

ST-C Module 9: Reconnecting through conjoint imagery with a childhood scene (by E. Roediger)

The conjoint imagery exercise is a variation of the imagery rescripting exercises we usually use in individual therapy. We start working with one of the partners as we would do in individual therapy, having the second partner observe. During the exercise we let the second partner “work” with us, for example during reparenting. Having the second partner comforting the vulnerable child instead of doing it oneself helps patients to experience their partners as supportive, caring, trustful and loving. This is the key to emotional reconnection. While doing imagery we also get access to significant childhood experiences and schema-inducing scenes. This gives some depth to our work even if we don’t take a comprehensive history of the partners in the beginning of therapy. It makes sense to do this exercise with both partners. You might begin with the withdrawn partner to involve him more into the therapy. To create a safe situation for the active partner (doing the imagery exercise) all three close eyes.

Therapist: “Let’s start with a recent clash you had. Can you please bring up a vivid image of the scene?” Ask for all sensory channels until you have a vivid image of the scene yourself. *“How do you feel in this scene?.....How does that feel in your body?.....Please stay in touch with all these feelings and let the picture of the scene fade out.....Allow yourself to float back in time into your youth and your childhood.....staying on touch with your feeling, what scene comes up before your eyes.....how do you feel being in this scene.....what do you need now? Please stop the scene now and stay in touch with this need.”*

Then the therapist addresses him- or herself to the listening partner: *“How do you feel seeing Tom (or Betty) in such a situation?.....How does this make you feel in your body?....what do you like to say or do to Tom (or Betty)?”* If the feelings and impulses are adaptive, you support the partner to sit close by the imaging partner and talk softly to them or hug them. If the listening partner remains detached you do the reparenting as the therapist yourself. However, this is a critical sign about the emotional resources of the couple.

After both partners returned to their seats let them to open their eyes gain and ask how they experienced the exercise. Ask them to compare their feelings at the beginning and the end of the exercise (discrimination). It is important to wait with this exercise until the couple managed to stop clashes and reconnect in a functional way. Otherwise you risk that the imaging partner gets emotionally hurt and deprived again. Usually the exercise works very well and deepens the understanding for the partner’s behavior patterns based on the childhood experiences and creates a better emotional connection.