

Motivational Interviewing and Ambivalence

Respecting mixed feelings about change.

Ambivalence is normal

Most people do not simply want one thing. A person may want to change and not want to change. They may long for freedom but fear losing protection. They may want closeness but fear vulnerability. They may want to stop a behavior while also relying on it for comfort, control, or survival.

Motivational Interviewing is useful because it respects this ambivalence. It does not treat mixed feelings as laziness, resistance, or failure. It understands that important patterns often serve a purpose, even when they also cause pain.

Change works best when it comes from within

Rather than pushing, persuading, or confronting too quickly, Motivational Interviewing listens for the person's own reasons for change. It helps clarify values, hopes, fears, costs, benefits, and readiness.

This matters in depth-oriented therapy because pressure often activates defenses. If a person feels forced, they may comply on the surface while becoming more guarded underneath. A collaborative approach helps protect dignity and autonomy.

Questions we may explore

- What feels important about changing this?
- What would become possible if this pattern softened?
- What concerns you about changing it?
- What has this pattern helped you manage?
- What would help you feel one step more ready?

Ambivalence as information

In this approach, ambivalence is not something to defeat. It is information. It may reveal fear, grief, loyalty, exhaustion, protection, uncertainty, or a conflict between different values and needs.

Motivational Interviewing helps therapy honor timing. It supports change that emerges from within the person rather than being imposed from outside. This can make change more honest, more durable, and less organized around shame.