Talking to Change: An MI Podcast
Glenn Hinds and Sebastian Kaplan

Episode 53: Motivational Interviewing for Working with Children & Families, with Donald Forrester

Sebastian Kaplan:

Hello, everyone. Welcome to another episode of Talking To Change: A Motivational Interviewing Podcast. My name is Sebastian Kaplan and I'm based in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, and as always, I'm joined by my good friend, Glenn Hinds over in Derry, Northern Ireland. Hello Glenn.

Glenn Hinds:

Hello, Seb. Hello, everybody.

Sebastian Kaplan:

Hello everyone, indeed. So, before we discus today's episode or today's interview that we did, orient everyone to social media and ways to contact us on.

Glenn Hinds:

Of course. Thanks Seb. So, on Twitter, its change talking. On Facebook it's Talking To Change. On Instagram it's Talking To Change Podcast. For questions or reflections or information on training if you want, email is podcast@glennhinds.com.

Sebastian Kaplan:

Great. Thank you, Glenn. So, today we had a really interesting conversation with Donald Forrester, who is a professor at Cardiff University. He and his colleagues have recently written a book about Motivational Interviewing in the context of working with children and families. And so, we got to think about MI in some really difficult situations. And Glenn, just wondering what some of the takeaways you had from our conversation that we just finished up.

Glenn Hinds:

Yeah. First of all, it's just to acknowledge that this was a really important episode, I think, because an awful lot of us will recognize that there's this idea of Motivational Interviewing can go so far. And what was wonderful about the conversation with Donald was he was saying, look in my experience it's if we think it can only go so far, there's situations we won't take it into and what his research and practices are saying, look, they can go under the white heat of family support services or child protection services. And so throughout it was clear was his dedication to being supportive to professionals and colleagues who are in the helping game and who want to be supportive. And he's just been curious. The whole thing about his journey has been informed by his curiosity to understand what it is these individuals and organizations as well need.

Glenn Hinds:

And then very importantly, what is it that would make them, these individuals, and organizations, introduce and maintain the changes in their practice to make them more effective as helpers. And the second about him was just that courage that he had to come on the podcast and to invite us to take him to really uncomfortable, not uncomfortable, for me to be the client and to be someone who really didn't want him to be around me as a client. And just had that willingness to take that, to go at that difficult situation, and then how he models the spirit of Motivational Interviewing and the compassion, but also the way he manifests what he did identified as what's called purposefulness and good authority in getting someone to recognize, I have a responsibility as a social worker to do certain things. And it's how he holds those three spaces between being an authority and being a carer and helper and how he manifests that and the way he speaks to the dad in this conversation.

Sebastian Kaplan:

Yeah, this is another episode where we introduced or included a role play based on suggestions and listener feedback. We've had a lot of encouragement to include more of those practical bits and even role plays when applicable. So, this was one of those episodes where we had an opportunity to do that. And you're right. Donald really showed a lot of courage in doing that. And one of the takeaways for me from the role play was just thinking about situations where the urgency is really quite high. And we've explored those scenarios through situations in other episodes here is one in the context of children that are in danger, children that are hurt and perhaps it's some of the situations where the urgency is at its highest, not to mention the conversation itself involving really heightened emotions.

Sebastian Kaplan:

And you playing the role of a child's father who has sort of sparked an investigation. We got to witness or listen to Donald using MI principles and skills in that particular clinical context. And yeah, the other thing for me, I always appreciate maybe a bit more of an intellectual exploration, but what are the boundaries of MI? When is something MI and when is it not MI? What defines that? And we had a bit of discussion about that. So, we got into a lot of practical bits and some other more sort of maybe intellectual ideas exploring MI in this context. So, we hope you enjoy it. And as always, keep in touch with us to give us ideas and feedback on what you heard. Donald, welcome to the podcast. We're really excited to be speaking with you today.

Donald Forrester:

I'm really excited to be here, thanks for inviting me and looking forward to it.

Sebastian Kaplan:

Great. And so, we always get started finding out a little bit from our guests about their background, what they do, and also what we like to call the early MI story. So, how you came to first learn about Motivational Interviewing.

Donald Forrester:

So, I'm a professor dealing with child and family social work in Cardiff university. But my background is I was a child and family social worker through the 90s really. And since then, I've been an academic. And as a practitioner, I found myself working with a lot of parents who used and misused drugs and alcohol and found it difficult to know how to work with them. And the first study I got funded was really looking at the extent of drug and alcohol issues in social worker caseloads in England. And found very large proportion of cases involved drugs and alcohol. They had, broadly speaking, quite poor outcomes and social workers really struggled. They often felt very stuck, didn't know how to work with them.

Donald Forrester:

So, I came to MI, because that study made me think I don't ever want to do a study where I just describe a problem again. I want to try to be part of the solution. So, the issue is how could you help social workers to work better with the drug and alcohol problems? Often, they were saying, well I can't really engage this person. There's loads of denial and minimization. I'm just waiting for something to go wrong. So, I looked at the substance abuse literature, and I was struck by the evidence base for Motivational Interviewing but even more I was struck by the values and principles of it, which I thought were really compatible with social work. And also, the understanding of resistance as it was called then.

Donald Forrester:

The sense that, that's something that is often an understandable response to the situation you're in, which is very applicable to child protection situations, and also something that could be increased or reduced by the way you talk to people. So, from there, I did my first study of MI and I've been doing studies of MI on and off for 15, well, long time, longer than I care to remember, trying to understand. And that then takes me into broader issues. So, what is good practice? What difference does it make and how can you change people's practice? Because my initial studies of training along with other people's studies of training have found sort of limited initial impact. So, how can you influence practice? So, it's a long answer to a short question.

Glenn Hinds:

It sounds like what's driving you as an individual, first of all, as a social worker and then as an academic and researcher, is that your desire is to be helpful. It's not just enough to know something. You want to help make a difference.

Donald Forrester:

Yes.

Glenn Hinds:

And in that desire to make a difference around drugs and alcohol and the impact it has on people's experiences in families and then social workers' relationships with those families is that what can we do that will help families in that situation? And you were drawn to Motivational Interviewing, and you've been researching that ever since.

Donald Forrester:

Yes.

Glenn Hinds:

I was wondering, what did you discover, Donald, that made you continue to want to be part of this? Or did you discover more about it and that you want now to share with social workers in this generation?

Donald Forrester:

Yeah, well, one of the things I think I concluded early on was that there's not much difference between drugs and alcohol and other issues. So, the behavior, social workers work with a whole wide range of behavior issues, whether it's sort of neglect of a child or mental health issues or all sorts of things, and an awful lot of them involve issues of risk, issues of ambivalence and difficulty changing, et cetera. So, I fairly early concluded that domestic abuse is another big one that social workers deal with. I felt the principles of MI could be applied to working with a very, very wide range, the majority of things that social workers work with. So, that was the first thing. What have I learned in the studies, change is very difficult or can be very difficult. So, you've got sort two sets of change I'm interested in. One is how do you help people to change? But the change that I think can, parents particularly, but also young people we work with, the other though is often about how services can change the practice within the service.

