

Motivational Interviewing: Example Scripts¹

I: When the patient is in a pre-contemplation stage

(e.g., when the patient is not considering change—“Weight is not a concern for me”)

Goals:

1. Help patient develop a reason for changing
2. Validate the patient’s experience
3. Encourage further self-exploration
4. Leave the door open for future conversations

1. Validate the patient’s experience:

“I can understand why you feel that way”

2. Acknowledge the patient’s control of the decision:

“It’s up to you to decide if and when you are ready to make lifestyle changes.”

3. Repeat a simple, direct statement about your stand on the medical benefits of weight loss for this patient:

“I believe that your extra weight is putting you at risk for heart disease. Making some lifestyle changes could help you lose weight, and improve your health substantially.”

4. Explore potential concerns:

“Has your weight created difficulties in your life?” “Can you imagine how your weight might cause problems in the future?”

5. Acknowledge possible feelings of being pressured:

“It can be hard to initiate changes in your life when you feel pressured by others. I want to thank you for talking with me about this today.”

6. Validate that they are not ready:

“I hear you saying that you are not ready to lose weight right now.”

7. Restate your position that it is up to them:

“It’s totally up to you to decide if this is right for you right now.”

8. Encourage reframing of current state of change—the potential beginning of a change rather than a decision never to change:

“Everyone who’s ever lost weight starts right where you are now; they start by seeing the reasons where they might want to lose weight. And that’s what I’ve been talking to you about.”

¹ These scripts were developed by the UCLA Center for Human Nutrition, and are available at http://www.cellinteractive.com/ucla/physician_ed/scripts_for_change.html preventing weight bias helping without harming in clinical practice

II: When the patient is in a contemplation stage

(e.g., when the patient is ambivalent about change - "Yes my weight is a concern for me, but I'm not willing or able to begin losing weight within the next month.")

Goals:

1. Validate the patient's experience
2. Clarify the patient's perceptions of the pros and cons of attempted weight loss
3. Encourage further self-exploration
4. Leave the door open for moving to preparation

1. Validate the patient's experience:

"I'm hearing that you are thinking about losing weight but you're definitely not ready to take action right now."

2. Acknowledge patient's control of the decision:

"It's up to you to decide if and when you are ready to make lifestyle changes."

3. Clarify patient's perceptions of the pros and cons of attempted weight loss:

"What is one benefit of losing weight? What is one drawback of losing weight?"

4. Encourage further self-exploration:

"Would you be willing to think about this further and talk to me about it at our next visit?"

5. Restate your position that it is up to them:

"It's totally up to you to decide if this is right for you right now. Whatever you choose, I'm here to support you."

6. Leave the door open for moving to preparation:

"After talking about this, and doing the exercise, if you feel you would like to make some changes, the next step won't be jumping into action – we can begin with some preparation work."

III: When the patient is in a preparation stage

(e.g., when the patient is preparing to change and begins making small changes to prepare for a larger life change – “My weight is a concern for me; I’m clear that the benefits of attempting weight loss outweigh the drawbacks, and I’m planning to start within the next month.”)

Goals:

1. Reinforce the decision to change behavior
2. Prioritize behavior change opportunities
3. Identify and assist in problem solving re: obstacles
4. Encourage small initial steps
5. Encourage identification of social supports

1. Reinforce the decision to change behavior:

“It’s great that you feel good about your decision to make some lifestyle changes; you are taking important steps to improve your health.”

2. Prioritize behavior change opportunities:

“Looking at your eating habits, I think the biggest benefits would come from switching from whole milk dairy products to fat-free dairy products. What do you think?”

3. Identify and assist in problem solving re: obstacles:

“Have you ever attempted weight loss before? What was helpful? What kinds of problems would you expect in making those changes now? How do you think you could deal with them?”

4. Encourage small, initial steps:

“So, the initial goal is to try nonfat milk instead of whole milk every time you have cereal this week.”

5. Assist patient in identifying social support:

“Which family members or friends could support you as you make this change? How could they support you? Is there anything else I can do to help?”