

Imagery exercises for building healthy modes

Preliminary observations and suggestions:

Imagery work is helpful for activating and strengthening different modes. For example to increase awareness of Clever and Wise mode the patient is instructed to imagine the clever part with all senses if possible.

Another way to develop competence is to use imagery to project into the future. The child can visualize themselves in the future (“Time travelling”), seeing him or herself at an older age, visualizing very specifically how they will look and act. For example at the age of 18, when he finishes school, what he wants to do, what qualities he will possess. Using visualization a child is can develop a picture of himself as successful, able to find friends and having other needed skills.

Mode dialogs can also be conducted in imagery. For example, imagery allows the Angry Child to speak to the father and express his anger. Or imagery can be used to have an internal dialogue between the modes (analogous to the chair work).

Imagery Exercises

Journey to my own strengths, based on Portmann (2008, p 43)

“Close your eyes and go back in time to a time when you felt happy (Happy Child mode)... it could a few weeks ago, months or even years ago when you felt strong and confident (Clever and Wise mode). Imagine a situation in which you felt particularly What do you see, what do you hear, what voices, smells. What do you feel inside your body. What is giving you that sense of strength and self-confidence. Search for a word or a sentence that describes this strength. When you found it, take three deep breathes, stretch your body and travel back here with to this room with me. Open your eyes and write down your sentence or word that fits with the strength or confidence. You can also paint a picture and choose colors that connect to the positive feelings you had.

Imagery Exercise: “My house and my modes”

In addition to the “inner house” work described in section 11.1, the inside of the house can also be accessed through imagery.

During a workshop on developing adaptive modes (DGVT practice days in Hamburg, 2011) Silvia Höfer from Reutlingen presented various imagery ideas based on Kruger & Reddemann’s work (2009), that can used to strengthen Clever and Wise mode. Based on the “My house” exercise (suitable for children aged 6 and older) we would like to suggest clinicians adapt these ideas to mode work (see chapter 9.).

As part of psycho-education the patient is oriented to the idea of internal modes (see Psycho-education in Section 7.3.). This exercise can then follow:

“I would like us to go on a little fantasy trip to your inner house. I invite you to imagine a house that is located inside of yourself and where many different people or modes live.

These may be people in your family, friends or other relatives, but also animals or figures with some of your characteristics; they are a part of you. Some people/modes can be completely made up or even not alive anymore, important people in your memories. Now simply close your eyes and explore this house.

1. Identify the presenting modes

Imagine you have a house inside of you.

- Who would you want to live or invite there?
- Which characters / people appear in your imagination now?
- Is Happy Fritz also there? Where does the Clever Fritz live?
- Maybe there is also Little Fritz, a big Fritz, and a grandmother?
- Is there anyone who puts himself in the house even though you might not want him there? Is there anyone you do not like?

Once again just go through all floors and see if you discover something or someone, is anyone in the basement? Now let's imagine that you create a really nice room for everyone you like. Who gets into that room? What does mom's / grandma's room look like? What is left? Is there a garden? What does it look like in the garden?

Option A: You can interrupt the exercise – if the child needs a break, “Let's leave the house again mentally and open your eyes. Now you can paint your internal house”.

Option B: Alternatively, The modes can be explored in imagery if the child is able to continue and is engaged, in order to deepen understanding;

2. Access to the Vulnerable/Lonely/Injured Child

Where does Little Fritz live in the house? What does he look like? What is he feeling and thinking? Is he saying anything? What (or who) does he need in order to feel safe? Who can he go to if he is scared? What does Little Fritz need to give him more protection from ? (for example, earmuffs, a thick skin, etc.)”

3. Determine each mode's functionality

“Who in your inner house plays an important role in real life? For example, what task does have? In what situation does look out of the window or come outside?”

The patient is encouraged to formulate the needs related to each individual figure (modes). For example if a patient involves a pet (e.g. there is a dog in the house who is brave and barks) questions about the meaning of the pet can be explored: “What is the dog needed for?” (e.g. the patient might want to be as brave as the dog). The therapist can then start to understand which modes the characters are connected to, both adaptive and maladaptive.

The patient is asked repeatedly how they are similar to positive figures - to facilitate identification with adaptive modes. For example, “Do you have anything in common with your grandma? Do you ever look out of the window like your father does?”

4. Strengthen adaptive modes and weaken dysfunctional modes

“Who could visit each other, maybe help each other?”

“What would happen if shared his/her opinion more often? Who could Little Fritz turn

to? E.g. to Grandma? What may he want to say or ask her? Does have enough space? Is there anyone in the house who should take up less space or should not always get involved? Is there anyone you'd rather send on holiday or get out of the basement?"

