

The Power of 'What' and 'How': A Coach's Blueprint for Neurodiversity - Lane Anthony

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As a neuro coach, your role is to create a space of psychological safety where your clients can discover their own strengths and design their own path. This work isn't about fixing or changing a person's neurology, but about empowering them to thrive within it. The most powerful tools you possess aren't instructions, but questions, specifically, **what** and **how** questions.

In traditional coaching and even in everyday life, we often default to the "why" question. As a school leader, you may have asked a pupil, "Why did you do that?" or a teacher, "Why is that process not working?" This type of question, while seemingly direct, can unintentionally put someone on the defensive. It often leads to justifications, rationalisations, and a focus on past problems or perceived failures. In the context of neurodiversity, it can be particularly unhelpful, forcing individuals to explain a neurology that is simply different, not flawed.

'What' and 'how' questions, however, shift the entire dynamic. They're rooted in curiosity and empathy, moving the client from a position of defence to one of discovery. They are the keys to unlocking a client's own inner wisdom, fostering the very self-awareness that is the bedrock of your work.

'What' Questions for Clarity and Understanding

'What' questions are a coach's tool for grounding a conversation in reality and possibility. They invite the client to describe their internal and external world without judgment. They ask for facts and perceptions, opening a door to insight.

- **To explore current feelings without judgment:** "What are you feeling at this moment?"
- **To define a desired state:** "What would success look and feel like for you?"
- **To uncover strengths and resources:** "What is working well right now?" or "What parts of your brilliant brain can we lean on to approach this challenge?" (This phrasing, inspired by your work in *Autism a Superpower*, validates their neurotype as an asset).

'How' Questions for Action and Agency

'How' questions are the engines of progress. They move the conversation from abstract ideas to concrete action. They encourage a client to think about strategy, process, and accountability, empowering them to design their own path forward.

- **To create actionable steps:** "How can we break this goal into smaller, more manageable steps?"
 - **To design a personalised strategy:** "How might you adapt this plan to fit your unique energy and sensory needs?"
 - **To promote accountability and ownership:** "How will you know when you've made progress?"
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Aligning with the ICF Framework: A Neuro-affirming Lens

The power of 'what' and 'how' questions isn't just a personal philosophy; it's deeply aligned with the International Coaching Federation's (ICF) core competencies. Your practice of neurodiversity coaching works seamlessly within this renowned framework by applying a neuro-affirming lens.

- **Evokes Awareness (ICF Competency 7):** This competency is about using tools like powerful questions to facilitate client insight. For the neuro coach, this is where you ask, "**What** assumptions are you making?" or "**How** might your perception of this situation be different from others?" By focusing on these open-ended queries, you help the client uncover their own unique logic and motivations. This resonates with the DDP model you developed, which focuses on strengths-based strategies and individualised support.
- **Listens Actively (ICF Competency 6):** Asking is only half the work; the other half is truly hearing. A neuro coach listens for the words, but also for the emotion and subtext behind them. A 'what' or 'how' question can be a gentle probe to deepen this listening. For example, if a client says they feel "overwhelmed," you might ask, "**What** does 'overwhelmed' feel like in your body?" This shows you're present and committed to understanding their internal experience, not just their words.
- **Facilitates Client Growth (ICF Competency 8):** The final step is translating newfound

awareness into sustainable action. This is where you use 'what' and 'how' to help the client build a plan that is authentic to them. "**What** will you do next?" "**How** can you hold yourself accountable?" and "**What** support do you need to move forward?" are all questions that empower the client to design their own solutions and commit to them.

A Practical Framework: The GROW Model for Neuro Coaches

The GROW model (Goal, Reality, Options, Will) is a foundational coaching tool that can be transformed into a neuro-affirming framework using 'what' and 'how' questions.

- **Goal:** "**What** do you want to accomplish?" "**How** will you know you've been successful?"
- **Reality:** "**What** is your current situation?" "**What** have you already tried?"
- **Options:** "**What** are all the possible options?" "**How** else could you approach this?"
- **Will:** "**What** is the first, smallest step you are willing to take?" "**How** will you hold yourself accountable to this commitment?"

By consciously adopting 'what' and 'how' questions, you aren't just following a coaching model; you're embodying a philosophy of empowerment. You're helping your clients build a life that honours their unique neurology, shifting the focus from fitting in to truly flourishing.