

# How To Use Open-Ended Questions With Children



Asking open-ended questions is a great way to actively involve your child in a good children's book.

What is an open-ended question? Glad you asked.

## Open-Ended Questions - A Definition

There are two types of questions:

- Open-ended questions
- Closed-ended questions

**Open-ended questions** cannot be answered with one word answers such as "yes" or "no".

For example:

- Why do you think the bear is feeling grumpy?
- How did the frog end up on top of the man's head?

Open-ended questions often begin with:

- what
- how
- who
- why

The opposite of open-ended questions are [closed-ended questions](#). Closed-ended questions can be answered with one or two word answers such as “yes” or “no”.

For example:

- Do you like ice-cream? **Answer:** Yes/No
- Do you want an apple? **Answer:** Yes/No

Closed-ended questions often begin with:

- Did you ...?
- When ...?
- Do you want to ...?
- Will you ...?
- Have you ...?

## Why Are Open-Ended Questions Better Than Closed-Ended Questions?

Open-ended questions encourage children to:

- use language. Instead of just answering ‘yes’ or ‘no (answers closed-ended questions often prompt)’, children need to give fuller answers that draw on a wider range of vocabulary. Hint: encourage children to use whole sentences when answering rather than just fragments or phrases.
- think about their answers and give details to reasonably answer the question.
- elaborate with details, express thoughts or offer an opinion
- be creative
- think of new ideas
- use imagination
- give more information

- problem-solve and use cognitive (intellectual) skills. Children must search for vocabulary and form sentences which conveys thoughts, opinions, ideas, etc. rather than simply answering “yes” or “no”
- build relationships. Children become more invested in the conversation when they have to actively engage in it with full sentences. They are able to relate something of meaning and respond to the person/people with whom they are communicating. In this way, open-ended questions be used to positively build and deepen relationships.

In contrast to open-ended questions, closed-ended questions limit answers to one or two words and don't allow for extra information, opinions, thoughts or the expansion of ideas and concepts. Closed-ended questions do not require the child actively engage in the conversation as they can remain disassociated. They do not have to give an opinion, explain thoughts, offer ideas. In reality, the thinking behind answering closed-ended questions needn't be in-depth or take any great effort.

## Open-Ended Questions & Children's Self-Esteem

When children are asked open-ended questions, it shows them that their opinions, ideas, thought, feelings, etc, matter. After all, if you didn't want to know, you wouldn't ask.

Therefore, asking open-ended questions says to a child that their contribution matters. You want to know what they think. You value their opinion. You are genuinely interested in their ideas. All of this goes to strengthening your child's positive self-esteem and self-image, as well as strengthening your relationship with your child.

### Using Open-Ended Questions Together With Books

- Start with the cover.

Ask, “What do you think this story will be about?” Clues can be drawn from the illustration on the cover along with the title. This question involves the intellectual skills of prediction.

- As you read through the book, ask questions.

Sometimes I find it more productive to do this on the second reading of the book – especially if it's a picture book that really has captured my child's imagination. A child can sometimes

become frustrated with the stopping and starting as all she/he wants to do is find out what happens next. How will the problem be solved? What will happen to the character? Will he make it out of this looming disaster okay?

Once the first reading of the picture book has been completed, the urgency has passed as the questions have been resolved. However, this is where the opportunity arises to revisit and relook at the story, expanding on ideas, thoughts, opinions and reasonings.

Great questions to ask on the second reading may include:

Why do you think ....?

What is happening ....?

Why is the ...?

- Ask questions which help your child relate the story to their own life and experiences. For example,

What would happen if ..... came to your house?

What would happen if ..... the fly landed on your birthday cake?

## Using Open-Ended Questions With Closed-Ended Questions

Sometimes, it's helpful to combine open end questions and closed questions together. For example, if you're reading a book about a boy at the zoo, you could ask:

- **Closed-ended question:** Have you ever been to the zoo?
- **Open-ended question:** "What happened when you went there?" Or "What did you enjoy the most about going to the zoo?"
  
- **Closed-ended question:** "Which animal did you like the most?"
- **Open-ended question:** "Why did you like the ... (giraffes)... the most?" "What did they do when you were watching them?"

In these examples, the **closed-ended questions** are used to establish facts upon which the **open-ended questions** can be used to expand the conversation with more information, details, thoughts, opinions, etc.

## An Example of How to Use Open-Ended Questions With Books

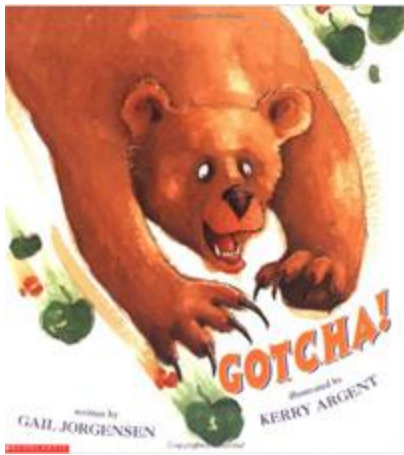


We've created [a list of possible open-ended questions](#) which can be used with the children's picture book, "Gotcha", which was written by Gail Jorgensen and illustrated by Kerry Argent.

Try writing your own list of open-ended questions relating to one of your favourite books. Try them out with your child.

**A word of warning:** open-ended questions are designed to make your child think and use language more fully. However, there's an added bonus. Coming up with these questions will also make you think! In general, we use a lot more closed-ended questions than open-ended questions in our daily conversations unless we purposefully set out to use the latter more often. You may be surprised how many closed-ended questions you use each day. Have fun creating open-ended questions in your conversations today. *It's very rewarding!*

## Gotcha: Open-Ended Questions



We've recently been reading an excellent children's picture book entitled, "Gotcha", written by Gail Jorgensen and illustrated by Kerry Argent.

Read more about [our experience with Gotcha](#).

As part of our story extension activities for "Gotcha", we've created a list of open-ended questions which have been designed to promote children's critical thinking skills.

## A List of Open-Ended Questions to Use with the Story "Gotcha"

For useful and practical information about using open-ended questions with children, especially in regards to books, click on [How To Use Open-Ended Questions With Children](#).

These questions are designed to be used in conjunction with the book. As children look at the illustrations, ask these questions:

- Look at the cover illustration and title. What do you think the story will be about?
- What do you think is going to happen?
- Why did the fly dive-bomb the cake?
- How would you feel if a fly buzzed in your ear or flew up your nose?
- How do you think Bertha and the bears are feeling? Why?
- Why doesn't Bertha see all of the animals as she chases the fly?

- Why are the animals chasing Bertha?
- What do you think the animals want to do to Bertha?
- What does Bertha do when the animals are angry with her?
- Why do you think this helps calm the animals down?
- Why do you think all of the animals are sleeping?
- What do you think will happen next?

You will be able to come up with your own open-ended questions that will interest your child. The idea is to create questions which will encourage your child to think. At the same time, your child will be encouraged to extend language skills.

There are so many benefits for your child when you use open-ended questions. Read about [why open-ended questions are so important!](#)