



This guide focuses on the art of asking "open-minded" questions—a core skill in Motivational Interviewing (MI) that builds trust and encourages patients to share their wisdom and experience.

1. Open vs. Closed Questions

Definition: An **open-ended question** invites a person to think before responding and provides latitude for how they choose to answer. In contrast, a **closed question** is often designed to gather specific clinical data and typically results in a limited "yes" or "no" response, which can make a patient feel interrogated.

Closed Question Example	Open-Ended Alternative
"Are you feeling well today?"	"How have you been feeling since we last talked?"
"Did you read the brochure?"	"What stuck with you most from what you read or watched?"
"Have you had side effects before?"	"What concerns you about getting this vaccine?"
"Do you want her to get shots today?"	"What questions do you have about the vaccines we recommend?"
"Is your child too young for this?"	"What have you heard about the HPV shot?"

2. The Six Key Questions

Using a genuinely curious approach with these questions helps build engagement and bypass "psychological reactance".

1. **"How have you been feeling since we last talked?"** – Use this to address the whole person and uncover important information that might be missed in a standard symptoms list.
2. **"What would you like to start with?"** – Use for **collaborative agenda-setting**, especially with patients who get off-topic, to ensure their priorities are met.



3. **“What concerns you about getting this vaccine?”** – Use only if a patient shows hesitancy; it shows you are genuinely open to hearing their perspective without judgment.
 4. **“How might things be different if you were able to [make change]?”** – Use to invite **“change talk”** by giving the patient a chance to envision the positive benefits of a decision.
 5. **“If nothing changes, what do you think might happen?”** – Use to explore the patient's internal understanding of risks without using "Righting Reflex" scare tactics.
 6. **“So what do you think you might do?”** – Use to **bridge the gap** between a supportive conversation and making a concrete clinical plan.
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3. “Why” Question Alternatives

Clinicians should **“Beware of ‘Why’ Questions”** because they can sound interrogatory and force patients to defend their current behavior.

Problematic "Why" Question	Better MI-Consistent Alternative
“Why don’t you want the vaccine?”	“What would help you feel more confident about this?”
“Why haven’t you gotten it yet?”	“Help me understand what you’ve learned about this.”
“Why don’t you trust the research?”	“What would you want to know if you decided to look into this more?”
“Why do you need to wait?”	“What matters most to you as you think about this decision?”
“Why would you believe that source?”	“What made that information seem credible to you?”

4. Question Sort Activity

Identify each question as **Open** or **Closed**.



Study Guide

Module 5: Core Skill – Open-Ended Questions

1. Are you ready to start the visit?
2. What brings you in today?
3. Did you have any trouble finding the clinic?
4. How did you hear about this program?
5. Have you ever had a reaction to a shot?
6. What have you heard about community immunity?
7. Is it okay if we talk about vaccines today?
8. What would make this visit successful for you?
9. Do you think your child is too young for this?
10. Help me understand your thinking on this?
11. Are you planning to travel outside the country soon?
12. What stuck with you most from what you read online?
13. Do you have any questions for the doctor?
14. Where do you like to go for health information?
15. Do you want to go ahead with the shots today?

Answers:

- 1. Closed | 2. Open | 3. Closed | 4. Open | 5. Closed | 6. Open | 7. Closed (Permission) | 8. Open | 9. Closed | 10. Open | 11. Closed | 12. Open | 13. Closed | 14. Open | 15. Closed
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5. Practice Challenge

This week, identify 3 instances where you would typically ask a closed question and replace them with open-ended ones. Note how the person's response changes when you give them more "latitude" to answer.