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My Socratic Questions

Explore one thought with curiosity in four stages: ask, listen, summarise, synthesise. A self-help version of an idea used in CBT, not therapy. If the thought is about harming yourself, stop and see selfgrowth.org/help.

01 Before I start

Check in first. This sheet is for everyday thoughts. If anything below is true, set it aside and look at the support section at the end.

Tick any that are true right now:

- [ ] The thought is about harming myself or not wanting to be here
- [ ] The thought is tied to something painful that happened to me, and I don't feel ready to revisit it
- [ ] I'm afraid of someone, or I'm not safe where I am. A worried thought may be accurate. See selfgrowth.org/help
- [ ] My low mood or worry is getting in the way of my life, or I'm worried about how long it has lasted
- [ ] None of these. I'm ready to be curious about an everyday thought

If I ticked any of the first four, the person or line I'll turn to first (a friend, my GP, Samaritans 116 123, 988 in the US) is:

_____

02 The thought

Write the thought as it sounds in your head.

The thought:

How much do I believe it right now?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Not at all — Completely

How I feel (a word or two):

03 Stage 1: Ask informational questions

Start concrete and factual. Ask questions you actually have the answers to. The three marked (Padesky) are from her 1993 talk, adapted to 'I'. The others are ours. Skip any question that takes you somewhere painful. Leaving it blank is fine.

What exactly do I mean by this? What's a specific time it showed up?

What are the facts here, and what am I guessing?

Have I been in similar circumstances before? What did I do? How did that turn out? (Padesky)

What do I know now that I didn't know then? (Padesky)

What would I advise a friend who told me something similar? (Padesky)

What else is true about this that I'm not looking at right now?

04 Stage 2: Listen to my own answers

Read back what you wrote, as if a friend had said it. Padesky tells therapists to listen for unusual words and emotional reactions, and to stay open to being surprised. Try that with your own answers.

Which answer surprised me, or which word stands out?

Is there anything I wrote that I'd want to ask a follow-up question about?

05 Stage 3: Summarise

Pull the pieces together in a few sentences. Putting the new information side by side can show you more than each answer did alone.

In two or three sentences, what have I found out so far?

06 Stage 4: Synthesise

Now bring it back to the thought you started with. Padesky's simplest version of this question is, 'How does all this information fit with your idea?'

How does all this fit with my original thought?

If the thought changed at all, how would I put it now? (It's fine if it didn't.)

How much do I believe the original thought now?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Not at all — Completely

One small thing I could try or watch for, to find out more (or 'nothing, that's fine'):

07 If this is bringing things up

A worksheet is a small tool. Some thoughts need a person. Tick anything that fits and decide who you'll tell.

- [ ] The thought feels constant, or too heavy to look at alone
- [ ] It affects my sleep, work or relationships
- [ ] I'll talk to my GP, or refer myself to a talking therapy (NHS Talking Therapies in England)
- [ ] I'll tell someone I trust this week
- [ ] If I think about harming myself: Samaritans 116 123 (UK and Ireland), call or text 988 (US), findahelpline.com elsewhere

When you're done, a moment to reflect

- Did I ask the questions out of curiosity, or was I hoping for a particular answer? What did I notice?
- Which question gave me the most to think about?
- What did I learn that I might not have seen if I'd just argued with the thought?
- Is there a question I'd rather put to a trusted person than to myself?

Free worksheet from selfgrowth.org. Free self-growth worksheets for real life. Fill it in online and it saves as you go: selfgrowth.org/worksheets/socratic-questioning-worksheet

If things feel heavier than a worksheet can hold

These are self-reflection tools, not therapy. If you're struggling, especially if you have any thoughts of harming yourself, please reach out to someone now. In the US, call or text **988**. In the UK & Ireland, call **116 123** (Samaritans). Elsewhere, find a free helpline at **findahelpline.com**. If you're in immediate danger, call your local emergency number.