

HOUSING SUPPORT TRAINING SERIES...

**PRACTICING MOTIVATIONAL
INTERVIEWING TO HELP
PEOPLE ATTAIN AND REMAIN
HOUSED**

RESOURCE & WORKBOOK

ORGCODE CONSULTING INC.
Version II



“Practicing Motivational Interviewing to Help People Attain and Remain Housed” is an interactive training program to assist housing support workers in better supporting their clients to engage in change talk and positive actions that support the change process.

Through this training you will:

- Increase your understanding of motivational interviewing is
- Situate motivational interviewing within the context of helping homeless people attain housing and helping formerly homeless people remain housed
- Learn practical tips to improve your working relationships with people where change may be of benefit to overall housing stability
- Be able to see your role as a positive change agent
- Improve your communication techniques and strategies

This training is focused on the practice of motivational interviewing within a housing support context. It appreciates that some people with whom you are likely to be engaging are currently homeless – many of them chronically so with co-occurring, complex issues. It also appreciates that when these same individuals/families become housed, the issues and need for motivation to make life changes does not evaporate.

Acknowledgements: OrgCode Consulting would like to thank consumers, service providers and other professionals that have provided access to materials, knowledge and tools contained within the document, provided commentary on our approach and helped improve each version of our training related to Motivational Interviewing in the context of housing.

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Securing the Invitation

Motivational Interviewing is predicated on permission on the part of the client to engage in conversation regarding change. This is grounded in knowledge that people are more ready and confident to change when they enter into discussion willfully and without coercion.

Examples of phrases that invite participation in change discussion include:

“Do you mind if we talk about [insert behavior or situation where change is being encouraged]?”

“I see/heard [blank] and I am wondering if you would be open to discussing [blank].”

“They say there is no time like the present. I have a few minutes right now and want to know if you’d be interested in discussing [blank].”

“I would like us to spend a little bit of time talking about [blank]. Are you up to that right now?” (If the answer is “no” you may want to follow up with, “So when would be a good time this week?”)

“I was reviewing your file (assessment, goals sheet, intake documents, etc.) and noticed [blank]. How about we spend just a little time talking about that.”

Now think of some possible phrases you may use to secure an invitation to engage in change discussion in the following situations:

Bobby has been coming to your day center for about a year. He keeps to himself most of the time. When he does engage with other service users or staff he is very pleasant, but that engagement is exceptionally rare. More often than not he is reading a book, napping or silently watching TV while in the center, with this buggy full of possessions close by his side.

Katie was housed two months ago. She has not been staying at her apartment most nights, electing instead to sleep with friends in the park or even go to the shelter and tell them she is homeless.

The doctor told Anthony that his liver is showing advanced stages of damage as a result of heavy drinking. Cirrhosis has not yet occurred and the doctor has warned Anthony that he needs to take action now. If cirrhosis happens, the chances of the liver healing, according to the doctor, are nil in Anthony's case.

Affirmations

Supportive statements by the housing case manager, when genuine, increase the client's confidence, readiness and ability to change. An affirmation can acknowledge discussion about change, attempts at change, and/or actual change accomplishments – including when that change has been maintained.

Affirmative statements that are too broad (“That is great”) or ingratiating (“I always knew you could do it”) must be avoided. The more specific you can be about what the individual is attempting to change and the situation/context in which it happened, the better.

Examples of types of affirmative statements that can be used in housing-based case management include:

“You showed a lot of [insert compliment/observation] in following your guest policy.”

“When you got that bad news [or be specific of what the news was] you handled it well without putting your housing at risk.”

“Your commitment to partying [drinking, using, dealing, etc.] in some place other than your apartment or near your apartment is great.”

“In spite of our meeting being a tough one last week [or specify date], your willingness to engage in conversation with me again today shows that you are serious about changing [specify thing/behavior that is changing].”

Now think of some affirmative statements you may make in response to the situations below:

Mark is still getting drunk most days, however, he is staying in his apartment when he does so and is drinking beer to get drunk instead of mouthwash.