Donald Forrester:

And I've seen spectacular examples of really, really great practice, but I've also seen how difficult it could be to change practice, not least because people are already doing their best in difficult circumstances. So, even if their best may not be the best thing for parents, it's often something they've developed for good reasons. So, you do need to understand why practitioners are doing what they're doing and how you can work with it. And I guess initially I was hopeful that training would make a big impact. In fact, I remember trying to convince local authorities the difference training could make, and I'd say even fairly intensive training programs can have limited impact. They do have impact. They're important for various reasons, but you need more than training. You need to create a system that supports and reinforces positive practice and can also identify where practice is not so good and provide feedback.

Donald Forrester:

So, you need things, as well as training, you need some inspirational sense of what practice should be. You need observations of practice. I always use the example of my kid's learning piano. You wouldn't expect them to learn the piano and then go and sit and talk to their piano teacher. The piano teacher actually watches them practice and gives them feedback. And a surprising thing in social work is, we actually have the first model for a lot of what we do. So, people go and practice in families' homes, and they come and talk about it to a supervisor who very often doesn't actually see what the practice is. So, we need to break that down and provide feedback, coaching, supervision that supports

practice. I don't know how helpful that is, but it is. I guess also I began to, sorry, you triggered me, but I've spent 20 years looking at this.

Donald Forrester:

So, I feel I've got quite a lot to say. The other thing I became interested in is what difference do practice skills actually make to outcomes for families? And while the picture is complicated. And I think for quite a lot of families, perhaps social workers don't make much difference. Nonetheless, there was evidence that MI skills and particularly what you might call it MI related skills actually did make a difference to outcomes for families. And that's therefore I think strong evidence that we should be supporting practice that is more like that, which we find in MI.

Sebastian Kaplan:

Wow. It struck me as I was listening to you that you started with this a really challenging clinical context, and that is at its sort of basic level, children in danger. And that is one of these sort of high urgency kinds of scenarios that we've explored in past episodes too, where it can be really hard for the practitioner to adopt the sort of autonomy support and acceptance part of the spirit and these sorts of things when confronted with these really challenging contexts. So, then you went from that challenging clinical context to a really challenging, I guess, educational context. And that is training these services and systems that are, if it's anything like the US, are highly stressed, under resourced, and then attempting to sort of enact some change systemwide.

Sebastian Kaplan:

And I'm wondering, Donald, if maybe I don't know, if you can pinpoint one thing and probably a few things over time, but do you think helped your terms of those systems? Because for them to be open to doing something different, they really had to believe it was going make a difference. And if it's counterintuitive to not ... I mean, it's not, I guess, for them, it probably wasn't initially counterintuitive to ... it didn't make sense initially, I imagine, for many of them to adopt a more accepting stance with parents who are in the system. And so, I guess what I'm wondering is what was it that, do you think, that sort of turned the tide and allowed you to help them or invited them to be more open to what your ideas were?

Donald Forrester:

Well, I don't know if we've turned the tide, but there's definitely been a big shift which is broader than Motivational Interviewing within children's social care in England, Wales, I think across the UK, which is really when I was a practitioner, there was no sense that you had a model for practice. That the local authority just, I think they just thought you got on with things and there's been a major shift towards where we should be having a model or a framework for good practice. We should be able to say what good practice is, because if you can't say that, how can you know what you should train people, what sort of supervision to provide, what sort of professional development you're looking at, et cetera. So, there's been a general shift towards we need to have models of good practice, and therefore there's a lot of interest now in Motivational Interviewing.

Donald Forrester:

It's now part of a framework of practice called family safeguarding, but it's also integrated into quite a lot of other approaches, probably for similar reasons to the ones that attracted me to it, which are, it's got an evidence base, a strong but a deep evidence, a rich evidence base, I would say in other settings and a bit of an evidence base in social care, probably as good as anything has. And then the values. And I suppose there's three things, the values, and the theoretical sort of orientation of things that can fit quite well with MI. But you're absolutely right. These are difficult issues. It's not straightforward to sort of change practice. There's all sorts of good reasons why people don't necessarily want to change immediately. Yeah.

Glenn Hinds:

Yeah. And what strikes me is that so much of the parallel of what you're describing. It's almost directly recognizing the services are the corporate parent. They're responsible for the social workers who then go out and work within the community with the actual parents and children. And there are parallels between first of all, an awful lot of us as social workers aren't really quite sure what being a good social worker actually means in this context. What's the evidence? What is it we're trying to be so that we can get on and not only so that we can ... that other people can, not so much judge us, but measure and support us to become the best version. In the same ways we're going to have to try and teach people and individuals how to be good parents, that there needs to be some sort of explanation of what is it we think is good enough.

Glenn Hinds:

And this is where you currently are, and this is how we're trying to support you become different, but the reluctance and the frustration and the resistance that perhaps many of us who social workers will recognize that we experience from in very common as our clients, is manifesting your relationship with them as social workers and as agencies that the corporate parent doesn't like us having a look at it itself, at its practices and how it takes care of people. And I'm just wondering, how are you helping them change that mindset? Because I guess that's a real risk for them too.

Donald Forrester:

Yeah. I think it’s; I suppose I would think more that they have competing stresses and motivations going on, which creates ambivalence about what should be in good practice. So, on the one hand you have most people come into social work to help people. I think that is still a strong motivation to make a positive difference in people's lives that really permeates the whole organization. So, when you talk to directors of children services, they, most of them, actually want to make a positive difference to kids and families. On the other hand, you have a situation where when a child dies, there's a media frenzy, there's inspection regimes. There's a lot of focus on risk. There's a sense of don't get it wrong. You've got to be assertive. You've got to confront parents. This idea is like disguised compliance, which is the idea, it's a rather… it's a very unfortunate term, but it's the idea that people will be pretending to go along with you, but actually they're abusing

their kids. And since the social worker shouldn't have the wool pulled over their eyes, so you've got all those.

Donald Forrester:

And I guess that this is the heart of the problem is that you have the care and control element manifested at sort of structural level, which social workers have to work through. And that's why, I guess, part of the reason why this is a debate. In fact, even in those of us who wrote the book, David Wilkins, Charlotte Whittaker, and myself is MI a sort of technique or a set of techniques for helping people around behavior change, which you can use in bits of social work. For instance, if you're talking someone about domestic abuse or alcohol misuse or whatever, or is it more a sort of philosophy or so-called spirit of MI and would that be consistent with child protection practice? I think I tend more towards the latter. I think it's consistent with fundamental social work principles and that you can combine the care and control elements in a way that is consistent with MI principles, and you can use many of the practices of MI, but perhaps it wouldn't be MI, more like MI inspired practice or something like that.

Sebastian Kaplan:

Yeah. But there's, well, there was a few things there. I mean, I guess it is one of those, again, clinical context where the extent to which the other person, the client's autonomy is in fact limited, there is an actual element of the work that you're describing where it isn't the case that the client can simply do whatever they want to do. If they're in an addiction service, they could leave the service eventually and continue to use substances if that's what they choose. But there is an element of actual control. And within that, it provides a really interesting, I guess for me, it's a practical question too. And I know you were really emphasizing sort of the philosophy maybe behind MI and how it aligns with social work. But I'm curious about some of the practicalities of it also, as you see, and what are some of the things that you found helpful, practically speaking, when engaging with someone whose autonomy is in fact limited, but sort of maintains the, I guess, maintains that spirit of MI and sort of the values of social work.

