



Free Fact Sheet # 1

Asking productive questions



Who is this topic for?

I developed this Fact Sheet to support people taking part in my coaching and mentoring programmes. But as the material could be helpful to a much wider audience please feel free to download this document for your own use.

What is it about?

It's about how to hold more responsive dialogues with others. I strongly believe that having high quality conversations around learning is the key to helping students progress and colleagues develop professionally.

Coaching and mentoring is recognised as one of the most effective way of structuring these types of conversations. As a coach, effective questioning is a core skill which will help people to:

- Use their imagination
- Reflect on behaviours and attitudes
- Look at things from different perspectives
- Recognise strengths and resources
- Challenge their beliefs and actions
- Explore change and new possibilities.

On the following pages you'll find a range of different types of questions you might find helpful as in structuring your coaching conversations. Please adapt them to your own style and context.

Different types of Questions

Questions can be classified into 9 different types. Here is what they are and when you might want to use or avoid them:

| Type | Example question | It's effect |
|--------------------------|--|---|
| Closed | "Do you think this is the best thing under these circumstances?" | Only a short factual answer is needed - usually "yes" or "no" which either shortens or inhibits discussion. |
| Open | "How did you feel when that happened?" | Encourages expansion of ideas and triggers thinking and reflection. |
| Developer | "What else?" "Tell me more" "How did you do that?" (See further examples on page 3) | Draws out more detail like peeling an onion. |
| Insightful | "What do think they meant by that?" | Attempts to develop perspective and understanding. |
| Reflective | "So you feel valued when that happens?" | Reflect back an implication to check. |
| Clarifying | "So have I understood correctly that you ...?" | Summarising to check understanding and confirm attention. |
| Intuitive | "I have a sense that you might be feeling undervalued here" | Checks out the validity of things maybe unspoken and can give new directions. |
| Solution creating | "What would it be like if you were able to overcome that?" | Moves the person towards what they would like to happen and may lead to goals. |
| Leading | "Don't you think it would better if you ...?" | To be avoided as people may give you the answer that they think you want and may feel disempowered or just wrong. |

More 'Developer Questions' ...

- How did you do that?
- What did that involve?
- I'm curious about...
- Tell me more about how you.....?
- What else?
- What told you it was working?
- What happened that was useful as a result?

Some 'Coaching Questions'

- What do you want from this?
- What stops you getting there at the moment?
- In what ways is this useful to you?
- Describe to me...
- How do you know?
- What's the real/main issue here for you?
- I'm curious about a time when it was less troublesome
- What factors contributed to that?
- I was interested that you said....
- What makes you say that?
- Can you explain the thinking behind that?
- What would be the first step towards this?
- How might this become action?
- What is the range of options for you?
- What would be a significant step in the right direction for you?
- How will it be when this has happened?

Some 'Goal Setting Questions'

Adult examples

- How will you notice when things are working better for you?
- When you feel you are being more assertive with the class what will you be doing differently?
- Imagine you have got on top of the marking - what other benefits might that bring?
- What would you like to be better about the content of your lessons?
- Which part of that is within your control?
- When you are building more VAK into your lessons, what will that be like?
- When your team is pulling together more, what will you notice first?
- You told me that you'd like the opening phase of the lesson to be "sharper". I wondered what you feel would be the first thing to hone? How would you recognise that this phase was developing that edge?

Children examples

- What would you like to be different about how you and school get on?
- Suppose, over the next few weeks, school got a little easier to manage – what would that be like?
- Imagine that tomorrow is a good day. You're at your best and you give it your best shot. So you can be pleased with yourself and the school can be pleased with you. What would you be doing for that to happen?
- What's your vision of a good future?
- Let's imagine that being here turns out to be helpful. What will you be doing differently then?
- If we made a videotape of a day when trouble pushed into your life at school and another a few weeks later when you have learned to resist trouble, what would we see on the second video? How could we tell which is the second video?

Exception Questions

- Tell me about the times when X happens less
- What are the lessons/ parts of the day when X bothers you least?
- What do you suppose keeps you from doing X more often?
- What is it you are doing when you are not doing X?
- Tell me about the last time that X has seemed a bit more manageable?
- What are the times when X is less dominating?
- How come you sometimes resist the urge to X?
- What was life like before X came along? What were you doing differently then?
- What are the lessons/ times that are a bit more interesting for you? What do you do differently in those?

- Tell me about a time when the problem happened and you were able to get to grips with it better. What was different about that time?
- What's the longest you've gone without letting X get to you? How did you do that?
- When things go wobbly/ pear shaped etc how do you get things back in check?
- What's something you can tolerate about X and maybe even enjoy once in a while?
- How come you haven't given up on this?
- What things have people not noticed about you or you not notice about yourself in these situations?

To find out more, take a look at these books and courses on my website:

http://www.andyvass.net/cpd_courses_for_teachers.html

http://www.andyvass.net/leadership_coaching.html

http://www.andyvass.net/behaviour_management.html

[Coaching in schools pocketbook](#)