

Ask Open-Ended Questions

What is it?

Open-ended questions are questions that encourage a response from the child that is more than a head nod or yes/no.

Questions that begin with **who, what, where, when, why, which,** and **how** are considered open-ended.

Open-ended questions can be answered with a single word or multiple words, as long as the response cannot be "yes" or "no."



Why is it important?

Open-ended questions provide opportunities for children to *practice communication* through their responses.

They encourage children to respond with a *variety* of both verbal and nonverbal responses.

Open-ended questions promote *back-and-forth interactions*, extending adult-child conversations.

Getting Started

*Did you know that children of any age benefit from being asked questions? Even infants may smile back or babble, but as they grow older, their responses will be related to the question that was asked, and become more meaningful. Asking the type of questions we are going to talk about today - Open-Ended Questions - is a fun and engaging way to encourage children to practice responding and teach **back and forth interactions**.*



Ways to Ask Open-Ended Questions

Caregiver

Ask questions and pause for a response

Ask questions about the child's play that begin with "who, what, why, where, or how." Then, pause to give the child time to think and respond.

What are you playing?

Child

...

Cars.

Where is your car going?

Ask about routines you are doing together

When you are changing diapers, you can encourage engagement by asking open-ended questions. Try it with other routines, too!

Where is your leg?

wiggles legs

That's right! That's where your leg is.

Ask questions that encourage a child to lead

When pretending to cook, you can ask questions that encourage the child to lead.

What should we cook?

We're making soup.

Oh, soup sounds yummy!

When asking questions to children who have difficulty with language, you can give extra support by providing choices or using fill in the blank.

Choices: "What do you want? Do you want the ball or the blocks?" (show choices)

Fill in the Blank: "Where is the ball? It's under the ..." (point to location)

Open Questions

Ask questions in a way that encourages children to respond in different ways, rather than simply "yes" or "no."



Often, young children don't know how to answer questions, and very young children might not understand what a question is. If a child does not answer a question, pause and then fill in the answer yourself. By modeling, you are teaching the child how to answer!

Where is the ball?

...

Oh, the ball is under the table!

Asking Open-Ended Questions with Children Who Use Gestures & Sounds

Ideas for Asking Open-Ended Questions During Activities



Play

- Notice the child's play and show you are interested and ready to engage by asking questions in a curious tone. *"What are you doing?" "What is that?"*
- Play with a puzzle or shape sorter and ask "where" questions. *"Where does it go?"* If the child doesn't answer, provide the response. *"I think the circle goes right here."*
- When you notice a child not involved in an activity, ask questions to get them playing. *"Which crayon do you want to color with?" "What would you like to do?"*



Daily Routines

- During clean-up time, ask questions to keep children involved. *"Where does this go?" "Which toy are you going to put away?"*
- Encourage interactions between children by asking "who" questions during circle or meal times. *"Who are you sitting by?" "Who is here?"*
- During routines a child knows well, such as hand washing, pause during the routine to ask questions. *"What's next?" "What do we do now?"*



Books

- When a child sits in the book area, show two or three books and ask, *"Which book do you want?"*
- When looking at books, allow the child to choose where they want to sit. *"Where should we sit to look at books?"*
- When looking at pictures in a book, ask about the story or the characters. *"Where is the duck?" "What is that?"*



After you ask a question, pause and watch the child to see if they are going to respond. It's okay if the child doesn't respond. You can either provide the answer or ask the question in a new way. Asking questions and showing children how to respond will help them learn what to do!

Open Questions

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Asking Open-Ended Questions with Children Who Use Words

Ideas for Asking Open-Ended Questions During Activities



Play

- Encourage friendship skills by asking open-ended questions. When a child is playing alone, ask, *"Who should we ask to come play with us?"*
- While playing outside together, ask questions that put the child in the lead. *"Where should we go next?" "What should we make with the sand?"*
- When small groups of children are playing together, ask questions that encourage them to notice each other. *"What do you think Sam is building?" "What song is Nina singing?" "What is Andre drawing?"*
- During creative play, such as art or building, ask questions about how to make things. *"How are we going to make this kite?" "How should we stack the blocks?"*



Daily Routines

- Help a child get comfortable when arriving at a familiar place by asking, *"Who should we say hello to?"*
- During routines a child is learning to complete more independently, such as toileting or hand washing, pause at a familiar step and ask, *"What do we do next?"*
- Ask questions during transition activities, like standing in line or walking in the hallway. *"Who's in front of you?" "Where are we going?" "What animal should we pretend to be?"*



Books

- Ask questions about the main idea of a picture. *"What is happening in this picture?" "What are these animals doing?"*
- Ask questions that encourage children to think about what might be happening in the story. *"What do you think will happen next?" "How do you think she feels?"*
- Choose books that show everyday events, such as eating, playing, or bathing. This can make it easier for children to answer questions like, *"What are they doing here?"* or *"Why is she doing that?"*



It takes time and practice for children to be able to answer questions about pictures and books. If children look confused or don't respond, model how to answer the question.

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