



Open-ended Questions \* Affirmations \* Reflections (OARS)

## OPEN QUESTIONS

Start with words like *How* (“*How are things going?*”) or *What* (“*What would be most helpful?*”). (Try to avoid *Why* questions, which can prompt your child to justify their negative behaviors.) Open questions can even be a statement, as in, “*Tell me more about that...*” If a question can be answered with one word, such as “yes” or “no,” it is a closed question. Closed questions make *you* work harder trying to find the “perfect” question, and they usually do not get you the answer you were looking for. Consider how you have phrased certain questions in the past and try to turn them into open questions.

Closed Questions	Open Questions
<i>Did you drink last night?</i>	<i>How did you manage your drinking last night?</i>
<i>Don't you want to change?</i>	<i>What would be different if you changed your use of _____?</i>
<i>Why did you do that?</i>	<i>Tell me more about that...</i>

## AFFIRMATIONS

Note some ways that your child has tried to explain their behavior in the past; then imagine affirming responses you could use that recognize the behavior you want them to continue.

Situation	Affirming Statement
<i>I tried not to use but it didn't work out last night.</i>	<i>You took a stab at doing something difficult.</i>
<i>I know I didn't tell you until you asked me about it.</i>	<i>I appreciate you talking honestly to me about this now.</i>
<i>I DID try to at least not start drinking until later in the party...</i>	<i>It took some courage to try something different last night.</i>

## REFLECTIONS

Recall some things your child has said to you about how they feel, and how you have responded in the past. Then try to reconstruct your response to make it reflective. Notice the impulse to “correct” what your child is saying. What you get for your correction is usually further justification by them of their “rightness.” What you get for letting them have their version of events is a greater likelihood that they will hear another perspective.

Your Partner’s Statement	“Counter” Response	“Reflective” Response
<i>You never listen to me.</i>	<i>That’s not true, I...</i>	<i>You don’t feel like I’m hearing you...</i>
<i>I don’t want to stop drinking.</i>	<i>Don’t you see that you have a problem?!</i>	<i>Alcohol is really important to you right now.</i>
<i>I didn’t use last night.</i>	<i>Yeah, but it’s only one night.</i>	<i>Not using was a priority for you last night and you were successful.</i>

For the complete *Parents’ 20 Minute Guide*, go to <http://the20minuteguide.com>