

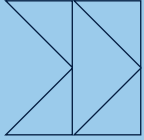


# Introduction to empathy and reflective listening



## WORKSHOP FACILITATION GUIDE

This facilitation guide provides a structure and resources for professionals who are skilled in motivational interviewing to deliver a practical introduction workshop.



# Background

This workshop is to support the initial training in Motivational Interviewing (MI).

Empathy (an aspect of acceptance, in the spirit of MI) and the skill of reflective listening are essential to a guiding style of conversation. By exploring and reflecting the young person's own arguments for change, it can help resolve ambivalence and strengthen commitment to change.



# Learning objectives

## **KNOWLEDGE**

To be able to articulate what the components of empathy are, how reflective listening supports empathy and how it relates to the use of motivational interviewing.

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## **ATTITUDE**

To appreciate that:

- Empathy is an aspect of 'acceptance' - one of the elements in the spirit of motivational interviewing.
  - Reflective listening is one of the core components of the engine of MI - the OARS (Open-ended questions, Affirmations, Reflections, Summaries).
  - It is more beneficial for people to have an experience of being listened to and feeling understood, rather than feeling as though the listener is just trying to solve their problems.
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## **SKILL**

To develop the skills of reflective listening - aiming for a minimum of one reflection to every question, potentially two reflections to every question.

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## **KEY POINTS**

- Motivational interviewing is an effective way to build motivation for people who are ambivalent about change.
- The expression of empathy has strong evidence for positive outcomes.
- Reflective listening is a core skill in building people's ability to be empathic.
- Reflective listening is a helpful way of reducing discord with young people.
- Reflections can often be used instead of questions.
- The ratio of questions to reflections:  
Basic competency: 40% complex reflections.  
Proficiency: 50% or more complex reflections.  
Basic competency for the Questions to Reflections ratio is 1Q:1R.  
Proficiency for the Questions to Reflections ratio is 1Q:2R.



# Underpinning principles

Motivational interviewing (MI) is a person centered style of conversation to aid people in resolving ambivalence and strengthening commitment for change.

The four aspects of the spirit of MI comprises of Partnership, Acceptance, Compassion and Empowerment.

The aspect of Acceptance includes absolute worth, autonomy support, accurate empathy and affirmation.

Reflective listening is one of the core skills of OARS (Open questions, Affirmations, Reflections and Summaries). These are the oars that are essential to paddling the waka of motivational interviewing. The skill of forming reflections help young people feel heard, seen and deeply understood.

This workshop is one hour in length to fit in with school professional learning and development times. It is facilitated in a way that progressively builds understanding and appreciation for the core skill of motivational interviewing through engagement with a series of facts.

These facts are:

- ▶ Reflective listening is a core skill to support accurate empathy, an aspect of the spirit of motivational interviewing (MI).
- ▶ There is strong evidence that accurate empathy predicts positive outcomes.
- ▶ Accurate empathy is a teachable skill that people can get better at.
- ▶ The skill of forming complex reflections strengthens people's sense of feeling understood.



# Additional resources

Matua Raki (2017). **Bridging the Gap: Young people and substance use.** Wellington: Matua Raki. pp. 51 - 54.

Britt, E., Gregory, D., Tohiariki, T., and Huriwai, T. (2014). **Takitaki mai: A guide to motivational interviewing for Māori.** Wellington: Matua Raki.

Miller, W.R., Rollnick, S. (2013). **Motivational interviewing: Helping people change.** 3rd. Edition. New York: Guildford Press.

Rosengren, D. (2009). **Building motivational interviewing skills: A practitioner workbook.** New York: The Guildford Press.

Miller, W.R., Rollnick, S. Moyers, T. (2013) Motivational Interviewing DVD. **Helping People Change** - Based on Motivational Interviewing 3rd Edition.

Miller, W.R. (2018) **Listening Well: The Art of Empathic Understanding.** Eugene, Orgeon: Wipf and Stock.

Matching patients with alcohol disorders to treatments: Clinical implications from project MATCH (1998): **Journal of Mental Health Vol 7.** Dec 1998, 589-602.

Cutler, R.B., Fishbain, D.A. **Are alcoholism treatments effective?** The Project MATCH data. BMC Public Health 5, 75 (2005). <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2458-5-75>



# Suggested approach

## Welcomes and introductions

1. **Karakia** | Spiritual invocation
2. **Mihimihi** | Acknowledgements
3. **Whānaungatanga** | No hea koe? Ko wai koe?
4. **Welcome the workshop participants and introduce yourself.**

## Frame up for the workshop

SLIDE 2                      Explain this karakia came about during Bill Miller's conversations with the Native American of the American Southwest. They informed him in order to teach MI to them, MI needed a prayer, a song and a dance. This prayer reflects the underlying spirit of Motivational Interviewing.

