E-Module: Questions in Person-Centered or Youth-Driven Conversations

What Is the Point?

When a provider is aiming to have youth-driven or person-centered conversation, different types of questions can support—or hinder—this goal. Certain types of questions tend to help a young person explore their own perspective and ideas, which is the goal of a person-centered or youth-driven conversation. In contrast, other types of questions can shut down this exploration and/or include suggestions about what the young person should say in response. The differences between questions that help with exploration and questions that restrict exploration can be subtle, and the ability to recognize which questions are serving which purpose is an essential skill for facilitating youth-driven conversations.

Open-ended questions invite a young person to express or explore their own perspectives and ideas without imposing any limits. Other types of questions tend to limit this exploration. Closed-ended questions make only a certain set of responses optional. Often, closed-ended questions ask for a yes/no response, or pose a choice between a few possible answers, like a multiple-choice exam question. Leading questions can take the form of either open- or closed-ended questions, but actually contain a suggestion about what the "right" answer should be. Stacked questions are asked one after another without providing time for answers in between. The use of stacked

Screenshot from E-Module

questions can be confusing and give the impression that the questioner is not really interested in the responses.

This is not to say that open-ended questions are always good or closed-ended questions always bad. The skillful use of questions requires not only an understanding of the different kinds of questions, but also the awareness of how any particular type of question is functioning in a conversation. The purpose of this module is to provide some practice in these areas.

Things to Keep in Mind

» Open-ended questions help young people expand and explore, and there are no wrong answers.

» Not all closed-end questions are bad.

» If providers approach conversations with young people with genuine curiosity and flexibility, they will be less tempted to use leading questions.

» If the goal is to have a youth-driven or person-centered conversation, providers should avoid inserting their own ideas or agendas.

Possible Discussion Points

Slide 1

Where would you say your education is at and where would you like to see it going?

» It's not clear, but possible that the provider is using questions from a list or form. Can this type of situation contribute to stacking questions?

» Is the stacking of questions here problematic? Why or why not?

Slides 2 and 3

But when are you supposed to graduate?

And are you on track to graduate?

» Are these closed-ended questions problematic? Why or why not?

Slide 4

After high school, where would you like to see your education go?

» What do you think the possible embedded suggestion is here? Is that a problem?

https://www.pathwaysrtc.pdx.edu/learning-tools

Possible Discussion Points

Slide 6

For the summer or longer than that?

» Do you find this to be a leading question? If so, what might the provider be leading towards?

Slide 7

It's at a fast food restaurant, right?

» How about this yes/no question, do you find it problematic? Why or why not?

Slide 9

So where do your passions lie?

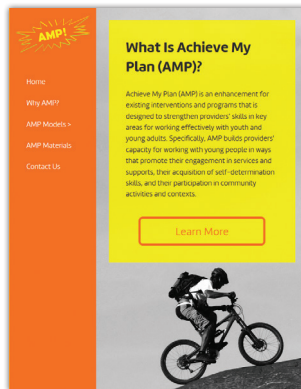» What do you think about this as an open-ended question?

Slide 10

So right now in high school are you taking any arts or photography classes?

» What difference might it make if the provider asked the question suggested in the module instead of the question they did ask?

Reflections

» What are some situations in which a provider might unintentionally use questions that shut down exploration, even though their original intent was to have a youth-driven conversation?

» Are there ever times when it's appropriate to use leading questions? What would these be?

» Can you think of a time in your own experience where helping a young person explore their ideas led the conversation somewhere surprising and helpful? Were questions an important part of this? What other techniques were helpful?

» How have you seen young people respond to the use of leading questions? Based on this experience, do you think the "leading" worked?

Other Resources

» Achieve My Plan's (AMP) Top 10 Tips for Engaging young People: https://www.pathwaysrtc.pdx.edu/pdf/proj-5-AMP-top-ten-tips-for-engaging-young-people.pdf

» AMP training: https://achievemyplan.pdx.edu

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National Institute on Disability, Independent Living, and Rehabilitation Research

SAMHSA
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration

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