

Two-Chair Enactments

Two-chair enactments (Pugh, 2019) involve the client enacting cognitive-affective events such as worry, rumination, or self-criticism. Enacting these internal events provides the therapist / coach with valuable information about the content, tone, and autobiographical origins of these experiences. For the client, two-enactments highlight that these processes are essentially 'done to' oneself and can, therefore, be changed.

Process of dialogue:

1). The facilitator identifies a cognitive or emotional process that would be helpful to explore through chairwork.

Facilitator: "Let's explore your self-criticism in more depth, using the chairs."

2). The facilitator introduces a chair representing the cognitive-affective process.

Facilitator: "Imagine this seat [introduces chair] holds your critical side."

3). The individual is asked to move into the new chair and speak to themselves from the embodied perspective of the cognitive-affective process.

Facilitator: "Change seats. [Client moves]. In this chair, I'd you to be the critical side. Tell Jacob [gestures to the client's original chair] what's wrong with him. Criticise him. Make him feel bad."

4). Once the cognitive-affective process has been spoken, the client is asked to return to their original chair and to reflect on their experience of that part of themselves.

Facilitator: "Come back to your first seat. [Client switches back]. How do you feel after hearing your critical side? What happens inside your body? What do you say to yourself in response to hearing that? When the critical side speaks to you like this, what do you want to do? Do any memories come to mind?"

Facilitation notes:

- Before speaking from the perspective of the cognitive-affective process, it is often helpful for the therapist/coach to guide the client in fully embodying that part of themselves. For example, the therapist/coach might ask the client what posture, tone of voice, and gestures go with the cognitive-affective process (e.g. curled lip, pointing finger, aggressive tone) and to adopt these during the dialogue.

- After experiencing the cognitive-affective process, the client is asked what their emotional and existential needs are (Facilitator: “The critical part makes you feel so bad, huh? What do you need from that side of your self?”). This not only legitimises these needs, but can also begin the process of transformation (Facilitator: “Say that to the critical side - I need you to give me a break”) (Pascual-Leone & Greenberg, 2007).
- Asking the client what memories and experiences come to mind after experiencing the cognitive-affective process will illuminate its autobiographical origins (Facilitator: “Having heard your critical side, what memories comes to mind? Does it remind you of anyone?”). This can be a useful springboard into “unfinished business” with significant others in the client’s life.

Further Reading:

Pascual-Leone, A., & Greenberg, L. S. (2007). Emotional processing in experiential therapy: Why "the only way out is through." *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 75*, 875–887

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

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