



DIVERSITY SCIENCE

An Evidence-Based Approach to Inclusion

Handling Challenging Situations: *Ask Questions*

The Art of Asking Questions

Why questions?

- ▶ Research has shown a strong positive correlation between use of questions that ask for clarification and the learner's development of their metacognitive skills.
- ▶ Asking a learner to elaborate on an initial response will lead them to think more deeply.
- ▶ The process of clarifying requires learners' thinking to go beyond superficial and invites learners to, in a safe and non-judgmental environment, examine the validity of an opinion or belief.
- ▶ Questions engage the learner and promotes critical thinking.
- ▶ The process may engage and educate bystanders. It invites them to think deeply and more critically.

Preparation

- ▶ You will be most effective if you have strong personal **emotional regulation** skills. This means staying centered, calm and present (mindful).
- ▶ Consider your goals and try to preserve the relationship.
- ▶ If you are leading/facilitating/chairing a group, class, or meeting, your best chance of success is if you have done the groundwork to establish **psychological safety**.

Preparation:

- ▶ Feelings are inevitable. For example, if someone makes a statement which is offensive and distasteful, the most likely response of the listener is to feel emotions that may include disgust, fear, antipathy or hostility,
- ▶ The first urge may well be to argue. While natural, it is rarely effective.
- ▶ Rather waste energy suppressing feelings, notice them and let them flow by.
- ▶ Practice, practice, practice **emotion shifting** and **mindfulness**.

Your initial reaction

- ▶ **Do not** express judgment
- ▶ **Do not** try to internally suppress your negative emotions.
- ▶ **Do not** take on responsibility for their opinion/changing their opinion.

Your initial reaction

- ▶ **Do** let your negative emotions flow by and focus on your values and/or goal in the present moment..
- ▶ **Do** stay positive towards the person, regardless of how much you reject their comment.
- ▶ **Try:**
 - ▶ Focusing on something you have in common with that learner
 - ▶ Focusing on something likeable about the learning or something positive they have done

Types of Questions

Clarification Questions

- ▶ Tell me more about _____?
- ▶ What do you mean by _____?
- ▶ Could you put that another way?
- ▶ How does this relate to our discussion?
- ▶ Can you give me an example?

Probing Assumptions

- ▶ I am curious about how you choose those beliefs (assumptions)?
- ▶ That's an important point. How can you verify (or disapprove) those beliefs?

! Its also important that bystanders do not mistake your questions for your endorsement or validation of an injurious point of view.

- ▶ *“I am really interested in your perspective. It makes me curious because it so different than the research evidence showing that... What do you make of the disconnect between your point of view and this evidence?”*

Probing Reasons and Evidence

- ▶ How do you know?
- ▶ Why do you think that is true?
- ▶ What do you think causes that to happen..?
- ▶ What evidence is there to support what you are saying?

Probing Viewpoint and Perspectives

- ▶ What is another way to look at it?
- ▶ Help me understand why it is necessary or beneficial, and who benefits?
 - ▶ “Thank you for that point. Lets stick with it for a while – if you were able to make (x) happen, what would happen? Or “Who would benefit most?”
- ▶ Good point – lets stick with it. What are the strengths and weaknesses of...?

Probing Implications and Consequences

- ▶ So, imagine that's how things went. Help me (us) envision it. Then what would happen?
 - ▶ Possibly:
 - ▶ Is that consequence consistent with your values?
 - ▶ Is that consequence consistent with the organizations' values?

Develop your own set of “go-to” questions.

- ▶ You have your own conversational style so use it!
- ▶ After a while, asking questions becomes second nature.
- ▶ To start, figure out the first few words that work for you and put them in your mental “toolkit”. For example:
 - ▶ “I am wondering...”
 - ▶ “Tell me more about your thinking on...”
 - ▶ “Help me understand...”