

Two-Chair Self-Soothing I (Self-Other)

Two-chair self-soothing is an emotion-focused dialogue which aims to relieve emotional distress (Watson & Greenberg, 2017). This dialogue is particularly helpful when distress is linked to an unmet interpersonal need (e.g. love, protection, and acceptance) or intense self-attacking. As such, it is often used in combination with empty-chair dialogues with significant others ('unfinished business') and two-chair dialogues with the inner critic. In the following dialogue, soothing is provided by a comforting 'other'.

Process of dialogue:

1). The individual describes feeling emotionally distressed.

Facilitator: "It sounds like you are experiencing a great sense of loneliness right now."

2). The facilitator asks the individual to identify the unmet need linked to their emotional distress.

Facilitator: "What does that loneliness need?"

3). The facilitator invites the individual to identify a 'soothing other' who would be able to fulfil the unmet emotional need.

Facilitator: "Who would be able to take care of that pain and suffering?"

4). The soothing other is invited into the dialogue.

Facilitator: "Let's imagine that your kind grandfather were held in this chair. [Facilitator introduces an empty chair]. Tell him what you are feeling."

5). The individual changes seats and embodies the soothing other.

Facilitator: "Change seats. [Individual moves to the chair of the soothing other]. Grandpa, you've heard the pain that grandson, Jacob, is feeling right now. What do you want to say to him?"

6). The individual changes seats and reflects on the experience of receiving care.

Facilitator: "Change back. [Individual returns to their original chair]. Take a moment to hear what your grandfather has said. How does that feel to hear?"

Facilitation notes:

- Some individuals struggle to identify a person who would be able to provide emotional support. Fictitious individuals (e.g. a superhero), divine entities, and animals offer an alternative source of comfort. An idealised parent can also be helpful (Facilitator: “Imagine this chair holds the parent you needed but didn’t have. Change seats and be the parent who is able to take care of your pain”).
- Clients often find comfort in statements which emphasise the perpetuity of the soothing other (Facilitator [to soothing other]: “Tell Jacob that you are always be there for him, in his heart, whenever he needs you”).
- Following two-chair self-soothing, clients can be asked to identify a comforting object which symbolises and concretises the soothing other (e.g. a photo or figurine).
- It is often useful to employ self-soothing at the end of therapy sessions which have left the individual feeling raw or vulnerable.

Further Reading:

Sutherland, O., Peräkylä, A., & Elliott, R. (2014). Conversation analysis of the two-chair self-soothing task in emotion-focused therapy. *Psychotherapy Research*, 24, 738-751.

Watson, J. C., & Greenberg, L. S. (2017). *Emotion-focused therapy for generalized anxiety*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Citation:

Pugh, M. & Bell, T. (2020). Two-chair self-soothing 1: Facilitation guidance. Retrieved from www.chairwork.co.uk.

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