

## Two-Chair-work for Conflict Splits\*

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*Learning Emotion-Focused Therapy: The Process-Experiential Approach to Change*.  
Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.)

1. A conflict between two aspects of self indicates that a two-chair dialogue task is an appropriate working method, such as when one is struggling with how to express the more adaptive aspects of self (the part that knows what is right), and which constantly faces disapproving aspects of self that judges one to be "mean" and/or unacceptable—this struggle can lead to a sense of despair.
2. Two-chair dialogue is designed to target *conflict splits*—problems that arise when one part of the self attacks or blocks the full expression of a more adaptive and fundamental aspect of self.
3. Conflicting aspects of self are frequently verbalized and expressed as two parts in conflict—such as, "I'd like to, but I am afraid" or "I wish I could, but I stop myself" and often arise out of the person's developmental experiences. Conflicts represent internalized standards often developed in the early formative years. Partially out of habit, partially out of fear, one comes to live according to already incorporated standards, edicts, and judgments about how one "ought" to be, rather than engaging in a more discriminating process of attending to and selecting what fits and will lead to greatest satisfaction of needs. As a result, important needs get ignored, lost, or minimized.
4. The coercive or evaluative aspects of self is labelled *Top-Dog* and verbalizes "shoulds," "oughts," aimed at *Bottom-Dog*. Top-Dog also carries with it hostility, disgust, or contempt for Bottom-Dog that feeds into Bottom-Dog's feelings of hopelessness, powerlessness, and subsequent depressive or anxious states. The dominance of Top-Dog's negative self-evaluating process leaves the person immobilized, anxious, depressed, and uncertain. It is important to stress that these processes are habitual and often occur out of awareness; one is not necessarily conscious of "beating up" on oneself. When brought to awareness, however, that is how it is felt.
5. CLINICAL INDICATORS OF CONFLICT SPLITS
  - a. Particular markers of conflict splits are the characteristically different in presentation depending on the symptomatic difficulty—e.g.: in depression, there is the negative evaluative critic with intense feelings of hostility or disgust where these feelings appear as perfectionism and emotional blocking; in anxiety or posttraumatic stress, there is a critical aspect of the self that persistently frightens the vulnerable *experiencing-self* as its protective strategy; in substance abuse or habit disorders, a conflict may exist between a distressed, weak self-aspect that engages in persistent self-harming behavior as a means of distracting itself from emotional pain (a maladaptive self-soothing strategy), and a healthier aspect of the self that is concerned about the self-harm but is unable to stop it; in personality disorders, where one has near implacable splits it requires longer work over time; in fragile individuals, who can fragment easily they need to be stable enough or grounded when overwhelmed to begin emotional work.

## 6. TWO-CHAIR DIALOGUE FOR SELF-EVALUATIVE SPLITS

### a. *Participant and Primary Processes in Two-Chair Dialogue (Tasks & Stages)*

- i. A person-centered relational stance of acceptance, prizing, and empathic presence underlies the facilitation of all work. Such an attitude is fundamental to the view that awareness and acceptance of one's experiences is key to change.
- ii. The goal of two-chair dialogue is transformation rather than modification, control, or denial. The process is one of facilitating deeper experiencing rather than skill training or symptomatic relief. Participants access healthier aspects of self, such as primary adaptive anger and basic wants and needs, which previously had little influence on their modes of acting in the world. Operating with such emotional access allows one to become better self-leaders and navigate themselves toward their own goals.

## 7. STAGES (*see summary chart on last page*)

### a. Stage 1; Marker Confirmation

- i. Expressions of conflict between two aspects of self accompanied by distress are verbal indicators for two-chair dialogue; it presents the opportunity for change.

#### Example:

*Participant:* I want to be myself and express what I feel.

