

Because the QI visit emphasizes a collaborative approach, consultants should lead discussions with provider staff in a way that builds rapport and involves them in problem-solving.

Communication techniques that can be used are:

- Open-ended questions
- Affirmations
- Attentive listening
- Reflective listening
- Probing questions

Open-Ended Questions

An open-ended question is one that asks for additional detail and deeper thought, whereas a close-ended question is one that needs only a one-word (e.g., “yes” or “no”) response. Asking open-ended questions during discussions with provider staff is key because it creates a receptive, open tone and invites them to talk more in detail about their perspective. Asking closed-ended questions may lead to passive participation in the discussion (waiting for more questions rather than offering information) or responses of only one word or a short phrase.

| Open-Ended Questions | Close-Ended Questions |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begin with “What,” “How,” “In what way,” “Tell me ...,” or “Describe ...” • Are relevant to the discussion • Are not leading or implying a personal view • Are asked in a neutral tone of voice • Provide detailed information | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide only one-word and limited response (i.e., “yes” or “no”) • Provide you with limited information • Can be irrelevant or imply that the questioner holds a negative opinion • Prompts or encourages the desired answer |
| Examples | Examples |
| <p>“Can you describe what happened when you attempted to update your scheduling procedures?”</p> <p>“What happened when you tried running reports from the IIS?”</p> <p>“What concerns did parents have that you were not able to address?”</p> | <p>“Did your front desk staff do as you asked?”</p> <p>“When you tried to run reports from the IIS, they timed out, right?”</p> <p>“Don’t parents listen to their doctors?”</p> |

Affirmations

Affirmations are statements of support made during a discussion to emphasize the provider staff has done well. By affirming provider staff, the consultant recognizes their strengths and reinforces to their ability to effect change.

Examples

“I can see that implementing these changes was no easy task.”

“You’ve put a lot of effort into learning how to run these reports.”

“I can clearly see that you care a lot about making sure parents have all the information they need.”

Attentive Listening

- Consultants should listen attentively when providers answer their questions. An attentive listener:
 - Looks at the speaker and gives them their undivided attention
 - Shows that they are listening—nods, maintains an open posture, encourages the speaker to continue
 - Waits until the speaker is finished with their answer before responding

Reflective Listening

Reflective listening is the practice of attentively listening during a discussion, then reflecting back to the person a brief summary of what they said. A consultant who is practicing reflective listening appears open and receptive and delivers their response in a neutral tone of voice. When responding, a consultant can either paraphrase what they heard or provide an abbreviated version of what they heard:

- “Are you saying that your front desk staff isn’t really comfortable with the new scheduling procedures?”
- “It sounds like the reports you are running include patients that aren’t yours. Is that correct?”
- “So, parents are still vaccine-hesitant because they don’t understand the need for multiple shots in one visit?”

Probing Questions

A probing question is one that draws out a more detailed response or additional information from someone during a discussion. When used as a follow-up to a workflow description, for example, a probing question can help a consultant pinpoint the reasons why a provider’s workflow may be set up in a certain way or determine the underlying reasons why a provider might not be implementing their chosen strategy.

One way to probe more deeply and get more information is simply to ask why:

- “Why do you think that follow-up appointments are not being scheduled routinely by all staff?”
- “Why do you think that is happening?”
- “Why do you think this isn’t working?”