



# EMPOWERING CLIENT VOICES

## Speaker:

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Legal Empowerment Program Director  
The Right Question Institute

**OCTOBER 29-30, 2024 | TYSONS CORNER, VA**

# In this session we will:

- Learn a method that helps **SNAP E&T participants** ask their own questions and participate effectively in decisions.
- Explore how the method can be integrated into case management.

# Agenda

- Session overview & background on the Right Question Institute
- An experience in the method
- Unpack the method and explore its applications in direct service provision
- Discuss how to integrate the method into case management for SNAP E&T participants
- Review facilitation guidelines
- Next steps and Q&A

# After the session

- **Evaluation**
- Look for an email with:
  - The **powerpoint slides**
  - Download link for the **resources** introduced today
  - Opportunities for **personalized support**

# Before we get started...

- Do you currently have a specific strategy for client empowerment at your agency or organization?
- If so, what does that strategy entail?



# **Background on the Right Question Institute**



# The Right Question Strategy


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An educational strategy that fosters the development of two skills:

# The Right Question Strategy 2

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An educational strategy that fosters the development of two skills:

- Asking better questions
  - Participating more effectively in decisions
- 



# Why questions? Why decisions?

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Asking questions is a foundational skill for thinking, learning, and taking action.



# Why questions? Why decisions? 2

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Asking questions is a foundational skill for thinking, learning, and taking action.

The ability to focus on decisions helps people become more effective and strategic.



# Why questions? Why decisions? 3

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Asking questions is a foundational skill for thinking, learning, and taking action.

The ability to focus on decisions helps people become more effective and strategic.

People become more engaged, understand more, and discover their own power.

# Why questions? Why decisions? 4

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Asking questions is a foundational skill for thinking, learning, and taking action.

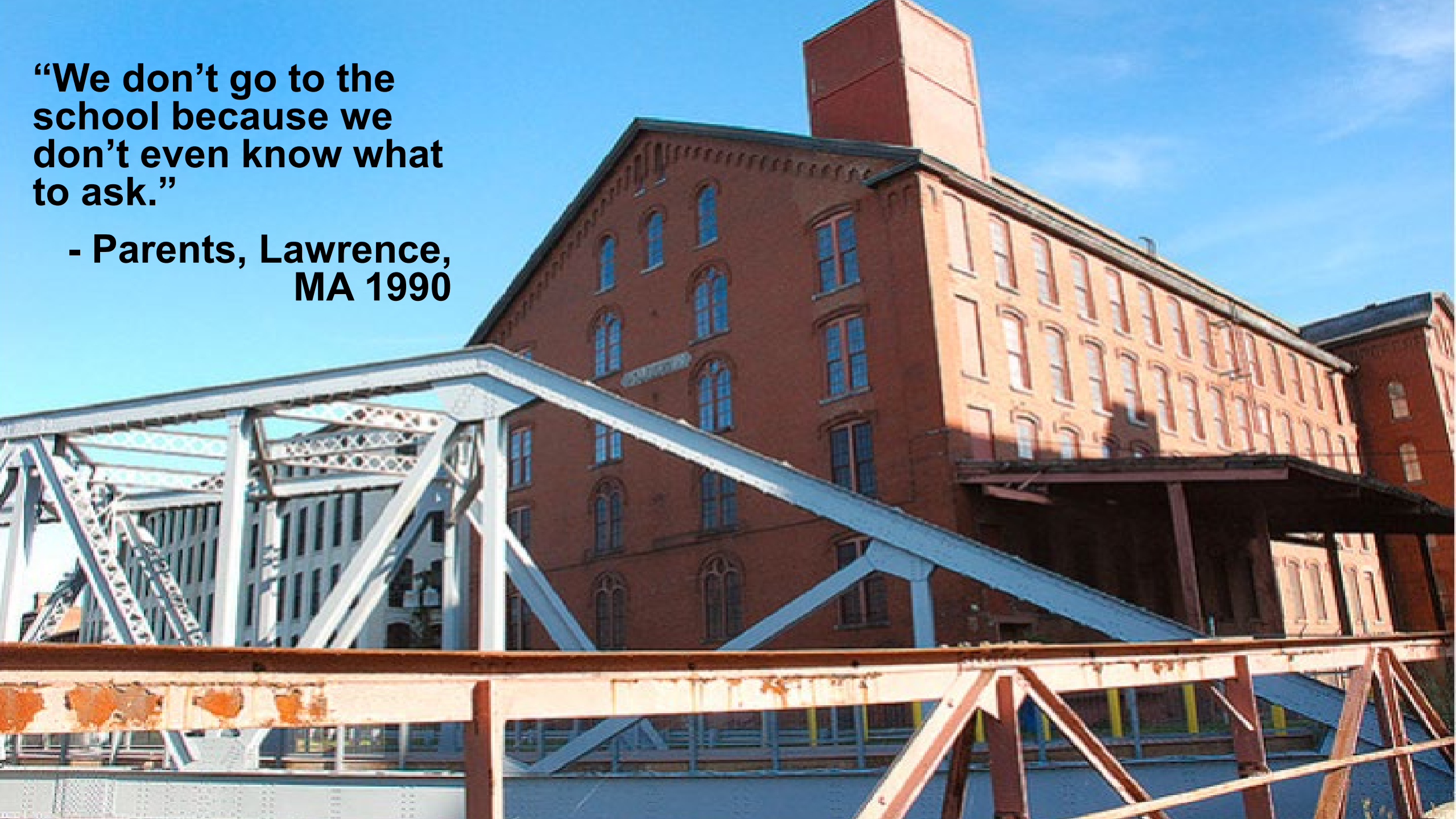
The ability to focus on decisions helps people become more effective and strategic.

