

Parent Language – Asking Questions

Information for patients, relatives and carers

December 2023

What are questions?

Speaking and interacting with your child is very important for developing their communication and interaction skills. However it is also important to realise that there are many different ways of speaking and interacting, and that some are more useful for your child's language development than others. Questions are sentences that we direct at other people because we want to get information from them.

There are 2 main types of questions – open questions and closed questions – but they are very different. **Open questions** can be answered in lots of different ways. They start with 'wh-question words' like *who*, *what*, *when*, *where* etc. **Closed questions** are much more limited in terms of how they can be answered. They usually start with different words like *do/does/did*, *am/is/are/was/were* or *have/has/had*. There are 2 types of closed questions – yes/no questions and choice questions. **Yes/no questions** are usually answered either with a "yes" or a "no" (or sometimes "maybe"!) and **choice questions** are supposed to be answered by repeating one of the choices mentioned in the question.

Why is reducing questions a good strategy?

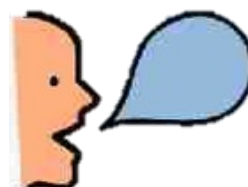
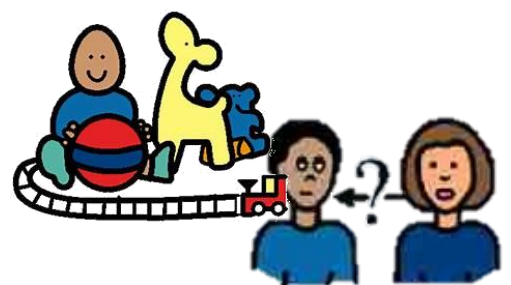
Questions are very different from comments in that questions involve getting information from somebody else whereas comments are a way to share information with others. When it comes to language learning, children benefit far more from hearing adults' comments than being asked questions. Asking questions does not provide your child with as much useful language or information about what things are called or what is going on around them.

How do I ask better questions?

There is one type of question that benefits a child's language learning more than all the others: **choice questions**. In order to ask a good choice question you have to give the child a choice of at least 2 options, and 1 of the choices has to be the correct choice.

Activities to try at home:

- ☐ 1. Learn your questions
- ☐ 2. Turn open questions into closed questions.
- ☐ 3. Practise your questions



Learn Your Questions

- **Open questions** typically start with 'wh- question words' *who, what, when, where, why, and how* (*how* still belongs to this group of words even if it just begins with a 'h') and can be answered in a number of different ways depending on the context
Examples of open questions include "**who** is that?", "**what** are you doing?", "**when** do we eat breakfast?", "**where** are you going?" and "**why** are you crying?"
- **Yes/No questions** usually start with words like *do/does/did, am/is/are/was/were, or have/has/had* and should be answered with "yes" or "no"
Examples of yes/no questions (the first words are underlined) include "**do** you want water?", "**are** you hungry?" or "**have** you finished?"
- **Choice questions** also usually start with words like *do/does/did, am/is/are/was/were or have/has/had* and should be answered with one of the choices given in the question
Examples of choice questions (the first word and choices are underline) include "**do** you want **water** or **juice**?", "**are** you **hungry** or **full**?" or "**have** you got **teddy** or **baby**?"

Turn Open Questions into Closed Questions

- Look at all the questions below and you will see *any open question* can be turned → into a **yes/no question** and → into a **choice question**
 - "**who** is that?" → "**is** that Thomas?" → "**is** that **Thomas** or **James**?"
 - "**what** are you doing?" → "**are** you playing?" → "**are** you **working** or **playing**?"
 - "**when** do we eat breakfast?" → "**do** we eat breakfast in the evening?" → "**do** we eat breakfast **in the evening** or **in the morning**?"
 - "**where** are you going?" → "**are** you going to the kitchen?" → "**are** you going to the **kitchen** or **the bathroom**?"
 - "**why** are you crying?" → "**are** you crying **because you fell over**?" → "**are** you crying **because you're sad** or **because you fell over**?"
- It can be a bit tricky at first but it usually doesn't take too long to get the hang of it!

Practise your Questions

- You can ask choice questions throughout the day whenever it is possible to offer your child a choice
- You can also ask choice questions to check if your child understands a word e.g. hold up a teddy and ask "is this baby or teddy?"

How do I make a comment about my visit?

We aim to provide the best possible service and staff will be happy to answer any of the questions you may have.

If you have any suggestions or comments about your visit, please either speak to a member of staff or contact the patient advice and liaison service (PALS) on 0191 445 6129 (10.00 – 16.00, Monday to Friday).

You can also email PALS at ghnt.pals.service@nhs.net

Alternatively, you may wish to complain by contacting our complaints department:

Mrs Trudie Davies,
Gateshead Health NHS Foundation Trust,
Trust Headquarters,
Queen Elizabeth Hospital,
Sheriff Hill,
Gateshead,
NE9 6SX

The PALS team will listen to your concerns, suggestions or queries and is often able to help solve problems on your behalf.

Data Protection

Any personal information is kept confidential. There may be occasions where your information needs to be shared with other care professionals to ensure you receive the best care possible.

In order to assist us to improve the services available, your information may be used for clinical audit, research, teaching and anonymised for National NHS Reviews and Statistics.

Further information is available via Gateshead Health NHS Foundation Trust website ([Privacy - QE Gateshead](#)) or by contacting the Data Protection Officer by telephone on 0191 445 8418 or by email ghnt.ig.team@nhs.net.

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