

Adapted by Washington WIC Connects – ENERGIZER



“What...? How...? Tell me...” **Asking Open-Ended Questions**

Time: 25 – 30 minutes

Objective: Practice open-ended questions

Instructions:

1. **Share** the following:
 - A. **Introduction** –Share a summary of open-ended questions (see below)
 - B. **Content** – Read or ask volunteer to read the content section. Share the **characteristics of an open-ended question** and **examples comparing close ended and open ended questions** (both are included on the staff handout.)
2. **Lead** the group in a facilitated discussion using the **Facilitated Discussion Guide – Using Open-ended Questions**. Based on time allowed for this activity, decide on how many questions and what questions you will use.
3. **Decide** on the **Activity** –There are 2 choices. You can decide what works best for your group. In Choice 1 - the staff pair up and take turns reading and responding with open questions. In Choice 2 – the leader tosses a ball and each person gets a chance to respond using an open-ended question.
4. **Debrief** and **close** by bringing the whole group together. Ask a question about today’s Energizer, such as: What, if anything, will you change or do differently based on what we discussed today? Thank the group for participating!

1. Read or share this information:

A. Introduction

Open-ended questions are one of the 4 active listening skills. We are familiar with open-ended questions because we use them every day. Anyone who asks the Assessment Questions already asks open-ended questions, like: “How is your pregnancy going?” We also know that all of us are good information gatherers and use open-ended questions often. For example: “What questions do you have about shopping for your WIC foods?” or “What have you heard about breastfeeding?” Using open-ended questions to gather information helps us hear what is going on with our client. We can learn what they already know or what they are interested in knowing more about.

Read or ask staff to read:

B. Content

Open-ended questions are a great way to start a conversation and to keep it going. Open-ended questions encourage deeper conversations. They allow us to gather more information. After asking an open-ended question, we may need to wait quietly and allow our client to think about their answer.

The right open-ended question can help guide a conversation. In some cases, asking an open-ended question can help you get more information before you offer education. For example:

Sharon says: "I am going back to work. My friend told me about adding cereal to the bottle so I can get a little more sleep. It really seems to be working."

What is your initial response?

When you hear this, do you feel the need to fix it by offering information? "Adding cereal to the bottle adds more calories than your baby needs. Only give cereal from a spoon. You have to wait until your baby is ready. WIC doesn't give cereal until your baby is 6 months old."

Are you tempted to ask a closed-ended question? "Do you put cereal in every bottle?"

What if you asked an open-ended question before offering information or education? How would it change the conversation?

Here is an example of how that might look:

Sharon says: "I am going back to work and my friend told me about adding cereal to the bottle so I can get a little more sleep. It really seems to be working."

You could say: "Tell me more about how you are adding cereal to the bottle."

Sharon says: "I first mix the formula and the cereal together, and then I add the water. I have to cut the nipple a little bigger, but the baby is used to that now."

How does this change what you discuss with Sharon?

By asking an open-ended question first, Sharon provides more information and different information. You can change your approach because you heard more from Sharon.

Let's review the: *Characteristics of an open-ended question:*

- *Requires more than a yes or no answer*
- *Requires 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*

- *Comes from a place of curiosity, rather than judgment – with no expectation about what is the correct or the best answer*

Based on the characteristics of open-ended questions, let's take a look at:

Examples that compare 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 – Can you come to your appointment on Monday at 3:00? (yes or no answer)

Open – What day and time works best for you?

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

Open – How are you planning to feed your baby?

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?

2. Choose from this list or use your own questions to guide your discussion.

Facilitated Discussion Guide – Using Open-ended Questions:

1. What are some of the open-ended questions that you use every day? Which ones work well with clients?
2. What are some open-ended questions that you used that didn't work very well?
3. How did you handle it when you asked an open-ended question that didn't go anywhere or get much of a response?
4. What do you think could make an open-ended question seem judgmental?
5. Tell me about your experiences using open-ended questions or coming up with open-ended questions.

3. Decide on Choice 1, a pairing activity, or Choice 2, a group activity:

Activity- Choice 1:

- Find a partner
- Use the scenarios on page 2 of your handout
- One person read the scenario and the other respond with an open ended question
- Take turns reading the scenarios and responding with open-ended questions
- Avoid answering the question

Activity- Choice 2: (this is fun to do in a circle)

- Group forms a circle (if enough people)
- I am going to read a scenario and (lightly) toss a ball to one of you.

Leader Copy

- Catch the ball and respond with an open-ended question
- Avoid answering the question
- That person then tosses the ball to another person.
- They will also respond to the scenario with a different open-ended question.

Optional: You can write the scenarios on a flip chart before the activity starts so the scenarios are easy to read while in the circle. You may also find it helpful to write the words (When, Tell me, What, How, How often, Why, etc.) for ways to begin the question.

Here is an example of how this sounds:

Read the scenario:

A mom with twins says: "I let my boys drink juice all day. They like it and it has vitamin C which is good for them."

Respond with an open-ended question: *"Tell me more about what your boys have to drink on a typical day."*

1. A breastfeeding mom says: "I need to wean!"
2. A mom with a 4 year old child says: "She won't eat any vegetables."
3. A new pregnant mom comes into the clinic and says: "I'm interested in signing up for WIC, but my schedule is really busy."
4. A mom with a 4 month old Lucy says: "Now that I started back to work, I'm putting cereal in Lucy's night time bottle so she'll sleep through the night. I really need my rest to make it through my busy day."
5. A pregnant mom says: "I'm really having a hard time finding whole grain foods at my grocery store."
6. A pregnant mom with her 2nd child says: "Breastfeeding was so hard the first time but I'd like to try it with my new baby."
7. A caregiver calls to cancel her appointment which is in 2 hours. She says, "I can't make it to my appointment this afternoon."
8. A woman pregnant for the 3rd time is looking at her weight chart with you. She says, "I know I have gained a lot of weight this pregnancy, but I'm not worried about it."
9. A father with an 18 month old Aaron says, "His mom and I are separated. When Aaron spends the night at my house, I find giving him a bottle helps him get to sleep."
10. A mom with 2 year old twins says, "My kids won't drink any other milk than whole milk."

How did that activity go for you?

4. Debrief and close.

Here is a sample closing question: What, if anything, will you change or do differently based on what we discussed today? Thank you for participating!

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Staff Handout

Content:

Open-ended questions are a great way to start a conversation and to keep it going. Open-ended questions encourage deeper conversations. They allow us to gather more information. After asking an open-ended question, we may need to wait quietly and allow our client to think about their answer.

The right open-ended question can help guide a conversation. In some cases, asking an open-ended question can help you get more information before you offer education. For example:

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Examples comparing close-ended and open-ended questions

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Open – How are you planning to feed your baby?

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?

Activity:

Find a partner. One person read the scenario. Give your partner time to respond with an open-ended question. Switch roles. Avoid answering the question.

Alternate activity:

The Connector reads a scenario and (lightly) tosses a ball to a staff person. The staff person responds with an open-ended question.

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Participant Copy

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