Why Socrates?

Socratic method (SM) is a useful technique in many forms of therapy, and is especially influential on the cognitive therapies of Beck and Ellis.

Viewed today as a form of cooperation and exploration that helps clients:
- Recognize knowledge deficits
- Increase their desire to learn
- Motivate clients to find answers to their problems

Elements of the Socratic Method

I. Systematic Questioning
II. Inductive Reasoning
III. Universal Questioning
IV. Disavowal of Knowledge
V. Self-improvement
VI. Promoting Virtue in Everyday Life
**SYSTEMATIC QUESTIONING**

Involves the use of graded questions to facilitate independent thinking

Involves client and therapist actively collaborating

Can be used to shape client’s thought processes

Can be described according to format, content, and process of questioning

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**QUESTION FORMAT**

Seven primary types of questions

Most likely to rely on analysis, synthesis, and evaluation

Memory

Recall or recognition of information

“When did the problem first begin?”

Translation

Change information into a different but parallel format

“What does it mean to you?” or “How can we make sense of this?”

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**QUESTION FORMAT**

Interpretation

Discover relationships among things

“How are these two situations similar / different?”

Application

Apply information or skills to specific problem situation

“What have you tried to correct this problem?”

Analysis

Solve a problem by breaking it down

“What do you think is causing the problem?” or “Are there things that make it worse / better?”
**QUESTION FORMAT**

**Synthesis**
- Encourage use of creative/divergent thinking
  - “What other ways could you look at this situation?”

**Evaluation**
- Make a value judgment according to specified standards
  - “What does it mean to you to be a success?”

**QUESTION CONTENT**

Designed to foster independent, rational problem-solving in clients

Integration with the problem-solving approach is useful and can help guide which format of question to use

**Question Content**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question Content</th>
<th>Memory</th>
<th>Application</th>
<th>Analysis</th>
<th>Synthesis</th>
<th>Evaluation</th>
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++ = Minor role, ++ = Moderate role, +++ = Major role
QUESTIONING PROCESS

A series of questions, or temporal process, is involved in the Socratic method

Five elements
- Leading question
- Explication
- Defense
- Sequential progression
- Use of short sequences

LEADING QUESTIONS

Focus client’s attention on specific area, but don’t push them towards a specific answer

Provide structure, but don’t bias response
  “Is that a good sign or a bad sign?”

Force the client to think, rather than just answer a question

EXPICATION

Occurs when client hasn’t understood leading question
  Makes all assumptions explicit in order to test them
  “Could you have done anything else?” instead of “What else could you have done?”

Should not be used often, as it implies therapist does not understand the level of the client
DEFENSE

Follows explication, makes clients defend their view

May rephrase original question, or ask why questions

“Why do you think so?”

Helps client reason through a problem to its solution

SEQUENTIAL PROGRESSION

Second leading question helps to carry the discussion closer to its goal

Shaping process that is like helping someone with a puzzle

Use Socratic questioning when necessary, not exclusively!

INDUCTIVE REASONING

Helps client draw general inferences from specific events

Allows transcendence of personal experiences and broader view of reality

Helps clients distinguish between facts, beliefs, and opinions
Enumerative Generalizations

Identifying a general category that applies to all members of a group based on experience with only some group members.

Clients often do this inaccurately, especially in relation to themselves.

Think Beck’s negative cognitive triad.

Have the client and therapist identify maladaptive patterns in their life and then use different coping strategies.

Three step process where you:

1. Critically evaluate the client’s generalization.
2. Use pattern identification to revise the generalization.
3. Test the new generalization.

Analogical Comparisons

Build on enumerations, but infer from one sample to another sample.

Compares two objects / events / people based on relevant (but not obvious) similarities.

Indicates other similarities not yet identified.

Purpose is to allow client to view new, novel situations in relation to familiar ones.
**ANALOGICAL COMPARISONS**

In therapy, this translates as therapist having client draw parallels between current problem and past, solved problem.

Focus is on transfer of knowledge / coping skills to new situations or events.

**ELIMINATIVE CAUSAL REASONING**

Involves examining the occurrences of an effect under a variety of circumstances, or making proper attributions.

Helps clients understand, predict, and control their behavior.

Lays foundation for treatment planning, since if a cause is understood, it may be changed.

**ELIMINATIVE CAUSAL REASONING**

Builds on enumeration’s generalizations.

