



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

Staff Handout

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 sit quietly and wait for the participant to think about their answer.

Close-ended questions give you very little information and can make people feel that they are being interrogated. Close-ended 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?

Practice 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?