

Using the Readiness Ruler to Explore Changes in Behavior



The Readiness Ruler is a brief motivational interviewing tool designed to assess a patient's current level of readiness, importance, or confidence regarding a specific behavior change. In forensic settings, it supports collaborative, trauma-informed conversations that respect autonomy while also acknowledging risk, external constraints, and the unique context of mandated treatment.

Staff should introduce the tool in a neutral, non-judgmental manner and emphasize that the patient's rating is not an evaluation of compliance, but an opportunity to explore their viewpoints, ambivalence, and goals. The aim is to understand the patient's perspective and to evoke their own reasons for change, not to persuade or pressure them. You can also just ask the questions without introducing or showing the tool.

After the patient provides a number, staff use MI-consistent follow-up questions (e.g., *"Why that number and not lower?"* or *"What might help you move one step higher?"*) to guide discussion. The Readiness Ruler can help identify strengths, barriers, and next steps that align with the patient's motivations.

Using the Readiness Ruler (and other MI tools) with patients helps guide conversations about personal change including:

- Discovering their OWN interest in considering making a change in their life
- Expressing in their own words their desire for change (change talk)
- Eliciting and strengthening change talk
- Examining their ambivalence about change
- Enhancing confidence in taking action towards change
- Strengthening their commitment towards change

Readiness Ruler

How important would you say it is to make this change?

Not at all important			Somewhat Important				Extremely Important		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

- Why did you pick a ____ and not a lower number?
- What would it take for you to be at a higher number?
- What concerns do you have about changing your behavior?

If you were to decide right now to make a change in your behavior, how confident are you that you could succeed?

Not at all confident			Unsure				Extremely Confident		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

- Why did you pick a ____ and not a lower number?
- What would help you have a higher number?

How ready are you right now to make a change in your behavior?

Not at all Ready			Unsure		Ready		Trying to Change		
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

- What changes are you interested in making?
- Please list your goal for making a change.
- Is there a first step you can take now to make the change you identified? If so, what is it and when could you do it?