Donald Forrester:

Yeah. Well, in fact, one of the, so there's some more skills-based things which I'll talk about in a moment, but one of the things that practitioners say they find most helpful is that is actually almost a theoretical reorientation. And that is from thinking you can make parents change to realizing that ultimately people make decisions about their own lives. Now there may be consequences, you may be directly responsible for those consequences. They may need to realize that if they stop going to the alcohol service, a consequence may be that you're going to start care proceedings and may have to remove children. I mean, very serious consequences, but there's a difference between ensuring that people have a clear understanding of consequences of different forms of action, while respect to of consequences of different things they may do while being respecting their right to make those decisions. Compared to thinking you can force people to change or make people change.

Donald Forrester:

So, one of the things that I think the people who really, when I run MI training, the people who really get it, one of the first things that happens is the sense of a weight being lifted, because the system is such that they often feel pressurized to make parents change. And that is not what you can do. You can offer people opportunities; you can explain consequences. Ultimately, they have to make decisions. So, that at a higher level, almost philosophical perspective, I think, is a really important shift. And then there's skills that are associated with that. But that I think are really helpful. One of the most important is showing people you understand their perspective. So, I think quite a lot, we've done a lot of recordings of practice. I think over 800 now. One of the things that can quite often happen is an argument, or almost an argument can happen because the parent is saying, you don't understand this, this, this, this, this.

Donald Forrester:

And the social worker can start to say, well, you don't understand XYZ will happen, or this is why I'm concerned. And that can often be short circuited by using MI skills like reflections and summary statements to show the person that you understand their point of view, really understand it, not superficial, but you can understand why they're or agitated or feel you shouldn't be involved. Or even better. How they're feeling or what's important to them. And then you can have a conversation about what it's more likely than you can have a conversation about the things that you are bringing to it. So, I suppose I see the skills as MI, which were developed for counseling and counseling interviewing as being ones we can use to have helpful dialogues with people and more equal respectful dialogues with people. And that's why I think these skills are MI influenced, but you could say they're not strictly MI, because they're not necessarily about behavior change. They may be about having difficult conversations about consequences of different things that happen.

Glenn Hinds:

So, it's not even so much MI light, but it's MI with some dilution, a little bit of MI with a wee bit of water added to it in the sense of, we're not expecting your social workers to be counselors, because you have responsibilities, and you have directions to follow. And at the same time within that context, what we've learned from these interventions and particularly Motivational Interviewing, and there's ways we can have conversations with people that seems to have a direct bearing on what they do next. And part of that is, first of all, you thinking about the way you're thinking, feeling, and then what it is you're choosing to say in response to them being angry or frustrated or happy or sad.

Glenn Hinds:

Because it's your response to them being this way will influence what happens next. And it's almost familiar that idea of, for me to invite this person who behaving in a certain way, that we have concerns about, that invitation is to be understood, first seek to understand. When you go to meet this person, you may not agree with what you understand they're doing. You may not agree with what it is you believe they're up to, but what you can do is you can create an environment where you seek to understand why that makes sense for them.

Donald Forrester:

Yep. Absolutely.

Glenn Hinds:

And then begin to explore under what circumstances we have, share your concerns, and then explore under what circumstances would you be willing to change that so that we can leave you alone again.

Donald Forrester:

Exactly. And one of the challenges is I think most of us come into social work to sort of help people. And we initially therefore want to help the parents. And then we need to learn that sometimes that should be to focus on the child and the vulnerable child here, and we need to understand what's going on for them. And a lot of people talk about being child focused, but if you're just child focused, it can often become very punitive and unhelpful towards parents.

Donald Forrester:

I think really the heart to good practice and the difficult thing is you need to realize that there's a vulnerable child here who may be at risk and bad things may be happening for them. There's also almost invariably, a vulnerable parent who's having difficulties. And the challenge of good practice is to not just focus on one or the other, but to be able to focus on both, obviously sometimes you may have to prioritize the child's situation, but really understanding what's going on for both and bearing in mind that we have responsibilities to both those people or to all those people in order to try to help them. And I mean, that's the challenge that makes it really complicated, because you've got a balancing exercise. You can't be drawn into becoming a counselor who's just there for the parent. You need to be thinking about the child. But if you just think about the child without thinking about the relationship with the parent and others, that's problematic, you need to able to hold both in mind.

Sebastian Kaplan:

Yeah. I imagine that's a real challenge. In some circumstances it would be quite natural, I imagine, for the social worker to experience really strong emotions against a parent who's abusing their child. And so, there's that challenge. But I imagine there's the idea that, well, what helps the parent also helps the child. There's something that makes sense intuitively there, but there seems to be even a step further beyond that, which is the parent is in need and even worthy of respect and care and even the concepts of unconditional positive regard, if you want to tap into the Rogerian elements of it. And it's probably easy to care for the child, but really sort of devoting some genuine attention to helping this parent and to care for this parent is a real challenge.

Donald Forrester:

Yeah, absolutely. And I think if we talk about the spirit of MI, I think the spirit of any way of helping people, there's the kind of loving at the heart of it. I find the concept of agape quite useful, which is the sort of Greek word for love. And it's when, there's different, the

Greeks are far more words I'm reliably informed for loves, but the Agape, it can be any love. It can be combined with romantic love or love for your child or a friend. And it's the idea that you genuinely deeply want the best for that person. And I think that's sense agape's at the heart of MI, but probably at the heart of any helping relationship. And it's also when you do it as a helper, you can feel it.

Donald Forrester:

And you can feel it even, I can think of times when I was a practitioner and I took a child away, but I had tears in my eyes and really felt for the parents. And that's actually what I think all social workers should be like. I mean, that's society I want. One where the people making those difficult decisions have not cut themselves off from the emotions that they're creating, but that's very difficult emotional work, but I think that's sort of at the heart of what we should be aspiring to.

Donald Forrester:

This is slight, I don't know if this is where to go. But interestingly, one of my studies I did where I did a lot of follow up consultations with social workers. So, I did MI training and then they had, I think four or five months of weekly coaching sessions, I was already teaching the skills we're going to do. They'll come in off the training, we'll do reflections, and we'll do maybe listen to the practice, et cetera. What really surprised me is the first several weeks, it was like a tsunami of emotion that hit me. And we weren't talking about the technical skills at all. They were talking about things like, I really don't like this dad, or I'm scared when I go into this family, I find it difficult to say difficult things. And many of them were saying, I can't say these things in supervision, because supervision it gets written down.

Donald Forrester:

And if I said, I hate the dad for instance, that would be considered unprofessional. So, we do need some way of helping social workers, other people trying to help people to process the emotions they're going through, because it's emotional work. If it's nothing else, it's certainly emotional work.

Glenn Hinds:

So, again, it's about that. How do we create the environment where what it is we're trying to create or the individual we're trying to help become ... who's helping us be that? If I'm going to be a parent who tolerates my child's tantrums, who's helping me tolerate my emotions or the emotions of the parents that I'm working with. And to recognize that it's not a coincidence that you're in the helping game. And more specifically, you're probably more attuned to this language called emotion.

