

Module 10: Training the Adult Mode (Copyright by Eckhard Roediger)

Goal of this module: Balanced expression of feelings, needs, and wishes in activating situations.

Triggers are (almost) everywhere. We cannot avoid or escape schema activation without ending up in a constrained life making us unhappy. So we better learn how to deal with schema activations instead. For example, we need to be aware that many externalizers are absolutely unaware of how RED they come across. They interrupt others without noticing, or devalue their statements in a seemingly offhand way, saying things like: *“That’s nonsense!”* Later in therapy, unlike to Module 4, the entire mode cycle is no longer analyzed. The focus now is specifically on the inner balance between the two basic needs—the RED and BLUE legs—and on functional verbal expression.

Procedure: Interrupting and shifting to the observer level first. If one of the two has trouble speaking calmly and in a balanced manner, we interrupt gently and shift together to the observer level:

“Excuse me for interrupting, but I notice that you’re slipping back into a mode cycle. That can happen. We agreed that we would stop at this point. Let’s briefly stand up together to try out how it might go better.” Standing side by side (we in the middle), looking down at the now empty chairs, and speaking in the third person, we address the person we want to practice with.

Formulating a concrete wish from inner balance: *“Betty, as you look at that Betty down there, which leg is she standing on when she speaks like that? ... Exactly, that’s more the RED leg. You know where that tends to lead! ... Let’s try together to get more in touch with the BLUE leg ... What is your wish for Tom now? When you look forward, what can or should he do right now? ... How does it feel to say that to Tom now? ... Do you feel like you’re really standing evenly on both legs? ... How do you think Tom will respond to this wish?”*

Modeling and shaping expression while standing: If the expression is still not sufficiently balanced, we ask the person if they want to hear our perception, and then share it: *“Betty, would you like to know how I experience this? ... I see your effort, but I fear it’s still a bit too RED for Tom, and he might retreat again. Try going right up to your absolute pain threshold on the BLUE leg and speak from there.”*

Betty should not feel “shown up.” It is better if we support by prompting or offering formulations: *“How does it feel to you if I say it this way to Tom?”* (we model it). *“Good, then try to say it again now in your own words.”* This can go back and forth a few times until the best possible result for the moment is achieved.

If the wish is still not well-balanced, we give friendly feedback. If necessary, we rebalance by weighing giving and receiving (as in Module 7). This softens the sharpness of demands. Finally, we ask: *“How does it feel to say it this way? ... Down to the body? ... Good, then let’s ask Tom how the Tom down there would now respond to this.”*

Transferring the result to the process level (sitting): If the result looks promising, the couple sits back down in their chairs. We sit next to Betty (or slightly behind): *“Good, Betty. You’ve brought the feeling from up there down onto this chair. Please try now to say it directly to Tom in the same way.”* Support and fine-tuning may still be needed here: *“Betty, are you satisfied with this result? ... How does it feel to express your wish this way?”* It is not easy for patients to avoid slipping back into autopilot mode when seated!

Checking the effect on the other person: We now switch to Tom's side and ask how Betty's statement affects him. We can also ask how Tom would prefer it to be said, so he would be more inclined to respond to Betty. If Betty is willing, we may continue practicing with her. Otherwise, we end the exercise and return to our normal seat. If necessary, we make sure at the end that a wish—or even a demand—is sufficiently balanced with a bonding offer.

At this stage of therapy, it is crucial to build as much understanding and goodwill between the couple as possible. This is the foundation for successful work with Module 11.

Possible Homework: At home, while speaking, repeatedly imagine how one's behavior would look if viewed from the outside through a camera—and try stepping a little more onto the "other leg."