



OARS: The Art and Science of Uncomfortable Conversations

Glossary of Terms and Definitions

Accurate Empathy—The skill of perceiving and reflecting back another person’s meaning; one of four aspects of acceptance as a component of MI spirit.

Affirmation—One of four aspects of acceptance as a component of MI spirit, by which the counselor accentuates the positive, seeking and acknowledging a person’s strengths and efforts.

Affirming—An interviewer statement valuing a positive client attribute or behavior.

Ambivalence—The simultaneous presence of competing motivations for and against change.

Change Talk—Any client speech that favors movement toward a particular change goal.

Client-centered Counseling—See Person-centered Counseling.

Closed Question—A question that asks for yes/no, a short answer, or specific information.

Collaboration—See *Partnership*.

Confront-(1) as a goal: to come face to face with one’s current situation and experience; (2) as a practice: an MI-inconsistent interviewer response such as warning, disagreeing, or arguing.

Directing—A natural communication style that involves telling, leading, providing advice, information, or instruction.

Empathy—The extent to which an interviewer communicates accurate understanding of the client’s perspectives and experience; most commonly manifested as reflection.



Engaging—The first of four fundamental processes in MI, the process of establishing a mutually trusting and respectful helping relationship.

Evocation—One of four central components of the underlying spirit of MI by which the interviewer elicits the client’s own perspectives and motivation.

Evoking—The third of four fundamental processes of MI, which involves eliciting the person’s own motivation for a particular change.

Focusing—The second of four fundamental processes of MI, which involves clarifying a particular goal or direction for change.

Following—A natural communication style that involves listening to and following along with the other’s experience without inserting one’s own material.

Guiding—A natural communication style for helping others find their way, combining some elements of both directing and following.

Motivational Interviewing—

- *Lay definition:* A collaborative conversation style for strengthening a person’s own motivation and commitment to change.
- *Clinical definition:* A person-centered counseling style for addressing the common problem of ambivalence about change.
- *Technical definition:* A collaborative, goal-oriented style of communication with particular attention to the language of change, designed to strengthen personal motivation for and commitment to a specific goal by eliciting and exploring the person’s own reasons for change within an atmosphere of acceptance and compassion.

OARS—An acronym for four basic client-centered communication skills: Open-ended questions, Affirmations, Reflective Listening, and Summarizing.

Open Ended Question—A question that offers the client broad latitude and choice in how to respond; compare with Closed Question or “Yes or No” Question.

Overshooting—A reflection that adds intensity to the content or emotion expressed by a client. See also Amplified Reflection.



Partnership—One of four central components of the underlying spirit of MI by which the interviewer functions as a partner or companion, collaborating with the client’s own expertise.

Permission—Obtaining by the interviewer of client assent before providing advice or information.

Person-centered Counseling—A therapeutic approach introduced by psychologist Carl Rogers in which people explore their own experience within a supportive, empathic, and accepting relationship; also called client-centered counseling.

Reflective Listening—The skill of “active” listening whereby the counselor seeks to understand the client’s subjective experience, offering reflections as guesses about the person’s meaning. See also *Accurate Empathy*.

Reflection—An interviewer statement intended to mirror meaning (explicit or implicit) of preceding client speech.

Reframe—An interviewer statement that invites the client to consider a different interpretation of what has been said.

Resistance—A term previously used in MI, now deconstructed into its components: sustain talk and discord.

Righting Reflex—The natural desire of helpers to set things right, to prevent harm and promote client welfare.

Self-Disclosure—Sharing something of oneself that is true when there is good reason to expect that it will be helpful to the client.

Self-Efficacy—A client’s perceived ability to successfully achieve a particular goal or perform a particular task.

Stages of Change—Within the transtheoretical model of change, a sequence of steps through which people pass in the change process: precontemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, and maintenance.

Summary—A reflection that draws together content from two or more prior client statements.



Sustain Talk—Any client speech that favors status quo rather than movement toward a change goal.

Transtheoretical Model—A complex model of change developed by James Prochaska and Carlo DiClemente, one part of which describes stages of change.

Undershooting—A reflection that diminishes or understates the intensity of the content or emotion expressed by a client.

Working Alliance—The quality of the collaborative relationship between client and counselor, which tends to predict client retention and outcome.