

**DIALOGICAL INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**  
*for Eating Disorders*  
**(DIS-ED)**

Matthew Pugh

CITATION: Pugh, M. (2019). *Dialogical interview schedule for eating disorders*. Unpublished manuscript / protocol. London, UK.

Correspondence:  
Vincent Square Eating Disorders Service  
Central and North West London NHS Foundation Trust  
1 Nightingale Place  
London  
SW10 9NG  
matthewpugh@nhs.net

## **Dialogical Interview Schedule for Eating Disorders (DIS-ED)**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Dialogical Interview Schedule for Eating Disorders (DIS-ED) is a semi-structured approach to dialoguing with the internal eating disorder ‘voice’ or eating disorder ‘self’ (EDV/S).

The DIS-ED is inspired by a number of approaches, principally the Voice Dialogue method (Stone & Stone, 1988), as well as Psychodrama (Moreno, 1987), Ego State Therapy (Emmerson, 2003), and Talking with Voices (Corstens, Longden, & May, 2010).

The DIS-ED has three objectives. These are: 1). to help individuals better understand the functions, intentions, and origins of their EDV/S, 2). to encourage a decentred perspective on this aspect of the self, and 3). to create space for the emergence of more adaptive internal voices and new ways of relating to the EDV/S.

### **OVERVIEW**

The DIS-ED is divided into four parts:

- Part one aims to explore the individual’s experience of their EDV/S and put them at ease with the dialogical method.
- Part two aims to explore the content, origins, intentions, and relating style of the EDV/S through dialogue with this aspect of the self.
- Part three aims to help the individual ‘step back’ and observe the EDV/S from a decentred, metacognitive perspective.
- Part four aims to reflect on the process of dialoguing with the EDV/S and explore new ways of relating to these experiences.

Part two of the DIS-ED involves either direct or indirect dialogue with the EDV/S. Key areas of discussion during this phase of the DIS-ED include exploring the:

**Functions** of eating disorder voice / self:

- What is your role in this individual’s life?
- What do you do for this individual?

**Content** of the eating disorder voice / self:

- What do you tend to say to this individual?
- How do you respond to this individual when they do a,b,c?

**Origins** of the eating disorder voice / self:

- When did you come into this individual’s life? How do you come to be?
- Do you take after anyone this individual has known?

**Intentions** of the eating disorder voice / self:

- What’s important to you?
- What do you want for this individual? What are your hopes for them?

**Relationship** between the individual and their eating disorder voice / self:

- How do you feel towards this individual? What’s your relationship with them like?
- What is it like performing this role for this individual?

Underlying **feelings and concerns** of the eating disorder voice / self:

- What might happen if you didn’t perform this role for this individual?
- What you want this individual to know or understand about yourself and your role?

**Participant Background Information**

**Participant initials:**.....

**Age:**.....

**Self-described ethnicity:**.....

**Eating disorder diagnosis:**.....

**Self-reported length of illness:**.....

**Current treatment (*type*):** .....

**Current treatment (*number of sessions*):** - .....

**Previous outpatient treatments (*number*):**.....

**Previous outpatient treatments (*types*):**.....

**Previous inpatient treatments (*number*):**.....

## Implementing the DIS-ED

### INTRODUCING THE DIS-ED

The DIS-ED begins with a brief introduction to the interview and its aims. Talking with internal voices and self-parts is not for everyone - engaging in the DIS-ED should always be consensual. Individuals are encouraged to discuss any questions or concerns about the approach before the interview begins.

Shall I begin by explaining the aims of this interview in a bit more detail?

Research suggests that many individuals experience an internal eating disorder voice. Other individuals describe experiencing not so much a voice, but rather a particular experience of the themselves linked to their eating disorder - what we might call their 'anorexic self' or 'anorexic part'. Internal voices and the experience of being made up of different selves, parts, or subpersonalities is very normal.