Glenn Hinds:

And it's about how do we help you learn to recognize the sound of that language? And then very importantly, how do you understand it without becoming it so that you ... what's it like for you to be around such angry people all day? And what's the consequence for you at an emotional level containing so much anger or sadness or loss or fear? That really

difficult, uncomfortable human emotions. And it sounds like what you're hoping for and you're encouraging is that the service that looks after the community is itself being looked after. That it models good care.

Donald Forrester:

Absolutely. And yet any social worker listening to this will laugh, holler at how far that is from the realities of practice. So, I've just finished supervising a really good piece of work by Lucy Trevie for her doctorate, where she was looking at supervision and then practice and she found several interesting things. But one of them was that a lot of practice was really about surveillance. So, going and checking on families, there wasn't all this emotional stuff, we're talking about very much… And then we shook up to supervision, it was like surveillance of the worker. It was, have you done this? Have you done that? And the social worker says, well, I did this, this, this, this.

Donald Forrester:

If you provide surveillance as your form of support for social workers, you will get a sort of practice that is surveillance. So, how can we look after workers, provide nurturing, caring environments that then help them to provide the nurturing care and also challenge that family's need. So, it's a tough, tough, tough nut to crack. And it's certainly not cracked yet, but I think at least that's the vision that I and many others try to aspire towards.

Sebastian Kaplan:

One of the things that this might be a good time to start to explore is ahead of today's conversation we posted an invitation for some ideas and questions on Twitter. And it does seem like something that you've perhaps addressed a bit, but maybe we can sort of specifically target this one question. So, it came from Melinda Hohman, past guest on our podcast, who asks 'in essence, can social workers selectively use MI? Is that something that's possible? Is that something that you'd recommend?' There was also a comment in response to that saying that in their ideas, that it wasn't something you'd sort of turn on or off, since it is a way of being with someone, it is just sort of part of your conversation. So, what are your thoughts about the idea of selective use of MI?

Donald Forrester:

So, I think you can use MI selectively. I think you could say, I'm learning the skills to use a certain sort of behavioral issues, but I think it then begs the question. What are you doing the rest of the time and what are the theories principles, practices that guide your work the rest of the time? And I suppose the more I've looked at what good practice might be, the more I've researched it, the more I've thought even when you've got very difficult news to impart or difficult consequences to explain. So, even in the most difficult circumstances, I think you can use the principles of MI. So, one of those is people have got decisions to make about their lives and about their behavior and we should be supporting their autonomy as possible. And that requires respectful sort of practice where we try to understand situation and help them almost take charge of their lives as much as they can.

Donald Forrester:

I almost don't see why you wouldn't use that in every circumstance, but I guess we also get into a thing here of which people are new to MI will often ask, which is how do you compare MI to Systemic Therapy or Solution Focused Therapy, et cetera? I mean, honestly, I think they've got far more in common than they are different. What I think has happened is various groups of people have thought deeply about what helps people and then they've invented languages for producing that and maybe researching that. But because what helps people will obviously have a lot in common or most of the main approaches have a lot in common. I mean, crude behaviorism is slightly different, but almost every kind of counseling type approach I do think has much more in common than it has different. It's always good to be respectful. It's always good to be empathic.

Donald Forrester:

I think we don't talk about it enough is what is about a kind of loving relationship. And so why would you not try to apply those into the more difficult places, for me I think the spirit of principle apply really across the board. But I think it is legitimate to say I'm actually use a particular technique. I can't say that's wrong, it's better than not using it. I'm saying you could go further.

Glenn Hinds:

That's very powerful that just that reminder that or imitation to consider that what Motivational Interviewing is a description of what works, what Systemic Therapy is a description of what works, what CBT is a description of what works. There's a thing called, it works and there's these different languages explaining it. And what this is an invitation to go, this is what this language sounds like. And this is how you might speak in this language when you're working with families and children. And try it when you're working with people who take drugs, try it with people who are maybe eating too much or you want help them become a great footballer, because what this is a language of being helpful. And part of what you're exploring is what helps an individual practitioner enter into that journey of discovery and learning. And then very importantly, what makes them want to stay to become good at it?

Glenn Hinds:

It's one thing they learn. And I know this, well, I've heard this thing about empathy and all of a sudden, they can reference empathy, but what we're exploring is how to recognize what empathy is and experience it. And then how you translate the experience into a reflection that acknowledges this other person's experience, so they feel helped by it. And I'm just wondering, given how deep in your heart this sounds like it is for you, Donald, I'm just wondering what is it you're experiencing that is making people want to do more of that? And what could some of our listeners do if they were interested and deepening and growing as practitioners? What support or advice would you offer?

Donald Forrester:

So, I suppose people hear something about MI that they like the sound of, that the empathic orientation, the strength-based principles, or the understanding of resistance

and suddenly a penny drops, but what really makes a difference is then what happens next? So, you can run your training course and you can have people go, yeah, yeah, that sounds great. What makes a difference about whether someone then goes on to really become good, dedicate themselves to become good at MI, is where is really when they try it out. So, if they try it out, then I find they come back and very often, not always, but very often report, wow, that conversation went really differently. It was a different quality of conversation. I got more satisfaction from it.

Donald Forrester:

Often, they report, I felt less stressed, because instead of trying to force someone to change, they started to talk about change themselves. So, it's that sense of in some ways, the thing training needs to do is inspire people to try it out, then trying it out motivates people. So, then the thing that's difficult is to keep supporting them to keep trying it out. There was a lovely thing at the end of I think one of the previous editions of the Miller and Rollnick book on MI, which might be the first edition that said, nobody taught us MI. We learned was that change talk was a green light and resistance talk was a red light.

Donald Forrester:

And if we'd listen very carefully to clients or the people we're working with, they taught us how to do MI, because they're constantly giving us feedback in terms of what you might call resistance or change talk. I know we'd be used different terminology these days, but those two basic ideas. And I think that's really helpful if you can empower people to think, well, if I listen very carefully reflect on what's happening in my meetings with people, then the parents and children I work with will teach me how to be better.

Donald Forrester:

And then if you've got that sensitivity, you almost don't need to worry about some of the technical detail. Was this a simple or a complex reflection? Who cares? Did it help the person feel understood? And how would you know because of what they say to you? So, I think it can be really liberating for people to realize, actually it's not Professor Forrester in a training course who teaches me MI, he can perhaps inspire me. The people who teach me MI are the people I work with. And what I need to learn is how to really listen to what they're saying back to me.

Sebastian Kaplan:

Yeah. Because it is quite natural to get really inwardly focused, I suppose, especially if you're first learning something and how do I make a complex reflection right now? Oh, no, that was a closed question, it should have been open, and we can get really in our heads about it. But if learners, whether it's early learners or more advanced learners, that if we can from time to time get outside of ourselves and just stay attuned to how our clients are responding to us, that could be a really useful real time trainer in a sense, real time teacher. I wanted to, we had another question from another past guest of ours, Stan Steindl, who asked, well, it was more of a statement or an invitation. "One thing I've often thought about is the three ways MI might be used with parents, with kids and teaching the

principles and skills of MI to parents to help in their conversations with their kids. I'd be interested to hear thoughts on this." Some thoughts on that, Donald.

