

1. Why are open-ended questions so important?
 - They require a person to pause, think, and reflect.
 - Answers include personal feelings, opinions, or ideas about a subject.
 - The control of the conversation switches from the person asking the question to the person being asked the question. It begins an exchange between the caseworker and the family. If the control of the conversation stays with the caseworker, you are asking closed-ended questions.
2. Open-ended questions begin in very specific ways. Open-ended questions begin with the following words: why, how, what, describe, tell me about..., or what do you think about...
3. Use open-ended questions as follow ups for other questions. These follow ups can be asked after open or closed-ended questions.
 - Ask "why" and "how" to follow up and gain a more thorough answer after asking a closed-ended question.
 - When the participant has finished talking, ask an open-ended question that refers to what they just said, or is related to what they just said. This keeps the conversation flowing in an open and engaging way.
4. Wording is very important when asking open-ended questions, especially if you are looking for a certain type of answer.
 - Gauge the family's comfort level when asking questions. Be careful when asking questions that are very personal or require too much personal information early in the conversation.
 - A person who is uncomfortable answering open-ended questions either doesn't understand where you are going with it or doesn't want to answer. Explain why you are asking the question, re-phrase the question or save the question for another time.
 - Open-ended questions can result in long answers. If you would like to keep them brief or relevant, be specific when asking the question.

Examples of Open-Ended Questions

Use open-ended questions as follow ups for other questions; can be asked after open or closed-ended questions.

1. How did you get involved in...?
2. What kind of challenges are you facing?
3. What's the most important priority to you? Why?
4. What could make this no longer a priority?
5. What other issues are important to you?
6. What would you like to see improved?
7. Who else is involved in this decision?
8. What do you see as the next steps?
9. How do you measure that?
10. What is your timeline for implementing this action?
11. What is it that you'd like to see accomplished?
12. What are your expectations?
13. How do you see this happening?
14. With whom have you had success in the past?
15. With whom have you had difficulties in the past?
16. Can you help me understand that a little better?
17. What concerns do you have?
18. What's changed since we last talked?
19. What other items should we discuss?
20. How did you reach this decision?