

# MI Session Cheat Sheet for Mandated Clients

Justice-Involved Treatment Mastery Series | Month 5 Resource | The Underrated Superhero LLC

## PROCESS 1: ENGAGING — Start Where They Actually Are

**Goal:** Name the mandate directly. Create space around it. Make it safe to be honest.

INSTEAD OF THIS...	TRY THIS...
"What brings you in today?"	"I know the court sent you here. That's the reality. What I'm curious about is — what do YOU want to get out of this time?"
"How motivated are you to change?"	"On a scale of 1–10, how much do you feel like being here right now? ... A 2. What made it a 2 instead of a zero?"
"You need to be open to the process."	"You don't have to want to be here. But you are here. So let's figure out if any of this can be useful to you."
"Let's talk about your substance use."	"There's a lot the court wants us to cover. But first — what's actually going on in your life right now?"

**Clinical Tip:** The first session isn't about substance use. It's about trust. If you spend it talking about their legal situation and frustrations with the system, you've done more therapeutic work than a full assessment battery.

## PROCESS 2: FOCUSING — Let Them Set the Agenda (Within the Framework)

**Goal:** Find the overlap between court requirements and what the client actually cares about.

INSTEAD OF THIS...	TRY THIS...
"We need to focus on your substance use."	"What's the thing that's stressing you out most right now — not the court stuff, but in your actual life?"
"The court requires us to address..."	"The court does want us to address substance use — and we will. But tell me what matters to YOU first. If we can connect this to what you care about, it won't feel like checking a box."
"You're minimizing your use."	"So the job situation is front and center for you. I hear that. How does your use connect to that — or does it?"

**Clinical Tip:** Keep a running list of what each client says matters to them — housing, kids, employment. When you must address substance use, frame it through THEIR values, not the court's.

## PROCESS 3: EVOKING — Finding Change Talk When They Don't Think Change Is Needed

**Goal:** Evoke motivation about their LIFE and SITUATION — not just substance use.

INSTEAD OF THIS...	TRY THIS...
"Do you think you have a problem?"	"What was your life like before the arrest?" ... "And now?" ... "What would it take to get back to something like that?"
"You need to admit you're an addict."	"The court sees it one way, you see it another. Help me understand your side."
"Why do you keep using?"	"You mentioned getting your kids back is everything. How has your use affected that?"
"You just need to get through this" (dismissing)	"Get through this — and then what?" (exploring)

**Clinical Tip:** The most powerful change talk from mandated clients often starts as compliance talk: "I just need to get through this." Don't dismiss it — explore it. That's where real goals hide.

## PROCESS 4: PLANNING — Build Plans They'll Actually Follow

**Goal: Create treatment plans that satisfy the court AND reflect the client's actual goals.**

INSTEAD OF THIS...	TRY THIS...
"You need to attend 3x/week."	"What's one thing you'd want to be different by the time your case closes?"
"Here are your treatment goals."	"If the court weren't involved at all, what would you still want to work on?"
"You need to stay clean for 90 days."	"What's the smallest step that would actually feel like progress to you?"

### Documentation Reframe:

*Instead of:* "Client will attend substance abuse treatment 3x/week as ordered by the court."

*Try:* "Client will engage in treatment focused on rebuilding stability, including employment readiness and family reunification, while meeting court-mandated attendance and substance use monitoring requirements."

## QUICK RESPONSE GUIDE: Meeting Them Where They Are

CLIENT SAYS	YOUR MOVE
"I don't want to be here and I'm not talking."	Don't push. Reflect the silence. "You don't have to talk. You showed up, and that took something." Let the session be short. Goal: they come back.
"I'm here because I have to be. Let's get through it."	Validate the pragmatism. "That's fair. Since you ARE here, what would make this feel like less of a waste?" Find overlap between compliance and need.
"I guess I could use help, but not like this."	Name both truths. "There IS something you want help with — you just wish it was on your terms. Let's make as much of this on your terms as possible."
"I don't have a problem. The court does."	Don't argue. Get curious. "The court sees it one way, you see it another. Help me understand your side. What happened from your perspective?"