

Why is it important to use open-ended questions?

While observing the children in your classroom take the opportunity to have conversations and dig a little deeper to find out who they are. We often wonder:

“I wish I knew what they were thinking.”

A great way for a teacher to get a better understanding of how a child is thinking, exploring or making decisions is to use open-ended questions, as opposed to closed ended questions.

Closed ended questions are

questions that usually have one right answer. The teacher typically knows what he/she wants the child to answer, limiting the amount of critical thinking the child is encouraged to use.

Questioning a child using opened-ended questions, helps to extend their experience and is a wonderful way to open the doorway to a meaningful conversation with the child.

As teachers in an early childhood classroom it is our job to support children.

Open-ended questions are a type of teacher support that can be utilized throughout the day in all learning areas, at meal times, bathroom times and outside.

While using open-ended questions it is important to really listen to (or watch) the child’s response to the questions and see where the conversation might go.

Is the child interested in the conversation and ready for more questions or challenges? Or is the child more interested in engaging in play without interruptions?

AVOID

CLOSE-ENDED QUESTIONS

“What color is that?”

“How many do you have?”

“What letter is this?”

“Do you like this because it is green?”

“What is this called?”

“Is this yours?”

“Do you like playing with the blocks?”

“What are you drawing [writing]?”

Open-ended Question Examples

To put thoughts into words: *“Why do you think the little boy in the story was sad?”*

“How do you think that happened?”

To observe: *“What do you see, hear, feel? What did you notice?”*

To make predictions: *“What do you think will happen if you keep adding more blocks?”*

“What do you think we could do with these [shells, paints, etc.]?”

To think about similarities and differences: *“How are these two blocks the same?”*

“What makes these two go together?”

To apply knowledge to solve a problem: *“What could you do to keep the paint from dripping on the floor?”*

To stretch thinking: *“What would happen if there were not trains, boats, cars, planes, buses? How would you get around?”*

To consider consequences: *“What would happen if your left your drawing outside, and it rained?”*

“What do you think we could do to fix that?”

To evaluate: *“What made you decide to choose this book to read? How did that make you feel?”*

“What made you decide to make a [doghouse, landscape] today?”

To assess feelings: *“How would you feel if that happened to you?”*

References:

The Creative Curriculum For Preschool-4th Edition (2009) by Trister Dodge, Laura J. Colker, Cate Heroman and Toni S. Bickart, Contributing Author

The Intentional Teacher (2007) by Ann S. Epstein