

Write a Branching Script©

(Adapted from Rosengren, 2017)

This exercise involves writing a script that reflects the multiple pathways that a conversation could take. You may work individually or in small groups to create this branching script, though we've found small groups a particularly effective way to do this exercise.

As we all know from experience, conversations can go a number of ways depending how we respond. Think of a time recently when you were in a conversation about a tough subject and you thought, "How should I respond to this?" Has that happened to all of you? Now back up a minute and think about what made you stop and think, "How should I respond to this?" My guess is that you—like me—recognize that how you responded would affect how the other person would then respond.

Now, let's take that a step further. In MI, we've said that our responses are important determinants of what sorts of things that clients might say. In the next exercise, we're going to take that a step further and play out several different ways a conversation might go, but all starting from the same point. Let's begin by looking at how this might work.

On the sheet, there are boxes filled with statements. The boxes have four different colors. The blue boxes represent practitioner statements and it starts with this very first one that says, "I understand your blood glucose levels have been running high." This is a factual statement by the practitioner and neutral in tone. Now, below it are three possible client responses. You'll notice one is green. As you read that

statement you'll notice there are some change elements in it. Now read the tan colored one. That one sounds a little more neutral. Now, the red one – how does that sound to you? Right, the client seems a little dissenting or there is at least some discord in the relationship.

And in the next row we have all blue responses. These are practitioner statements. All are reflections. On the next line there are three types of responses. Now, even good reflections don't go exactly like we'd like them, too – perhaps in part because some are focusing on the sustain or resistant side of the equation. Read through the rest of these and see how these conversation strings play out.

Now comes the fun part. There is a blank sheet with color code boxes. You decide what the focus of the conversation will be and create responses that you think might lead to these different response types (red, green or tan). Don't worry about your skill as a playwright or screen writer. Just imagine your client responses and see where it takes you. Then start filling in parts of the branching script. It typically works best if you work down the columns rather than row by row, but that is for you to decide. Remember, the goal is to move towards change talk, though sometimes this means getting to neutral first. You can focus on reflections only in this exercise or you can also use your EARS+I.