

## "The Body Dialogue"

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*The Body Dialogue* is an action structure which can be used with clients in private practice as well as in groups. When used in private practice, it can be done using an empty chair. In groups, the protagonist can choose another group member to play the role of the body. This structure also may be facilitated with the addition of someone in the role of a "strength" (e.g. courage, or truth-teller, or an interpersonal strength like a best friend) so that the protagonist can role reverse into the strength role if she needs additional support to continue with *The Body Dialogue*.

For trauma survivors, there is a troubled relationship with the body which has been the holder of pain and the trauma. Often, there is a history of addictions, eating disorders, self harm, and not wanting to be in the body. Intrusive memories, flashbacks, and emotional flooding, and body memories result in dissociation and disconnection from the body. There is an antagonistic relationship with the body because it was the vehicle in which the abuse occurred.

The protagonist and body are in role with chairs facing one another:

**Step 1:** The director says, "Here is your body. How long have you had this relationship with your body?" (Protagonist says how many years). "Tell your body how you feel about your body now." Protagonist makes a statement to the body.

**Step 2:** Role Reverse with body to see what body says, wants, needs.

**Step 3:** Role Reverse to see if protagonist can do what body is asking for and make a commitment. Director: "Look into the eyes of your body and make the commitment to do what you said."

**Step 4:** Continue role reversing between self and body and continue until there is some agreement and new relationship between body and self.

**Step 5:** Director looks for non-verbal cues to get information about what the new relationship could be. Body positions can be exchanged to facilitate the new connection, e.g. from face to face to side by side. Encourage physical connection between body and self if it doesn't occur spontaneously, e.g. holding hands, hugging, etc.

**Step 6:** Director: "Make a final statement to your body to close out the scene."

### Example

**Step 1:** Kelly chooses Missy for role of Body. Director: "What do you want to say to your body?"

**Step 2:** Kelly moves in, holds body's hands and is crying. "You are sick right now and I feel really sad that I haven't been taking good care of you somehow. I know I've gotten better, but I'm still not good at letting you rest, rest for no reason, not just when I am sick."

**Step 3: Role Reverse.** Director to Kelly in role of Body, “What do you want Kelly to do before you get sick?” She answers, “I need to go slow sometimes and it’s hard for you, for your mind to go slow. You forget it’s important to go slow with me and when we rest we have time to be together. I need more rest than you. Sometimes you try to make my needs match yours and we aren’t always in tune.”

**Step 4: Role Reverse** – Kelly admits to body that she doesn’t pay attention to body’s needs. Body repeats, “We are together when we rest, that’s our time together.” Kelly says, “I have heard the teenage part, but I forget about the baby – that’s the part that needs to rest. That’s the part I forget because I didn’t even know you were there for a long time.”

**Step 5: Role Reverse:** Kelly speaks in role of body, “I’m really cute and I need to rest. Babies need to go slow and to rest. I’m good at the later years, but I need more rest.” Self (Missy in role) says, “You are cute!” *Role Reverse:* I will let you rest more, hear your needs and be attuned. I’m not gonna wait til you cry. I’m just gonna know what you need. *Role Reverse* (lines repeated) body says, “I do trust you.”

**Step 6: Final Statement to Body.** “You are a gift from God and I am grateful you didn’t die despite my hard efforts.” Body says, “I stuck with you and I’m still here.” Self says, “I don’t feel like you’re holding it against me and I’m grateful for that as well. I’m gonna listen to the baby better. I can do that.” They hug.

Director gently facilitates rocking motion and labels it “Rock the baby”.

End of scene.

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