

The Socratic Method

Developed by Socrates, the **Socratic method** is a tool for **de-escalation**. It utilises open-ended questions to:

- Bypass defensiveness by replacing confrontation with curiosity.
- Disrupt "us vs. them" logic by gently exposing flaws in oversimplified thinking.
- Encourage self-reflection, allowing individuals to spot their own contradictions.

When dealing with rigid or extreme worldviews, direct arguments usually backfire. Shaming or confronting someone triggers defensive walls and often pushes them deeper into radicalised mindsets.

How to Use the Socratic Method

1. Start with curiosity, not correction

Instead of telling someone they're wrong, ask a gentle question. This keeps the conversation exploratory rather than confrontational.

"What makes you think that?"
"How did you come to that idea?"

2. Ask open-ended questions

Avoid yes/no questions. Use prompts that require explanation and get them thinking deeply, rather than just repeating memorised slogans.

"What do you think would happen if...?"
"Why do you think that rule exists?"

3. Clarify their thinking

Help them define vague labels. This often reveals the fragility of broad, sweeping generalisations.

"What do you mean by 'they'?"
"Can you give me a specific example?"

4. Gently explore consequences

Encourage them to play out the real-world impact of their beliefs to build empathy and break down collective blame.

"If everyone did that, what might happen?"
"How would people living there feel in that situation?"

5. Examine assumptions

Help them notice the unverified beliefs backing up their claims, introducing flexibility without dismissing them out of hand.

"Do you think that's always true?"
"Is there another way to see this?"

6. Allow silence and struggle

Resist the urge to jump in with answers. Productive pauses give people the vital mental space needed to process contradictions and develop independent thinking.