

ADOPTING A STYLE – Guided Discovery & Socratic Dialogue

Guided Discovery

The aim of guided discovery is to be genuinely interested in understanding your client's struggle with their problem and to develop an empathic, collaborative professional relationship. It involves teaching the client a process of evaluating his/her goals, thoughts, behaviours, moods and physiological reactions so that s/he can learn methods of improving his/her life and making adaptive choices for many years to come, rather than persuading him/her to adopt a particular point of view (Beck & Young 1985).

Padesky (1993: 17-19) outlines the process of guided discovery as having four key steps:

1. Ask concrete, structured information gathering questions: Can you give me a specific example? Who? What? Where? When? How did you feel? What did you do? How is this a problem for you? What have you done in the past? What would you tell a friend?
2. Listen reflectively & remain open to discovering the unexpected. Be empathic. Listen for idiosyncratic words and images, to the client's metaphors, and recreate in your mind, their imagery. Notice key ideas and related beliefs. Identify the client's strengths as well as weaknesses. Try to attend to what the client doesn't say. Be truly curious!
3. Summarise every few minutes & give feedback. State the initial thought / belief and then give a concise summary of key information obtained so far. It is very useful to take notes and then to show a written summary to the client, or in fact write a summary together. Feedback does NOT mean giving your interpretation.

Examples: 'So if I understand you correctly.....'; 'and when you do X, you feel Y – is that correct?'; 'You seem to be struggling at the moment.....'

4. Asking synthesising or analytical questions, which encourage either the development and expansion of an idea or theme (synthesising) or the refinement of key information (analysing).

'How does all this information fit with your idea that.....?'

'So what do you make of that?'

'In light of these experiences, what do you think will help?'

'What would you tell a friend who had told you all these things?'

Socratic Dialogue

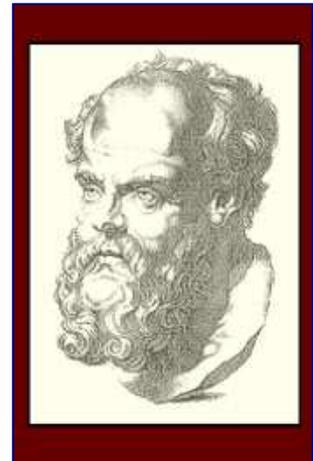
Questioning is one of the ways of promoting cognitive change. It is important when introducing the client to the questioning technique to remain neutral when exploring the evidence for and against a thought. Your role as therapist or helper is thus to craft 'a series of questions to first understand the client's conclusions and then open those conclusions to include other possible alternatives... to help clients to evaluate and provide answers to their own thoughts' (Weishaar 1993: 81), rather than providing direct answers. This type of questioning or challenging is often referred to as Socratic dialogue – *see below*. As a result, the client is less likely to feel defensive or required to agree with the therapist / helper, and more likely to express additional thoughts, fears and feelings.

Giving direct answers is unlikely to help the client to acquire any new self-help coping skills in disputing unhelpful thoughts. Your role is thus to facilitate the client in arriving at his / her own challenging statements. This is best achieved by asking 'how' and 'what' questions, rather than 'why' questions. The latter will often lead to the client struggling and becoming stuck. It is important to emphasise to the client that this technique requires considerable and consistent practice, which may be enhanced by introducing the client to the use of a written thought diary / record.

Socratic dialogue is characterised by adopting a non-judgemental, flexible and curious style, being very interested in understanding the client's viewpoint, rather than attempting to manipulate, trap or expose the client's thoughts as false, or giving advice or instructions (Weishaar 1993). For this, the therapist / helper will need to adopt a negotiating and collaborative style in working with the client, emphasising team-work in finding the best ways and questions of effectively examining and challenging unhelpful thoughts. A number of useful question guides are available which may assist the client in effectively challenging unhelpful thoughts.

about Socrates – the influential Greek Philosopher

Born in Athens (470 – 399 BC), Socrates was a rationalist with an unshakable faith in human reason. He profoundly altered Western philosophical thought through his influence on his most famous pupil, Plato, who passed on Socrates' teachings in his dialectical writings. A master in the art of discourse, Socrates taught that every person has full knowledge of ultimate truth contained within the soul and needs only to be spurred to conscious reflection to become aware of it. Unfortunately, his criticism of injustice in Athenian society led to his prosecution and a death sentence for allegedly corrupting the youth of Athens.



