

## Open-Ended Questions

Open-ended questions are ones that keep the conversation going; ones that cannot be answered by one word (like yes or no). You are trying to explore the ambivalence (both sides) and augment the discrepancy (difference) between them. We want to avoid having them feel judged. What follows are examples:

- **What** are your impressions about how ... this program is working out for you?  
...your probation is going? ... you are dealing with \_\_\_\_ (your health condition, behavior, addiction)?
- What brings you here today?
- What happens when you ...?
- What's different for you this time?
- What can you do to improve your situation?
- What questions could I ask?
- What else?
- What was that like?
- What did you first think about being involved in that?
- What would you like to do now?
- What are your options?
- **How** can this program help you/feel safer/support you?
- How is that working out for you?
- How do you think your friends/family help or hinder your progress?
- How did you feel about that/him/her...?
- How would you like your life to be?
- **Tell me** more about when this first began.
- Tell me about your overall experience ... at this school... with your probation... with your health condition.
- Tell me about a time when you felt good about how well you were doing.
- Tell me more about that situation.
- Tell me more about this.
- Such as?
- Tell me about your goals in your life.
- Tell me what you think about all of this.
- How would you know things were different?
- What would your life look like if you were successful in making these changes?
- Tell me about a time in your life when you were successful.
- What did your life look like?
- Tell me about your life before you began to hang out with your friends and get high.

## Affirming

Affirmations are statements that we use to highlight their competence and accentuate the positive—their strengths and effort. It must be genuine. We recognize their inherent worth as a fellow human. It could involve highlighting some personal strength we perceive or show our appreciation/recognition for what they are going through. The strengths usually are related to their values, goals, skills, effort or life-style or recognizing challenges or experiences they are going through. They are not compliments (you acting as a judge), and it is preferable not to begin them with “I am...” statements, such as “I am so proud of you!” Here are some things you might say, or ways to begin:

- You must feel real proud of yourself!
- Even if you feel like it is not fair, you are not willing to let that interfere with your dreams for the future.
- Despite the challenges you face, you remain positive.
- You’re amazing!
- Despite feeling discouraged you, aren’t giving up.
- It is impressive that you have gone to great lengths to. . .
- You are determined to do what’s best for yourself. . .
- With all the obstacles you have right now, it’s amazing that you. . .
- It must’ve taken lots of effort to. . .
- It’s impressive that you showed up today in spite of being. . .
- You are a person with strong values. . .
- You are very committed!
- The fact that you are here shows you are concerned about what’s happening right now.
- You’re really serious about this change.
- It sounds like you have worked hard to. . .
- Wow, that must have been a challenge. . .
- Your determination really shows by the steps you’re taking.
- You showed a lot of ...by doing that.
- It appears that you’re trying to. . .
- You haven’t given up. . .
- This shows real dedication.
- You care about yourself as much as you do about others...

Below are words that you can use to show appreciation and/or to

complete the above sentences: Dreams                      Succeed                      Determination  
Commitment                      Self-Control                      Character  
Kindness                      Obstacles                      Hard work  
Will                      Generous                      Sensitivity

## Reflections

Reflections require careful attentiveness that is called “reflective listening.” What follows are some examples of 8 types of reflections. You can use these as a basic guide to practice with, adding to them with your own style and scenarios. It takes lots of practice and is more “art” than “science.” Remember, you can’t do any harm by reflecting what you have heard them say. The key is to listen attentively and try to understand and perceive their emotions.

**Simple or straight reflections:** Tells the student/client that you understood what they said. (C=client and P=Practitioner/you)

C: Its not important to me if I quit smoking. I just want to get my mom off my back.

P: The real reason you would quit smoking is because of your mom.

C: I thought I might be eating too many sweets, but I haven’t missed them for several days now.

P: So if you had been eating too much sugar you would certainly have missed it after this many days.

C: I missed my appointment because I hate to wait in the clinic all day. There is no way I can handle wasting my time sitting in the waiting room.

P: You would keep your appointment if there wasn’t a long waiting time in the clinic.

**Amplified reflection** (exaggerating a bit): You take what the client has said and add a little exaggeration to what they have said in order to help them increase the chance they will see the need for change and build discrepancy (change or no change).

C: I don’t have a problem unless my boyfriend comes over. He brings over some beers and tells me not to worry about the drinking.

