

GUIDELINES FOR HONEST, OPEN QUESTIONS

1. The best single mark of an honest, open question is that the questioner **could not possibly anticipate the answer** to it.

*“What surprises you? What energizes you? What scares you?
What feels easiest for you? What about this is hardest?”*

2. Ask questions that **help the person** rather than satisfying your curiosity.
Ask questions directed **to the person** (feelings, stories) as well as to the problem.

*“Have you ever had an experience that felt like your current dilemma?
Did you learn anything from that prior experience that feels useful to you now?
How do you feel about the experience you just described?”*

3. **Stay with the person’s language** (vs. what you think they might or should be feeling)

*“You said this was an impossible situation – could you say more about what this means to you?
What do you mean when you said you felt frustrated?
...As opposed to “Don’t you ever feel angry?”*

4. Formulate questions that are **brief and to the point** (vs. long background)

“What were/are your expectations or hopes or fears?”

5. **Trust your own intuition**, even if your instincts seem off the wall. Listen deeply to the story and allow questions to come from your heart rather than your head.

6. **Avoid long storytelling** or speech making that may draw attention to yourself.

7. **Consider waiting** to ask a question if you’re not sure what type of question it is. If it keeps coming back to you, see if you can reframe it into an honest, open question.

8. The best questions are **simple**.

*“How does this work for you? What questions do you have?
What is the hardest aspect of this situation? What is the easiest aspect of this situation?”*

9. **Avoid questions with right/wrong answers**. Consider re-framing

*From: “Don’t you think it would be helpful to talk to her?”
To: “What has been most helpful? Least helpful?”*

10. Use **creative images or metaphors** that the person might relate to so as to open things up in ways that more direct questions do not.

*“If you were writing a book about this experience, how would you name this chapter?
If you were using a roadmap to navigate this issue, what would be on your map?”*

Source: Adapted from Parker Palmer, “A Hidden Wholeness”