

Motivational Interviewing Bench Card

FOR VETERANS
TREATMENT COURTS



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1 Open Questions, Affirmations, Reflections & Summaries (OARS)

TIPS:

- ▶ Start with “what,” “how,” “tell me about,” and “describe.”
- ▶ Elicits more than a yes-or-no answer.
- ▶ Provides a sense of what is on the participant’s mind.

Open questions function differently in each of the four tasks:

- **Engaging:** Establish rapport, foster connection, and elicit information about the person.
 - “Tell me more about your experience in the military.”
 - “Describe aspects of your military experience that you feel the proudest of.”
 - “In what ways has your background shaped your goals and values?”
- **Focusing:** Identify specific goals and priorities for the participant.
 - “What topic would be most useful for you today?”
 - “What would you like to start with?”

- “What areas do you need the most support in right now?”
- **Evoking:** Invite the person to imagine the why and how of change before deciding to carry it out.
 - “What benefits might there be to changing your drinking?”
 - “How do you see your life improving if you decided to take a computer class?”
 - “What would success look like for you in addressing the legal charge?”
- **Planning:** Explore possible steps to achieve identified goals and empower the participant to lead the change plan.
 - “What steps might be helpful in addressing the legal charge?”
 - “What are some ideas you have already considered for managing stress without using substances?”
 - “What resources in the veterans treatment court program might support you?”

1 Open Questions, Affirmations, Reflections & Summaries (OARS)

2 OARS: Affirmations

TIPS:

- ▶ Typically, start sentences with "You."
- ▶ Keep it simple. Affirm one topic per sentence.
- ▶ Genuine affirmations are powerful.
- ▶ Sources of affirmations include goals, values, efforts, skill, and culture. Listen for what is most important to the person.

Simple affirmations are reflections of something the participant has said or done, or an effort they made:

- "You are up for the challenge of going back to school."
- "You are making the effort to get healthier."
- "Cooking for others is important to you."
- "Hiking makes you feel more connected, more spiritual."
- "Some of your military experiences have been difficult to talk about, and yet you did so anyway."

Complex affirmations are reflections of an enduring part of the person's character, such as their values, qualities, cultural connection, or attributes:

- "You demonstrate integrity in your relationships."
- "You are open-minded and willing to consider different perspectives."
- "You are committed to fostering a nurturing and supportive family environment."
- "You bring your deep sense of culture into your recovery, enriching others around you."
- "You are disciplined to practice mindfulness every day."
- "You are to be applauded for never missing an appointment."
- "You are giving back to your community now just like you gave back to others when you were serving."

3 OARS: Reflections

TIPS:

- ▶ Use the different types of reflections to say out loud what you think the participant means.
- ▶ Start sentences with “You” rather than “I” to center the participant.
- ▶ Use more complex reflections than simple reflections. Too many simple reflections can become frustrating to the participant.
- ▶ Complex reflections do not need to be wordy to be powerful.
- ▶ Aim for at least one reflection after each question. As your skills develop, increase the number of reflections in proportion to questions.

Simple reflections rephrase or restate, staying close to what the person has said.

- **Participant statement:** “It’s hard to talk about some experiences in the military.”
- **Practitioner reflections:**
 - “Discussing your time in the military is uncomfortable.”
 - “You’d rather not talk about some experiences.”

Complex reflections add something more to what the person said. They voice a deeper meaning or unstated content.

- **Participant statement:** “I miss the camaraderie I had in the service.”
- **Practitioner reflections:**
 - “The strong bonds were very meaningful to you.”
 - “The connection to others balanced you.”

Double-sided reflections recognize both sides of a participant’s ambivalence. They state sustain talk first and change talk last. Instead of “but,” use “and” to honor ambivalence.

- **Participant statement:** “Part of me wants to connect with other veterans, but I’m not sure.”
- **Practitioner reflections:**
 - “You have a desire to connect with other veterans and you’re also trying to acclimate to civilian life.”
 - “You feel two ways about connecting with veterans: On one hand, they might understand you better than civilians, and on the other hand, it might bring up some difficult memories.”

3 OARS: Reflections (continued)

Reflections of feeling simply name the emotion you think the person may be feeling.

- **Participant statement:** "Recalling my deployment is complicated."
- **Practitioner reflections:**
 - "Talking about your deployment brings up some sadness."
 - "You feel pride and other emotions at the same time."

Metaphor offers a creative or visual symbol for understanding.

- **Participant statement:** "Transitioning back to civilian life is awkward."
- **Practitioner reflections:**
 - "The ship was your anchor; civilian waters feel less familiar right now."
 - "You're in a dance where the steps don't quite match the rhythm just yet."

Amplified reflections are a very evocative type of statement that can help you get through stuck points. Use these thoughtfully and infrequently. Delivered *without* sarcasm, they use absolute language such as "none," "never," and "all" in the hope the person will step away from an extreme position.

