



Coaching Conversations: Motivational Interviewing to Support Provider Wellness and Engagement

Amy Hunter, Georgetown University
Julia Sayles, Georgetown University
Mary Louise Hemmeter, Vanderbilt University

March 12, 2025



National Center for
Pyramid Model
INNOVATIONS
ChallengingBehavior.org

1

Presenters



Amy Hunter, LICSW
Georgetown University

Julia Sayles, LMHC
Georgetown University

Mary Louise Hemmeter, PhD
Vanderbilt University



2

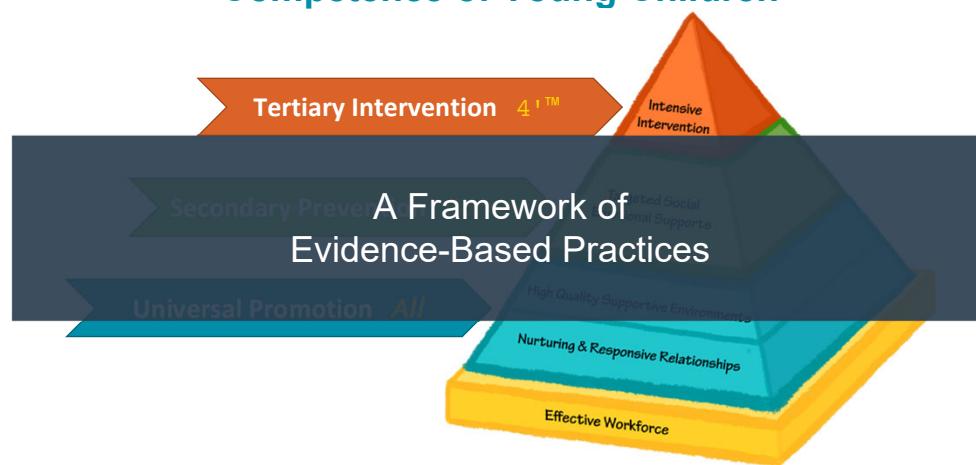
Learning Objectives:

- Gain increased knowledge about provider well-being and its impact on children's social emotional development.
- Identify motivational interviewing skills that can be used in conversations with early childhood providers to enhance their engagement in coaching and with children.
- Explore real life examples related to coaching Pyramid Model practices and strategies that can help.



3

Pyramid Model for Promoting the Social and Emotional Competence of Young Children



4

Why are early educators leaving the field?

- Low pay
- Not enough respect
- Lack of benefits
- Not enough support for challenging behaviors

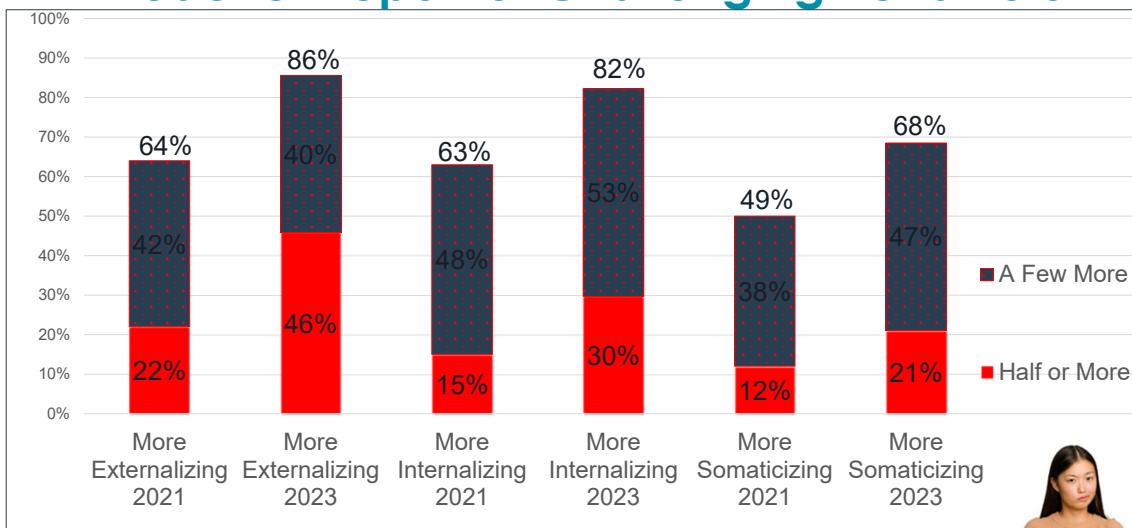
- Gilliam et al. (2025) Longitudinal Follow up (N=25,524; N=3,724 Leaving the Field)