Donald Forrester:

Yeah. Yeah. So, I guess one of the chapters we struggled with a bit more in the book was using MI with children, young people. So, there's quite a lot of evidence though, with adolescents, teenagers, it can be really, really helpful way of working, but the younger you go, the less sure we were about that. Because younger the child, the less a nondirective approach may be helpful. They can become confused, not really know what you're trying to say to them. I certainly think with sort of teenagers, adolescents, it can be an extremely useful way of working. We've, as part of the training, we have worked with teams who work primarily with children, and they've developed all sorts of creative ways of applying the principles of MI to work with even the younger children. And so that can be trying to apply into, I don't know, someone who did ... well, I suppose it was a bit like value, the values cards we used with adults.

Donald Forrester:

They had pictures of things that were important in their lives, and they got the child to talk about some of those. But I guess there's also an issue of what one of the principles of MI is people have some responsibility and control over their behavior. And again, the younger you go, the less it is reasonable to expect that. So, I think there's some issues there. The thing about MI as parents, I've never tried teaching MI to parents or even suggested to others do it, but like many who have encountered MI, I've tried to use it with my own kids.

Donald Forrester:

Summary statements and reflections can be really useful, even with very in fact, maybe even particularly with very young kids, giving them a sense of you're really upset or so this morning. One of our youngest was upset because for various reasons he had to brush his teeth before he got dressed for school. Offering that back to him was helpful. So, he stopped crying because he knew that I understood why he was crying. But he still had to do what I said. So, I think there is potential, and it would be really interesting to explore that. Presumably, some people have. I am just not aware of it.

Glenn Hinds:

And I guess for awful lot of people that idea of introducing this awareness as skills into these close, loving relationships at home. I know that Steve Rollnick at one of our conferences, the hardest place for him to be Motivational Interviewing is through his own front door. Because he's this close to the people. And there's rules and responsibilities and there's rules, but that doesn't stop the effort. And it sounds like part of what you're describing. And I know that as a dad myself, that how I speak to my kids, 25 years after I started learning Motivational Interviewing, is very different from how I would've to without it. And that is about, I guess, the manifestation of my desire to be loving towards my kids. And it sounds like that, when you were speaking to your son this morning, you were

thinking about your son and his experience, knowing son, you're going to have to do this, but you said that without having to say it in those terms.

Glenn Hinds:

And that he was part of that conversation. He was a child that was seen, that was heard, that his emotions were recognized. And once the emotion was recognized, there's a fact that the power of the container of the emotional experience, which was, I know you're upset. I know you're upset because this doesn't suit you. And it's almost like in that recognition that the emotion can then move and then the individual can respond differently within your emotion arising them. And it's, again, it's back to what you were describing on your own is that this is you endeavoring to be loving with the most important people in your life. And what we're exploring is that being a helping professional is an aversion of that to the wider society. How can we be good parents to everybody we meet?

Glenn Hinds:

What if we thought about the needs of everybody, including ourselves, which is important in the conversations we have? And what MI does is say, what if when you listened in this way and what if you, when you responded, you thought about framing your language to take this into account and not just between nine and five and not just when you're on duty, but just again, it's back to Rogerian idea of being with people and Bill's idea of MI's more than a constant state, it's way of being with people. But it's getting to a place where my life's actually easier as a person when I think like this and talk to people like this, because I take less stuff personally, because I'm learning to listen to other people's perspectives without it being a competition.

Glenn Hinds:

And it sounds like that idea of how do we help parents. I know that I've worked with some groups where we talk about adults who at the criminal justice groups, where the children are getting in the trouble, but the service is using support. So, I've gone along and talked about MI. So, I'm not teaching them as not pure MI, but we're talking about that essence of why are they doing that? And what are they trying to tell us by that behavior? And what if you noticed that to them?

Glenn Hinds:

And here are some ways you could frame that language and then very importantly notice what's it like for you to be around an angry teenager and how do you respond to that? And what other choices do you have? So, again, it's an interesting question from Stan and about how do we help take this counselling style and take what's wonderful about it and translate it into a language that isn't an adult being a counselor to their child, but a really loving, kind adult, loving, kind parent to their son, their daughter, their partner, their friends, the person on the bus stop, without having to be making an effort.

Donald Forrester:

Yeah, well, I certainly haven't cracked that and my wife will sometimes say you're using that voice again or whatever and I'm trying to be like that, but it is about trying to create

loving relationships by which I mean, when we genuinely want the best for each other and try to understand each other's point of view across the board. And it has some links with the idea of mentalization, which is the children learn about their own feelings and their own understanding of themselves in large part because of the way which parents reflect it to them. So, even with a, quite a young baby, or maybe not quite a young baby, but you can be communicating to them that you understand that they're upset or whatever. And that helps them to understand that maybe they're hungry or what's going on for. So, there's huge potential to use in those sorts of situations. So, I've not done much myself.

Sebastian Kaplan:

Yeah, really, we certainly thank Mindy and Stan and everyone who's contributed to discussions on social media. I was thinking, if it's all right with you guys, we could maybe transition a role play or a demonstration of what MI might sound and feel like in a really complicated situation. We sort of pre-prepared this a bit ahead of time. And Glenn you're going to play the role of a dad who has had a tough time and you and your family come to the attention of the local child protective service. And so, we're going to hear what it sounds like and debrief it a little bit so we can explore this more in depth. Any other kind setup that you'd like to offer here before we get started with the role play?

Donald Forrester:

Yeah. So, I think that the scenario set up deliberately not to be a counseling type situation. It's about an allegation. So, these two five-year-old girls who are twins, one's not going to school. The other said there was a big argument last night and daddy broke Jen's arm. So, as the advocate, the social worker obviously needs to go around and find out what's happening. We could have chosen a lighter sort of topic on the spectrum of discussion. But with this, I hope, will give us an opportunity to explore some of the issues we've talked about, which is, can you use MI principles or skills in a very different sort of situation where really, you're using authority in order to ensure a child is assessed? I guess that's the context. And I think we're doing it around the house that I've knocked on the door and got in. Is that right?

Sebastian Kaplan:

Yeah. Yeah.

Donald Forrester:

Okay. Well, I guess I'm ready when you are.

Glenn Hinds:

Okay. Hello.

Donald Forrester:

Hi, Dave. Thanks for letting me in. I've come round because I wanted to talk about some concerns about Jen and…

Glenn Hinds:

Listen, listen, don't be ... Is that other one? Is that, that wee Sally saying to you at school? She does this all the time. But listen, everything's groovy. Everything's groovy. No fears, worries here. It's great that you… she's six. She makes things up.

Donald Forrester:

Yeah. So, from your perspective, there's nothing to worry about, but you can understand why I'm here by the sound of it.

Glenn Hinds:

Well, yeah. If that was true, my goodness.

Donald Forrester:

But it's a load of nonsense from your perspective.

Glenn Hinds:

Yeah. I don't even know what she's told you. The fact that you're here is mad.