People become more engaged, understand more, and discover their own power.

These two skills are rarely taught.

**“We don’t go to the school because we don’t even know what to ask.”**

**- Parents, Lawrence, MA 1990**



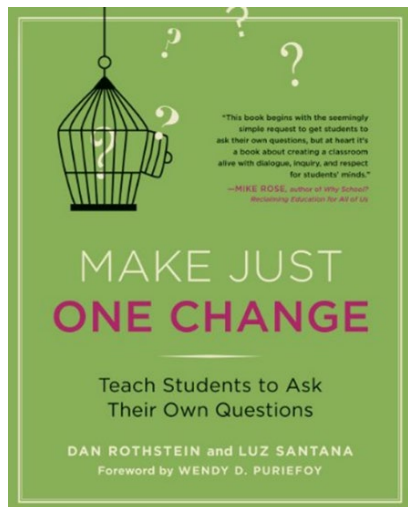


# Right Question Institute

A Catalyst for Microdemocracy



HARVARD  
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION



**NIH Public Access**  
**Author Manuscript**  
*Med Care*. Author manuscript; available in PMC 2013 February 25.

Published in final edited form as:  
*Med Care*. 2008 March ; 46(3): 247-256. doi:10.1097/MLR.0b013e318158af52.

**Evaluation of a Patient Activation and Empowerment Intervention in Mental Health Care**

Margarita Alegria, PhD<sup>1,†</sup>, Antonio Polo, PhD<sup>2</sup>, Shan Gao, MS<sup>3</sup>, Luz Santana, MS<sup>3</sup>, Dan Rothstein, PhD<sup>3</sup>, Aida Jimenez, PhD<sup>4</sup>, Mary Lyons Hunter, PsyD<sup>5</sup>, Frances Mendieta, BS<sup>6</sup>, Vanessa Oddo, BA<sup>7</sup>, and Sharon-Lise Normand, PhD<sup>1</sup>

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**NIH Public Access**  
**Author Manuscript**  
*Health Educ Behav*. Author manuscript; available in PMC 2013 January 07.

Published in final edited form as:  
*Health Educ Behav*. 2009 February ; 36(1): 138-154. doi:10.1177/1090198108314618.

**Patient-Provider Communication: Understanding the Role of Patient Activation for Latinos in Mental Health Treatment**

Dharma E. Cortes, PhD,  
Cambridge Health Alliance, Harvard Medical School, Boston, Massachusetts  
Norah Mulvaney-Day, PhD,  
Center for Multicultural Mental Health Research, Somerville, Massachusetts, and Harvard



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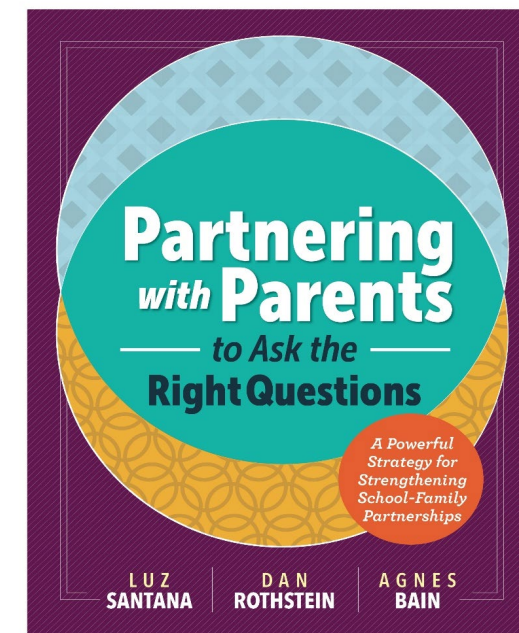


