



# APPROPRIATE USE OF QUESTIONS

Through the years I have trained hundreds of students in the art of using appropriate questioning in a therapeutic setting.

The first thing I would reflect is that unlike having a conversation with a friend or a family member, a therapeutic dialogue consists of a joint exploration at the client's pace for their benefit.

When speaking with friends and family, we sometimes use questioning to quench our curiosity or to explore issues which are essential to us.

In therapy, especially Person-Centred therapy, we ask questions only to clarify our understanding so we can get closer to the client's worldview or, in some cases, make sure we fully understand what the client meant.

One trap that students fall into is using the *Why* question. This route of enquiry can give the impression of having to justify one's actions. The tone of the question may also appear judgmental.

## Some other observations:

### Use open questions

These are designed to encourage a full, meaningful answer using the client's knowledge or feelings. They are the opposite of a closed question, which promotes a short or single-word answer. They also put the client in control of how much or little they wish to say.

Examples of open questions are:

'Where would you like to begin?'

'What does selfish mean to you?'

'How do you feel about that?'

'What feelings are you aware of now?'

Closed questions have their place if you are trying to obtain factual information.

For example:

'Can I contact you on this phone number?'

'Do you want to make another appointment?'

'Are you alright?'

Finally, if you are thinking of asking a question, it is sometimes useful to ask yourself

'Who is this question for - myself or the client?'