

# 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:

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