



Counseling in Times of Crisis: Tips and Strategies from Guilford Experts

Q&A with Melinda Hohman, author of *Motivational Interviewing in Social Work Practice, Second Edition*

1. Congratulations on the publication of *Motivational Interviewing in Social Work Practice, Second Edition*. Your book came out in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, a time that has seen a surge in people seeking psychological help. How has this impacted your experience as an author, and as a mental health professional?

Much of the book was completed either before or right at the start of the pandemic. Of course, none of us knew what to expect and it was a time of anxiety for many people, myself included. I enjoy writing so in a way it was a way of coping, to have a task to focus on. Some of my colleagues and I wrote a piece on Motivational Interviewing (MI) and contact tracing for a special edition of a journal on COVID and social work. This gave me a chance to review some of the research on the impacts of pandemics and mental health and it became quite clear that this pandemic was also having a large impact, from what the early research told us, on rates of depression, anxiety, and suicide. With over 2.5 million deaths worldwide, the grief and loss people feel is enormous as well. Most likely these will be overlapping problems with clients that social workers will see, no matter the context.

2. What aspects of your book make it stand out from others on a similar topic? Are there any features that make it uniquely suited to helping people cope during the pandemic?

The book is written for practicing social workers and other professionals as well as social work students. I included new client vignettes to demonstrate MI conversations in some innovative social work contexts, such as public libraries. I also included short pieces from current social workers, many of them my former students, about how they are using MI in their work. While written before the pandemic, some of the themes include clients impacted by loss of housing, grief and loss, suicide, and racial disparities. Hopefully these examples will be useful to social workers as they work with clients who seek their help in these areas. COVID has only magnified these problems.

3. Your book is widely viewed as the definitive text on motivational interviewing written by and for social workers. Can you share one or two ways in which social workers can use MI techniques to help people cope with COVID related mental health issues?

MI is a focused listening with empathy and compassion. Sometimes just listening to someone's struggles is healing to them. MI encourages social workers to work with each client to help them decide what works best for them. Our job is not to fix people or offer solutions. Trusting that clients can come up with their own solutions honors their own self-efficacy around their coping mechanisms. Embracing this approach can free us from our own internal pressures to make people change. Some of the issues related to COVID are very emotional. Use of MI in vaccine hesitancy, for instance, helps the practitioner to take a step back and put their own emotions aside and listen for the concerns of the individual. They ultimately have to decide what is best for them.

