

Emotion Exploration Dialogues

Emotional exploration dialogues allow individuals to explore emotional reactions and responses through the embodiment of affective states in different chairs. This dialogue is particularly helpful for individuals who tend to avoid or suppress their emotional reactions, or when emotional reactions are vague, confused, or perplexing.

Process of dialogue:

1). The individual describes an emotional reaction or emotional response.

Facilitator: "It sounds like you are feeling sad right now."

2). The facilitator introduces a chair which represents the emotion.

Facilitator: "Imagine this chair holds your sadness. [Introduces a seat]."

3). The facilitator invites the individual to change seats and embody the emotion.

Facilitator: "If you're willing, I'd like you change seats and speak as your sadness. I think this help us understand it better. [Client changes seats]."

4). The individual is guided in exploring key dimensions of the emotion, including associated thoughts, bodily events, behavioural motivations, and memories.

Facilitator: "Where you do experience this sad self in your body? What does it feel like? What posture goes with sadness? Speaking as this sad self, what do you want to say? What do you want to do? If you had complete control, what would follow? What memories are linked to this sadness? What do you need in order to feel soothed and cared for? Do you have a message for Jacob? [Gestures to the individual's original chair]."

4). The individual returns to their original seat and reflects on what their 'emotional self' has conveyed.

Facilitation notes:

- Multiple chairs can be used to explore multiple emotional reactions. This forms the basis of 'Multiple Selves Dialogues' (see other guidance).
- A less evocative version of this dialogue involves the individual describing their emotional reactions from a distance (i.e. using third-person language) (Facilitator:

“Imagine your sadness where sat in that seat. [Gestures to a second chair]. What would it be saying? What does it want to do?...).

- Facilitators may find it helpful to conclude this dialogue by inviting the individual to care for their emotion(s). This might involve bringing a ‘soothing other’ into the dialogue (see Two-chair Self-Soothing), comforting the emotion from the seat of the Compassionate Self, or practicing observing and attending to emotions from a decentred perspective (see Compassionate Witness Dialogues).

Further Reading:

Pugh, M. (2019). *Cognitive behavioural chairwork: Distinctive features*. Oxon, UK: Routledge.

Citation:

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