5

1

Teacher Report of Challenging Behaviors



(Data from Yale CARES; 2021 N=56,913; 2023 N=25,524) Gilliam et al. (2025)



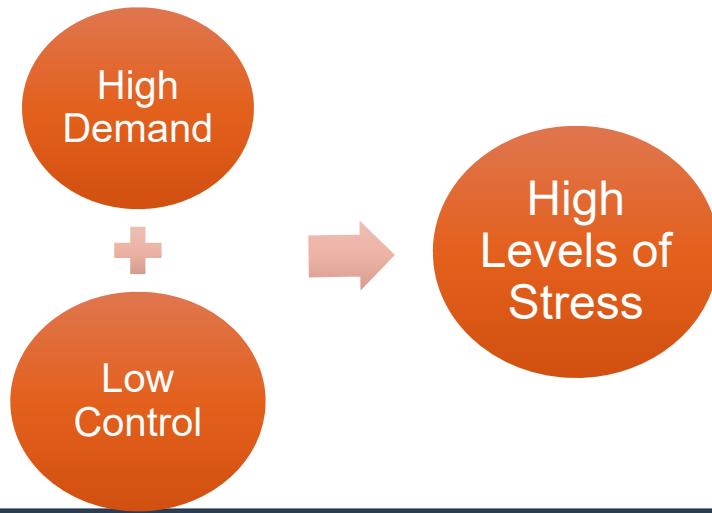
6

Slide 6

1 need help with formatting this slide. The key can't be read.

Amy Hunter, 2/18/2025

Early Childhood Practitioners Often Experience



7

Community Care

- Community Care - we are **stronger together**.
- Self-care can be a feel-good activity that can be part of the work.
- A shift to community care increases the possibility that:
 - the most marginalized are better supported
 - resources can be redistributed to those in higher need
 - those who care for others and have obstacles to self-care are included



8

Collective Wellbeing

Engaging in activities that benefit the wider community:

Can strengthen:

- social connectedness
- a sense of purpose
- compassion and empathy
- increase self-esteem
- build resilience
- reduce stress



9

Community Care Tips

Goal = Cultivate a community of kindness and a sense of belonging

- Check in regularly.
- Empathize
- Socialize with one another.
- Make a specific offer to help.
- Assess what others may need.
- Prioritize rest
- Intervene when witnessing harm being caused (e.g. rudeness, insensitivity).
- Create a culture of caring.



10

A Proactive Approach: Motivational Interviewing can help us get there



Children need consistent, sensitive, caring, and stable relationships with adults.



Adults who are well, physically and mentally, are more likely to engage in positive relationships.



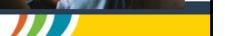
When we support staff well-being, we strengthen early care and education.



11

What is Motivational Interviewing?

Motivational interviewing (MI) 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.



12

What is at the Heart of Motivational Interviewing?

A **trusting mutual relationship** is at the heart of motivational interviewing. It includes people we work with as equal partners in talking about change.



13

How Can MI help in coaching?

