

OARS Cheat Sheet: Core Skills for Motivational Interviewing

In Motivational Interviewing, OARS represents the foundational, person-centered communication skills used by practitioners to help individuals explore and resolve ambivalence about change.

O

Open-Ended Questions

These are questions that invite people to reflect and elaborate, rather than give a one-word answer - they open the conversation and help you to understand the person better.

- “Where do you think this path is leading you?”
- “What are the three best reasons for you to do this?”
- “Tell me more about what this would look like?”

A

Affirmations

Statements that recognize and acknowledge strengths or values that the person has not said. They build confidence and strengthen the relationship.

- “You value your relationships”
- “It took courage to bring that up.”
- “You’ve put a lot of thought into this decision.”

R

Reflections

Statements that mirror back what the person has said to show that you’re listening and help the person hear themselves. Simple reflections repeat or paraphrase the content, whereas complex reflections mirror back emotion, meaning, and intentions.

- “You have hope that things could be different.”
- “Your exercises have been difficult, and you want to be strong and independent”

S

Summaries

These are extended reflections that pull together what has been said and end with a question.

- “What I’ve heard so far is ... did I get that right?”
- “We’ve been talking about ___, ___, and ___. Which is the most important to you right now?”

Want to build these skills further?

Visit our website to learn more about motivational interviewing training: centrecmi.ca/motivational-interviewing

All definitions based on Miller WR, Rollnick S. Motivational interviewing: helping people change. 3rd ed. New York: Guilford Press; 2023.