

“Why all the questions?”

It has been shown that children learn well when they work out the answers to tasks and challenges by themselves. In our role as children’s coaches we aim to must aim to use games to challenge the players’ techniques and decision making skills. Throughout sessions we should constantly be asking questions to the children to (a) check understanding and (b) guide learning.

There are two main types of question; open and closed.

A closed question can be answered with either one word or a short phrase. It also implies that the teacher/coach has a predetermined correct response in mind that they wish the child to use. These are nearly always used as recall for facts that have already been provided by the teacher/coach. For example,

- What part of your foot did you use to pass the ball?
- Did the ball go where you wanted it to?

An open question is likely to receive a longer answer with much more detail. It allows for a much wider range of responses, and gives the child the chance to form their own opinion which in turn makes them think beyond the literal answer. For example,

- Could you tell me the different parts of your foot that you like to use to pass the ball with? Why do these work best?
- How do you make sure the ball goes where you want it to go?

The effective use of open questions gives three main positive outcomes; they give the child the chance to think and reflect, the child will reply with their thoughts, opinions and feelings, and hands the control of the conversation over to the child promoting self-esteem and confidence.

Black and William (1998) inform through research that a ‘waiting time’ of 5 seconds should be used to give children time to process the question and formulate an answer. This is the optimum time it takes for a child to respond to the question with a suitable answer. Research shows that on average teachers/coaches wait 2 seconds before either asking someone else or answering the question themselves. If this is the norm in a group then the children will often be nervous to answer as they know that the answer or another question will soon follow anyway!

A great way to ask questions is in conversation with small groups or individuals to check understanding and learning. This may seem to stop them playing for a short time but learning is still taking place. By asking open questions and giving children time to answer we are trying to guide the children to working out links between skills and activities whilst steering them to working out how to achieve success in the game.

We are trying to develop players with strong decision making skills and by constantly asking open questions we hope that children can form opinions, make clear decisions on their own, and display their feelings and beliefs to others.