

Three-Chair Cognitive Restructuring

Three-chair cognitive restructuring aims to challenge and restructure negative automatic thoughts and core beliefs. This method expands upon the traditional two-chair method by including a third 'experiencing' chair. This enables individuals to experience the emotional impact of NATs and core beliefs, thereby encouraging deeper cognitive restructuring.

Process of dialogue:

1). The facilitator introduces two new chairs: Seat A, which represents the evidence supporting the negative cognition, and Seat B, which represents the evidence which does not support the negative cognition.

Facilitator: "Let's imagine these seats represent the evidence supporting your core belief [facilitator introduces Seat A] and the evidence which does not support your core belief [introduces Seat B]. Please move to the first seat."

2). The facilitator invites the individual to present the evidence supporting their negative cognition from Seat A.

Facilitator: "Speaking at the negative / critical side, tell [individual's name] the reasons why this core belief is true [gestures to the individual's original chair]."

3). The facilitator invites the individual to return to their original chair and experience the emotional impact of Seat A.

Facilitator: "Switch back. [Individual returns to their original chair]. How do you feel hearing that evidence?"

4). The facilitator invites the individual to move to Seat B and explore alternative perspectives on evidence presented from Seat B. Coaching is often needed at this point.

Facilitator: "Please move to the chair representing the healthy side. [Individual moves to Seat B]. Let's scrutinise the evidence which the negative / critical side has just shared. In what ways is it biased, untrue, or unhelpful?"

5). Remaining in Seat B, the individual is invited to refute the evidence presented from Seat A.

Facilitator: "Now that we have some robust counter-arguments, let's respond to the negative / critical side. Tell that part why its untrue and unhelpful [gestures to Seat A]."

6). Remaining in Seat B, the individual is invited to soothe and reassure the 'experiencing self' in the original chair. Coaching is often needed at this point.

Facilitator: "Let's turn our attention to [individual's name] [gestures to the individual's original chair]. How do you think (s)he is feeling right now? What does (s)he need in order to feel better? Tell him/her that.

6). The individual returns to their original chair and reflects on the experience of being defended and soothed.

Facilitation notes:

- Inviting the individual to identify and express their unmet needs in response to hearing from Seat A not only deepens emotional experiencing, but also provides valuable cues as to the response required from Seat B (Facilitator: "Hearing and feeling the impact of the negative side [gestures to Seat A], what do you need right now?").
- It is often helpful for the facilitator to write down the evidence presented from Seat A so that it can be reviewed collaboratively in Seat B. Reviewing a list of common 'thinking errors' can help initiate the process of reframing and restructuring this evidence in Seat B.
- If the individual struggles to respond from the 'healthy side' (Seat B), the facilitator can step into the dialogue and model this I-position.
- It is often helpful to conclude this exercise by moving the client into the (standing) Compassionate Witness I-position to aid reflection and containment.

Further Reading:

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

Citation:

Pugh, M. & Bell, T. (2020). Three-chair cognitive restructuring: Facilitation guidance. Retrieved from www.chairwork.co.uk.

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