

FEATURED SESSION B

2026 Joint Annual Conference

What the Moment Needs

Motivational Interviewing Strategies for High-Stakes Intervention Conversations

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What has this work taught you about helping?

When I first entered this work, I thought helping meant…

Today, I understand helping as…

The moments that matter

An expectation is challenged.

A commitment has not been met.

A person stops contributing.

A quick “yes” leaves us unsure.

MI works with the person's own motivation

A collaborative conversation about change.

The person's own reasons and reservations.

Their strengths and possibilities.

Their motivation and commitment.

Listening is part of the intervention

Ask openly.

Reflect what you understand.

Recognize strengths.

Summarize what matters.

Exchange useful information.

Carry your part in the change process

Our responsibility	The person’s part
Listening and judgment	Their perspective and reasons
Clear information and limits	Choices within actual limits
Support and follow-through	Their decisions and actions

Not every conversation is about change

Listen to understand.

Share information.

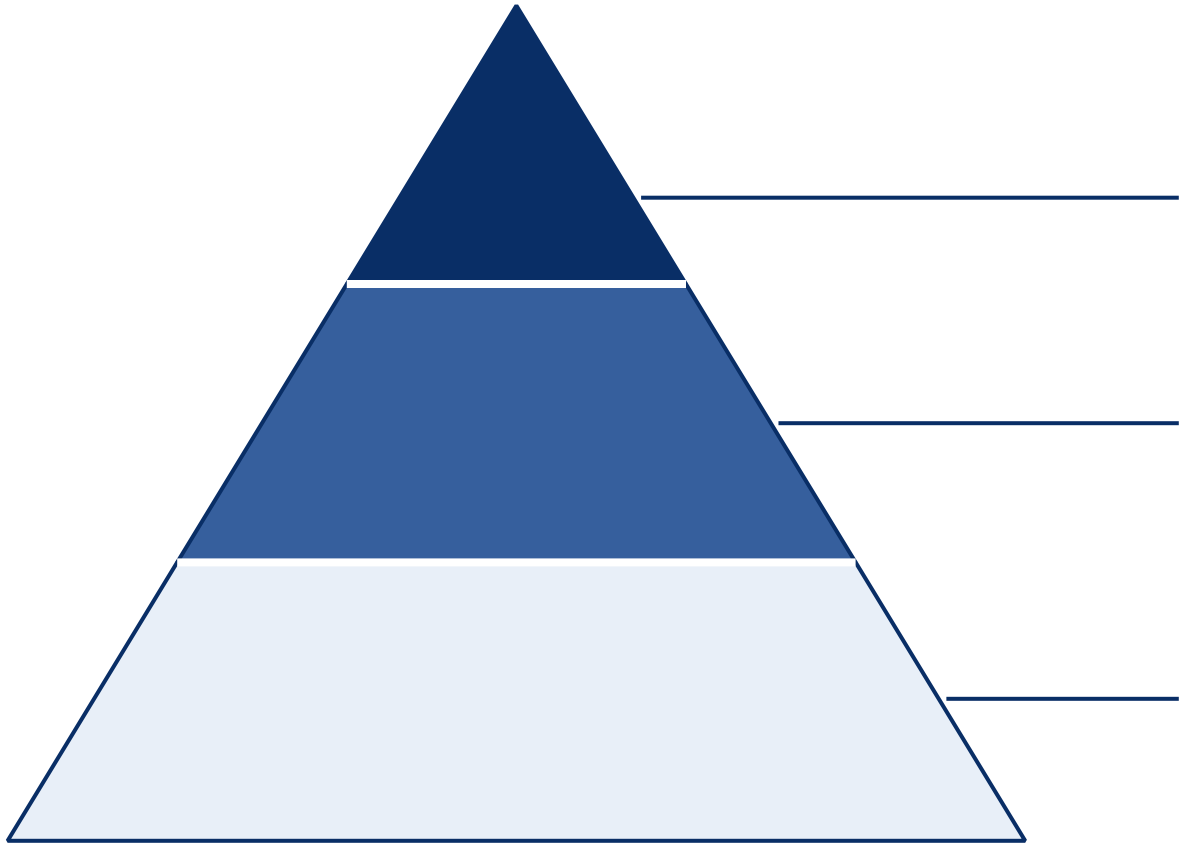
Explain an expectation.

Address a responsibility.

Support a next step.

What does this conversation need to make possible?

What supports a conversation about change?



Conversation about change

Meaningful participation

A credible basis for trust

What could make it hard to trust us?

Cultural and community experience

What has been learned about institutions like ours?

Systems and power

What can this process affect—and who controls it?

Personal experience and present circumstances

What has happened before?
What is the person carrying today?

This relationship

What have our actions given them reason to expect?

Trust and accountability share a foundation

They understand what they can expect from us.

We understand what we can expect from them.

Both know what happens next.

