

Motivational Interviewing Adaptations

How to Tweak MI for Mandated Clients

How to Use This Tool:

Standard MI assumes voluntary engagement. With mandated clients, you need strategic modifications. This tool shows how to adapt each core MI skill for clients who didn't choose to be there.

WHY MI WORKS WITH MANDATED CLIENTS — THE RESEARCH

- Better Treatment Attendance: MI increases session attendance rates compared to confrontational approaches
- Lower Dropout Rates: Clients receiving MI are significantly less likely to leave treatment prematurely
- Reduced Recidivism: Studies show lower re-arrest rates when MI is used with justice-involved populations
- Addresses Reactance: MI's non-confrontational style reduces psychological reactance common in mandated clients

ADAPTING THE MI SPIRIT

Partnership (Standard)

"We're working together on your goals"
Assumes shared agenda
Collaborative from the start
Client sets the direction

Partnership (Adapted)

"You may not have chosen this, but let's figure out how to make it worth your time."
Acknowledge the mandate openly
Find goals **WITHIN** the constraint

Autonomy (Standard)

"It's completely up to you"
Emphasizes total freedom
No pressure or consequences
Client has all the power

Autonomy (Adapted)

"You're right that your control seems limited, but you **CAN** control what you get out of it."
Acknowledge **LIMITED** autonomy honestly
Focus on choices they **DO** have

Evocation (Standard)

"What do **YOU** want to change?"
Assumes desire for change exists
Draws out internal motivation
Follows client's lead

Evocation (Adapted)

"What matters to **you** that this legal situation is affecting? Job? Kids? Housing?"
Connect to values **BEYOND** substance use
Find motivation in consequences they care about

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ADAPTING OARS SKILLS

Open Questions (Standard)

"What brings you in today?"
"How would you like things to be different?"
Assumes voluntary presence
Explores their stated concerns

Open Questions (Adapted)

"What's the worst part about having to be here?"
"What would make this less of a waste of time?"
Acknowledge mandate in the question
Meet resistance with curiosity

Affirmations (Standard)

"You're really committed to change"
"I can see how hard you're working"
Affirms stated goals
Celebrates engagement

Affirmations (Adapted)

"You showed up even though you didn't want to"
"You're being honest instead of telling me
what I want to hear—that takes guts"
Affirm the EFFORT of engaging at all

Reflections (Standard)

"You want to drink less"
"Part of you is ready for change"
Reflects stated desires
Amplifies change talk

Reflections (Adapted)

"You're frustrated because you feel like you
have no control over this situation"
"Part of you thinks this is BS, and part of you
knows something has to change"
Reflect the AMBIVALENCE about being there

Summaries (Standard)

Collect change talk
Highlight discrepancy
Build toward commitment
Transition to planning

Summaries (Adapted)

"So you didn't choose to be here, AND you want
to keep your job. You're sick of probation, AND
you know using could mean jail..."
Use AND not BUT—honor both sides

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HANDLING COMMON MANDATED CLIENT RESPONSES

"I don't have a problem" (Standard)

Standard MI: Roll with resistance
"You're not sure you need to be here"
Avoid argumentation
Don't push back

"I don't have a problem" (Adapted)

"You're right—you might not need treatment.
The court appears to think you do. So while
you're here, what could we work on that
YOU think matters?" AGREE, then redirect

"I can quit anytime" (Standard)

Standard MI: Explore both sides
What are the good things? Less good?
Develop discrepancy
Let them convince themselves

"I can quit anytime" (Adapted)

"What would it cost you to quit completely
right now? What would it cost you NOT to
change anything? Let's look at both."
Make discrepancy about THEIR consequences

"You're just a narc" (Standard)

Standard MI: Reflect and validate
Explore the feeling
Avoid defensiveness
Stay curious

"You're just a narc" (Adapted)

"You're right—I am. And I'm required to write
reports. Here's exactly what I report... Now,
given that, how do you want to use our time?"
Be TRANSPARENT about your role

"You can't make me" (Standard)

Standard MI: Emphasize autonomy
"It's your choice"
Support self-efficacy
Express confidence

"You can't make me" (Adapted)

"You don't have to. But here's what happens
if you don't, and here's what might happen if
you do. What sounds better to you?"
Give them REAL information for real choices

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QUICK REFERENCE: KEY PHRASE SWAPS

INSTEAD OF...	TRY...
"What brings you in?"	"What do you wish I understood about why you're here?"
"How can I help you?"	"How can I make this less painful for you?"
"What do you want to change?"	"What's at stake for you in this situation?"
"It's up to you"	"You can't control being here—what CAN you control?"
"I hear you're ambivalent"	"Part of you thinks this is BS, and part of you is worried"
"Let's set some goals"	"What matters enough to you to work on while you're here?"

MY ADAPTATIONS & NOTES

Phrases That Work With My Clients / Additional Adaptations: