

Episode 4- Evoking Change Talk

Motivational interviewing podcast focuses on evidence based practice of communication

CASAT Podcast Network. In episode four, Paul and Amy talk about how to intentionally evoke change Talk. For episode resources, contact us and other information, please visit the Lions and Tigers & Bears MI website at nfartec.org/mipodcast that's n f a r t e c.org /mipodcast

Paul Warren: Lions and Tigers and Bears MI An interactive podcast focused on the evidence based practice of motivational interviewing, a method of communication that guides toward behavior change while honoring autonomy.

Amy Shanahan: I'm Amy Shanahan.

Paul Warren: And I'm Paul Warren.

Amy Shanahan: And we've worked together over the past 10 years. We've been facilitating MI learning collaboratives and providing trainings and coaching sessions focused on, the adoption and refinement of MI we're also members of the Motivational Interviewing Network of trainers. Join us in this adventure into the forest where we explore and get curious about what lies behind the curtain of MI

Change talk is one of the most misunderstood components of motivational interviewing

Paul Warren: Amy, I am so excited that we are at podcast number four and that we are talking today about Change Talk.

Amy Shanahan: Great. I was just thinking all, right. Why are you so happy?

Paul Warren: well, I'm so happy. Thank you for asking that. I am so glad we're talking about Change Talk because again, I'm not sure if this is your perspective as a trainer. My perspective as a trainer is that Change talk is one of the things that's, least discussed. It's one of the most misunderstood components of motivational interviewing. And I would go so far as to say it's probably one of the most important components of the practice of motivational interviewing.

Amy Shanahan: Yeah. So you're excited because it's important to underscore that Change Talk should be talked about a lot. And that's why we wanted to dive into it, examine it, explore it, hopefully be curious about it. What does it mean? What does it sound like? What can we do as practitioners and as trainers? And you mentioned, you know, how it's the least talked about. And it reminds me in my early practice of motivational interviewing that I was truly focused on the oars, the open ended questions, affirmations and reflections and of course, hopefully with the spirit and in hindsight, realize that I didn't have a specific focus in mind. I just thought I was using MI in the right way. I was reflecting and it did become clearer over time and with practice and relearning and hearing things that other MI practitioners say that change talk and a, change behavior is so important. It's actually one of the major aspects of knowing when it's time to use MI Absolutely.

Paul Warren: And, you know, you made me think, Amy, that I've actually been in trainings where the focus has predominantly been oars. You know, oars are the superstars of motivational interviewing. and really all they simply are the core communication skills that we use, and they're not exclusive to motivational interviewing, but oftentimes the training focuses on that. And then it will be, you know, like, there's a half an hour left to the training, and the trainer will say, oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, let me tell you about change talk. And then, the training's over. So every. Everything, all the focus has been on oars. And yes, you need to know how to use the skills, but you're using the skills in order to evoke and employ the change talk that's generated around the behavioral change goal. So I am delighted that we are spending our podcast conversation, talking about this critically important topic of change talk.

What is the opposite of change talk in motivational interviewing

Amy Shanahan: Yeah, and recently in a training that I was facilitating, I started to talk about change talk. And I'm asking you and

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Amy Shanahan: the listeners to consider what's the opposite. Sometimes I like to know what motivational interviewing is not, so I could define what it is, which is the theme and the frame of our whole podcast in general. Same question, same type of question. What is the opposite of change talk? And someone in the training had an answer for that. And I wonder what your response would be.

Paul Warren: Well, my response, and I'm fascinated to hear what the person in the

training thought, but my response would be, be that it's sustained talk, which is anything that the person says in favor of maintaining the status quo. The change talk, of course, is anything that the person says in terms of the identified behavioral change goal, moving toward that or accomplishing that.

Amy Shanahan: And the person in the training called it staying the same talk.

Paul Warren: I love that.

Amy Shanahan: Yeah, so did I. It was so simple. It's like, well, that's obvious, isn't it? The opposite of change talk is staying the same talk. And it really became the frame of how the trainees thought about it and listened for it. being able to think about it from that perspective of staying the same talk. Reasons for staying the same. Just like you said, we call it sustained talk in motivational interviewing.

