

Questions designed to help facilitate a discussion



A classroom-style discussion is an easy way to get students engaged. A challenging question can attract their interest and get them thinking about the subject. The students' answers will give you an insight into their understanding, interests and reactions, which you can use to shape your talk in the future.

Below are a series of questions and guideline answers you can use to help you prepare for a discussion.

When you are planning a discussion, think about the age group of the students and tailor the questions accordingly. Older students are probably more interested in the routes into nursing and midwifery and what qualifications they need. Younger students are more likely to be interested in what you do day-to-day and the more practical side of your role.

To make things more interesting, you could split the class into small groups of three or four students and ask each group to discuss a different question and then feedback their key points to the whole group at the end.

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What do nurses and midwives do?

Nurses are degree-trained healthcare professionals who work as part of a multi-disciplinary team with other professionals, not always in the same place. They help to plan and provide care for adults and children with chronic or acute physical or mental health problems. They can also give people advice on staying healthy, losing weight and stopping smoking to prevent ill health or support rehabilitation.

An example of a typical day for a nurse working in a hospital is busy and diverse and can vary enormously depending on their role. Responsibilities could include:

- assessing and planning a patient's care requirements
- monitoring and administering medication
- making sure a patient's records are kept up to date at all times
- taking regular observations, such as blood pressure, temperature and heart rate and monitoring any changes to a patient's state
- responding quickly when a patient's health starts to deteriorate
- communicating with the wider team of professionals
- offering advice and support to families

Midwives are trained healthcare professionals who are the main providers of care for women throughout pregnancy, during labour and in the first few days of new babies' lives. They work as part of a multi-disciplinary team with other healthcare professionals, such as obstetricians, GPs, other midwives, health visitors and neonatal nurses. Midwives help women to make their own decisions about the care and services they access and will provide health education and parenting advice until care is transferred to a health visitor.

Being a midwife is a demanding and unique role. They are responsible for creating and sustaining a positive relationship with the pregnant woman and her partner, to help her to have the best possible experience of birth.

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Where do nurses and midwives work?

When you first train as a **nurse**, you'll need to study for one of the four fields of nursing:

- mental health
- learning disabilities
- children's nursing
- adult nursing

Some universities now provide combined courses, for example adult nursing and mental health.

Once you have qualified as a registered nurse you can choose to work in many different settings including:

- a care home
- a GP practice or medical centre
- in research
- in the community
- in a school
- a hospital

In all these settings, nurses make a real difference to the lives of people of all ages and backgrounds, every day.

Midwives tend to work either in a hospital or the community.

Hospital midwives are midwives who are based in a hospital obstetric or consultant unit, or a birth centre. Midwives also work in hospitals' antenatal clinics, labour wards and postnatal wards.

Community midwives work in women's homes, local clinics, children's centres and GP surgeries. Once a baby is born, they'll visit mothers at home for up to ten days afterwards. Community midwives also provide postnatal care for women who have been looked after during labour by hospital midwives.

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How do you get into nursing or midwifery?

Most people qualify to be a registered **nurse** or **midwife** by studying a three-year degree in nursing or midwifery. All degrees involve both academic study and practical hands-on experience with patients in hospital and community settings.

Entry requirements for nursing or midwifery degree courses vary. Universities set their own entry criteria, but to apply for a **degree in nursing or midwifery** you'll generally need to have:

- Two or three A-levels (science or a health subject is advised)
- OR equivalent BTEC level-3 qualifications
- PLUS five supporting GCSEs, grades 4–9 in English, maths and a science

Some people train to be a nurse and then decide to complete further training to be a midwife.

Another way to become a **nurse** is through a nursing degree apprenticeship. Degree apprenticeships combine working with studying part-time at university, typically over four years. To apply for a **nursing degree apprenticeship**, you will need:

- Two or three A-levels (science or a health subject is advised)
- OR equivalent BTEC level-3 qualifications
- PLUS two supporting GCSEs in English and maths at grades 4–9

At the moment it's not possible to train directly as a midwife through an apprenticeship, although similar degree apprenticeships for midwifery are being explored.

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What kind of skills do you need to become a nurse or midwife?

Nurses and midwives need a wide range of skills. Here are five skills that are vital to be a successful nurse or midwife.

Listening and communication

Nurses and midwives are a central point of communication within healthcare. They convey and interpret information between doctors, other nurses and midwives, therapists, family members and patients. So as a nurse or midwife, having the ability to listen and establish effective communication is essential to provide the best possible care for patients.

Teamwork

Nurses and midwives both work as part of a team with a whole range of other professionals. They may work with doctors, health visitors, therapists, GPs, other nurses and midwives, and social workers. Each professional has a different role to play in caring for a patient. So a nurse or midwife must work effectively with everyone to give the best possible care to a patient.

Attention to detail

To make sure every patient gets the right care and mistakes are avoided, accuracy is crucial. It's really important that:

- instructions are followed precisely
- medicine is administered correctly
- each patient's records are kept up to date with clear and accurate information
- ensure effective handovers are made with other healthcare professionals, for example from an ambulance team, or from a ward to a discharge team

Having good attention to detail means nurses and midwives can also notice subtle changes in a patient's medical condition, which can then be dealt with appropriately.

