

Ask About Context and Meaning

Clinical practice and supervision | Clinicians | 10 to 15 minutes

Explore the client's interpretation of a concern and relevant social context.

Invite the client to define what matters in their experience. Identity, relationships, community, faith, disability, work, and systems can shape a problem and possible support. Ask with curiosity without requiring the client to educate you about an entire group.

Begin with the client's explanation

Ask: "What do you call this concern? What do you think contributes to it? What do people important to you understand differently?" Leave room for uncertainty and for more than one explanation.

Explore resources and barriers

Ask about belonging, responsibilities, discrimination, financial pressure, access, and support when relevant. Notice both individual coping and changes needed in the environment. Do not turn structural harm into a personal thinking error.

Check your own interpretation

Offer a tentative summary and invite correction: "What have I missed or assumed?" Discuss whether the proposed intervention fits the client's values and circumstances. Identify knowledge you need to seek independently or through consultation.

The client's language and explanation of the concern

Relevant relationships, identities, resources, and pressures

My assumptions or gaps in understanding

How the treatment plan will respond to this context