

---

## Using Motivational Interviewing Techniques in SMART Recovery<sup>®</sup>

By Jim (GJBXVI) Braastad

According to research dating back to the 1960's, people tend to believe what they hear themselves say. However, in order for them to "hear", they first have to "say". Getting people to open up and "talk" is a difficulty often encountered in our meetings. It is important to remember that most SMART Recovery<sup>®</sup> Facilitators and Volunteers are not professionally qualified to perform Motivational Interviewing or provide Motivational Enhancement Therapy and doing so is **NOT** the purpose of SMART Recovery<sup>®</sup>. However, drawing upon and utilizing the basic skills and principles used in Motivational Interviewing can be a useful tool for our Volunteers to use to further assist our members and meeting participants accomplish their goals.

### What Is Motivational Interviewing?

- As defined by its developers, "*Motivational Interviewing is a directive, client-centered counseling style for eliciting behavior change by helping clients to explore and resolve ambivalence.*"
- Is based on the Stages of Change
- Assumes that motivation is fluid and can be influenced
- Is focused and goal oriented, helping resolve ambivalence by increasing the discrepancy between current behaviors and desired goals, while minimizing resistance.

**Goal of Motivational Interviewing:** The goal of Motivational Interviewing is to get individuals to resolve their ambivalence about changing their behavior, without evoking resistance to change.

### ***Roadblocks to Listening***

*Thomas Gordon, PhD*

- *Giving advice, making suggestions, or providing solutions*
- *Persuading with logic, arguing, lecturing*
- *Moralizing, preaching*
- *Disagreeing, judging, criticizing, or blaming*
- *Shaming, ridiculing, or labeling*
- *Interpreting or analyzing*
- *Reassuring, sympathizing, or consoling*
- *Questioning or probing*
- *Withdrawing, distracting, or humoring*

### Motivational Interviewing Techniques Can Help People Change By:

- Helping them to recognize their high-risk behavior
- Allowing them to evaluate how much of a problem their current behavior is for them in relation to other issues in their life
- Looking at ways to begin the process of changing their behavior(s), such as identifying strengths, weaknesses and developing action plans

## OARS: Four Basic Skills of Motivational Interviewing

“OARS” can be used to help SMART Recovery<sup>®</sup> members and meeting participants by establishing interactive communications that can help lead them into resolving their problem behavior(s) themselves. While we cannot recover for them, we can certainly help them “work it out”. This is accomplished by:

- Developing discrepancy between where they are now and where they want to be (*i.e. their goals*).
- Helping them acknowledge and resolve their ambivalence (*i.e. conflict*) in making the necessary changes to reach their goals.

### ***Four Basic Skills in Motivational Interviewing***

- ***Open-ended questions***
- ***Affirmations***
- ***Reflective Listening***
- ***Summary Statements***

1. **Open-Ended Questions:** The asking of open-ended questions, questions that cannot be answered with a limited response, (*i.e. “yes”, “no”, “maybe”, “seven”, “next week”, etc.*), will help individuals investigate and explore their own thinking, and moves us, as Facilitators and Volunteers, away from giving or offering “advice”. Open-ended questions are the “door-openers” that encourage members to do most the talking, with the goal to elicit statements that develop discrepancy and reflect self-efficacy. As stated previously, people tend to believe what they hear themselves say, and we can help elicit these self-motivating statements with well chosen, open-ended questions.
2. **Affirmations:** Making affirming statements help individuals acknowledge their positive behaviors and strengths, which then builds confidence in their ability to change. Affirming statements allow for both recognition of their difficulties and support of their strengths, letting them know their concerns and issues are valid. These affirmations convey respect, understanding and support, and need to be both genuine and appropriate.
3. **Reflective Listening:** Paraphrase (*mirror*) the individuals’ comments by repeating back what they said. This lets them know you heard what they said and it makes sure you heard what you think you heard. This also “deepens” the conversation by allowing the individual to hear (*again*) what they said, which will help them understand their own thoughts better.
4. **Summary Statements:** Summary statements pull together everything stated, allowing for the transition to the next topic. You might ask what they have learned or got out of the experience. These are similar to reflective listening, but can be a major help in developing discrepancy.

