



Effective Communication Techniques to Support Motivational Interviewing

Effective Communication Techniques: Open-Ended Questions and Reflective Listening

Successful use of motivational interviewing can be enhanced by the use of open-ended questions and reflective listening. This section provides examples of each of these techniques.

Examples of Closed-Ended Questions

- “Would you like to...? (something specific)”
- “Can I...?”
- “Would it be better if you...?”
- “Don’t you think you should...?” (Leading questions can sound judgmental)
- “Were you scared that...?”
- “Why don’t you...?”
- “Do you like your new psychiatrist?”

An Open-Ended Question is One That:

- Establishes an atmosphere of acceptance and trust by defining your role as one who listens.
- Encourages the speaker to do most of the talking.
- Encourages the speaker to explore her/his problem.
- Cannot be answered by a “yes,” “no” or other short answer.

Examples of Open-Ended Questions

- “What’s going on?”
- “What is the problem?”
- “How are you feeling about that?”
- “What is it that you would like to discuss?”
- “In what way might I be helpful?”
- “How do you feel about your new psychiatrist?”

Reflective listening is a skill used to help motivate people. While listening involves keeping quiet and hearing what a person has to say, reflective listening involves responding to a person to clarify their meaning. To do this well we must actively select what we want to reflect, with the goal of building motivation for change.

Why Use Reflective Listening Skills?

- Most statements have multiple meanings.
- Reflective listening is a way of checking, rather than assuming that you know what is meant.
- Reflective listening helps people think things through on their own.
- Reflective listening helps people feel understood.

How to Listen Reflectively

- When a person speaks, he or she is trying to communicate a meaning. This is coded into words, often imperfectly. The listener has to hear the words accurately and then decode their meaning.



- The listener forms a reasonable guess as to what the person means and gives voice to this guess in the form of a statement.
- It should be in the form of a statement rather than a question, since questions distance the speaker from his or her experience.

Examples of Clarifying Statements Include:

- “I want to make sure that I’m understanding this correctly.”
- “I’m going to try and review the main points we’ve discussed so far.”
- “It sounds like your primary concern is...”
- “What I hear is...”
- “Please correct me if I’m wrong...”

The speaker then has the opportunity to validate, elaborate or change what he or she meant.