

# Glossary of Motivational Interviewing Terms

**Ability**—A form of client *preparatory change talk* that reflects perceived personal capability of making a change; typical words include *can*, *could*, and *able*.

**Absolute Worth**—One of four aspects of *acceptance* as a component of MI *spirit*, prizing the inherent value and potential of every human being.

**Acceptance**—One of four central components of the underlying *spirit* of MI by which the interviewer communicates *absolute worth*, *accurate empathy*, *affirmation*, and *autonomy support*.

**Accurate Empathy**—The skill of perceiving and reflecting back another person's meaning; one of four aspects of *acceptance* as a component of MI *spirit*.

**Activation Language**—A form of client *mobilizing change talk* that expresses disposition toward action, but falls short of *commitment language*; typical words include *ready*, *willing*, *considering*.

**Affirmation**—One of four aspects of *acceptance* as a component of MI *spirit*, by which the counselor accentuates the positive, seeking and acknowledging a person's strengths and efforts.

**Affirming**—An interviewer statement valuing a positive client attribute or behavior.

**Agenda Mapping**—A short *focusing* metaconversation in which you step back with the client to choose a *direction* from among several options.

**Agreement with a Twist**—A *reflection*, *affirmation*, or accord followed by a reframe.

**Ambivalence**—The simultaneous presence of competing motivations for and against change.

**Amplified Reflection**—A response in which the interviewer reflects back the client's content with greater intensity than the client had expressed; one form of response to client *sustain talk* or *discord*.

**Apologizing**—A way of responding to *discord* by taking partial responsibility.

**Assessment Feedback**—Providing a client with personal feedback of findings from an evaluation, often in relation to normative ranges; see *Motivational Enhancement Therapy*.

**Assessment Trap**—The clinical error of beginning consultation with expert information gathering at the cost of not listening to the client's concerns. See also *Question-Answer Trap*.

**Autonomy Support**—One of four aspects of *acceptance* as a component of MI *spirit*, by which the interviewer accepts and confirms the client's irrevocable right to self-determination and choice.

**Blaming Trap**—The clinical error of focusing on blame or fault-finding rather than change.

**Bouquet**—A particular kind of *summary* that collects and emphasizes the client's *change talk*.

**Brainstorming**—Generating options without initially critiquing them.

**CATs**—An acronym for three subtypes of client *mobilizing change talk*: *Commitment*, *Activation*, and *Taking Steps*.

**Change Goal**—A specific target for change in *motivational interviewing*; typically a particular behavior change, although it may also be a broader goal (e.g., glycemic control) toward which there are multiple avenues of approach.

**Change Plan**—A specific scheme to implement a *change goal*.

**Change Ruler**—A rating scale, usually 0–10, used to assess a client's motivation for a particular change; see *Confidence Ruler* and *Importance Ruler*.

**Change Talk**—Any client speech that favors movement toward a particular *change goal*.

**Chat Trap**—The clinical error of engaging in excessive small talk and informal chat that does not further the processes of *engaging*, *focusing*, *evoking*, and *planning*.

**Client-centered Counseling**—See *Person-centered Counseling*.

**Closed Question**—A question that asks for yes/no, a short answer, or specific information.

**Coaching**—The process of helping someone to acquire skill.

**Collaboration**—See *Partnership*.

**Collecting Summary**—A special form of *reflection* that pulls together a series of interrelated items that the person has offered. See also *Summary*.

**Coming Alongside**—A response to persistent *sustain talk* or *discord* in which the interviewer accepts and reflects the client's theme.

**Commitment Language**—A form of client *mobilizing change talk* that reflects intention or disposition to carry out change; common verbs include *will*, *do*, *going to*.

**Compassion**—One of four central components of the underlying *spirit* of MI by which the interviewer acts benevolently to promote the client's welfare, giving priority to the client's needs.

**Complex Reflection**—An interviewer *reflection* that adds additional or different meaning beyond what the client has just said; a guess as to what the client may have meant.

**Confidence Ruler**—A scale (typically 0–10) on which clients are asked to rate their level of confidence in their ability to make a particular change.