The “S” in OARS is also sometimes referred to as “**Self-motivational Statements**”. These are used to get individuals to both recognize and verbalize the issue(s) they are dealing with, by pointing out the observations you have made and asking for their further input.

**No matter which skill or method used, emphasize personal choice and control.** If you tell someone what to do, it is usually taken as being confrontational and will often foster resistance. Again, create a “free and friendly space” to explore the difficult issues. When emphasizing and allowing personal choice and control over their problem behavior(s), there is less resistance and it gets them engaged in their recovery.

## ***Examples of “OARS” Components***

### **Open-ended questions:**

- Who is the most important person in your life? Why is she/he important to you?
- How does being on probation affect your home/work life?
- What are the 5 most important things in your life?
- How can I help you with \_\_\_?
- What was the best 5 minutes of your day? What was the worst 5 minutes?
- How would you like things to be different?
- What are the good things about \_\_\_ and what are the less good things about it?
- When would you be most likely to \_\_\_?
- Where would you be most likely to \_\_\_?
- What do you think you will lose if you give up \_\_\_?
- What have you tried before to make a change?
- Who are those in your life that will support your changing this behavior?
- What do you want to do next?
- How does your (behavior) affect your family?
- What do you know about the risks of (drinking/drugs)?
- How will getting off probation affect your home/work life?

### **Affirming responses:**

- I appreciate that you were willing to share that with us.
- You are clearly a very resourceful person.
- You handled yourself really well in that situation.
- That’s a good suggestion.
- Congratulations on the successful completion of...
- If I were in your shoes, I don’t know if I could have managed nearly so well.
- I’ve really enjoyed this discussion today.
- You are very courageous to be so open about this.
- You’ve accomplished a lot in a short time.
- You’ve tried very hard to quit.

### **Reflective Listening statements:**

- So you feel...
- It sounds like you...
- You’re wondering if...
- So, what I hear you saying is...
- This is what I am hearing; please correct me if I am wrong...

### **Summary Statements:** (*Begin with a statement indicating you are making a summary*)

- Let me see if I understand this so far...
- Here is what I’ve heard. Tell me if I’ve missed anything.
- What you’ve said is important.
- I value what you say.
- Did I hear you correctly?
- We covered that well. Now let’s talk about...

## ***“OARS” in Action***

**Scenario:** You have someone in your meeting that, during “check-in”, stated his job is stressful and he stops “for a couple” every night to unwind after work, except that the couple turns into a couple too many.

**Facilitator:** You stated your job is an activating event of stress in your life. Tell us some more about your work. (Open-ended question)

*Participant: I’m a lawyer in a large company. There is a lot of pressure put on everybody to produce and bring in new clients.*

**Facilitator:** It really sounds like your work is quite stressful. (Reflective Listening)

*Participant: Yes, it is quite challenging but it pays well and I really like going to court to try cases.*

**Facilitator:** So even though your work is stressful, you find it rewarding. (Reflective Listening)

*Participant: Well most of the time, but lately I wonder where it is all going.*

**Facilitator:** What other concerns do you have about your work? (Open-ended question)

*Participant: That’s really a good question. Actually there has been alot of cutbacks lately—“downsizing” they call it. It keeps me on edge and I just can’t relax anymore.*

**Facilitator:** What kinds of things have you done in the past to relax? (Open-ended question)

*Participant: Biking, but lately, I’ve just been too tired to go.*

**Facilitator:** What other kinds of things help you relax? (Open-ended question)

*Participant: Going out to eat at a good restaurant at the end of the week or having some friends over and preparing a gourmet meal for them... but I haven’t done any of those things much at all lately either.*

**Facilitator:** You’ve mentioned many things about your current lifestyle, such as the cutbacks at your work and the stress you feel because of it. You also spoke of having little energy to do some of the things that you used to like to do to relax. What are some things that might help get you back to doing some of those things that you once enjoyed? (Summary Statement)

Do you see the direction this interaction moved?

