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*Thoughts on Improved Practice (TIP) #1834*

**Mary Teaches Motivational Interviewing!**



It was a beautiful winter day - just a little over two thousand years ago. Having an overly busy and very demanding practice, Registered Counsellor Dr. Eck Spurt always set aside Thursdays for the purpose of taking in new patients. Mary, just having learned that she was pregnant (despite being a virgin) had no idea how to break the news to her sweetie – Joseph. Mary knew a little about Motivational Interviewing and she hoped that this appointment might help her to sort out her thoughts and feelings about how to go about letting Joseph in on this very strange news. As she settled into the huge leather chair in the therapy room, Mary decided it best to just start with the facts and pray that this man knew his OARS skills inside and out! (She knew she was about to put him to the test!)

- Mary** “Thank you for seeing me today – and I know it was short notice – but I’m in a bit of a quandary, I’m afraid. The thing is – and you may think this is just a tad strange – but I just found out that I’m pregnant – and worst of all, ... well ... frankly ... is that my fiancé doesn’t know anything about it”.
- Dr. Spurt** “Oh, I see” (in a tone that suggested he did not see at all). I take it that you don’t want him to know that his child is on the way?”
- Mary** “Well, the thing is, the whole situation is a little complicated. You see, the man to whom I am betrothed is ... well ... he is not exactly the father of this child. I’m worried that Joseph will never understand”.
- Dr. Spurt** “Oh. Dear. Oh dear – yes. (Trying not to sound shocked). That’s a situation alright. Yes. Yes. Yes, I can see where that would complicate things a little. You’re about to be a Mother Mary and that’s a tough spot to be in. Definitely. For sure. Hmmm – so perhaps I should ask then, if not Joseph, who would be the father of this child?”
- Mary** “This (pointing to her stomach) is God’s child.”
- Dr. Spurt** “Oh Dear! (making no attempt this time to hide his sense of surprise.) I’m not sure I heard you correctly. Are you telling me that God is the father of your baby?”
- Mary** “Yes. I know ... I know it sounds a little weird ... but I know I need to be honest about it.”
- Dr. Spurt** (Saying under his breath, and only to himself, “Grandiose. Grandiose thinking for sure.”)

The doctor waited a moment to give his mind time to absorb the impact of what he had just heard. He scrambled furiously to find a place in his brain where he might have stored some of the material he had been exposed to in his course on “psychosis”.

“Uh huh ... and when was it that you had sex with God?” (The frazzled doctor was trying to hide the sarcasm that was leaking out of his thoughts.)

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**Mary** "I did NOT have sex with God! That is preposterous."

**Dr. Spurt** "Well Mary ... if you haven't had sex with God, then how, may I ask, do you know that God is the father of your baby? What is your evidence?"

**Mary** "Gabriel told me."

**Dr. Spurt** "Oh, I see. Uh huh. And just exactly who is this 'Gabriel' person?"

**Mary** "Gabriel is not a person. Gabriel is an Angel."

**Dr. Spurt** (There was a long pause before Dr. Spurt began to speak again). "Uh huh. Yes. Yes, of course. I should have known. How silly of me. You are pregnant with God's baby, and you know this because an Angel told you that such was the case."

**Mary** "That's right. Exactly."

**Dr. Spurt** "So, when did you have sex with Gabriel in order to produce this divine child?"

**Mary** "I have never had sex with Gabriel. Don't be ridiculous. Gabriel is a Messenger of God. People do not have sex with Angels. Besides, when I became pregnant, I was a virgin. I had never had sex with anyone."

**Dr. Spurt** "Uh, huh. Of course. I should have known that too, I suppose. You became pregnant while you were a virgin. I don't hear that too often."

("3 mg. of Haldol might be a good start here". Again, Dr. Spurt kept his thoughts private despite his racing brain)

**Mary** "I know it sounds very unusual, but I just need you to trust me on this. I need to sort out what I want to say to Joseph."

