

# The Four Processes of MI

MI conversations have a purpose and direction. They seek to help people identify and explore their hopes, values, and change goals within the context of an empathic, guiding style. This guiding approach generally moves through four processes over time.

These processes—*Engaging*, *Focusing*, *Evoking*, and *Planning*—tend to be sequential in MI conversations, although they can be revisited as needed. For example, since the Evoking and Planning processes are directly linked to the identified Focus, if the Focus changes, then the content of the Evoking and Planning conversations will necessarily take a different direction.

The Evoking process is at the heart of motivational conversations. It can be tempting to move directly from Focusing to Planning—“So, now that you have a change goal in mind, how are you going to accomplish it?” However, bypassing the Evoking process disregards the importance of exploring ambivalence and eliciting motivational statements referred to in MI as “change talk.”

In any given conversation or session, it may be possible to move through all four processes. However, it is also quite common to move more deliberately across several sessions, particularly lingering longer on clarifying and narrowing the Focus, or on exploring the various aspects of motivation in the Evoking process. The pace will be determined in large part by the client’s readiness to move forward.

Using MI has some similarities to improv theater. There’s no script. The storyline unfolds collaboratively as each party provides input, and there is no predetermined ending. That said, there are some overarching guidelines that inform both approaches. For health coaches using MI, the four processes provide a framework to guide conversations with clients.

Below is a sampling of inquiries a health coach might use within each of these processes.

## ENGAGING - GETTING TO KNOW SOMEONE AND BUILDING TRUST

- "It's really good to meet you/see you again."
- "What would you like me to know about yourself?"
- "What would you like to know about me?"
- "What's going well in your life? What concerns, if any, do you have?"
- "What are some of your hopes related to your health and well-being?"

## FOCUSING - FIGURING OUT TOGETHER WHAT TO TALK ABOUT AND EXPLORE

- "What would you like to focus on in our time together today?"
- "What's on your mind that you'd like to make sure we cover today?"
- "You've mentioned several things (specify them) that we might explore together. Where would you like to start?"
- "It seems like you're feeling a bit stuck. Could we explore that a bit?"
- "Would it be all right if we took a closer look at your relationship with cannabis?"
- "How might we narrow that down a bit?"

## EVOKING - EXPLORING AMBIVALENCE AND DRAWING OUT THE PERSON'S OWN DESIRE, REASONS, AND ABILITY TO CHANGE (*EX. DRINKING AS THE FOCUS*)

- "How would you describe the role of alcohol in your life?"
- "What does drinking do for you?"
- "What concerns, if any, do you have about your drinking?"
- "If you did decide to cut back or quit drinking, why might you want to do that?"
- "How would you go about it in order to be successful?"
- "Given everything in your life, how important is it for you to make this change?"
- "How confident are you that you could cut back or quit if you wanted to?"

## PLANNING - DEVELOPING A SPECIFIC CHANGE PLAN THAT THE PERSON IS WILLING TO PUT INTO ACTION

- "What do you think you'll do next?"
- "Who or what could be of help?"
- "What challenges, if any, do you anticipate in carrying out your plan?"
- "How will you know when your plan is working?"
- "How will you celebrate successes along the way?"