

Body Dialogue (Self-practice Self-reflection / Guided Dialogue)

The script below is taken from the training: 'Chairwork for Individuals with Eating Disorders' (see Chairwork.co.uk). The guided dialogue illustrates the core principles and processes of the chairwork and is used as a 'warm-up' to the practice of experiential methods. The dialogue also demonstrates how the body can be addressed directly during chairwork methods and the treatment of people with eating difficulties.

If you are a coach or therapist, the guided dialogue can be engaged with as a self-practice/self-reflection exercise. After following the instructions in the guidance below, complete the reflective questions to deepen your learning.

The exercise is best practiced with a pen and paper, and an additional chair.

Guided dialogue:

"The aim of this exercise is to give you an experiential introduction to the core principles and processes of chairwork. I'll be asking you to write down your ideas, move between chairs or different locations in the room around you, and to speak with different parts of yourself.

To begin this dialogue, I'd like you to write down examples of ways in which you care for your body: taking rest when you need it; providing your body with nourishing food; stretching when aching or tired; taking exercise; engaging in soothing activities where you relax your body or engage your senses; washing or cleaning your skin, teeth, and hair; or simply clothing your body against weather and temperature.

Now, I'd like to write down examples of when you treat your body harshly, roughly or without care. This might be evident in your behaviour: forcing your body to work beyond its comfortable limits; pushing yourself to stay up late; sitting in the same position for hours; denying or restricting food; or neglecting your body in some way. Or it might be in how you relate to your body: tuning-out from your physical sensations or needs; or becoming very anxious or disappointed about a part of your body. Perhaps you might notice how you speak negatively to parts of your body: criticizing, judging or labelling. Don't think about your answers too much, just write down whatever comes to mind and be respectful of your own personal limits.

Looking at your lists, choose one example which stands out to you and which you would feel comfortable exploring for the rest of the exercise.

You have already covered a number of chairwork principles and processes: you have considered self-multiplicity and separated different parts; you have begun to consider the different relationships or dialogues that already exist between these parts.

Next, we need to animate the different parts of you and create a dialogue. For those of you with an empty chair available, now is the time to use it.

Now, focusing your attention on the chair in front of you, or a space in the room around you, let's bring this relationship to life. I'd like you to imagine that sat in that chair is your body, or a part of your body that relates to the example you chose. What do you see in that chair? What images arise? You don't need to create a vivid image but rather focus on generating a presence of your body (whole or part) there in front of you in the opposite chair.

And as you look at this representation of your body, notice what thoughts, feelings, and memories come to mind.

Then, when you are ready, we are going to enact and deepen this dialogue between you and your body. Based on the caring or harsh example you chose: put into words how you are thinking and feeling towards your body. What would you want to say? What do you want your body to know? I'd invite you to go ahead and to share these words. To say whatever comes to mind, either out loud or in your mind. Say what you want to say to your body.

I'm also going to suggest some incomplete sentences for you to say too. If they feel relevant, I'd like you to repeat them after me and complete them in whatever way feels right.

Looking at your body, begin by saying the lines:

'Body, when I see you I feel..... And I feel this because....' Repeat and complete the sentence.

'Body, when I see you I think... And I think this because...'. Repeat and complete the sentence.

'I want to tell you.....And I want you to know this because....' Repeat and complete the sentence.

'Body, I need you to.....And I need this because...' Repeat and complete the sentence.

Take a few moments to say whatever else you want share with your body. As you do that, notice which part of you happens to be saying these things. Are you speaking from your critical side right now? Your compassionate side? The part of you that is driven and achievement focused? Or maybe your detached side?

I'm now going to invite you to change seats and take the place of the empty chair. If this isn't possible, change the position of your seat to where you have been focusing. As you make this movement, I invite you to take on the role of your 'body', to become the part of you that received those messages: to be your body hearing what you have just said in the other chair or space. Notice what thoughts, feelings, and memories come to mind as you take on this role. Look back over to the seat or space that gave you those previous messages and picture the part of you that said and felt those things (the part that commented on

you, pushed or soothed you, cared for you or criticised you). Notice what it feels like to be in the presence of that part of you. Do any images or memories arise?

Focusing back on your role as your body, see if you can put into words how you are feeling. What would you want to say? What do you want the other part of you to know? Again, I'd invite you to go ahead and to share these words. Say whatever comes to mind, either out loud or in your mind. Say what you want to say to this aspect of you.

I'm also going to suggest some incomplete sentences for you to say too. If they feel relevant, I'd like you to repeat them after me and complete them in whatever way feels right:

'As the body, when you treat me this way I feel...I feel this way because...'

'Hearing you tell me these things I feel...I feel this way because...'

'What I really need is...I need this because...'

'What I want you to know is...I want you to know and remember this because...'

'What you don't know about me as your body is...you don't know this about me because...'

And now take a few moments to say whatever else you want share from your body. Notice how you feel saying these things. Does anything change?

Now, with a new awareness of these different parts of you, I'd like you to stand up and step back from this interaction. We're now moving from a horizontal dialogue, in which we speak with parts of ourselves, into a vertical dialogue, in which we simply witness and observe parts of our self, held in different chairs.

From this standing position, take a look the two chairs before you – one which held your body or parts of your body and another chair which related to your body in a specific way (the part of the self that initiated this dialogue). Notice how it feels to witness these parts of yourself. It's as if they are still sat there, in their chairs. How does it feel to simply observe these parts, compared to participating in the dialogue? Notice how you can be present with both these parts of yourself, and yet be separate from them.

Let's begin bringing this dialogue to close. With great thanks and appreciation for these parts of you, take a moment to say a goodbye in whichever way feels right.

Take a breath. Move or stretch a little. If it helps, you can literally shake off this dialogue using your body. Take a moment to move or re-orientate the chairs to mark the closure of this dialogue."

Self-reflection questions

Write down your answers

- What did you experience during the exercise? What thoughts, images, or feelings did you notice? What stood out? Did anything surprise you?

- Based on your experience, what have you learnt about chairwork? What was it like to separate aspects of yourself and move between chairs? What was it like to dialogue between aspects of yourself? Do your experiences give you any insights into how chairwork works?
- Based on your experience, have you discovered anything about how you relate to your body? Or in turn, what the body needs? Do these insights have any implication for how you might look after your body in the future?
- If you are a therapist or coach, how might you use aspects of this exercise with your clients? Which clients might benefit from this approach most? Explain your answer.
- If you are a therapist or coach, what obstacles might you encounter in using such a method with your clients? How might you overcome them?

Citation:

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For further chairwork guidelines and facilitation notes visit
www.chairwork.co.uk