

# **Recent Developments in Therapeutic Conversation**

Part 2: Reflexive Questioning

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# Reflexive Questioning

- Defined as a process of asking questions with the intent to influence clients by inviting them to make distinctions that enable their own healing and wellness
- The focus is on opening space for clients to distinguish new possibilities or heuristic connections among relevant meanings, behaviors, and events

# Types of Reflexive Questions

- Future Oriented Questions
- Observer Perspective Questions
- Unexpected Context Change Questions
- Embedded Suggestion Questions
- Normative Comparison Questions
- Distinction Clarifying Questions
- Questions Introducing Hypotheses
- Process Interruption Questions

# Additional Reflexive Questions

- Grounding Questions
- Externalizing Questions
- Internalizing Questions
- De-construction Questions
- Re-construction Questions
- Agency Questions
- Audience Questions

# Additional Reflexive Questions (cont'd)

- Wonderment Questions
- Motivating Questions
- Responsibility Questions
- Interpersonal Pattern Questions
- Re-emotioning Questions
- Endurance Questions
- Self Reflexive Questions

# Bifurcation Questioning

- A type of reflexive questioning that can have empowering effects with respect to the client's experience of personal agency
- Questions are used as a means to co-construct greater awareness of alternatives and of oneself as an active agent in making choices among them
- The term “bifurcation” refers to a branching structure of the question and may be placed in different time frames
  - Past choices
  - Present options
  - Future possibilities

# Examples of Bifurcation Questions

- Past: “What made it possible for you to walk away from the argument last night rather than escalating when she began blaming you?”
- Present: “How can you tell when your anger is a friend in helping you hold others accountable for unfair practices and when it is an enemy that creates more conflict and undermines your relationships?”
- Future: “If you wanted to develop a reputation for greater honesty and you happened to make a mistake, would it be better to openly acknowledge it or keep it to yourself?”

## A Suggested Exercise:

Form three person groups of interviewer, interviewee, and observer

Take turns to practice asking bifurcation questions and reflect on the interviewing process

Provides an opportunity to work towards co-constructing an enhanced sense of personal agency



# Sequencing of Reflexive Questions

- Co-constructing hope
- Co-constructing responsibility
- Creating conditions for child acceptance of a step parent
- Deconstructing shame and guilt
- Opening space for apology, forgiveness and reconciliation

# Co-constructing Hope

- A Working Definition of Hope:
  - “Living a preferred future in the present”
- Sequencing of Reflexive Questions
  - Bring forth preferences (interests, desires and/or passions)
  - Open space for future possibilities
- A Possible Complication
  - Fostering unrealistic hopes

# Co-constructing Responsibility

- A Working Definition of Responsibility
  - “Living consistently with an awareness of whether one likes or dislikes the consequences of one’s own actions”

# Co-constructing Responsibility (cont'd)

- Sequencing of Reflexive Questions
  - Search for positive intentions in taking action
  - Open space for awareness of a difference between intended effects and actual effects of actions taken
  - Bring forth an awareness of one's feelings about the actual effects
  - Invite reflection on alternative possible actions to realize one's good intentions

# Child Acceptance of a Step-Parent

- Open space for open acknowledgment of differential attachments between the child and step-parent vs child and natural parent
- Bring forth an awareness of the effects of the strength and quality of the step relationship on the new partnership
- Co-construct a means to promote growth in the step relationship and diminish the parental imbalance in attachment

# References

- Tomm, K., "Interventive Interviewing: Part II. Reflexive Questioning as a Means to Enable Self Healing," Family Process, 26: 153-183, 1987.

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