The aim of this interview is to simply get to know your 'eating disorder voice' or 'eating disorder self' better. We can do this by asking your eating disorder voice some questions. There are no right or wrong answers to these questions. I hope you will find this process of speaking with your eating disorder voice or self (EDV/S) very natural.

The interview is divided into three parts. First, I will ask you some very general questions about your experiences of your EDV/S. Afterwards, I will ask you to change seats and to speak from the perspective of your EDV/S. Last of all, I will ask you to return to your origin seat and reflect on what your EDV/S has said. I'll help guide you through this process.

Once we have completed the interview, we will take short break. After this, I would like to ask some very general questions about how you found the interview and the process of speaking with your EDV/S.

Do you have any questions?

Would you like to give it a try?

### PHASE ONE - Exploring experiences of the EDV/S

The DIS-ED begins by exploring the individuals' general experiences of their EDV/S.

Would it be ok if we begin by talking a little about your EDV/S?

#### *Example interview questions:*

- Tell me about your experience of your EDV/S. What is it like?
- How does the EDV/S interact with you?
- When do you tend to experience the EDV/S?
- What do you think the EDV/S wants for you?

### PHASE TWO - Dialogue with the EDV/S

Dialogue with the EDV/S involves the client speaking from the perspective of their EDV/S. Dialogues with the EDV/S can be either direct (inviting the individual to change seats and speak as their EDV/S) or indirect (inviting the client to convey, in the third person, what the EDV/S is saying).

***DIRECT DIALOGUE with the EDV/S:*** If you feel ready, I'd like to speak with your EDV/S for a little while. All you have to do is change seats and speak as that part of your self. If at any time you want to stop, we can. Does that sound ok?

***INDIRECT DIALOGUE with the EDV/S:*** I'd like to ask your EDV/S some questions. When I do, I'd like you to relay these questions to your EDV/S and to let me know how it responds. For example, I might ask you to say "hello" to the EDV/S on my behalf and to let me know what it says back.

Irrespective of whether dialogue is direct or indirect, the client is asked to place a chair representing the EDV/S somewhere in the room which feels appropriate and comfortable.

Where would you like the chair for your EDV/S to be? [*Individual locates chair in the room*].

It can sometimes be helpful to check whether there is anything the individual would like to ask or explore with the EDV/S.

Before we begin, is there anything particular you would like me to ask your EDV/S or things you'd like to know?

It is important that the interviewer communicates with the EDV/S in a manner which is respectful, curious, and non-confrontational. The EDV/S needs to feel secure and understood during dialogue. It can be helpful to think of the dialogue as being like getting to know an interesting stranger at a party.

***DIRECT DIALOGUE with the EDV/S:*** I'd now like you to now change seats and to adopt the perspective of your EDV/s. [*Client changes seats*]. In this chair, I'd like you to speak as your EDV/S.

#### **Sample interview questions for the EDV/S:**

- So, [participant] is over here and you are his/her eating disorder voice.
- It's nice to meet you. What would you like me to call you?
- Tell me a bit about yourself. What's your role in this person's life? What do you do? (Function)
- What situations tend to bring you out? (Content)
  - How about when it comes to eating?
  - How about when it comes to the way this individual looks?
- What do you tend to say in situations like that? (Content)
- When did you first come into this person's life? Do you remember when you came to be? (Origins)
- What were your reasons for becoming a part of their life at that time? (Origins)
- Did you learn this role from anyone? Who do you take after? (Origins)
- What's it like playing this role for this person? Do you ever run into problems? (Relationship)
- How do you feel towards this person? How do you think this person feels towards you? (Relationship)
- Are you aware of any difficulties you might be causing this individual? (Relationship)
- Why do you do this for this person? (Intent)
- What do you want for this individual? (Intent)
- What's important to you? (Intent)
- What do you want for this individual? (Intent)
- What you think might happen if you weren't a part of this person's life? (Underlying feelings)
- What are you afraid of? (Underlying feelings)
  - What concerns / frustrates / saddens / makes you anxious? (Underlying feelings)
- What you think might happen if you weren't a part of this person's life? (Underlying feelings)
- If I could see you as you are, what would you look like? (Imagery)

The dialogue ends with the interviewer thanking the EDV/S for speaking and inviting it to share any parting words.

