

Open Questions

“Judge a man by his questions rather than by his answers.” Voltaire

The ability to ask quality questions and to actively listen is integral to any relationship.

Open questions start with who, what, where, when, which, why, how? When asked with rapport, they will tend to generate a more than one word response.

Open questions, asked with a genuine curiosity and without any prejudgement of the response, encourage people to think things through and take responsibility for themselves and their lives. They empower people to become solution focused.

Closed questions limit people’s thinking and are often designed to get the other person to agree with our solution. *“Did you do / think / feel?”* Closed questions start with a verb – did, have, can, will, etc. They generate a yes or no response. Whilst asking closed questions may appear to be quicker in getting to a decision / agreement, often they are controlling and the person responding is only giving lip service to the solution.

Consider the difference:

- Are you committed?
- How committed are you?

Big TED

Another great questioning technique is “Big TED.” These questions help you to elicit even more information and detail about the subject that is being discussed.

T.E.D. stands for Tell, Explain, Describe.

- “Tell me a bit more about ...”
- “Explain what steps you took to achieve...”
- “Describe to me exactly what you saw / heard / felt when...”

When accompanied with a genuine sense of curiosity, using open or Big TED questions is likely to encourage the other person to give you much more information about the situation or issue.

I tend to avoid using ‘why’ wherever possible, as it can cause the other person to get defensive and start to justify and defend their position. Where I can, I replace ‘why’ with ‘how’.

Consider the difference:

- “Why did you do that?”
- “I am curious about how come you chose to approach ... in that way?”