

OARS in Motivational Interviewing

The four core motivational interviewing skills, or OARS, are Open questioning, Affirming, Reflecting and Summarizing (Miller, W. R., & Rollnick, S. 2013). POs can use these essential micro-counseling skills as part of their toolbox, as they are also used in a wide variety of counseling and helping situations. Because these four skills are essential in motivational interviewing, we review each one individually below:

O	Open questioning	<p>Using open questions gives the client the opportunity to tell their story and provide important information. This skill demonstrates interest in the client’s life and their struggle with behavior change, and it assists in building acceptance and trust.</p> <p>Open questions in motivational interviewing gather broad descriptive information. They:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitate dialogue; • Require more than a simple yes or no response; • Often start with words like “how”, “what”, “tell me about”, or “describe”; and • Usually go from general to specific. <p>Remember that closed questions have a place for gathering discrete pieces of information such as employment or marital status. Be cautious not to get into a question-and-answer session. Asking question after question can seem a little like an interrogation. The accepted practice is to ask no more than 3 questions in a row with the client doing most of the talking.</p>
A	Affirming	<p>Affirmations can be used liberally in motivational interviewing, but they should be congruent and not effusive or over the top. The PO must feel and believe what they say – if you are not genuine, the client will feel this, and trust may be lost. Affirming is different from praising, which is often more about the PO and can come across as superior and patronizing. Affirming the client acknowledges and supports the client’s struggles and hard work. Notice opportunities to use affirmations in your work. Affirmations are best when they focus on the client rather than on your response.</p>
R	Reflecting	<p>Reflective listening is the primary skill used to demonstrate empathy, interest, and understanding. In relation to influencing behavior change, reflective listening helps to clarify, to manage conflict, to explore reasons for change, and to provide affirmation. Reflective listening begins with an interest in what the client has to say and a desire to truly understand how that client sees things. Reflective listening needs to be developed, as it is easy for beginners to get</p>

		trapped in what becomes an interrogation, asking question after question with little or no reflection.
S	Summarizing	Summarizing reinforces what has been said and shows you have been listening carefully. Summaries are usually brief, about 3-4 sentences. Use summaries throughout the session as well as at the conclusion of a session. This is a good way to check that both the PO and the client are on the same page. The client hears a rundown of their concerns and has the opportunity to correct any errors in understanding. A summary can also be used to help shift direction in the session and to move the conversation forward.