

DR. RICHARD NONGARD

The empty chair technique is a therapeutic tool commonly used in gestalt therapy. It involves role-playing a dialogue between two chairs, where one chair represents a person or aspect of the self, and the other represents someone or something else. The technique is designed to help individuals explore and process unresolved feelings, conflicts, and unexpressed emotions. Here are the steps involved in the empty chair technique:

Identify the focus of the technique: The therapist and client discuss the issue or situation that the technique will be applied to. The therapist helps the client identify the specific emotions, thoughts, or conflicts related to the issue.

Set up the chairs: Two chairs are arranged facing each other. One chair represents the client, and the other chair represents the person or situation the client wishes to explore.

Move to the empty chair: The client sits in the chair representing themselves, and then moves to the other chair, representing the person or situation they wish to explore.

Express emotions: The client speaks to the empty chair as if the person or situation were present. The client is encouraged to express their feelings, thoughts, and emotions related to the issue. The therapist may guide the conversation by asking questions or making suggestions.

Move back to the original chair: The client moves back to the original chair, representing themselves. The therapist may ask the client to describe the experience of speaking to the empty chair and how it made them feel.

Repeat the process: The client may move back and forth between the chairs several times, exploring different aspects of the issue and expressing different emotions.

The empty chair technique is a commonly used therapeutic technique in Gestalt therapy that involves using an empty chair as a tool for exploring feelings, thoughts, and conflicts. Here are some of the problems the empty chair technique has proven to be effective with:

Anger management: The empty chair technique can be useful in helping individuals manage their anger by allowing them to express their anger in a safe and controlled manner.

Grief and loss: The empty chair technique can help individuals work through the grieving process by allowing them to express their feelings to a person who is no longer present.

Relationship issues: The empty chair technique can be helpful in resolving conflicts in relationships by allowing individuals to express their thoughts and feelings to the other person in a safe and non-confrontational way.

Self-esteem issues: The empty chair technique can be effective in boosting self-esteem by allowing individuals to practice assertiveness and self-expression in a safe and supportive environment.

The empty chair technique can be useful in processing traumatic experiences by allowing individuals to confront their feelings and thoughts related to the trauma.

Overall, the empty chair technique can be an effective tool for addressing a wide range of emotional and psychological issues. However, it is important to note that the technique should only be used by trained professionals and may not be appropriate for everyone.

The goals of the empty chair technique include:

Facilitating emotional expression: The technique allows clients to express difficult emotions that may have been suppressed or avoided.

Enhancing awareness: The technique helps clients become more aware of their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors related to the issue.

Encouraging self-acceptance: The technique promotes self-acceptance and self-understanding by encouraging clients to explore different aspects of themselves and their relationships.

Resolving conflicts: The technique can help resolve internal and external conflicts by providing a safe space for clients to explore and express their emotions.

Improving communication: The technique can improve communication skills by encouraging clients to express their thoughts and feelings in a safe and structured environment.

In the context of hypnotherapy, the empty chair technique can be adapted to help clients explore and process unresolved feelings, conflicts, and unexpressed emotions while in a trance state. The process can be facilitated as follows:

Induce trance: The hypnotherapist guides the client into a trance state using relaxation techniques and suggestions for deepening the trance. This helps the client become more receptive to exploring their emotions and thoughts.

Identify the focus of the technique: While in trance, the hypnotherapist and client discuss the issue or situation that the technique will be applied to. The hypnotherapist helps the client identify the specific emotions, thoughts, or conflicts related to the issue.

Visualize the chairs: Instead of physically setting up two chairs, the hypnotherapist guides the client to visualize two chairs facing each other in their mind. One chair represents the client, and the other chair represents the person or situation the client wishes to explore.

Imaginary dialogue: The hypnotherapist instructs the client to imagine themselves moving between the two chairs and engaging in a dialogue with the person or situation represented by the empty chair. The client is encouraged to express their feelings, thoughts, and emotions related to the issue. The hypnotherapist may guide the conversation by asking questions or making suggestions.

Reflect on the experience: The hypnotherapist asks the client to reflect on the experience of speaking to the empty chair and how it made them feel while still in trance. This can help deepen the client's understanding and emotional processing.

Repeat the process: The client may continue to engage in imaginary dialogue between the chairs, exploring different aspects of the issue and expressing different emotions, as guided by the hypnotherapist.

Bring the client out of trance: Once the process is complete, the hypnotherapist gently guides the client out of the trance state, ensuring they feel grounded and present.

The goals of the empty chair technique in hypnotherapy remain the same as in gestalt therapy, including facilitating emotional expression, enhancing awareness, encouraging self-acceptance, resolving conflicts, and improving communication. The primary difference is the use of trance to facilitate a deeper exploration of emotions and thoughts in a more immersive, imaginative environment.

Hypnosis Script

Please find a comfortable position, sitting or lying down, and begin to focus on your breath. Take a few slow, deep breaths, allowing yourself to relax and let go of any tension or stress.

As you continue to breathe, begin to imagine a wave of relaxation flowing from the top of your head, down through your face, neck, shoulders, and all the way down to your toes. Allow this wave to wash over you, releasing any tension, and helping you to feel more and more relaxed with each breath.

Now, as you continue to breathe and relax, I'd like you to focus on my voice, allowing it to guide you deeper and deeper into relaxation. With each word I speak, feel yourself becoming more and more relaxed, open, and receptive.

[Empty Chair Technique]

In this deeply relaxed state, let's begin to explore an issue or situation that you would like to address. Think about the specific emotions, thoughts, or conflicts related to this issue.

As you focus on this issue, imagine a room with two chairs facing each other. One chair represents you, and the other chair represents the person or situation you wish to explore.

Now, visualize yourself sitting in the chair representing you. Take a moment to get comfortable and feel connected to this representation of yourself.

When you're ready, imagine moving to the other chair, representing the person or situation you wish to explore. As you sit in this chair, allow yourself to feel connected to the perspective and emotions of the person or situation you are addressing.

Begin to engage in a dialogue with the empty chair, as if the person or situation were present. Speak your thoughts, feelings, and emotions related to the issue. Allow yourself to be honest and open as you communicate.

After expressing yourself, imagine moving back to the original chair, representing you. Reflect on the experience of speaking to the empty chair and how it made you feel. Take your time to process the emotions and thoughts that arose during this conversation.

Continue to move back and forth between the chairs, exploring different aspects of the issue and expressing different emotions, as needed. Allow yourself to gain new insights, understanding, and emotional healing.

When you feel that you have fully explored and processed the emotions and thoughts related to this issue, take a moment to thank the person or situation in the empty chair for the opportunity to communicate and gain understanding.

[Reorientation]

Now, it's time to bring this experience to a close and return to full awareness. I will count from one to five, and with each number, you will begin to feel more and more awake and present.

Beginning to become aware of your body and surroundings.

Feeling your muscles start to reawaken and energize.

Becoming more and more alert, as your mind becomes clearer.

Almost fully awake now, feeling refreshed and grounded.

Fully awake and present, feeling revitalized and ready to continue with your day.

Take a moment to stretch and reconnect with your surroundings, and when you're ready, you can open your eyes and continue with your day, carrying with you the insights and emotional healing gained from this experience.