
ASKING EVOCATIVE OPEN QUESTIONS

Open questions are questions that cannot be readily answered with a 'yes', 'no' or a single word.



Open questions are a foundation skill in patient-centred care, because they enable your patient to tell you what they know, feel, understand, value and prioritise.

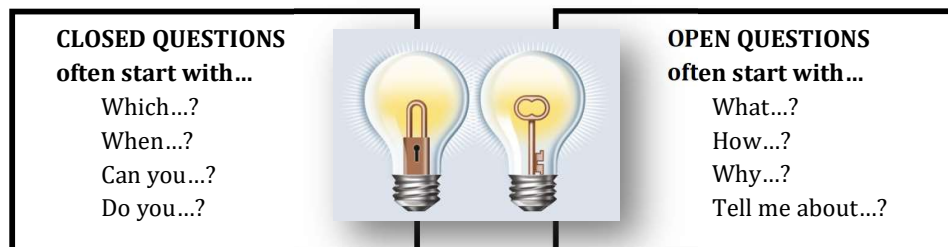


While we have all met patients who are reluctant to talk, or perhaps adolescents who make frequent use of answers such as 'dunno' or 'sort of', it is very difficult to establish a collaborative relationship if a consultation gets stuck in the question-answer trap. Although closed questions play an important role in assessment, they also promote 'yes'/'no' responses.

Clinicians sometimes fear open questions, because they think that their patients will talk endlessly, or about things that are not relevant. Evocative open questions can elicit change talk in conversations with patients. Use of open questions can also elicit a patient's priorities and preferences about changing behaviour.

How do I ask more open questions?

There are some question words that promote the asking of open questions. Keeping these in mind can make it easier to ask questions that are open. Open questions which ask about what patients want, need, can do, feel is important, or what they are willing to do (in short, asking for change talk) may be helpful in assisting patients to change their behaviour.



Reflective exercise:

Think about a health change that you are considering making for yourself.

Ask yourself the following questions:

- What are the changes you would like to make?
- What are your three best reasons for making a change?
- Why do you feel it is important to make a change?
- What are the most important areas of your life that are affected by your current health?
- What are you able to do, as a first step?
- What do you think you will do?
- How might you go about making the change?

How much change talk did you notice in your answers?

How might your patients respond to questions like these?