He spent most of his life in the city squares and market places of Athens talking to people he met there. His essential nature was not to instruct people but to learn from those he spoke with – he therefore discussed issues by asking questions as if he knew nothing. In the course of discussion, he would therefore use questions to assist others to reach their own conclusions, and solutions for their problems.



Interestingly, his mother was a midwife whose role was to help others in the delivery of the child – similarly, he saw his task as helping people to 'give birth' to the correct insight, since real understanding must come from within and cannot be imparted from someone else. He believed that only that understanding which comes from within can lead to true insight.

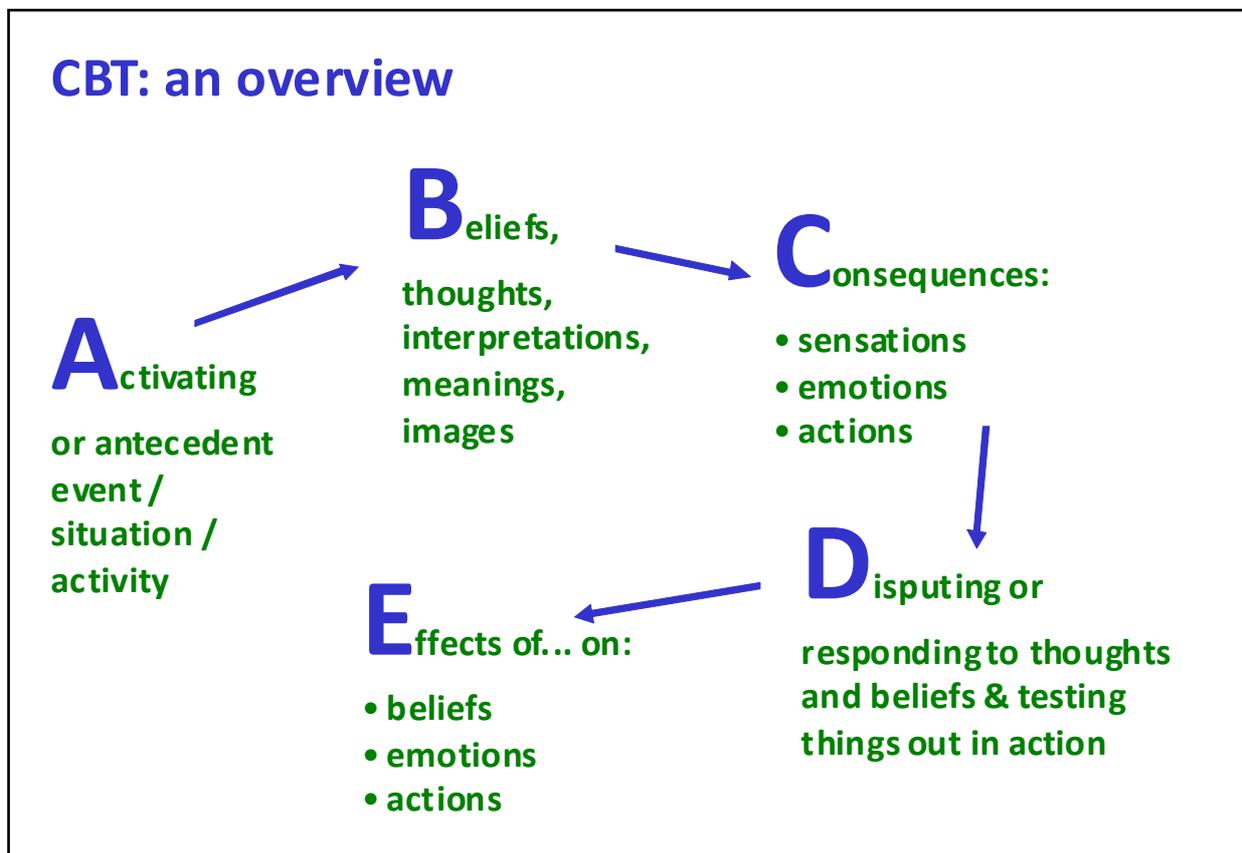
So, Socratic dialogue involves *working collaboratively with the client to assist him/her to make a meaningful realistic interpretation / new realisations.*

