

Task 4: Engaging Adopters with Open Questions

In this task, we'll learn about open questions, a conversational technique that facilitates engagement. We'll then practice creating open questions for some of the topics that typically arise during adoption counseling.

What are Open Questions?¹



An open question is **a question without a set, "correct" answer**. In addition:

- An open question asks a person to draw upon her/his own life experiences and creativity.
- An open question invites dialogue.
- An open question engages people by requiring reflection and critical thinking.
- When counselors ask open questions, they are demonstrating respect for the adopters.

Examples of open questions, and phrases that can introduce open questions, include:

- "How did you arrive at that decision?"
- "What does this remind you of?"
- "What does that mean to you?"
- "What do you like about ...?"
- "Tell me about"

Unlike open questions, **a closed question has an expected answer**.

- The listener may assume – often accurately – that there is one correct answer to the question.
- A closed question is defined by the questioner's assumptions. For example, "What kind of fence do you have for your yard?" assumes that the adopter has a fence – and has a yard. An apartment dweller answering this question immediately feels they are at a disadvantage, even if they live across the street from a dog park and go for a 5-mile run every morning.
- Closed questions can make an adopter feel as if they are taking a test. The adopter may focus more on responding with the "right" answers than seriously reflecting on the real issue, such as their plans for exercising their dog.

➤ What questions do you have about open questions?



¹ This material is adapted from *Learning to Listen, Learning to Teach*. Global Learning Partners www.globalearning.com.

Designing Open Questions to Use in Adoption Situations

➤ The following are examples of closed questions from typical adoption interactions. With a partner, make them into open questions. We'll hear examples of each.

- "Have you ever had a cat before?"

- "Do you own your own home?"

- "How many hours of the day are you away from home?"

- "Do you have a fenced yard?"

- "Do you have any questions?"

➤ With your same partner, take turns asking each other these now open questions and answering them honestly (as if you are the adopter). After three minutes, switch.

- What was it like to answer open questions? To ask open questions?

➤ What are some advantages to using open questions in adoption counseling? What are the drawbacks?



Review your adoption paperwork/process and identify a couple of questions that – if changed to open questions – could improve your adoption counseling.