

Good Question – Bad Question

Making friends and getting to know people involves asking questions. But many of us are shy about asking questions, either because it feels ‘intrusive’ (i.e. nosey!), or we risk asking the wrong thing to the wrong person and causing offence.

But there’s nothing for it! If we are going to make friends *especially* in a cross-cultural setting, then we *need* to be able to ask good questions.

This exercise is designed to help us think what might be a good question – or not. It often depends on who is asking and in what way, so there are no clear right-or-wrong answers. Experience suggests that this exercise tends to give people confidence that there *are* good questions and good ways to ask them and get to know new people.

But please note: *asking* good questions is not enough. We need to be people who *listen* to the answers people give and *remember* as much as we can to demonstrate we have been listening.

The exercise

Get into groups of 4-7 people. Take the cards from the envelope and place them FACE DOWN.

Take it in turns to take the next card on the top of the pack and read it aloud to the group.

The group must imagine the person reading aloud is the person asking the question to an international student in a social setting. This is important, because some questions are fine for some people to ask but totally inappropriate for others.

Decide in the group whether the question is a good one or not – and you may choose to have an “ok” category as well.

Take your time with each question to think about why a question might to be good / not good – and make sure you have a laugh along the way!

Note to leaders: in most cases this exercise is encouraging. But often people are more wary of saying the wrong thing than they need to be, so go round the room as the activity is taking place and listen to the discussions giving encouragements and positive examples where you can. You don’t want volunteers to think that talking to international students is a minefield!

Peter Teagle, Friends International Oxford 2018

What do your parents do?	Where do you come from?
Where do you call home?	Do you support a football team?
What's your favourite hobby?	Is everyone in your country as good looking as you?
Are you from China? (the student looks Chinese)	You're from Japan? Great, I love all that kungfu stuff!
You're from Malaysia? Wow, that's so exotic and interesting!	Isn't your country ruled by a ruthless, corrupt dictator?
Do you have brothers and sisters?	What are you studying?
Tell me about your family.	Isn't British food boring?
What's your favourite colour?	Do you have a boyfriend/girlfriend?
How old are you?	Isn't it true that people eat dog in your country?
What do you think about your flatmates?	How have you found living in Britain so far?
Did you choose your own English name?	Do you have arranged marriages in your country?
Do you believe in God?	What countries have you visited?

What do you hope to do in the future?	What do you want to do after you finish studying?
Where have you visited in Britain so far?	In your home country, do you live in a flat, an apartment or a house?
I heard there was an earthquake recently in your country. How do you feel about it?	Those earrings are really pretty. Where did you get them?
What do you think about the latest Spiderman movie?	I hear that there are a lot of wars and fighting in your country. Is that true?
You have a house-maid at home?! Isn't that rather classist?	What language do you speak at home?
Have you ever visited a church?/ Is this your first time in church?	What are your hopes and dreams for the future?
You speak English very well! Where you did learn it?	(pointing at what the student is eating) Are people in your religion allowed to eat that?!
Does the Koran teach that women are less important than men?	Have you spoken to your parents recently?