- ii. The adaptive aspect of self, referred to as the *experiencing-self* or *experiencer* is currently obscured by another self-aspect that believes that following the experiencer would make one a "mean person" or somehow "not ok." This self-aspect represents what is referred to as the *critical self* or the *inner critic*. A marker for a split is indicated when there is a verbal statement by the Participant that two aspects of the self are in opposition, with accompanying verbal or paralinguistic indicators of struggle or coercion.
- iii. Sometimes, the two aspects of critic and experiencer are less obvious or apparent. Such splits may be expressed as "Part of me wants this, but another part wants that." A Participant may experience a decisional split, such as "Part of me wants to stay in my relationship and get married, and another part wants out, to be free. It's so confusing." When the two sides are placed in chairs and encouraged to engage in dialogue, one side clearly emerges as more coercive or evaluative than the other.
- iv. The critic-experiencer configuration is more obvious in markers such as "I should do this, but I can't." "Shoulds" tend to represent negative evaluative aspects of self and most often emerge as the internal critic. The statement "I want to do this, but I am inadequate" indicates the operation of some form of negative self-evaluative processing. These are the most common types of conflict.

- v. Some splits are implicit statements but not actually presented as a conflict between two opposing sides. Often take the form of negative self-evaluations such as "I'm a failure," "I am worthless," "I am a bad person," or "I am too needy." One part of the self is negatively evaluating the other. Other statements indicate implicit splits and explored for possibilities such as "I am guilty" (or depressed, or hopeless) which indicate that one part of the self is negatively evaluating the other. Statements such as "I am afraid" (or unsure, or anxious) may be one part of the self frightening the other with catastrophic expectations about the future or constructing a threatening view of the past. Finally, complaints about having "low self-esteem" are a sure sign of an implicit split.

Example:

Look for the marker of the split between the two opposing aspects of self, indicating it is appropriate for two-chair dialogue.

*Primary* (gently): Yeah, it's like being yourself and saying what you want is really difficult for you.

*Participant*: Yeah, you really hit the spot, (sobbing)

*Primary*: Yeah, just take a breath.

*Participant*: You really touched something when you said "be myself."

*Primary*: I guess there's a feeling of closing yourself down.

*Participant*: Yeah, it really worries me, too. Like, don't I have self-respect?

*Primary*: Yeah, that is the other side talking, but there's something about, that it's bad to be yourself.

*Participant*: Yeah, it's bad to speak my mind, because (sniff), and I know it comes from my parents saying it, and then also getting it from Jim (her husband). I just have a hard time, you know even though it is in my mind, I want to express it, but (pause) I hold back.

- vi. When one begins to criticize oneself for having a conflict ("I don't have self-respect"), recognize that this is a *secondary reactive split* that will not lead to a deepening of experience, and focus on the more primary split. The intent is to unpack how the experience of low self-respect is produced, leaving the open edge of one's reflection on the critical voice that is part of the self-doubting experience. One may then

spontaneously generalized and broadened the conflict from the particular situation to a broader set of circumstances.

b. Stage 2: Initiating Two-Chair Dialogue

i. *Introducing Two-Chair Dialogue*

1. The introduction of the two-chair dialogue flows directly out of the *immediate experience* and should appear as an obvious strategy for addressing the conflict.

Example:

*Primary* (gently): Why don't we try something? Can you come over here for a second? (Points to a chair placed directly across from the participant) (Could and maybe should do more to introduce chair-work, especially if it is the first time for a hesitant or doubtful Participant, but on the other hand don't want to lose the emotional energy when it is immediate and present with too much talk.)

*Participant*: Sure, (moves to critic chair)

*Primary*: You are kind of saying this is how you hold yourself back, how you restrain yourself, so maybe we could work with how you do that. Can you try doing that, actually kind of put whoever is pushing her back here, if it's your parents, or Jim, or you, making it hard to be yourself, whatever feels right. Hold her back. Stop her from being herself.

*Participant* (as critic): Um, OK. Don't say those things! Don't make people laugh at you by saying those things.

