

# Motivational Interviewing

## Foundational Considerations

### Working Collaboratively with Parents and Caregivers

#### What's in a name?

##### **Mo-ti·va-tion·al** /,mōdə`vāSH(ə) nəl/

Motivation is generally defined as an internal force in organisms that initiates and sustains action toward a particular goal. MI defines it more simply: whatever actually gets someone moving. And while the force itself is internal, the prompts to that force can be both internal (I am hungry...I look in the refrigerator) and external (I see a commercial for French fries...I look in the refrigerator).

##### **In-ter-view-ing** /`in(t)ər,vyoo ing/

Interview is generally defined as a structured dialogue in which information is learned from a person. MI refines this general definition, and differentiates it from 'having a conversation' – where people have similar roles and responsibilities. The 'interviewer' in MI, though, takes a guiding role with the responsibility of asking particular questions, listening with curiosity, and learning from the parent.

##### **Mo-ti·va-tion·al In-ter-view-ing**

Motivational Interviewing (MI) is a particular, guided interview intended to assist a parent discover their own motivations about change. It is not about installing motivations, but rather it is about evoking from the parent their own reasons for change. Installed motivations are not likely to be started, and less likely to be sustained. A person's own motivations for change, though, are much more likely to be started and sustained.

#### **Ambivalence**

What gets in the way of change? Change is hard and the idea of trying to change can be scary. Being hesitant to make a change, wondering if the trouble is worth it, and even lacking confidence that it can be done are all quite normal experiences. The 'old way' of doing things may be causing problems, but at least it is familiar. So, when thinking about trying a change, many parents experience feelings of *ambivalence* – or having mixed, even contradictory, feelings. It is wanting things to stay the same and change at the same time. It can seem quite illogical. And it is a perfectly normal human experience.

Ambivalence is a normal, even expected, experience, and is not a sign of resistance, stupidity or pathology.

Without the support of guided explorations about their own reasons for change, parents can remain stuck in ambivalence for a long time.

#### Working with Parents (not 'fixing' them)



MI is guided by the spirit of *Partnering* with parents, *Accepting* them without judgement, engaging with *Compassion*, and *Empowering* autonomous choice and direction. It strives to guide parents' own ideas and motivations about change, increasing the chances that healthy changes will be started and maintained. Any helping professional, though, can get impatient for change to start and move from a guiding role to a directive role. This inclination to argue for change, to try to persuade the parent or to 'make it happen', is called the *Fixing Reflex*. These intentions are likely good, but also likely to have the opposite effect – by placing the parent on the defensive and making them more apt to support the opposite position, that is – not to change

