

Guidelines for Asking Open & Honest Questions

1. The best single mark of an honest, open question is that you can't possibly anticipate the answer to it, nor think while asking it: "I know the right answer to this and I sure hope you give it to me!" So, "Have you ever thought about seeing a therapist?" is not an open and honest question! But "What did you learn from the experience you just told us about?" is.
2. Ask questions aimed at helping the focus person to explore her or his concern rather than satisfying your own curiosity.
3. Ask questions that are brief and to the point rather than weighing them down with background considerations and rationale that allow you to slip in your own opinions or advice or turn them into stories about yourself.
4. Ask questions that go to the person as well as the problem—questions about the person's inner life as well as the outward facts.
5. Avoid questions with yes/no or right/wrong answers.
6. Sometimes questions that invite images or metaphors can open things up in ways that more direct questions don't. At the same time, remember that the best questions tend to be fairly simple: clear, clean, brief (but not "simplistic").
7. If you have an intuition that your question might be useful, even if it seems a bit "off the wall," trust it – once you're reasonably certain that it is an honest, open question (e.g., "What color is this issue for you, and why?").
8. As you listen deeply to what is being said try to allow questions to come from your heart, rather than only from your head.
9. Allow questions to "bubble up" or emerge, rather than force them. Remember, this isn't about you, and it's not a contest – so don't worry about whether your questions outshine others' questions.
10. Consider holding a question rather than asking it immediately, particularly if you're not sure it's a good question. If you're not sure, sit with it a while and wait for clarity. If it keeps coming back to you, ask it later.
11. Watch the pacing of your questions. Questions coming too fast can feel aggressive and might cut off reflection. Allow for space. Trust the silences. Breathe.

Be patient toward all that is unresolved in your heart... Try to love the questions themselves... Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given because you would not be able to live them—and the point is to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answers.

~ Rainer Maria Rilke