Tamara has made each one of her classes over the last week even while one of her teenage sons was charged by the police for assault.

Dennis was facing noise complaints constantly because of loud music late at night. He has saved up enough money to buy headphones and is going out after your home visit today to purchase those headphones.

Reinforcing Self Confidence

Self-confidence comes about when the client realizes that they have the ability to make changes in their life, and that they have the wherewithal to do so. To reinforce self-confidence the housing case manager must observe a change that is occurring and then elicit a response from the client on why or how they were able to accomplish the change.

Examples of phrases that can be used to help reinforce self-confidence in housing based case management include:

“It looks like you have been working hard to keep the kitchen tidy. That is different than when you first moved in. How have you been able to do that?”

“When I did my follow up with the landlord to make sure she got her rent from you, she told me that she hasn’t had one noise complaint about your apartment in the last month. I knew you previously said you were going to work on that, but I had no idea you had been working so hard to make it a reality. Why did you go about making the changes and how did you do it?”

“Last week you weren’t sure if you wanted to go to the VA Medical Clinic and this past Monday you went. What changed your mind? How were you able to do it?”

“Telling Tyler that he can’t sleep on your floor was the right thing to do so that you weren’t violating your lease, even though he is your best friend. How were you able to make this change happen?”

Now think about how you can reinforce self-confidence in the following scenarios:

CeeCee and her boyfriend usually had arguments resulting in the police being called to her apartment at least two times per week. After telling you for months that she felt she needed to break up with him and take care of her own life, she ended her relationship with him a few days ago.

Ryan has been working really hard to schedule things to do each day that bring him happiness, but has been hesitant to take steps forward because he feels shy and is embarrassed by his facial tattoo. Yesterday he went out and got himself the community event calendar and is looking through it to pick activities to try.

Last week Annie wasn’t sure she could go a day without having a few beer in the evening, even though she felt too sleepy to read to her kids before they went to sleep. Over the past week there has only been one day where she has had a few beer, and that is when the kids were with her mother.

Balancing Decisions

Motivating someone to change can be made easier if the housing worker acknowledges that there is likely some real or perceived benefit that the individual has to the behavior in her/his life that will most likely benefit from change. The decisional balance can be seen as a scale where awareness is being raised to help the client measure the pros

and cons of her/his behavior. This can help stimulate change conversation and has proven to be effective at helping the client reflect on the benefits of change or to overcome ambivalence.

Here are some statements that are common in housing case management:

“What are the good things about being homeless? [Client answers] On the flipside, what are some less good things about being homeless?”

“What do you enjoy most about having parties at your apartment. [Client answers] And now, tell me what you are think are the less good things about having parties at your apartment.”

“What are the benefits of your daughter being taken from you? [Client answers] Okay, and tell me now what you think are not benefits about your daughter being taken from you.”

“What do you think are the good things about keeping your apartment clean? [Client answers] Looking at it another way, what are the less good things about keeping your apartment clean?”

For each situation below, outline how you may go about helping the client balance decisions:

Jerome has been issued an eviction notice for disrupting the reasonable enjoyment of other tenants in the building.

Sally’s psychiatrist has given her a final warning – miss one more appointment and he will drop her from his patient list.

Chester, for the second time in a month, has punched a hole in the drywall in his living room when frustrated after playing video games.

Normalizing

A normalizing statement is a motivational interviewing technique when the housing case manager is trying to help the client appreciate that change is difficult for a lot of people. The intent is not to make the client feel okay with not changing. Instead, it is supposed to help the client understand that it is not uncommon for people to have struggles. The housing case manager should help the client feel they are not alone in their experience or ambivalence.

Some common normalizing statements in housing case management can include:

“A lot of people have a hard time spending two nights in a row in their new apartment.”

“I have had a lot of clients tell me they feel the same way that you do about [be specific]. They want to change [behavior/situation] but find it really hard to do so.”

“It is safe to say that a lot of people [act a specific way/feel a certain way] when they have the first apartment they’ve had in years.”