Paul Warren: And that also speaks to. And this is something that you and I have discussed a lot in our conversations is this idea of intentionality and selectivity. Because we are intentionally evoking change talk, we are selectively reflecting, summarizing, affirming, inviting elaboration on that particular change talk. And I love the way the Participant put it staying the same talk, the sustained talk. You know, the image that I've heard Dr. Miller talk about and others is the idea that change talk and sustain talk are the opposite sides of one coin.

Paul Warren: Both of them are normal to the language of ambivalence. So sustained talk in and of itself is neither evil nor bad. It's just the other side of the coin in the conversation about ambivalence. And we want to attend to sustained talk and we want to manage it in a particular way. And I always think of Kate Speck, one of our

colleagues, and also a MINT member, because she often talks about softening sustained talk. We want to emphasize the change talk, we want to amplify, we want to strengthen, we want to accumulate more of the change talk, and we want to soften and manage the sustained talk.

Amy Shanahan: Yeah, and I'll add to that as well, if you don't mind. Paul Armin, who had really listened into some of the recordings done earlier and found this notion of people who had more change talk and specifically commitment type of change talk, that they were more apt to move to change. And he. I had the opportunity for him to listen to a recording I had with a, patient in a project that I was involved in and he shared some feedback with me that around that notion of intentionality, that we also don't want to ignore the change, the sustained talk, or the staying the same talk. We don't want to risk that the person didn't feel heard. So when we think about that notion of intentionality, and in this particular case, this person was new to me. So perhaps the perception was that I leaned into change talk, maybe when I could have leaned in a little bit to some of us staying the same talk with the intention to engage that person and maybe not come across as, hm. Well, she's only listening to one side of my ambivalence and responding to one side of my ambivalence. And it made me really think a lot about the skills and the tools that I use. And an example would be using a double sided reflection so I could respond to someone and say something along the lines of, you find that alcohol relaxes you and at the same time you wake up feeling sluggish and groggy. So the staying the same talk is the first thing I said and I end it with the change talk. So I'm honoring both sides of that ambivalence, thus staying the same or sustained talk and the change talk at the end. So

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Amy Shanahan: with this intention, we hope and know that most people will respond to the last thing that was said. So there's some intention to that specific skill.

Paul Warren: And you know, I think the beauty of the double sided reflection that you actually offered is the structural beauty of it. By putting the change talk at the end and you're also communicating to the person you're having the conversation with that because you're joining the sustain talk and the change talk with an and as opposed to the. But you're really attending to their full story.

Paul Warren: And you're not judging one side over the other. So again, which is, I think another level of nuance in communicating. Am I spirit? Because you are conveying both sides. You are landing on the side of the change talk and you're also acknowledging that those two things are existing at the same time. It also, you know, you mentioned too the whole idea of commitment language and it made me think of, you know, preparatory change talk, which is desire, ability, reasons and need, and then mobilizing change talk, which is the transition into commitment, language activation and taking steps. And when we're practicing motivational interviewing, we want to attend to everything that the person is saying.

Paul Warren: And you know, of course we really want to be listening for that change talk. And also keeping in mind that we don't have to wait for the change talk to happen, we can actually evoke it.

Amy Shanahan: So that's a really good point about evoking it. And I love the evocative strategies for that. And I've had folks who gave me the idea I just put the evocative strategy list on my desk to remind me that these are also strategies and skills we could use. that may be similar to some of the ors like elaboration, for example. Asking for

elaboration is one of them. And that sounds like an open question. And there are other evocative strategies. What would it look like in the future? What did it look like in the past? So there's evocative strategies that we could just explore. And people have said to me, after practicing them that they seem like really natural skills of conversation to have as well. So those are strategies that people have come forward and said, I really like that being able to think about these strategies to evoke more change talk and keeps me from my writing reflex of wanting to fill the gap with my own thoughts about what they could consider doing.

