

## Internalised Other Interviewing (Conflict)

Internalised Other Interviewing (IOI) is an experiential method developed by Karl Tomm. It is often associated with family therapy but it can also be used in individual therapy. IOI involves interviewing an individual in the role of another person (e.g., a family member, role model, or customer). This can be a useful method for helping individuals explore conflicts with others, work through loss, deepen their empathy, and think creatively.

This guide describes how IOI can be used to resolve conflicts with other people.

### Process of dialogue:

1). The facilitator asks the client to change seats and take on the role of the 'other' with whom they are in conflict.

*Facilitator:* "Layla, instead of us talking about your sister, perhaps we could do try an experiment today. I'd like you to change seats and *become* your sister in the other chair. I'll then interview you about the difficulties you are having in this relationship as if you were your sister, Zara. I don't know what will happen, but it might be helpful. Would you be willing to give it a try?"

2). After the client has changed seats, the facilitator begins with simple, concrete questions to help the client get into their new role.

*Facilitator:* "Ready? [*Client changes seats*]. It's nice to meet you. What is your name?... How old are you, Zara?... What is your relationship with Laura?... How do you feel about being interviewed today?"

3). Once the client is grounded in the role of the other, the interview moves on to positive/appreciative relational questions.

*Facilitator:* "Zara, what do you appreciate about Laura?... What do you value in your relationship with her?... Tell me about some of the positive experiences you've had with her."

4). The interview then moves on to more challenging relational questions (e.g., regarding the conflict with the other).

*Facilitator:* "Zara, what concerns you about your relationship with Laura?... What difficulties are you having?... What do you think the cause is?"

5). The facilitator explores how the situation might be improved.

*Facilitator:* “Zara, if Laura were willing to do some things differently in your relationship, what you appreciate the most?... What changes would make a difference to you?”

6). The client returns to their original chair and de-briefs with the facilitator.

*Facilitator:* “What was that experience like for you?”... How well were you able to get into your sister’s perspective?... Were there any questions you struggled to answer?”

**Facilitation notes:**

- Before the interview, reassure the client that some questions may be challenging to answer as the other. This is to be expected. What is most important is that the client is able to connect with *their* representation of the other, rather than the other’s actual perspective.
- Referring to the client using the other’s name throughout the interview can help them stay grounded in their new role.
- There are some situations where IOI may be unhelpful. For example, interviewing the client as an abuser may generate empathy and understanding for this individual’s actions (‘siding with the abuser’), which is likely to be counter-therapeutic.

**References:**

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