**Dr. Spurt** "Uh, huh. Yes, we should talk about that. For sure. But perhaps I should first ask you a few questions. It might help me to figure out what would be helpful."

**Mary** "Whatever you think will be best ... "

**Dr. Spurt** "Have you had any injuries to your head at all in the last little while?"

**Mary** "No. Nothing that I can remember."

**Dr. Spurt** "Oh. I see. You are having memory problems then?"

**Mary** "No. I don't think so. Not that I know of."

**Dr. Spurt** "So, you are saying that you don't remember if you're having problems remembering?"

**Mary** "I don't recall having any problems in that way. No."

**Dr. Spurt** "And you don't remember if you've had a blow to your head of any sort?"

**Mary** "Well, if I did, I certainly don't remember anything ... "

**Dr. Spurt** "Uh, huh. So, I guess that confirms that then. You seem to be having problems with your memory. That's very helpful to know. So, next I'll ask about headaches. Have you had any trouble with headaches in the past week or two?"

**Mary** "Well, yes. As a matter of fact, right after Gabriel gave me the news, my head was spinning for a few days. I was trying to figure out what I might say to Joseph."

**Dr. Spurt** "Uh, huh. Yes. Hmmm ... memory issues and recent headaches. Hmmm... "

"What about hallucinations? Have you seen things that weren't really there at all – or maybe heard things that weren't really real?"

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**Mary** "Not that I recall."  
**Dr. Spurt** "Hmmm ... the memory problem again huh?"  
**Mary** "No. There's nothing wrong with my memory. I would remember something like that. The only thing out of the ordinary was when Gabriel appeared unto me and told me about the child."  
**Dr. Spurt** "I see. So ... both visual and auditory hallucinations then, I guess."  
**Mary** "Not hallucinations. No. It was just a 'heads up' about the arrival of the boy child."  
**Dr. Spurt** "Oh. Yes. Back to the baby idea again."  
**Mary** "Well, he's not just any old baby, you know. He's going to be a very special baby, you know."  
**Dr. Spurt** "Yes, most Mothers say that about their babies. And what makes you think it is going to be a boy?"  
**Mary** "Because Gabriel said so. There was total clarity about that."  
**Dr. Spurt** "Of course there was."  
**Mary** "I am supposed to call him 'Jesus'."  
**Dr. Spurt** "Well, that's a strange name indeed. Aren't you worried that he'll be teased at school? Maybe 'Kevin' would work better."  
**Mary** "No. His name will be Jesus. He will be the God who lives amongst us."  
**Dr. Spurt** "Oh, I'm sorry. I think I may have misunderstood you here. I thought you just said that your baby is going to be God on Earth. I'm afraid it's been a very long day around here and I must be more tired than I thought."  
**Mary** "No – you didn't misunderstand at all. You heard me right. He will be the Son of the Living God."  
**Dr. Spurt** (Again thinking only silently to himself, "Delusions. Very grandiose delusions.")  
**Mary** "I don't blame you if you doubt me. You won't be the last to do so. I know it all sounds very 'out there'."  
**Dr. Spurt** "Well, yes. I must admit, it's pretty out there! Or (he said while pointing his pointer finger to his right temple) – perhaps it's not so 'out there' as it is in here ... in your head!"  
**Mary** "I came to you because I was hoping you might help me think through how to tell Joseph."  
**Dr. Spurt** "My advice is that you should not tell him just now. In fact, I would suggest that you say nothing at all. Not even about the Angel stuff. Let's work together a while and see if we can help you get yourself grounded in the real world once again."  
**Mary** "You are not listening to me. I don't need to get 'grounded' again. That is not why I came."  
**Dr. Spurt** "Well, I have helped hundreds of people who suffer from all kinds of delusions and have had great success with some of the new pharmaceuticals that have come out in the last few years."  
**Mary** "I am NOT about to start taking pharmaceuticals! I'm pregnant. Have you not heard a word I said?"  
**Dr. Spurt** "Well, I don't suppose you're exactly an expert in the field of professional helping."  
**Mary** "I've read a few things. You're not doing it the way I expected. Shouldn't you be using your OARS skills? Maybe engaging with my point of view?"

