

Your Guide:

From one-word answers to real conversations

Moving from consultation to co-production means shifting from brief, transactional responses to deeper, more meaningful conversations. One-word answers often emerge from closed questions or environments where people don't feel safe or valued enough to share more. Active listening helps practitioners move beyond surface-level engagement by creating space for people to express themselves fully, using open-ended questions, and recognising lived experience as expertise.

Use this guide to help you open up genuine dialogue, build trust, and unlock the deeper insights that are essential for co-production.

Tools and techniques for deeper conversation

Moving someone from a short vague answer like 'It's fine' to something more meaningful is absolutely possible with the right tools and a bit of practice. The more you use these techniques, the more confident you'll become. This approach can really help shift conversations from vague responses to deeper insights. Real conversations happen when we show curiosity and value people's experiences.

Your role isn't just to hear answers but to invite stories, examples, and meaning.



1. Ask open questions

Open questions invite people to share their thoughts, experiences and feelings in their own words, rather than limiting them to yes/no answers or predetermined options.

How: ask questions that start with *what, how, why, tell me about...*



2. Use prompts

Prompts help you gently dig deeper into people's answers, moving from surface-level responses to the stories, reasons, and feelings that reveal what really matters to them. Here are some examples for you to try:

- "What makes you say that?"
- "What's important about that to you?"
- "What would make it better?"
- "What would it look like if it worked well?"
- "How did that make you feel?"
- "Why does that matter?"
- "Can you tell me more about that?"
- "Can you give me an example?"



3. Demonstrate active listening

When you show you're genuinely listening and checking your understanding, this helps build trust and encourages people to share more.

How: repeat back or summarise what they said to show you value the answer. Here are some examples:



- "So you're saying..."
- "If I've understood, you mean..."
- "Let me check I've got this right..."
- "What I'm hearing is..."
- "It sounds like..."
- "Can I just reflect back what you've said..."
- "So what matters most to you is..."
- "If I've understood correctly..."
- "Just to make sure I've understood..."
- "What you're describing is..."
- "So the main thing for you is..."
- "It seems like..."
- "Tell me if I've got this wrong, but it sounds like..."



4. Be curious and patient

Silence isn't awkward: it's thinking time. When you ask a meaningful question, people often need a moment to reflect before they can articulate what they really think or feel. Resist the urge to fill the silence or jump in with another question.

How: After asking a question, pause and give people space to gather their thoughts. Show through your body language and expression that you're comfortable waiting and genuinely interested in what they have to say. Sometimes the most valuable insights come after a few seconds of quiet reflection.

Try it out!

Rewrite the following closed questions into 2-3 open questions. Here's an example to get you started: ***"Do you like living here?"***

Your turn:

1. "Are you happy with the service?"
2. "Did the appointment go well?"
3. "Do you feel supported?"
4. "Is the community centre useful to you?"
5. "Would you come to more events?"



Summary and tips for the future

Ultimately, effective co-production relies on our ability to listen actively, remain curious, and create conditions that empower people to speak. The techniques in this guide aren't about following a script—they're about developing a mindset that values people's experiences and invites them to share more.

Building your practice

1

Start small: Select a few prompt questions from this guide that feel natural to you and test them out. Notice what works and what opens up the conversation.

Keep adding to your toolbox: As you gain confidence, try new prompts and approaches. Pay attention to what helps people share more, and what feels comfortable for you to ask.

2

3

Get comfortable with silence: Resist the urge to fill pauses. Give people thinking time; some of the richest insights come after a moment of quiet reflection.

Avoid yes/no traps: Catch yourself before asking closed questions and reframe them into invitations for stories and examples.

4

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Stay curious: Phrases like "tell me more" and "can you give me an example?" are simple but powerful ways to show genuine interest.

Create safety: People share more when they feel valued and heard. Use active listening to show you're genuinely interested in what they have to say.

6

The more you practice these techniques, the more natural they'll become, and the deeper and more meaningful your conversations will be.



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Need help putting this guide into practice? Get in touch: hello@copronet.wales. For more tools & resources to support your co-production journey, including guidance for working with people in a wide range of settings, visit our website: copronet.wales