

- Feelings can change over time as circumstances change. Be aware that how a client feels at a particular point in time may be quite different from how he or she feels just moments, hours, or days later. Be patient with your client and with yourself.

Always attend to the nonverbal messages; for example, “I see a smile on your face. You must feel pleased with the way things have turned out.” (See the “Attending Behaviors” section.)

The boy’s recounting of his parent’s fighting in Box 5 B reflects many feelings. Try to identify three feeling words and then write a reflection of feeling response.

Open-Ended Questions

Asking relevant, purposeful, and insightful questions requires skill. In reality, the social worker defines what is important to ask, and the client has the willingness to answer or not. Asking questions comes naturally to the social worker. Sometimes, however, the social worker may be uncomfortable asking very personal and intimate questions. It is important to do so, however, if the question is relevant and can yield new information. The social worker can direct the interview by asking relevant questions, thus exploring the issues and situations that concern the client. In the following segments, listen to the instructor define what an open-ended question is. How can open-ended questions be used to move the interview forward?



Open-Ended Questions

In Interactive Case Study #5, Diane asks Mrs. Kia to tell her more about her husband Jiro. Using an open-ended question such as the one Diane used, the social worker can prompt the client to elaborate on a point. Understanding the context of the client situation, such as who was involved and how the parties interacted or what the sequences of events were, allows the social worker to navigate through the issues most salient to

Box 5 B Now You Try It . . . Feeling Words

A 12-year-old male talking to a hotline worker:

“My Mom and Dad always fight. Sometimes they scream so loud that they wake me up at night. I wish they’d stop it. I lie awake waiting for them to stop. They just keep on and on and on. Maybe if they didn’t live together they’d stop fighting. Is there any chance things will get better?”

A. Feeling words in the client’s message:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

B. Your reflection of feeling response:

1. _____

the presenting problem. Open-ended questions give the client the opportunity to discuss important aspects of the problem in more depth (Kadushin & Kadushin, 2013). Questions also convey interest in what the client has to say. Often, the social worker will begin with a general question that relates to the client’s situation and over the course of the interview ask questions that probe a bit deeper; for example, “How did you react when you found out that your mom had cancer?” and “What is your relationship like with your mom?” And, finally, “Can you talk about how you are coping with the news?” It is important to pace your questions, giving your client time to respond. Also, using a variety of interviewing skills is preferred, as there are many other techniques and skills for gathering data. For example, using a reflection-of-feeling response such as “It seems like you are feeling tired and worn down right now,” the social worker can pause and wait for the client to elaborate, as you have pinpointed an important aspect of his or her feeling state. By offering a reflection-of-feeling statement, the client may elaborate about his or her emotions without explicitly being asked to do so.

Questions can be asked in a linear fashion; for example, asking for the sequence of events: “What happened first?” and “And then what happened?” These questions provide insights into the client’s thought processes. Asking a hypothetical question may also be useful in getting the client to elaborate. In this instance, the client may share some insight about an “imaginary situation” while at the same time giving the social worker some important information about how the client may think, feel, or behave in a similar circumstance. For example, the social worker might ask, “If you were in your daughter’s place and had to choose between good grades or spending time with your friends, but you can’t do both, how would you have chosen, knowing what you know today?” or “If you were in her shoes and could make the whole situation better, how would you fix it?” Asking an open-ended question at the beginning of an interview can be very effective in order to learn about the client and their current situation. This gives the client an opportunity to decide what he or she would like to talk about. Open-ended questions tend to be general (e.g., “How are you feeling today?” or “What has been going on since we last met?”). Once the social worker has an overview of the situation, asking more specific questions will fill in the picture (e.g., “You said that you are very upset about having to talk to me. Please tell me, what aspects of being here troubles you the most?”).

When asking an open-ended question, there are several issues to consider: Is the question relevant, and does it help achieve the purpose of the interview? Is there perceived harm that may come to the client if answered truthfully? Are there cultural/social taboos attached to my question, such as sexual assault or child abuse? Is the client answering in a way to placate the social worker—saying what the client believes the social worker wants to hear? Or is the client considering, if I answer this way, that the probable outcome will be X. Questions should be phrased in a way that invites a response, not in a way that demands a response (e.g., “Please tell me” or “Can you please elaborate?” versus “I must know”). Questions can take the form of who, what, why, where, when, and how (Ivey & Ivey, 2009). See Box 5.8 for some examples of open-ended questions.

The best questions are short, focused on the client, and to the point. Typically, the best question is also the least directive question (Hepworth et al., 2013). Ask yourself, what exactly do I need to know in order to fully understand the issue at hand? Also, does my question focus on the client’s strengths? You want to ask questions that help the