on Your Caring Instinct—Google “baby pictures” and pick different ones to observe carefully. As you look at them, reflect on the following:

- Do they make you smile?
- If they were present and in danger would you feel protective?

Now transport yourself in your mind to being in the presence of a student that has been a problem to you or others. Can you get yourself to transfer that kind of caring? Maybe, start by thinking of meeting them years ago as a baby. Time has passed, and life’s circumstances have gotten them where they are. Now you are there to support their autonomous decision-making, helping them grow and develop and decide what to do about the issue at hand. You are having this conversation with them because you care. Busy as you are, you are being generous with your time to do so.

Core Skills: OARS

O=Open Questions; A=Affirmations; R=Reflections; S=Summaries

Of these four core skills, the one that is used the most is R. The skill of Questioning is likely one you’re good at if you’re an educator or a counselor, so a review of this core skill will come a bit later and be brief.

Reflections

Reflective listening is a skill that requires a special type of attention to be able to tell the person what is going on in their mind. In MI, R’s are often used at least twice as much as the other core skills all together. It is likely that you are not very used to giving people “reflections” of what they just said or must be thinking/feeling since it is not done much in normal conversations (unless you are a journalist). So, it will likely take extra effort on your part to master this core skill to use it as frequently as we do in MI. Short-term memory about what the person said earlier is what will sharpen as your MI skills develop. Knowing what to remember is of course key. Listening well will enable you to various possibilities,

like providing: a simple paraphrase, emotions related to their issue, amplifying their reason (for innocence or no change), the two sides of the ambivalence, specific thoughts about changing or not changing, or values or goals expressed. Reflections can also be the result of your skill of empathy to help you hypothesize what you think they may be feeling or thinking. Some hypothesis can also be your understanding of human nature or the ambivalent mind (spoken tentatively), like:

- “It is important to you to decide things for yourself.”
- “You’d like to do what is best for yourself and your future.”
- “You really don’t want to mess up your life.”
- “You’re torn, feeling like you’re not sure what to do.”
- “Deciding to change is not easy.”

Activity 5: Talking Reflectively in the Second Person – Use the [statements provided](#) to come up with the kind of [reflection](#) given in the example before.

Student: [I’m tired of the teacher getting on my case like I’m the only one that talks during class.](#)

Simple Paraphrase: “You feel picked on because you’re not the only one that talks.”

Amplified Reflection: “You do the same as everyone else and you feel like you’re the only one ever to get reprimanded.”

Student: [I don’t understand what the math teacher is saying half the time.](#)

Simple Paraphrase: _____
(emotion: frustration)

Amplified Reflection: _____
(Possibilities: not your fault; you’re doing all you can; no way...)

Student: [I come to school late because I need to drop off my sister at her school first and she is so slow.](#)

Simple Paraphrase: _____
(Possibilities: frustration, makes you angry)

Amplified Reflection: _____
(Possibilities: can never make it on time because of sister; not anything you could do...)

Student: [I’m failing Science because class is boring and so I cut class with my friends I’m behind on my assignments, but I really don’t want to go to Summer school.](#)

Double-Sided Reflection (2 sides of ambivalence, best if change side last): On the one hand cutting class with friends is fun and on the other hand getting behind and running the risk of having to go to summer school is upsetting.

Student: [I don’t want to continue to be upset, but she had it coming and deserves everything I said to her.](#)

Double-Sided Reflection (angry/not want to be stressed): _____

Student: I'm tired of being told you have to do this and that in order to graduate; I just want to be done with it and be in charge of my own life.

Double-Sided Reflection: _____

Student: I hate wearing gym clothes to pass the class; I hate it.

Reflection (any): _____

A good thing to remember is that a reflection does not have an inflection that goes up, like the end of a question. If it does, it turns it in to a closed (yes/no) question. If you doubt the value of reflections, just know that it helps in the integration of thoughts to facilitate decision-making. It is fun to discover the power of reflections in conversations leading to change.

Affirmations

Affirmations are very similar to a reflection and are simple statements that acknowledge and highlight the student's strengths (competence in some aspect of their life). It is a very useful skill in that it helps create a positive relationship that leads to a collaborative, engaging conversation that can lead to clearer thinking. This seems to facilitate movement toward decisions to change. Affirmations can recognize the person's effort, values, skills or positive attitude.

Activity 6: Name the Student's Strengths – Think of your student as you think of strengths that could be linked to the change focus and use the graph below to fill them in below along with turning them into affirmation statements. Note that affirmations are made as authentic statements of fact rather than praise, which are statements that are made from a subjective-judgment perspective ("I think you are wonderful").

CHANGE FOCUS	STRENGTH	AFFIRMATION
	<i>Effort, attitudes, skills, talents, abilities, values, perceptions...</i>	<i>You are..., You have..., You...</i>

Example

1. Graduate	Commitment to an education	You are a goal-oriented person.
2. Get to school on time		
3. Keep from failing a class		
4. Learn to self-regulate their anger		
5. Stay in school		
6. Return to school		
7. Mend a relationship		
8. Conflict with a Parent		

Open Questions

Using questions that require more than a yes/no answer are common in teaching, which is important in guiding the conversation to think about change. It can help a person integrate their decision about change. In keeping with the spirit of MI, we'll want to avoid questions that might elicit feelings of being judged (like past tense "why?" questions).

Activity 7: Link Affirmations with Evocative Question – Use the affirmations listed above and turn them into questions.

