

## THE EXTENDED INVESTIGATION

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**ABSTRACT**

The aim of the extended investigation is to probe the mind for specific situations or issues that may help unravel the patient's problem. The tool used is the mnemonic of CAR-ACE (clarifications, assumptions, reasons, alternatives, consequences, and relational experiencing). This disciplined inquiry brings information about feelings and thinking into the open, relating to the situation at hand. This is often used in problem work when troublesome situations are identified. It is used to uncover the Negative Automatic Thoughts arising from cognitive distortions that triggered the emotions. It is also used in pattern work to investigate the salient situations linked by themes into stories. The themes and stories can then be investigated for consistency and context.

**KEYWORDS:** CAR-ACE; Clarifications; Assumptions; Reasons; Alternatives; Consequences; Relational Experiencing.

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**INTRODUCTION**

The doctor may wish to investigate specific psychosocial issues identified.<sup>1</sup> One way is to use the Socratic inquiry tool that can be remembered by the mnemonic CAR-ACE (clarifications, assumptions, reasons, alternatives, consequences and relational experiencing).<sup>2</sup>

**THE CAR-ACE INQUIRY**

This is a generic framework to facilitate open inquiry, to help enlarge the open area of the Johari windows. It is a disciplined approach of asking questions that can deeply explore and analyse the patient's mind. There is a depiction of Johari windows in Unit 1.

Many of us start and then stop at clarification of symptoms. We should clarify the length (time relationship), breadth (relatedness and context), and the depth (severity, emotions, cognition, spirituality). To explore more, we may continue to probe into the assumptions the patient holds and the reasons for them.

With some training, we can ACE the inquiry by exploring alternatives and possibilities, the consequences of expressed thoughts or scenarios, and the experiences that arise therein. We can then actively seed and facilitate the elaboration of thoughts, feelings and beliefs.

Many of us face difficulty in using this open inquiry system because we are accustomed as experts, to use directive and prescriptive language. However, it may be more effective to let the patient arrive at a viewpoint by himself. We employ astute but respectful open questioning, rather than foist our viewpoint upon him. This would require us to be more patient and reflective, in collaborative and not expert mode. Because time is scarce in a consultation, this approach should be used judiciously.

This extended investigation and inquiry tool is often used in situational problem work in what is commonly known as cognitive behavioural therapy. It is also used in pattern work for both situations and stories of situations linked by themes. Information on the context and discrepancies are used to deconstruct problem-saturated stories so that preferred positive stories can be constructed. This is elaborated on in Unit 5.

**REFERENCES**

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**LEARNING POINTS**

- **CAR-ACE can help probe specific situations or issues.**
- **This disciplined inquiry brings information about feelings and thinking into the open, relating to the situation at hand.**
- **This is often used in problem work when troublesome situations are identified. It is used to uncover the Negative Automatic Thoughts arising from cognitive distortions that triggered the emotions (see Unit 5).**
- **It is also used in pattern work to investigate the salient situations linked by themes into stories. The themes and stories can be investigated for consistency and context (see Unit 5).**

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