Paul Warren: M m. And you know, this idea of naturally occurring change talk during the course of the conversation where somebody's ambivalent people are naturally going to offer change talk, it'll just happen. And of course we want to attend to that and we want to put that to work. Then there's the evoked change talk, which you just went over a number of the strategies that people can use to actually intentionally evoke change talk about the identified behavioral change goal. And then there's another one that I would add, and this has been a particular area of interest for me, which I call it evoked and employed change talk, meaning that the person has, the worker has intentionally evoked change talk and then they're doing something with that change talk helps strengthen the person's motivation. And that's where the ears, asking for elaboration, affirming the change talk, reflecting or summarizing the change talk specifically, like you demonstrated in the double sided reflection, can employ the change talk. Because if it's not employed, it's like leaving money on the table.

Years ago, Paul, you really introduced me to this notion of intentionality

Amy Shanahan: Years ago, Paul, you really introduced me to this notion of intentionality which I have since read about. And it's interesting, I reflect back and think, why did that word not jump off the page at me? And when you shared an exercise, which I'm sharing here because I still use it even in my own way, if I listen to my own practice of a tape or someone else practicing MI M, I listen in for what's their intention in that moment with the person. What is the change

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Amy Shanahan: talk? What is the behavioral goal? And I noticed that when I think about that notion of intentionality and paying good attention and skillful attention to change talk, softening that sustained talk, my head is not so wrapped up around which skill ors I'm using or which evocative strategy I'm using. And I found that over time, because of that intentionality, I'm not so stuck in my head and I'm more about, in my ears and in my heart listening for what is their ambivalence. Where is that change talk? If it's not there, I could draw it out of them if I get a sense that it's there, or at least test the waters with my curiosity to see if it's there. And that has been really helpful for me, Paul, I give you credit for that. In my head a lot. Maybe I don't say it as much as I should, but that whole exercise that you created in a workshop that we went to in New Orleans, that Was it New Orleans? Yeah. Or Tallinn that we did was really, it really stood out to me as something powerful to pay attention in our practice. And I invite listeners to Consider that as well.

Paul Warren: Thank you for saying that, Amy. And you know, it's funny because that activity, which we called roundtable work, really came out of, a need that we found and identified in our training and practice implementation institute, our group practice sessions. And what we were finding is that folks were really good at using open ended

questions, doing a reflection, and it had nothing to do with the change goal.

Paul Warren: And they still thought they were practicing motivational interviewing.

Amy Shanahan: Right.

Paul Warren: And you know, the intentionality and the selectivity that you're talking about, if, if you simplify that, it's really just keeping focused on the identified behavioral change goal. Because if you're attuned that you will kind of know like, what's the next strategy for me to use to strengthen motivation around that particular behavioral change goal? That behavioral change goal becomes the North Star. That kind of guides the conversation, you.

Amy Shanahan: Know, if you don't mind, Paul. I love that. And people ask this question and I wonder what you think about how or how you would respond to it. Yeah, it's one thing I'm responding to change talk. And then, you know, my, the person that I'm helping, you know, goes all over the place and they start talking about their, their relationship issues. And so my change talk, let's say, is to stop smoking. And I'm working on that and you're working with me on that. And then I just start saying, well, you know, I'm really stressed out and you know, my significant other is giving me all kinds of pressure and I'm really struggling with that and I'm more stressed. And you know, so when you talk about intentionality around a behavioral goal, what would you say to people like that, that ask that question? How do I handle that? When somebody really starts talking about something serious that they want to talk about, that doesn't have anything to do maybe with their change goal?

Paul Warren: You know, that's a great question, Amy, because oftentimes people will

think like, oh, this person is going off on a tangent and it's not really related to what it is. They are the identified behavioral change goal, which in this case was the idea of cutting down or quitting smoking.

Paul Warren: What I sometimes do is I look for and listen for what might be what I call a conjunction between the stress that they might be experiencing, what they're talking about, and how that might relate to the identified behavioral change goal. So if the person was saying, oh, I'm under a lot of pressure right now, my spouse is really, we're not really Getting along very well. I might do a reflection, which would be something to the effect of you're under a lot of pressure right now, you're feeling a lot of stress, and the person may elaborate.

