

Applying Mental Health Knowledge: Inquiry

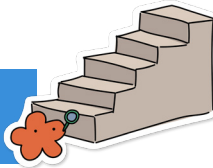
Here's a step-by-step example for how to develop your own inquiry questions.

The example is about **physical health**, specifically the topic of **low physical activity levels of young people in Canada**. You will eventually be choosing a **mental health** topic and formulating your own relevant inquiry questions.

Step-by-Step Example

Topic: Low Physical Activity Levels of Young People in Canada

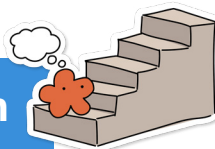
Step 1: Clarify Your Topic



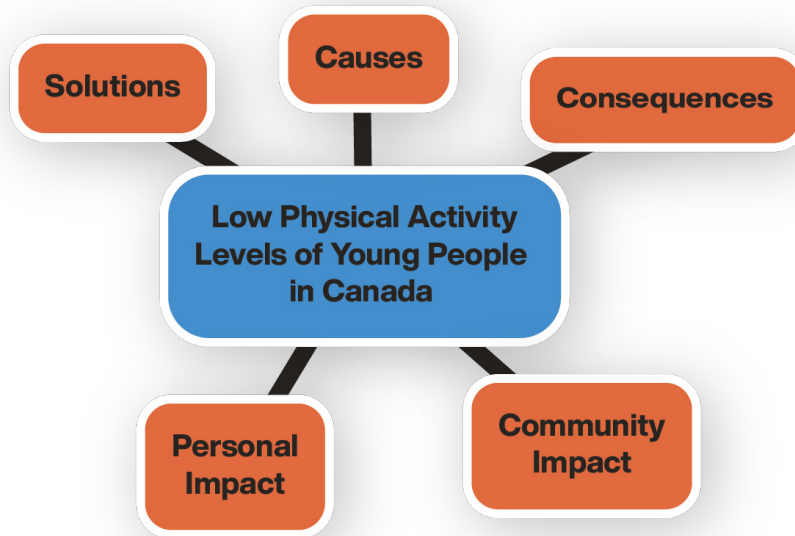
In the case of this example, the goal is to explore why young people in Canada have low physical activity levels and how this affects their health.

It is important to ask meaningful questions to guide your research, but that will come later. One step at a time!

Step 2: Brainstorming Session



Create a mind map, list, or chart to help you collect and organize your ideas. We are showing a mind map here first, but below you can see some answers listed. Use the strategy — or strategies — that work best for you!



Possible Answers:

- Causes: School workload, screen time, lack of facilities
- Consequences: Obesity, mental health issues, chronic diseases
- Personal Impact: Self-esteem, academic performance
- Community Impact: Healthcare costs, social dynamics
- Solutions: School programs, community sports, public awareness

What are some other possible answers? (Write them in the space below.)

- Causes:

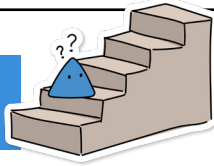
- Consequences:

- Personal Impact:

- Community Impact:

- Solutions:

Step 3: Question Development



Think aloud: “I want to know why young people are not active. One question could be, ‘What are the main barriers to physical activity for young people in Canada?’ Another could be, ‘How do school and home environments influence physical activity levels?’”

What is another question we could ask to learn more about this topic? (Write in the space below.)

Criteria for Effective Inquiry Questions

- **Open-ended Nature:** should invite detailed responses and discussion, rather than eliciting a simple yes/no or factual answer
- **Clarity and Specificity:** should be clear, precise, and free of ambiguity. It should specify exactly what aspect of the topic it is addressing
- **Complexity and Depth:** should stimulate deeper thinking and analysis, prompting the responder to consider multiple perspectives or layers of understanding
- **Exploratory:** should open pathways for exploration, allowing for a range of possible answers or discussions.

