Group Session: Motivational Interviewing for Parents of Teens – Facilitator information

Note to Facilitators: The text below may be utilized to some extent also as a script when discussing the associated handout with your parents group

Context: This handout outlines some of the skills and techniques used in Motivational Interviewing (MI) primarily to build a relationship with others and create a space of open communication. It is important to note that these skills here are intended to provide a framework or a style of communication you can use with your son or daughter. The goal is to create a collaborative partnership which in turn allows your teenager to explore all sides of a change in their behaviour – the costs and benefits of changing their tech use/gaming or not changing it. MI is also used to strengthen a person’s commitment to change but is not a set of techniques to “trick” a person into making changes. The techniques described herein are core interviewing skills in MI and they are to be used with a non-judgmental, collaborative spirit.

Note to Facilitators: It is important that parents understand that MI is not just a set of techniques to use to get other people to do what you want. The spirit of collaboration should be emphasized and the point that MI is not a “trick” or form of manipulation should be made clear either here or at the end of the session.

Discuss the Righting Reflex: An important component of MI is also the idea that one must RESIST THE RIGHTING REFLEX. The righting reflex typically looks like directing – telling someone what they “need” to do or what they “should” do – which runs contrary to the MI spirit. As parents, this is can be hard to do and is in fact necessary in many situations (like if your teen is actively engaged in something dangerous that you need to intervene with) – however, this strategy may not help to engage your teenager in a conversation. Research has demonstrated that MI is helpful and related to reductions in addictive behaviours (alcohol, tobacco and substance use) among adolescents (Jensen et al., 2011). The idea is that through a collaborative partnership using the MI skills described, your teenager will find their own reasons for making changes in a positive direction.

Note to Facilitators: Elicit feedback from the group about this point, in particular, when they have found themselves using the righting reflex and the outcome of that interaction. Ask participants to think in what the conversation looked like. Examples can potentially be used later in this session when reviewing the MI skills and asking participants how they can reframe what they said previously to be consistent with the MI spirit.
Describe Core MI skills:
The core motivational interviewing skills can be remembered easily using the acronym OARS

Open-ended questions
Open ended questions are frequently used in MI to gather information. They are preferred over closed-questions (i.e., questions that can be answered with either a “yes” or “no” or other short response) because they allow a speaker (or client) to elaborate and provide further information.

Open ended questions frequently start with “what” or “how.”

Examples of open ended questions could include:

“How can I help?”

“How does this affect you on a day to day basis?”

“What do you think you’ll do now?”

“What do you plan on doing with your day today?”

“How does this affect your relationship with your siblings/parents?”

“What do you like about online gaming?”

In addition to the example in your handout, another couple of examples of closed questions are:

“Are you going to put down your phone and spend some time with us?” or “Are you going to get off the internet at some point?”

Note to Facilitators: Ask participants at this point how they can turn example closed questions into open questions. Time permitting, ask participants to spend 5 minutes in pairs practicing asking only open ended questions. Following this, ask participants how it felt to be asking only open ended questions or to be answering only open ended questions.

Affirmations
Affirmations involve highlighting the positive, recognizing and acknowledging the good or the strengths in a situation. Affirmations instill hope and allow your teenager to see the resources and strengths they have available to them. These should be communicated genuinely - you need to really mean what you say or it can sound superficial or insincere.

Affirmations demonstrate appreciation and understanding of the other person’s strengths, and the focus should be on behaviours (rather than attitudes for example), and descriptions (not evaluations. An evaluation would be an assessment of the behavior as either “good” or “bad” for example “you did a good job....” is considered an evaluation). Affirmations typically begin with “you” statements. So if your teen played online for 8 hours today, but yesterday was 10 hours, then
you could provide affirmation for the effort made to reduce their time online. For example "You are working hard to find other activities aside from gaming online." This statement focuses on the strengths (i.e., working hard, finding other activities) rather than the problem (i.e., online gaming).

If your teen is opening up to you about something going on in their life you might say something like "You are opening up about these things, even though I know they are difficult to talk about with me."

**Note to Facilitators:** Ask participants to generate affirmations they could use with the teens in various situations. Also make clear that compliments and affirmations differ. Compliments begin with “I” like “I think” which does not provide the same prizing of the others’ strengths (e.g., “I think you are trying very hard to do well in school” vs. “You are determined to do well in school.”)

**Reflections**

Reflections are the **primary** skill of motivational interviewing. In fact, it is recommended that those using MI use three reflections between each open ended question. Reflective listening often appears easier than it is, but it really takes a lot of practice to master.

Reflections show interest in what the other person is saying, and they demonstrate that you are listening to what the other person is saying. Reflections are also used to maintain momentum in a conversation – they keep a conversation moving forward (and ideally towards change). They are also useful in responding to sustain talk (i.e., comments from your teen that pertain to staying the same like "I don’t want to spend more time outside, I want to play this game!") as reflections show understanding of the sustain talk and are not likely to elicit defensiveness. Think about the last time you were trying to make a decision about something and another person told you what they think you should do – how did you respond? A lot of people tend to dig their heels in further. For example if someone told you “you should quit smoking” your response might be “I like smoking, and I get really stressed out when I can't have a cigarette.” If someone responded to your latter statement with “yea, it is really hard to quit smoking

In some ways reflections are also taking a guess at what the other person means. Rather than assuming you understand what your teenager means, you would communicate your understanding back to them to verify that you have understood correctly. Reflective listening involves making statements, not asking questions.

**Note to Facilitators:** Elicit examples of reflections from participants, and practice using reflections with each other as well in a short five minute conversation with a partner. Suggest that their partner role-play as their teen. Be sure to spend adequate time on this piece so that participants understand how they can use simple reflections in speaking with their teen.
Summaries

Summaries are similar to reflections but gather more information and pull it together in a coherent way. These also are meant to show that you are listening and that you care. Much like reflections and within the spirit of MI, there is no judgment attached when forming a summary of what the other person has said. Summaries are often used to transition the conversation and focus might be on strengths or changes the person has talked about making.

**Note to Facilitators:** Provide a summary of what’s been discussed in group so far as an example, or a summary of a conversation point one of your participants had today, then ask if any participants would be willing to provide a summary of the discussion from group today.

*(Suggestion might also be to have another five minute practice if time permits to practice these skills in partners, again with one partner role-playing as their teenager or some modified version of their teenager.)*

References