



CLINICAL TIP

Powerful Questions

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As helping professionals, our role often includes assisting people in addressing challenges, making important changes, and taking steps toward living their best lives. Throughout this process, many of us prioritize having the “right” answers to direct someone in making those changes. However, from a person-centered approach, we recognize that tapping into a person’s internal motivation, encouraging them to find their own solutions, and guiding them toward what’s important to them is often the most effective path to progress.

Powerful questions encourage self-reflection, promote deeper understanding of one’s thoughts and emotions, foster a trusting relationship, and ultimately empower people to identify their own solutions. Powerful questions can also:

- **Facilitate self-awareness:** By prompting introspection, powerful questions help people explore their motivations, beliefs, and patterns that may be contributing to their challenges, leading to greater self-understanding.
- **Encourage autonomy and sense of self-efficacy:** Instead of providing direct answers, powerful questions encourage people to actively participate in their own change process by considering different perspectives and coming up with their own solutions.
- **Build rapport and trust:** Asking thoughtful questions demonstrates genuine interest in a person’s experiences, creating a safe space for open communication and vulnerability.
- **Identify underlying issues:** Well-crafted questions can delve deeper into a person’s concerns, uncovering potential root causes and complex dynamics that might not be readily apparent.
- **Promote positive change:** By focusing on desired outcomes and potential solutions, powerful questions can nurture motivation to take steps towards what matters most to them.
- **Facilitate a tailored approach:** Powerful questions can be adapted to each person’s unique situation, ensuring your time with them is relevant and focused on their specific needs.
- **Demonstrate cultural humility:** Powerful questions invite a person to share their perspective, which mitigates assumptions and potential bias.

When we shift our focus from providing answers to asking thoughtful questions with genuine curiosity, we create a safe space for exploration, foster hope and discovery, deepen understanding, and inspire new insights. Powerful questions are open-ended, empowering the person to determine the best course of action.



There is an endless array of powerful questions to draw from. Below are some examples to help support your role as an agent of positive change. Notice there are different categories based on the conversation you might be having.

Opening a Conversation

What are you most concerned about today?
What are you hoping to see happen today?
How will you know our meeting today was worthwhile?
How can I best support you in a way that respects your values?
What are your hopes for how we can approach this topic together?
What questions do you have for me to better understand your perspective?

Understanding What's Important (Goal Definition Questions)

What really matters to you?
What things in your life do you value?
What makes your life meaningful?
What do you need?
What do you really want?
What would you like to be different?
What do you want to keep the same?

Examining the Current Situation (Problem Definition Questions)

What things have had a negative effect on your well-being?
When did you become aware that this was a problem?
What do you think is causing the problem?
How is the problem affecting your life?
What have you tried?
What works?
What is not working?

Exploring Possibilities Questions

What do you think is possible?
What resonates with you?
If you decided to do this, what would change?
What do you think will help improve things?
What have you done in the past? What helped even a little bit?
What have others suggested you do?
Of all the things you have tried, what has worked the best?
Next best? The worst?
What will make it possible for more of this to happen?
What could you do that would be different from what you have tried before?
How will things be different when this is solved? For yourself?
For others?
Who can support you in making this change?

Going Below the Surface (Clarifying Questions)

What comes up for you?
What about it excites you?
What do you make of that?
What are your greatest strengths?
How do these strengths help support you and your goals?
How do you feel about that?
What is stopping you?
What could you stop doing?
What is the choice?
How does change usually happen in your life?
What might I not be understanding?
What are some important aspects of your identity that might be relevant?

Miracle Question

If a miracle happened tonight and you woke up the next morning and your problem was solved, how would things be different? Describe what you would be doing and what others would be doing?

Closing the Conversation (Wrapping Up Questions)

What do you think you want to do?
What will you do next?
If you decided to do this, how would you go about it?
What could you start doing?
What is one thing you will do?
What can I do to be of help?
Who can support you in sustaining this change?

These are a few examples of powerful questions to help you and the person you're working with navigate challenges, explore what matters most to them, and identify the resources and steps they can take to reach their goals.

REFERENCES

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