

Questions

Effective mentors select and use questions skilfully. In developmental mentoring, open, probing, reflective, clarifying or comparative questions are the most helpful and are used most often.

Helpful questions

Open	To open up the dialogue and give the person an open space in which to respond.	<i>What...? What if...? How...?</i> Use 'why' sparingly – it can feel like interrogation.
Probing	To fill in details, to help the mentee explore an issue in depth.	<i>What were the exact words you used?</i> <i>What actually happened?</i>
Reflective	Repeats something the mentee has said/implied. Helps them feel the impact of what he/she has just said and can lead to new insights.	<i>When you said 'I can't work with you', I wonder how he felt?</i>
Clarifying	Helps the mentor check the meaning behind words and the mentee hear what the other has heard.	<i>Do you mean you would prefer to...?</i>
Comparative	A form of closed question. Helps the mentee reflect. Gives the option of following with how/what.	<i>Which was most successful for you: this... or that...?</i>

Unhelpful questions

Leading	Where the questioner knows the answer they expect and leads the person to give this response.	<i>Wouldn't you say that...?</i>
Multiple	A string of questions: the mentee usually answers the first, the last or the one they find easiest.	<i>Why did you take that job, how long did it last and what did you dislike about it?</i>
Ambiguous	Has an unclear meaning or frame of reference - may provoke a question from the mentee and can lead to misunderstanding.	<i>I was wondering, why do you not just tell them, what if you invited them to participate then let them decide for themselves?</i>
Catch/trick	Attempts to trick the subject into revealing something significant through answering an apparently different question.	<i>What were you trying to do?... Is that really your role?</i>

Can be helpful or unhelpful

Closed	Requires a short answer and useful for establishing facts. Often overused with a negative impact on the flow of dialogue. Overuse can also make mentees feel grilled!	<i>Did you do it?</i> <i>Did you enjoy that role?</i> <i>How long did that last?</i>
Hypothetical	Value lies in encouraging the person to explore new ideas and think through the potential consequences. However, sometimes it is better to ask the mentee how they tackled something previously.	<i>What would happen if you shared your concerns with the team?</i>