Motivational Interviewing with Adolescents and Young Adults

Sylvie Naar-King and Mariann Suarez
Guilford Press
US $35.00

Review by Rachel Johnson, DClinPsych[1]

As a chartered clinical psychologist working in independent practice in the UK, my clinical time is increasingly filled with families and young people who have found that they simply do not seem to 'fit' the mainstream, often CBT-based, approaches offered within their local mental health services. Families tell me that although they see the value of what was offered, ultimately the input provided has failed to understand or address the complexity of their individual experiences.

With no group of clients is this more prominent than those between the ages of 13 and 21; parents approach me citing discharge letters stating that "poor engagement" or "lack of insight" has affected their teen's ability to benefit from the intervention.

It is perhaps unsurprising, therefore, that I have found myself increasingly drawn towards MI as an approach to help address these issues. MI seems to provide a missing link for clients who find themselves ambivalent not only in relation to the therapeutic input offered, but also about the adult world that offers it, and their own changing role within that world.

Divided into three logical sections, this book sets out to provide a comprehensive introduction to the use of MI with adolescents and young adults, exploring how the core principles of MI can be applied to this age group and some of the common difficulties with which they present. Writing in a clear and pragmatic style, Sylvie Naar-King and Mariann Suarez achieve just that, and the resulting book proved to be easy to read, as well as being a useful and informative clinical guide.

Part 1 presents a guide to the history and central principles of MI with young people; after orienting the reader to the structure of the book, the authors provide a brief, but undeniably valuable, review of some central theories in social, biological and cognitive development in adolescence. Having provided this context, the guide then runs smoothly and coherently through the principles and style of MI interactions; with a clear visual aid to guide the uninitiated from spirit to person-centred skills, through resistance and change talk to plans and commitment towards positive change. Providing tips, examples and summary boxes throughout, this section certainly achieves what it sets out to do, namely providing a sound introduction to the development and rationale of MI, alongside a practical guide to integrating this theory into everyday practice.

Part 2 comprises twelve sections, each focusing on the use of MI with young people on specific behavioural change issues. With sections covering smoking, alcohol and substance misuse, youth offending, psychiatric disorders, eating disorders, obesity and chronic medical conditions, as well as the application of MI in schools as a family-based intervention, the range of topics is varied without feeling disjointed. A common format for these chapters helps readers draw their own parallels between the areas. Written by an impressive team of over thirty clinicians and researchers specialising in the areas they discuss, each section provides:

- ➢ An introduction to the scope of the problem
- ➢ An overview of why MI constitutes a useful approach in the area
- ➢ A guide to the application of MI spirit and strategies in the area
- ➢ Research implications

Part 3 goes on to provide a brief outline of the challenges that might be faced by clinicians looking to integrate MI into their own practice. The first half of this section considers the ethical considerations inherent in balancing the views and goals of client, family, and practitioners, utilising a small range of examples to illustrate four primary ethical guidelines laid out by Miller and Rollnick (2002) for behavioural change. Finally, having made a brief but considered analysis of these, discussion then turns to the process of developing proficiency in MI, from first consideration to the establishment of a MI peer learning group and access of training offered by members of MINT.

This final section offers just a taste of some of the considerations of power, interest, and development that are likely to arise in a journey towards proficiency in MI. However, this is perhaps as it should be. Whilst those already familiar with and utilising MI within their everyday practice will certainly find this book to be a useful resource to revisit skills and principles, perhaps adapting these for use with a different age group, it will be perhaps of most interest to those new to the area. Clinicians from a variety of professional backgrounds who are new to the theory of MI and are seeking different ways to engage adolescents and young people in therapeutic settings will find this to be an accessible guide. The clarity of structure and helpful chapter summaries make the book easy to pick up, even in the midst of a busy clinic.

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