**Confidence Talk**—Change talk that particularly bespeaks *ability* to change.

**Confront**—(1) as a goal: to come face to face with one's current situation and experience; (2) as a practice: an MI-inconsistent interviewer response such as warning, disagreeing, or arguing.

**Continuing the Paragraph**—A method of *reflective listening* in which the counselor offers what might be the next (as yet unspoken) sentence in the client’s paragraph.

**DARN**—An acronym for four subtypes of client preparatory change talk: *Desire, Ability, Reason, and Need*.

**Decisional Balance**—A choice-focused technique that can be used when counseling with neutrality, devoting equal exploration to the pros and cons of change or of a specific plan.

**Depth of Reflection**—The extent to which a *reflection* contains more than the literal content of what a person has already said. See also *Complex Reflection*.

**Desire**—A form of client *preparatory change talk* that reflects a preference for change; typical verbs include *want, wish, and like*.

**Directing**—A natural communication style that involves telling, leading, providing advice, information, or instruction.

**Direction**—The extent to which an interviewer maintains in-session momentum toward a *change goal*.

**Discord**—Interpersonal behavior that reflects dissonance in the working relationship; *sustain talk* does not in itself constitute *discord*; examples include arguing, interrupting, discounting, or ignoring.

**Discrepancy**—The distance between the *status quo* and one or more client *change goals*.

**Docere**—(Latin verb infinitive) To inform, in the sense of installing knowledge, wisdom, insight; etymologic root of *doctrine, indoctrinate, docent, and doctor*.

**Double-Sided Reflection**—An interviewer *reflection* that includes both client *sustain talk* and *change talk*, usually with the conjunction “and.”

**Ducere**—(Latin verb infinitive) To elicit or draw out; a Socratic approach; etymologic root of education (*e ducere*); compare with *Docere*.

**Elaboration**—An interviewer response to client *change talk*, asking for additional detail, clarification, or example.

**Elicit–provide–elicit**—An information exchange process that begins and ends with exploring the client’s own experience to frame whatever information is being provided to the client.

**Empathy**—The extent to which an interviewer communicates accurate understanding of the client’s perspectives and experience; most commonly manifested as *reflection*.

**Emphasizing Personal Control**—An interviewer statement directly expressing *autonomy support*, acknowledging the client’s ability for choice and self-determination.

**Engaging**—The first of four fundamental processes in MI, the process of establishing a mutually trusting and respectful helping relationship.

**Envisioning**—Client speech that reflects the client imagining having made a change.

**Equipoise**—The clinician’s decision to counsel with neutrality in a way that consciously avoids guiding a client toward one particular choice or change and instead explores the available options equally.

**Evocation**—One of four central components of the underlying *spirit* of MI by which the interviewer elicits the client’s own perspectives and motivation. See also *Ducere*.

**Evocative Questions**—Strategic open questions the natural answer to which is *change talk*.

**Evoking**—The third of four fundamental processes of MI, which involves eliciting the person’s own motivation for a particular change.

**Expert Trap**—The clinical error of assuming and communicating that the counselor has the best answers to the client’s problems.

**Exploring Goals and Values**—A strategy for evoking *change talk* by having people describe their most important life goals or values.

**Focusing**—The second of four fundamental processes of MI, which involves clarifying a particular goal or direction for change.

**Following**—A natural communication style that involves listening to and following along with the other’s experience without inserting one’s own material.

**Formulation** —Developing a shared picture or hypothesis regarding the client’s situation and how it might be addressed.

**FRAMES**—An acronym summarizing six components commonly found in effective brief interventions for alcohol problems: *Feedback, Responsibility, Advice, Menu of options, Empathy, and Self-efficacy*.

**Goal Attainment Scaling**—A method originally developed by Thomas Kiresuk for evaluating treatment outcomes across a range of problem areas.

**Goldilocks Principle**—In order to be motivating, a discrepancy should be not too large or too small.

**Guiding**—A natural communication style for helping others find their way, combining some elements of both directing and following.

**Implementation Intention**—A stated intention or commitment to take a specific action.

**Importance Ruler**—A scale (typically 0–10) on which clients are asked to rate the importance of making a particular change.