2. Once consented, move the other chair over so that it is directly facing the Participant's chair. Allow a comfortable space between the two chairs and position yourself slightly outside of but equidistant from the two chairs. Physical positioning is important: Do not align with one side or the other (Aldo's exception: moving alongside or behind each chair every time there is a change). You may feel compelled to support the "weaker" aspect of self by placing their chair beside it, assuming a "cheerleading" attitude—implies a lack of acceptance toward important aspects of the participant's experience embedded in the critical self. The participant may extract the belief that you favor one aspect of self over the other or may hear that the critic must be eliminated. True resolution generally requires both sides to work together (Aldo's exception: I suppose you just need to be conscious of your choices regarding where to place yourself and when).
3. Other ways to begin involve summarizing the conflict and then asking, "What side do you feel most in touch with right now?" or "Which side feels most alive to

you?" Ask the Participant to begin by "talking from" this side. If unsure which side to start with, make a judgment based on observation of which side is most lively. Usually, it is easier to first identify with the critical, blaming aspects of self, because "The critic usually has the power."

4. When Participants experience the evaluation or coercion as coming from an external person in the environment, it is referred to as a *projected conflict* or an *attribution split*. Rather than owning or experiencing themselves as inhibiting, people often experience "others" as responsible for such actions and not yourself. It is often easier to begin with an externalized critic, useful to encourage an image of the perceived instigator, and begin by speaking from the position of the "other." Subsequently, participants often spontaneously shift the responsibility from the external other, and recognize through exploration that *they* are criticizing or restraining themselves.
5. As one moves into the dialogue, encourage the Participant to *be specific* in expressing how the critic holds the experiencer back or criticizes it. Work as a team, aiming to bring to awareness to how internal criticisms and injunctions either inhibit and silence or, conversely, push and cajole the Participant to act in certain ways. Help Participants directly experience how they control and criticize themselves, but it is unnecessary and undesirable to state this directly, as one may feel blamed or judged. Direct the Participant to conjure up the two aspects of self in an imaginary fashion, almost as if play-acting at first.

Example:

*Participant:* Don't say those things, don't make people laugh at you. If you say that, people will laugh at you. You don't know anything!

*Primary:* Tell her, "You don't know what you're talking about."

*Participant:* Yeah, you're no good, what comes out of your mouth is senseless, it doesn't count; it's just stupidity. You're stupid, and you don't make any sense.

*Primary:* OK, can you switch? (Participant moves to experiencer chair.) How do you feel when she tells you that?

*Participant (as experiencer):* Uh, you're wrong.

*ii. Separating and Creating Contact*

1. Once you access the harsh criticism, direct reflection of the explicit meaning of the harsh statements gives permission to elaborate and specify the criticisms more fully. Once criticisms are clearly stated, it is important to maintain the tension by suggesting a move to the other chair to access the affective reaction activated in

response to the harsh critic. This principle of separating the two sides and maintaining contact between them should be kept in mind throughout. Storytelling and "talking about" without direct reference back to the experience of the ongoing dialogue can easily derail the work and prevent resolution of the conflict split. Once derailed, they can further spiral outward in their storytelling, and find it difficult to know how to return to the essential dialogue.

iii. *Working Interpersonally with the Intrapersonal*

1. Sometimes you may find that if the Participant is not familiar with chair-work or is more relationally oriented, the participant may move out of the dialogue and attempt to engage interpersonally (also applies to you as the Primary). They might begin to turn their body or chair away from the "other" chair and address communication to you, the Primary. When this happens, it is important to acknowledge and empathize while simultaneously being mindful of maintaining the flow of the dialogue. It is important to maintain a strong, supportive bond, but also essential to keep the dialogue flowing once the emotional processes have been activated. It helps to remember that a successful dialogue will enhance the alliance simply because the Participant will feel they are working with the Primary toward solving their problems.
2. A caveat to this rule is that chair-work should be initiated only when judged that the Participant possesses sufficient ego strength to tolerate the artificial splitting of the self. If the Participant begins to feel overwhelmed or fragile, you may choose to move back to purely supportive, relational work. This reaction, however, is the exception rather than the rule.

c. Stage 3: Deepening the Split

i. *Working with the Affective Reaction*

1. The "you're no good—you are wrong" sequence is common at this point in chair-work. This initial response in the experiencing chair is a defensive one, characteristic of what is described as the "underdog." It has the sound of a surface, pre-rehearsed struggle that has occurred many times before. One must work to help further refine the position of the experiencing-self by helping access feelings underlying the emotional reaction to the critic.

