

MI with Adolescents and Young Adults

Study notes on Naar-King and Suarez (2011)

Source	Use it	Pages
Naar-King & Suarez	Study or supervision	Four

Notes compiled by Jesse Jonesberg. Page numbers refer to the book. YP = young person.

Developmental considerations

Abstract thinking	From about age 11 or 12, young people are more able to talk about ambivalence, long-term goals and values. Younger children do better with short-term, concrete goals.
Information processing	Less life experience can mean more sway from the people around them.
Identity	Accurate empathy matters a lot while identity is forming.
Emerging adulthood	New roles, and a higher chance of risky behavior.
Autonomy	Emotional and behavioral independence is a key part of growing up.
Family and friends	Acceptance or rejection by peers weighs heavily. Find out whose feedback the YP values.
Big emotions	When emotions run high, lean into support and focus less on change talk for a while.

Spirit of MI

Autonomy	Young people push away when autonomy is violated. Support it even within limits set by adults: they can talk with their parents about the rules, or break them and deal with the reaction. The choice is theirs.
Collaboration	Support autonomy while acknowledging pressure from authority figures. Help the YP find their own solutions.
Evocation	Solving problems for young people puts them in a passive role. Draw out their own experience and reasons.

Principles

- Express empathy** Many young people have strained or conditional relationships with adults. Empathy is essential for growing intrinsic motivation.
- Roll with resistance** When freedoms are limited, especially when treatment is mandated, rebellion is a natural response. **Stop:** reflect on the situation and their experience. **Drop:** let go of the argument. **Roll:** express understanding and emphasize choice.
- Support self-efficacy** Hold real hope and belief that the YP can succeed.

Getting started

- Opening** Let them know this may be different: you're not here to tell them what to change, but to understand what's going on and help with changes they choose. If they're doubtful, emphasize choice. Talking about "young people" rather than "you" can lower defenses.
- Agenda setting** Offer a menu: "Would you prefer to talk first about X, Y, or what's going on at school?" Visual tools help.
- Typical day** "Take me through yesterday." Start with less risky topics and treat the YP as the expert on their life.
- Ask-Tell-Ask** Ask permission, share two or three sentences at most (for example, about confidentiality), then ask what they think.

OARS with young people

- Reflections** Offering a reflection is like handing over the steering wheel. Young people often feel unheard, so reflections are usually welcome. Lean toward feelings, skip "cool" metaphors, vary your stems and watch your tone.
- Questions** Take the spotlight off them: "What are other people concerned about?" "What do people hassle you about?" Keep questions curious. Multiple choice can help; always include "other."
- Affirmations** Genuine and specific, well timed, and without "I think..."
- Summaries** Connect the dots for them.

Resistance and discord

The authors see resistance as a normal part of development, showing up as resistance talk, sustain talk or not talking. With young people, less sustain talk may predict change more than more change talk does. A good guide never gets too far ahead (p. 40).

- Omission reflections** Useful when a YP isn't talking: reflect what you see.
- Amplified reflections** Use an honest, empathetic tone, never sarcasm. A stem like "It seems like..." makes clear you're not agreeing.

Personal control	Find the choice even in restrictive situations; it eases power struggles.
Pros and cons	Explore the good things about the status quo, then the not-so-good. Frame goals positively (“staying clean” rather than “quitting drugs”).
Agreement with a twist	Validate their view and offer something new: “Your parents are driving you crazy. I wonder if there’s a way to make all that attention more supportive.”
Shifting focus	Steer around stumbling blocks, and offer to set aside topics they don’t want to discuss.

Change talk

Their reasons for change may differ from yours or other adults’. Stay non-judgmental; what matters is their motivation (p. 49).

Reflect it	Using “you” is fine when reflecting change talk. End double-sided reflections on change.
Ask about it	Evocative questions, without rushing to plans or steps.
Direct questions	“If you decided to make a change, what would it be?”
Imagining	Look back, look ahead, explore extremes. Drawing or acting out scenes can help.
Values	“I know you really want to be independent. I wonder how taking care of your health fits with that.” A values card sort helps.
Strengths	Past successes, what others say they’re good at, your own observations. Try an affirmations card sort.
Rulers	“Why a 5 and not a 2? What would it take to get to a 7?”
Feedback	Factual, personal information can help, offered with Ask-Tell-Ask.

Commitment and planning

Listen for it	Change talk growing stronger, sustain talk fading. Sustain talk may rise near commitment; acknowledge it and keep focusing on change.
Testing the waters	A summary plus an evocative question can open planning. If emotions are high, plan later.
The plan	A goal, steps, likely barriers and ways around them. Keep it specific and sized to the time you have. Written or spoken, whatever fits.
Not ready yet	A small change, thinking about it, or revisiting later are all valid. So is skipping planning for now.
Follow-up	Review the plan, celebrate successes, empathize with setbacks, and update the plan as things change.

Fitting MI into practice

- Brief settings** Such as ER visits or HIV counseling: name the target behavior, set the agenda together, use OARS. Time may require planning before full readiness.
- With other treatments** MI can reduce ambivalence and strengthen commitment to CBT tasks and other approaches.
- External motivators** Look for places to offer choice, ask permission, and let the YP take the lead.

The book's later chapters cover alcohol, cannabis, the juvenile justice system, sexual health, smoking, mental health, eating concerns, chronic illness, groups, schools, families, ethics, and growing proficiency in MI.

Source

Naar-King, S., & Suarez, M. (2011). Motivational interviewing with adolescents and young adults. Guilford Press.