

## Additional Module 15: Dealing with Ambivalences

(Excerpt from: Roediger, E. & Frank-Noyon, E. (2026). Schema Therapy for Couples. The Module based Approach. Bognor Regis: Wiley & Sons)

**Indication:** Whenever you get stuck and there is a gut feeling, that there is an invisible “elephant in the room” present, you may use this module in an individual session to offer a safe space for sensible information to be “put on the table”. However, this intervention might be limited by your therapeutic stance towards sharing secrets and confidentiality – and to the legal restrictions in your country too. Then you may try applying this module in a conjoint session.

**Goal:** To give space for ambivalent feeling with the limiting presence of the partner to get clearer about the direction the therapy may take and unlock stuck states.

**Intervention:** Like with all tangible or difficult issues we introduce this step in the standing-up position: *“To be honest with you, the therapist down there feels somehow stuck. Sometimes this is caused by unspoken ambivalences or inner conflicts. Right now, he perceives Betty in a detached state. Tom, how about having the therapist one or two individual sessions with Betty and then let’s put everything together in a conjoint session?”*

**Split the client on two chairs.** A cognitive option to work with ambivalence is using a four-field matrix listing the pros and cons of both options. To some extent this is helpful, but is based on conscious content from the semantic memory storage. We try to work on ambivalences on a slightly deeper level using imagery hopefully activating more material on the episodic level. Therefore, we offer two (similar) chairs representing e.g., the “stay” or “leave” option. The clients decide which side they want to start with. We execute the following procedure on both chairs.

**Giving voice.** We sit beside the client. You may place an empty chair for the partner or the task in front of both of you. Both close eyes. We ask: *“Picture staying in the relationship for one more year, how does that make you feel in your body?.....What voices pop up in your mind....What is your impulse now?”* Here are some questions fueling the “leave”-impulse:

- *“If your relationship continues this way until your death—do you want to grow old like this?”*
- *“Imagine today is your wedding day. Standing before the registrar or altar, knowing everything you know now about Betty/Tom—would you marry her/him again?”*

These questions can activate latent impulses toward separation. After releasing the experience on this side, the client shifts to the “stay” chair. We now ask conversely: *“Please picture leaving your partner today. How do you picture your life in a month/a year? How does that image make you feel in your body?.... What thoughts arise?...What is your impulse then?”* If a client cannot bring up a serious alternative vision of a better life outside the relationship but continues blaming their partners, you may “spill the wine with some water” by asking:

- *“Picture separating from Tom/Betty.....you know, you will never see him/her again all your life. How does that make you feel in your body?.....What will you miss?”*
- *“Let all potential partners you know pass before your inner eye. With whom would you rather be? Please tell me their name, phone number, email address ...”*

This question can highlight that no real “better” partner exists, but rather a fantasy of a prince on a white horse. We can then return to expectations and evaluations using Module 8.

Questions to move towards a **living together apart** arrangement:

- On the *Connection chair* you may ask: “*What can you picture still doing together with your partner?...How does that feel in your body?*” This is meant to bring the remaining good feelings together into the awareness in order to stimulate the willingness to attach.
- On the *Autonomy chair* you may ask: “*What activities you definitely don’t want to sacrifice but do with others or alone?*”.....*How does it feel having the space and consent doing that?*” This is meant to satisfy the assertiveness and autonomy need to be able to stay in the relationship.

**Closing.** Depending on the result (still in the imagery state) we ask for possible next steps to eventually gradually move into this direction. Then we agree on the content we want to bring to the next conjoint session. In any case we recommend to take the result of this imagery as a momentary state and continue observing their feelings over the next weeks, reflect the content of their dreams and continue talking with friends to consolidate their decision.