

Oregon WIC Listens – Continuing Education: “What...? How...? Tell me...” – Asking Open-Ended Questions



Time: 20 – 30 minutes

Objective:

1. Staff will be able to practice forming open-ended questions

Instructions:

1. Briefly review the information included in the **Content** section of this CE with staff.
2. Conduct a facilitated discussion with staff using the **Sample Questions** from the **Facilitated Discussion Guide** section in this CE.
3. Provide time for staff to practice changing closed questions to open-ended ones and to share their open-ended questions with other staff members.
4. Debrief with staff about their experiences in composing open-ended questions.

Introduction:

Open-ended questions are one of the 4 active listening skills that we have begun using as a part of participant centered counseling. Information gathered through open-ended questions can help us really hear what is going on with the participant and learn about what they already know.

Content:

Open-ended questions are a great way to start a conversation and to keep it going. Open-ended questions encourage deeper conversation and allow the certifier to gather more information from the participant. After asking, the certifier may need to wait quietly and allow the participant to think about their answer.

Closed questions give you very little information and can make people feel that they are being interrogated. Closed questions also lead people to tell you what they think is the “right” answer, rather than drawing information out. The right open-ended question can help guide a conversation.

Characteristics of an open-ended question:

- ❖ Require more than a yes or no answer
- ❖ Require more than a short answer, such as a specific fact or number
- ❖ Often start with “What...” “How...” “Tell me...”
- ❖ May take the participant a few seconds to think about their answer
- ❖ There are no right or wrong answers
- ❖ Come from a place of curiosity, rather than judgment – with no expectation about what is the correct or best answer

Examples comparing close-ended and open-ended questions

Closed – Does Billy like fruits and vegetables? (yes or no answer)

Open – What fruits and vegetables does Billy eat?

Closed – How are you? (answer would probably be “fine”)

Open – Tell me about how you have been feeling.

Closed – Do you plan to breastfeed? (yes or no answer and implies a right answer)

Open – What are your plans for feeding your baby after it is born?

Closed – Is there anything else you would like to talk about today? (yes or no answer)

Open – What else, if anything, would you like to talk about today?

Facilitated Discussion Guide - Sample Questions:

1. Tell me about your experiences using/forming open-ended questions.
2. What have you found difficult about forming or using open-ended questions?
3. What have you found easy about forming or using open-ended questions?
4. What are some open-ended questions you have used that did not work very well?
5. What are some of the open-ended questions that you have found to work well with participants?
6. How did you handle it when you asked an open-ended question that didn't go anywhere or get much of a response?
7. What do you think could make an open-ended question seem judgmental?

Case Studies or Activities:

Take the following closed questions and turn them into open-ended questions.

1. Have you offered any juice?
2. Is it offered in the cup or the bottle?
3. Do you have any concerns?
4. Any questions?

5. Do you prepare fruits and vegetables for your family?
6. Does your child like milk?
7. What is your child's favorite food?
8. Do you ever buy frozen or canned vegetables?
9. Is your child a picky eater?
10. Does your family like to try new foods?
11. Are you going to try some of the ideas we discussed today?