

Socratic Dialogue

REVIEW AND RESOURCES HANDOUT

Types of Socratic questions, objectives, and examples to use
for building better sessions



Clarifying Questions

OBJECTIVES

- To understand a client's experience and views
- To determine the content and/or quality of something in a client's experience
- To inquire about the meaning of words
- To identify context of events

EXAMPLES

- What do you mean when you say _____?
- Please say more about that.
- What is an example of that?
- How might you describe what _____ is like for you?
- Can you rephrase that please?



WHY

Probing Assumptions

OBJECTIVES

- To facilitate understanding of why a client believes what they believe
- To question the foundation on which clients' conclusions are made

EXAMPLES

- Help me understand how you've come to that conclusion.
- What is the basis of this idea?
- Please walk me through why you think that.
- How is it that this idea makes sense for you?
- How could we verify or disprove this idea?
- What information are you using to support this idea?



WHY

Examining Real Evidence

OBJECTIVES

- To evaluate the validity upon which a client's conclusions are made
- To help clients evaluate evidence/information that may or may not support their conclusions

EXAMPLES

- Why is it that _____?
- How do we know that's completely true?
- Might there be other reasons why _____?
- What evidence is there to support what you're saying?



WHY

Viewpoints and Perspectives

OBJECTIVES

- To better understand where clients stand
- To facilitate broadening the scope of a viewpoint
- To consider alternatives together

EXAMPLES

- What might be an alternative here?
- What might we not be considering here?
- What might be other relevant factors that are not being taken into account?
- What might be another way to approach this?



WHY

Deeper Meaning / Objectives

OBJECTIVES

- To help clarify essence of what a client believes about themselves, others, and the world
- Can provide information about a client's values and why they hold those values

EXAMPLES

- What do you take that to mean about you?
- What do you take that to mean about other people?
- What do you take that to mean about the world?
- What do you take this to mean about what is truly important to you?



WHY

Questions About Questions

OBJECTIVES

- To gain a better understanding of a client's motivation when asking a question
- To understand (and help the client understand) the intended function of a question they posed

EXAMPLES

- What were your reasons for asking that question?
- What, if anything, were you hoping I would say when you asked that question?
- Why do you think you asked this question?
- What were you hoping would come out of asking that question?
- What were you hoping to understand/learn by asking that question?



WHY

RECOMMENDED READINGS

Overholser, J. (2018). *The Socratic method of psychotherapy*. Columbia University Press.

Overholser, J. C., & Beale, E. (2023). The art and science behind Socratic questioning and guided discovery: A research review. *Psychotherapy Research: 33* (7), 946–956. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10503307.2023.2183154>

Padesky, C.A. (1993). *Socratic questioning: Changing minds or guiding discovery?* Keynote address by European Congress of Behavioural and Cognitive Therapies, London, September 24, 1993. (Available online: <http://padesky.com/newpad/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/socquest.pdf>)

Paul, R., & Elder, L. (2006). *The art of Socratic questioning*. Foundation for Critical Thinking.

Waltman, S.H., Codd, T., McFarr, L.M., & Moore, B.A. (2021). *Socratic questioning for therapists and counselors: Learn how to think and intervene like a cognitive behavioral therapist*. Routledge.