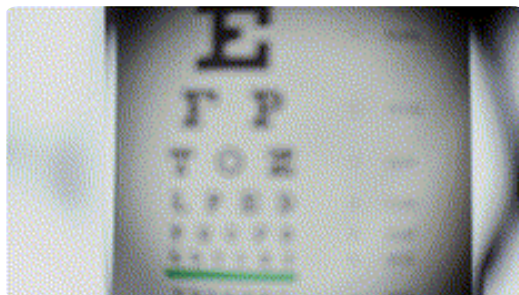


# Reality Testing or Manipulation?

Using questioning skills to support informed decision-making and develop confidence, insight and understanding



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- ***Questioning Skills***



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## Questioning: why?

- To gather information
- To facilitate understanding
- To encourage someone to “tell their story”
- To demonstrate interest; listening; care; empathy; understanding
- To focus attention
- To clarify (eg facts; needs and expectations)
- To probe (eg for underlying issues)
- To facilitate information exchange
- To reality-test (eg a position; option; agreement; plan)

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## The Art of Questioning

Purpose drives practice

| Types of question | Purpose   | Impact   |
|-------------------|---|--|
| Open              | To obtain more depth; detail; opinions; feelings; ideas; attitudes                          | Empowering; encourages revelation of more info; ideas; feelings; concerns based on what speaker sees as important. |
| Closed            | To obtain specific information & facts; limit boundaries; narrow topic; interrupt; restrict | Depowering; encourages one-word answers based on what questioner sees as important                                 |

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# The Art of Questioning

Purpose drives practice

| Types of question | Purpose  | Impact  |
|-------------------|--|---|
| Clarifying        | To verify understanding; confirm meaning   | Calming - if delivered sensitively, respectfully and in a non-threatening manner. |
| Focused           | To move discussion in a particular direction, especially when someone is moving around from one things to another... | Builds confidence, helps re-focus on issue at hand.                               |

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# The Art of Questioning

Purpose drives practice

| Types of question | Purpose                                 | Impact  |
|-------------------|---|---|
| Probing           | To make explicit what has been implicit | Deepens understanding   |
| Stacked           | To manipulate                           | Unsettling; decreases confidence; damages rapport; reduces trust. |

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## Reality-Testing

*Asking questions to help people explore and realistically assess:*

- Whether all issues are being / can be addressed through the process
- The pros and cons of proceeding with a course of action / maintaining a particular position
- Whether particular options / outcomes will meet their needs
- The workability of particular options or outcomes

*Can also be used to:*

- Challenge any dissonance / inconsistencies
- Encourage a thorough risk assessment of alternatives to agreement
- Determine next steps in a process or the correct or preferable outcome and how best to convey it

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## Reality-testing: purpose and impact

- *The overall purpose of reality-testing is to help people make informed decisions and smart choices at various steps in a process by encouraging thorough risk-assessments and checking whether potential outcomes will meet their needs (and the legislative context within which they find themselves).*
- *It is a useful technique that helps develop insight and understanding; moves people from their positions and encourages informed decision-making.*

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## Reality-testing: benefits

| For ADR Practitioners                                    | For Members  | For Participants   |
|--|--|--|
| Can help resolve an impasse                              | Ensures all relevant issues are addressed  | Increases confidence in decision-making  |
| Can shift people from their positions                    | Helps clarify any inconsistencies  | Helps clarify needs / objectives   |
| Supports informed decision-making and self-determination | May assist fact-finding and decision-making process                                  | Provides structure for thorough genuine and non-threatening risk-assessment                              |
| Brings focus to participants' overall objectives/goals   | Can assist in consideration of likely levels of acceptance/compliance with decisions | Helps participants realistically assess whether proceeding with a course of action will meet their needs |
| Helps minimize post-process remorse                      | Can help determine if decision meets objectives of the review process                | Can help manage power dynamics thereby increasing safety   |
| Can help expand the range of resolution options          | Helps test if agreements/outcomes are workable and meet needs                        | Can build trust  |

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## Reality-testing questions: some examples

- How does that fit with what you were saying earlier about....?
- What would you like to achieve through this process? What's most important for you?
- How does that fit with what you heard (the other person needs)?
- What's likely to happen if you can't reach agreement?
- Can a decision at hearing meet your needs? What else could you do?
- What would be involved in proceeding to hearing? Would you need time off work? Do you have an idea of how long it might take to be heard / get a decision? What would the costs be? % rating of likely success? Could you lose money even if you win?
- Are there any publicity or enforceability issues?
- What about stress/health/relationship costs?

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## Reality-testing: risks

***If done too early before trust and rapport has been built and/or not done sensitively or respectfully then it can:***

- come across as advice-giving
- be experienced as manipulative or as intimidation
- damage any rapport that has been built
- cause loss of face with associated intransigence
- decrease satisfaction with the process
- be experienced as unjust or unfair

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## Reality-testing: when

- After participants have had the opportunity to be heard; to fully express their views and ideally hear those of the other side
- When a sufficient level of trust and rapport with you and the process has been built
- In joint or separate sessions depending on the process and circumstances

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## Reality-testing: how

- **How:**

- Ask questions; listen to answers; ask more questions
- Refer back to what you have already heard eg about needs / priorities
- Be genuinely curious and respectful – don't assume you know the answer
- Slow down; choose type of question based on purpose
- Can include "what if...?" (hypothesizing) and "If.....then what might...?" (future projection) or "how might they view....?" (role reversal)
- Be diplomatic and seek consent to the process of reality-testing
- Avoid providing advice
- Consider the most appropriate timing
- Use active voice & avoid double-negatives and multi-layered questions

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## Key points

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- **Reality-testing helps participants:**

- understand and appreciate their needs and priorities
- consider the implications of different choices
- reach agreements that are "just" and "fair" or at least "sensible" in the context of their situation, standards, laws and potential outcomes.

- **When reality-testing we must:**

- Be wary of how we exercise our power
- Avoid providing advice
- Consider the most appropriate timing
- Consider purpose and what we have heard to guide our choice of questions

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