

The Flow of MI

Here is a simple structure to illustrate how an MI conversation might flow across the four processes of engaging, focusing, evoking, and planning. In this example, the agreed-upon focus is the client's ambivalence about eating fast food. The individual expresses a love for fast food while at the same time harboring concerns about the health risks of eating poorly.

A caveat and some reminders: 1) Real-life conversations rarely play out in such a linear manner; 2) the spirit and core skills of MI are applied throughout the four processes of MI; 3) consider leading with reflections before asking questions; 4) as a general guideline, try to use at least as many, if not more, reflective statements than open questions.

ENGAGING

Provide a warm welcome; offer a beverage; exchange small talk; make sure the person feels comfortable; demonstrate your interest in the person as a person; be hopeful.

- “Hi. It’s really good to see you. Would you like some juice or tea?” “How have things been going lately?” (lead with reflective statements in responding)

FOCUSING

Agree on what to talk about.

- “What would you like to focus on today?” or “You mentioned that you have mixed feelings about your eating habits. Would it be all right if we explore that a bit?” (lead with reflective statements in responding)

EVOKING

Explore ambivalence.

- “What do you like about eating fast food?” ... “What are your concerns about it?” (lead with reflective statements in responding)

Elicit change talk.

- DESIRE (want, wish, like)
“How would you like things to be different than they are now related to your eating?” (lead with reflective statements in responding)

- REASONS (specific reasons for change)

“If you were to cut back or stop eating fast food, what are some reasons you would want to do that?” (lead with reflective statements in responding)
- ABILITY (can, could, able)

“If you were to change your usual way of eating, what do you think would work for you in order to be successful?” (lead with reflective statements in responding)
- NEED (have to or important to – without stating specific reason)

“How important is it to you to make this change?” (Consider using 0–10 scaling questions, i.e., “If zero = not at all urgent/important and 10 = incredibly urgent/important, what number would you give yourself? ... How does that number compare to several numbers lower? ... What would be different if you were to move your number to one number higher?” (lead with reflective statements in responding)

PLANNING

- TESTING THE WATER (readiness and confidence)

“How ready are you to make this change?” “How confident are you to make this change?” (Consider using 0–10 scaling question in regard to readiness/confidence) (lead with reflective statements in responding)
- COMMITMENT (will, plan to, intend to, going to, willing, ready, etc.)

“What do you think you could do as a next step to move in the direction of making this change? ... Who or what would be helpful to you in making this change?” (lead with reflective statements in responding)