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me today. It's been interesting getting to you know you better. Is there anything else that you would like to say or that I need to know before we draw this talk to a close?

### PHASE THREE – Decentring from the EDV/S

The third phase of the DIS-ED invites the individual to 'step back' and observe the EDV/S from a new, decentred perspective (known as the 'witness state' in Voice Dialogue). The individual is first asked to return to their original chair and to separate from the EDV/S.

I'd like you to return to your original chair now. As you best you can, leave your EDV/S in the empty seat and connect with your self again as you change chairs. [*Individual moves seats*].

Some individuals may need a little time to ground themselves when switching perspectives (e.g. stretching, attending to their breathing, walking around their chair, etc.).

Let's take a moment to separate from your EDV/S by bringing attention to the breath. Find a rate of breathing that feels calm, soothing, and grounded. Focus on the experience of the air moving in and out of your body.

At this point, it is helpful to 'check-in' with the client and establish whether they have been able to separate from the EDV/S

How are you feeling? Do you feel a little more separated from that side of your self?

Once the client has separated from the EDV/S, they are invited to stand beside the therapist, who then provides a summary of what this self has conveyed.

Can you come and stand beside me? I'd now like to provide my understanding of what I have heard your EDV/S share with us...

Once a summary has been provided, the therapist draws attention to the decentred and observational nature of this new perspective.

And now notice how, from this position, you can step back from the EDV/S and reflect upon it from more of a distance. [*Gestures to the empty chair*]. Witnessing what is happening between these parts of your self without needing to be involved.

The client then returns to their first chair.

### PHASE FOUR - Reflecting on the dialogical process

The final part of the interview provides an opportunity to reflect on the dialogue and their impressions of the EDV/S.

#### *Sample interview questions:*

- What do you make of what the EDV/S has said?
- What do you make of the EDV/S intentions / what the EDV/S wants for you?
  - How does that fit with what you want for your self?
- Is there anything you would like the EDV/S to know or understand?
- Are there anything you want or need from the EDV/S?
- Is there anything you would like to say to the EDV/S?

Whilst the aim of this phase is not to facilitate a dialogue between the individual and their EDV/S, sometimes individuals will want to respond to their EDV/S directly. If statements seem to be directed at the EDV/S, rather than the interviewer, the individual can be invited to convey these to the empty chair (“Would you like to try saying that to your EDV/S?”).

### **PHASE FIVE - Reflecting on the DIS-ED (*research purposes only*)**

The participant is asked if they would like to take a break before discussing their experiences of engaging in the DIS-ED.

You did a great job. Well done. Before we explore what your experience of talking with your EDV/S was like, would you like to take a break?

Wherever possible, the participant is encouraged to elaborate on their responses during the phase four interview (e.g. “Can you say more about that? Can you give me an example of that?”).

#### ***Sample interview questions:***

- How did you experience the interview? What stood out to you?
- What was it like to speak as your EDV/S?
- What was it like to respond to your EDV/S?
- How do you understand the EDV/S now? How do you feel towards it?
- How do you understand your eating difficulties after the interview?
- What was helpful or unhelpful about the interview we’ve had?
- What did you like or dislike about the process?
- What do you think you will take away from this experience?
- Overall, how would you describe your experience of this interview?

### **REFERENCES**

- Corstens, D., Longden, E., & May, R. (2012). Talking with voices: exploring what is expressed by the voices people hear. *Psychosis*, 4, 95-104.
- Emmerson. G. (2003). *Ego state therapy*. Carmarthen, UK: Crown House.
- Moreno, J. L. (1987). *The essential Moreno: Writings on psychodrama, group method and spontaneity*. New York, NY: Springer.
- Stone, H., & Stone, S. (1988). *Embracing our selves: The voice dialogue manual*. Novato, CA: Nataraj Publishing.