



COMMUNICATION SKILLS: ASKING TOUGH QUESTIONS*

▶ ABOUT THIS ACTIVITY

 **Time:** 50 minutes

 **Objectives:** By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

- Demonstrate the importance of communicating clearly with others.
- Demonstrate how easy it is to miss exactly what others are saying and discuss what that means for communication.

 **Training Methods:** Brainstorm, Role Play, Skills Practice

 **In This Activity You Will...**

- Conduct a brainstorming introduction to the activity about difficult questions and responses (15 minutes).
- Facilitate an activity using scenarios (20 minutes).
- Facilitate a discussion about the activity (15 minutes).

 **Materials:**

- Handout- Questioning Scenarios
- Flip chart
- Markers

 **Preparation:**

- Make 3 copies of each questioning scenario and put on separate pieces of paper.

Instructions

1. Explain the purpose of this activity. There are some topics that it's hard to ask someone you don't know well. What are some of these topics that you might have trouble bringing up with a peer?

[Note: some responses might include the following:]

- Sex
- Sexual orientation
- Religion
- Drugs
- Alcohol use
- Feelings—depression, anger, etc.
- Death and dying
- Anger with provider

2. Ask how a peer might feel if you appear uncomfortable discussing these issues? **[Note: some responses might include the following:]**

- Alienated
- Judged
- Angry
- Alone
- Shameful
- Guilty

3. Ask how this might affect the outcome of your peer education session? **[Note: some responses might include the following:]**

- Peer might not come back
- S/he might not get important information
- S/he might not follow recommendations from peer and mentor
- S/he might shut down during session

* This module comes from Duke University, Partners in Caring; Center for Creative Education, 2006.

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4. Ask what are some things we need to keep in mind when we ask tough questions? **[Note: some responses might include the following:]**

- What words we use
 - How we say the words
 - Timing is important
 - Need to know why you are asking each question
5. Provide instructions for activity. This is an activity where you can practice asking some of these difficult topics as well as experience what it's like to be on the receiving end of hearing potentially offensive or embarrassing terms.
6. The trainers will demonstrate by going first. Choose one scenario and perform a skit.
7. Break up larger group into pairs and distribute scenarios.

For this exercise, the taller person will be the peer educator and other person will be the peer. In a moment, I'll distribute three scenarios to each group. You'll have 6 minutes to role-play these scenarios.

After 6 minutes, you'll switch roles and I'll give you three different scenarios to work with. You might want to use the questioning handout as a reminder to ask open-ended questions.

You'll have 6 more minutes to practice these situations. Notice your own feelings, thought and sensations when asking the tough questions as well as when answering.

[Note: trainers should be available to help those with limited literacy skills.]

8. Allow both “peer” and “peer educator” to practice the first 3 scenarios. After ten minutes, distribute three different scenarios and signal that they should switch roles.
9. After time is up (12-15 minutes), call larger group back together and process with the following questions:
- How was your experience?
 - What was difficult about it?
 - What are some ideas you have about making this experience easier with peers in the future?

Summary

A large part of being an effective peer educator is being able to listen without jumping in—letting the patient do the speaking. But sometimes you have to ask questions to get to a peer's underlying concern or behavior. Modeling comfort and professionalism encourages peers to be open and honest.

* This module is part of the online toolkit Building Blocks to Peer Success. For more information, visit http://www.hdwg.org/peer_center/training_toolkit. This module comes from Duke University, Partners in Caring; Center for Creative Education, 2006

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SESSION HANDOUT

QUESTIONING SCENARIOS

Your peer is a single mother whose main issue is safer-sex practices. Your goal is to find out what sort of activities she's concerned about and what kind of barriers she has been using or will use.

Your peer is a heroin addict. Your goal is to find out whether s/he has been practicing harm reduction.

Your peer is a gay male who has told you he's been "bare-backing." Your goal is to discuss how to practice safer sex and disclose his HIV status to partner/s.

Your peer is an HIV+ woman who has just found out she is pregnant. Your goal is to discuss treatment options and whether her partner/s are aware of her HIV infection.

Your peer is a 17-year old sex worker. Your goal is to find out how she's been practicing safer sex.

Your peer is a bi-sexual woman who is currently having sex with only women. She doesn't think she can pass HIV to another woman so she hasn't been using protection. Your goal is to discuss safer sex options with her.