5 Powerful Questions for Defusion

Adapt and modify these 5 questions to suit your way of speaking and your clients.

There are numerous possible variations …

Instead of ‘hooked’: caught up, fused, lost in, pushed around by, dominated by, etc.

Instead of ‘mind’: brain

Instead of ‘story’: thought, cognition, words and pictures, narrative, concept, idea

All of the following questions can help to instigate and reinforce defusion

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Two ‘Anytime’ Questions

The first two questions that follow can be used liberally in any session at any stage of therapy
1. What Is Your Mind Telling You?

Use versions of this question liberally throughout your sessions. For example:

*If I could listen in to your mind right now, what would I hear it saying?*

*So immediately before you got drunk, what was your mind saying to you?*

*What is your mind telling you right now?*

*What is your mind likely to tell you later, to talk you out of doing this? What reasons will it come up with not to do it?*
2. Do You Notice What Your Mind Is Doing (or Just Did)?

This is useful to ask immediately after a client says something that is unhelpful.

*Did you notice how your mind just stuck the knife into you there?*

*Did you notice that; how your mind just piped in with the ‘not good enough story again?*

*Do you notice how your mind keeps coming up with reasons not to do this? It’s got a ‘yes, but’ for everything, hasn’t it?*
Two ‘Linking’ Questions

- The next two questions can also be used in any session at any stage of therapy.
- However, they are especially useful when we first wish to explicitly introduce defusion. This is because they help to make the link between fusion and ineffective action, which in turn enables us to ‘sell’ defusion as a beneficial new skill.

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3. What Did You Do Next (After You Got Hooked)?

First identify thoughts/feelings that showed up in a certain situation, then ask the question.

T: And what were you feeling?
C: Really anxious!

T: What was your mind telling you?
C: That I’m a loser, and she’s going to leave me.

T: So you got pretty hooked by those thoughts and feelings: what did you do next?
C: I stormed out of the house and went to a bar.
4. The Video Question

This is a really useful linking question to elicit the overt behavioural changes that happen when the client fuses.

- *If we followed you around with a camera crew, and filmed you ‘Big Brother’ style, 24 hours a day, what would I see or hear on that video that would show me you’d been hooked by that story/those thoughts/those feelings?*
Making The Link

Those last 2 questions help to make the link between fusion and ‘away moves’ (ineffective, values-incongruent actions).

For example, you might say, ‘So do you notice, that when you get hooked by this story/these thoughts, your behaviour changes; you start behaving in ways that are not like the person you want to be?’
‘Sell’ Defusion

Once you’ve made the link, you can ‘sell’ defusion, e.g:

So would it be helpful if we could do some work here around learning to unhook yourself from these thoughts/ take the power out of this story?

Once the client agrees, you would then go on to more formal defusion exercises
The Point of Defusion

The main purpose of defusion is to be able to act more flexibly in the presence of unhelpful cognitions.

So \textit{after} the client has practiced some formal defusion techniques – \textit{not before} - and \textit{only if} the client already gets that distraction, disputation, thought blocking, positive affirmation etc. aren’t usually helpful in terms of living a richer, values-guided life - you can go on to ask the next question.
5. What Could You Do Differently, Next Time This Thought Shows Up?

Are there ever times your mind tells you this stuff, but you don’t get so hooked by it? (You do towards moves rather than away moves?) Tell me about those.

This story/thought/judgment/belief/idea is going to show up again very soon. Any ideas about what you could do differently when it reappears?
Timing for Question 5

NB: If you ask question 5 *before* the client has practiced some formal defusion techniques — or *before* the client gets that distraction, disputation, thought blocking, positive affirmation etc. aren’t usually helpful in terms of living a richer, values-guided life — then you will probably get unhelpful answers: e.g. ignore it, push it away, distract myself, think positively, tell myself it’s not true.
Importance of Formal Defusion

These 5 questions are all very useful, and variants of them can be freely used throughout any and all sessions to facilitate defusion. However, for many people this will not be enough to help them develop good defusion skills; thus formal practice of defusion techniques in session and between sessions is usually necessary.