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OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

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Asking open-ended questions is one of the best ways to enhance children's curiosity and guide them through the learning process without telling them what to do. These questions encourage high-level thinking because there are many possible responses (Lee, 2010). Children's responses will reveal what they feel, think, and comprehend.

Open-ended inquiry encourages children to investigate further and participate in more diverse, deep, complex activities that build their knowledge. When adults who ask intentional thought-provoking questions they expand children's discovery orbit. Children are inspired to see possibilities with no limitations. For instance, after a child has played with water, what activity will expand on their experience? How about asking questions about bubbles, transferring, measuring, squeezing sponges, or floating and sinking objects? These are ideas children may not come up with on their own. The questions can suggest activities and give permission to act at the same time.

KEY POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Not all children will respond to questions vocally. They may be shy, too young to understand the question, too young to speak, may speak a different language, or may have developmental delays.
- Open-ended questions help keep conversations flowing back and forth from adult to child and back again.
- Children require plenty of time to think about, process, and respond to questions.
- Open-ended questions can be asked anytime; to support instruction across all domains.
- Observe and actively listen. If you're not paying attention to what children are doing and saying, you will not know what to ask.
- Show you care. Demonstrate that you are interested in the children's responses by setting aside the cell phone, turning from distractions, dropping to their level, and making eye contact.
- Avoid bombarding children with question after question.
- Select one question and wait to see what happens
- The questions don't have to make sense, but they should be interesting enough to provoke thought, expand vocabulary, create imagery, initiate an activity, or promote social awareness.
- Ask questions that fit the moment or activity without distracting children from what they're doing or intruding on their thoughts. Stay on the subject as they act and react.
- Do your homework. Research topics that are of interest to the children. A Google search is at your fingertips.

- Understand the make-up of children and their families, including developmental needs, disabilities, culture, religious beliefs, household status, income, parenting styles, native language, and types of households.
- Introduce developmentally appropriate materials that are worth expanding upon and exploring. To take children to the next level of learning, there must be a next level.
- Rotate materials and props. Put the old ones away for a while and replace them with interesting new ones. Materials don't have to be expensive; they can just be different.
- Combine materials that typically would not be used together.
- Store and display materials in an inviting, organized manner.
- Be sure to ask "Why" questions with a smile because questions such as, "Why did you make it?" or "Why did you put it there?" can sound accusatory or critical.
- Build on what children already know or can already do. Ask questions that extend children's investigations, add new ideas to their work, or take them to their next level of learning.
- There is no perfect question, and there is no single right or wrong answer to correct, grade, applaud, or criticize
- Acknowledge children's attempts at reasoning with encouragement instead of praise. Support them as they take initiative.

ASK OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS IN THOUGHT-PROVOKING WAYS:

~ Ask for a prediction:

What do you think will happen if you pour the sand into the strainer?

~ Ask for a solution:

How will you clean up the water?

~ Ask about consequences:

If you break the tips off, how will you color?

~ Ask for a real-life connection:

Have you ever seen a real bridge? Tell us about it.

~ Ask for an explanation:

Why did you put the big blocks on the bottom?

~ Ask about same vs. different:

How do you know this is a triangle, and that's a square?

~ Ask something nonsensical:

What if we all looked exactly the same?

~ Ask to consider feelings:

What if someone knocked down your tower?

~ Ask to recall:

What happened to the bear after he ate all of the pie?

"Critical thinking involves children in the learning process by allowing them to probe and question while encouraging them to analyze and process the information through reflection and evaluation" (Dewey [1910] 2008).

Angela Russ-Ayon is the author of *The BIG Book of Open-Ended Questions to Intentionally Support Young Children in Learning*, scheduled to release late Mar 2022. ISBN: 978-09987090-5-5.

Thank you for listening, and welcome to the CLUB!