

The empty chair

The empty chair method is a therapeutic technique commonly used in Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) and other forms of psychotherapy, particularly in dealing with grief. This short script demonstrates an empty chair conversation in practice.

Therapist: "Today, I'd like to try a technique called the empty chair method. This can be very helpful in processing grief and making decisions. Are you willing to give it a go?"

Client: "Sure, I think so."

Therapist: "Great. I want you to imagine that the person you've lost is sitting in this chair beside us. Can you picture them there?"

Client: "Yes, I can see them."

Therapist: "Now, let's talk about a decision or dilemma you're facing. What's been on your mind?"

Client: "I'm not sure whether I should take this new job opportunity. It feels risky."

Therapist: "That's a significant decision. If [person who died] were here right now, listening to what you've just shared, what do you think they might say? What would they think was the right thing to do?"

Client: (pausing) "I think they would encourage me to take the risk. They always believed in me."

Therapist: "Would it be okay if we explore that further? Imagine them really here with us. What do you think they would say about your concerns? How might they respond to your fears?"

Client: "They might say that life is too short to play it safe and that I should go for it."

Therapist: "That's an important perspective. It's also okay if you don't fully agree with what they would have said. Remember, even if you get a clear idea of their opinion, you don't have to follow it. You might have disagreed with them in life, and that's valuable to explore as well. How does that make you feel?"

Client: "It feels freeing but also a bit scary. I've always felt I had to do what they thought was right."

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Therapist: "That's a crucial insight. It's common to feel that obligation. Let's sit with that for a moment. How can you honour their memory while still making a choice that feels right for you?"

Client: "I think I can take their encouragement into account but still weigh my own feelings about the job."

Therapist: "That sounds like a healthy balance. Remember, it's okay to feel a mix of emotions - sadness, anger, or guilt - while navigating these decisions. Would you like to share anything else with them in the chair?"

Client: "I just want them to know I'm trying my best."

Therapist: "That's a beautiful sentiment. Let's take a moment to acknowledge that before we move forward."

This script provides a structured approach to using the empty chair method while emphasizing emotional safety and client autonomy. It encourages clients to engage with their grief and decision-making processes in a supportive environment.