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SLIDE 3                      Outline that this workshop will cover the art of reflective listening to build and strengthen empathy.

We will discuss the question: "what is empathy?" and look at a model of communication process of thinking reflectively then forming reflective statement of understanding.

Explain that forming reflections is one of the core skills of MI that are utilised in all four stages (Engagement, Focusing, Evoking and Planning). The others are the OARS (Open-ended questions, Affirmations and Summaries).

Explain that while not focusing on open questions, being mindful of the ratio of questions to reflections is important, as evidence supports that the greater the number of reflections to questions there are, the better the outcome.

## Introduce ambivalence

SLIDE 4 Explain that reflective listening is one of the core skills of Motivational Interviewing.

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SLIDE 5 Title slide for 'introducing empathy.'

## Introduce empathy

SLIDE 6 This slide introduces two quotes. Read them out loud. Ask them to form pairs/small groups and number off. Half of the groups focus on the first quote, and the other half on the second quote, to discuss what their quote means to them. Give them a few minutes to discuss this.

Invite people from each group to offer their perspective. As the facilitator, you might offer a reflection: "Sounds like..." / "What I'm hearing is..." / "It's as is..." / "It seems..." / "You..." / "You're..." / "On the one hand...and on the other hand" etc. It's important that you model the skill of reflective listening for the group.

Provide information about empathy as the significant predictor for change despite what model/approach is being used. Citing project MATCH is useful here. You might like to make a comparison between Motivational Enhancement Therapy, CBT and 12-step facilitation. All approaches had similar outcomes, however, the most significant predictor of positive client outcomes was the degree of empathy experienced.

Inform them the next slide gives a way of conceptualising communication and empathy.

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SLIDE 7 Explain this way of framing communication came from Gordon Thompson around 1970.

You can ask the group, using this model, what are some of the ways communication can break down? (I.e., the speaker doesn't say what they mean / uses words that don't convey what they mean. The listener incorrectly hears the words or misinterprets the meaning.) This conveys the importance of the listener offering statements of understanding to give the speaker an opportunity to let the speaker know they're on the right track.

Emphasise that when we're offering a reflection of understanding, we are having a guess as to what the other person means. Let people know they're about to do an exercise that highlights this process.

# Thinking reflectively

SLIDE 8 Title slide for 'thinking reflectively'.

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SLIDE 9 Explain that in having a guess about what someone means, it's as if we are asking "Do you mean that you...?"

Set the exercise up by asking for two volunteers to demonstrate the next exercise.

As the facilitator, you say "one thing I like about myself is..." then ask which volunteer would be willing to start and have a guess starting their statement with "Do you mean that you...?" When they ask their question having a guess at what you mean, you can only say "yes" or "no" (You can use the intonation of your voice to convey your "yes" or "no" in such a way that it conveys there's more to it and it's difficult to say only "yes" or "no").

Sort people into groups of three and give about 5 minutes for people to each sit in the place of the speaker and listener. This often raises the energy and generates some laughter.

To debrief after this exercise:

- A. Ask for observations from the speaker perspective first. Themes such as "it was difficult to say something I like about me"; difficult giving just a "yes" or "no" answer; they felt frustrated as they wanted to say more to clarify what they meant; it doesn't feel natural; they felt frustrated if saying "no" a lot; wanted more than just a "yes" or "no" from the speaker.  
*Explain that it's normal to experience this and it highlights that we have a natural desire to want to guide people's understanding of us to what we mean.*
- B. Ask for observations from the listener's side. A range of experiences will emerge from difficult to easy, such as: it felt unnatural; wanted more than just a "yes" or "no" from the speaker.  
*Emphasise that a number of different perspectives could elicit a "yes" response. The key takeaway is that there is NO wrong perspective, as the speaker will have the desire to guide your understanding of what they mean. This can help people feel at ease and that they don't HAVE to get it right all the time. Sometimes not getting it right may be helpful to the speaker.*

Summarise the learning before transitioning to the next exercise, where we will be turning the "Do you mean that you...?" questions into reflective statements of understanding.



# Forming reflections

SLIDE 10 Title slide for 'forming reflections'.

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SLIDE 11 Explain reflections come in different shapes and form and that this is an active process. Explain the distinction between accurate empathy (an aspect of the spirit of MI) and reflective listening. Reflective listening is a practice and a learnable skill. It is something you *do*. Bill Miller in his book *Listening Well* (2018) describes accurate empathy as "a way of *being* that develops over time and involves a willingness not to be the centre of attention...temporarily suspending your own 'stuff' in the service of another." Underneath accurate empathy is a 'heartset' of compassion, desire and commitment to another's wellbeing.

Inform them that reflections fall broadly into two categories: simple and complex.

