

Worksheet 4.4.1: O of OARS – open questioning style

It is important to be being aware of the types of questions and language you are using, as they can be heard differently by super sensitive person Edi. All our questions and statements plant seeds and we have control over planting healthy positive seeds or critical judgemental seeds. All MI communication has the aim of moving forward in a positive manner, perhaps opening up new horizons through 'bigger-picture thinking' or exploring the person's values, beliefs and spirit, and also acknowledging their efforts and intentions.

Think of open questions as a way of opening doors for communication.

Types of question

Closed questions ask the person to choose a response out of choices implied by the question, for example yes/no, now/later, etc. For example, 'Are you going to eat what's on your plate?' These are normal in everyday speech, and should be used as little as possible with supersensitive Edi.

Open questions invite the person to give their point of view and increase our understanding of their perspective – this shows we are interested in what they have to say and value their efforts and thoughts. For example 'What can we do together that might make this easier for you?'

Leading questions such as 'Don't you think that...?' are really asking someone to say they agree with us. This can be frustrating if they don't, and gives the impression we don't care what they really think; we just want them to say they agree. These should be avoided, although it's hard to do.

Why questions can feel critical and blaming – for example 'Why haven't you gone to the doctors yet?' 'Why did you do x?'

Solution-focused questions can encourage Edi to create their own argument for change. For example 'What, specifically could you do to get started?' As opposed to a non-solution-focused question, such as 'Why haven't you got started yet?' Edi needs to be firmly in preparation for this type of questioning to be useful.

Useful questions when Edi is in pre-contemplation might include:

- Tell me about your day.
- Help me understand the benefits of staying in your current position.
- What do you think about our plans for the holidays?

Are these open or closed questions? If closed reframe them in to open questions.

1. What are the good and the not so good aspects of controlling your diet?
2. Are you going to finish what's on your plate this time?
3. When are you going to admit that you have AN?
4. In what ways has AN been a problem for you?
5. Have you any thoughts on what you might do to care for your nutritional health?
6. Why haven't you been to see the dietician?
7. Is there any way I can help you to stick to your plan?

What seed does each question plant?

Don't be put off if Edi answers an open question with a grunt or a shrug. You will have planted a seed that you care and are interested in helping if you can.

If Edi answers an open question with a tirade of abusive language or an emotional outburst, that gives you the opportunity to shower them with reflections and affirmations:

- Thank you for telling me how you are feeling.
- You are upset because nobody is listening and nobody understands, I would be upset too.
- You are angry/sad/frustrated/fed up/exhausted.