

Research in Brief

Motivating Offenders to Change Volume III in MI Series

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Building Motivation for Change

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 provides ways to move an offender toward change, with strategies to guide conversations resulting in behavior change. The article has suggestions to encourage positive talk and get the probationer to think about change. There are also suggestions on ways to connect talk to action.

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 the MI 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. Some of its limitations are described above.

There are two phases of motivation: building motivation and strengthening commitment. This article provides numerous suggestions for a probation officer (PO) to build motivation, then move the probationer to act.

Building Motivation - It is most effective to address just a couple topics at a time with the probationer. Assessments may focus your topic areas, in early supervision, while progress or problems may focus your topic areas during supervision. Once a focus is selected, the PO looks for and emphasizes things that motivate. The best motivators are internal to the probationer, as opposed to external punishment. Listen for important things in the probationer's life, such as family, work, religion, attitudes.

Strengthening Commitment - In the second phase of motivation, the PO tries to elicit specific commitments to change. It is important not to pressure the probationer into a weak commitment, as it probably will not result in follow-through. Instead, return to the first phase to continue building motivation. However, for the motivated probationer, the PO uses action questions, such as, "What's the next step?" or "Where do we go from here?" For motivated probationers without solutions, the PO can give advice without telling the probationer what to do. For example, if transportation is an issue, the PO should avoid giving suggestions without asking for permission before offering solutions. The PO might also try to give more than one option, or preface advice with permission to disagree: "This may or may not

work for you, but you could try..." Help the probationer connect talk to action by settling on a plan. Use the case plan worksheet to plan the action, or have the probationer write out the answers to What? When? Where? Why? Who? and How? The more concrete the plan, the better the odds of it succeeding.

Practical Applications

Phase I

- ✓ Ask questions that raise interest in talking about change: "What concerns do you have about your drug use?"
- ✓ Follow up on productive talk. If the probationer says treatment might help but gives three reasons why he can't attend, focus only on why he thinks treatment may be beneficial.
- ✓ Ask forward-focused questions. Instead of "Why can't you?" try asking "How can you?"
- ✓ Use scaled questions. "On a scale of 1 to 10, how important is treatment?" Low to moderate scores can be addressed by asking why the number isn't lower. Let the probationer argue for change.

Phase II

- ✓ Ask action questions. "Now what?" "What do you want to do next?"
- ✓ Give advice without dictating. Try asking for permission, "Would it be OK to give you some ideas?" Or give options, such as, "There are a couple things that might work in this situation."

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