

PCC Interviewing Tips

Probing questions (“probes”) are used to help the client tell his story and identify the thoughts and feelings he was having before, during, and after the UAI encounter. This appendix provides additional information about possible probing questions. The probes are to be used as needed. Some clients will tell their story easily and the counselor’s main focus will be to stay out of the way. Others will need more guidance and encouragement.

Do’s and Don’ts

How you use probes is even more important than the probes you use. The following are some do’s and don’ts to help you make your probing questions work for you.

Do	Don’t
Use open-ended probing questions	Ask a series of closed questions
Tie your next question to what the client just said	Read off the probes like a checklist
Let the client be in charge of his own narrative	Let your probes structure the narrative
Use the client’s own words, echo or briefly summarize the content and feelings the client is expressing to show you understand	Spoon-feed words describing the client’s experience, making you rather than him responsible for telling his story
Use silence to cue the client to think about and expand on what he just said	Interrupt while the client is thinking

Partner probes

In this context, “partner” refers to the sexual partner in the episode of UAI.

- “Tell me about your partner.”
- “How did you meet?”
- “What made him attractive?”
- “At what point did you realize that your interaction with this man might become sexual? How did you know? How were you feeling about it?”
- [*Only if interaction was with a boyfriend*]: “How did being in a relationship influence the types of sex you had and how you felt about it?”

Mood probes

- “How were you feeling emotionally the day before you had sex with [name]?”
- “What kind of mood were you in that day or week?”
- “How were you feeling about yourself in general?”

Time probes

- “What time of day was it when you guys had sex?”
- “What had you just been doing at the time you met?”
- “Were you expecting to hook up with someone that night/day? Why?”
- “What were your thoughts about whether or not you would have sex that night/day?”

Place probes

(Type of venue, chat room, time of day, environment, social situation, work setting, etc.)

- “Where did you meet your partner?”
- “Where did you have sex?”
- “What was the place like?”
- “How were you feeling about the place?”

Substance use probes

- “Were either you or your partner drunk or high?”
- “How much had you been drinking/using?”
- “How was the alcohol/drug making your body feel?”
- “Was it affecting how you were thinking? How?”

Sex probes

- “How did having sex get started?”
- “At that time, what was going through your mind?”
- “What did you guys do sexually?”
- “At what point did you decide to have anal sex?”
- “What was going through your mind while you were having sex?”
- “How were you feeling while you were having sex?”
- “What were you feeling afterward?”
- “Was the sex satisfying? How so/why not?”

Communication probes

- “What kinds of body language did the two of you exchange about whether you would use a condom?”
- “What did you say about whether you would use a condom?”
- “Did you make any assumptions about your partner being HIV-negative or positive? Based on what?”
- “Did these assumptions affect what you did?”

Perceived HIV risk

- “Would you consider what you guys did to be safe or unsafe with respect to HIV?”
“What part made it safe or unsafe?”

Probes for thoughts before sex

Goal: Make sure you have a clear understanding of any distorted thoughts the person had prior to sex that could have influenced his behavior. This is important because it lays the groundwork for the next step.

- “What kinds of thoughts were you having earlier that day?”
- “Do you have a sense of what was triggering those thoughts?”
- “How does that kind of thinking make you feel? What does that mean to you?”
- “What were you thinking when you first got there? What were you saying to yourself?”
- “At what point did that thought change? What made it change?”
- “What were you thinking when you first started talking?”
- “How long were you thinking that? Do you usually think those kinds of things when you are in situations like that?”

Probes for feelings before sex

Goal: Make sure you have a clear understanding of the client’s feelings prior to sex that could have influenced his behavior. His strategies to manage his feelings may be important in leading to risky behavior.

- “How were you feeling earlier that day?”
- “Do you have a sense of what was triggering those feelings?”
- “What does that mean to you that you were feeling that way?”
- “What were you feeling when you first got there? What was that like for you?”
- “At what point did your mood shift? What made it change?”
- “How were you feeling when you first started talking?”

- “How long did that feeling last? Do you always feel that way when you are in situations like that?”
- “What do you usually do when you feel that way?”

Probes for thoughts during sex

Goal: Get a sense of his specific thoughts at various moments during the sexual encounter. Give the client plenty of time to recreate it in his mind so he can give you specifics.

- “While you were having sex, do you remember what you were thinking?”
- “How did that thinking make you feel?”
- “At what point (of sexual encounter) did your thought change?”
- “Do you think those thoughts had anything to do with what you did sexually? How or why?” “If not, can you imagine how your thoughts might interfere with being able to have safer sex?”

Probes for feelings during sex

Goal: Get a sense of his specific emotions at various moments during the sexual encounter. As with probes for thoughts, give the client plenty of time to recreate it in his mind so he can give specifics.

- “While you were having sex, do you remember what you were feeling emotionally?”
- “At what point (of sexual encounter) did your feelings change?”
- “Do you think your feelings had anything to do with what you did sexually? How or why?” “If not, can you imagine how your feelings might interfere with being able to have safer sex?”

Suggested probes for thoughts after sex

Goal: This will be helpful information to know when the counselor is identifying a problem/distorted thought. These questions will reflect the negative consequences of the client’s behavior, which he will want to avoid re-experiencing.

- “What about afterward? What were you thinking then? What were you saying to yourself about that encounter?”
- “How did you feel about yourself at that point?”
- “So when you have thoughts about _____ before or during sex and after unprotected anal sex you end up feeling _____? Is that right? Do you see that as a problem?”

Suggested probes for feelings after sex

Goal: This will be helpful information to know when the counselor is identifying a problem. These questions will reflect the negative consequences of the client’s behavior, which he will want to avoid re-experiencing.

- “What about afterward? What were you feeling then? How did you feel about yourself?”
- “How long did you feel that way? What did you do?”
- “So when you feel _____ before or during sex and after unprotected anal sex you end up feeling _____? Is that right? Do you see that as a problem?”