- Supports **relationship building**
- Emphasizes practitioners' **interests, values and expertise**
- **Explores uncertainty**
- Enhances **motivation to change** and try new strategies
- **Validates, acknowledges and empathizes** with practitioners' experience
- Supports **sense of autonomy**
- Encourages and **supports progress**
- **Works through resistance**



14

4 Key Principles of MI

Express Empathy	Support Self-Efficacy	Roll with Resistance	Develop Discrepancies
One's ability to connect to another's experience, emotions, and beliefs	The attitude and behavior that demonstrates one's belief in another's potential to change	Encourages another individual to consider as many options as possible. Defining the problem, generating solutions. Less focus on resistance.	The intention of helping another identify and acknowledge the difference between their actions in the present and their attainment of goals.

15

OARS

Open Ended Questions	Affirmations	Reflective Listening	Summaries
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Tell me about... ▪ Say more... ▪ How are you feeling about... ▪ When have you... ▪ What is that experience like for you? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ I am so impressed with the way you... ▪ You kept going despite all of the challenges! ▪ It takes a lot of strength to be vulnerable. ▪ Thank you for trusting me with that information. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ It sounds like... ▪ You're saying... ▪ You're feeling like... ▪ You sound unsure... ▪ Non-verbal cues <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -nodding your head -learning in with your body 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Let me see if I understand this so far... ▪ I just want to check in to make sure I am understanding what you are sharing.

16

Process of Motivational Interviewing

Engaging:

- Establishing a mutually trusting and respectful helping relationship.

Focusing:

- Seeking and maintaining a direction. Clarifying a particular goal or direction for change.

Evoking:

- Eliciting the individual's own motivation for a particular change.

Planning:

- Developing a specific change plan that the individual is willing to implement.



17

Wrestling vs Dancing



18

Start with Reflection to Disrupt the Chaos

Go Inward

Checking in with yourself as a coach:
How are you doing?

What is coming up for you?

Do you need regulation before moving on?

Take a breath.

Go Outward

What is the coachee experiencing?

How might their histories impact the situation?

Are others in the program impacted by similar issues?

What is the scope of the problem?

Go Together

What MI strategies can you use to partner?

What supports does the program offer?

Who is part of the squad care team?

What is a small manageable goal?



19

Common Coaching Scenario

- As a coach you observe a teacher in the classroom. The teacher is using Pyramid Model practices and the classroom is running smoothly, but it feels like something is missing. It seems like the teacher is depleted and most of their interactions with children and the co-teacher feel like they are lacking warmth or genuine connection. You have talked about wellness with the teacher before without a lot of success.



20

MI Strategies that Can Help

- **Ask open ended questions**
- **Reflective listening:**
 - Non-verbal cues
 - -nodding your head
 - -learning in with your body
- **Affirming and validating**

“What does it feel like for you walking into your classroom every morning?”

“It sounds like you have had a lot to overcome so far this year”



21

MI Strategies that Can Help

- **Engaging; Affirmations**
- **Open ended questions**
- **Expressing Empathy**

“You have such beautiful transitions in your classroom. I can see all of the thought you have put into teaching them. You had individual interactions with children during centers. I wonder what those interactions feel like for you?”



22

Strategies we Can Use to Roll with Resistance

- **Developing Discrepancy**

"On one hand you have had so many challenges this year and that have increased your stress level and on the other hand you do not ready to focus on wellbeing goals during our coaching time together."



23

Confidence Ruler

On a scale of 1-10 how confident are you that things could get better?

(1= not confident at all and 10 = very confident)

This strategy helps the coachee talk about why she thinks things could get better.

Why not a 1? (or even 0)



24

The Power of Going Slow to Go Far



25

Coaching in Early Intervention

- Chase is a new Early Intervention provider. He has shared a few situations with a similar theme. He arrives at a family's house for his session and as soon as he arrives the child's parent leaves the room to do something else in the house like the dishes, or goes to lay down in their bedroom. Chase isn't sure how to talk about this with the families.



26

Parallel Process

Ask **open ended questions** (to interventionist):

What have you tried?

