

# Research in Brief

## *The Motivational Interviewing Style* Volume I in MI Series

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**Key Words:** Motivational Interviewing, Evidence-based practices, recidivism, effective programs

### Summary/Conclusions

In this guide, published by the National Institute of Corrections, the authors define Motivational Interviewing (MI), discuss how MI fits into the discipline of corrections, and provide the reader with a description of MI techniques. The guide is of significant length, so this summary covers only one chapter. Subsequent Research in Briefs will summarize more information from the guide.

This Chapter, *The Motivational Interviewing Style*, covers the definition of MI and provides the basic concepts of motivational interviewing. The Chapter focuses mainly on conceptual ideas, rather than specific techniques, which are described in later chapters.

### Limitations of Information

Motivational Interviewing (MI) is a highly skilled set of techniques, which requires training, practice, and ongoing feedback. Although suggestions for ways to engage probationers are suggested, it is recommended the reader complete Motivational Interviewing training and have ongoing feedback to ensure optimal effectiveness.

**Caveat:** The information presented here is intended to summarize and inform readers of research and information relevant to probation work. It can provide a framework for carrying out the business of probation as well as suggestions for practical application of the material. While it may, in some instances, lead to further exploration and result in *future* decisions, it is not intended to prescribe policy and is not necessarily conclusive in its findings.

### Interviewing Style

This chapter defines Motivational Interviewing and how it facilitates change. The authors write, "Motivational Interviewing (MI) is a way of talking with offenders to build their internal motivation for change." The idea behind MI is that the probation officer (PO) can have a significant impact on the defendant's motivation. This approach can be brief but powerful. Results from research, by Hettema et al. and Rubak et al. (2005), strongly support the effectiveness of MI.

The chapter suggests MI is more of a style of interaction than a strategy, with four basic principles for success: 1) express empathy, 2) roll with resistance, 3) develop discrepancy, and 4) support self-efficacy. This approach requires the PO to listen closely, using the probationer's words to guide the interaction toward change. For those PO's who use a more confrontational or active approach, MI may appear passive. This is not the case. A PO skilled in MI is working hard, listening to the probationer to discover his values, strengths, and ambivalence.

MI facilitates change by reducing resistance, identifying discrepancy, and eliciting "change talk." When a good MI session is broken down, one will discover the PO has taken advantage of very specific language. This motivational speech can be divided "into five categories: desire, ability, reasons, need, and commitment." By recognizing these elements and using MI skills, the PO guides the probationer toward identifying a need for change. When this need is perceived to have come from the probationer, the more apt he is to implement the change.

### Practical Applications

- √ Express Empathy - You don't have to agree with the probationer's beliefs, but empathy demonstrates an understanding. It builds rapport and helps to create a positive environment.
- √ Roll with Resistance - Don't argue or tell the probationer what to do. "It's normal to have mixed feelings when thinking about change."
- √ Develop Discrepancy - Listen to what's important, then point out the difference between where the probationer wants to be versus where he is.
- √ Support Self-Efficacy - Support all positive changes, no matter how small.
- √ Elicit Change Talk - Guide interactions to provide a setting for the probationer to move toward change. Listen for motivational speech and focus on verbalizations in areas of "DARN-C":
  - Desire: A stated wish or desire to succeed.
  - Ability: A statement expressing the probationer has the ability to accomplish the stated goal or behavior change.
  - Reasons: The probationer provides a reason why the change might be beneficial or necessary.
  - Need: A stronger expression for change than reason.
  - Commitment: When a probationer makes a commitment to change, the more likely it is to happen. Although "I'll try" is an encouraging statement, guiding a probationer to "I will," will produce more action.

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