
Making Safeguarding Personal Toolkit

Practice Tool 21:

Motivational interviewing (MI)



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Motivational interviewing involves having conversations with people which support them to make changes in their behaviour. Unlike counselling and other non-directive therapies, it works in a way which balances being directive with also being supportive and non-judgemental (Lydia Guthrie, 2018). Whilst being directive it is still congruent with the principles of Making Safeguarding Personal – it recognises people as the experts in their own lives and focuses on strengths, what resources people have, the changes that they are, or have been, able to make, their value base and their identity.

Key skills

The four key parts of the MI approach are known by the **OARS** acronym:

Open-ended questions: Most social care professionals are familiar with the idea of not asking closed questions, and instead asking open questions which seek more information, or asking someone to say something about how they view their world, to tell their story (which can give information that isn't previously known).

Affirmations: This is when you offer the person an observation of something that you've noticed that is important to them, either something they've achieved or a value they hold dear.

Reflections: These are not questions. It's reflective listening, repeating parts of what the other person says, but not as questions. It's really crucial that your tone of voice doesn't go up at the end. It's like taking a verbal highlighter pen to something that you've just heard the person say. You can do that on the contents of what they say, which is the simplest form, where you just repeat back some words. You can also do that on the meaning of what they say, or offer a feeling reflection, reflecting back to the other person an impression you're getting of a feeling that they might be experiencing or something that really matters to them.

Summaries: You can be very strategic in what you summarise - summarising the change talk that you hear, summarising the things that the person has said which indicate that they're already thinking about changing or have already taken some tiny steps towards changing. This helps to highlight to the person what is already working that could be built upon.