

Collaborative Questioning in a Clinical Context

Collaborative questioning is a technique that uses a learner's curiosity to explore their understanding, knowledge, and critical thinking in a supportive environment. You're not questioning to intimidate or embarrass, but to guide your teaching and identify their next step for learning. The goal is to frame 'not knowing' as a learning opportunity.

STEP 1: INVITE Questions

Create a supportive learning environment where the learner understands the purpose of your questions.

Be explicit about your intent:

- **Preceptor:** "Before we talk about Ms. Reyes, I want to let you know that I like to ask a lot of questions so you don't need to feel bad if you don't know an answer. I expect that you won't know everything! With my questions I'm trying to find out more about what you already know and what would be helpful for us to focus on next."

Briefly summarize and invite learner questions to get them thinking about connecting findings to a diagnosis:

- **Preceptor:** "We saw Ms. Reyes today and did a foot exam. What are your thoughts? Is there anything you'd like to learn more about?"
- **Learner:** "Well, Ms. Reyes couldn't feel the tuning fork vibration even when I hit the fork really hard and tried her ankles. I guess I'm wondering...what does that mean for her?"

STEP 2: IDENTIFY Knowledge Gaps

Once you've invited your learner into a questioning session and they've opened with some questions of their own, use that to help identify knowledge gaps.

Try to normalize 'not knowing' early in the conversation:

- **Preceptor:** "It's great that you're thinking about what these findings mean. Sometimes it's hard to say without further exploration."

Help the learner connect not knowing and learning so that they look at knowledge gaps as potentially positive ways to direct new learning:

- **Preceptor:** "There's always so much to learn, isn't there? What should we explore first?"

Ask follow up questions to get the learner to share more of their knowledge:

- **Preceptor:** "What would you do if you also noticed that the patient had decreased pulses in their foot?"

STEP 3: ENCOURAGE Further Questions

After you've identified information gaps, encourage further questions to explore the topic and carefully find the limit of the learner's knowledge.

Start with a question to relate the patient interaction to finding a diagnosis:

- **Preceptor:** "A screening test helps to find something of clinical relevance - what are we looking for when we check sensation under the metatarsal pads?"
- **Learner:** "Not being able to feel the monofilament defines the risk of...something...a foot ulcer? Which could be prevented."

Help the learner feel confident in sharing their answers, and pay close attention to determine the "edge" of their knowledge:

- **Preceptor:** "Fantastic, yes. Lack of perception of the monofilament correlates with what? And what conditions might cause the lack of perception?"
- **Learner:** "Hmm, OK, let me think for a moment...?"

STEP 4: EXPLORE Next Steps

Explore the next steps with your learner and together plan for future learning.

Use the learner's natural curiosity to inform your answers and recommendations:

- **Preceptor:** "What else would be helpful for you to learn for the next time you have a patient with a similar presentation?"
- **Learner:** "Well, I see how it comes down to people being aware and taking measures to protect themselves from injury. What kind of advice do you give those patients?"
- **Preceptor:** "I give people a handout on checking their feet and footwear. For position sense, I ask patients to think about a walking aid, holding bars in the shower, stuff like that."

Provide self-study ideas and let the learner to think of their own way of educating patients. Think ahead and identify patients that might reinforce this learning.