- **Participant statement:** "Other people use way more than I do."
- **Practitioner reflections:**
 - "Your drinking hasn't caused you **any** problems."
 - "There is **no** reason for you to be here."

4 OARS: Summaries

Short summaries:

- Collect topics that have been or will be discussed. Focus on the present conversation.
 - "So far, we've talked about how drinking started out as calming and social for you. Recently, it has started to cause you some trouble with your license."
- Link information from previous sessions or between the target behavior and the person's goals, values, and culture.
 - "Last session, you were working with the VA to renew your physical therapy sessions. You were thinking that getting back into regular sessions might decrease the pain you're experiencing in your knee."

Long summaries:

- Prepare for a transition at the end of a session or when moving from one task to another. They set up a key question.
 - "Today, we talked about how you are dealing with the physical pain from your service injury and with the stress of the DUI. You're working toward getting back into physical therapy and you've recently opted in to the veterans treatment court program. You are learning about the requirements and benefits and have some questions. What might be the next step?"

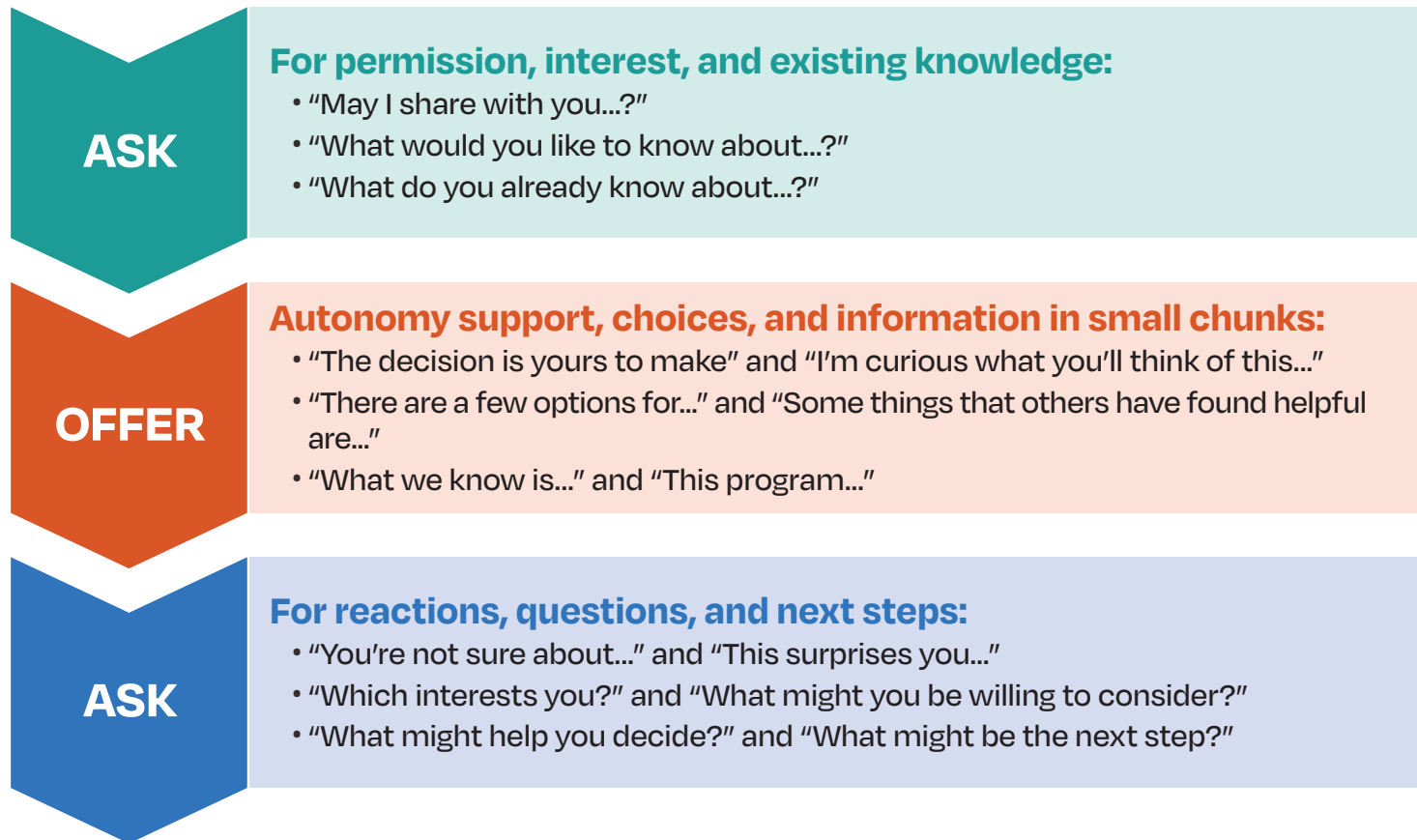
Key questions:

- Assess the impact of the conversation:
 - "What do you think you might do?"
 - "What might you be considering?"
 - "Where does this leave you now?"
 - "What are you planning to do this week?"



