

QUESTIONING AND NONQUESTIONING TECHNIQUES

Asking Questions, Not Giving Answers

The questions you ask as a health professional help to direct the discussion among you, your patients, and their families. They also help move the focus away from you. Your questions not only facilitate the discussion or health interview, but they also convey your interest in the child and family.

Open a discussion with a “starter” question such as: “How are you?” or “Where would you like to begin?” These questions are valuable in eliciting the needs and concerns of the child or family.

Enrich the discussion with questions that allow a broad range of appropriate responses. Changing the types of questions you ask often helps to advance to a family-centered discussion.

Identify the most appropriate types of questions to facilitate a family-centered discussion. There are **seven general types of questions** listed below that a health professional might ask the family. They can help move the discussion from the general to the specific or vice versa.

1. **Diagnosis:** “What do you think is going on?” “What makes you think that way?”
2. **Action:** “Where should we begin?” “What aspects of your child’s problem(s) are of greatest interest to you?”
3. **Information Gathering:** “Who is in Armando's family?” “When did you first become aware of the problem?”
4. **Challenge:** “Why do you believe that?” “What supports your thinking?”
5. **Extension:** “How is his behavior related to his grades?” “How is the symptom related to the diagnosis?”
6. **Prediction:** “What problems do you see with trying to follow this plan?” “How do you anticipate your child reacting to this course of treatment?”
7. **Generalization:** “Based upon your child’s diagnosis, do you recognize these symptoms/behaviors in your other children at home?” “How do you think Ethan is talking compared to other children his age?”

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QUESTIONING AND NONQUESTIONING TECHNIQUES (continued)

The Use of Questions

When asking questions, it is important to keep the following points in mind:

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| Prepare the question | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask yourself “<i>What is the question for?</i>” and “<i>Which question should I ask?</i>” • Consider the different types of questions you might use. |
| Consider how to ask the question | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Before you ask the question, decide if it should be an open-ended or closed question. Consider what you will do with the answer. <p>Generally, open-ended questions promote family-centered discussion; closed questions promote provider-centered discussion.</p> <p><i>Open-ended:</i> What you do with your friends to have fun?</p> <p><i>Closed:</i> Do you have any friends?</p> |
| Evaluate the question | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How effective were your questions? • Did your questions do what you intended? |

Nonquestioning Techniques

There are many types of questions that can be asked, but questions combined with statements and silence (nonquestioning techniques) all contribute to and promote learning.

Other useful techniques include:

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| Silence | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An important aspect of listening. |
| Five important areas of listening | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Content, logic, substantive facts, intellectual information. This is what is most obvious. • Continuity. Listen over time to observe change. Remember what was said, and in what context, so that you can refer back later to what was said. • Mechanics. Which words are spoken loudly, and which are mumbled? |

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QUESTIONING AND NONQUESTIONING TECHNIQUES (continued)

Five important areas of listening *(continued)*

- A person's **capacity** to listen. Is the parent distracted?
- **Emotion**, especially:
 - a. *certitude*: absolutes or conditionals used
 - b. *depth of feeling*: voice tone, spoken words, and latent feelings

Statements

- **Declarative**. "I think the problem is X."
- **Reflective**. Repeating what has been said (stating again in the same form) and restating (stating again in a different or summary form).

Referral

- **"Linking"** or stating the relationship between what the child/family has just said and what the previous speaker said.

Polling

- **Posing the topic** to other members of the group. "Let's take a minute to hear what someone else is thinking" (most useful in teaching).

Improving Interviews with Children and Families

In interviews with children and families, discussion improves when:

- The pediatric provider speaks calmly and gives the child or family time to consider and answer questions.
- The pediatric provider waits for 3–5 seconds after asking a question.
- The pediatric provider responds in a nonjudgmental manner.
- The pediatric provider asks questions that encourage the child or family to demonstrate that they understand what has been said.