



Effective Communication Techniques: Open-Ended Questions and Reflective Listening

A. EXPLORATION AND OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

EXAMPLES OF CLOSED-ENDED QUESTIONS:

- Would you like to...? (something specific)
- Can I...?
- Would it be better if you...?
- Don't you think you should...? (Leading questions can sound judgmental)
- Were you scared that...?
- Why don't you...?
- Do you like your new psychiatrist?

AN OPEN-ENDED QUESTION IS ONE THAT:

- ✓ Establishes an atmosphere of acceptance and trust by defining your role as one who listens.
- ✓ Encourages the speaker to do most of the talking.
- ✓ Encourages the speaker to explore her/his problem.
- ✓ Cannot be answered by a “yes” or “no” or other short answer.

EXAMPLES OF OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS:

- What's going on?
- What is the problem?
- How are you feeling about that?
- What is it that you would like to discuss?
- In what way might I be helpful?
- How do you feel about your new psychiatrist?

Note: This document is included within the *Supportive Services* section of CSH's *Toolkit for Developing and Operating Supportive Housing*, which is available at www.csh.org/toolkit2. This document has been adapted from the HUD-funded curriculum *Case Management Services*, which is available at www.csh.org/training.

B. REFLECTIVE LISTENING

Reflective listening is a skill used to help motivate people. While listening involves keeping quiet and hearing what a person has to say, reflective listening involves listening and responding to what a person says in such a way as to clarify a person's meaning. To do this well we must actively select what content we want to reflect with the goal in mind of building motivation for change.

WHY USE REFLECTIVE LISTENING SKILLS:

- Most statements have multiple meanings.
- Reflective listening is a way of checking, rather than assuming that you know what is meant.
- Reflective listening helps people think things through on their own.
- Reflective listening helps people feel understood.

HOW TO LISTEN REFLECTIVELY:

- When a person speaks, he or she is trying to communicate a meaning. This is coded into words, often imperfectly. The listener has to hear the words accurately and then decode their meaning.
- The listener forms a reasonable guess as to what the person means and gives voice to this guess in the form of a statement.
- It should be in the form of a statement rather than a question since questions can distance the speaker from his or her experience.

EXAMPLES OF CLARIFYING STATEMENTS INCLUDE:

- I want to make sure I'm understanding this correctly.
- I'm going to try and review the main points we've discussed so far.
- It sounds like your primary concern is...
- What I hear is...
- Please correct me if I'm wrong.
- The speaker then has the opportunity to validate, elaborate or change what he or she meant.