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# An experience in the Right Question Strategy



# Rules for Producing Questions

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1. ASK AS **MANY** QUESTIONS AS YOU CAN
2. DO **NOT STOP** TO ANSWER, JUDGE OR DISCUSS
3. WRITE DOWN EVERY QUESTION **EXACTLY** AS IT IS STATED OR COMES TO MIND
4. **CHANGE** ANY STATEMENTS INTO QUESTIONS



# Rules for Producing Questions 2

---

1. ASK AS **MANY** QUESTIONS AS YOU CAN
2. DO **NOT STOP** TO ANSWER, JUDGE OR DISCUSS
3. WRITE DOWN EVERY QUESTION **EXACTLY** AS IT IS STATED OR COMES TO MIND
4. **CHANGE** ANY STATEMENTS INTO QUESTIONS

What might be difficult about following these rules?

# Today's Question Focus

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**Choose one of these statements for  
your Question Focus:**

# Today's Question Focus 2

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**Choose one of these statements for  
your Question Focus:**

Your child might be held back in the same grade for  
one more year.

The doctor might be changing your medication.



***Your child might be held back in the same grade for one more year.***

***OR***

***The doctor might be changing your medication.***


- Ask as many questions as you can.
- Do not stop to answer, judge, or discuss.
- Write down every question exactly as it comes to mind.
- Change any statements into questions.

# Categorizing Questions:

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- **Closed-ended** questions can be answered with a “yes” or “no” or with a **one-word** answer.
- **Open-ended** questions require more **explanation**.

Identify your questions as closed-ended or open-ended by **marking them** with a “**C**” or an “**O.**”



# Closed- and Open-Ended Questions

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## Closed-ended questions

<b>Advantages</b>	
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# Closed- and Open-Ended Questions 2

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Closed-ended questions	
	<b>Disadvantages</b>

# Closed- and Open-Ended Questions 3

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## Open-ended questions

**Advantages**





# Closed- and Open-Ended Questions 4

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## Open-ended questions

	<b>Disadvantages</b>
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# Improving Questions

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Change one **closed-ended question** so it becomes **open-ended**.



Change one **open-ended question** so it becomes **closed-ended**.



# Prioritizing Questions

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**Review your list of questions.**

Choose three questions you consider *most important* from your list.

**While prioritizing, think about the Question Focus you chose:**

*Your child might be held back in the same grade for one more year.*

*The doctor might be changing your medication.*

# Focusing on decisions

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# Focusing on decisions 2

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## A simple definition:

A **decision** is the selection of one option from among two or more options.

# When decisions are made it is important to focus on:

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- The **OPTIONS**


# When decisions are made it is important to focus on: (2)

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- The **OPTIONS**
- **REASONS** - the basis or explanation for a decision.

# When decisions are made it is important to focus on: (3)

---

- The **OPTIONS**
  - **REASONS** - the basis or explanation for a decision.
  - **PROCESS** - the steps and actions taken, people involved, and information used in making the decision.
- 



# When decisions are made it is important to focus on: (4)

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- The **OPTIONS**
- **REASONS** - the basis or explanation for a decision.
- **PROCESS** - the steps and actions taken, people involved, and information used in making the decision.
- **ROLE** - the part you play/ the part the people affected by the decision play in the decision-making process. For example, you make the decision, someone else makes the decision and you give your opinion, you give information, you accept or challenge the decision.

# An example

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Every day you make a decision about what to wear:



The **OPTIONS**

# An example 2

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**The REASON:** If you chose the t-shirt, the reason might be that it is hot outside.



**The PROCESS:** The process might be checking the temperature.



**Your ROLE:** Your role in choosing what to wear is that you made the decision.

# Identify one question that will help you learn about:

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- The **REASON** for the decision.

Add a new question to your list if you don't have one

# Identify one question that will help you learn about: 2

---

- The **REASON** for the decision.
- The **PROCESS** for making the decision.

