

**Compassion**

Exercise



15-25 min.



Client



No

**Goal**

The goal of the exercise is to access disparate facets of the self, in order to understand how they work together, conflict, and how they feel in when experienced in the present.

**Advice**

- This exercise works best if three empty chairs are used, preferably in a triangular arrangement. Because the exercise may sound a bit strange for clients, it can be helpful as a coach to demonstrate the exercise first. Because clients sometimes have little or no experience expressing the supportive friend or wise counselor, the coach can first play this role.
- If clients find it difficult to directly talk to the different aspects of the self, a coach can take a seat in one of the chairs and physically represent the voice that is being talked to. Although there is a fixed sequence and structure in this exercise, sometimes clients feel that they need to switch chairs in between the separate parts of the exercise. It is good to let the conversation between the different voices be as dynamic as possible and take the proposed structure mainly as a rough guideline.



## Suggested Readings

Arntz, A., Jacob, G. (2013). *Schema therapy in practice: an introductory guide to the schema mode approach*. Chichester, West Sussex; Malden, MA.

Young, J. E., Klosko, J. S., & Weishaar, M. (2003). *Schema therapy: A practitioner's guide*. New York: Guilford Publications.



# Compassionate Chair Work

## Instructions

Think of something that has recently caused you to criticize yourself. Each chair in front of you represents a different perspective to help you understand your self-criticism.

The first chair represents a voice of self-criticism.

The second chair represents the emotionality or sensation of feeling judged.

The last chair takes the perspective of a supportive friend or wise counselor.

Your job is to play the role of each voice represented by the respective chairs. There's no need to feel silly. Learn through accessing different perspectives.

## Part 1

First, sit from the perspective of the inner critic. Now, express out loud in words or sound how you think about the issue that you have been dwelling on. For example, "I hate that I am so lazy and can't seem to get anything done." Try to understand the tone you use. Notice the emotions your words evoke. Notice your posture or general demeanor.

## Part 2

Now move to the chair that represents the sensation of being judged (by yourself). Express out loud in words or sound how it feels to encounter criticism. For example, "I feel hurt" or "I do not feel supported." Notice the same things you did before (your tone, emotions, posture, etc.).

## Part 3

Now, engage with yourself in a dialogue between the last two perspectives (the critical voice and the emotion voice). Try to understand how each perspective feels.

## Part 4

Next, move to the chair that represents the friend or wise counselor. Drawing on a sincere sense of compassion, confront the critical voice and the critiqued voice. Address both perspectives out loud. What do you say? What advice do you give? How do you relate to each perspective from a more detached point of view? Notice your tone and demeanor.

Allow yourself enough time to express everything you need to from each perspective. Make sure you leave time to reflect on the experience. Try to understand how you think, and how you could benefit from the perspectives you explored. How does that inform your inner critic and your experience with self-compassion? Ultimately, you are already capable of using a more supportive voice. Next time you find yourself being negative and self-critical, try to locate the compassionate voice.