

## MI Strategy: Express Empathy

Because behavior change is such a difficult process, being able to express empathy is one of the most important skills to practice when dealing with patients/clients who have unhealthy patterns of substance use behavior. Empathy relays compassion and understanding and it involves seeing the world through the client/patient's eyes. It also involves being aware of and sensitive to their thoughts and feelings. Expressing empathy is important because when a client/patient feels understood, they are more likely to share and engage in the process of examining their behaviors.

### The Key Elements of Empathy

- ❖ Show warmth and communicate respect and understanding.
- ❖ Establish a non-judgmental, collaborative relationship.
- ❖ Express empathy through reflective listening—listen attentively to your client/patient and reflect back in your own words, helping to convey to them that you understand them.
- ❖ Examples of reflective listening:
  - *“It sounds like you are proud of yourself for taking these steps toward change.”*
  - *“It seems like you have a lot on your plate right now and smoking helps you cope with the stress. So you are not sure that you can handle cutting back on your smoking right now.”*
  - *“That sounds very frustrating.”*