



**Workshop Description:** This workshop supports youth program staff in developing and practicing effective communication skills in youth program settings. Successful implementation of this workshop will ultimately help youth program staff to reflect on how they support youth's communication skills and how they use communication to further support the positive development of youth within the program.

This workshop guide will ask participants to examine and reflect on their communication strategies to better assist youth in their development. This workshop guide and all others within the Effective Communication series are intended to lead to building skills in youth program staff that help address unhealthy or negative behaviors and better assist youth in their development.

**Preparation Time:** The preparation time for this workshop is approximately 15 to 20 minutes. This preparation time should include reading background information on the Effective Communication and Positive Youth Development website and in this workshop guide, collecting materials, and gathering any additional information you may need.

**Instruction Time:** It will take approximately 65-70 minutes to complete all activities within this guide. If you do not have time for the full workshop, only use the most relevant activities to make the workshop fit within your timeframe or split the workshop into multiple sessions. Be sure to keep the reflection portion of the activities and workshop as this is where staff should consider how the activities and knowledge apply to their work.

**Materials:**

- Printed copies of the Handout: *OARS Observation Form* (one for each participant)
- Flip chart paper, white board, or laptop and projector

**Preparation Instructions:** You should read the content related to this topic on the Effective Communication and Positive Youth Development website, specifically the content related to Effective Communication and Youth Program Staff. In addition, you should review the background information in this workshop guide, gather all necessary materials, and prepare for the activities.

In this series of workshops, youth program staff will learn skills that build on one another in a specific sequence. We recommend you complete this set of workshops the workshops in the following order:

1. *Understanding Effective Communication,*
2. *Effective Communication and Youth Development Factors,*
3. *Effective Communication Strategy: Active Listening*
4. *Effective Communication Strategy: Clear Expectations and Direction,*
5. *Understanding Stages of Change and Motivational Interviewing,*
6. *Understanding Change Talk,*
7. *Motivational Interviewing Strategies,*
8. *Practicing Motivational Interviewing*



### Knowledge: Effective Communication and Youth Program Staff

Sometimes youth exhibit unhealthy or harmful behaviors or express a desire to adopt new healthy behaviors. One technique, called motivational interviewing, can be used to help youth adjust behaviors and at the same time drive the process of change. This technique uses both effective communication skills and our understanding of how behaviors change to engage individuals in conversations to reconcile their behavior with their goals. Motivational interviewing is a person-centered approach to behavior change that reinforces positive youth development, autonomy, agency, youth voice, and accountability. At its core, motivational interviewing is a communication strategy that combines active-listening and facilitated decision-making to promote better choices and positive change.<sup>109, 110</sup>

Although motivational interviewing takes practice to perfect, it is a useful tool for youth program staff to use when working with youth as it supports self-efficacy and strengthens adult youth relationships. It can also be used to support prosocial norms, the adoption of healthy behaviors, decision making, and critical thinking. Motivational interviewing works best in an environment that practices positive youth development and fosters supportive adult/youth relationships. This technique fits well within a program that focuses on youth's strengths and goals and tries to help them feel motivated to engage in positive change.<sup>111</sup>

As noted earlier, motivational interviewing is complex. To be truly successful a youth program staff must keep some key components in mind. The youth program staff's mindset is one component and describes what guides all of their interactions. This mindset is often called the *Spirit* of motivational interviewing. Youth program staff approach interactions with compassion, acceptance, evocation, and partnership and help to build rapport and an alliance with the youth on any subject (whether related to behavior change or not.) Another component is often called the *Principles* of motivational interviewing. These principles guide how youth program staff work with youth and guide youth's internal motivation for change. They include express empathy, develop discrepancy, roll with resistance, and support self-efficacy. These principles help staff decide which strategy to use to support the youth as they discover their internal motivation. A third component of motivational interviewing has to do with understanding ambivalence, resistance, and discord. This component requires the staff to use active-listening skills to listen for '*change talk*' or the youth's expression of desire, ability, reason, or need to change. The final component is a set of strategies represented by the acronym *OARS* and involves program staff using open-questions, affirmations, reflective listening, and summaries to guide conversations with youth and help them to discover their internal motivation to adopt or change behaviors.

Although there have been no empirical studies of motivational interviewing use in youth programs, motivational interviewing demonstrates promise as a tool for staff who work with youth<sup>112, 113, 114</sup> and who are tasked with applying communication strategies that help to manage youth's behavior and overall experience within a youth program.

#### Objectives:

- Learn how to employ motivational interviewing strategies to improve staff's ability to support youth development



**Introduction (5 minutes):**

- Briefly summarize the content you covered in the previous Workshops: *Understanding Stages of Change and Motivational Interviewing* and *Motivational Interviewing Skills*.
  - What to say: “In the previous workshops we learned about the Stages of Change and explored the spirit and key aspects of motivational interviewing. We also started learning about how to use open-questions, affirmations, reflections, and summaries or OARS to practice motivational interviewing. Today we are going to practice using these skills some more.”
- Transition into Prior Knowledge activity:
  - What to say: “To start, we are going see what you remember about the stages of change and concepts that make up the spirit of motivational interviewing.”