In therapy, this involves the systematic observation of problems, hypothesis formation, and hypothesis testing.

Basis for Beck’s “collaborative empiricism” and Ellis’ “logical thinking.”
Universal Definitions

Describe the properties that are sufficient to capture the essence of a concept

Helps clients evaluate the appropriateness of the terms they use and the generalizations they make

Important because language influences our thoughts, perceptions, descriptions, and understanding of the world

Universal Definitions

Confronting and modifying the labels clients have for something can change their perception of that thing

What is a "horrible job" or a "good marriage"?

When is something a "catastrophe" versus a "problem"?

Universal Definitions

When clients use a new term, make them define it for you, then critically evaluate it

Work together to find limits or confusion to the client’s definition

Build a new, shared definition that is more appropriate and logical

Helps make communication more clear, as well as challenge irrational beliefs and thoughts
**Disavowal of Knowledge**

General attitude in, rather than a specific method of, the Socratic method

The tendency to remain skeptical of what knowledge should be viewed as objective

Views cognitive processes as based on tentative beliefs and opinions

For the client, this reduces faith in unsupported beliefs, stimulates a desire to learn, and enhances critical thinking skills

For therapists, this means viewing their own beliefs as hypotheses, not assuming that they know all the answers or solutions

Involves intellectual modesty, desire for knowledge, and collaborative empiricism

**Other Elements**

Self-improvement is the key outcome of the Socratic method, whether in teaching or therapy

Different specific virtues (e.g., wisdom, courage) are also encouraged by this method
**Therapeutic Socratic Outline**

1. Elicit and identify automatic thoughts
2. Tie the thought to feelings and behavior
3. Link the T-F-B sequence together
4. Obtain collaboration on steps 1-3
5. Socratically test the belief using the described methods

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**Homework in CBT**
**Why?**

Between-session activities cause both consolidation and generalization of skills learned in session.

Allows a continuation of therapy outside of the treatment setting.

Assists clients in eventually becoming their own therapist.

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**How?**

1. Create a meaningful homework assignment
2. Set up the assignment and secure compliance with it
3. Review the assignment

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**Creating Homework**

Meaningful assignments help communicate that the therapist understands the client.

Clients learn to trust therapists and gain confidence in the treatment.

Following certain guidelines ensures the creation of meaningful homework.
Guidelines

1. Provide clear rationales linked to client’s treatment goals
   - If a client understands the reason for homework, they are more likely to do it
   - Refer back to what the client hopes to achieve when assigning homework
   - Encourage the client to offer a rationale for homework
   - Use analogies to make homework more concrete

Guidelines

2. Make homework relevant to the focus of the therapy session
   - Summarize the session focus
   - Link session focus to previous sessions
   - Link session focus to homework
   - Link homework to treatment goals

Guidelines

3. Make homework acceptable to both client and therapist
   - Improves therapeutic alliance
   - Increases odds of client completing homework
   - Always check if homework is acceptable to client and others involved in the homework
GUIDELINES

4. Make homework socially and culturally appropriate
   - Keep in mind a person’s ethnic background, financial situations, social skills, spirituality, and any other factors that might impact homework completion

SETTING UP HOMEWORK

Properly setting up assignments will help get homework off to a good start and prevent many typical problems

Working collaboratively in making the assignment can prevent noncompliance
   - Allow them to know they can veto an assignment

Set up assignments as a “no-lose proposition”

SETTING UP HOMEWORK

Be as specific and concrete with assignments as possible – have client write them down

Review the homework after assigning it, making the client tell it back to you including why the rationale for doing it

Solicit the client’s commitment to the assignment – have them say they will do it
**SUCCESSFUL HOMEWORK**

At the start of therapy, start with small, easily doable assignments
This builds confidence, both in therapy and within the client

Agree on how assignments will be recorded
Again, be specific and concrete

Monitoring the quality of homework can be useful in gradually building compliance

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**SUCCESSFUL HOMEWORK**

If possible, use or develop forms to help clients record homework outcomes
Worry logs, activity schedules, thought records

Anticipate possible problems that could occur, and develop backup assignments or plans

Linking homework to potential reinforcers can greatly increase compliance

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**REVIEWING HOMEWORK**

Follow these guidelines:

- Be consistent
- Be curious
- Be complimentary
- Be careful
- Consider reassignment after troubleshooting