Within CBT, techniques designed to address negative or faulty thinking are referred to as cognitive restructuring (e.g., A. T. Beck, 1979; J. S. Beck & Beck, 2011).

Such techniques are based on the premise that changing the way clients think will change their emotions and behavior (Clark & Beck, 2011).

Common cognitive restructuring techniques include challenging the truthfulness of a thought by looking at evidence for and against the thought, identifying thinking errors the thought exemplifies, and developing alternative thoughts that more realistically reflect their experience (Arch & Craske, 2008).

Eifert and Forsyth (2005) characterize the process of challenging dysfunctional thoughts as engaging patients in an attempt to “master” and “control” their thoughts. These authors suggest that cognitive restructuring aims to “teach clients to become better suppressors and avoiders of their unwanted thoughts” (p. 39), thereby arming them with a potentially unworkable strategy to avoid experiencing negative emotions.

Socratic questioning/Guided Discovery

Guided discovery is based on asking a series of questions that allows information to be brought into the client’s awareness. The client is therefore encouraged to discover things for herself. Guided discovery is sometimes also known interchangeably as Socratic questioning as it is derived from the method of teaching employed by Socrates, as recorded in the Socratic Dialogues (Cooper, 1997). This consisted of asking questions, which then promoted reflection, which in turn produced knowledge.

Socratic questioning can be a component for guided discovery but there are other factors that are required, like collaboration and genuine curiosity (Padesky, 1993).

The Socratic Method is an important component in Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) interventions (e.g. Ehlers et al. 2005).

The approach has been described as a “cornerstone” (Padesky 1993) of CBT and as an essential competency of CBT therapists (Roth and Pilling 2007).

Padesky (1993) suggests that Socratic questioning consists of 4 stages

- Asking informational questions
- Listening attentively and reflecting back
- Summarising newly acquired information
- Asking analytic or synthesising questions to apply the new information to the client’s original problem or thought

She goes on to state that for guided discovery to occur, then the questions asked should be within the client’s knowledge base, should draw attention to the relevant issue under discussion (but may be outside the client’s focus) and generally move from concrete questions to more abstract. By the end, the client should be able to apply new information to a previously held belief or generate a new one.

Looking at the advantages and disadvantages of holding the belief

The advantages-disadvantages analysis is a versatile strategy that can be used for many purposes in cognitive therapy, such as evaluating potential solutions to problems or for weighing the pros and cons of decisions that patients face in their daily lives. It can also be