

ASKING AND ANSWERING QUESTIONS

What is this developmental skill?

Asking and answering questions allows children to gather information, solve problems, clarify misunderstandings, and participate in conversations. Children learn to answer simple factual questions before progressing to "why," "how," and hypothetical questions.

Questioning is also an important tool for learning and social interaction.

How does this normally develop?

Responsive adults naturally ask children questions throughout the day and answer the child's own questions with patience and curiosity. These interactions teach children how conversations work and encourage curiosity about the world.

How can neglect interfere with its development?

Children who experience neglect often participate in far fewer back-and-forth conversations. Some children stop asking questions because previous attempts were ignored. Others have difficulty understanding complex questions because they have had limited conversational experience.

Children may:

- Answer only with "yes" or "no."
- Avoid asking for clarification.
- Misinterpret questions.
- Become anxious when questioned.
- Give unrelated responses.

What might this look like?

A teacher asks, "Why do you think that happened?" and the child shrugs. A caregiver asks multiple questions, and the child repeatedly answers, "I don't know." Another child never asks for help, even when confused.

Parenting Implications

Support question development by:

- Asking open-ended questions.
- Giving children extra processing time.
- Encouraging curiosity.
- Modeling your own questions.
- Avoiding rapid-fire questioning.
- Celebrating thoughtful questions as much as correct answers.

From Understanding to Attunement

When children struggle with questions, ask yourself: *"Has this child learned that conversations are places where questions are welcomed?"* Children often become curious when adults first become curious with them.