Example 1: How do you see your commitment to graduate help you in dealing with the challenge you are facing?

2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____

Summaries

As the conversation progresses, a number of reflections stated together become summaries that guide the conversation by helping the student review what they have said. By reiterating the various reasons for change (referred to as "change talk") it often helps evoke more change talk or helps to transition to a discussion of what the next steps might be. As Bill Miller says, it is a metaphoric bouquet of flowers you give them. The conversation is like a walk in a field of wild flowers and you want to pick a beautiful bouquet; ones that go well together to give back to the student. It allows for the conversation to move ahead by facilitating integrated thinking about change and ultimately help them increase their commitment to change and decide to create action steps in the planning process.

Activity 8: Summarizing an Early Intervention MI Conversation With Jason

This freshman year, Jason is on track in all but one of his classes, the last class of the day. After the first marking period, his advisory teacher (T) meets with him to talk about the marking period referral, which a referral note from the Math teacher shows he is failing Algebra and mentions he has an excessive number of absences.

Teacher: The referral for you to talk to me is about your 7th period Algebra class. It just shows your grade to date and your attendance. It's not that helpful in understanding where you are with regard to that class. Maybe you could you tell me why you think Ms. Jones wanted you to talk to me.

Jason: I don't know, I mean I just have trouble staying awake in her class. I get bored and by that time of the day I'm tired.

T: You'd like to do well, but it's hard during a 7th-period class.

J: I can't think well when I'm sleepy.

T: And it's not an easy class.

J: I've never been good in Math.

T: You'd like to do better like in your other classes, but algebra is more challenging.

J: At first I tried to keep up and understand, but then I just didn't get it.

T: And that's when you started to cut.

J: Well, yah; my friends Xavier and Rob leave after 6th period, so sometimes I just leave with them, but that isn't every day.

T: So some days you decided to leave, even though my guess is you care about passing.

J: I mean I definitely want to pass. I just wish it would be easier for me.

T: Can I ask you if you ever had to struggle with another class in the past and what you did to deal with it?

J: Well, I've had trouble in some of my classes. Like in 7th grade I was having trouble with history class; there were too many dates and events to remember. I ended up going to summer school. That was a boring summer; when others were doing what they wanted; I had to go sit in class.

T: In your mind, not something you want to repeat.

J: Yah, so in 8th grade when I had trouble, I got tutoring to help me when I was having trouble in math. My mom sort of made me.

T: And you really didn't want to go to summer school, so that help was welcome.

J: I was able to enjoy my whole summer with my friends.

T: You did what you wanted over the summer. So, what was it that you did with the tutor that helped?

J: Well, we reviewed what was happening in class, and I was able to understand things easier.

T: And when you understood things, the class probably became more interesting.

J: Kind of. I get what you're getting at; you think that my Algebra class is boring because I'm not keeping up.

T: Well, maybe, but I'm not you, and I'm not in the class to know that.

J: I mean if I could understand it I'd get less frustrated and wouldn't give up. When I go home nobody can help me with algebra. And tutoring after school would mean that I'd miss being with my friends. Um, I might be able to get some help at lunch-time.

T: You're torn because you'd like it all to be going better.

J: Its all such a hassle and I know I'll get yelled at by my mom when she sees my report card. She puts lots of pressure on me and says I need to be a good role model for my younger brother. That just makes me mad. I know she works hard for us kids, but she doesn't get what it is like. She's not good in math herself!

SUMMARY TIME! Look at the following summaries and decide which one you think would be the best one.

Summary 1

You find yourself very tired during your 7th period Algebra class and find it boring and difficult to understand. Because of that you find it more fun sometimes to take off with your friends and cut class. Staying after school for tutoring would mean you'd never have time to enjoy being with your friends. Your mom doesn't get what it is like for you and expects you to do well even if she isn't good in math herself and pressures you to be a good role model for your brother, something that you resent. Did I get that right?

Summary 2

Your last period Algebra class is harder than your other classes, and you wish it would be easier for you. You know that cutting classes could mean you'll end up in summer school and you hate that possibility. You also don't want to be yelled at by your mother. You have found that getting tutoring has helped you in the past and think this time you might be able to arrange tutoring during lunch-time, so you would still be free after school. What might you do next?

Summary 3

Because you are sleepy 7th-period, you can't concentrate, which makes it hard to pay attention in class and easy to blame it on a boring class. Getting enough sleep by getting to bed sooner would help. You prefer to cut class and hangout with your friends even if you know that could end you in summer school, something that you know is short-sighted, fun at the moment, not thinking about your future. If you don't want your mother to yell at you, you know what you need to do: go to tutoring. When are you going to start?

In addition to these activities, you may find the ones in chapter 17 in the book *MI in Schools, conversations to improve behavior and learning* useful (Improving your knowledge and skills); the great resource-filled book *MI Workbook: a practitioner's guide* by D. Rosengren) or the master resource *Motivational Interviewing, 3rd Ed.* (Miller & Rollnick).

Summaries Key

- 1: Primarily reflects the sustain talk of the conversation and does not guide the conversation toward change (Could be rescued with some guiding by reflecting on the change talk).
- 2: Reflects Jason's change talk; affirms and builds on his self-efficacy and elicits from him what he wants to do next (Best).
- 3: Is judgmental and condescending and does not honor Jason's need for autonomy; his likely response will be to react by resisting the idea of change due to the discord you create with this summary (Not MI).