Problem solving

Nurses and midwives are required to adapt and respond quickly when things change or problems arise. They must be able to use critical thinking to aid their decision-making. For example, if a patient starts to suddenly deteriorate, a nurse or midwife needs to be able to respond by quickly assessing what's going on, looking at and interpreting the evidence and then determining and prioritising the best course of action. This can sometimes make the difference between life and death.

Compassion

To be a good nurse or midwife, it's essential you have compassion. You'll work with a variety of people of all different ages and backgrounds, from babies and teenagers to frail elderly people. Every single patient needs their beliefs to be considered and their dignity protected at all times. A patient and their family should be able to trust a nurse or midwife to provide a high level of care both emotionally and mentally and not to be judgemental.

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Reflection

It is important for lifelong learning, and to assist meeting revalidation requirements, that you try to capture what you have learned from any educational initiative that you have undertaken. Reflection is a conscious effort to think about an activity or incident that allows us to consider what was positive or challenging and if appropriate plan how it might be enhanced, improved or done differently in the future.

What type of people do nurses and midwives care for?

Nurses work with a variety of people of all ages and backgrounds. Everyone from tiny babies, children and teenagers to very old people. They care for people with chronic (long-term) illness and those with acute (sudden or short-term) conditions. Their patients' problems could be physical or mental. They also help people who need advice on things like staying healthy, losing weight and stopping smoking. Nurses will give advice and support to a patient's family too.

Once you are qualified as a registered nurse, you can choose to progress your career in many different ways. Some nurses will choose to specialise and work only with particular types of people, such as newborn babies, the elderly or people with specific medical conditions, such as cancer, diabetes, kidney disease or musculoskeletal ailments.

Midwives care for women who are having babies, throughout their pregnancy, during labour and in the first few days of their new baby's life. They are responsible for creating a good relationship with the pregnant woman and her partner, to help them to have the best possible birth experience.

What are the career development opportunities?

After qualifying as a **nurse** or **midwife** and gaining some clinical experience, there are lots of different ways you could choose to develop your career.

As a nurse, you could decide to become a specialist in a certain area, such as anaesthetic, intensive care, or even a specific health condition. For midwives it could be areas like parenting education, intensive care neonatal units, and ultrasound and foetal medicine.

Some nurses and midwives decide to move into teaching or research within a healthcare setting or university. Others might decide to take a management role, dividing time between working directly with patients, training, managing a team and leading improvements in practice. Or you could decide to move into a more influential role in higher management, such as head of nursing or midwifery or director of midwifery or nursing services, or even chief executive.

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What are the best/most interesting things about being a nurse or midwife?

No two days are ever the same! You work with different people, of all ages and backgrounds, and every patient has different needs. So the job is always interesting and you're continuously learning new things.

Your patients will inspire you. When you spend time with patients, you develop a relationship with them. And you'll find that many of them will inspire you with their strength, their optimism and their willingness to fight against the odds.

You'll make a difference to people's lives every day. You'll play a significant role in promoting health and preventing disease, alleviating pain and suffering, and advocating for individuals, families and communities.

You're one of the most trusted professionals. Trusting relationships are absolutely essential in healthcare. In a healthcare team, nurses are the ones who spend the most time with the patient. Patients know that when they call for help, it is their nurse who is always the first to respond.

You'll never need to worry about being out of work. Nurses and midwives will always be needed. At the moment there are 40,000 nursing vacancies across England. Students in other subjects sometimes struggle to find a job when they graduate from university.

You can change your career path if you want to. The medical field is huge and there are so many different areas you can move into. Lots of nurses and midwives do go from one type of medicine to another, or experience different settings, until they find the place they like the best.

And you'll have lots of opportunities to progress your career. Once you've qualified, you could work towards becoming a specialist in a certain area or go into teaching or research. Once you've got more experience, you could take a leadership role, managing a team and leading improvements, or even a higher management role such as head of nursing or midwifery.

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What are the hardest parts of the job?

The long hours. Not every nurse or midwife works 12-hour shifts, but it's fairly common and those 12 hours are pretty much non-stop, a lot of the time on your feet, so it can be pretty tiring.

Challenging environments. As a nurse or midwife, you work under a lot of pressure, coping with death, long hours, managing difficult patients and hazardous materials such as contaminated needles. The job requires constant attention to detail and looking after others without much downtime. But some people find that a little stress can be a motivator, making the work days go by fast and full of purpose.

Coping with death. You spend a lot of your time building relationships with patients and their families, so when someone dies it's really hard. But you learn to accept that it's part of your job, while developing ways to deal with it. And when someone leaves the world, you know you did your very best for them.

Separating your home life from your work life. As a nurse or midwife, you build an emotional attachment with your patients and sometimes you have to make really difficult decisions that can impact a patient's outcome. So when you finish a shift, it's not always easy to switch off. But over time, you find your own individual way to deal with it.

Tip

If you get asked a question about how much a nurse or midwife earns, it's probably better to avoid a discussion and just provide a direct and honest answer. For example: the pay system for a nurse or midwife is based on bands from 5 to 9. Within each band there are also a number of different pay points. As a newly qualified nurse or midwife you would start at band 5 on a salary around £23,023. However, once you have gained some clinical experience and if you're ambitious, there are lots of different ways you can then choose to develop to quickly move up the salary scale.