

Information Sheet

What is motivational dialogue?

Motivational dialogue is a conversational approach that starts learners talking about change in their lives. It is based on research into the strategies adopted by people who have successfully made significant changes in their lives. These people had two things in common:

- They worked through an identifiable sequence of stages of change.
- They were aware of the stage they were at and what would help them at that stage.

Out of the research came the Wheel of Change¹, a model that defines the process of change in the following stages:

- Pre-awareness – lack of awareness that a change is needed.
- Contemplation – recognition that a problem exists.
- Decision – deciding to do something about the problem.
- Active change – putting in place whatever is needed to support change.
- Maintenance – turning new behaviour into a well-established habit.
- Relapse – a setback that can happen at any time.

Motivational dialogue is a learner-centred approach to motivating people to change their behaviour. It's quite directive in that the person helping the learner has a particular agenda for behaviour change they want the learner to adopt. It remains learner-centred because the tutor will be trying to bring the learner along at their own pace and using skills and techniques that are appropriate to where the learner is at the time. What I like about motivational dialogue is that it helps to overcome the resistance that so many learners have about accepting advice from authority figures and from other adults.

Paul Lalgee

You cannot make your learners change. They will change when they are ready – not when they are told or pushed. The motivation has to come from them. You can help learners embrace the possibility of change and move forward by:

- understanding where they are on the Wheel of Change;
- using helping strategies appropriate to the stage they are at;
- developing your skills in helping learners to take responsibility for their lives;
- using techniques that bring focus and clarity to the conversations you have with learners;

¹ Prochaska, J. O. and DiClemente, C. C., 'Transtheoretical therapy: towards a more integrative model for change', 1982, *Psychotherapy, research and practice* 19 (3), pp. 276–88.

- helping them to realise that change is not easy and that there might be setbacks from time to time. Some setbacks will be temporary; others may need a more serious reappraisal of commitment and strategies.

You will do this through conversations in which you:

- adopt a quiet, friendly and respectful style;
- recognise that learners are experts on their own feelings and behaviour;
- help learners explore and resolve their mixed feelings or ambivalence about change;
- focus learners' attention on talking about change.

Motivational dialogue with a learner is a holistic process. You're having a purposeful conversation with a young person but you're employing a variety of different skills. It is about building trust and rapport and giving lots of empathy so that the learner becomes inclined to open up. You can't just jump into trying to get a person to change their mind about the way they see their life, or the things that they ought to be doing.

Ted Daszkiewicz

The ethos of motivational dialogue

Talking to learners in this way captures the ethos of motivational dialogue and is very different from:

- telling;
- urging;
- persuading;
- confronting strongly;
- giving unsolicited advice.

What I really like about motivational dialogue is that it teaches the learner to be reflective. It actually teaches them to think: "If I want certain things to happen to me in about three to five years'time, how am I going to have to change my behaviour tomorrow?"

That in itself is a mature way of thinking that adults take for granted. But it's a way of thinking that many youngsters don't have. They think: "What do I want now? I want to go out and have a beer so I'm going to stop work and I'm going to go out for a beer now." They don't think, "Well if I do go out for a beer now and I do this for the rest of the week, how am I going to get my assignment in? If I don't get my assignment in how am I going to pass the course? If I don't pass the course how am I going to get the job?"

Motivational dialogue stimulates the kind of thought processes that encourage that kind of personal development. I think that what we're doing when we are doing motivational dialogue, apart from motivating learners to change their behaviour, is teaching them some thinking skills – some reflective skills that they would never develop if we just used a confrontational approach.

Paul Lalgee