Motivational Interviewing (MI)
Rolling with Resistance

What is resistance?
- Resistance is what happens when we expect or push for change when the client is not ready for that change.
- Conscious or unconscious defenses against change.
- Clients who exhibit resistance are less likely to change.

Why does resistance occur?
- It arises as a normal, expected product of the interaction.
- When resistance emerges, there are good reasons the client is not ready to change in the way we are asking.
  - The reasons may not be clear to us or to the client, but they exist.
  - Ignoring them gets us nowhere.

There is no way to make people like change.
You can only make them feel less threatened by it.
Frederick Hayes

What are some of the types of resistance we encounter?
- **Issue resistance**
  - Related to a specific issue—such as smoking cessation, changing a dietary pattern, physical activity, etc.
- **Relational resistance**
  - Has to do with the relationship between you and the client.
  - There is discord in the interactions.
  - You can tell this by comments made:
    - You don’t understand.
    - You can’t help me.

How do we know when the client is being resistant?

**Signs of resistance:**
- The client may interrupt you.
- The client seems distracted (looking at watch, cell phone, etc.).
- The client may get defensive.
How do we respond to resistance?

What doesn’t work---Inappropriate responses:

- **Persuasion**
  - It’s tempting to try to be helpful by persuading the client about:
    - The importance or urgency of the problem being addressed.
    - The benefits of changing a behavior.
  - Persuasion is not an effective method for resolving ambivalence and will probably backfire on you.
  - It usually only increases client resistance and decreases the probability of change.

- **Righting reflex**
  - As health care professionals, we use our corrective lens.
  - We want to change client behavior and we want to make things right, so we argue or push back with the client.
  - Since we are arguing for the change side of ambivalence, this usually causes the client to keep voicing sustain talk (the reasons not to change).
  - With MI, the practitioner doesn’t try to make things right or doesn’t try to change the client’s behavior.
  - Change comes from the client’s intrinsic motivation.
  - We have to acknowledge that the righting reflex is present and ask ourselves to override it.
  - We have to ask it to step aside and focus on the person in front of us.

Strategies to use--Appropriate responses

With issue resistance, use key strategies of Motivational Interviewing (MI):

- **Express empathy**
  - Empathize with the concern and explore.
  - Non-judgmental.
  - Assures client is being heard and understood.
  - Shows you recognize barriers the client faces.

- **Develop discrepancy**
  - Help the client see that some behaviors don’t mesh with ultimate goals that are important/valuable.
  - Help the client see the difference between her core values and her behavior(s).
  - Define most important goals.
  - Change won’t occur without discrepancy.
  - Create gap between where the client is and where she wants to be.
  - Allows the client to realize current behavior isn’t leading to goal and be more open to change.
• **Support self-efficacy** -
  • Client’s self-belief in ability to change.
  • Promote belief in client’s ability to do the skill needed.
  • Focus on past successes and skills and strengths client has or can easily learn.
  • Promote self-esteem and build confidence.

• **Use change talk** -
  • Talk that moves the client in direction of change.
  • As opposed to sustain talk, which keeps status quo (client speech that favors status quo).
  • Goal is to move the client to change talk.

**With relational resistance** -
• Respect the resistance and roll with it.
• Sometimes may have to apologize or shift the conversation.
• Always want to express empathy.
• Avoid argumentation!
• Let go of the expert model.

*How do we roll with resistance?*

• Resistance often stems from fear of change.
• Use when the client is defensive about change.
• When encountering resistance to change, don’t confront it directly.
• Reframe it and reflect it in a way that decreases resistance.
• Avoid arguing for change.
• Explore positive and negative consequences of change or continuing current behavior.
  • Help the client explore pros and cons of change and pros and cons of continuing the current behavior.
• Always remember to focus on the problem-NOT the client.
• Encountering resistance is a sign you should shift your approach.

*How can we decrease the likelihood of evoking resistance?*

• Reflect what we hear without judgment.
  • Allows the client to feel understood.
  • Use double-sided reflection. Reflect both sides of the ambivalence. You are reflecting what you hear the client say about the reason not to change and the reason to change.
• Emphasize personal choice and control.
• Track closely a client’s readiness.
• Introduce behavior change as an experiment.
What to say when we hear resistance:

- Reflect the resistant statement:
  - You don't like this idea.
- Reflect the tone of what you are hearing:
  - You seem to feel hopeless.
  - You're not happy about...
- Reflect ambivalence:
  - On the one hand you want... and on the other you don’t think you can ...
- Acknowledge the resistance process:
  - We seem to be arguing.
  - I’ve gotten us off track here.
- Support choice/control:
  - It's up to you.
  - You’re the one in charge here.
- You can do several of these sequentially:
  - You don’t like this idea of joining a gym. It is your choice.

Take home points

The more simple and direct your response, the more effective it will be.

It’s easy to revert to the righting reflex.

- When we encounter resistant statements or behavior, it is easy to fall into a pattern of arguing or to push back.

Rolling with resistance and skillfully working to elicit the client’s own motivation to change are more effective.

- You may think you are drawing attention to the resistance when you want to minimize it. However...
- Rolling with resistance techniques reduce the likelihood that the client will continue in a resistant stance.

We don’t have a lot of time to interact with clients.

- We need to ask instead of tell.
- By listening more and talking less, it actually saves us time.
- Listening lets clients feel you are actually spending more time with them.

We have to let go of the expert model and become more patient-centered.

- We have all this knowledge and we may think we know what is best for the client.
- It’s critical that we learn to let go if we are going to be successful with MI.

How we as providers respond to client resistance is a big determining factor in the outcome of our interaction with that client and the ability to help the client move toward behavior change.