Example:

*Primary:* You feel she is wrong, that leaves you feeling dismissed, hurt. (Pause) Stay with whatever is happening inside.

*Participant:* I want to say how I feel.

*Primary:* You want to say what you feel, what you want. Tell her what you feel.

*Participant:* I feel that I do count...

ii. *Working with the Developmental Growth Edge*

1. Vocal quality may be thin, and sentences trail off at the end, suggesting that the participant is unsure. The voice may shake when starting to communicate, "I do count," indicating that as one begins to access core sadness, one experiences trepidation. Nevertheless, even with a weak voice, the developmental growth edge has begun to emerge, which is the healthy aspect of self that feels aware of and entitled to needs. Be aware both that there is new and important emergent experiencing that needs expression, and that the participant may be shaky in this new stance. Be careful to communicate understanding and support and to encourage the elaboration and expression of associated feelings to the critic.

Example:

*Primary:* So you're telling her, "I do count." What are you feeling when you say this?

*Participant:* Well, I feel sad and afraid.

*Primary:* Uh-huh, afraid ... afraid of . . . ?

*Participant:* Afraid of them not liking me or hating me

*Primary:* Tell her what you are afraid of.

*Participant:* I am afraid you won't like me, that you might hate me. (Pause) You may make me feel worse, more neglected. If I just keep quiet and say nothing, I think that you won't hate me as much as if I say what I feel.

*Primary:* "I want you to like me."

*Participant:* I want you to like me for who I am and what I feel.

*Primary:* How do you feel as you say this...?

*Participant:* I feel that the sadness is going away, I feel a bit eager to tell her what I feel. I am important.

*Primary:* Tell her.

*Participant:* I feel I am important and I do count. I care a lot about myself and my feelings....

iii. *Encouraging Expression of Underlying Feelings and Needs*

1. In the above example, the Participant is encouraged to voice fears and state what is needed. Statements of need strengthen people and orient them toward goals. In addition, there is an acknowledgement of fear, but realizes that does not want to feel neglected; it is more important to stand up for oneself, and preferable to make needs clear and risk rejection, rather than to go unnoticed. The maximal focus of attention on all aspects of experience allows the processing of what is important as if one were living the experience. By acknowledging what wants, one gathers strength. In addition, validation of both fears and needs encourages acceptance of them. The sadness subsides and gives way to excitement. One feels more equipped to confront whatever pain may result from being neglected by the other. With encouragement, now able to re-access the developmental growth edge, which is "I do care about myself." Although the dialogue is clearly on the path to resolution, often it loops around one more time. They run through the stages once more, albeit at a deeper level. In the following, after an initial self-assertion, the Participant was moved to the other chair to get a response from the critic. The critic's responses left a feeling of hurt and being unloved.

Example:

*Participant:* Yeah, I want you to recognize that I do count, I am not stupid. I need love from you.

*Primary:* OK, switch back over here. (Participant moves to critic chair.) What do you say?

*Participant* (in a dismissive tone): What are you talking about? Don't try to pretend. You don't know what you are talking about, and you know it.

*Primary:* OK, so come back over here. (Participant moves to experiencing chair.) What do you feel when she tries to make you feel stupid and ridiculed? What's that like for you?

*Participant* (crying and sobbing): Uh, lonely, not knowing why I'm alive.

*Primary:* Like you can't find a reason for being alive, that sounds painful, (Pause) If you can, stay with that part that feels so unloved.

*Participant:* I feel all alone, like I am small, I feel trapped in here. I feel like I don't count, just trapped inside.

*Primary:* Can you come over here (Participant moves to critic chair) and make her feel trapped? How do you do that?

iv. *Knowing When to Split the Split*

1. From the above example, the inner critic becomes dismissive, and the experiencer again begins to access painful feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and despair. Through an exploration of that experience, one begins to feel trapped. This is an appropriate time to move back to the other chair to increase awareness of how one comes to feel trapped. The intervention is aimed toward heightening awareness of critical and interruptive processes that leave one feeling anxious and alone. Paradoxically, this micro-intervention gives a Participant a greater sense of control, increasing their awareness that they are ultimately agents of their own experience. It also provides heightened awareness of the direct link between self-critical processes and subsequent negative affective reactions. It does run the risk of leaving Participants feeling blamed and misunderstood; therefore, it must be done within the context of a strong bond and without the communication of blame.