Summary:

Socratic Questioning, which incorporates guided discovery (Padesky 1993: 13) involves asking the client questions which:

- *the client has the knowledge to answer,*
- *draws the client’s attention to information which is relevant to the issue being discussed but which may be outside the client’s current focus,*
- *generally moves from the abstract to the concrete, so that*
- *the client can, in the end, apply the new information to either re-evaluate a previous conclusion or construct a new idea.*

an overview of this strategy of *disputing* is summarised in the following diagram:



Evaluating & Responding to Unhelpful Thoughts

Once the person has managed to identify a key or 'hot' unhelpful thought (*a thought which seems to be most directly linked to the client's most significant emotions*), the next step is to practice responding to or evaluating the thought. This can be carried out by introducing the client to a number of cognitive interventions as a basic skills training exercise, which may include:

- **developing *alternative statements***: *Is there a more helpful way of looking at this?*
- ***de-centering***: *taking a step back in viewing cognitions as mental events rather than as expressions of reality – so stand back, observe, recognise the thought as an opinion rather than a fact, & label the thinking process rather than dwell on the content* (Westbrook, Kennerley & Kirk 2007: 116)
- ***role reversal technique***: *What would you say to a friend who was describing this to you? Would this be helpful? What could you say to yourself that would be helpful?*
- ***evidential technique***: *What leads you to think this?*
- ***hypothesis testing***: *Is there a way of checking it out?*
- ***re-attribution***: *Challenge your tendency to relate external events to yourself, shifting the blame to where it is due*
- **using *analogies* or metaphors to reinforce your challenge**
- **using *cue-cards***: *Pre-prepare by writing out more helpful statements onto cue cards, to help when you most need them*

Using the Evidential Technique: the daily thought record

Many people find it helpful to use the A-B-C method as a basic structure for keeping a diary to monitor their thoughts and feelings, and to learn how to review and respond to unhelpful thoughts. *An example of a diary (part 1) is shown on the following pages.* Greenberger & Padesky (1995) provide detailed guidance on the use of thought diaries.

Balancing Unhelpful Thoughts

Once you have managed to identify a key or 'hot' unhelpful / troublesome thought, the next step is to practice re-appraising, re-evaluating or responding to the thought. As you cannot possibly work on every thought you have, you will need to be selective about which thoughts to work on.

Evaluating and responding to unhelpful thoughts may be helped by considering some key questions – *for example*:

- *Is there a more helpful way of looking at this situation & what happened?*
- *If a good friend was describing this situation to me, what would I say to them? Would this be helpful? What can I therefore say to myself that would be helpful?*
- *What leads me to think what I'm thinking about? Is there any real evidence to support what I'm thinking about? Is there any evidence against what I'm thinking?*

Guide lists of helpful questions are also available as resource sheets to support the practice of a self-questioning technique. An *example*, based on some of the question guides produced in the literature (after: Blackburn 1987; Curwen, Palmer & Ruddell 2000) is shown on the following pages – *this has been written in the first person*.

This process of evaluating and responding to unhelpful is a skill which may take considerable practice, and is best practiced by keeping a second part to your diary – *an example of a diary is shown on the following pages*.

Practice!

It is important to realise that: practising this process of balancing unhelpful thoughts will not make you feel any worse and initially may not make you feel any better – however, the more helpful messages you give yourself, then the more you'll be able to balance your thoughts & the better you'll feel. With continued practice, you will become skilled in effectively and more automatically balancing up your unhelpful thoughts as they occur.