Donald Forrester:

Yeah. Well, that's what I wanted to say is that whenever we have concerns about family, the first thing I'd like to do, if I can, is talk to the parents so that you can hear what we've been told, and you can give us your side of things.

Glenn Hinds:

No problem. No problem. That's great. Listen, I'm meeting someone buddies down in the bookies later on, but if we can get this cleared up quick, that'd be great.

Donald Forrester:

Well, that would be great. We'll see how long it takes. So, what Sally said was that last night, there was a big argument, a fight between you and your wife and during the fight you pulled Jen's arm. And she said that she thought you'd broken it. So, that's obviously from our point of view, quite a worrying thing and we want to find, I guess the first thing I want to find out is what you've got to say about that, but I also need to see Jen and check that she's okay.

Glenn Hinds:

Look, there was a game of football on the TV. I support West Ham, she supports Arsenal. The youngster got in the way. It was West Ham was running forward. And I just, you know as kids do, they walk in front of the TV. I just reached across, pull her out of the way.

Donald Forrester:

So, you didn't mean to hurt her, there was just-

Glenn Hinds:

She wasn't even hurt, man. It was just, she was upset that I was upset.

Donald Forrester:

All right.

Glenn Hinds:

And we West Ham won, so that's why the wife's annoyed.

Donald Forrester:

Okay. So, the whole thing was, so is it that you support different teams? One of you is West Ham, one's Arsenal?

Glenn Hinds:

Yeah. Yeah.

Donald Forrester:

And that caused some shouting

Glenn Hinds:

Well, it only happens when, and it's a game. It's a bit of banter. It's just two huge football teams and she comes from a long, long line of gunners and I'm West Ham. And it was just that we're doing well this season and she doesn't like it. And Jen just walked in front of the TV, and I just gave her a yank to get out of the way.

Donald Forrester:

And you feel like Sally's just got the wrong end of the stick.

Glenn Hinds:

Sally's her mommy's girl. And she's at that age there you know that she's always going to, if mommy's upset, she's upset. And that's what it was because mommy was upset. Arsenal lost.

Donald Forrester:

Yeah. So, from your point of view, this is like storming a teacup, something about nothing. But you can, I hope you understand why I'm here as a social worker. Why we would've to come and talk to you about it?

Glenn Hinds:

You know what, it's a bit ridiculous when West Ham beat Arsenal that I have to have a social worker around.

Donald Forrester:

Okay.

Glenn Hinds:

I know West Ham beating Arsenal is a big deal, but seriously, not that serious.

Donald Forrester:

No. So, I guess the football score isn't why I'm around here. I'm around here because I'm a bit worried about Jen and want to check she's okay. It's great to hear your side of things.

Glenn Hinds:

Great. Jen's grand.

Donald Forrester:

One of the things I need to do as a social worker is I'll need to talk to Jen, find out how she is. And it may be that we need to get her seen medically if there are any issues. So, I wanted to talk to you about whether that would be possible.

Glenn Hinds:

Listen, Jen's grand and because she was upset, she didn't sleep that well last night. So, she's up in her bed, she's sleeping. And if there's anything, what I can do is when she gets up this afternoon, I'll, if you want, I'll take her around the doctor. Let doctor have a look at her and we can get on with it.

Donald Forrester:

Okay. Well, if she's asleep, I guess what I'm going to say may not be what you want to hear. But I feel I need to see her really now that this isn't something that could wait until this afternoon.

Glenn Hinds:

Oh man. I don't want to go upstairs and wake her up. God’s sake, she's only a baby.

Donald Forrester:

Yeah. She is only young. And obviously the last thing you want do is wake her up if she's just been put down. Would it be okay if I explained from my perspective how I see things, which is, you've told how things were last night, we've got Kim saying some kind of different things, which would lead me to be quite worried. What I hope is I can talk to Jen, and we can sort it all out, but I don't feel I can just wait until later this afternoon, it sounds too serious to me. So, that's where I'm at.

Glenn Hinds:

This doesn't suit you because you're busy. It's like you don't want to come back because you have other things to do.

Donald Forrester:

No, it's not that I'm busy. I've stopped everything else to come in and look at this. It's because at the moment I've got what you've said about last night, and then I've got what Kim, what Sally has said about last night. And I'm that just leads me to be a bit worried about Jen.

Glenn Hinds:

Listen, I'm trying to be as polite as can, man. I've let you into my house. I've told you what's going on and now you want to go and hoke around, and my family want to poke your nose in their business. This is starting to annoy me.

Donald Forrester:

Yeah. So, you're annoyed because I'm coming here, poking around, and making things difficult for you when you want to go off and see your mate down-

Glenn Hinds:

Listen, if you want find families with problems, go on up the street, the place is full of them.

Donald Forrester:

Yeah, I guess we're getting to a difficult situation here. Because I can see that you really, really don't want me to disturb Jen right now. I am so worried about her that I feel I really need to see her. So, I guess I need to explain what your options are here. So, you could, what I hope is you'll let me see Jen and we can try to sort this out. If you really feel I can't wake up Jen, and go in to talk to her, I'll need to leave. It's your house. That's your call. But I'm so worried that I would contact the police about this.

Glenn Hinds:

What?

Donald Forrester:

Because they have rights.

Glenn Hinds:

What are you taking about?

Donald Forrester:

Well, exactly. It's the last thing I want to do. What I hope is we can sort this out without that, but I guess we're in a situation where really -

Glenn Hinds:

No wonder social workers have a bad name if you're going, if I don't care what I want, I'm going to get the police.

Donald Forrester:

Yeah. I completely understand. The last thing you would want is the police to come around here and disrupt things when, from your point of view, Jen's just having a sleep upstairs and it's fine. The difficulty for me is unless I talk to her, I can't check out what situation-

Glenn Hinds:

You can talk to her later on.

Donald Forrester:

Yeah. So, from your point of view, I can wait. But from my point of view, it's getting on today already. We're nearly at midday. By the time we wait for a while, she may not be able to see a doctor. I also want to try to sort these things out before Sally has to come home from school, because I want to make sure she's going to be okay after what she's told us. So, there's a whole bunch of reasons why for me, I need to see her now.

Glenn Hinds:

You've already decided that I'm wrong. You've already decided that I've done something bad. All you're saying is I need to make sure that my children are safe, because I think you're dangerous.

Donald Forrester:

I haven't decided at all. And I really appreciate you coming in here, letting me come in here, talking to me, explaining your side of things. What I have decided before I came in the door is that I'm quite worried from what I've heard about Jen and that I need to see her to make sure she's okay. And I guess that means my worry about that leaves you having only a couple of options. What I hope is that you and me could talk it through an arrange that I can see Jen. But I have to be honest with you, I always said I'd be honest with you, if you say no, which is your right. I'm so worried that I would go and ask the police and see if they could come around with me to see her. So, I guess it leaves you without many options, but those are your options. I can go now and do that. What I hope is you and me can talk this through and I can see Jen.

Glenn Hinds:

I'm just between a rock and a hard place.

Donald Forrester:

Yeah, yeah. I know.