Example:

In this next segment, in response to the suggestion for the critic to make the experiencer feel trapped, the Participant responds as follows:

*Participant:* You're worthless, you don't count; you don't deserve any comfort. Just stay in there and don't talk to anybody.

*Primary:* OK, come back over here. (Participant moves to experiencing chair.) What do you say to that?

*Participant:* She is right. I should not receive anything, I don't deserve comfort.

v. *Working with the Collapsed Self*

1. The preceding dialogue represents a key juncture that is both important and difficult. The critic and experiencer have merged, almost as if they are in collusion. We call the stance of "my critic is right" as the *Collapsed Self*, because the critic possesses the only dominant voice, and the development growth edge self has disappeared—a core process in depression.

2. Beginning Primaries find this point very difficult and sometimes begin to panic—do not despair. Take a breath and prepare for action. Managing a collapsed self is a work opportunity, and the successful working-through of this impasse is key to the resolution of the dialogue.
3. The goal is to help access the feelings underlying the experiencing-self's taking the "you're right" position in response to the critic. Participants in the collapsed state can only access the critic's position, but doing so is associated with shame, depression, and painful emotional processes. One feels helpless and resigned in such a state and have felt this way so long that it has become a theme in their lives. The Participant's strength lies beyond present awareness—within the oyster lies the pearl. The only way to access the primary adaptive emotions and needs is through the currently felt secondary experience of hopelessness and resignation. Feelings of helplessness, powerlessness, and hopelessness must be accessed and explored. It is important to help the Participant step back from "you're right" as a statement of truth in order to become aware of what it feels like to be told, "You are worthless." Two possible routes to take at this point are: (1) to accept and work with the Collapsed Self and/or (2) to encourage greater specificity in the critic. Examples are given below.

vi. *Accepting and working with the collapsed sense of self*

1. Selecting the first choice of action exercises the principle of acceptance of "what is," staying present and following the process. The goal is to provide a safe, accepting environment so that Participants find the source of strength within themselves. In this scenario, one might offer the following response:

*Primary:* So, she says, you don't deserve any comfort. What's that like inside? You must feel pretty powerless, like that is just the way it is.

*Participant:* Well, yeah, it feels pretty bad. (hunching over in her chair). I just feel like what can I do; she's right, and I don't deserve comfort.

2. With the goal of heightening awareness to activate core experience, the Primary empathically provides a process observation of nonverbal and paralinguistic indicators of the Participant's current state, offering a response such as,

*Primary:* Yeah, it sounds like you are feeling pretty down. I notice as you sit over here that you're kind of hunched over in your chair, and your voice has become very small. I guess you must be feeling pretty defeated....

3. In addition, may want to use experiential teaching to communicate about why you are asking the Participant to "stay with hopelessness." This may seem like an odd or insensitive request; the Participant may feel that the hopelessness is the

problem trying to move away from. One can explain that helpless feelings do in fact lead to anxiety and hopelessness to depression. One can also validate the hopelessness, acknowledging that although it is a painful feeling one is trying to avoid, it is also very real and the source of difficulty. Can point out that embedded within the experience of weakness are more primary feelings such as sadness and anger which are important to give expression to. These feelings need to find expression; this will lead to a change in view of the self and the problems.

Example:

*Primary:* So, you feel pretty powerless. It's as if there is nothing you can do. It's just this way, and you're stuck. (Pause) And, you know, it strikes me, no wonder you end up feeling discouraged!

*Participant:* Yeah, I guess you're right. I really do feel like I don't deserve it, and that makes me feel so ... worthless.

*Primary:* Yes, it's not just this feeling of worthlessness, but it's the hopelessness that we have to work with, 'cause it's weighing you down and leaving you feeling depressed. I also sense that there is some real sadness and pain underneath the hopelessness.

