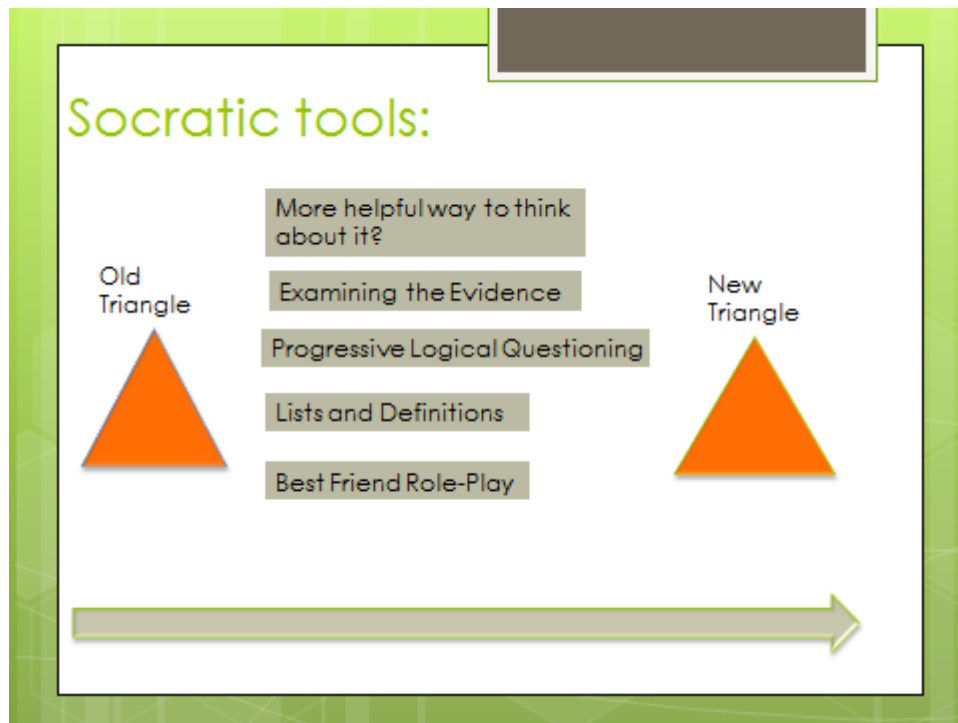


## Socratic Methods for Stuck Thoughts

Socratic methods are to address “stuck thoughts”. Stuck thoughts are those that clients hold onto even when the thoughts are clearly untrue or unhelpful. Stuck thoughts do not usually respond to psychoeducation or just giving corrective information. A Socratic method is one that involves asking QUESTIONS. The basic idea is to help clients talk themselves into new and more helpful thoughts. It is important NOT to try to talk clients into the new and better thoughts when they are stuck. That can lead to defending the thought. It is best to tie the conversation to a situation where they had the thoughts.



### **A more helpful way to think about it?**

Do a triangle with the client. Make sure s/he understands the thought to feeling connection. Ask him/her to generate a different thought that would produce more helpful feelings. Even if ts/he doesn't buy it yet, see if s/he will agree that the alternative thought would produce more positive feelings.

Example: I know you say that no one can be trusted. But looking at the triangle, what kinds of feelings would any person have if she thought no one could be trusted? OK, worried, afraid, nervous. Are those easy feelings to have? How about having those feelings when there is nothing to really worry about? So tell me what might be a thought that would cause less stressful feelings. Even if you don't have that thought right now, what could be a more helpful thought?

### **Examining the evidence.**

Get agreement with the client about the untrue or unhelpful thought. Then ask the question. What is the evidence that this thought is true? What is your proof it is true? Where did you get that thought? Is there any evidence that it isn't true?

Example: You said that you decided not to leave the house yesterday because you believed that something bad would happen. Tell me why you thought that? What is it that makes you think that something bad will happen? Where did you get that idea?

### **Progressive Logical Questioning.**

Present the thought that is unhelpful and then begin asking questions. Keep following up with additional questions to help the client think about the thought and start having questions about the validity or usefulness of the thought.

Example:

You said that you should have done something more when your dad was beating up your mother. What was happening when he was doing that? What were you feeling? Who is the bigger person? What could have happened if you tried to do something to stop him? What could he have done to you or your mom? So it sounds like you had some really good reasons not to do anything to make him madder.

### **Lists and Definitions**

This technique works best in situations where the client generalizes an untrue or unhelpful thought about a personal characteristic or a core belief. It can be especially helpful for depression thoughts. Have the client identify the untrue or unhelpful characterization and then prompt the client to come up with characteristics for the general category. The idea is to get the client to see that they do have at least some positive qualities. Only use this technique if there are positive qualities that the client would recognize once elicited.

Example: You said no one likes you because you are a bad friend. Let talk about what it means to be a good friend. Tell me all the qualities you think go with being a good friend. [prompt the

child for qualities that are known-nice, not mean]. OK, it sounds as though there are a lot of different things that go into being a good friend. Let's talk about which ones you have.

### **Best Friend Role Play**

This technique is designed to get the client to step back and think about how s/he might talk to a friend that is different from the way the client is talking him/herself [unhelpful cognitions are a form of negative self-talk]. Ask the client to imagine that a friend comes to him/her and describes a situation or a thought about themselves. If the client does not have a best friend, use friend or another person the client cares about. Try to get the situation as close as possible to the client situation that involves the unhelpful thought.

Example: Let's say that you have a friend who thinks he is a total loser and there is no point in even trying. He came to you yesterday and told you that. What would you say to him? You mean you wouldn't just tell him that he was right? Why not? Seems like you are a better friend to others than you are to yourself.

### **Responsibility Pie**

This technique is used for self-blame. The idea is to use the metaphor of a pie to get the client to divide up the pie by allocating all the possible responsibility that could be placed for what happened. It is important to present it in a way to that encourages more rather than fewer possible sources of responsibility. Once the pie is divided up reflect back to the client how much of the pie that have allocated to the various people or circumstances. Then ask the client why s/he believes the person/circumstances has responsibility. Use questioning techniques to get the client get clarify the accuracy of the belief. Then reallocate the pieces of the pie. The goal is to reduce the apportionment to the client. It is OK for the client to retain a small sliver that is conceptualized as regret versus responsibility.

Example:

Let's draw a pie with all the people and circumstances that have any type of responsibility for when you got raped at that party when you had been drinking and were kind of out of it. So who do you consider have responsibility? Besides yourself who contributed? OK you're right the boy who did it has responsibility. Tell me why? You said your girlfriend could see that you were drunk and didn't do anything when she saw him take you into the bedroom. OK so she gets a piece of the pie. What about the parents who were not home and didn't take precautions about their son having a party with drinking? How about the people who sold the alcohol to the underage guys? So we can see that a lot of people have at least some part of responsibility for the situation. You regret that you drank so much but now you realize that

there were a lot of different people who had responsibility for the situation, mostly the boy who raped you.

If one Socratic technique does not seem to resonate or click with the client, switch gears and try another one. Always stick to QUESTIONING over telling. Have the goal of getting the client to produce a new triangle that is genuine. REMEMBER. These techniques work best when the untrue or unhelpful thoughts are linked to a specific situation rather than being more generic or global.