Examples:

- Ineffective: “Do young people exercise?” (Yes/No)
- Better: “What are the most significant barriers preventing young people in Canada from engaging in regular physical activity?”

The second question is open-ended, clear and specific. It is complex and deep enough that the answer requires research, analysis, and evaluation. You would need to not only determine what barriers exist, but you would also decide which barriers you think are the most significant and explain why. This will lead to a more fulsome, interesting answer.

Want more practice improving questions? Try this!

 **Student Activity: Improving Questions** →

Question Formulation Technique (QFT)

Try to remove the expectation from yourself to create “perfect” questions. Like many things in life, this is a process! Just take one step at a time.

P.I.P. → Produce, Improve, Prioritize

P: Produce Questions

- List as many questions as you can without judging or answering them.
- Example: “Why aren’t young people exercising? What role do parents play? How does school affect activity levels? What are the health consequences?”

I: Improve Questions

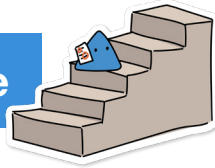
- Convert closed questions to open-ended and make them more specific.
- Example: Change “Why aren’t young people exercising?” to “What are the most significant reasons young people in Canada do not engage in regular physical activity?”

P: Prioritize Questions

- Select the most relevant and interesting questions to guide your research.
- Example: “What are the most significant barriers preventing young people in Canada from engaging in regular physical activity? How do these barriers vary between urban and rural areas?”

After this step, you will still have the chance to change and improve your questions. You’re still exploring and inquiring!

Step 4: Reflect and Revise



Reflect on Initial Questions:

- Review your questions and consider if they lead to deeper understanding.
- Example Reflection: “Do my questions help me understand both the causes and impacts of low physical activity levels? Are they specific enough?”

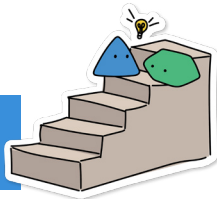
Revise Questions:

- Make adjustments to improve clarity and focus.
- Example: “How do socioeconomic factors* influence the physical activity levels of young people in Canada?”

*socioeconomic factors: social factors (e.g. education and literacy, gender, race/racism) and economic factors (e.g. income)

Source: [Social determinants of health and health inequalities - Canada.ca](#)

Step 5: Peer Review



Activity: Share and Feedback

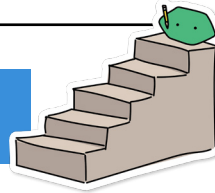
Share your questions with peers and provide feedback.

Example Feedback Prompts: “Is the question clear? Does it lead to deeper exploration? How could it be improved?”

Your teacher will provide you with time to do peer review after you have selected your topic and developed your questions.

For now, just know that you’ll have support with developing effective questions.
Teamwork!

Step 6: Refine Questions Based on Feedback



Back to our example topic. Let's say you want to know how school affects the activity level of youth.

A peer might suggest refining “How does school affect activity levels?” to “How do school policies and programs influence physical activity levels among young people in Canada?”

Here, the peer feedback focuses the question on **specific parts of school** — policies and programs — **rather than school generally**.

And that's it! Once you have refined your questions, you can start researching the answers.

Before you go, let's take one final look at our example topic and what the final guiding questions might look like.



Final Guiding Questions Example

Recall that our initial goal was to explore why young people in Canada have low physical activity levels and how this affects their health.

After following the steps above, we might end up with the following questions to guide our research.

1. Causes:

- What are the most significant barriers preventing young people in Canada from engaging in regular physical activity?
- How do school policies and programs influence physical activity levels among young people in Canada?

2. Consequences:

- What are the long-term health impacts of low physical activity levels among Canadian youth?
- How does low physical activity affect the mental health and academic performance of young people?

3. Solutions:

- What initiatives have been effective in increasing physical activity levels among young people in Canada?
- How can communities create environments that encourage physical activity among youth?

By following these steps, you can develop your own meaningful, inquiry-based questions that will drive your research and deepen your understanding of the topic you choose to inquire about.