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- Dr. Spurt** "Oh, I see. And now you're not just the Mother of God, but you are also a clinical supervisor?"
- Mary** "Your ratio of reflections to questions is way off-base."
- Dr. Spurt** "My ratio ... my ratio of ... what?"
- Mary** "You're supposed to reflect back to me what I am saying and thinking and meaning."
- Dr. Spurt** "I don't believe in reflecting back psychotic thinking."
- Mary** "And that is part of the 'premature focus trap'. You're focused on a diagnosis and what I need is someone who can help me think this through."
- Dr. Spurt** "You'd rather I not have a focus in a conversation like this? Is that what you're saying?"
- Mary** "No ... but I'd rather you had engaged with me first. You know ... it would have helped if you had taken some time to see this from my point of view."
- Dr. Spurt** "I don't believe in engaging with psychosis."
- Mary** "There you go with the "Labeling Trap". That's such a problem these days. I hate it."
- Dr. Spurt** "That's not a label. It's a diagnosis."
- Mary** "You're putting what I'm saying in a box and it is preventing you from hearing me."
- Dr. Spurt** "Well, my advice for you is that you not say a word about your situation to anyone – and especially not to Joseph."
- Mary** "I didn't come here for advice – and besides, you didn't do it right."
- Dr. Spurt** "Do "what" right?"
- Mary** "You didn't give your advice in the right way. You're supposed to "elicit" first. You know - "E-P-E"?"
- Dr. Spurt** "E-P-E"?"
- Mary** "You know ... Elicit first what the patient knows and thinks herself. Then Provide advice, and then follow up with Eliciting what she thinks about the advice you offered."
- Dr. Spurt** "Never heard of it."
- Mary** "Yah, that's obvious."
- Dr. Spurt** "By any chance, have you been taking any recreational drugs lately?"
- Mary** "No".
- Dr. Spurt** "Not even smoking a little something?"
- Mary** "I don't smoke. I never have. And besides, I told you, I'm pregnant."
- Dr. Spurt** "Drinking? What about drinking? Do you like to party?"
- Mary** "No. That's just not me. That's just not how I roll."
- Dr. Spurt** "Not even a few Margueritas now and again?"
- Mary** "No. We don't have those in Nazareth."
- Dr. Spurt** "Why not?"
- Mary** "They haven't been invented yet."
- Dr. Spurt** "Oh. Yes. Right. I forgot."
- Mary** "You forgot? ... having memory problems are you?"
- Dr. Spurt** "Do you think that is funny?"
- Mary** "No."
- Dr. Spurt** "Is there any history of mental illness in other people in your family?"

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**Mary** "No."

**Dr. Spurt** "Do you sometimes question your own ability to cope in the world?"

**Mary** "That doesn't sound like a very strength-based question to me."

**Dr. Spurt** "I am not focusing on your strengths."

**Mary** "Yes. That's obvious!"

**Dr. Spurt** "What do you want from me?"

**Mary** "Do you realize that that was the first open-ended question you've asked me since I got here?"

**Dr. Spurt** "So what?"

**Mary** "So, I think you are in the 'Question-Answer' Trap."

**Dr. Spurt** "So, I suppose you think you're an expert in therapy for women who are pregnant with God's baby?"

**Mary** "That was a non-adherent statement! Your MITI score would suffer for that!"

**Dr. Spurt** "Do you have a lot of trauma in your background?"

**Mary** "Some might even say that you are now in the Assessment Trap."

**Dr. Spurt** "Well, what were you wanting from me. What did you expect?"

**Mary** "Well, I was hoping that we'd establish a bit of a partnership."

**Dr. Spurt** "A partnership? I am not a 'partner'. I am a therapist."

**Mary** "No, you certainly aren't a partner. That's kind of clear".

**Dr. Spurt** "You need to understand that I went to school for a very long time to learn how to do what I do. I have a doctorate degree you know."