4. The goal is to access the emotional response that underlies the sense of collapse or resignation. Sufficient empathic affirmation of underlying feelings (e.g., sadness, anger) invariably leads to the emergence of the more proactive, healthy aspects of self, because primary adaptive emotions are naturally self-assertive and growth oriented.

*vii. Encouraging greater specificity in the critic*

1. The other route in dealing with powerlessness or defeat is described below. Can move the Participant back into the critic chair and encourage the critic to be more specific in its criticisms. Such action can serve to paradoxically stimulate the "fight" inside the Experiencing-Self, and encourage the affective response that underlies the resigned, hopeless position.

Example:

*Primary:* OK, come back over here. (Participant moves to critic chair.) Somehow, you tell her that she's worthless and she doesn't deserve anything. Tell her what's bad about her. Tell her why she doesn't deserve anything.

*Participant:* Umm. You don't share your love with others. When they need you, you are not there for them.

*Primary:* So, you are not available enough.

*Participant:* Yeah, more giving or more available, yeah. Just hear people out more or comfort them, be there for them more.

*Primary:* Yeah, just be there for whoever else needs you. How would you do that?

*Participant:* I just stay in the house or do house cleaning or whatever needs to be done, um...

*Primary:* OK. Do that now; put her aside. What do you do? It's almost as if you put her in a box. Do that now. Trap her.

*Participant:* OK, yeah. Just stay home. Don't go out, don't see anybody— you have to be home for your family, and *you* don't count. (Participant holds out hand in a halting position.)

*Primary:* Uh-huh, and what are you doing with your hands?

*Participant:* I am pushing her aside.

*Primary:* Do that some more. Push her aside.

*Participant* (mocking tone): Yeah, just go to the closet, stay in your room, or stay in the house! And you don't count. Just be there for the kids, and that's it. You don't need to make friends and have a good time. You don't deserve it. You're taking too much time for yourself, and you're being selfish.

2. Notice that while the Participant is in the critic chair, the Primary encourages to be as specific as possible and attempts to heighten emotional awareness by directing expression of accompanying body language. The Primary also helps the Participant symbolize and make meaning from the expression of her hand.

viii. Stage 4: New Experiencing and Self-Assertion (Partial Resolution)

1. The first sign of resolution of conflict is the emergence of new experiencing during the deepening phase of the work. This emergence usually occurs in the experiencing chair and indicates partial resolution. The split is still present but has begun to shift. In the example, this emergence occurs in response to the mocking, belittling tone of the critic.

Example:

*Primary:* OK, come back over here. (Participant moves to experiencing chair.)

*Participant:* I disagree. Urr, I'm going to, urr, feel my feelings, (crying for a while) urr, I want to allow me to feel what is right, [partial resolution indicator]

*Primary:* It really hurts when she criticizes you like that. Can you tell her how you hurt?

2. At this point, it is very important to empathically affirm the Participant's emerging experience. When moved to the experiencing chair, she feels hurt and sad. With every primary emotion is an associated need. Needs are associated with action tendencies and often direct Participants toward attaining goals highly relevant to their well-being. It is essential to recognize and affirm the Participant's underlying feelings, but the Primary is also listening for associated needs and guiding the Participant to express these directly to the other side. Encourage a statement of need, aiming to heighten emotional arousal and help the Participant feel empowered. This encouragement strengthens the self and promotes change.

Example:

*Primary:* Yeah, tell her, "I want you to allow me to feel."

*Participant:* I want you to allow me to feel what is right and what my needs are.

*Primary:* Can you make a demand on her? What do you want from her?

*Participant:* To accept me unconditionally, and, um, just to back off and let me be me.

*Primary:* Uh-huh, yeah, tell her, "Back off, I want your acceptance, not your criticism."

*Participant:* Yeah, just let me run my life the way I feel is right for me.

*Primary:* And what do you feel as you say that to her?

*Participant:* She seems small.

*Primary:* Yeah, tell her, "You're small."

*Participant:* You're smaller now. I believe I am bigger, because I am stronger. I know the difference between right and wrong, and I'm not going to let you talk to me that way. I am not going to absorb it. I don't believe what you say. I dislike it; it's not fair.

