

memo

DATE: December 15, 2021
TO: Local Agency Staff
FROM: State WIC Staff
SUBJECT: Open-Ended Questions: Sixth in the Nutrition Assessment Series

Asking questions is the method we use for information gathering during the assessment portion of WIC appointments. Using open-ended, rather than close-ended, questions provides participants the opportunity to share a range of responses that can help the CPA collect information about behaviors, thoughts, and motivations. Open-ended questions can help set the tone for a nonjudgmental WIC appointment and allow the CPA to hear what is happening with the participant; they are the backbone of the information-gathering process. Open-ended questions set the stage for a deeper conversation and a more participant-centered nutrition assessment.

Although close-ended questions may be occasionally used to get a specific answer, the CPA should rely on open-ended questions during the assessment. Heavy use of close-ended questions can feel like an interrogation, provides little information, and may cause the participant to give you what they think is the correct answer.

We learned in the last memo about conversational assessment. The use of open-ended questions helps to keep the assessment conversational and draw out more information from the participant.

Characteristics of Open-ended Questions

- Often start with: What, why, how, or tell me.
- Require more than a yes/no or very short answer.
- Come from a place of curiosity, with no right or wrong answers.
- Participant does most of the talking.

Comparing open- and close-ended questions

- Instead of...
 - Are you planning to breastfeed? (Yes or no answer, implies a correct answer)
 - Do you give your baby solid food? (Yes or no answer)
 - When are you planning to wean your child from the bottle? (Short answer)
 - Do you give your child fruits and vegetables? (Yes or no answer)
- ...Try
 - What have you heard about breastfeeding?
 - What is your infant eating and drinking?
 - Tell me about your thoughts on weaning your child from the bottle.
 - What fruits and vegetables does your child eat?

Your turn!

How can you turn the following close-ended questions into open-ended questions?

- Do you have any concerns about your eating habits?
- Does your baby let you know when they are hungry?
- Do you discard the contents of the bottle when your baby is done eating?
- How many times per day does your baby eat?
- Does your child eat snacks?
- What does your child eat for breakfast?
- Is your child active?

Discussion Questions

- What has gone well with using open-ended questions?
- What challenges do you have with forming and using open-ended questions?
- What are examples of open-ended questions you have used that have worked well? Not worked well?
- What do you do if you ask an open-ended question but don't get much of a response?
- What has helped you become more confident and comfortable with using open-ended questions?
- Think about a time when you have been at an appointment where you have needed to answer questions, such as with your health care provider. How did you feel answering open- or close-ended questions? What did you learn from that experience that may help you in your role as CPA?

Watch for the next memo in our Nutrition Assessment series next month!

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