Paul Warren: And then I might say something to the effect of if it's okay, could I ask you a question, Ask permission, and then follow that with you're experiencing a lot of stress right now. Tell me a little bit about how that's

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Paul Warren: affecting your smoking at this particular time. So looking for that connection between what it is they're saying and listening for that connection, I want to attend to what may seem like a tangent.

Paul Warren: But my goal is to help that to come back to what the behavioral change goal is and also to acknowledge that sometimes the conversation turns into something that is not motivational interviewing because the person has another need and the conversation about the behavior change is concluded or paused at that moment.

Amy Shanahan: That's really helpful, I think, in general because there's times when I want to go down the that path with that question and feel sometimes like I'm, supervising a person in the audience asking that type of question. That's really helpful that you have a choice as a practitioner to navigate. Is this what you're talking about, this tangent or, this tributary that you went down? Does it relate to your change goal? And if it doesn't, that's okay too. Will tend to that. And perhaps we're not taking care of the change goal and using motivational interviewing. We might switch into some of the other strategies and skills we use in our helping world to help someone in that moment about that thing. And I know that we're using a specific example and it's hard to speculate a person's relationship with a person at any given time. At the same time, it's nice to talk about how do you move in and out of using motivational interviewing and listening for that change talk, and responding to that change talk and tending to a person who wants to talk about something else right now.

Paul Warren: Absolutely. And you know, Amy, you make me think of a very specific example that I actually just heard in a recording. I, was reviewing somebody's recording. They were having a conversation with somebody who was mandated to treatment because of their alcohol consumption and their children had been removed from them because of their alcohol consumption. So they were mandated to treatment. And the conversation began with the person, the client, expressing a lot of anger and a lot of frustration and a lot of suspicion that the worker was really working for the court M. And the worker was Very skilled, and was able to attend to what the client said and really reflect back the depth of feeling. And although the quote unquote organizational or programmatic change goal was to help this person abstain from the use of alcohol, the client identified that their goal was to get their children back. M. And this counselor was so skilled at, honoring that goal and creating the conjunction between the impact of the alcohol and the possibility of achieving that particular goal.

Amy Shanahan: That's really powerful, that. That comes up so much around the notion of people who are mandated to care or treatment, whether it be probation, the judge, their wife, their spouse, they feel like they have to do something because someone's forcing them to do it and being able to listen in for change talk. And there's things that I've said to people who say that, well, they made the choice to come and they could have chosen not to. That's one piece. So there's already ambivalence in the. In the door.

Paul Warren: And that ambivalence is an opportunity.

Amy Shanahan: Right. And they may want to change something that they may want more peace in their life. Yes. Based on your intentionality scenario, they may want peace in their life. So they'll decide that they're going to make a decision to change a behavior that they maybe wouldn't have otherwise to get that piece. And how to find that what you call conjunction, where you elicit and evoke from that person all those things that bring those two pieces together if they do right. And honoring their choice not to.

Paul Warren: Absolutely. And, you know, it was extraordinary how much change talk that this worker was able to evoke and that she also employed. Like, she didn't leave the money on the table. The change talk was evoked. And then she put it to work. She reflected it back. She summarized it back to the client,

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Paul Warren: which invited the client to then offer elaboration and more change talk.

You talked about listening for change talk in your motivational

interviewing practice

Amy Shanahan: You know, I was wondering about. And we always talk about listening to others tapes. And you just shared an example of one on how we practice our own, listening for change talk or our own practice in general. And I realized recently, in listening to some of my tapes and having my wonderful trusting colleagues like you give me feedback about how I'm doing with motivational interviewing. And I've noticed that I lean into sustained talk a bit more than I thought. And I'm like, oh, no. and yet that feedback was so helpful to me that I started to listen to my recordings and specifically listen for that. Sometimes I listen for my skills of the oars or other things. And lately I've been particularly listening for, when I respond to change talk, like you say, employ it. Did I respond to that? Did I miss it? have I been strategic? Did I soften that sustained talk or did I respond to it and make it stronger? And I could listen to my sessions specifically for that purpose. And I wonder what you have, thoughts about that.

