

Three chairs of perspective

Explanation: This is an exercise that encourages a compassionate voice that we can use to calm our inner critic. By imagining how we would support a friend in a similar situation we can encourage our own self-compassion.

How to do it: Arrange three empty chairs in your room. Ask the young person to think of something where they have blamed themselves – this may be to do with something that has happened to them but does not have to be. Each chair represents a different way of thinking about what has happened.

The first chair represents the young person's self-blame and the thoughts and emotions that go with that. The second chair represents the feelings that other people are judging you. The last chair takes the perspective of a supportive friend or wise counsellor.

Ask the young person to physically sit in each chair and express out loud what that perspective feels like. In each chair, the young person can use words or just noises to represent that perspective, but ask them to notice the tone of voice, the emotions that accompany the words and even the posture adopted in each chair. Try to understand how each perspective feels. When the young person is in chair 3 encourage them to talk directly to the emotions and thoughts expressed in chairs one and two. What do you say? What advice do you give? How do you relate to each perspective from a more detached point of view?

Don't spend too long in chairs one and two and always finish in chair three. Reflect to the young person that they already have the ability to use a more supportive voice to themselves. It can be helpful to give this voice, or aspect of themselves a name (a superhero name can be good, like 'Captain Calm' or 'Mrs Kindness') so that when they are feeling down on themselves they can step outside and ask, "What would Captain Calm say about this?"

When it's useful: This is great for young people who enjoy role playing or who struggle to understand others' points of view. It engages the observing self so that we can take a step back and be more compassionate to ourselves.

