

COMPANIONS



ASKING GREAT QUESTIONS

Questioning during conversations with a companion requires particular skill and tact. As Vincentians, we must keep our Mission at the forefront, seeking to deepen our spirituality through service. Our goal is to gather enough information to properly inform our decision-making while not seeking information beyond what we need to provide meaningful and relevant support, while always respecting the dignity and privacy of the companion.

Depending upon the mood of the companion, questions should be open or closed. Open questions can be better when you want to gain a broader understanding of the companion, but if you need them to focus, you may need to use closed questions to elicit specific information.

It's also important to remember that asking good questions goes hand in hand with listening carefully — more guidance on listening techniques can be found in Learning Bite 3.”

Key Considerations in Questioning

Tone of Voice:

The tone can convey empathy, concern, and respect or, conversely, judgment and disinterest. Aim for a warm and caring tone to foster a supportive environment.

Volume of Speech:

Speaking too loudly can come across as aggressive, while speaking too softly might seem unsure. Use a moderate volume to ensure clarity and convey confidence.

Cadence of Speech:

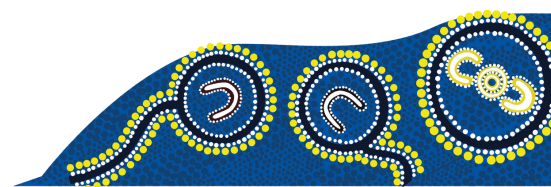
The rhythm of your speech can affect how your questions are perceived. A steady, calm cadence can help put the companion at ease, while a rushed or erratic rhythm might make them feel pressured or anxious.

Facial Expression:

Even during phone conversations, your facial expressions can influence your tone and cadence. A gentle smile or a look of concern can be felt in your voice, making the companion feel more comfortable and understood.

Posture:

Your body language, whether open and inviting or closed and defensive, significantly impacts the interaction. An open posture shows attentiveness and readiness to listen, whereas a hostile posture can create a barrier.



Types of Questions

Open Questions:

These encourage a free-flowing response and allow the companion to express their feelings and experiences in their own words. Open questions are ideal for exploring thoughts and emotions.

Examples:

- "Tell me how you felt when you were at Centrelink for the first time."
- "Can you describe your experience with the new job?"

Closed Questions:

These require a direct answer, often yes or no, or a specific piece of information. Closed questions can be useful for clarifying details but should be used sparingly to avoid limiting the conversation.

Examples:

- "What time is it?"
- "Do you need help with your rent this month?"

Effective Use of Questions

Encouraging Openness:

Questions can be a great tool to encourage the person to open up, show interest in the companion, and communicate empathy. They can help the companion focus on positives or options.

Examples:

- "You seem to be under a lot of stress. Would you tell me how things have been for you lately?"
- "I am interested to know how you're doing. What's happening these days, and how can we help?"
- "Would you like us to organise some budget counselling? People find it useful in managing their money."
- "Would you like us to accompany you to a budgeting appointment? Many people find that helpful when trying to manage their finances"

Avoiding Non-Questions:

Some questions are not really proper questions at all; they are judgments or criticisms disguised as questions. These can damage trust and make the companion feel judged or attacked.

Examples:

- "Why do you ask for help when you smoke cigarettes?"
- "How can you ask for assistance when you play the pokies?"
- "This is a nice home, do you own it?"
- "That's a very nice car you have, if you can afford that, why would you need help?"



Additional Tips for Effective Questioning

Building Rapport:

Start with general, open-ended questions to build rapport before moving to more specific issues. This helps establish trust and makes the companion more comfortable sharing personal details.

Being Patient:

Allow the companion time to think and respond. Don't rush to fill silences; sometimes, a pause can encourage them to open up more.

Reflective Listening:

Reflective listening involves repeating back what the companion has said in your own words to show that you have understood. This can also encourage them to expand on their thoughts.

Example:

- "So, you're feeling overwhelmed by your job search and need some guidance, is that right?"

Empathising and Validating:

Show empathy by acknowledging their feelings and validating their experiences. This can help the companion feel heard and supported.

Example:

- "It sounds like you're going through a really tough time. It's understandable to feel stressed."

Offering Support:

Frame questions in a way that offers support and assistance rather than judgment. Focus on how you can help them improve their situation.

Example:

- "What kind of support would be most helpful for you right now?"

By mastering the skill of questioning, you can create a safe and supportive environment for companions, fostering open communication and ensuring that you gather the information necessary to provide effective and compassionate support.

TRY THIS Activity

Consider a Companion with whom you find yourself having repetitive conversations.

What questioning strategies could be beneficial in assisting them to move forward?

Share your thoughts with the Conference.

