

Tips for Facilitating Participant Practice During MI Workshops



virtually and in-person

Participant practice is one of the most important aspects of the workshops, for many reasons:

- Because MI skills facilitate connection between people, when participants practice, they have a real experience of how powerful the techniques can be, in just a few minutes. This means they will leave your workshop feeling more connected to others, which is how we hope our patients feel after interactions with us.
- During practices, participants have an experience of both practicing the skills, as well as being on the receiving end, deepening understanding for both experiences.
- MI is harder than it sounds, and we tend to overestimate how much we are using the techniques. It is only during practice that participants get a clear understanding of how often, and how much, they use MI, as well as how easy or difficult it might be.
- Participants highly value practice. On Evaluations of MI workshops, participants invariably say practicing was the most valuable aspect.

During virtual workshops, if the platform does not support break-out groups, MI practice is not possible. In these cases, showing short videos, and demonstrating with a co-facilitator or willing participant for each skill, is very important. Additionally, having participants set goals around using one of the skills, between workshops, then checking in on the goals at the beginning of the next workshop, is useful.

Guidelines for facilitating participant practice during workshops:



Ensure at least 25% of the workshop is practicing; shooting for 30% is great. For example, for an hour workshop, 15-20 minutes will be practice. For a 3 hour workshop, 45-60 minutes will be practice.



Use groups of 3 when possible. Groups of three allow an observer role. The observer role is important, as they are charged with intervening with the practitioner if they are off track. Without an observer, pairs often do not practice MI skills, however, are unaware (for example, they may ask closed questions without knowing it). Due to the numbers in the workshop, sometimes one group will need to be in a pair. It is ideal to ensure the group that must be paired are stronger in MI skills to begin with.



Keep groups the same for every practice episode. People tend to feel safer knowing their groups won't change; additionally, it is more chaotic to try and change groups for each practice episode.



Explain clearly the 3 roles. Ensure participants understand the 3 roles: *Practicer*: the one who is practicing MI skills; *practice partner*: the one who is sharing about their own lives; and the observer, the role that will ensure the *practicer* is practicing MI skills. The group rotates, so everyone gets a chance to be in each role.



Ensure participants do not 'role play'. This might be the most important guidance for successful practice episodes. Most people have been in trainings where they have role played, and often automatically assume this is how they will practice MI skills- on a partner who is pretending to be a patient, for example. *Because role playing is not real, this type of practice is not helpful, and rarely results in behavior change for the participants.* Additionally, participants won't feel closer to each other after role-playing practice, as they haven't shared anything 'real'. We can participate know, when they are the practice partner, to pick something that they feel very comfortable talking about, and give some examples, such as sleep, diet, exercise, which tend to be fairly low risk.



Time the practice. 2 minutes per person is a good ballpark, so 6-8 minutes for practice episodes. In person, call out after 2 minutes for people to switch roles. During break outs, send a message to groups at 2 minutes to switch.



Ask for sharing when practice ends and triads come back to the large group. Asking something like 'what were people's experiences as practitioners?' or 'what did people notice?'. Having 2-3 people share their experiences with the big group after coming back from practice episodes helps the large group benefit from others experiences and is a useful transition for people to get settled back into the larger group.



Caution explicitly to avoid advice. The single most common thing participants do, which renders practice ineffective, is to give advice instead of practicing MI skills. We are incredibly conditioned to give advice, the tendency is so strong, people tend to engage in it without even knowing they are doing it. Before every practice episode, it is important to remind people not to give any advice, not even a smidgen! This includes 'have you ever thought of...?' and 'do you think X might help...?' ☺



Observe practice sessions and intervene when necessary. During in-person workshop practice sessions, walk around the room to listen to groups for a few seconds. If they are on track, move on. Often, however, a group will be role playing, or you and your co-facilitator will hear someone asking closed questions, and see the observer doesn't say anything, for example. It is important to intervene quickly to give feedback 'ah, that was closed', or 'that was advice' is enough for the person practicing to pause and start over.



Split groups by threes by walking around the room and grouping three people who are sitting next to each other. Avoiding 'counting off' to split groups, as it creates chaos and confusion. Additionally, people often sit next to those they know, making practicing feel safer for them.