By using the skills of “OARS”, the Facilitator was able to navigate the conversation so that the participant did the talking... which allows him/her to hear what they are saying and come up with their own solutions.

---

## DEARS: Five Principles of Motivational Interviewing

### *Five Principles of Motivational Interviewing*

- *Develop Discrepancy*
- *Express Empathy*
- *Amplify Ambivalence*
- *Roll with Resistance*
- *Support Self-efficacy*

1. **Develop Discrepancy:** By pointing out discrepancies, you create a gap between where the person has been (or currently is) and where they want to be. The individual can come to a realization that their current behavior(s) is not leading them towards their goals and they become more motivated and open to change. The goal is to resolve that discrepancy by changing behavior.
2. **Express Empathy:** Empathy is one of the most important elements of Motivational Interviewing. As SMART Recovery® Facilitators and Volunteers, we listen to people to get an idea of their concerns and their reasons for behaving as they do. We try to put ourselves in their place, viewing the world through their eyes, thinking as they think, feeling as they feel, and experiencing their world as they experience it. In order to express empathy effectively, place yourself in their perspective.  
  
When people feel understood, they are more likely to be open and share their experiences. The more people are willing to share their experiences with us, the better we are able to determine where they need information and support. Empathic listening is **ESSENTIAL** to minimizing resistance. Our ability to demonstrate empathy, to understand and feel what people are experiencing, has a major impact on their willingness and ability to change. It has been shown that high levels of empathy are closely linked to positive results across a broad range of different therapies.
3. **Amplify Ambivalence:** Ambivalence to “change” is normal. However, it can become paralyzing and cause some people to remain “stuck.” By recognizing and verbalizing ambivalence, you help people acknowledge their ambivalence by discussing it with them and exploring the two different “sides” they are dealing with, which can help them work through it. If this does not occur, long-lasting behavior changes become less likely.
4. **Roll with Resistance:** Like ambivalence, resistance is a normal behavior that should be expected when people are being asked to change. Arguing with a person, or creating a power struggle by threatening or trying to assert control will usually only make matters worse. When you tell someone what to do, it is likely to be deemed as confrontational and fosters resistance. Instead, seek to clarify and understand; invite the consideration and openness to new perspectives. By encouraging people to come up with their own solutions to their situations as **THEY** define them, we invite them to examine new perspectives without badgering, lecturing or imposing new ways of thinking on them. Emphasizing and allowing personal choice and control over their problems can help minimize resistance. **If you meet resistance, it is a telltale sign to respond differently.**
5. **Support Self-Efficacy:** A person’s belief that change is possible is an important motivator in making change. In Motivational Interviewing, there is no “right way” to change. If a specific plan for change doesn’t work, people can come up with other plans. However, for this to occur, they must believe that change is possible and that they are capable of making the changes necessary to improve their current situation. Create a friendly space for them to explore the difficult issues and engage them in conversations that will help them believe that change **IS** both possible and attainable.

## *Examples of “DEARS”*

### **Developing Discrepancy:**

- *Tell us some good things and not so good things about your behavior.*
- *How do you think your life would be different if you were not drinking?*
- *What do you see your life to be like if you don't make changes and continue to use?*
- *How does your \_\_\_\_\_ fit in with your goals?*
- *On one hand, you say that your \_\_\_\_\_ are important to you, yet you continue to \_\_\_\_\_, help me to understand...*
- *What do you feel you need to change to obtain your goals?*
- *How will things be for you a year from now if you continue to \_\_\_\_\_?*
- *Hypothetically speaking, if you were to make a change in any area of your life, what would it be?*

### **Expressing Empathy:**

- *I understand how difficult this is...*
- *Yes, making changes is hard work... it is **VERY** hard work!*
- *I know where you're at with this.*
- *That must have been hard on you.*

### **Amplifying Ambivalence:**

- *How has your behavior been a problem to you? How has it been a problem for others?*
- *What was your life like before you started having problems with drinking?*
- *If you keep heading down the road you're on, what do you see happening?*