Glenn Hinds:

I'm in no win situation here. I can't protect my kids from you, because if I do tell you to leave, you're just going to get the feds and come back and do what you want anyway.

Donald Forrester:

Yeah, you are in a difficult situation where you're ... and I just have to be honest about what your options are, that they're pretty limited. What I hope is we can find ways of

talking through this and sorting it out. Me checking Jen's okay. That aren't bad for you, but you are in a difficult position, and I guess you've got a tough decision to make or tough limited decision to make.

Sebastian Kaplan:

Well, yeah, all right guys, thanks for doing that. We'll catch our breaths. Pretty intense conversations. Even just as a role play there's an attention that's palpable.

Donald Forrester:

It felt a great role. Glenn felt very realistic. I've been in conversations like that many times and he felt very realistic. Though I guess what might happen is in reality, we were sitting there, there might be shouting and sort of threatening behavior. It's not uncommon, but it is a sort of difficult conversation one has quite often, I guess.

Glenn Hinds:

And for me, the reason why I stopped at that point was because I could feel myself at a crossroads. I could feel myself on one side being really quite frightened about what was going to happen next. If my daughter was upstairs with an injured arm and what the consequence of that was going to be for me. The other side of that was I was about to blow a fuse. I was getting that angry. And I think the two things were interrelated that I was in a really, really powerful bind. And what you were saying was we're do this one way or another. But what was significant was that it was being done in a really, without you shouting at me, without you trying ... I felt your power without you having to raise your voice.

Donald Forrester:

Yeah. I'm not sure how much I used MI skills in that, but because the options were very limited, and it was a short role play. We could have added in lots of other sorts of explanations about what was going on. Sometimes when we do the role play, there's a whole explanation about what happened the previous night. And you have to try to show an understanding of that. But I suppose the difference between what or what I think the difference is between what I was trying to do and what I think I often did as a worker.

Donald Forrester:

And I've certainly seen the social workers do, is I think social workers sometimes say, well, you've got to do it. And actually, I just wanted to explain what the options are and try to show an understanding for the person that for Dave, I think it was, that it's a difficult situation to be in. I should have used; I think an extra summary about how difficult he was finding it and how he was painted into a corner. But it is the sort of dynamic. It's almost the central dynamic of child protection is how can you work with someone in such respectful way in such difficult conversations?

Sebastian Kaplan:

Yeah, one thing that struck me very early on, which is something that I think can be a great challenge for people in a lot of different contexts is this idea of using reflections and

in particular adhering to that acceptance part of the MI spirit is the risk perhaps in agreeing with the other person's perspective or endorsing a choice that they want to make or a position that they have. And very early on Donald, you said, this is a load of nonsense from your perspective as a reflection. And it really struck me as an example of you weren't agreeing with him, saying you're right. I have no reason to be here. It was a reflection of what his perspective was.

Sebastian Kaplan:

And I thought it was a really wonderful way at the start at this really critical part of the encounter. But it was something that you maintained throughout as the emotions got heightened as Glenn playing the role of Dave got more and more frustrated and scared and angry. You sort of kept striking this balance of here are your options, I have a job to do. I have these concerns and your concerns are also valid. And that, to me, that was something that really stood out.

Donald Forrester:

Well. I'm glad about that. And I guess that the difficulty you have as a social worker is, there's a child in this case, in another room and that child may well just be asleep, because they've had a rough night or they may have a slight bruise or they may have a massive, a serious, they may be at death's door. And so, you are trying to be respectful to the parent while having to keep open a very wide range of possibilities, which includes some pretty serious ones. So, it's a tough conversation to have.

Glenn Hinds:

But you as a social worker, you don't actually have a choice. You do have to see this child, whether it's now or in an hour's time. But that has to be done. And what you were doing in the conversation with me was negotiating with me when I would be more willing to do that, whether you needed the force of the law behind you, for me to become willing or whether it would be simply a case of look, let go upstairs now, let's have a quick chat. If everything's rose in the garden, I'm away. And at some level it's also my reluctance, I guess, from a social worker or a practitioner's perspective, my reluctance to let you do that may be also add into the concern where that might, for someone who isn't containing it so well, may then get caught up in the emotion that the father's presenting with.

Glenn Hinds:

And now we start to react to each other. And what was lovely about what you were doing was that at no point did, I suppose in the old terms, you were meeting resistance with non-resistance. You were continuing to understand that while maintaining your position, you stood firm without trying to beat me, but there was clear guidance. This is what needs to happen. And it's just a case of when we do that with your participation is what we're here deciding.

Glenn Hinds:

And again, for me as the dad, it was in this role play in my heart that the child had an injured arm and I was doing what I could to say, look over there. And you were willing to

say, I see what's over there and I'm still looking here. I'm still looking, and I'm still interested. And you just narrowed the space between what we were talking about by looking at everything we talked about, talked about Arsenal, talked about West Ham. You heard me, you understood it. You even joked a little bit about it, but it was still with, and this is what I'm here for. And you just kept leading this to that place where there was nothing else to talk about, but this. And I got really frightened. And it was skillfully done that you brought me to a place where the fear I was experiencing was real for me and I know, I had a decision. Do I take the now or take it later, but I knew there's no way out of this.

Donald Forrester:

And I suppose what you're trying to do a practitioner is I talked about you've got the child beyond the door and there's a spectrum of possible situations. What you're trying to do is talk to a parent so that the less serious end of that spectrum, they're probably going to say, okay, and realize that with the more serious end of the spectrum, or with some parents who are very dug in and you're not going to change their view.

Donald Forrester:

So, all you can do is try to be clear, treat them respectfully and hope that makes the difference. And so relating to what I was talking about earlier, I don't know whether this is Motivational Interviewing, I don't think it is Motivational Interviewing, but I think if it uses some of the skills of Motivational Interviewing and in particular uses the principles, I think, of Motivational Interviewing the principles that people have got choices, decisions to make about their lives, that we should be treating respectfully. And with a kind of loving, I was trying to love you. I don't know if you felt it Glenn but trying to genuinely want the best for you and realize you're in a difficult situation, whatever the circumstances. So, it's just a very small role play, I suppose, but it's trying to reach for some of those bigger things. And I don't know whether it's Motivational Interviewing or something else, but it's certainly emerged from my long encounter with MI.

Sebastian Kaplan:

Yeah. I guess the question arises for me is when did it become something other than Motivational Interviewing and I know I've heard a lot of people talk about like MI as it's applied in correctional settings. And while this isn't corrections, there's a similarity to it in that you, as a social worker, do have some authority and maybe ... yeah. There's different viewpoints on that, but some might say, well, once you're exerting some kind of authority on the other person, then it becomes something else. Even if it's in the context of you offering choices to the person.

Donald Forrester:

Yeah. Yeah.

Sebastian Kaplan:

Some might say that the directiveness that you showed in particular as Glenn really was trying to brush this off as a sporting rivalry gone a bit too far, that you reflected that a little

bit, but then eventually you just got a lot more persistent about, yep, got it. And we still have the issue of your daughter upstairs. And some might say that directiveness starts to step outside the sort of the tent pegs of MI, but I don't know, ultimately it may be one of those questions that you can have multiple answers for. To me it felt very that spirit or the philosophy that you had referenced earlier, that seemed really clear throughout a lot of the skills that you were using, the reflections in particular were quite apparent. And you really were committed to presenting this as choice while also acknowledging the reality. I mean, even use the word limited and you were transparent about that. So, was it MI, was it not MI? I guess we can think about that.

