

Rules vs Roles* or IPDA*

Description

This tool can help clients uncover and analyze the roles they play in relationships along with the unspoken rules governing their behaviour and communication during those interactions. Called the “Interpersonal Downward Arrow” – IPDA, or “Rules vs Roles” worksheet which is a newer approach, are basically the same tool and David uses the labels interchangeably. See the *ebook* page 740-749 original version vs the worksheet in Toolkit or here: <https://feelinggood.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/interpersonal-downward-arrow-summary-sheet-v-1.pdf>

“The goal of the Interpersonal Downward Arrow is to help patients identify their Self-Defeating Beliefs about intimate relationships.” Dr. David Burns, Ebook, page 740

When to Use

Use when there are relationship patterns that may be important for clients to gain insight on. We'll often see the same patterns in our own dynamic with them as well (e.g., fear of giving criticisms.) I almost always use this tool in relationship work as it uncovers a lot of the “whys and what goes wrong” for a client in their conflicts. It can also help the client repair ‘attachment’ issues by modifying their “rules”. I admit I am not that familiar with attachment theory but this is a practical tool that can integrate it into TEAM.

Other times to use this tool:

- For mood problems relating to interactions with others. Such as if there is other blame on the DML, such as a negative thought "He always criticizes me and he shouldn't" but also good for all or nothing, overgeneralization, jumping to conclusions, should statements, labeling, and even self blame and submissive SDBs.
- From Mike Christensen:
 - you can use the Interpersonal Downward arrow (verbal as per *ebook* OR or Sheet with 4 quadrants) to uncover what is lying underneath a specific negative thought that is related to another person.
 - When on the ETS the client checks "It would be too upsetting for me to criticize my clinician" we can use this tool to uncover what is going on between us. As a technique this may do the trick in countering the lie that we are somehow dangerous or fragile.
 - Other techniques also may be needed. If that is the case then we can draw on a variety of other methods (cognitive, interpersonal, motivational , exposure... etc) to crush the negative thought including exploring the SDB's that show up in the rules.
- Option for faith based: For clients struggling with concepts about God. What rules have they created about themselves and God?

How To Do

See the Practice sections below for a detailed step by step “how to” guide on the Rules vs Roles Tool. In a nutshell, you’ll work through the four-quadrant worksheet following the instructions in each box. Clients describe their role (e.g., nurturing, passive), the other person’s role (e.g., demanding, dismissive), how the relationship feels (e.g., exhausting, fulfilling), and then unpack the unspoken rules in that relationship that dictate behaviour and communication (e.g., “I must always keep the peace”). This exercise highlights rigid

patterns, fostering insight into unhealthy relationship expectations and empowering individuals to create more flexible, balanced interactions.

For the Interpersonal Downward Arrow or IDPA please read Ebook pages 740 to 749 for more info on how to use this for SDB and Mood work. It's very similar to the Downward Arrow, IE: "What would that mean to you? Why would it be upsetting to you?" but the processing questions are different. Namely: We're trying to understand three things about the way the client views his relationship and perhaps with people in general:

1. How does the client view ____? In his mind, what role is ____ in?
2. How does the client view themselves? What's his/her role in the relationship?
3. What's the client's understanding of how two people in this kind of relationship (intimate, friendship, work, etc.) interact with each other? What are the rules?

Example:

Kelly and Luke have been married 35 years. They have raised 2 children who have moved out. Kelly is happy go lucky most of the time but a real perfectionist and task oriented. She works as a Realtor but has Lupus which limits what she can do. Luke is also an extrovert, loves talking with people, is semi-retired and works at Walmart mostly to fill his days. Many of their common interests were related to raising their kids and lately more conflict has been popping up. Kelly is coming to you because she is feeling more distant from her husband and feels frustrated and alone. Luke on the other hand feels everything is mostly fine as long as Kelly is flexible with what he does and doesn't ask him to join her doing things he doesn't like. Luke is a problem solver and finds he doesn't know what to do / say when Kelly is in pain. Both are "Withdrawers" in terms of EFT language.

SAMPLE Rules vs Roles*

My Role	His / Her / Their Role
<i>List some adjectives that describe your role in this relationship? What kind of person are you?</i>	<i>List adjectives that describe the other person's role? What kind of person is he or she?</i>
Needy Submissive Weak Supportive Flexible	Independent and Self-Sufficient Strong but Gentle and Kind Unsure how to be supportive Unpredictable / Moody Inflexible, dogmatic (politics)
The Feelings	The "Rules"
<i>Describe what it would feel like for you to be in this type of relationship.</i>	<i>What are the "rules" that govern this relationship and connect the two roles described above?</i>
Lonely, Alone Frustrated Anxious Worried Tense	I must not demand anything from Luke he won't like. I can't expect too much from our relationship. I should keep things in. I must fake being healthy, so I don't upset Luke. I have to give in to his ideas to prevent a fight.