What has worked in the past when this has come up?

Holding ambivalence

What would happen if you don't say anything to the parent?

What would happen if you ask the parent about joining the session?

Autonomy, Planning, Supporting Self Efficacy:

Would you like to role play how it might go? or Would it be useful to try some of the MI strategies we reviewed and talk about how it goes next week?



27

Supporting the Interventionist: Using Motivational Interviewing with a Family

- **Engaging and Affirming:** Rapport building and acknowledging

I appreciate you always making time for our appointments. I know you have a lot going on,

- **Evoking:** Exploring the parent's perspective

How do you think these visits are going?



28

Supporting the Interventionist: Using Motivational Interviewing with a Family

- **Developing Discrepancy:** asking versus telling, evoking a person's own motivation and resources for change
- **Open-ended questions**

It sounds like you're frustrated because you have so much to do. At the same time, I remember you mentioned that you wanted to feel more able to help your son. How do you see this appointment fitting into that goal?



29

Supporting the Interventionist: Using Motivational Interviewing with a Family

- **Affirming**
- **Supporting Autonomy**
- **Evoking**
- **Planning**

That makes a lot of sense what would make these visits more helpful to you?

How would you feel about trying a session together?

What changes do you feel most ready to make?



30

Supporting the Interventionist: Using Motivational Interviewing with a Family

- **Planning:** having a plan that has enough structure, accountability, and reward

How will you know if it feels helpful?

Would you like to try to be part of the visit next time?

What might get in the way of joining the time?



The Kinds of Conversations We Have Impact our Relationships

Our Relationships Greatly Impact Our Wellbeing

We are In This Together



Who is in Your Sunflower Field?



33

Reflect on Your Practice

- When faced with a practitioner who seems stuck, how do you remain curious about the provider's behavior, feelings, and motivations?
- How do you check in about your own feelings, experiences and hot buttons while coaching?
- How do you partner with practitioners to broach sensitive conversations or go a bit deeper?
- What are your own collective wellbeing strategies to support your regulation and wellness?



34

Questions?

Use the Q&A panel to submit your questions.



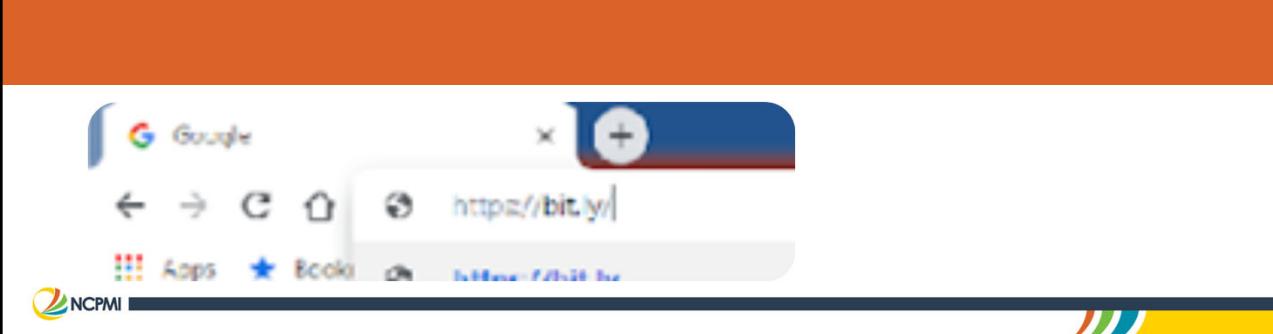
 NCPMI

35

Survey and Certificate

Recording Viewers

- Type URL during presentation into a web browser window or scan QR Code
- *URL is case sensitive*



 NCPMI

36

Visit us online at
ChallengingBehavior.org

37

Thank You



The contents of this presentation were developed under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education, #H326B170003. However, those contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the U.S. Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government. Project officer, Sunyoung Ahn.

38

19