

Conversations about permanency can be some of the most meaningful, and challenging, discussions we have with youth. They often involve complex emotions, uncertainty, differing perspectives, and competing priorities.

Motivational Interviewing (MI) offers a strengths-based approach that engages the youth in meaningful dialogue, explores hopes and concerns, and supports them in identifying their own path toward permanency. Before you start the process, be sure to ask permission:

- "Would it be okay if we talked a little about the people who have been important in your life?"
- "Would it be alright if I shared something I've noticed?"
- "Can I ask you a question about what you just said?"

Apply these MI skills, known as OARS, to lead permanency focused conversations :

Open-Ended Questions (Invite conversation, don't interrogate)

- "When you think about family, who comes to mind?"
- "Who are the people you feel most like yourself around?"
- "Tell me about a time you felt important or cared about."
- "What do you hope your life looks like a few years from now? Who is a part of it?"



Affirmations (Build confidence and strengths without pressure)

- "You've put a lot of thought into who feels safe to you."
- "It takes courage to talk about relationships that matter."
- "You know yourself well, even when things feel confusing or uncertain."
- "You have worked hard to stay connected with the people who matter to you."



Reflections (Show understanding; reduce defensiveness)

- "It sounds like you want connection, but don't want . . ."
- "You care about having a family, but you're worried about . . ."
- "You've been disappointed before, so it makes sense that you're being careful."
- "You're hoping for connection, but you want it to happen at your pace."
- "Independence is important to you, but you'd like to have people to turn to if needed."



Summaries (Help youth hear their own motivations to support clarity)

- "What I'm hearing is that finishing school, feeling stable, and having someone to count on are important. You're still figuring out who those people might be, that's okay."
- "It sounds like having lifelong connections matters to you. You may not know exactly what that looks like yet, but you know you don't want to do everything alone."
- "We don't have to decide today . . ."



Individualize Discussions, Support, and Approaches Across All Ages

YCPRT Youth Prep Toolkit

Use interactive tools to explain the purpose of permanency discussions and meetings (such as YCPRT) and how their voice shapes the meeting.

- Center youth voice in all planning and conversations.
- Involvement is on a spectrum: Celebrate connection.
- Reinforce that permanency is about people, not placement.

Key Message

"We are not trying to replace anyone in your circle, we are just exploring and expanding it."

- Talk with youth, not at them. Use prompts, examples, and validation.
- Permanency is not a one-time conversation.
- Plans/goals may change over time and that is ok.
- Explore who can be invited to the table to support them.

Interviewing Principles

Follow these core motivational interviewing principles for permanency:

- **Partnership:** "We're figuring this out together."
- **Autonomy:** "You're in charge of your choices."
- **Empathy:** "Your feelings make sense."
- **Evocation:** "You already have important answers inside you."



Ages (11) 12-13: Preparing Youth for Conversations

Developmental Lens: Concrete thinkers, present-focused, strong sensitivity to loyalty, may fear "choosing" between adults.

Your Focus: Building understanding, trust, and readiness for participation.

Skills & Activities:

- **Feelings/Emoji Chart:** Help youth identify and express emotions related to family, safety, and connection.
- **Circles of Support:** Create a visual of people who are or have been involved in their lives.
- **Naturally Connected Questions:** Focus on basic open-ended prompts, like: "Who do you go to when you're upset?" or "Who's always been there for you?" to explore natural connections.



Facilitator Tips:

- Keep conversations short and visual.
- Use youth-friendly language and pace.
- Normalize nervousness; focus on strengths and safety.



Motivational Interviewing Spotlight:

- No correcting. No fixing. Just reflecting.
- You're reinforcing choice and autonomy, not commitments.
- Example approaches include Magic Wand and Three Wishes.

Ages 14-16: Deepening Awareness & Connection

Developmental Lens: Growing abstract thinking, strong identity development, testing autonomy and boundaries.

Your Focus: Helping youth identify, explore, and reconnect with supportive adults.

Skills & Activities:

- **Circles of Support (revisited):** Create a visual of people who are or have been involved in their lives. Expand/revise based on changes in their support system.
- **Genogram:** Reflect on family history, names, and relationships that may offer connection opportunities.
- **Naturally Connected Questions:** Focus on deepening exploration around past/current relationships.



Facilitator Tips:

- Encourage youth to lead conversations about their journey.
- Use reflective tools (journals, visuals) to spark discussion.
- Support participation in outreach ideas (letters, texts, calls).



Motivational Interviewing Spotlight:

- Shift from preparing to partnering. Use curiosity, not conclusions.

Ages 17-18 (19): Social Networking & Future Planning

Developmental Lens: Seeking independence, future-oriented but sometimes reality unaware, sensitive to being "done to."

Your Focus: Building and sustaining connections beyond system involvement.

Skills & Activities:

- **Mobility Mapping:** Explore past caregivers, schools, and communities to identify supportive family, kin, or mentors.
- **Permanency Pact:** Create or update agreements outlining how supports will stay connected into adulthood. (Genograms can help identify supports.)
- **Naturally Connected Questions:** Focus on identifying dependable adult connections for now/future.



Facilitator Tips:

- Emphasize interdependence and connection.
- Use social networking activities to identify caring adults.
- Reinforce that permanency is lifelong and connected to real-life transitions.



Motivational Interviewing Spotlight:

- Emphasize choice and mutuality. Reflect confidence and concern together.
- Make it concrete and realistic (rides, holidays, advice, emergencies).