

Lesson 1: The Spirit of Motivational Interviewing

What Is Motivational Interviewing?

Motivational Interviewing (MI) is a communication style that healthcare professionals use to help their patients make healthy changes.

What Is The “Spirit Of Motivational Interviewing”?

The “spirit” of MI is this: people need to feel **understood, confident, and in control** in order to receive advice and make good decisions. This is especially true for teens and young adults, who are figuring out how to navigate the world independently from their parents.

We all want to be accepted and known for who we are, even as we consider making changes. We also want to feel capable and confident in our abilities and take charge of our lives. Few people like having decisions made for them. We might appreciate advice from our friends and loved ones, but we ultimately want to make our own decisions.

What Does “MI” Have To Do With Parenting Teens And Young Adults?

As kids get older, the stakes of their decisions grow and grow. It’s scary to admit it, but parents can’t really control most of the choices they make. Attempts to control teens’ and young adults’ behavior can lead to conflict and resentment, and often they just don’t work.

The authors of this course have adapted some of the core ideas and skills of motivational interviewing for people like you. You can use them to reduce the amount of arguing in your house and feel more relaxed and confident in your interactions with the almost-grown-up children in your life.

Lesson 2: The Righting Reflex

What Is The Righting Reflex?

The Righting Reflex is the impulse to relieve another person's suffering by fixing their problem or pointing out solutions. The righting reflex also shows up when we minimize someone's problem and tell them not to worry or insist that their view isn't right.

We do these things because we hate to see the people we care about struggle, feel upset, or do things that could negatively impact their physical or mental health. It's like a reflex because we do it without even thinking.

What's Wrong With The Righting Reflex?

Even when solutions seem obvious, pointing them out can cause conflict. Giving unwanted advice can get in the way of your child feeling understood, confident, and in control.

Try It Out

Notice the next time you experience the righting reflex. Instead of trying to fix or wave away the problem, listen carefully to how the other person views the dilemma. If you can't resist giving advice, **try asking for permission first**. You might say, "Would it be okay if I give you some advice?" This can help your child feel more in control and more willing to hear what you have to say.

Lesson 3: Reflections

What Is A Reflection?

A reflection is a simple communication strategy that you can use. A good reflection helps your teen or young adult feel accepted, and it prompts them think a little deeper about what they meant. It also gives you a chance to make sure you understand what your child is saying.

Here are three types of reflections:

1. **Simple Reflections** repeat back what you just heard using similar words.
2. **Complex Reflections** take an educated guess at what the speaker might *mean* but is not saying aloud.
3. **Feelings Reflections** emphasize the emotion that the speaker might be experiencing. For instance, "that sounds frustrating!"

Why Use Reflections?

When you are discussing a topic that has caused conflict in the past, reflections can help you slow down and listen. Whether you agree or disagree, try to keep your reflections judgment-free. In other words, a good reflection doesn't show whether you agree or disagree with your child's perspective, just that you are trying to understand it.

Reflection Examples

Everyone I know smokes weed. Its natural, and it helps me feel less stressed out.

- Smoking weed isn't a big deal to you.
- You know a lot of people who smoke weed.
- Smoking weed helps you de-stress.

Try It Out

Next time you feel your righting reflex activated, try a reflection instead!

Lesson 4: Open-Ended Questions

What Is An “Open-Ended” Question?

An open-ended question gets your child talking. It is not a yes-or-no question, a question with a few choices, or a question your child can get wrong.

All-Purpose Open-Ended Questions:

- Help me understand that.
- Tell me more.
- What do you like/dislike about that?
- What is your biggest concern?
- What do you wish I knew?
- What do you see as the pros and cons?

Why Use Open-Ended Questions?

Use non-judgmental, open-ended questions to advance a conversation and deepen your understanding of your child’s dilemma. To ask great questions, forget what you think you already know about your child. Instead, get curious and embrace the idea that even the people you see every day can surprise you.

Try It Out

Put the skills you’ve learned so far together:

1. Resist the righting reflex and just listen.
2. Use reflections and open-ended questions to help your child feel understood.
3. Ask permission before giving advice.

Lesson 5: Affirmations

What Are Affirmations?

Affirmations are a special kind of reflection in which you reflect the value or strength underlying your child's statement. When you notice how your child's values and strengths emerge in their statements or behavior, you can call your attention to it. Affirmations recognize your child's effort, skill, or values. They differ from praise in that they don't evaluate whether someone met your expectations.

Why Use Affirmations?

Affirmations help to build your child's confidence and are a nice opportunity to express your love and admiration without getting an eye-roll in response.

When Do You Use Affirmations?

Here are some examples of how you can transition from using praise to affirmation:

- Great job doing your chores! vs. Thanks for taking care of that.
- You are such a good grandchild to visit your grandmother vs. It was really kind of you to take time to visit your grandmother.
- You are so smart vs. You studied hard and it paid off.

Affirmations can also help you find common ground in **values** even when you disagree about **behaviors**. Recognizing values can help to de-escalate conflicts so they don't spin out of control. For example, you can recognize your child's value of becoming more independent while you talk to them about how they have missed the school bus multiple times.

Try It Out

Find an opportunity to recognize your child's effort or values and notice how they react.

Lesson 6: Finding Solutions

What If My Child Just Keeps Complaining Or Worrying?

Venting is okay; we all need to vent sometimes! But you might notice that your child is stuck on a problem and feel that they need some help moving toward a solution. How do you accomplish that without giving into your righting reflex?

Ask Solution-Focused Questions

Solution-focused questions elicit your child's ideas about how they might approach their dilemma. Here are two great solution-focused questions:

- How do you want to handle that?
- What have you already tried?

Put It All Together

Try to see advice as something you earn the opportunity to give. Before you offer advice, check to make sure you've put in the work.

First, you invested time in understanding the problem by using reflections and asking a few non-judgmental questions.

Then, you asked what solutions they've already tried or might have in mind.

At this point, your child may have generated an idea that seems good, and all you need to do is support them in implementing it!

They may also need some advice. Ask: Can I make a suggestion? Then, offer your advice or suggestion.

Once your child feels understood, confident, and in control, they are far more likely to hear and accept your advice.

Lesson 7: Mistakes and Recovery

What If These Skills Don't Work?

Conflict is a part of life. Everyone snaps at their kids sometimes. And kids may not always be able to tolerate a "hard talk," even if you've used your skills perfectly.

It's tempting to avoid the topic and declare the conversation a failure. But if you feel like you both might be ready to try again, here are three strategies for re-engaging.

Transparency

If you're worried that your child will think you're acting weird, or if they accuse you of being inauthentic, transparency can be helpful. You can say, "I'm working on being a better listener" or "I'm testing out some new skills because I want us to communicate better and fight less." You're being honest with them, and you're being a great role model.

Apology

Taking partial responsibility for a conflict can make room for a more productive conversation. You could say, "I'm sorry I yelled at you about getting home late. I'd like to try having that conversation again, and I promise I'll work hard on controlling my temper."

Hand-Over

Hand-overs are simple statements that can instantly diffuse power struggles. A hand-over involves you, the parent, acknowledging that your child is ultimately in control of a decision or behavior. That can be scary, but sometimes it's just the truth. Here are some hand-overs you can try:

- I can tell you've already made up your mind.
- You decide what's going to work for you.