5 Offering Information: Ask-Offer-Ask (AOA)

- ▶ Use AOA to offer information.
- ▶ Remember that the information offered is less important than what the participant thinks about it.
- ▶ AOA increases the likelihood the person will consider new or different information.



6 Strategies to Cultivate Change Talk

TIPS:

- ▶ Ask questions to which the answer is change talk.
- ▶ When you hear change talk, ask for elaboration, reflect, and affirm. The practitioner's response to change talk is the key to enhancing motivation and strengthening confidence.
- ▶ Choose general or specific questions based on how the participant responds. If "What would you like to change about your life?" is too broad, narrow it to a specific topic: "What would you like to change about your career?"

1 Explore DARN categories:

- **Desire:** "What would you like to change about...?"
- **Ability:** "Describe something you've successfully changed in the past."
- **Reason:** "What might be some advantages to making the change?"
- **Need:** "What about making this change is important right now?"

2 Use change rulers

- "On a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 means not at all important and 10 means extremely important, how important is it for you to...?"
- **Follow up:** "What makes you a [insert score] and not a [lower number]?" (Example: What makes you a 6 and not a 2?)

3 Look forward or back

- "Looking ahead, if you succeeded in changing your opioid use, how would your life be different?"
- "What was your relationship like before drinking started to cause problems?"

4 Explore goals, values, and culture

- "What goal would you like to achieve over the next year?"
- "From the list, which five values are most important to you right now?"
- "What are some ways you feel connected to your cultural traditions?"

5 Explore extremes

- "What might be the best things that could happen if you successfully managed stress?"
- "What might be the worst things that could happen if you decided not to change your drinking?"

6 What else?

- Simply ask "What else?" to invite elaboration on change talk already offered or to evoke more.
- The more people talk, the more they discover change talk that may not have been previously verbalized.

7 Strategies to Soften Sustain Talk

TIPS:

- ▶ A person who is ambivalent will naturally feel two ways about the change.
- ▶ You tend to get more of what you reflect.
- ▶ If you decide to reflect sustain talk, do so thoughtfully. The practitioner's goal is to express empathy without inadvertently eliciting more sustain talk.

1 Engage in reflective listening

- **Simple reflections:** Restate or rephrase using the same or similar words; this is very useful to diffuse anger.
 - "You're angry right now."
- **Double-sided reflections:** State both sides of the person's ambivalence, ending with change talk. Use "and" between the two.
 - "On one hand, going back to school feels scary, and on the other, it could be the jump start you've been looking for."
- **Amplified reflections:** Use carefully; emphasize the absolute word when the conversation is stuck; avoid sarcasm.
 - "You have zero reasons to be concerned about drinking."

2 Emphasize autonomy: Simply state the person's freedom to choose.

- "The choice is all yours to make."

3 Shift attention: Move on to another topic if the current one becomes stuck.

- "Right now, you'd rather focus on something else."

4 Apologize: Simply apologize for a misstep that may have occurred.

- "I am sorry for having trouble understanding this."

5 Use a pendulum approach: Briefly reflect sustain talk to build up momentum and swing into change talk.

Listen for an opportunity to reflect change talk that may be intertwined with sustain talk.

6 Come alongside: As with amplified reflections, use this strategy thoughtfully.

If the practitioner takes up the sustain talk side, the participant may naturally take up the side for change. Reflect sustain talk briefly.

- "You're not sure it's worth trying to change your drinking."

8 Practitioner Tasks in the Stages of Change

Precontemplation: "I don't have a problem."

- **Practitioner tasks:** Build a working alliance using accurate empathy, raise questions about substance use, such as what they like or don't like about it, sidestep the fixing reflex, honor autonomy.

Contemplation: "I might have a problem, but I don't know what to do about it."

- **Practitioner tasks:** Reflect ambivalence, increase awareness of the effect of the substance in the person's life, develop the discrepancy between the participant's behavior and their goals, values, and culture.

Preparation: "It might be time to do something about the problem."

- **Practitioner tasks:** Help the participant explore the options for change without pushing for it, avoid the fixing reflex, elicit possible solutions to participant-identified barriers to change, affirm small steps toward change.

Action: "I'm ready to make the change."

- **Practitioner tasks:** Affirm successful efforts to build self-efficacy and strengthen motivation, discuss unanticipated barriers, discuss what is and isn't working.

Maintenance: "I've sustained the change for a few months."

- **Practitioner tasks:** Affirm successes and the participant's efforts to problem-solve, elicit benefits experienced, notice high-risk situations that may challenge the change plan.

Relapse: "I slipped back into old behaviors."

- **Practitioner tasks:** Affirm the participant's decision to get back on track, elicit the participant's perspective on what led to the relapse, discuss additional resources and support if needed.





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Motivational Interviewing Bench Card For Veterans Treatment Courts

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