3. After encouraging a strong assertion of need, experientially check the Participant's experience of standing up to her critic. Particularly because this is a new position that is clearly more assertive than the previous one, check to see if it is really felt and simultaneously encourage to notice what it feels like to assume this stance.

Example:

A shift begins wherein the experiencing-self is becoming stronger:

*Primary:* "So I'm not letting you put me down." Tell her again what you want from her.

*Participant:* I want her to see that I am not a bad person, that I do the best I can, and that I need your comfort and love.

*Primary:* So: "I want your comfort."

*Participant:* Yeah, I want your comfort and love and understanding.

ix. Stage 5: Softening of the Critic

1. The new, assertive experiencing that emerges in the experiencer chair frequently leads to softening in the position of the critic.

Example:

*Primary:* OK, switch. (Participant moves to critic chair.) She's saying she wants understanding from you. What do you say?

*Participant:* Uh, OK, um (sniff). Yes, that's fair, uh ... (pause) I'm sorry. (crying)

*Primary:* What's happening inside?

*Participant:* I'm sad. (5-sec pause) Yes, you deserved to be loved and comforted, and (sniff) I'm sorry for saying those things.

*Primary:* You feel like she does deserve that. Can you give her comfort?

*Participant:* Yes, I do care about you, you're important. You're a good person. Um ... Your feelings are important to me, and, yes, you do count, and I'm sorry. I didn't mean to step all over you. I want you to feel loved.

2. Contact between the two parts is fresh. In response to strong statements of needs for comfort and love on the part of the Experiencing-Self and the critic's witnessing of the underlying pain, the critic is beginning to see how she may be hurting and squelching herself, in effect doing more harm than good. Facilitates an exploration of feelings underlying the critic. Example:

*Primary:* What is it like to say sorry?

*Participant:* I'm sorry for being demanding. I was just protecting you. I'm afraid to let you go.

*Primary:* Tell her what you are afraid of.

*Participant:* I'm afraid you are going to abandon me.

*Primary:* And you will be left alone.

3. There are various ways in which the critic softens: (1) into fear or anxiety, (2) into contrition, or (3) into caring or compassion. The Participant's statements illustrate several of these; often, a more benevolent stance toward the self emerges such as "I want to protect you." Fundamental needs and values underlying the critic's anxiety associated with this protective stance also need to be validated and explored. At this point, when the critic begins to state its standards, values, and fears, the Participant should be encouraged to express feelings and needs to the experiencing chair. Example:

*Participant:* Yeah, I don't want to be left all alone. I want you to stick by me.

*Primary:* So what do you want from her?

*Participant:* I feel she deserves to be happy and experience life on her own, but I want to make sure that she is with me, and I want to be able to protect her.

*Primary:* OK, switch. (Participant to moves experiencer chair.) What does she say to that?

4. As a rule, once either side has stated a heartfelt need, it is important to switch the Participant to the other side to hear a response. The experiencing-self protects and elaborates her newfound strength.

Example:

*Participant:* No, I know what is best for me, and I want to experience life, and if I make the mistakes, then I know that it is my fault and nobody else's.

*Primary:* Uh-huh. "So I want to be free to make mistakes."

*Participant:* Yeah, just leave me alone. Back off. Just let me live my life. I do count, I'm important, just stop putting me down and, um, making me feel that I don't count, or that I'm stupid, that I'm not a person.

*Primary:* Yeah, it's like, "Accept me unconditionally, just let me make mistakes."

*Participant:* Yeah, if I do make a mistake, accept, you know, that's just the way it is. You know, let me suffer the consequences of that, let me fall, or just, when there's pain or whatever follows, just back off.

*Primary:* OK, switch. (Participant moves to critic chair.) How do you respond when she says, "Back off and just let me live, let me go through this, let me suffer"?

*Participant:* Yeah, you are right, um, I'm sorry, (crying)

*Primary:* So what happens when she says that?