Add a new question to your list if you don't have one

# Identify one question that will help you learn about 3:

---

- The **REASON** for the decision.
- The **PROCESS** for making the decision.
- Your **ROLE/the ROLE** of the people affected by the decision.

Add a new question to your list if you don't have one

# Share

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# Reflect

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What did you learn?





# **Unpacking the method & applications in the field**



# The Question Formulation Technique

## 1. Question Focus

## 2. Producing questions

1. Ask as many questions as you can
2. Do not stop to discuss, judge or answer
3. Record *exactly* as stated
4. Change statements into questions

## 3. Improving questions

- Categorize questions as closed or open ended
- Change questions from one type to another

## 4. Strategizing

- Prioritize your questions
- Action plan or discuss next steps
- Share

## 5. Reflecting

# The Question Formulation Technique 2

## 1. Question Focus

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## 5. Reflecting

# The Voice in Decisions Technique

## 1. Question Focus

## 2. Producing questions

## 3. Improving questions

- Categorize questions as closed or open ended
- Change questions from one type to another

## 4. Strategizing on how to use questions

- Prioritize questions
- Define “decision” and key elements in decision-making
  - Reason(s): the basis for a decision
  - Process: the steps and actions taken, people and information involved
  - Role: the part people affected by the decision play in the process
- Identifying questions about reason, process, and role
- Optional: develop an action plan or discuss next steps

## 5. Reflecting

1. Ask as many questions as you can
2. Do not stop to discuss, judge or answer
3. Record *exactly* as stated
4. Change statements into questions

**Decision:** Choosing one option from among two or more

# The Voice in Decisions Technique 2

## 1. Question Focus

## 2. Producing questions

## 3. Improving questions

- Categorize questions as closed or open ended
- Change questions from one type to another

## 4. Strategizing on how to use questions

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- **Define “decision” and key elements in decision-making**

- Reason(s): the basis for a decision
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- **Identifying questions about reason, process, and role**

- Optional: develop an action plan or discuss next steps

## 5. Reflecting

1. Ask as many questions as you can
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4. Change statements into questions

**Decision:** Choosing one option from among two or more

# How does this connect to empowerment?

When people formulate their own questions . . .

- People feel a stronger sense of **agency** as they navigate systems
- People are better able to **advocate and make their voice heard** for themselves and their families
- Frontline service providers and clients **build trust and partner** more effectively together to achieve better outcomes

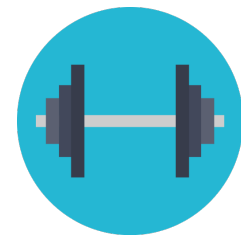
# Three changes as outcomes



**COGNITIVE**



**AFFECTIVE**



**BEHAVIORAL**

# From clients...

**“Estás más preparado. sabes lo que quieres. Cuando sabes lo que quieres, buscas la forma de obtenerlo. [You are better prepared. You know what you want. And when you know what you want, you can look for a way to get it.]”**

- Nelida Herrera, Sacramento, CA





# From clients... 2

“Estás más preparado. sabes lo que quieres. Cuando sabes lo que quieres, buscas la forma de obtenerlo. [You are better prepared. You know what you want. And when you know what you want, you can look for a way to get it.]”  
- Nelida Herrera, Sacramento, CA



“It helps you advocate for yourself, **without feeling overwhelmed or inferior** to what someone might have. I wasn’t intimidated any more... **it makes you feel like, ‘I can do this.’**” - Alicia, Boston, MA



# From clients... 3

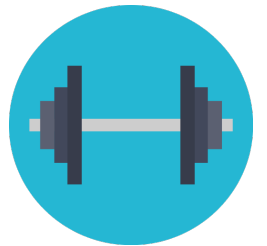
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“It helps you advocate for yourself, **without feeling overwhelmed or inferior** to what someone might have. I wasn’t intimidated any more... **it makes you feel like, ‘I can do this.’**” - Alicia, Boston, MA



“I didn’t know I could ask questions at the school. But, **by doing that, I was able to get my son the services he needs.**” - Session participant who learned to advocate for her son with a hearing impairment, Massachusetts



# From clients... 4

**“We became homeless, we were evicted from our apartment. . . .I was like, I can’t bring the kids to a homeless shelter, I’ve been there myself once and I don’t ever want to go back. It helped me to be more confident. When I went into that room, I don’t think without writing down those questions . . . I wouldn’t have been able to do that. I wouldn’t be able to go in there and not cry and be hysterical . . . I wasn’t like that at all, I was completely under control.”** - Stacey French, Dover, New Hampshire

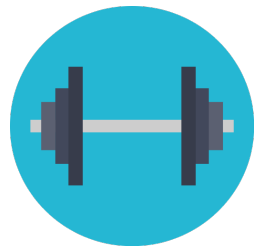


# From clients... 5

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As a result of this workshop I plan to: What ever it takes to get the information I need.



