



Designing Community Café Questions

Below are some questions that were used in diverse settings from neighborhoods to conference rooms. These questions are offered as a conversation starter for your planning team. What is a powerful question for one community may not be so with another community. Also, the work that is accomplished when a team spends time designing questions is very valuable. Often, designing questions is an opportunity to:

- Clarify the purpose of the café
- Define what the hosting team would like to discover
- Practice asking what is possible
- Practice trusting what will emerge from the group rather than promoting a predetermined outcome
- Add clarity to your Appreciative Inquiry process

When considering questions, you might ask if the question you are considering:

- Is open ended and can be answered or interpreted in different ways by anyone in the room
- Generates energy
- Asks something you are genuinely curious about
- Encourages people to speak from a personal perspective
- Is relevant to the culture and issues of the community
- Is simply stated
- Focuses on strengths and possibilities
- Invites people to contribute feelings, stories, as well as what they know (whole self is welcomed into the conversation)

Also offered are examples of harvest questions. The “harvest” is the large group conversation after the conversations where hosts have an opportunity to explore the collective wisdom of the group. Questions are designed to plant seeds for conversation. The harvest can be as simple as asking people for their insights, deeper questions, patterns they observed, or thinking that changed.

Sample Café Questions:

- What about parenting surprised you? What do you do when you need more information? When do you know to ask for help?
- There was a time in your history when all the children in your village were cared for. What were some family traditions or community practices that helped?
- Who supports your positive parenting? What does that look like? What in your family history makes it comfortable or not to seek parenting information?

- How do you know your child loves you? How does your child know you and feel your love?
- How does your child know how you are feeling? How do you notice what your child is feeling?
- What are the basic things your family needs in order for your child to thrive? How do you get information about resources in the community? How do we help all parents have access to the information and resources and not just parents who know the system?
- When times are tough, what gives you courage? Who gives you support and what does that look like?
- How does my community support my family? What do I do to contribute to my community?
- What must we do together that cannot be done alone?
- What is the difference between providing parent leadership and partnering with parents?
- What is the question you are holding that can create possibilities for this group?
- What helps you feel you belong here?
- How might your presence here tonight help your child to thrive?
- How does your family history affect your ability to ask for help?
- What is precious about a child's early years?
- What are the questions our community needs to talk about?

Harvest Questions:

- If this group spoke with one voice, what are some things we might hear?
- What is something you heard that you wish the whole room could have heard?
- What possibilities can we create together?
- Share a time during this conversation when you felt really connected and engaged in the conversation.
- What is the next important conversation I need to have?
- What was an insight, or an "aha!" moment you had
- What patterns did you hear in your conversations?