Paul Warren: Well, you just did a, ah, wonderful commercial for how important it is, I find in terms of refining my MI practice, how important it is to have colleagues and supervision that you feel safe and that you trust in terms of them being able to give you specific feedback on the opportunities for growth that you have. Like the idea that you acknowledge that, oh, through receiving feedback, I understand that, you know, I'm giving a little more air to sustain talk or exploring the sustained talk in a way that maybe is at the expense of the change talk.

Paul Warren: With that feedback, you can adjust your practice. And you know, you made me so much think of what Bill Miller, I, heard him say once, this idea of, you know, the more the thing you ask about the most or the thing that you reflect the most, you're just going to get more of that thing.

Paul Warren: So if you reflect the sustained talk or if you say, tell me a little bit more about the good things about smoking, you're going to get more of that.

Amy Shanahan: Yeah.

Paul Warren: And MI is about helping people to identify the things that are moving them toward their identified behavioral change goal, not keeping them where they are.

Amy Shanahan: Right. And that's the intention because we now know definitely from research that the more people talk about change, the more they talk themselves into change. And it's really cool because we don't have to do anything but intentionally respond to that change talk. And we really did nothing but support their own language. And that was another thing I wanted to, bring up that I think is really powerful that really responding and using people's language can be super helpful to let them know we're listening and not changing the words around too much. There was an example of a person using, when someone was talking about changing or reducing their swearing, someone reflected back, oh yeah, you're really uncomfortable using vulgar language. And there was, a little bit of discord in that because the person used their, the practitioner used their own language, which sounded judgmental because they used the word vulgar. So I think it's really powerful to put their words back on the table, as you say, so that they see it or hear it, if you will as well. That's really powerful.

Paul Warren: Absolutely. And you know, the other thing that I think is interesting about that too is, and we talked about this in the, first episode of the podcast, this idea that, you know, MI is not manipulation, nor is it magic. So using, employing the individual's, own change talk is not manipulation, it's their change talk.

Amy Shanahan: Right.

Paul Warren: It speaks to the selectivity of the practice though, because when we're practicing MI we are intentionally selecting that change talk. Just like you demonstrated with the double sided reflection you gave. We are selectively

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Paul Warren: reflecting, summarizing, asking for elaboration, affirming that change talk because we want to strengthen that, we want the person to hear it again and we want to invite them to elaborate on it.

Amy Shanahan: And to go back to what we were talking about earlier and how you gave really nice examples of having a mentor and a coach and recording your sessions. I want to add too, and invite people to consider recording their own practice for the sake of listening to their own work. Some people say to me, well, I don't have that level of supervision and, or I don't have a supervisor that understands motivational interviewing and I won't go down the rabbit hole of supervision. That would be a different podcast.

Paul Warren: Yes it would.

Amy Shanahan: And I could get on my soapbox because I'm very passionate about that. at the same time we have an opportunity, we have it in ourselves to listen and critique ourselves and listen for our own leaning in, as I said earlier. So I would invite folks to not shy away from asking people to practice and let them record it and listen to it and consider how much did they respond to change talk. Or just give yourself permission to listen for change talk. And you mentioned, the desire, abilities, reasons

and needs which we refer to as darn. And the cat part, which is the commitment, activating and taking steps that you could listen to your own tape without even worrying about what you did and listening first for what the person said and were they saying anything about desires, abilities, reasons and needs and did and then listen again and how did you respond to it and or as you said, evoke it when it's not so strong or not always on the table.

Paul Warren: And you know, those don't have to be real client conversations. They can be role play conversations. I, mean I've, you know, I've learned tremendous amount from the role play conversations that you and I have done where we've switched back and forth, where we've done one where you're the client or when you know, I'm the client or however we've done it as we've reviewed those and then talked through what was going on, from an MI perspective and we did, in a prior episode we did talk about the mighty, which gives us kind of a way of looking at it. And you know, another thing that you could do, there's a wonderful video which is called the Effective Dentist. And somebody could watch that video and they could identify how the worker, the dentist is evoking change talk and then what the dentist is doing with the change talk that's evoked.

