

Guidelines for Asking Honest, Open Questions

In support of the rule 'no fixing, no saving, no advising, no correcting' - and in support of our intention to help each other listen for inner truth...

- An honest, open question is one you cannot possibly ask while thinking, *'I know the right answer to this and I sure hope you give it to me...'* Thus, *'Have you ever thought about seeing a therapist?'* is not an honest, open question! But, *'What did you learn from the experience you just told us about?'* is.
- Try not to get ahead of the focus person's language with your questions. *'What did you mean when you said you felt sad?'* is an honest, open question. *'Didn't you also feel angry?'* is not.
- Ask questions that are brief and to the point rather than overloading with rationales and background materials that allow you to insert your own opinions or advice.
- Ask questions that go to the person as well as the problem, questions about the inner realities of the situation as well as the outward facts.
- Ask questions aimed at helping the focus person explore their concern rather than satisfying your own curiosity.
- If you have an intuition that a certain question might be useful, even if it seems a bit *'off the wall'*, trust it - once you are reasonably certain that it is an honest, open question, e.g., *'What color / colour is this issue for you, and why?'*
- If you aren't sure about a particular question, sit with it for a while and wait for clarity.
- As a group, watch the pacing of the questions, allowing some silence between the last answer and the next question. Questions that come too fast may feel aggressive, cutting off the deep reflection that can help the focus person.
- If you have asked one question and heard an answer, you may feel a need to ask a follow-up question. But if you find yourself about to ask the third question in a row before anyone else has had a chance to ask one, don't!
- Avoid questions with yes / no or right / wrong answers. At the same time, remember that the best questions are often simple and straightforward.

Learning to ask honest, open questions is challenging. We may slip occasionally into old *'fixing'* habits and need forgiveness, from others and from ourselves. As the old saying goes, *'Forgive and remember!'* and try not to make that particular mistake again. It helps to continually remind ourselves that our purpose in this exercise is not to show what good problem solvers we are, but simply to support another person in listening to their inner teacher.

These Guidelines were developed by the Centre for Courage and Renewal
www.couragerenewal.org

The sacred is rarely revealed in the answer but is always implied in the question.
Rilke

Examples of Honest, Open Questions

Caryl Ann Casbon

- ❖ How are you within?
- ❖ What do you want deeply in your heart?
- ❖ What do you seek?
- ❖ What is something you don't want to talk about, even to yourself?
- ❖ Is there a place in you that needs comforting, solace or rest?
- ❖ If a wise therapist asked, "Why did you come to see me?" what would you say?
- ❖ If you could design a first aid kit to get you through this time, what would you put in it?
- ❖ If your organization were a country or animal, which one would it be?
How about you?
- ❖ To whom or what do you give away your power?
- ❖ If you lived as though you loved yourself, what would your life be like?
- ❖ If you designed a ritual or prayer for this ending, what would it look like?
- ❖ What might be your first step with this change?
- ❖ What speed limit are you observing in your life?
- ❖ Could you say more about that?
- ❖ Has something like this happened before?
- ❖ Where in your body is this feeling you describe?
- ❖ If the feeling you just named had a voice, what would it say to you?
- ❖ If this time in your life were a book, name its chapter titles?
- ❖ If this project could sing, what song would it belt out?
- ❖ If you could write a completely honest letter to this person, what would you say in it?

Examples of Leading Question:

- Would you think about applying for other jobs?
- Why don't you just move on and try something else?
- Would you consider Internet dating?
- Since when did you think it was ok to act like that?
- Isn't it about time you get over it?

****It's important to remember that the best questions come from deep listening to the focus person, to their metaphors, emotions, and body language. The spirit of love and care are the ground on which this process grows and flourishes.