**Integrity**—To behave in a manner that is consistent with and fulfills one’s core values.

**Intrinsic Motivation**—The disposition and enactment of behavior for its consistency with personal goals and values.

**Key Question**—A particular form of question offered after a *recapitulation* at the transition from *evoking* to *planning*, that seeks to elicit *mobilizing change talk*.

**Labeling Trap**—The clinical error of engaging in unproductive struggles to persuade clients to accept a label or diagnosis.

**Lagom**—(Swedish) Just right; not too large, not too small. See also *Goldilocks Principle*.

**Linking Summary**—A special form of *reflection* that connects what the person has just said with something you remember from prior conversation. See also *Summary*.

**Looking Back**—A strategy for evoking client *change talk*, exploring a better time in the past.

**Looking Forward**—A strategy for evoking client *change talk*, exploring a possible better future that the client hopes for or imagines, or anticipating the future consequences of not changing.

**Menschenbild** (German)—One's fundamental view of human nature.

**MET**—An acronym for *Motivational Enhancement Therapy*.

**MIA-STEP**—A package of training materials for MI supervisors, produced by the U.S. Center for Substance Abuse Treatment.

**MINT**—The Motivational Interviewing Network of Trainers, founded in 1997 and incorporated in 2008 ([www.motivationalinterviewing.org](http://www.motivationalinterviewing.org)).

**MISC**—The Motivational Interviewing Skill Code, introduced by Miller and Mount as the first system for coding client and interviewer utterances within *motivational interviewing*.

**MITI**—The Motivational Interviewing Treatment Integrity coding system, simplified from the *MISC* and focusing only on interviewer responses, to document fidelity in MI delivery.

**Mobilizing Change Talk**—A subtype of client *change talk* that expresses or implies action to change; examples are *commitment*, *activation language*, and *taking steps*.

**Motivational Enhancement Therapy (MET)**—A combination of *motivational interviewing* with *assessment feedback*, originally developed and tested in Project MATCH.

**Motivational Interviewing**—

- Lay definition: A collaborative conversation style for strengthening a person's own motivation and commitment to change.
- Clinical definition: A person-centered counseling style for addressing the common problem of ambivalence about change.
- Technical definition: A collaborative, goal-oriented style of communication with particular attention to the language of change, designed to strengthen personal motivation for and commitment to a specific goal by eliciting and exploring the person's own reasons for change within an atmosphere of acceptance and compassion.

**Need**—A form of client *preparatory change talk* that expresses an imperative for change without specifying a particular reason. Common verbs include *need*, *have to*, *got to*, *must*.

**OARS**—An acronym for four basic client-centered communication skills: *Open question*, *Affirmation*, *Reflection*, and *Summary*.

**Open Question**—A question that offers the client broad latitude and choice in how to respond; compare with *Closed Question*.

**Orienting**—The process of finding a direction for change when the focus of consultation is unclear. See also *Focusing*.

**Overshooting**—A *reflection* that adds intensity to the content or emotion expressed by a client. See also *Amplified Reflection*.

**Partnership**—One of four central components of the underlying *spirit* of MI by which the interviewer functions as a partner or companion, collaborating with the client’s own expertise.

**Path Mapping**—The process of choosing a *change plan* when there are several possible routes toward the goal.

**Permission**—Obtaining by the interviewer of client assent before providing advice or information.

**Person-centered Counseling**—A therapeutic approach introduced by psychologist Carl Rogers in which people explore their own experience within a supportive, empathic, and accepting relationship; also called *client-centered counseling*.

**Phase 1**—A term used in prior editions of *Motivational Interviewing* to describe the earlier “uphill” period of engaging, guiding, and evoking, in which the general goal is to elicit and strengthen client motivation for change.

**Phase 2**—A term used in prior editions of *Motivational Interviewing* to describe the latter “downhill” period of planning in which the general goal is to elicit and strengthen *commitment* to a *change goal* and to negotiate a specific *change plan*.

**Planning**—The fourth fundamental process of MI, which involves developing a specific *change plan* that the client is willing to implement.

**Prefacing**—A specific form of *permission* in which the interviewer does not directly ask the client’s leave to provide information or advice, but instead precedes it with an *autonomy support* statement.

**Premature Focus Trap**—The clinical error of focusing before engaging, trying to direct before you have established a working collaboration and negotiated common goals.