**Prior Knowledge (10 minutes):**

- Write the five stages of change on a flip chart or whiteboard. Ask the participants if they can remember the signs/indicators of each of the stages. Record their responses on the paper/board so participants can see.

Instructors Note: The following chart lists the stages of change and some common indicators as discussion prompts.

Stage	Signs/Indicators
Precontemplation	Not aware, not recognized
Contemplation	Aware, but ambivalent
Preparation	Intent on taking action
Action	Actively modifying behavior
Maintenance	Sustaining new behavior new behavior

- Next, write the four components of the spirit of motivational interviewing on a flip chart or whiteboard. Ask the participants to help you define each component.

Instructors Note: The following chart lists the components of the spirit of motivational interviewing and some suggestions for definitions.

Component	Suggestions for Definition
Compassion	Demonstrate concern and awareness of other’s distress, suffering, or misfortune
Acceptance	The act of agreement or believing in an idea, opinion, or explanation
Evocation	The action of bringing forth a feeling, memory, image, or thought to the conscious mind
Partnership	The association of two or more people who work together in the same activity for a common end

- Next, write the four motivational interviewing strategies on a flip chart or whiteboard. Ask the participants to help you define each strategy.

Instructors Note: The following chart lists the motivational interviewing strategies and some suggestions for definitions.

Strategy	Suggestions for Definition
Open-ended questions	questions that are not easily answered with a yes/no/or other one word response (i.e., OK)
Affirmations	statements that highlight a person's resources
Reflective listening	active listening, not righting reflex. Hear the content and add the emotion
Summarizing	reviewing what people say

- Finally, ask the participants if there is anything they are unsure of in regards to any of the stages, components, or strategies or if there is anything they want to learn through this workshop. Again, record responses on a flip chart or whiteboard.

**Activities:**

**Activity: *Practicing OARS* (45 minutes)**

- Describe the *Practicing OARS* activity:
  - What to say: "In this activity, you will practice employing all parts of the motivational interview strategy with a given topic."
- Lead the *Practicing OARS* activity:
  - Divide participants into groups of 3 or 4.
  - Provide each participant a copy of the Handout: *OARS Observation Form*
  - Ask the groups to choose a speaker, listener, and an observer.
  - Instruct the group in the following tasks:
    - The speaker will begin by saying, "I feel two ways about \_\_\_\_\_ (and choose a subject)"
    - The listener will use OARS strategies (open-ended questions, affirmations, reflective listening, and summary statements) to respond to the speaker.
    - The observer will use the Handout: *OARS Observation Form* to track the types and frequency of the OARS strategies the listener uses.
    - Allow about 10 minutes for the dialogue between the speaker and the listener and about 5 minutes for the observer to debrief the conversation.
    - Switch roles so each member of the group can be the speaker, listener, and observer at least once.
  - Process the activity as a large group.
    - How did you start?
    - Explain how you decided to use an affirmation, open question, reflection, or summary?
    - Tell me about the point in the discussion where you as the listener struggled. What do you think caused that?
    - How do you see using these strategies with youth in the program?
    - What are some topics youth may bring up that may require you to get help either to address the behavior or for the safety of the youth or their friends?

**Reflection and Recap (5 minutes):**



## Effective Communication Workshop Practicing Motivational Interviewing

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- Return to the participants' responses gathered at the start of the workshop (see Prior Knowledge activity). Ask the participants what they learned during the course of the workshop and record the information on the same paper or a new blank page if there is no room. Draw attention to topics that were on the list generated earlier, new topics, and questions that were answered.
- Ask follow-up questions, such as “What part of the activity made you realize that?” and “How could you use these strategies with youth?”

### Resources:

Handout: *OARS Observation Form*

### Sources:

Tomlin, K., Walker, R., Grover, J., Arquette, W., & Stewart, P. *Motivational interviewing: Enhancing motivation for change—a learner's manual for the American Indian/Alaska Native counselor* [PDF file]. Portland, OR: SAMHSA. Retrieved from:

[https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/programs\\_campaigns/samhsa\\_hrsa/american-indian-alaska-native-motivational-interviewing.pdf](https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/programs_campaigns/samhsa_hrsa/american-indian-alaska-native-motivational-interviewing.pdf)



**Effective Communication Handout**  
**OARS Observation Form**

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**Directions:** Use this form to capture notes about how the listener uses OARS strategies (open questions, affirmations, reflections, and summaries). Please note the listener’s strengths and give examples.

Number of Open Questions \_\_\_\_\_

Examples:

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Number of Affirmations \_\_\_\_\_

Examples:

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Number of Reflections \_\_\_\_\_

Examples:

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Number of Summaries \_\_\_\_\_

Examples:

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Adapted from Source: Tomlin, K., Walker, R., Grover, J., Arquette, W., & Stewart, P. *Motivational interviewing: Enhancing motivation for change—a learner’s manual for the American Indian/Alaska Native counselor* [PDF file]. Portland, OR: SAMHSA. Retrieved from:  
[https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/programs\\_campaigns/samhsa\\_hrsa/american-indian-alaska-native-motivational-interviewing.pdf](https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/programs_campaigns/samhsa_hrsa/american-indian-alaska-native-motivational-interviewing.pdf)