

What Is Motivational Interviewing?

Review the frequently asked questions (FAQs) below to learn more about motivational interviewing and how it can benefit Head Start and Early Head Start programs.



Q: What is motivational interviewing?

A: Motivational interviewing is a collaborative conversation to learn about and strengthen an individual's motivation for changing behavior. Its principles and strategies may be used to enhance relationships and help staff feel more confident when addressing challenging issues. Head Start staff can also use motivational interviewing to help parents (and others) sort through any thoughts, ideas, uncertainties, and mixed feelings they may have about making a change. Explore the benefits and barriers to making changes together.

Q: What is at the heart of motivational interviewing?

A: A trusting mutual relationship is at the heart of motivational interviewing. It includes parents as equal partners in talking about change.

Q: What is the evidence for using motivational interviewing?

There are more than 1,100 peer-reviewed articles and 200 clinical studies published on motivational interviewing. It is effective in reducing problem behaviors (e.g., problem drinking, gambling, human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) risk behaviors) and promoting healthy behavior change (e.g., exercise, diet, medication adherence).¹

Research has shown that the ability to use empathy and develop trusting relationships with parents or clients is a large part of what makes motivational interviewing so effective.





Q: How can motivational interviewing in Head Start and Early Head Start program staff and families?

A: Using motivational interviewing can help **staff:**

- Enhance the strength of their relationship with families
- Foster communication that builds bridges and connects them with families in the program
- Be collaborative and respectful of a parent’s right to make his or her own decisions about changes in his or her life
- Feel more confident in their approach with families by using an effective, evidence-based strategy
- Reduce feelings of frustration as they understand more about the change process

Using motivational interviewing can help **families:**

- Engage and partner with Head Start and Early Head Start program staff
- Decide if they want to make a change in their lives at this time
 - If so, decide what kind of change to make
 - Determine how they will make the change
- Feel good about their ability to make meaningful change

Q: What do staff in Head Start and Early Head Start programs who use motivational interviewing say about it?

A: “Motivational interviewing is…”

- “Phenomenal”
- “Inspirational”
- “Encouraging”
- “Equal communication”
- [“A chance to make a difference in the families’ lives”](#)



Q: How can I learn more about motivational interviewing?

A: Explore the below resources to learn more.

- [Using Motivational Interviewing Techniques to More Effectively Partner with Parents](#)
Learn how to more effectively partner with parents through use of motivational interviewing strategies. The webinar also includes video highlighting these proven strategies.
- [Tooth Talk Moments](#)
This video includes information about motivational interviewing, examples around improving children’s oral health, and testimonials from Early Head Start program staff.
- [Motivational Interviewing Network of Trainers \(MINT\)](#)
Discover materials that are designed to facilitate the dissemination, adoption, and implementation of motivational interviewing.
- [Motivational Interviewing in Child Welfare Services \(CWS\)](#)
See brief examples of social workers using motivational interviewing skills with their clients.