- **Simple reflections** convey understanding yet do not add meaning. Sometimes they can be used to mark very important or intense emotions. They often repeat word for word or slightly paraphrase people's statements.
- **Complex reflections** add substantial meaning. They serve to convey a deeper and more complex picture of what a person has said. The helper/listener may wish to give them a deep sense of feeling heard by emphasising certain emotions, or it could be selectively choosing to take the conversation in a particular direction i.e. emphasising their arguments for change so it elicits more change talk from them.

Explain one can view reflections as having three qualities: depth, directionality and momentum. Clarify with people:

**Depth** refers to reflecting the emotional aspect of a person's experience or providing additional meaning to give texture and complexity to what they've experienced.

**Directionality** refers to consciously choosing the aspects of the conversation you are reflecting back. Are you reflecting back someone's arguments for not changing, or their arguments for change?

**Momentum** refers to focusing on imagining the possibility of positive change in the future. This aspect of a reflection can help instil hope.

These aspects of reflections make more sense and meaning as people practice the different types of reflection. This is a good segue into the next slide looking at types of reflections.

## SLIDE 12

Explain there is evidence to show that an increased use of complex reflections increases perceived empathy and is predictive of better health outcomes. For those interested, the facilitator can explain that in Motivational Interviewing (3rd Edition), they set out provisional competency & proficiency thresholds. These are set out as percentages. Provisional competency is for at least 40% of all reflections to be complex. For proficiency, 50% or more are to be complex reflections. This is measured as the number of complex reflections divided by the number of total reflections = complex/simple+complex.

Explain that people develop a deeper sense of perceived empathy when more complex reflections are used which in turn increases positive outcomes.

Explain the reflection stems on this slide lend themselves to forming complex reflections. All of these reflections stems can have elements of depth & directionality, however, continuing the paragraph reflection stem with "And you can see yourself.." or "And you can imagine yourself.." etc, emphasises momentum by giving the reflection a future focus. Here it can be useful to explain that people can initially start reflections off with "What I'm hearing you saying is.." or "It sounds like.." before adding these stems to add some complexity to their reflections.

Inform them as they gain more confidence in their use of these, they can form reflections without using these additions to the beginning of their reflections. Let people know they'll now have an opportunity to take their questions from the last exercise to form reflections using the stems provided.

- Ask for one of the groups to volunteer their example from the previous exercise ("One thing I like about myself is.." and the different "Do you mean that you..." responses).
- Write these on a whiteboard.
- Ask participants to change the "Do you mean that you..." question into a reflection using the stems given on slide 12.
- As the facilitator, it's important here to emphasise/reinforce it's not about getting it right or perfect, as all reflections can be helpful. It's more about sitting in the spirit of willingness to enter into someone else's experience and make a genuine attempt to understand them.
- Have people give examples of their reflections. Remind people to drop the inflection of their voice at the end of their reflections rather than raise the intonation which turns the reflection into a question. This can be difficult for some people to do. If people do raise their inflection, gently ask them to repeat their reflective statement and drop the inflection at the end. You can also demonstrate by giving the reflective statement with inflection raised, then again with inflection lowered - if needed.
- Give a summary of your observations of people's reflections using depth, directionality & momentum as a way of framing the summary if they choose to. Inform people there's another exercise to follow giving further practice in forming complex reflections.

## SLIDE 13

Introduce the next exercise (people will see the instructions on this slide). Reinforce in your own words the message of the previous exercise just completed: it's important here to emphasise/reinforce that it's not about getting it right/perfect as all reflections can be helpful. It's more about sitting in the spirit of willingness to enter into someone else's experience and make a genuine attempt to understand them.

Ask participants to generate 5 statements they hear from young people in the course of their daily work that indicate they have an issue or a problem they are experiencing. Write these on the whiteboard.

Break room into small groups. Have each group choose a spokesperson to deliver the reflection once back in the larger group. Inform groups they have 5-8 minutes to form 2 reflections for 5 statements. (You may want to change back to slide 12 for groups to see the reflection stems they can choose from to frame their reflections).

Once back in the larger group, have each spokesperson deliver their groups reflection.

*Note: If they deliver their reflection with a raised inflection at the end of the statement, ask them to repeat the reflection, lowering their inflection at the end of their reflective statement. You may have to do this several times. Highlight that it's normal - particularly in Aotearoa.*

Discuss as a group which reflections felt like they resonated most and why. Reflect / summarise people's experiences and link these to depth, directionality & momentum.

Affirm people's efforts in forming complex reflections. Modelling an MI way of affirming can be useful here. "**You are/You've got...**(state a value i.e. **determination, skill, courage** etc)...(and it's associated behaviour) "**... you made an attempt despite feeling anxious**".

## Summary

### SLIDE 14

Title slide for 'summary.'

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### SLIDE 15

Ask people to pick one of the questions on the slide to share their final reflections regarding their learning.

Affirm their efforts and note any strengths you've observed in their practice of the reflections.

Encourage them to use reflections at every opportunity they can!

**tūturu.**