SOCRATIC QUESTIONING

A collaborative question-to-action blueprint

01 PURPOSE: EXPLORE, NOT PERSUADE

Socratic questioning uses thoughtful, open questions to help clients examine the meaning, evidence and usefulness of thoughts. The aim is shared curiosity - not persuading someone to think positively.

02 THE SIX-STAGE CONVERSATION

1 Choose a moment

Find one recent, specific situation.

2 Capture the thought

Ask for the exact words or image that appeared.

3 Explore the evidence

Consider what supports and challenges the thought.

4 Broaden perspectives

Explore other explanations without dismissing feelings.

5 Develop a balanced view

Invite a realistic, personally credible conclusion.

6 Test and review

Agree a small observation or behavioural experiment.

03 CLINICAL STANCE

Ask one question at a time; allow silence; reflect and validate; check the client agrees with the direction. If distress rises or the client feels interrogated, slow down and reconnect.

SOCRATIC QUESTIONING

Swipe-and-use questions for CBT sessions

04 QUESTION BANK: FOLLOW THE CLIENT'S MEANING

CLARIFY THE THOUGHT

- What went through your mind just then?
- What would that mean about you?
- How strongly do you believe that, from 0-100%?

EXAMINE EVIDENCE

- What makes that interpretation feel true?
- Is there anything that does not quite fit?
- What facts are we missing?

CONSIDER ALTERNATIVES

- Could there be another explanation?
- How might someone else understand this?
- What would you say to a friend in this situation?

EXPLORE CONSEQUENCES

- What happens when you believe this thought?
- Does this belief help you move towards your goal?
- What changes when you hold it more lightly?

PLAN A TEST

- What small step could help us learn more?
- What do you predict will happen?
- What would count as evidence either way?

05 KEEP QUESTIONS COLLABORATIVE

Prefer: "Could we explore that together?" Avoid: "But surely you can see that is irrational?" Invite the client to decide which perspective feels accurate.

SOCRATIC QUESTIONING

Worked example, mini-template and final check

06 WORKED EXAMPLE: SOCIAL ANXIETY

Situation
A client speaks briefly in a team meeting.

Automatic thought
"Everyone thinks I sound stupid."

Evidence exploration
"What did you notice that suggested that? What else happened?"

Alternative perspective
"Some colleagues were looking at notes; I cannot know what they thought."

Test
Speak once in the next meeting; record prediction and what actually happened.

07 SESSION MINI-TEMPLATE

Situation / trigger:

Exact automatic thought:

Evidence for and against:

Alternative or balanced view:

Small test / next step:

08 30-SECOND THERAPIST CHECK

[ ] Client chose the focus [ ] Questions were open and respectful [ ] Emotion was validated

[ ] Conclusion was client-generated [ ] Next step is realistic and reviewable