John Butler – Consultant Nurse
PSI Resources: brief description of key interventions
2007

PART 1: Monitoring Thoughts & Feelings: *using a diary*

Date / Time	Situation / Activity	How did you feel? Try to describe this in one or two words. Rate how intense this was at the time: 0 – 100	What was going through your mind at the time? What were you saying to yourself? Rate how strongly you believed this at the time: 0 – 100	What did you do to manage or cope? Rate how useful this was: 0 – 100 Can you identify anything else that might have been useful?

PART 2: Balancing Unhelpful Thoughts: *using a diary* (adapted from: Greenberger & Padesky 1995)

Identify the 'hot' or troublesome thought: _____

<p>List the factual evidence that supports the hot thought.</p>	<p>List the evidence that does NOT support the hot thought. <i>Try using the questions at the bottom of this sheet.</i></p>	<p>Write an alternative or balanced thought. Rate how strongly you believe each alternative or balanced thought: 0 – 100</p>	<p>What was the effect of working through this process? Re-rate your initial feeling: 0 – 100 Re-rate how strongly you now believe your initial thoughts: 0 – 100 How do you feel now?</p>

Examples of questions to help find evidence that does NOT support the 'hot' thought:
 Have I had any experiences that show that this thought is not completely true all the time? If my best friend or someone I care about had this thought, what would I say to them? If my best friend knew I was thinking this way, what would they say to me? What evidence would they point out to suggest that my thoughts were not 100% true? What has actually happened in similar situations before? Are there any small things that contradict my thoughts that I might be discounting as not important? Am I jumping to conclusions?

Practising Self Questioning

No.	Questions to consider
1	Am I assuming that my view / initial thoughts about the situation is the only one possible? What alternative explanations are there? What would be a more helpful / more likely explanation?
2	Am I confusing what is actually a thought with what are facts? What do I actually know?
3	What is the evidence for my thought / belief? What is the evidence against it?
4	Is my thought / belief reasonable / realistic?
5	Would my friends and colleagues agree with my idea? Does everybody share my attitude? If not, then what would others say about it?
6	If a family-member, friend or colleague was describing this to me, what would I say to them? Would this be helpful? If not, what else could I say that would be helpful?
7	Am I expecting myself or others to be perfect? Is this realistic / achievable?
8	Am I using a double standard e.g. one for myself and another for others? If a friend made a similar mistake, would I be so critical?
9	What makes the situation so terrible, awful or horrible? How would it compare to other events?
10	Am I blowing things up out of all proportion? Am I exaggerating the importance of this problem? Is it likely that this will seem important or bad in one, three, six months or in two years time?
11	Am I jumping to quick conclusions, like mind-reading or thinking that worst possible will happen? What do I actually know? How could I check things out?
12	Am I anticipating or over-estimating the chances of disaster, or of things going wrong? What is most likely to happen? Is it really likely that I'll fall apart?
13	Am I concentrating on my weaknesses and forgetting my strengths? What are my strengths?
14	Am I agonising about how things should be instead of dealing with them as they are?
15	What are the advantages and disadvantages of thinking this way? Where is this thought or attitude getting me?
16	Am I focused on my goal and trying to solve the problem?
17	Am I thinking in all-or-nothing, black and white, terms? Am I paying attention only to the black side of things? Is there any middle ground?
18	Am I labelling myself, somebody or something else? Is this really a fair thing to do?
19	Am I setting rules for myself or others (e.g. musts, shoulds)? If so, is this helpful and constructive? Do I need to be more relaxed about these rules?
20	Am I using ultimatum words in my thinking? How could I rephrase this in a helpful way?
21	Am I taking things too personally or blaming others unfairly? Am I therefore being fair on myself?
22	Am I asking questions that have no answers, instead of focusing on what I need to do to cope or manage things? Am I assuming that I can do nothing to change my situation? How can I check things out? Is there something I could do in trying things out?

Highlight the questions which work best for you.