

Asking Good QUESTIONS

“To be able to question means to want to know, and to want to know means to know that one doesn't know.” ~Hans-Georg Gadamer

ASKING GOOD QUESTIONS IS AN IMPORTANT ELEMENT OF DIALOGUE.

Good questions come from the position of genuine curiosity and are motivated by an authentic interest—an honest seeking. They do not position the listener as inferior, that is, they do not suggest that the questioner knows whereas the listeners have to prove their knowledge. Good questions do not support one side and exclude the consideration of the opposite. Instead, they are open to possibilities and take multiple perspectives and opinions into account.

ACCORDING TO THE GERMAN PHILOSOPHER, HANS-GEORG GADAMER, ASKING GOOD QUESTIONS IS AN ART, and “a person skilled in the ‘art’ of questioning is a person who can prevent questions from being suppressed by the dominant opinion.” Asking good questions creates the space to look at a concept from different angles and leads to a deeper understanding of that concept. To be able to ask good questions, we need to have a good imagination. We need to think of different ways of looking at something while asking ourselves those “What could be” or “What

if” questions. Good questions can deeply impact the way we think, act, and treat others.

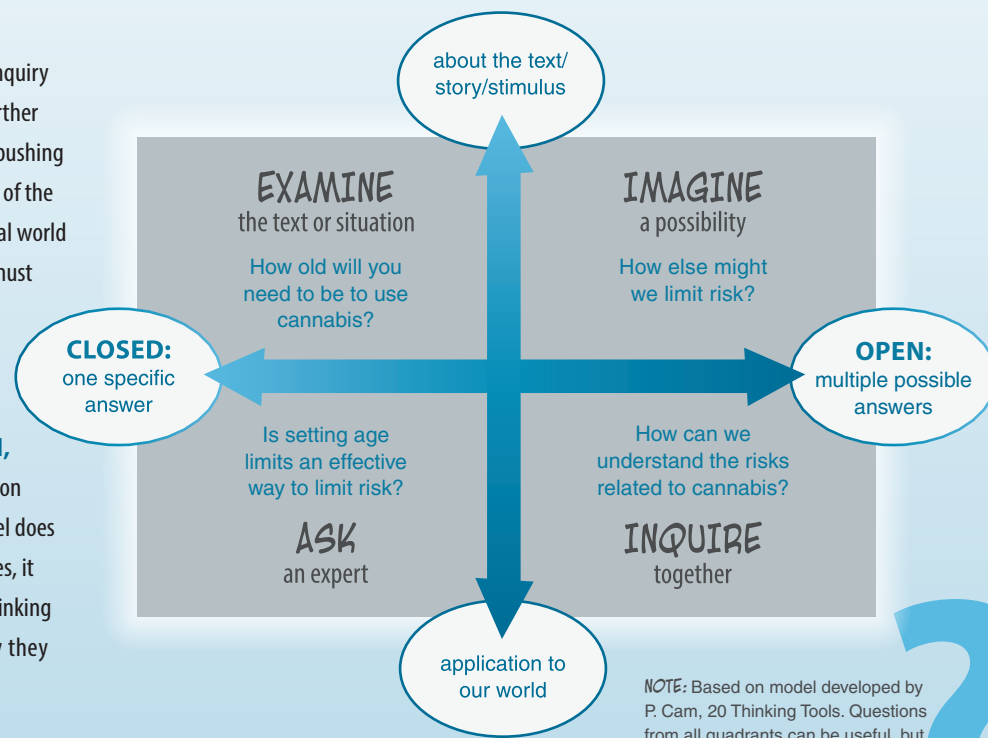
QUESTIONS CAN BE CATEGORIZED AS CLOSED OR OPEN.

Closed questions have specific answers. They elicit short responses and are useful for collecting quick facts or information. *Open questions* are like an open door to a world of possibility.

THE UNPREDICTABLE NATURE OF OPEN QUESTIONS CAN BE UNSETTLING, but when we are unsettled we become aware of, and begin to reconsider, our

values and assumptions. Inquiry questions may move us further from our comfort zone by pushing us from the abstract world of the text to consider messier real world applications in which we must engage in real dialogue.

IF WE ADD A SECOND DIMENSION TO THE CLASSIFICATION, we might develop a question quadrant. While this model does not exhaust the possibilities, it provides a richer way of thinking about questions and how they might contribute to dialogue.



NOTE: Based on model developed by P. Cam, 20 Thinking Tools. Questions from all quadrants can be useful, but some are more powerful than others.