**Preparatory Change Talk**—A subtype of client *change talk* that expresses motivations for change without stating or implying specific intent or commitment to do it; examples are *desire*, *ability*, *reason*, and *need*.

**Q Sorting**—A technique developed by William Stephenson, a colleague of Carl Rogers, in which a person sorts cards describing attributes into piles ranging from “not like me” to “very much like me.”

**Querying Extremes**—A strategy for evoking *change talk* by asking clients to imagine best consequences of change or worst consequences of *status quo*.

**Question–Answer Trap**—The clinical error of asking too many questions, leaving the client in the passive role of answering them. See also *Assessment Trap*.

**Reactance**—The natural human tendency to reassert one’s freedom when it appears to be threatened.

**Readiness Ruler**—See *Change Ruler*.

**Reason**—A form of client *preparatory change talk* that describes a specific if–then motive for change.

**Recapitulation**—A *bouquet* summary offered at the transition from *evoking* to *planning*, drawing together the client’s *change talk*.

**Reflective Listening**—The skill of “active” listening whereby the counselor seeks to understand the client’s subjective experience, offering *reflections* as guesses about the person’s meaning. See also *Accurate Empathy*.

**Reflection**—An interviewer statement intended to mirror meaning (explicit or implicit) of preceding client speech. See also *Simple Reflection*, *Complex Reflection*.

**Reframe**—An interviewer statement that invites the client to consider a different interpretation of what has been said.

**Resistance**—A term previously used in MI, now deconstructed into its components: *sustain talk* and *discord*.

**Righting Reflex**—The natural desire of helpers to set things right, to prevent harm and promote client welfare.

**Running Head Start**—A strategy for eliciting client *change talk* in which the interviewer first explores perceived “good things” about the status quo, in order to then query the “not-so-good things.”

**Self-Actualization**—The pursuit and realization of one’s core values—becoming what one is meant to be. See also *Telos*.

**Self-Disclosure**—Sharing something of oneself that is true when there is good reason to expect that it will be helpful to the client.

**Self-Efficacy**—A client’s perceived ability to successfully achieve a particular goal or perform a particular task; term introduced by Albert Bandura.

**Self-Esteem**—A client’s general level of perceived worth.

**Self-Motivational Statement**—See *Change Talk*.

**Self-Regulation**—The ability to develop a plan of one’s own and to implement behavior in order to carry it out.

**Shifting Focus**—A way of responding to *discord* by redirecting attention and discussion to a less contentious topic or perspective.

**Simple Reflection**—A *reflection* that contains little or no additional content beyond what the client has said.

**Smoke Alarms**—Interpersonal signals of *discord* in the working alliance.

**Spirit**—The underlying set of mind and heart within which MI is practiced, including *partnership, acceptance, compassion, and evocation*.

**Stages of Change**—Within the *transtheoretical model* of change, a sequence of steps through which people pass in the change process: precontemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, and maintenance.

**Status Quo**—The current state of affairs without change.

**Summary**—A *reflection* that draws together content from two or more prior client statements. See also *Collecting Summary, Linking Summary, Transitional Summary*.

**Sustain Talk**—Any client speech that favors *status quo* rather than movement toward a *change goal*.

**Taking Steps**—A form of client *mobilizing change talk* that describes an action or step already taken toward change.

**Telos**—(Greek) The natural, mature end state of an organism toward which it grows, given optimal conditions.

**TNT**—An acronym for a Training of New Trainers in *motivational interviewing*; begun in 1993.

**Transitional Summary**—A special form of *reflection* to wrap up a task or session by pulling together what seems important and signal a shift to something new.

**Transtheoretical Model**—A complex model of change developed by James Prochaska and Carlo DiClemente, one part of which describes *stages of change*.

**Undershooting**—A *reflection* that diminishes or understates the intensity of the content or emotion expressed by a client.

**Values**—A person’s core goals or standards that provide meaning and direction in life.

**Values Sorting**—A technique used by Milton Rokeach and others, in which a person gives priority rankings to various values, for example, by sorting cards into piles ranging from “not at all important” to “most important.”

**Working Alliance**—The quality of the collaborative relationship between client and counselor, which tends to predict client retention and outcome.