

ST-C Module 7: Accessing the assertive side on chairs (with internalizers; by Eckhard Roediger)

This is the complementary exercise to module 5. It tries to bring the blocked assertive side behind the anxious protectors on stage. This is the road to take for all clients with detached protectors or self-soothers driven by fear or sadness, feeling weak and vulnerable and trying to protect themselves by withdrawing and detaching. With the protectors driven by disgust or anger we use module 5.

1. Interrupt the unfolding mode cycle and identify the coping mode

The first step dealing with detaching modes is to detect, which basic emotion is driving them. Thus, after stopping the clash and standing up together as described in module 5 you turn to the detached client asking what emotions drives the detached coping mode. Then you turn the detached coping chair away from the partner, add a chair for the vulnerable part in front of it according to figure 3.

2. Identify active emotions (child mode) and the downside of the coping mode

Ask the client to sit down on the vulnerable chair. The other partner (Betty) sits down on her normal chair again. First ask for the feelings on this chair. Usually they feel protected and safer. You validate the function of the protecting (or self-soothing) mode. Then you try to point out the downside of it by asking: *"Ok, you feel safe (or more relaxed). But if we look into the future, do you want to stay this way until you die?""Could it be, that the wall, that protects you, at the same time is a wall locking you in somehow?"* Then you try to elicit some motivation for a change: *"Are you interested to find an additional option to feel safe and try something new?"....."I think in terms a big gate like in a city wall. You decide, when to open and when to close it. So the wall is still there and you can hide behind it anytime you need it."*

3. Address the blocked child mode side

Now you refer to the model saying: *"As you might recall from the still face video, we are all born with an assertive need and some anger power. In your case the anger power seems to be quite well hidden. But let's try to get in touch with it, ok?"* Then the therapist adds an additional child mode chair besides the chair representing the vulnerable side. However, the exercise works better if you don't ask the client to take a seat on the assertiveness chair, but let them stand up beside the assertiveness chair while you as the therapist stand close by and a little bit behind him or her. This is one of the rare occasions where the clients act on different levels (for sake to make Tom feel stronger).

4. Activate the neglected wishes and address them to the partner

Now look down on the detached coping mode chair in front of him or her: *"Ok. First, we have to move this detached protector chair a little bit aside for a moment, It is not gone and you might go into it again when things get difficult with Betty. But now for the sake of this exercise can we put it aside a bit?"* If the client agrees you continue: *"Can you imagine a miracle happen tonight and when you wake up tomorrow Betty is the way you want her to be. Tell me how she behaves towards you.How do you want her to be and to treat you?.....How does*

it feel seeing Betty this way?.....Are you willing to give it try to tell Betty how you want your relationship to be?"

But to open the partner up for the new balance in the relationship it is important to make the gain more visible by telling what you offer the partner in return: *"Tom, if Betty behaves in the expected way, what are you willing to give to her in return?.....What exactly are you willing to do for her in the time you spend with her?"* Usually it is about being more present, more reliable, more open or more supportive. This part is important to increase the partner's motivation to buy into a change.

Remember: If you feel that the partner might not like what Tom says, but Tom on hold and check back with the partner, if they are still ok, if you can go on or what they need to feel more comfortable. If it gets too difficult or the partner checks out completely, stop the exercise, change into the observer stance by standing up together and connect what happened with the mode model.

If the exercise goes well, you finally connect the new behavior with the emotional reverberations: *"How does that feel now?.....How does that resonate in your body?.....Can you please hold this feeling for a moment?"*

In the first step the client talks to you. In some cases, it might help if the client and the partner both closes eyes, because this disconnects from the real situation in the room and help the clients focusing on their inner world. Or you might ask them to go into the "power posing position" (see details in module 8). Once the client expresses their wish to you in a second step ask them to look the partner into the eyes and tell it straight to their face. Ask the clients after each step how they feel and how that resonates in their body. If the client remains reluctant to give you a picture how Betty should be you can move to Module 8 - the empowerment imagery.

5. Check back with the listening partner

Now the Therapist moves beside Betty (while Tom is still standing) asking her: *"How does it make you feel hearing Tom talk this way?.....What do you want to say or do to Tom now?.....Can you say this to Tom directly, please?"* If they are willing you can allow the couple to connect physically with eyes. But it is also a good end if they feel somehow comfortable with the situation. Don't push too much. After they accustomed to the situation you can say something like: *"Ok, there might still be some obstacles in the way we have to remove, but you see that you can still be close to each other."*

6. Discrimination

Ask them to compare their feelings now with the feelings at the beginning of the exercise and end the session.

If your client is able to make adequate use of their assertive side you can try a conjoint imagery exercise (module 9) and/or move to a connect talk (module 11) working on a presented problem from everyday life.