**“What ever it takes to get the information I need.”**- Session participant, Louisville, KY

# From frontline workers...

“When they start to think about it and formulate the questions, and find out what the particular agency is all about, and what is their policy, and what they can do, and cannot do, **this [method] helps them to see a bigger picture.** And once they have the understanding of how this process works **they start to think strategically.**”



# From frontline workers... 2

“When they start to think about it and formulate the questions, and find out what the particular agency is all about, and what is their policy, and what they can do, and cannot do, **this [method] helps them to see a bigger picture.** And once they have the understanding of how this process works **they start to think strategically.**”



“I saw how the questions start with such personal anger and frustration, but when they start thinking about what it actually is that they are trying to find out they realize, it’s not just. . . ‘you’re a bad social worker’ it’s, **‘what is it that we can do together to change this.’**”



# From frontline workers... 3

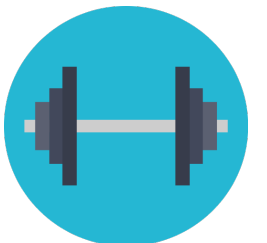
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“I saw how the questions start with such personal anger and frustration, but when they start thinking about what it actually is that they are trying to find out they realize, it’s not just. . . ‘you’re a bad social worker’ it’s, **‘what is it that we can do together to change this.’**”



“[The method] allows people who don’t usually speak up to find their own voice. **They don’t have to depend on me or others to speak for them . . . they speak for themselves.**”



# Examples of applications

- Legal professionals preparing families for IEP meetings
- Social worker preparing unhoused youth for court appearances and meetings with attorneys
- Re-entry program coach helping formerly incarcerated people navigate systems of services and prepare for job interviews
- Adult literacy program preparing mothers to have a conversations with the commissioner of the Division of Children, Youth and Families (NH)



# Making the strategy work for your needs

- How am I supposed to make time for something additional?
- Is this appropriate for situations where someone is facing an urgent problem?
- Some people are already asking questions, how is this going to help?



# Making the strategy work for your needs 2

- How am I supposed to make time for something additional?
- Is this appropriate for situations where someone is facing an urgent problem?
- Some people are already asking questions, how is this going to help?
- Spending 10 minutes can help make case management more efficient and productive.
- This is not appropriate for all settings! You will know if it is an appropriate time and situation to use a tool for partnering more effectively with SNAP E&T participants.
- Having someone prioritize and be strategic can get them better results, when they're working with you or when they're preparing for a different situation.

# Integration

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How do you think SNAP E&T recipients could benefit from a process for asking their own questions?



# Integration 2

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How do you think SNAP E&T recipients could benefit from a process for asking their own questions?

What are some specific situations in which service providers could use this method in case management or in other contexts?



# Facilitating the methods



# Using the process

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*One small shift in practice:*  
**the client is the one asking their own questions**

# The Question Focus

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The Question Focus is a stimulus for jumpstarting questions. It is the focus of question formulation.

**Only one requirement for the Question Focus:  
*It should NOT be a question.***

Today we used:

*Your child might be held back in the same grade for one more year.*

*The doctor might be changing your medication.*

# Examples of applications

- Legal professionals preparing families for IEP meetings  
*Example Question Focus: “The school recommends an IEP to help your child”  
or “Your child has been referred for an evaluation”*



# Examples of applications 2

- Legal professionals preparing families for IEP meetings

*Example Question Focus: “The school recommends an IEP to help your child”  
or “Your child has been referred for an evaluation”*

- Re-entry program coach helping formerly incarcerated people navigate systems of services and prepare for job interviews

*Example Question Focus: “Your job interview” or “You are starting a new job tomorrow”*



# Examples of applications 3

- Legal professionals preparing families for IEP meetings  
*Example Question Focus: “The school recommends an IEP to help your child” or “Your child has been referred for an evaluation”*
- Re-entry program coach helping formerly incarcerated people navigate systems of services and prepare for job interviews  
*Example Question Focus: “Your job interview” or “You are starting a new job tomorrow”*
- Adult educators helping GED class students advocate at the welfare office and access services  
*Example Question Focus: “You have been denied benefits” or “There’s a waiting list for ESL classes”*

# Facilitation tips

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- Introduce the process as quickly as possible
- Do not explain the topic or question focus or give examples of questions
- Do not stop to answer the questions as they are being produced – that is not your role
- Make sure to leave time for reflection – what did you learn? How can you use it?