5. Generalize therapeutic gains to everyday life

We've now discovered what your inner house is like. A lot of things are happening there. Different voices speak up and some don't speak up enough. Imagine you could go into your inner house and visit someone. Especially when Little Fritz needs comfort or help, when you are in situations where you feel sad or alone. Imagine the situation once again. Now imagine who in your inner house can help you. Let's visualize that in lots of detail ...".

Here are some examples where the therapist builds on the images the patient generates:

"And now imagine that your inner (e.g. dog) is always there." Or:

"Whenever you want to have that alone feeling, you need to imagine being in your house and ... (e.g. swinging). Close your eyes once again and imagine how you sit in the swing there like Happy Fritz.

"Feel what it's like when the wind blows, it's not so hot and still and sad anymore"

"In order to feel better, which room, which place would you go to? Whenever you do not want to be alone, you can think of your inner ... (e.g. Dad) and tell him everything. Imagine what his room would look like. Imagine that you tell him what is important to you. What would you want him to say to you so that you feel understood? What is it like when you are together with your inner (e.g. Papa) there?"

"Where would you go if you need comfort?"

"Where would you go if you need to be understood?"

The child is now lead out of the imagery and asked about how he now feels. "Which of the things that we talked about would you like to try in real life?" The therapist carefully considers what opportunities and risks there are in implementing those ideas with real people and which scenes from the imagery should stay in imagery for now.

In later sessions, the house can be accessed in imagery again and the experience deepened or modified. Later in therapy missing modes may be added as well.

Homework tasks involving revisiting the image and building on positive imagery can be set (going on the swings, sitting on grandma's lap as a Happy Child).

Imagery Exercise: "My tree and its branches"

Based on an exercise by Günter Geiken (from Hamburg DGKJP Congress in March 2009). The exercise is working on similar principals as Schema Therapy's focus on building the healthy modes and can be adapted to tie in with the mode language.

Sequence of steps:

1. Let's create a mind-map or tree with you in the center

The child is placed in the center with branches that represent the parts of the child, e.g. the fearful part (re-framed in positive terms), the brave part, the painter, the funny side, the

aggressive part, the caring part, the animal lover. The therapist draws connections between the branches, such as the caring part joins with the animal lover to take care of animals, to pat and play with them.

- 2. The strengths of each part is described (the positive aspects of modes can be listed).**
- 3. A reminder image is created: where, when and in what situation have you shown this ability / this part / this strength?**
- 4. The strength is described in detail, as if in a film, enriched with sensory aspects, how it began and developed, using sensory details.**
- 5. Sum up the story with a positive sentence that begins with “I am”.**
- 6. For the demonstrated ability a feeling is described: “I feel”.**
- 7. Then feeling is rated in terms of the intensity, from 1 - 10.**
- 8. The feeling is written down once again with the left hand.**

The process is repeated with the steps 4 to 7 up to three times.

The child is instructed to watch this inner film again before going to sleep. Thus they can “turn on” the movie again and again before certain difficult situations and thereby experience strengthening.

Imagery Exercise to activate of the Allied Protector mode:

The inner wisdom

Exercise for adolescents based on Krüger and Reddemann, 2009. Choose a gender for the wise protector that is the most helpful/least triggering for your patient.

- Close your eyes or focus on a spot on the floor or on the wall, to help you concentrate.
- Imagine that you're going for a walk without a destination and you come across a garden with a fence all the way around it.
- You walk around the garden, along the fence until you find a gate.
- You enter the garden.
- You see beautiful flowers, smell their scent, all of your favorite colors are in this garden.
- Take your time to explore everything.
- You hear birds and see all kinds of colors.
- You can smell the beautiful scents of the flowers, freshly cut grass.
- As you keep exploring the garden, you discover a house
- An old man / old woman sits inside the house
- He / she looks kind and loving.
- He / she is full of kindness.
- He / she is helpful and wise.
- He / she represents your own wisdom and intelligence.
- You can talk to him / her, ask him / her questions or seek his / her advice.
- You love to be there with them.
- You can keep him/her in your imagination always and talk to them whenever you want.
- You can take him / her with you in your mind wherever you go.
- You also have their wisdom.
- Now say goodbye to the garden for the time being.

- Look around again at the house and the garden as you leave, knowing you can come back at any time.
- Now let's draw the garden.

Note: This exercise is for the child alone to construct. Parents should not revise the image in any way.

Imagery Exercise to activate of the Caring Parent mode

- Imagine a beautiful place where you feel really good, really calm and safe.
- Now imagine there is a really kind and safe person in front of that here to help you and make sure that you're okay.
- The person might be similar to someone you already know who is very safe, but it is a little bit different to that, she or he is just for you.
- They have all the good qualities that you need.
- Let the person say something nice to you that you would like to hear from them.
- They can say it as often and as much as you need to hear it.
- This is your internal helper, or your caring helper who keeps on telling you what is good for you.

Let's write down all the positive phrases they say.