

Old Ways - New Ways of Being Exercise

This exercise was delivered as a self-practice/self-reflection exercise at the European Association for Behavioural and Cognitive Therapies (EABCT) Conference: Innovations in Cognitive Behavioural Therapies (September 7th 2022, Barcelona).

The aim of this exercise is to differentiate and contrast clients' old ways of being (e.g., their maladaptive schemas and problematic patterns of relating) and new ways of being (e.g., more adaptive schemas and patterns of relating). This is achieved by embodying and elaborating each way of being in different chairs. The enactment concludes with the client separating from the enactment ('witnessing') to support reflective processing.

Process of dialogue:

1). The facilitator introduces two chairs which represent the client's 'old ways of being' and 'new ways of being'.

Facilitator: *"Imagine these empty chairs represent your old and new ways of being".*

Part One: Elaborating the 'Old Way of Being'.

2). The client sits in the chair representing their 'old way of being' and gets into role.

Facilitator: *"I invite you now to sit in your 'old ways of being' chair. [Client changes seats]. Now, repeat after me: 'Sitting in this chair, I am the old way of being'".*

3). The client is encouraged to embody the old way of being.

Facilitator: *"Take on posture, facial expressions, and gestures of the old way of being."*

4). The client is encouraged to take on the mindset of the old way of being.

Facilitator: *"Imagine that you see the world, other people, and you own life through the eyes of your old way of being. Bring to mind the beliefs tied to this way of being and imagine you hold them as complete truths. Get a sense of how it feels to hold these beliefs so strongly."*

5). The client is helped to elaborate a memory of taking action from the old way of being.

Facilitator: *"Bring to mind an example of when you have acted from your old way of being. Tell me what happened from the perspective of your old way of being, speaking from a first-person, present-tense point of view, as you are back in the event. For example, 'I see... I feel... I want to...'".*

6). The client is helped from speak from their old way being.

Facilitator: *"I want you to now clarify the nature of your old way of being by repeating and completing the following lines..."*

- *As my old way of being, I think about myself as...*
- *As my old way of being, I think about other people as....*
- *As my old way of being, I cope with difficulties by...*
- *As my old way of being, I feel like....*
- *As my old way of being, what I really want is...."*

7). The client is helped to think about the future from the old way being.

Facilitator: *"Finally, tell me about how you see your future from the perspective of your old way of being. What do you expect to happen in your life? What do these events seem to mean about you?"*

Part Two: Elaborating the 'New Way of Being'.

8). The client switches seats and sits in the chair representing their 'new way of being'.

Facilitator: *"Now we are going to separate from the old way of being and access the new way of being. When you are ready, stand up and step away from the old way of being chair. Make a motion to 'shake-off' that old role. Sit down in the chair holding your new way of being".*

9). The client is helped to get into the role of their 'new way of being'.

Facilitator: *"Repeat after me... 'Sitting in this chair, I am the new way of being'"*.

10). The client embodies their 'new way of being'.

Facilitator: *"Take on posture, facial expressions, and gestures of the new way of being".*

11). The client takes on the mindset of their new way of being.

Facilitator: *"Imagine you see the world, other people, and your life through the eyes of your new way of being. Imagine this perspective is your true experience of things. Get a sense of how it feels to be the new way of being."*

12). The client is encouraged to elaborate a fantasy of acting from the new way of being.

Facilitator: *"Let's imagine acting out your new way of being. Pick a situation where you could imagine bringing this new way of being to life. You might revisit the example you used earlier. Picture yourself in this scenario and tell me what is happening from the perspective of your new way of being, speaking from a first-person, present-tense point of view. For example, "I see... I feel... I want to..."*

13). The client speaks from their new way of being.

Facilitator: *“I want you to clarify the nature of your new way of being by repeating and completing the following lines...”*

- *As my new way of being, I think about myself as...*
- *As my new way of being, I think about other people as....*
- *As my new way of being, I cope with difficulties by...*
- *As my new way of being, I feel like....*
- *As my new way of being, my main motivation is...”.*

14). The client speaks about their future from the perspective of their new way of being.

Facilitator: *“Finally, tell me about how you see your future from the perspective of your new way of being. What do you expect to happen in your life? Tell me what these events would mean about you.”*

Part Three: Witnessing the enactment.

15). The client returns to their original chair and separates from both the new and old ways of being.

Facilitator: *“When you are ready, stand up and separate from both the old and new ways of being. To help you return back to the here-and-now, name three things you can see in the room around you.... And then name two things you can hear...”*

16). The client summarises their experience of the enactment from a witnessing perspective.

Facilitator: *“Looking back at the chairs with a degree of distance and separation, summarise what you experienced in each of the chairs. What have you learnt about your old and new ways of being?”*

Facilitation notes:

- Throughout the exercise, it can be helpful to bring the individual’s attention back to their bodily sensations and felt-sense. This can create somatic markers/anchors for each way of being which aids identification when outside of the session.
- The chairwork exercise can be followed by behavioural experiments to test out the impact and utility of each way of being. Behavioural experiments can also help individuals to embody their new way of being and provide opportunities to road-test and adapt new patterns of thinking, feeling, and behaving. Such experiments can be carried out within the session via role-plays with the therapist: for example, the

facilitator might take the role of a 'difficult person' from the individual's life and a conversation might be enacted from both old and new ways of being.

- A shorter version of the exercise might involve reviewing the past week via the mind-set of each way of being. Similarly, a homework task or upcoming problem might be approached from both ways of being to demonstrate the different consequences they create.

Citation:

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