“When you tell me [specify], it reminds me of at least [general number] that I have worked with over the years that have shared something similar. It wasn’t easy, but most of them were able to [specify change].”

Consider each of these situations and suggest a normalizing statement for each:

Doug started to cry when furniture was delivered to his home.

Chrissy has shared she feels like being homeless again on the days she wakes up and has nothing to do.

Having no money left by the third week of the month, Jacob says he feels pathetic.

Inspiring/Evoking Change Talk

Rather than providing advice or lecturing (which is proven not to work well) this strategy within Motivational Interviewing is focused on eliciting a response from the client about why a change may be personally important to them. The approach to inspiring the change talk can come about from different approaches: noting discrepancies; forward looking; provoking extremes; measuring importance, confidence and readiness; and, suggesting change when the client is having difficulty changing. Inspiring/Evoking Change Talk is proven to be effective for successful outcomes in the change process.

Some common Inspiring/Evoking Change Talk in housing case management:

“What makes you think you need to change [specify]? What will happen if you don’t change?”

“What would your life be like in [insert time period like 3 months, 6 months, a year, 3 years, etc] if you changed your [specify behavior]?”

*“Suppose you don’t change [specify], what is the worst thing that might happen?”
And if you made the change, what is the best thing you can think of that may happen?”*

“Think about just your current situation, and tell me the one thing you think is most important to change and why you think that is important.”

“How important is it to you to change [specify]? How would your life be different if you make the change happen? How confident are you to make this happen? How ready are you to start changing?”

“Tell me what changes you have made since the last time we met and why those changes are important to you.”

“What makes you think it is a good time to focus on changing [specify]?”

“You say you want to change [specify] in your life, yet when we meet it is clear that you are still doing [specify]. Explain that to me. Is the change actually something you want to do? What is getting in your way?”

Below are various client scenarios. For each, provide suggestions on how you might inspire or evoke change talk:

Barry has been approved for apprenticeship training on building maintenance, but called in sick on the first day he was supposed to be at the training site and has stated he doesn’t know if he wants to go tomorrow either.

Kaly has had a goal for two months to improve her social relationships and networks, but continues to hang out with the same small group of friends that are over to her apartment frequently, eat her food, and leave the place messy.

Tam has been prioritized for housing, and has been homeless for the better part of six years. He has missed six appointments in a row to go view potential apartment units.

Eddie has been housed for six months. He tells you that while he is nervous and scared he would like to start reducing his drinking or quitting altogether.

Reflective Listening

Reflective listening serves two primary purposes: it creates an environment to validate what clients are feeling/thinking about; and, it builds empathy. The Reflective Listening strategy is the opportunity for the housing case manager to form hypotheses through paraphrasing what they believe to be the client's intent, and then listen to see if the hypothesis is confirmed, corrected or disconfirmed. Reflective Listening statements should be short – and definitely shorter than the statement to which it may be responding. And remember that the intent is to create a hypothesis, not to summarize every small detail. Also, the language of the housing case manager should come across as a statement with a downward trail in the voice at the end, not upwards like a question.

Some examples of Reflective Listening statements used in housing case management:

“On the one hand I have heard you say [blank] and on the other hand [blank].”

“I get the sense that [blank]...”

“It sounds like when [blank] occurred that got you concerned about [blank] and made you interested in starting to change.”

“I have heard you say you want to change [blank] but you have concerns about [blank].”

“I have a feeling you feel pressure to change, but you aren’t sure you can succeed because [blank] happened when you tried in the past.”

Here are some statements and situations made by/encountered with clients. For each, outline some possible Reflective Listening statements:

“Bobby died in the park last week. I didn’t know him all that well, but it sure makes a guy think about stuff.”

“If I agree to participate in this program, I don’t want someone getting all into my business all the time. I need my space. I don’t need someone looking over my shoulder all the time. I don’t want to be homeless anymore, but I don’t want someone judging me all the time or telling me what I can or can’t do.”

Jamie used to participate in home visits. Once he got evicted and then re-housed he does not speak as much in home visits and uses nods, grunts or short yes-no answers.
