



Basic Counseling Skills III – Open and Closed Questions

Asking the right question is at the heart of effective communication. By using the right questions in a particular situation, you can gather better information, learn more, build stronger relationships, and help others to learn, too.

The questions we ask can help a person open up or can close them down.

Closed Questions are used to get specific information. They can normally be answered with yes or no, a single word, or short phrase.

Examples: Do you like bananas? Are you mad about that? Do you enjoy sports?

Closed Questions:

- Give you just the facts
- Stop the conversation
- Keep control of the conversation with the questioner
- Keep your focus on your next question instead of what the person is saying

.....

Open Questions are used to gather a lot of information. You use them when you want a longer, more thorough response.

Examples: What kinds of fruit do you like? How do you feel about that? What sports do you enjoy?

Open Questions:

- Give you a longer answer with lots of useful information
- Ask the person to think and reflect
- Give you opinions and feelings
- Give control of the conversation to the respondent

Open questions are more effective in emotional situations when you want the person to express feelings.

Avoid suggestive questions such as “Don’t you think...?” “Shouldn’t you...?” With these questions you are inserting your thoughts and opinions into the question and not allowing the person to have an open response. (Your message is: “I think you should.”) Change your question to “What do you think...?”

Sample Closed and Open Sentences - Notice the difference in the type of response you might get...

Closed: “Do you want to try talking to your friend about it?” (Response: Yes or no)

Open: “What do you think would happen if you tried to talk to your friend about it?”
(Response: “I’m scared of what they will think of me...”)

Worksheet

Change the following closed questions to open:

1. Do you like school?

2. Do you want to try talking to him about that?

3. Are you angry about the way she yelled at you?

4. Did you have fun on the field trip?

5. Do you think your friend would agree with that?

6. Are you upset that you didn't get a good mark in math?

7. Did you agree to play just so your friend wouldn't get mad?

8. Is Payal your best friend at school?

Worksheet – Answer Key

(Sample responses – there are many correct responses)

1. Do you like school?
Can you tell me how you feel about school?
2. Do you want to try talking to him about that?
What do you think would happen if you talked to him about that?
3. Are you angry about the way she yelled at you?
How did it make you feel when she yelled at you? Can you describe it to me?
4. Did you have fun on the field trip?
What did you enjoy about the trip? Can you tell me about it?
5. Do you think your friend would agree with that?
What do you think your friend's response would be to that?
6. Are you upset that you didn't get a good mark in math?
How do you feel about your marks in math?
7. Did you agree to play just so your friend wouldn't get mad?
Why did you agree to play with your friend?
8. Is Payal your best friend at school?
Tell me about your friends at school.