

Dealing with intruding critic voices or beliefs about oneself

This exercise helps tying the couple together to impeach **self-critical voices**. You can modify to impeach critic **voices directed to the partner** that support dominant coping modes.

The module system we described so far does not include working with interfering critic mode voices, since this is primarily content of individual sessions, because the critic voices result on schema activation we bring into the relationship as a kind of **legacy from our past**. This is one reason why we include individual sessions as a part of our comprehensive approach. We laid this process out in our Contextual Schematherapy book (https://www.schematherapy-roediger.org/images/Roediger/Instructions/Instructions_for_mode_dialogues_on_chairs.pdf). However, especially Cluster-C-like people can be driven very much by constantly interfering critic mode voices impacting and setting limits to our work with the couple. This is why we briefly outline how to take the steps from couples work to individual sessions.

1. Once we perceive interfering (self- or other-directed) critic voices or strong beliefs interfering with our work, we **label** and **validate** them and then try to put them on a **separate chair** aside in the therapy room. If you work online, we ask the client to put the voices in a corner of their room. Then we try to continue by asking for emotions, needs, visions about the future etc.

The following steps are about dealing with **self-critical voices**.

2. If the clients are not able to engage in the process but are distracted by their thoughts, we ask about the „critic voices in the head“ in more detail, collect 3 or 4 of them, turn them into **second person language** and ask the client to take a seat on the critic voices chair (1). Then either add an additional chair for the client's emotional side or move the client's chair from the starting position a bit backwards and turn it towards the critic voice chair, labeling it the „emotional chair“ now (2). We sit down beside the client, the observing partners remains seated on their chair. Then the „toxic“ **messages are spoken out** to the (empty) „emotional chair“ (3).

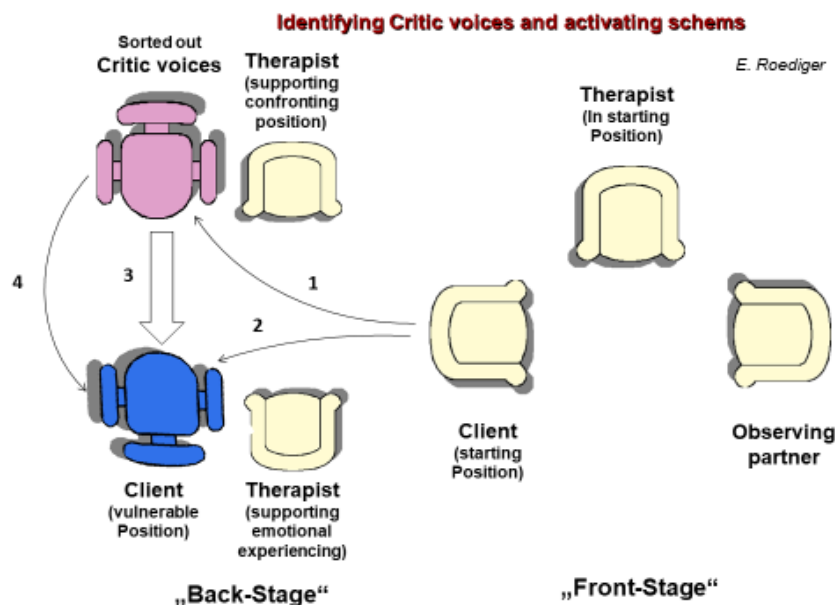
3. Then the client takes a seat on the „emotional chair“ (or the pulled-back original chair), we besides them (4) asking: „*How does it make you feel in your body listening to voices over there telling you...[we repeat the messages]?*“ Eventually, we need to **offer the polar body sensations** we introduced in module 5. Once the client sufficiently connects with their feelings we ask: „*What do you need now feeling.... [we repeat the emotions and body feelings]?*“ Typically they ask for protection, support or guidance.

4. Now all three **stand up** lining up side by side (the therapist in the middle) as an „observer team“ looking down on the critic chair and the chair with the induced emotions. We ask the active client first: „*What feelings are coming up in your body now when you see how these voiced put [client's first name] down?*“ Before going on, we ask the observing partner about their emotions. Usually both feelings are in line and the couple can develop a kind of coalition towards the critic mode voices. If anger comes up, we use this **constructive anger** to impeach the critic voices (5). Then we ask for body feeling to deepen the felt shift into the adult mode.

5. We now look at the „emotional chair“, ask for the feelings now. Again, we can ask both partners. This fosters the alliance between the partners. If the client feel **compassion** for the vulnerable part speaking out supporting messages toward the emotional side (6). Both (the impeaching and the self-compassionate) messages can be **recorded** on the client's smartphone. This gives them the opportunity to listen to them once the critic voices come back between the sessions. This helps to carry the corrective emotional experiences over from the therapy session into the client's everyday life.

The gain doing this exercise in the presence of the partner lies in the shared experience, how „toxic“ these voices are and how they impact the resulting interpersonal behavior. Previously the partner reacted to the displayed behavior on front stage, eventually criticizing or attacking the client from their „red leg“. You can agree that the observing partner gives a **timeout to critic voices** instead. Splitting the client up into the voices and the suffering emotional part enables both to sort the critic voices out as a **conjoint enemy** and stay connected with the vulnerable („blue“) emotional side and **work together** towards a functional solution for the presented problem as a team.

Once the Critic voices are identified, you might supporting the client dealing with his or her critic voices better in **individual sessions**, because distancing from and letting critic voices go takes many repetition and some kind of mindfulness training too.



Impeaching critic voices and showing compassion for the emotional side

