

Open-Ended Questions

Relevant Satellite Accreditation Standards

III. The Daily Program for Children

C. The provider uses a variety of techniques to address, extend, and support children's development and self-guided play.

5. The provider observes and describes to children what they are doing and asks them open-ended questions about their activities.



The Basics

What are open-ended questions?

What would happen if...? Why do you think...? Tell me about... How did you...?

Statements like these are open-ended, meaning there are many possible responses, spark thinking, and encourage discussion. Open-ended questions prompt children to process and expand on their experiences, solve problems, and practice verbal communication.

Do you like...? What color...? Where does...? Are you...?

In contrast, closed-ended questions are answered in one to two words and typically have a right or wrong answer. They seek specific information or confirm understanding. Closed-ended questions are beneficial to use when prompting children to make decisions.

Why use open-ended questions? Open-ended questions support:

Pre-literacy skills:

- Meaningful conversations with adults help children develop verbal language, made up of vocabulary (comprehending word meaning) and grammar (understanding how to arrange words in phrases and sentences).
- Verbal communication skills precede learning to read. Children with a larger vocabulary sound out and comprehend words more easily.

Critical thinking skills:

- Open-ended questions stimulate creative, imaginative, and flexible thinking.
- Adults help children discover solutions by breaking down problems, including social problems, into manageable steps.
- Why are they sad...? What happens when...? These statements prompt children to expand on their experiences and process how they relate to others.

[How do I use open-ended questions?](#) The amount of time children spend expressing ideas and hearing feedback has positive impact on children's development. **Ask an open-ended question and then wait for a response.** Children need significantly more time than adults to construct and deliver responses to questions. Typically, the younger the child, the more time needed to respond. Adults inhibit children's responses by not waiting long enough before ending the conversation, asking another question, or providing a statement. If a child does not respond, model a potential answer. If a child uses gestures or sounds, interpret the communication in words. Open-ended questions can be incorporated into every type of play or routine!

[I want to learn more!](#)

- [Questions to Help Children Think](#) (Resource)
- [Talk, Read, and Sing Together Every Day!](#) (Resource)
- [Open-Ended Questions CLASS Resource](#)
- [Realizing the Promise of Open-Ended Questions](#) (Research Article)
- [Guiding Children by Using Questions](#) (Article)
- [Asking Questions, Birth to Five](#) (Video)
- [Message in a Backpack Spark Creative Thinking with Open-Ended Questions](#) (Article)
- [Tips on Nurturing Your Child's Curiosity](#) (Article)