

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.