

Socratic Questioning: Review

Socratic Questions: What are they, and what do we use them for?

A cognitive therapy technique in which the therapist asks leading questions to assist the patient in challenging the accuracy of his/her thinking and rectifying inaccurate thought patterns in a way that alleviates psychological distress.¹ *It is believed that when individuals come to their own conclusions (as opposed to being told by someone else), the change that results is likely to be more meaningful and lasting.*²

For specific types of Socratic Questions and examples, see information on next page.

Examples and Advice:

There are two components in the TF-CBT model where Socratic Questioning can be effective, but the strategy is used differently in each component.

1. **Psycho-education-** use Socratic questioning as a main tool/skill throughout psycho-ed. As a clinician you are asking questions about children and trauma in general, thereby taking the focus off of the client and their trauma. Socratic questioning is effective in gathering information about what facts the client has related to the trauma and what beliefs the client holds. It can also be a useful way to judiciously provide key pieces of factual information that may call certain unhelpful cognitions into question. . Reminder: Do not spoon feed facts! Using Socratic questioning, find out what the client believes to be true about their trauma. Use it to assess the facts they have (accurate/inaccurate), and how they view their trauma, the world, and what they have experienced.
 - Examples: Sexual Abuse
 - What do you think sexual abuse is?
 - And how do other kids feel when they were abused?
 - How do you think they acted after?
 - How do perpetrators not get caught and get the kids to keep secret?
 - Examples: Physical Abuse
 - Do you think all kids get hit?
 - Are there other ways to discipline kids?
 - Are there other ways parents can show they care without hitting.
 - So, only bad kids get hit?
 - Do kids ever get hit even when they're not being bad?
2. **Trauma Processing-** Socratic questioning is also useful during Trauma Processing. Once the client writes their trauma narrative, the clinician can use Socratic questioning to shift the client into a more positive way of thinking about and making meaning of their trauma experiences.

Important Question: How does the youth see their trauma in regards to the rest of their whole life?

**** Socratic Questioning might be one of the hardest techniques in the model****

Donna's Advice: practice Socratic Questioning with each other!

¹ Cognitive Processing Therapy Manual (p.A3).

<http://depts.washington.edu/hcsats/PDF/research/Cognitive%20Processing%20Therapy%20Manual%2008.08.pdf>

² The Beck Initiative's Web-Based Training in Cognitive Therapy <http://thebeckinitiative.org/index.aspx> .

<http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:PiGiCDpvCBKJ:thebeckinitiative.org/additionalMaterials/Socratic%2520Questioning-short%2520version.doc+&cd=1&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us>

Types of Socratic Questions

Six categories of Socratic questioning:¹

- *Clarification* - “Tell me more” questions which help patients examine their beliefs/assumptions on a deeper level and provide information necessary for the therapist to fully understand the situation.
 - *Probing assumptions* – “Why” and “How” questions designed to challenge patients’ presuppositions and unquestioned beliefs.
 - *Probing reasons and evidence* – Questions that assist patients in looking at the actual evidence behind their beliefs. This is a similar process to probing assumptions.
 - *Questioning viewpoints and perspectives* – Challenging patients’ position through asking questions about alternative viewpoints and perspectives.
 - *Analyzing implications and consequences* – Questions that help the patient examine the potential outcomes of his/her beliefs to see if they are desirable or even make sense.
 - *Questions about the question* – A technique of responding when the therapist is directly questioned by the patient. Instead of providing an answer to the question, the therapist responds with another question that returns the focus back on the patient.
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Examples of Socratic Questions

* *Note: This information is taken from the University of Wollongong Clinical Psychology Program*
(http://gandalwaven.typepad.com/intheroom/socratic_questioning/)

Clarifying questions

- What do you mean by _____?
- What is your main point?
- How does _____ relate to _____?
- Could you put that another way?
- Let me see if I understand you; do you mean _____ or _____?
- Could you give me an example?
- Could you explain that further?
- Could you expand upon that?

Assumption questions

- What are you assuming?
- What could we assume instead?
- You seem to be assuming _____.
- Do I understand you correctly? You seem to be assuming _____.
- How would you justify taking this for granted?
- Is it always the case?
- Why do you think the assumption holds here?
- Why would someone make this assumption?

Reason and evidence questions

- How do you know?

¹ Cognitive Processing Therapy Manual (p.A3).

<http://depts.washington.edu/hcsats/PDF/research/Cognitive%20Processing%20Therapy%20Manual%208.08.pdf>

- Why do you think that is true?
- Do you have any evidence for that? What difference does that make?
- What are your reasons for saying that?
- Can you explain how you logically got from ____ to ____?
- Do you see any difficulties with your reasoning here?
- What would change your mind?
- What would you say to someone who said ____?
- Can someone else give evidence to support that response?
- By what reasoning did you come to that conclusion?
- How could we find out whether that is true?

Origin and sources questions

- Where did you learn this?
- Do your friends or family feel the same way?
- Have you always felt this way?
- What caused you to feel this way?
- Did you originate this idea or get it from someone else?

Implication and consequences questions

- What are you implying by that?
- When you say ____, are you implying ____?
- But if that happened, what else would happen as a result? Why?
- What effect would that have?
- Would that necessarily happen or only probably happen?
- What is the probability of this result?
- What is an alternative?
- If this and this are the case, then what else must also be true?

Viewpoint and perspective questions

- You seem to be approaching this issue from ____ perspective.
- Why have you chosen this rather than that perspective?
- How would other groups/types of people respond? Why?
- What would influence them?
- How could you answer the objection that ____ would make?
- What might someone who believed ____ think?
- Can/did anyone see this another way?
- What would someone who disagrees say?
- What is an alternative?

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¹ Cognitive Processing Therapy Manual (p.A3).

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