

# Motivational Interviewing How to Guide

## What is Motivational Interviewing?

Motivational Interviewing is a series of techniques that focus on teaching effective communication strategies. It is designed to strengthen personal motivation for and commitment to a specific goal.

Motivational Interviewing includes:

- Talking with (not at) the interviewee
- Letting the interviewee lead the discussion
- Sharing information in a non-judgmental and empathetic manner

Motivational interviewing discourages:

- Telling the interviewee what to do (this often leads to resistance)

## Motivational Interviewing Techniques:

### Use Empathy, Ask for Permission, Talk With (Not At)

#### Use Empathy

The first technique of motivational interviewing is displaying empathy. For example, if an interviewee mentions having a hard time balancing work and school, an empathetic response would sound like this:

- “It’s hard to say no to your friends when you have a test to study for”

Such statements do not mean you agree with the student’s actions but it opens the door for meaningful conversation.

#### Ask for Permission

Before sharing resources, it is important to ask for permission first. Sharing resources is only helpful if the interviewee is willing and ready to listen. Asking for permission can look like this:

- “I would like to talk with you about \_\_\_\_”
- “Can I share some other ideas for...?”

If an interviewee says no, you can follow up by simply asking for more information about the topic/circumstance. For instance,

- “Would you like to tell me more about \_\_\_\_?”

## Talk With (Not At)

Talking with (and not at) an interviewee helps to cultivate an accepting and empowering environment where interviewees get to lead the discussion. Talking with the interviewee encourages a healthy dialogue that can lead to meaningful change.

Here are some examples of talking *at* interviewees VS talking *with* interviewees:

- “You have to prioritize studying” VS “It can be hard to study when there is so much going on. What does studying look like to you?”
- “Do you feel depressed?” VS “It is normal to feel sad sometimes. Tell me more about how you’re feeling?”

## Motivational Interviewing Techniques:

### OAR Method (Open Ended Questions, Affirmations, and Reflections)

#### Open Ended Questions

Be sure to use open-ended questions. Open-ended questions give interviewees the opportunity to add additional information, lead or steer the conversation, and come up with helpful strategies/solutions.

Here are some examples of useful open-ended questions:

- “What do you think about...?”
- “Tell me about...?”

- “How do you decide when to...?”
- “Help me understand...”
- “What if you tried...?”
- “Where would you like to go from here?”

## Affirmations

Affirmations foster a sense of support, confidence, self-worth, and empowerment. Affirmative statements start with the word you and not I. This places the attention on the interviewee instead of the interviewer.

Here are some examples of affirmations:

- “You have...”
- “You are...”
- “You feel...”
- “You believe...”

## Reflections

Reflections are an opportunity to reiterate what has been said and check for understanding. It involves stating back what you heard rather than asking questions. Reflections should add an emphasis, additional meaning, or continuation of thought. This technique relies on active listening and tonal awareness. Below are the four main reflection models.

Example: An interviewee tells you that they are having a hard time staying organized. They’ve tried using a planner but it just never works out.

### 1. **Repeat**

Repeating involves repeating an element of what was said. For instance, “You have a planner and you are not using it”

2. **Rephrase**

Rephrasing involves using synonyms to stay close to what was said. For example, “You’re not using a planner and you want to stay organized.”

3. **Paraphrase**

Paraphrasing involves inferring or guessing at the meaning of what was said. For instance, “You’d like to find a way to organize your time and to-dos.”

4. **Reflections**

Reflecting feelings happens when one emphasizes the emotional connotations of a statement through feeling statements and metaphors. Example: “It’s scary to think about forgetting a deadline for class.”

## Sources

- Salerno, J. (M.A) (2021). Brief Opportunity of Supportive Training (BOOST): Motivational Interviewing as a Tool in College Student Success.
- [Motivational Interviewing in College BOOST](#), YouTube video from Teen Speak.