**Mary** "Yes. You see yourself as something of an expert."

**Dr. Spurt** "Yes."

**Mary** "Or – perhaps you are a bit caught in the 'Expert Trap'."

**Dr. Spurt** "You are obsessing over some crazy notion that you're pregnant with the Son of God, so being treated by an expert might be a darned good idea right about now."

**Mary** "A little compassion might also be helpful right about now."

**Dr. Spurt** "I have no interest in compassion. I leave that to the social workers. I have an important job to do. I have to help you get well."

**Mary** "I am not 'unwell'. I wish you'd just try to understand. I just need someone to hear me out while I decide what to do."

**Dr. Spurt** "I have a Ph.D. and I think I know a thing or two about abnormal psychology, you know. I'm pretty sure I know what I'm doing."

**Mary** "Yes, I'm sure you do. And I know a thing or two about ...well ... about being me as well."

**Dr. Spurt** "You know that you are going to be the one who delivers the Son of God into the world."

**Mary** "Now – THAT's more like it! That was a very good reflective statement! Thank you."

**Dr. Spurt** "You're saying that your husband is not likely going to take it well when he hears that you are prego – with a baby that is not his."

**Mary** "There you go! That's it! That's what I need. Another great reflection!"

**Dr. Spurt** "Oh. Ok. No problem. Why didn't you just say so? That's pretty easy. You just want someone to help you think about your thoughts ... to reflect on what's going on."

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- Mary** "You go, guy! That's three reflections in a row. Back-to-back. That's terrific."
- Dr. Spurt** "So, I guess what you're saying is that you didn't really come here for my advice at all."
- Mary.** "Right! Exactly! – and – by the way – that was a very well-constructed complex reflection."
- Dr. Spurt** "And where did you learn about all these communications ideas? From God?"
- Mary** "No – from two guys named Bill Miller and Steve Rollnick."
- Dr. Spurt** "Oh. And where do they live?"
- Mary** "Well. They actually aren't born yet. Not for another couple thousand years – but I had a vision about them. One of them lives in the desert. I saw these flat plains and large cactus trees everywhere. The other one lives in a place with great castles and wonderful parks where it rains far too much of the time."
- Dr. Spurt** "Maybe we should talk about them in another session. They seem to have made an impact on you."
- Mary** "Sure" That would be great. They're nice folk. They listen well - if you know what I mean".
- Dr. Spurt** "Well, how about if you come back again next week and we'll take a full hour while I listen to you about your thinking in terms of what you're going to say to Joseph. Would that be ok with you?"
- Mary** "Nice! Thanks for asking permission. That is an adherent thing to do."
- Dr. Spurt** "You could come in by yourself, or you could bring Joseph with you – whichever you think would be best."
- Mary** "Again – I gotta say – very well done! That shows support for my autonomy."
- Dr. Spurt** "Well, I'm looking forward to talking with you again. I get the sense that you didn't really come here for my expertise."
- Mary** "Not really, no. I was thinking it would be better just to have a helpful conversation."
- Dr. Spurt** "You know, Mary, I have the sense that you very special woman."
- Mary** "Thank you. That's kind of you to say. You know – it's funny you should say that because Gabriel also said that same thing when we talked. It's a bit hard to hear that when you're not used to thinking of yourself as being special in any significant way."
- Dr. Spurt** "You're wondering if you will be up to the task of raising the Son of God into the Man he is intended to be."
- Mary** (Laughing). "You are going to make a great interviewer one of these days! I can tell! You're already getting the hang of these helpful conversations!"
- Dr. Spurt** "I've learned a few things from you today, Mary. Thank you!"
- Mary** "Well, you are very welcome. Consider it a Christmas gift."
- Dr. Spurt** "Christmas?" A Christmas gift? I'm not sure what you mean? I've never heard of a thing called Christmas."
- Mary** "No worries. It will all become clear as soon as I have my baby."

*Best wishes for a happy holidays everyone! See y'all next year!*

