Guiding principles for writing in an MI style

Express Empathy

Meet need or **develop discrepancy**

Hopeful tone
Collaborative, personalised

Empower
increase self-efficacy

Broaden Understanding of Issues

Share rather than INSTRUCT

ACTIVE engagement

Limit additional distress

Build Motivation

Reflect experience

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We are often in a situation where we need to provide information to an individual or client group. This may be because

- we think an individual would benefit from knowing more
- the information is too much to communicate in the session or
- you want to give the individual more time to think about the content outside your session

An alternative scenario is that the individual you are working with may find a one-to-one potentially threatening or challenging.

Our team have analysed a lot of health communication materials such as leaflets and booklets aimed at changing behaviours to improve health. It was surprising how many of these did not appear to take the 'reader', or even usual 'learning processes' into account.

If you are reading this you probably know that producing effective written communication takes time. Even more if the situation means you are not there to explain or put the material into context.

HINTS, TIPS AND SUGGESTIONS.

These are not exhaustive, and you will almost certainly have your own ideas and experiences that you can add to these. It's worth thinking about what you think does and doesn't work in your own practice.

A. **DON'T FORGET BASIC LEARNING PRINCIPLES – chunk the information into digestible units. Don't overload, no matter how tempted you are to 'get everything in'. Less is more**

Use plenty of 'white space' around the content. The visual appearance is important. It communicates respect if someone has taken time over the 'look and feel' of the materials.

B. Think about **QUALITY** of the materials. If you want other people to see it as valuable, it helps to demonstrate that you have taken care with layout as well as content.

There may be lots of useful information but messages are lost by poor design or poor display practices.

C. TONE: Try to communicate in a hopeful and collaborative tone. Think especially carefully about openings and endings. Try to end on a positive, hopeful tone.

Use questions and informal conversational style where appropriate. This can activate the reader's interest and make them more ready to read on.

Think about using real examples from other people in similar situations.

Remember that fear messages very rarely work outside very specific contexts.

D. Try to communicate EMPATHY: recognise where people are starting from (but take care not to patronise)

For example, 'Many people in this situation can feel *XX/do XX*. We hope that by reading/doing *YYY* you may feel able to start doing *ZZZ"*

E. DEVELOP DISCREPANCY: Even in written forms there are ways of trying to elicit *change talk*.

On a scale of 1-10 how much is XXX bothering you/affecting you/?

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

Using the same scale, where would you like to be/want to be in 6 weeks ?

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |

F. Leave space for PLANNING:

Encourage active engagement where appropriate by leaving space for the person to write on the document. Or you could add a simple table with space for the recipient to add their own Actions and Dates. If it is an electronic version you could link it with calendar reminders.

G. GAUGE EMOTIONAL IMPACT BY ASKING FOR FEEDBACK:

Ask someone from your 'target audience' or even a neutral observer or colleague to read the content 'as if' they were the recipient. Then put the material to one side. How does the material make them FEEL? What are their immediate *emotional responses* to the content?

H. USE THE ASK, SHARE, ASK (Elicit-Provide-Elicit) technique when offering written materials.

What do you already know about X?	***ASK***
Would you be interested in this information we have about X?	
Here it is. It was written by/for/with X for people in a similar situation. Some of our clients have found it useful.	***SHARE***
What do you make of this information?	***ASK***
What in particular do you find useful?	
Can you tell me a bit more about that?	

[Don't forget to discuss next time you meet if appropriate.]

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