



1 Introduction

Child welfare systems have increasingly embraced the use of evidence-based behavioral health interventions to transition from crisis-oriented care to prevention-driven approaches for children and families. Motivational Interviewing (MI), an evidence-based counseling method, has been employed with the goal of effecting behavior change and enhancing physiological, psychological, and lifestyle outcomes. MI primarily targets ambivalence toward change while boosting motivation to change by having clients reflect on personal goals and any obstacles their current behaviors pose. Florida is currently using MI as a tool to enhance child welfare professionals' ability to engage families in treatment services – a philosophical shift that prioritizes collaboration with families. MI is viewed as a cultural or philosophical shift or mindset change. MI is rooted in responsiveness; therefore, staff develop a range of MI tools that they are ready to flexibly employ as the context demands.

Also implemented in Florida's child welfare system is a more targeted MI approach that is focused on stabilizing the family unit. Given the diversity in application, the utility of motivational interviewing in an educational setting is explored.

2 Methods

A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining qualitative interviews with child welfare and behavioral health professionals, a statewide survey, and document review of implementation workgroup meetings and training materials.

3 Findings

PARTICIPANT REPORTED STRENGTHS AND SKILLS DEVELOPED

Participants indicated that they became more client-centered, developed another perspective on how to help families, advanced their understanding of the need for respecting individual autonomy, acquired a different mindset that makes connecting with individuals easier and builds client confidence.

MI training changed the way they assess the needs of their clients, provided strategies to get more input from clients, assisted them in gathering better information regarding a case, and helped them to better gauge where the client is at in the treatment process.

Participants reported that they had made changes in the way they speak to clients, putting more thought into what they ask, asking more open-ended questions to elucidate underlying family dynamics, and recognizing the effect their questions could have on the path of any given conversation.

Participants shared that MI also empowers clients "by eliciting their narratives of meaning, pertinence, and capacity to change" and "capitalizing on the client's voice and choice and assisting them with their thought processes towards change."



PARTICIPANT REPORTED CHALLENGES TO MI IMPLEMENTATION

Challenges reported mainly came from nonclinical applications of MI, or case managers who had been asked to complete MI training and apply MI principles to all of the work they do with families.

Communication barriers to using MI that were reported include when parents didn't have adequate phone or wi-fi service, language barriers between caseworkers and clients, and stigma and/or beliefs individual case workers carried regarding either specific clients or other cultures.

Some families are not ready for MI, lack of trust, the child's ability to engage due to the level of trauma, extremely violent children or parents, and clients not moving from the pre-contemplation stage.

Clients who have not had the best experiences with service providers have different levels of openness to learning new parenting strategies, and clients who have special needs may also not be the easiest or best clients to use MI with.

4 Implications for Educators and Counselors

While it is commonly associated with counseling and therapy, its principles and techniques can be applied effectively in various fields, including education.

ENHANCED STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

MI encourages a collaborative and non-confrontational communication style. Teachers and counselors can use MI techniques to engage students in discussions about their academic goals, interests, and challenges.

BUILDING TRUST AND RAPPORT

The empathetic and non-judgmental approach of MI helps build trust between educators and students. This trust is essential for effective communication and collaboration.



SUPPORTING ACADEMIC GOAL SETTING

MI emphasizes the importance of intrinsic motivation. Educators can help students explore their values and personal reasons for academic success. By aligning academic goals with students' intrinsic motivations, teachers and counselors can increase the likelihood of sustained effort and commitment. Allows for tailored support for academic challenges and/or dropout risks.

IMPROVING COMMUNICATION SKILLS

MI teaches active listening and reflective communication skills. Teachers and counselors can use these skills to foster better communication with students, understanding their perspectives, and responding in a way that encourages open dialogue. This may be particularly helpful during parent-teacher conferences and to de-escalate peer and educator conflicts.

ADDRESSING RESISTANCE AND AMBIVALENCE

Teachers and counselors can use MI techniques to explore and address students' ambivalence about school, academic tasks, attendance, or behavioral expectations, helping them find their own reasons for change.



PROMOTING AUTONOMY

MI emphasizes the importance of autonomy and self-efficacy. Teachers and counselors can empower students by involving them in decision-making processes related to their education. This can lead to a sense of ownership and responsibility for their academic journey and may be valuable in career counseling by helping students explore their interests, values, and aspirations, clarify career goals, and identify steps toward those goals.

5 Conclusion

In summary, by incorporating Motivational Interviewing techniques into their practices, teachers and school counselors can create a more supportive and empowering learning environment, fostering positive relationships and promoting students' academic and personal growth.

For Further Information

Web: <http://childwelfareresearchandtrainingalliance.org>
Email: avargo@usf.edu