*Participant:* Um, I feel little, I feel small. I didn't mean to say those things. I was just protecting you. I just want to be there for you.

x. Stage 6: Negotiation (Full Resolution)

1. After the critic softens, the sense of struggle or opposition between the two sides vanishes, and the two sides enter a process of reflective negotiation and problem solving. Participants will often spontaneously comment on their new sense of wholeness, saying things such as, "Wow, it's as if she is over here now" (pointing to other chair) or "I feel like the two sides have kind of come together." From the Primary's perspective, there is a stronger sense of equality between the two parts and a sense of the two parts working together. After the vulnerable emotions and associated needs that underlie both sides have been expressed, the two sides are more compassionate toward each other and are more motivated to work together. At this point, the Primary assumes a less active position, facilitating exploration and expression of feelings and needs from both sides so that they may find a more integrated style of working together.

Example:

*Primary:* How could you *be* there for her?

*Participant:* I'd understand. I'd understand her needs.

*Primary:* Tell her what you understand.

*Participant:* I know that you're in pain, (crying) . . . Um, that you're sad and you feel cheated. I understand that you feel alone. I think it's time that I let go (crying) It's time that you made your own mistakes, and I just sit back, and it may be painful to watch, but that's the only way.

*Primary:* There's a lot of pain for you, isn't there?

*Participant:* Yeah, I am sorry for holding you back. I want to let you go and yet I'm scared. I'm afraid of losing you.

*Primary:* Uh-huh, you are afraid. What do you need from her?

*Participant:* I need her not to leave me, not to abandon me. (to experiencer) Don't forget about me. I need you...

2. The accessing of vulnerability underlying the critic leads to the emergence of deep pain. Be mindful to tread carefully, affirming pain and allowing exploration. Recognizes that this exercise unlocks painful emotion that may have a long history. Participants learn to be how they are in the world through survival strategies that become highly automatic. The accessing of underlying needs (e.g., for love, comfort, recognition, respect), although in part affirming and relieving, may necessitate a working through of the pain of not having needs met in the past. This sometimes has the flavor of grieving for the self that has been so deprived or bereft, with the Primary providing support and validation.

Example:

The two-chair dialogue ends as the two sides express openness and compassion for each other; an integration is occurring. The Primary is simply facilitating and supporting, through empathic exploration, the dialogue between these two newly accessed parts of self:

*Participant* (continuing): I want you to be there for me. I want you to listen to me.

*Primary:* What do you feel you can give her?

*Participant:* I am going to stand aside. I'm going to let you have some space. I'm going to make room for her. Keep doors open. I want to keep you with me, though.

## TWO-CHAIR DIALOGUE FOR SELF-EVALUATION CONFLICT SPLITS

### *Two-Chair Dialogue Stage*

1. *Marker confirmation:* Participant describes split in which one aspect of self is critical of, or coercive toward, another aspect. Broadly, participant describes two aspects, whether attributed or in somatic form.

2. *Initiating two-chair dialogue:* Participant clearly expresses criticisms, expectations, or "shoulds" to self in concrete, specific manner.

3. *Deepening the split:* Primary underlying feelings and needs begin to emerge in response to the criticisms. Critic differentiates values and standards. Identify participant marker. Elicit participant collaboration in task.

4. *New experiencing and self-assertion (partial resolution):* Participant clearly expresses needs and wants associated with a newly experienced feeling.

5. *Softening of the critic:* Participant genuinely accepts own feelings and needs and may show compassion, concern, and respect for self.

6. *Negotiation (full resolution):* Participant gains clear understanding of how various feelings, needs, and wishes may be accommodated and how previously antagonistic sides of self may be reconciled.

### *Therapist Responses*

Intensify participant's arousal.  
Elicit participant collaboration in task.

Structure (set up) dialogue.  
Create separation and contact.  
Promote owning of experience.  
Intensify participant's arousal

Help participant access and differentiate underlying feelings in the experiencing self and differentiate values and standards in the critical aspect. Facilitate identification of, expression of, or acting on organismic need. Bring contact to an appropriate close (ending session without resolution).

Facilitate emergence of new organismic feelings.  
Create a meaning perspective (processing).

Facilitate softening in critic (into fear or compassion).

Facilitate negotiation between aspects of self regarding practical compromises.