Amy Shanahan: And I've seen that video and I'm going to invite folks to consider also their songs that you could listen to on YouTube and even see the lyrics across the screen so that you could listen in for that. Macklemore has a song, Intentions, interestingly enough called Intentions. And he sings so much about his use and his behaviors and ambivalence is almost in every line a really nice opportunity to practice responding to change talk by listening to Macklemore's Intention song. So there's lots of ways that we can get practice in and listen in and not necessarily have that feedback loop, despite how powerful it would be to have that. And I remember that too, that I get

a lot out of us practicing role plays, not just with each other or with patients or people that we serve. We could talk with our family members as well. I remember listening to my sister in law and I was practicing specifically listening and responding to change talk. And at the end I just threw in the towel and totally dove into writing reflex and said okay, let's get going, let's go do this and jumped to wanting to plan. And it was kind of a humorous way to practice not being consistent with motivational interviewing. And it leads me to a serious point that I took away from that practice, is that when I have a familiarity or something is in my gut and I have that wanting to help someone, especially someone I know and care about, not that that's the only people I care about. My writing reflex is really powerful at that time and not

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Amy Shanahan: responding to it. And that's another podcast as well and folks can take a look at that. Like my desire to not respond, wanting to help people. But anyway, that intention was all about listening for change talk. And I dove into responding to sustained talk at the end.

Paul Warren: Understood. And you know, that is something that can happen in a conversation about change, especially if we feel really strongly or care about the person, that we're in that conversation with. And it's also something that we can course correct and come back from. And sometimes we're able to do that in the moment of the conversation. Like, oh, I'm kind of self monitoring. And I realized that I just went into the writing reflex.

Amy Shanahan: Hm.

Paul Warren: And now I'm going to back myself out of it and go back to being where the client is at. And that's also the benefit of recording one's conversations when possible and of course respecting people's confidentiality, and being able to reflect on that work. And I really appreciate the point that you're making, Amy, of that even if you don't have trusted colleagues that you can do that with, there are ways to do that on your own. Certainly I can only speak for myself. It's a very rich experience being able to do that with colleagues like yourself and other folks in Mint and, other people who are practicing motivational interviewing. And it can also be done individually if you don't have those resources available.

Amy Shanahan: Right. So practice is important. Getting feedback is important. You don't have to do it alone. And you can do it alone.

Paul Warren: Absolutely. And you know, if.

Change Talk is gold. And unless we employ the change talk, we've left money on the table

I guess if I had to boil it all down to three things that I'd like people to take away in regard to Change Talk. And sometimes I do this as an interactive opportunity. So I'm going to invite people who are listening to our conversation today to do this along with me, which is that Change Talk is. And I'm going to say that statement and I want you to finish it wherever you are, with the word gold. So, Amy, if you wouldn't mind demonstrating, Change Talk is gold. Yes, it is gold. And we want to mine for it. M. We also want to employ it. So yes, there's naturally occurring change talk, there's evoked Change talk. And unless we employ the change talk, whether it's naturally occurring or

evoked, we've left money on the table.

Amy Shanahan: We left that gold.

Paul Warren: That's right. We've left the gold there and don't do it. And the way to employ that change talk is to invite elaboration, affirm the strengths and efforts, reflect and summarize it. And that's the selectivity part of the intentional practice.

Amy Shanahan: That's a beautiful summary to end our conversation about Change Talk.

Amy and Paul discuss developing discrepancy in motivational interviewing

Paul Warren: Thank you. I really appreciate talking to you about this. And this is a topic that is truly near and dear to my heart and to my learning about how to be more effective, practicing motivational interviewing.

Amy Shanahan: Thanks for sharing. I feel your passion and I've learned so much from you along the way and again today. Thanks, Paul.

Paul Warren: You're welcome, Amy. Thank you.

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Paul Warren: Lions and Tigers and Bears Am I. An i: Thanks for listening to episode four of Lions and Tigers and Bears. MI Join us for episode five where Amy and Paul will

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