

Using OARS for Motivational Interviewing



Motivational interviewing is a collaborative, compassionate style of communication that helps people identify and strengthen their motivation for changing unhelpful or unwanted behavior and move forward after a crisis. When using motivational interviewing it is helpful to remember the mnemonic OARS.

O

Asking Open-ended Questions

- ✓ Helps you learn more about someone's experience, perspectives, and values
- ✓ Gives the person the chance to do the talking
- ✓ Elicits potential motivations for the client to try something new regarding their self-care or engaging in services

Examples

- Instead of asking, "Are you mad at yourself for what happened?" ask:
"It sounds like that experience was upsetting. Can you share more about that with me?"
- Instead of asking, "Are you concerned about your drinking?" ask:
"Can you tell me about your relationship with alcohol and your current feelings about it?"

A

Making Affirmations

- ✓ Helps build rapport and validate the client during the process of change
- ✓ Helps highlight and affirm any client motivation or effort to change
- ✓ Can take the form of compliments or statements of appreciation and understanding
- ✓ Can further motivate a client who has identified something they would like to change

Examples

- Instead of "It definitely sounds like your drinking is a problem, and we need to get it under control," say:
"I appreciate that it took a lot of courage to discuss your drinking with me today."
- Instead of "It sounds like you have been dealing with a lot over the years. I don't know how you did it," say:
"You appear to have a lot of resilience to have coped with these difficulties for the past few years."





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R

Using Reflections

- ✓ Rephrases a client's statement to capture the implicit meaning and feeling
- ✓ Encourages continual personal exploration and helps clients to more fully understand their motivations to change
- ✓ Can be used to reinforce or encourage a client's desire for change
- ✓ Creates an opportunity for the client to correct any provider misunderstandings and clarify meaning, intent, and key messages
- ✓ Can reinforce that change is hard and progress/healing is nonlinear
- ✓ Emphasizes that mistakes or missteps, and slower progress is all a healthy part of growth and not an indication of failure

Examples

- "I'm hearing that you're frustrated."
- "OK, it sounds like this is something that's really important to you."
- "I can hear how difficult it is for you to come to terms with the fact that you drank again."

S

Summarizing

- ✓ Ensures mutual understanding of the discussion so far
- ✓ Can offer observations regarding perceived discrepancies between the client's current situation or challenges and their future goals
- ✓ Demonstrates active listening and understanding of the client's perspective
- ✓ Can play back key themes, changes to try on, and motivations as connected to future goals, to support the client in developing a mental map of: "I am at point A, I want to get to point B, and X change will help me get there."

Example

- "If it's OK with you, let me check that I understand everything we've been discussing so far. You have been worrying about how much you've been drinking in recent months because you recognize that you have experienced some health issues associated with your alcohol intake and you've had some feedback from your partner that she isn't happy with how much you're drinking. But the few times you've tried to stop drinking have not been easy, and you're worried that you can't stop. How am I doing?"

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