



Video Transcript: What Do I Say Now?: Tips for Answering Challenging Questions

Katrina (00:00): I know asking questions is an important part of learning, but I get anxious before a group session that youth will ask me questions I'm not prepared to answer.

Speaker 1 (00:09): Caring for Yourself and Your Participants: Techniques for Effective Group Facilitation video series.

Katrina (00:16): "What Do I Say Now?": Tips for Answering Challenging Questions. Preparing to answer the questions of youth participants can be stressful for facilitators, especially during sessions focused on sexual and reproductive health topics.

Mallory (00:30): But with proper planning and practice, answering questions can be a rewarding experience. This video describes group agreements related to participant questions, common types of challenging questions, a framework to guide your answers, and tips for facilitators to answer any questions sent their way. This video is part of a series on caring for yourself and others as a group facilitator.

Katrina (00:55): It's important to plan ahead for participant questions. To prepare, commit to learning your content. Having a solid knowledge of the topics you're covering helps to minimize the shock and awkwardness that can come from topic specific questions. Talk with your project director and implementation partners about their expectations and any local or state policies that limit what you can or cannot discuss in your group sessions. Rehearse your session to get comfortable and make sure it flows well. Try to come up with a few questions you think participants may ask and prepare responses.

Mallory (01:32): It's important to establish or revisit group agreements at the beginning of each session. This is also an opportunity to remind participants about your expectations for questions. Encourage participants to ask questions. Discourage participants from asking or sharing personal information. Introduce a question box. Participants can write down their question and put it in the box to be answered later or in a following session. This is a helpful tool that gives facilitators time to read and process questions, and prepare a thoughtful response. It also provides an opportunity for participants to ask questions anonymously. Use a "parking lot" or "bike rack" for questions that could derail the session, but are important to come back to later on in a following session. Let participants know that if their questions remain unanswered at the end of the session, you'll answer them next time.

Katrina (02:31): There are five common types of questions. When you can identify which type of question a young person is asking, you may find it easier to come up with a good response. Information-seeking questions are when someone has a question that needs a factual response, usually related to the session content. This can be the easiest type of question to answer. It may sound like "how do people get HIV?", or "how does birth control work?" The most important thing to remember with information-seeking questions is to make sure your response is correct. If you don't know, tell them that you don't know and then commit to finding the right answer and bringing it back to them.

Mallory (03:07): Personal questions are when participants asked about your personal beliefs, values, behaviors, or expectations. Generally, it is recommended that you limit the amount of personal information you share with these participants. While it may be tempting to say “I’m going to be real with them and set no limits,” some things need to be set off-limits to create an age-appropriate and safe environment for you and your participants. These types of questions may be an opportunity to refer back to your group agreements, or encourage participants to talk to a parent, guardian, or other trusted adult.

Katrina (03:44): Permission-seeking questions are when a young person, asked, in a roundabout way, for permission to engage in a particular behavior. These questions can be hard to identify. They may sound like, “Did you wait until you were married to have sex?”, or “Doesn’t everyone smoke pot to relax?” It isn’t your place to give your opinion of what the young person should do. Instead, share any facts that are relevant to their question and emphasize that everyone makes different decisions based on what’s important to them. You might suggest that they discuss their particular situation with a trusted adult. If the question got personal, remind them of the group agreements not to ask for personal information.

Mallory (04:21): “Am I normal” questions are when a young person wants to know if what they are experiencing is normal. These questions may not always be easy to identify, but sometimes come in the form of “I have a friend who…” These types of questions might seem like personal questions, but with some probing, could lead to a factual answer.

Katrina (04:41): Shock questions are when a young person asks a question to get a rise out of you. These are normal, boundary-testing behaviors and are to be expected whenever working with young people. The important thing is to remain composed, refer to your group agreements, and bring it back to the topic being discussed and what you want them to remember from the session. When answering sensitive questions, it’s important to remember to: clarify what is being asked (if needed), think through why they are asking the question, to guide your response, affirm the young person for asking the question, give an accurate and direct response, or commit to finding the answer and reporting back, check that participants understand your response, make sure your responses are culturally responsive and appropriate for the people in the room and aligned with your program.

Mallory (05:34): S-O-Y is a helpful framework for answering challenging questions, especially personal and permission-seeking questions. It helps you provide information and invites the person asking the question to use that information to make their own decisions. S-O-Y stands for For Some, For Others, For You. Let’s watch S-O-Y in action.

Speaker 4 (05:59): So what’s the best option for me?

Katrina (06:01): For some, the best birth control method is one where you don’t have to think about it often, like an injectable, an intrauterine device, or even an implant. For others, the best birth control method is one that you take every day, like a pill. It is up to each person to decide the method best for them. It is up to you to decide which method is best for you.

Mallory (06:18): Remember, young people are trying to form their own values. S-O-Y is a helpful framework for answering young people’s questions, as it allows you to present them with a range of options and provide guidance as appropriate.

Katrina (06:32): Remember, facilitating group sessions where young people are asking questions is a sign that you have created a space for learning and engagement, so encourage questions.

Mallory (06:56): Set yourself up for success by having a plan of action when challenging questions arise, and when possible, tie your answers back to the session topic to make sure your participants walk away with the knowledge you want them to have. Developed by the Reproductive Health National Training Center, RHNTC, and Fact Forward.