Six conditions that support trust and accountability

01 **Shared understanding**

02 **Emotional safety and readiness**

03 **Ownership**

04 **Meaning-making**

05 **Boundaries**

06 **Next steps**

Shared understanding

Enough of a common picture to address the same issue.

We understand what is being discussed—and can identify what remains different.

Emotional safety and readiness

Enough room to think,
speak honestly,
and respond.

The conversation is manageable enough for both people to participate.

Ownership

A clear part for each person to carry.

Responsibility is understood, with appropriate support available.

Meaning-making

Understand how the same difficulty keeps returning.

We can see where a different response or support could make a difference.

Boundaries

What is fixed,
what can be shaped,
and who decides.

The person knows where
their contribution belongs.

Next steps

Who will do what, when, and with what support.

The next part is specific enough to carry and return to.

Our first reaction does not have to choose our response

Notice the reaction.

Hold the interpretation open.

Return to what the interaction needs.

Before Friday’s review

WORKER’S ACCOUNT

I’m helping a student prepare for Friday’s review of their place in the program. They have missed two follow-up meetings after repeated class absences.

No decision has been made. Completion requirements are fixed; the team will consider the student’s account and support needs.

THE STUDENT TELLS ME:

“Last time I explained what was happening and never heard back. Now there’s another meeting about my future. You keep asking what I think, but what difference is it going to make? Just tell me what you’ve decided.”

Before choosing a response

1. **In one sentence, define the problem the worker is facing with the client.**
2. **What assumption is influencing your problem statement?**
3. **What condition might be missing or contributing to this interaction?**

The condition gives AOA its purpose

Once you identify what needs attention, you know what your conversation needs to make possible.

Use Ask–Offer–Ask to work toward that outcome.

Ask–Offer–Ask

ASK

Understand the person's starting point.

OFFER

Bring what the moment requires, informed by what you heard.

ASK AGAIN

Find out what they made of it.

Closing reflection

Case 1 · After the report

WORKER'S ACCOUNT

I'm meeting with a student after a classroom incident was reported. I need to hear their account and explain the follow-up process.

I've started going through the report, the next meeting, and the information they could bring. The student keeps interrupting before I finish. I have twenty minutes before my next appointment.

THE STUDENT TELLS ME:

"I'm trying to listen, but you're giving me too much at once. I can't keep track of what I'm supposed to answer. Can we start with one thing?"

Case breakdown Ask–Offer–Ask Closing reflection

After the report · Case breakdown

ONE POSSIBLE READING

Problem	The conversation is moving faster than the student can follow.
Assumption to check	Interrupting means unwillingness to listen.
Likely condition	**Emotional safety and readiness.**

INTENDED OUTCOME

A manageable pace for hearing the account and explaining the process.

Back to case Ask–Offer–Ask Closing reflection

Case 2 · The referral

WORKER'S ACCOUNT

Last week, I gave a student their adviser's contact details and said I could help them arrange a meeting. I also asked them to make contact before our next check-in.

Today, no appointment is booked. The deadline for changing courses is tomorrow.

THE STUDENT TELLS ME:

> **"I thought you were emailing the adviser. You said you would help me get it set up. I've been waiting for you."**

Case breakdown Ask–Offer–Ask Closing reflection

The referral · Case breakdown

ONE POSSIBLE READING

Problem	The handoff left each person waiting for the other to act.
Assumption to check	My request meant we both understood who would make contact.
Likely condition	**Ownership and shared understanding.**

INTENDED OUTCOME

Clear responsibilities and support before the course-change deadline.

Back to case Ask–Offer–Ask Closing reflection

Case 3 · Another plan

WORKER'S ACCOUNT

I'm working with a student who wants help catching up. We make a plan each week. When I follow up after the first unfinished task, they stop replying. They eventually return with more work overdue.

Today they have asked for another plan. I ask what happens after our meetings.

THE STUDENT TELLS ME:

"When I get stuck, I think I should sort it out before I come back. Then I leave your messages because I don't want to turn up with nothing done again."

Case breakdown Ask–Offer–Ask Closing reflection

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Another plan · Case breakdown

ONE POSSIBLE READING

Problem	When work becomes difficult, contact stops and overdue work grows.
Assumption to check	Another plan will address what interrupted the last one.
Likely condition	**Meaning-making: understand the recurring pattern.**

INTENDED OUTCOME

A shared understanding of where the pattern needs a different response.

Back to case Ask–Offer–Ask Closing reflection

Return to your understanding of helping

After today's session,
my understanding of helping is…

How will I know my help is helping?

Thank you

Please reach out with any questions.

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Chapters 1–2: JW draft; chapter 3: AW draft, “What the Conversation Needs.”

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2026 Conference Schedule. Featured Session B:
“What the Moment Needs.” Supplied catalog, PDF page 8.

Fixing the Fixing Reflex.

A Practical Habit for Responding Under Pressure.
Supplied session brief; assumption-checking and discussion design.

AOA CoP Agenda.

Prior working agenda.
Opening reflection on how our understanding of helping develops.