Differences Between Closed- and

Open-Ended Questions

When assessing individuals, one is more likely to obtain comprehensive information when asking open-ended questions instead of closed-ended questions.

Think back to the days of mental health nursing and therapeutic communication skills. The emphasis was on asking open-ended questions to encourage the patient to share information, clarify, and reflect to ensure that the nurse heard what the patient was trying to communicate.

Skilled communication goes a few steps further. Respectful, collaborative communication among and between the nurse and the patient is important and valuable. In Milestone #2 of your Course Project, you are to develop specific primary and follow-up questions for each primary question that reflect an understanding of the categories that you selected about the influence culture may have on your individual. Active listening to seek understanding and using key follow-up questions are crucial when trying to elicit optimum information to provide culturally competent care.

**Closed-Ended Questions**

For the purposes of the Milestone, closed-ended questions are those for which you are only expecting a one-word answer such as *yes, no,* one’s age, educational level, country of origin, or so on. You should know this information already, and it is not necessary to ask for it again. Closed-ended questions may convey to your individual that you are in a hurry and may not really be interested in answers. Closed-ended questions can be replied to with a short phrase or a one-word answer. They may be appropriate when you are completing a checklist for a health history for a new patient but are not appropriate when trying to elicit comprehensive information about one’s culture. Closed-ended questions have the potential to end the conversation.

## Questions to Avoid

Questions to avoid include, but are not limited to, the following.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Do you…? | Are you…? | Will you…? | Have you…? | Can you…? |
| Who is…? | Is this…? |  |  |  |

**Open-Ended Questions**

On the other hand, open-ended questions help you elicit much more information and convey to your individual that you are truly interested in the answers. Open-ended questions require responses with more than one-word answers. A more in-depth and lengthier response is helpful in discovering more about a situation or person, especially as it relates to the culture of origin. This promotes further discussions.

## Questions to Ask

Phrases in responses include, but are not limited to, the following.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Please tell me more about… | It seems to me that… |
| I need more information about… | I gather that… |
| Describe that more fully for me… | I hear you describing… |
| Let’s talk more about… | With experiences like yours… |
| I’m not sure I follow. Please explain… | It sounds like… |
| It might be helpful for me to know… | How do you feel about… |
| Help me understand… | What you’re saying is… |
| I’m wondering… | What are some examples… |
| Explain to me… | Share with me… |

If you have questions about how to phrase your questions, primary or follow up, please consult your instructor.