

Worksheet 4.4: OARS (including LESS is more)

OARS is one of the most important communication skills when using the MI approach, it helps keep the conversation reflective and mindful. The aim is to be aware of everything we say to Edi and how we say it. The important thing is to keep practising it in everything we do. OARS can be used wherever Edi is in the cycle of change.

Key messages:

- Open questions: skilful questioning style
- Affirmations: to build confidence and motivation
- Reflections: non-judgemental listening style developing empathy
- Summary: demonstrating your understanding and next steps

Guidelines:

- Three reflections/affirmations for every open question.
- LESS is more – less talking and telling and more listening (*SBC*, Chapter 8, pp. 95–9).
- Summarise periodically.
- As a general rule if you can use OARS for 5 to 10 minutes a day you should start to see a positive effect. It's easy to get into the question/answer trap so, to be a great listener, try and provide as many summaries and reflections as possible – and aim for no more than one open question, on average, for every three reflections. Remember LESS is more.
- OARS is just as useful for telephone conversations. Carers can practice with a friend on the telephone, even without them knowing. Considering different scenarios is also very useful.
- The best way to practise OARS to start with is to think of a scenario and write out OARS for this scenario. Then practice speaking like this with anyone who is prepared to listen. Then try using it with your loved one with the ED and see what happens.
- This is a new way of communicating so it won't feel normal or natural.

Examples

Open questions

These invite Edi to talk and explore their own ideas and can help you to understand more about how Edi is really feeling. Avoid 'why' questions as much as possible.

- I am curious to know how I can help.
- What would be helpful?
- What would you like the next steps to be?
- Help me understand what you feel your options are.

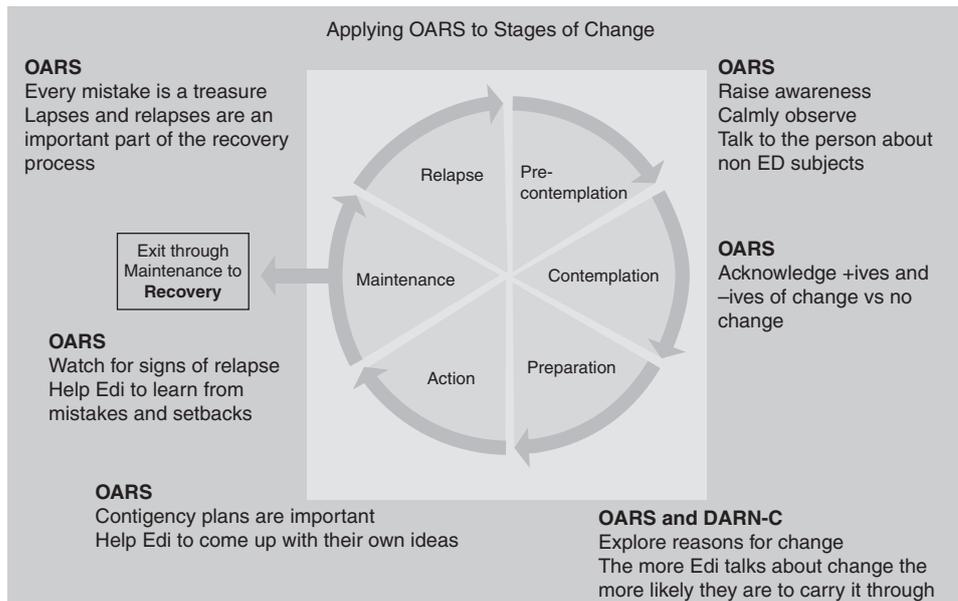


Figure 4.10 OARS can be used wherever Edi is in the cycle of change

Affirmations

These help Edi to acknowledge their own positive behaviours and character strengths, which then builds confidence in their ability to change.

- You are so hard-working, resourceful, thoughtful, creative, inspiring, etc.
- That's a really great idea.
- I can see that you find these things difficult and you displayed a great deal of courage.
- I'm not sure other people would manage so well.

Reflections

By paraphrasing Edi's comment and repeating them back you can show you are really listening and seeking to understand what is being said.

- I can see you are struggling to start/finish this.
- Please correct me if I'm wrong. What I think you mean is...
- It must be tough for you trying to fit everything in.
- You seem overwhelmed, exhausted, distressed.

Summaries

These pull together everything that has been discussed and again helps to reaffirm what has been said and to check that you fully understand the individual's thoughts, desires and intentions. If possible, schedule

the next conversation so that the Edi feels that you are really interested in his situation.

- In summary, we have talked about x, y and z, have I missed anything?
- We've covered a lot. Would you agree these are the next steps?
- Would you agree these are the key things to take away?
- We have had a really constructive conversation. Let's come back to this...

The best way to practise OARS is to think of difficult scenarios that have happened or that you can envisage happening in your family. Imagine how Edi would respond to an open question and then write down as many affirmations and reflections that you can think of. You will soon find that this style of language becomes more natural.