# Resources: teaching templates & guides

## 5 Steps for Asking Better Questions

Asking your own questions can help you get more information and advocate for what you need.

Topic:

1. Ask as many questions as you can about the topic.

- Do not stop to try to answer or judge the questions
- Write each question exactly as it comes to mind
- Change any thoughts or statements into questions

2. Find different types of questions on your list:

- Closed-ended questions: Can be answered with "yes" or "no" or one word. Mark them with a "C."
- Open-ended questions: Require an explanation. Mark them with an "O."

3. Practice changing your questions to get different information. Change one of each:

Closed → Open                      Open → Closed

4. Choose the three most important questions for you. Mark them with an "X."

5. Reflection: Why did you choose those three questions? What did you learn? How can you use it?

# Resources: facilitation videos

**RQI** Right Question Institute  
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## Resources

**BOOKS:**  
PARTNERING WITH PARENTS  
MAKE JUST ONE CHANGE

**VIEW BY FIELD:**  
TEACHING + LEARNING  
**SCHOOLS + FAMILIES**  
+ DOWNLOAD AND USE  
INFORMATIONAL MATERIALS  
FACILITATION MATERIALS  
+ WATCH + LISTEN  
INSTRUCTIONAL VIDEOS  
WEBINARS  
PODCASTS  
+ READ  
RIGHT QUESTION INSIGHTS  
RIGHT QUESTION ROUNDUP

LEGAL EMPOWERMENT  
VOTER ENGAGEMENT



**[Video] Using the Question Formulation Technique (QFT) with Individuals**  
FIELD(S): Schools + Families  
TYPE: Instructional Videos

# Next steps



# Evaluation

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- Evaluation: <https://tinyurl.com/RQISNAPET>




# Next steps

- Look for an email with:
  - The **powerpoint slides**
  - **Resources**
    - Teaching templates in English and Spanish
    - Videos of one-on-one facilitation
  - Opportunities for **personalized support and further training**

**5 Steps for Asking Better Questions**  
Asking your own questions can help you get more information and advocate for what you need.

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5. Reflection: Why did you choose those three questions? What did you learn? How can you use it?

  
Source: Right Question Institute  
www.rightquestion.org



# Some final thoughts

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# Free resources

The Right Question Institute offers many of our resources and methodology through a Creative Commons License and we encourage you to make use of and/or share this resource. **Please reference the Right Question Institute** as the source when using our resources or methods.



Source: [www.rightquestion.org](http://www.rightquestion.org)

# Thank you!

**Now, some time for your questions.**

Contact us at:

[naomi.campbell@rightquestion.org](mailto:naomi.campbell@rightquestion.org)

Register to access free resources at: [www.rightquestion.org](http://www.rightquestion.org)

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# In the medical literature

Alegría, M., Polo, A., Gao, S., Santana, L., Rothstein, D., Jimenez, A., Hunter, M.L., Mendieta, F., Oddo, V., Normand, S.L. (2008). **Evaluation of a patient activation and empowerment intervention in mental health care.** *Med Care*, 46(3), 247-56.

Cortes, D.E., Mulvaney-Day, N., Fortuna, L., Reinfeld, S., Alegría, M. (2009). **Patient—provider communication: understanding the role of patient activation for Latinos in mental health treatment.** *Health Education & Behavior*, 36(1), 138-54.

Deen, D., Lu, W.H., Rothstein, D., Santana, L., Gold, M.R.(2011). **Asking questions: the effect of a brief intervention in community health centers on patient activation.** *Patient Education and Counseling*, 84(2), 257-60.

Lu, W.H., Deen, D., Rothstein, D., Santana, L., Gold, M.R. (2011). **Activating community health center patients in developing question-formulation skills: a qualitative study.** *Health Education & Behavior*, 38(6), 637-45.

Deen, D., Lu, W.H., Weintraub, M.R., Maranda, M.J., Elshafey, S., Gold, M.R. (2012). **The impact of different modalities for activating patients in a community health setting.** *Patient Education and Counseling*, 89(1), 178-83.

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