Glenn Hinds:

Oh, maybe we could invite as people who are listen to this episode, whenever this happens to be, we'd be keen…what did you hear? What did you understand? What was that like for you? And if you do want to leave a comment, you could maybe do it on a Twitter handle @ChangeTalking and just hashtag MI and families. And then we can capture this at some point in the future. Just what's your experience of this and what are the rules for you?

Donald Forrester:

I'd love to hear from other people. It'd be really interesting. In relation to one of the things you sort of said at the beginning there said, when does it go beyond MI? One of the things we developed is we used the encoding interviews is we used the MITI codes, were just sort of Motivational Interviewing integrity codes of kind of core MI. But we also developed some other dimensions of practice in particular, to capture this sense of authority, we, through various focus groups, we developed three dimensions, which were purposefulness, focus on the child and clarity about concerns. And we operationalized them using MI principles.

Donald Forrester:

And so, we've coded a lot of the recordings using both the sort of core MI dimensions, but also these sorts of the three things that correlate with one another. And after using the expression coined by an academic called Harry Ferguson, we call them good authority. But what's interesting is in terms of the study of done looking at outcomes is the MI skills had some weak relationships with outcomes, but the good authority ones actually had stronger relationships with outcomes in the context of child protection. And I think that's because probably the most important thing when you're working with people is that they're clear about the purpose, that they know why you're there. But not in a way that you're just telling them. So, we operationalize that in a collaborative style. So, there's a collaborative sense of shared purpose. You develop a collaborative focus on the child and collaborative clarity about concerns, and those seem to be crucially important parts of effectively working with people.

Glenn Hinds:

And what strike me about that is without minimizing what the situations the social worker finds themselves in. It's almost like you're saying that the good authority is the very thing

that happened with you and your son this morning, which was he had to brush his teeth and how you did that was significant about leading to that place. That as a social worker, these people have to look after their children. They have to let you have access. They have to make decisions, but it's the way they go about this that is all been explored and negotiated in your trainings and in your mentoring. And there's different ways to get people to brush their teeth.

Donald Forrester:

Yeah, and there's also, we don't have time to discuss this, we've talked about the heavy ended, difficult interview, but there's another bunch of interviews which are pretty common in the recording we've done where we can't really work out what the point of the interview is. And my guess is the social worker's going around and checking up on people. And actually, I think the concept of purposefulness and good authority can be really helpful there for not just the social worker, but also the family to have a sense of this is why the social workers here. If I had a magic wand and could wish for one simple change to social work, it would be that at the beginning of every interview there was a negotiation about the agenda.

Donald Forrester:

So, the social workers says, oh, I'm here. And there's a couple things I want to talk about. Is there anything you'd like to talk about? Or you can negotiate it in different ways, but some sense of this is what we're here to talk about. Because there's quite a lot of interviews where I couldn't really see what the point was. And that's another thing that MI or any other framework can provide is a sense of purpose. So, that as a social worker, you know what you're doing, you know how you're trying to achieve things, you've got a way of thinking about what's going on. So, I think, yeah, MI is also very helpful in that respect.

Sebastian Kaplan:

Well, we're at a point in our conversation here where we're going to start winding down after a really thoughtful discussion and role play there. And we often ask our guests towards the end of our discussions about anything that's on the horizon for you, anything that's caught your attention, something that you're working on, or you anticipate that you'll begin to work on, whether it's a professional context or perhaps more personal one.

Donald Forrester:

Yeah. So, various things, but I'm working on another book, which really has risen out of the MI one. And it's about trying to frame social workers as rights based and often dealing with conflicting rights. So, in the role play, we actually saw it wasn't about counseling. It was about conflicting rights, in this case the child's rights to protection, but also the parents' right to a considerable level of freedom about how they parent. So, I'm very ... and that's the reason from the sense that a lot of social work is not actually about helping, even though we've talked about it a lot. And it's why I came to social work. It's often about balancing rights and trying to minimize state involvement in family life. And how can we

understand some of those dilemmas? So, that's kind of what I'm interested in. It's helped me rethink a lot of my preconceptions about social work.

Donald Forrester:

And also, as part of that, something we haven't talked about, is the difference between counseling and social work is the social in the title. And I suppose one of my reservations about MI is it can be overly individualistic. It can be down to the individual to change. What about context of poverty? What about racism? What about these broader factors? How can we have a practice that is simultaneously helping individuals while also changing their context or at least understanding those contexts more broadly? And I think a rights-based sort of lens can help provide a framework for thinking about that so that we don't become overly individualistic about this.

Donald Forrester:

There's many reasons I've come to this, but one was a role play I did with some students. I had this girl where there was a parent who's going to have contact with the child and didn't have enough money for the bus fare. And I did it in a sort of classic MI style. So, I think I was using all the skills of MI fairly reasonably to get her to think about how she could use her money appropriately so that she had money left for contact. But the student quite rightly pointed out, isn't the issue that you should be giving her money. And that's absolutely right. So, we need that a higher-level critical view of individual choice is important, but what are the social factors and what can we do to give people the positive resources they need to exercise freedom. And that's where a civil rights-based approach can be helpful.

Glenn Hinds:

Wow, okay. We're going to have to get you back again in a few months' time because again, that sounds fascinating, not just from a social work perspective, but I guess for us as MI practitioners to recognize what are the social circumstances of the individuals that we're working with and how do we take that into account in our thinking, and that integrates it into our spirit in the approach? And the responsibilities then we have as individuals to act on their behalf if that's necessary. So, thank you for that, Donald. And we always ask our guests as well, if, and I'm sure there will be people out there who will be interested to talk to you or ask you questions or engage with you, with what you've shared or the books that you've written. If people want to contact you in relation to what you've talked about here today, how can they do that? How can people reach you?

Donald Forrester:

So, they can email me. I think my work email's readily available if you put Donald Forrester Cardiff University into Google, it comes up. Should I spell it out as well?

Glenn Hinds:

Yes, please. Yes.

Donald Forrester:

Okay. It's ForresterD, that's F-O-R-R-E-S-T-E-R-D@cardiff.ac.uk. And I'm very happy to hear from people by email or you can contact me on Twitter. I think it's @DonaldForr, F-O-R-R, all right one word. And if you've got any comments, thoughts, want to point out where I'm wrong or what I should do next, I'm very, very happy to hear from anyone.

Glenn Hinds:

Thank you. And we'll include all those details in the podcast notes as well.

Donald Forrester:

Right, brilliant, great.

Sebastian Kaplan:

Well, Donald, we really, really appreciate you joining us. This was wonderful. And certainly, given us a lot to think about in this really challenging context that you've devoted your career to. So, again, thank you for joining us.

Donald Forrester:

Thank you. It was really enjoyable.

Glenn Hinds:

Brilliant. Thanks, Donald.

Donald Forrester:

Thank you.