P: So you can make your own choices except when your boyfriend comes over to your place.

C: I think I’m doing fine with my diabetes even though my doctor says my sugar is too high. It’s not my fault that I eat some of the candy my family leaves around. If they wouldn’t bring it home, I wouldn’t be eating it.

P: You’re not to blame. And when it comes down to it, everything should be fine.

**Double-sided reflection:** You take what the student/client has said and state both sides of the argument – for a change and no change (sustain talk). Refrain from using “but” in between (it undermines the first part).

C: I don't see how I 've gained weight eating just a little bit of candy now and then. The nurse practitioner just two months ago said that I was doing fine.

P: It doesn't seem possible that you could have gained weight so quickly even though you recognize that you've slacked off in the last months.

C: I really don't see how I could take night classes now with the baby, and all.

P: So on the one hand you'd like to begin taking night classes and, on the other hand, you just don't see where you'll get the time to start right now.

**Reframing:** Provides a different meaning or perspective allowing the client to take a new way of looking at something that is more consistent with the behavior change or change talk.

C: I can party without getting really wasted better than my friends.

P: You can drink more without feeling the effects including the warning signs that most people use to know when to stop drinking.

C: I 've tried quitting three times before and after a week or so each time, I start back. I don't understand; it's hopeless.

P: You've been serious enough about quitting smoking that you've tried several times and are here today. People who aren't serious and believe they are truly hopeless don't keep trying; they give up. I'm impressed with your perseverance (affirmation).

**Emphasizing Autonomy:** Reminds the person that it is their choice to decide what to do.

C: I don't know if going back to school will really help me get a better job. I'm so busy taking care of my children and I never even liked school before. I'm worried if I did go, I might not do very well.

P: You aren't sure what you want to do about getting a better job. It is really up to you how you decide to handle this situation, as difficult as it is.

C: I really don't know what I'd like to do about my relationship. He provides me soe support, but I don't trust him. But I don't like anyone telling me what I should do.

P: You know it's really up to you. I'm not going to tell you what you should do.

**Changing Focus** (when you hit a wall, turn left): moving the focus from something that the patient/client seems unwilling to discuss at this time.

C: I'm sick of things. Sick of all of it. I want to eat the food I like. I can't see making any changes at this point. I don't really care what happens.

P: You are not interested in talking about your diet and you're frustrated that your health condition requires some changes in your eating. So I wonder what you might be willing to talk about to improve your health.

**Agreeing with a twist:** A reframe prefaced with a reflection that sides with the sustain talk. You agree with part of what the patient/client has said but you emphasize a different aspect of the conversation.

C: I just need to cut down on the amount of sugar I eat; I'm not going to give it up no matter what you say!

P: What you want is to be able to eat what you want without the worry.

**Coming Alongside** or "Well, if you insist...": this is rather like a paradox where you simply go along with the client, agreeing with whatever they say; be careful not to overuse this one - it can backfire!

C: I can't do this anyway. I'm nothing but a loser!

P: This might not be the right time to make this change; you might fail after all.

## Summarizing

Summaries provide an additional way to help guide the conversation (toward change talk) while making sure you've heard and understood (including their feelings) everything the client/student has said. It helps to show the client that you have been truly listening as you prepare to deepen the conversation or change the direction as you move ahead. Summarizing is a way to pick the most important aspects of the conversation to help strengthen the discrepancy of the ambivalence in which they find themselves. It is like picking a bouquet of flowers from a field of wild flowers.

- Build rapport
- Show that you are understanding their thoughts/feelings
- Communicate your interest in your client
- Transition to another topic or question
- Shift focus and attention
- Ask to correct anything you misunderstood or misheard
- Reflect ambivalence (pros or cons)

Here are some ideas of what to say to form a summary:

- You mentioned that you. . . as well as. . .
- To summarize what we've been discussing. . .
- So, this is what you've said so far. . .
- Let me see if I've got this right . . .

This is then followed by a question or statement of a chance to see if there's anything the person would like to add. Questions like this:

- "So what do you think you want to do?"
- "Have I got it right?"
- "Did I leave anything out?"
- "Is there anything else you think I should know at this point?"
- "Did I misunderstand anything?"
- "So what else can you tell me about...?"