### **Rolling with Resistance:**

- *That is OK if you don't want to quit... it is your choice.*
- *Maybe you aren't ready to quit.*
- *What do you want to do? How do you want to proceed?*
- *Where do you want to go from here?*

### **Supporting Self-Efficacy:**

- *It seems as though you have put a lot of thought into your goals...*
- *You have a good plan of action...*
- *It sounds like you are still struggling with making these changes, but you have had some success at making some.*
- *It sounds like you have made real progress. How does that make you feel?*

## Readiness to Change Ruler

(An adaptation of “Importance/Confidence Ruler” by Stephen Rollnick, PhD)

- People come to SMART Recovery® meetings with different levels of motivation (or readiness) to change. We often tend to overestimate the motivation of those who say they’re ready to change and underestimate the motivation of those who indicate no interest in change.
- An effective Facilitator will operate at the same level of change where the individual is in order to minimize resistance and gain cooperation.
- You might ask early on, “On the following 5-point scale from 1 to 5 where 1 is ‘Not Ready’ and 5 is ‘Ready’, where are you at now in terms of changing your behavior?”
- People move forward and back along this “Readiness to Change” scale.

On the following scale, what number best reflects how ready you are to change your behavior?

### CIRCLE ONE

Not Ready to Change	Thinking of Changing	Undecided/ Uncertain	Somewhat Ready	Very Ready to Change
1	2	3	4	5

### Scaling Examples:

- **Multiple Problems** (When dealing with someone experiencing multiple issues):
  - I realize it might be difficult to put numbers on each of the problems we’re discussing. So let’s say number 5 is the most urgent and 1 is the least. How do you think you would rate your drinking?
  - What number would you give your other problems? (i.e. marriage, health)
- **Coerced Individuals** (Negotiating goals with coerced individuals):
  - Whose idea was it that you come here? Who suggested you come here?
  - What makes \_\_\_\_\_ think that you need to come here?
  - What does \_\_\_\_\_ think is the reason that you have a drinking problem?
  - What does \_\_\_\_\_ say you need to do differently?
- **Self-Acceptance** (Working towards self-acceptance):
  - Let’s say when you first started coming, the problem that brought you here was a 1 and where you want to be is 10. Between 1 and 10, where would you say you are right now?
  - What do you think you’ll need to do to move up to \_\_\_\_ (the next level)?
  - Let’s say that two months from now you’ve gotten up to a 7. What do you think people will notice that is different about you that will tell them you are at 7?

### Scaling Questions:

- Let’s say 10 means how you want your life to be and 1 means how bad things were when you first came. How would you rate your problem today?
- What would it take to go from (#) up to (#)?
- Suppose 10 means you will do anything to stop drinking and change your life around good for you and 1 means all you are willing to do is to sit and do nothing. Where would you say you are today?
- You’ve come a long way! What do you have to do to move up from (#) to (#)?

### References

- “Motivational Interviewing: Preparing People to Change” (2<sup>nd</sup> edition). Miller, W. R., & Rollnick, S. (2002). New York: Guilford.
- “Enhancing Motivation for Change in Substance Abuse Treatment”. Treatment Improvement Protocol (TIP 35). SAMHSA (2002). USDHHS: Rockville, MD.
- “Promoting Behavior Change- And Loving It”, Edward Pecukonis, PhD, University of Maryland School of Social Work
- “An Introduction to Motivational Interviewing”, Steve Martino, PhD and Christian Hopfer, MD, NIDA Clinical Trials Network
- “Motivational Interviewing in a Chemical Dependency Treatment Setting”, CASAC Continuing Education Workbook, New York State OASAS
- “Introduction to Motivational Interviewing” Eric Morse, LISW, Mental Health Services for Homeless Persons, Inc.
- “Introduction to Motivational Interviewing” Jennifer Hetteema, PhD, Trauma Recovery Center
- “Motivational Interviewing Training” (Lesson Plans), Justice System Assessment & Training (<http://nicic.gov/Library/019791>)
- “Motivational Interviewing Overview and Tips” Sobell, L.C. & Sobell, M.B (2003)
- Motivational Interviewing website [www.motivationalinterview.org](http://www.motivationalinterview.org)