## Going with the Flow: The Four Tasks in MI

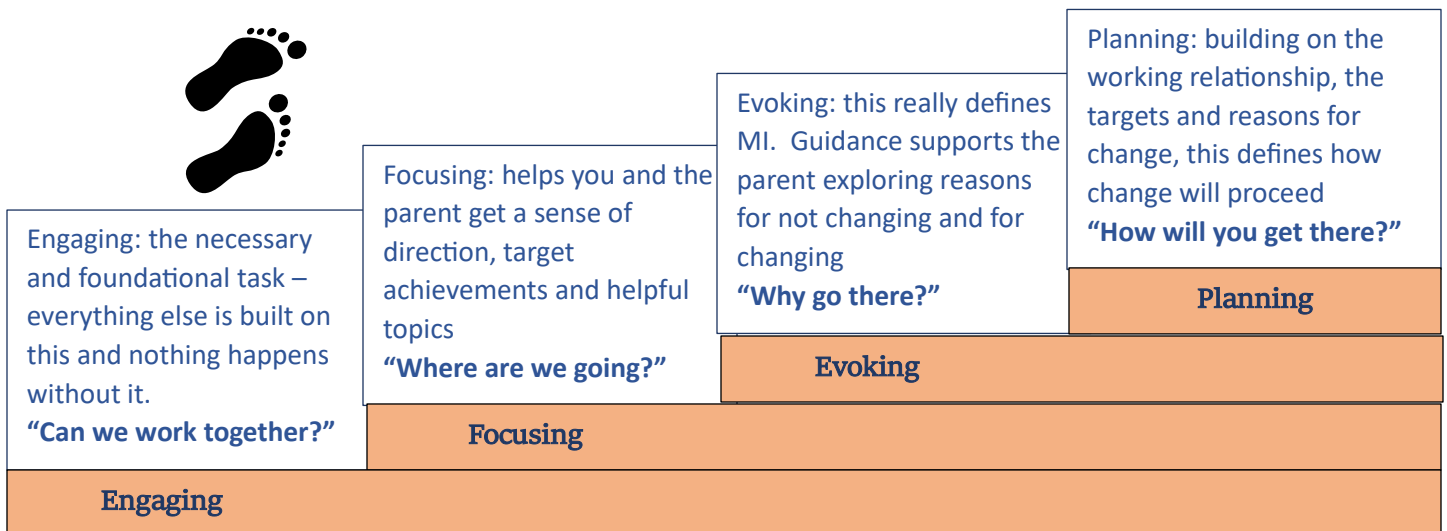
Engaging

Focusing

Evoking

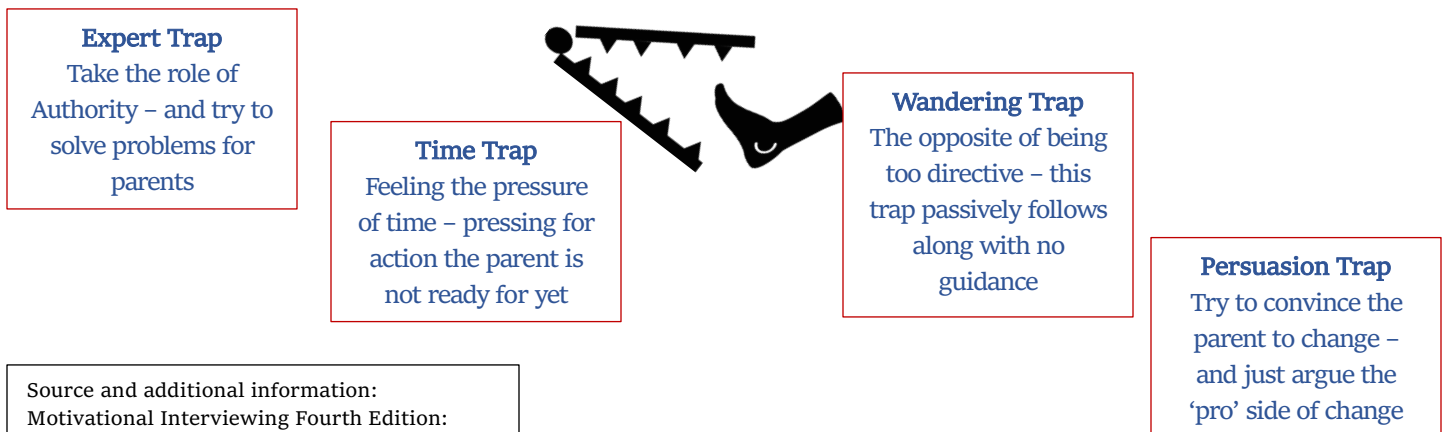
Planning

All relationships have a flow, and this is especially true in an MI relationship. In MI, this flow can be generally considered as tasks that predominate during different points in the guided conversational relationship. It may seem like these tasks are linear, that is, like following a line, as one happens first followed by the next and so on. However, while they do occur in order – starting with Engaging, followed by Focusing, then Evoking and Planning – one does not expire, or end, as it moves into the next. Rather, these tasks build on each other like stairsteps. Engaging is necessary at the start, and it blends into Focusing. Focusing and Engaging can then support Evoking, and the blend of these three eventually support Planning. And the process is not ‘One-Way Only’. Parents may move up and down the stairs as change is explored.



### Some Traps on these steps....

The Spirit and Tasks of MI follow a Guiding Path – that is, not being too directive and not just passively following along. There are some common traps on this path, though, that threaten successful and sustained engagement with parents – and therefore threaten the entire relationship.



Source and additional information:  
Motivational Interviewing Fourth Edition:  
Helping People Change and Grow by W. Miller  
and S. Rollnick (2023). Guildford Press.