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*(An excerpt from Classrooms That Work: A Teacher's Guide to Discipline Without Stress)*

## **Open and closed questions**

There are two kinds of questions; open and closed. A closed question looks for specific facts, and only requires a one-word answer, often a yes or a no:

- "What time did this happen?"
- "How many people are going with me to the track meet?"
- "Where were you standing when the fight started?"
- "Did you finish your homework?"
- "What game were you playing at recess?"
- "Who won the baseball game?"
- "Are you going to buy milk with your lunch today?"

As you can see, closed questions are good for uncovering specific facts to help you make a decision quickly, or even just to gather more information. However, they are not effective when you are trying to deal with emotional situations or conflicts in which you want the child to open up and freely express herself. Closed questions are ineffective when you are trying to encourage dialogue because the child might find this collecting of data irrelevant, or may interpret it as an attempt by the teacher to control the direction of the conversation.

Open-ended questions invite the child to elaborate, without limiting the direction or otherwise controlling the conversation. They also require, or at least open the door to, answers of more than one word:

- "Why don't you tell me more about that?"
- "What do you think would happen if...?"
- "Sounds interesting. How does it work?"
- "How do you feel about that?"

Sometimes you can help children solve their problems just by asking open-ended questions.

*Student: "I left my project at home. My mom's at work so she can't bring it to me."*

*Teacher: Sounds like you have a tricky problem there. What kind of options can you think of for yourself?"*

*Student: "I can bring it in tomorrow, but I'll lose marks for lateness."*

*Teacher: "That would be a shame, because I know you worked very hard on it. Can you think of any way to get it today?"*

*Student: "I guess I could call my mom and ask her if it's alright for me to walk home at lunch and get it."*

*Teacher: "Sounds like a good plan. Let me know how it works"*

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