



Motivational Interviewing (MI) FAQ

How will I know if MI is for me?

MI is an evidence-based communication style shown to enhance engagement, increase readiness, reduce tension, and guide conversations to support positive behaviour change. It was originally developed for use with problem drinking, but has been expanded to general mental health use since. MI recognises that change is not easy and emphasises that thinking about change can be just as important as the action of change itself.

MI may not be for you if you are already highly motivated to change, as there are other types of more action-oriented therapies that would be more suitable.

What can I expect on my first visit with a MI therapist?

At your first visit, you and the MI therapist will discuss:

- The process of change
- Stages of change and where you may be at that point
- Potential consequences to your current behaviour
- Whether MI is a suitable treatment approach for you

By the end of this first visit, you and the therapist will have developed a general understanding of your motivations to change and start treatment planning to address your difficulties.

How can I get the most out of MI between sessions?

MI is a directive treatment approach that requires one to commit to doing things differently. Research has shown that changing ones behaviour can directly influence their motivations to change, even if one does not initially plan to change. It involves creative problem solving and behavioural experiments to be completed as homework between sessions.

How long does MI last?

MI is a short-term, focused treatment approach. Generally, sessions span 3-5 sessions. However, the length of treatment can vary, depending on the severity and complexity of a client's issues.

How frequent are the sessions?

MI usually starts out with weekly sessions. As treatment progresses, sessions may be spaced further apart, such as every two weeks or month. Once clients have finished a course of MI, it is common for them to return for occasional "booster" sessions to keep up their progress, deal with any setbacks and prevent relapse of problems.



Do I need to prepare for MI sessions?

Preparing to discuss a specific problem at each session helps you get the most out of MI. Coming prepared also means considering your motivations (ie. importance and confidence) and being prepared to focus on “change talk”. This helps to build a therapeutic relationship between you and your therapist, improving communication.

Will the MI therapist be able to understand and appreciate my own unique background?

MI is a non-judgemental approach and is an effective treatment regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, culture, sexual orientation or social economic status. MI therapists are trained to recognise the importance of cultural values and to adapt their treatments to meet culturally unique needs. They are trained, for example, to be aware of:

- their own personal values and biases and how these may influence their relationship with the client
- how certain cultural processes may influence the relationship between the therapist and client

As a client in MI, you should feel safe to openly discuss, aspects of your culture or work for example, and that your treatment will be delivered in a manner that is consistent with these values.

Is MI an effective treatment for children and adolescents?

MI has been found to be particularly useful for use with children and adolescents, whom are more problem-focused and motivated to change. The content and pacing of the therapy is adjusted to be appropriate for the child’s level of development.

What are the common barriers that come up in MI?

Barriers to treatment can include:

- perceived stigma associated with mental health treatment
- difficulty staying accountable for their actions
- difficulty in reflecting on thoughts
- difficulty tolerating heightened emotions
- not completing homework

The therapist will work with you to reduce these barriers and will also offer strategies that you can use to overcome barriers.

How can I stay well after finishing MI?

A major goal of MI is for you to become your own therapist and to continue to practise the skills even after you are feeling better. You may also wish to return for follow-up or “booster” sessions from time to time. MI aims to operationalize one’s motivations for change, and ensure they are consistent with your values. By doing so, clients will naturally increase the frequency of positive behaviours over time.