NCPMI

Using Motivational Interviewing in Coaching

Coaching can be very rewarding. It can also be hard work. Coaching requires scheduling and caseload planning, balancing coaching with other duties, and providing support to a wide range of classrooms and settings. Coaches also need to work collaboratively with practitioners, which also involves its own set of challenges.

These challenges may include:

- Coaches might be seen as an evaluator rather than as a support.
- Practitioners might feel receiving coaching indicates they are being identified as performing poorly.
- Practitioners might have had negative experiences with previous professional development support.
- The perceived power differential between coaches and practitioners might hinder a practitioner's willingness to be involved.
- Practitioners may be uncertain about engaging in the coaching process because they fear the unknown or because they feel like they will be in a vulnerable position.
- Practitioners might be concerned about the time coaching takes and how they will manage their other responsibilities.
- Practitioners might not be interested in changing their practices or adopting new practices at this time.

Motivational interviewing (MI) strategies can help address many challenges coaches face. MI may be particularly helpful when supporting others when they feel stuck, doubt their abilities, are unsure if they want to change, or are not clear about the benefits of changing practices. Using MI can help a practitioner see a coach as a collaborative partner.

What is Motivational Interviewing?

Motivational interviewing is a collaborative conversation to learn about, clarify, and strengthen an individual's motivation and interest in changing behavior. Its principles and strategies enhance relationships and help practitioners feel more confident when addressing challenging issues. The heart of motivational interviewing is building a trusting relationship based on careful listening, nonjudgment, and curiosity.

How can MI Help in coaching?

Motivational Interviewing:

- Supports relationship building
- Emphasizes the interests, values, strengths, and expertise of practitioners
- Explores uncertainty about change
- Enhances motivation for practitioners to change their behaviors and try new strategies
- Validates, acknowledges, and empathizes with practitioners' experiences
- Supports the practitioner's sense of autonomy (i.e., their ability to make decisions about their use of practices)
- Encourages and supports progress toward goals
- Works through times of resistance

What are key MI strategies that you can use in your coaching?

Ask Open-Ended Questions

Open-ended questions usually cannot be answered with one-word answers or yes or no responses. Asking open-ended questions can offer choice and flexibility in how a person responds. This can allow the person being coached to do most of the talking.

Open-ended question starters:

- Tell me about…
- Say more about…
- How are you feeling about…
- What is your take on…
- When are you noticing…
- How does that…

Provide Affirmations

Affirmations acknowledge a practitioner's strengths and recognize the effort of the practitioner. Coaches can genuinely share affirmations within the coaching relationship to offer perspective when things feel hard, express optimism, and recognize that any even small measures of progress are moving towards bigger goals and should be celebrated. Affirmations can be an opportunity for coaches to offer positive descriptive feedback to the person they are coaching.

Affirmation examples:

- I am so impressed by…
- This situation feels so frustrating, and you are still here working to figure it out.
- There have been a lot of barriers and you are still making progress!
- It makes sense that this is so challenging! You are working so hard.

Use Reflective Listening

Reflective listening mirrors what the practitioner is saying. It is an opportunity for the coach to make a best guess or a check to make sure the coach understands what the coachee is sharing. Reflective listening is an opportunity to emphasize equity and collaboration within the coaching relationship. Reflective listening should be included frequently within a conversation.

Reflective listening sentence starters:

- It sounds like you…
- You're saying that…Do I have it right?
- I'm hearing that you feel like…
- I want to make sure I am understanding…

Offer Summaries

Summaries are another strategy that supports the practitioner in knowing that the coach is listening and understanding what is being shared. Summaries can help to pull together relevant thoughts, ideas, and information. This can help to clarify the next steps, areas of change, motivation levels, or feelings about change. Summaries can also help to mirror back the feelings of unsureness or resistance that a practitioner might share.

Summary sentence starters:

- Let me see if I understand this so far…
- It sounds like…
- "Let's tie this together..."
- "So your major concerns/goals are…"
- "In summary, our plan is…"

Reflect on your current use of MI strategies

- How often do you use open-ended questions?
- When faced with a practitioner who seems stuck, how do you remain curious about the coachee's behavior, feelings, and motivations?
- How do you remain nonjudgmental in your work with coachees?
- How do you collaboratively build an agenda for your conversations with coachees?
- How do you agree on shared purpose in your conversations with coachees?
- How often do you seek permission from coachees to engage in conversations? (e.g., "Would it be ok if we talked about …?")

Reference:

Motivational Interviewing Network of Trainers (2019). Understanding Motivational Interviewing. MINT. https://motivationalinterviewing.org/understanding-motivational-interviewing

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