How to process AFTER:

After doing this tool you can simply ask them what it is like to be in a relationship like this? Then ask which rule, if any, would they like to change. Think of the rules like relationship SDBs in addition to the general ones like Fear of Rejection, Love Addiction, etc. IE: I must do ____ so X will love me. People or X will reject me if I _____. I should _____ (do/say/not say in regard to the other person).

1. Do a Cost-Benefit Analysis with that Rule (do they actually want to change it or are there more benefits to keeping it?) (*We will do CBA next practice*). Weigh the benefits to the costs.
2. If costs weigh more, then we can use various tools to help the client change the rule/SDB. Any tool that helps change thoughts will be helpful changing SDBs (see our section on SDBs we did back a few months ago). Some of the more helpful go to:
 - Semantic technique (rewrite the rule to make a new rule that aligns with them better)
 - Experimental technique/survey technique (test the old rule)
 - Feared fantasy (face fear of rejection from others)
3. Have them work on the other rules as homework.
4. Then if you both see fit, continue with interpersonal tools with the relationship journal, forced empathy, 5 secrets. etc. Or it can just be an end all method with just beginning to follow their new rule more (e.g., more like hidden emotion - express anger or feelings instead of bottling them up, although communication training is probably still helpful.)

PS: Credit to Thai-An for teaching me this basic outline for processing the worksheet.

Notes from Dr. Burns:

It is ok to “help” a client see the “rules”. Questions Dr. Burns asks are: What rules do I have to follow to relate to you? What rule does ____ me (choose ONE of the roles or feelings) have to follow. E.g. What rules does submissive me have to follow in this relationship? He did this question several times, going through the roles list and a couple of the feeling words too.

After filling in the worksheet use “Changing the Focus” see *Feeling Good Together* page 237 to 246 to aid the client in new thinking toward the relationship and the rules of that relationship. Focus on how they and the other person feels, rather than what is being said. Dr. Burns said the way to ‘cure’ the relationship is for the client to bring to conscious awareness all these “rules” and then work on “changing the focus”. Can do the last part of the relationship journal if not done already.

Practice

Use one of your own thoughts toward a person you are struggling or have a conflict with but would like to “get closer” to / have less conflict. (You’ll want to stick with the same person for all the practices if possible.) Even better, do an entire relationship journal ahead of practice if you haven’t already. Could use last week’s demo vignette but this tool will be harder to do as “pretend.” Work through the worksheet (see Therapist Toolkit or previous Example) as time allows. Switch halfway through so you each get to practice.

NOTE: you may NOT Have time to do the entire script below. Just go as far as you can in the time allowed.

- **Clinician:** Invite client to do Rules vs Roles, “I have a tool called Rules vs Roles that explores some of the emotions, thoughts, and behavioural patterns you might be having in your relationship with _____. Would you be willing to give that a go with me?”
- **Client:** “Sure”

- **Clinician:** In the first quadrant on the top left, let's right down your 'role' in this relationship with _____. It's best to use adjectives. How would you describe yourself in this relationship?"
- **Client:** Make it up. Give three or four answers. (in real life we'd go for 10 or more)
- **Clinician:** Do a bit of empathy while the client gives answers. "Next let's look at the top right box and describe the other person's 'role' in this relationship using adjectives. How would you describe _____ in this relationship?"
- **Client:** Make it up. Give three or four answers. (in real life we'd go for 10 or more)
- **Clinician:** "Next let's look at what it's been like for you in this relationship. How has it felt for you? What emotions and feelings do you have, let's write those in the bottom left."
- **Client:** Make it up. Give three or four answers. (in real life we'd go for 10 or more)
- **Clinician:** Do a bit of empathy (keep brief in practice). "Finally, we are going to look at the rules that govern this relationship. This one can be a bit challenging. If you look at all the roles above, what do they imply the rules are?" (You may have to offer suggestions, IE: "I should never upset my husband by speak my mind.")
- **Client:** Make it up. Give one or two answers. (in real life we'd go for 5 or more) IE: "I should always correct X when they are wrong." "I can't express myself." Etc.
- **Clinician:** Do a bit of empathy (keep brief in practice) then ask one of the Motivation Questions (see above).
- **Client:** 75% willing to work to improve the relationship
- **Clinician:** Stop here for your practice. In a real session you can use the how to process section.

STOP & DEBRIEF -- Client gives clinician feedback

- Empathy Score with a letter grade.
- One thing you liked.
- One thing you would have improved.

SWITCH ROLES & REPEAT

Source/References

- *Therapists' ebook, "Tools NOT Schools", pg. 740-749*
- *Feeling Good Together, pg. 222-227*
- Podcasts 40 <https://feelinggood.com/2017/06/05/040-uncovering-techniques-the-interpersonal-downward-arrow-part-2/>

SAMPLE for demo next page or use "Example".

Interpersonal Downward Arrow: The Rules and the Roles¹

List a negative thought about the other person / relationship: He shouldn't blame me for living my own life.

Step 1: My Role in this Relationship List some adjectives that describe your role in this relationship? What kind of person are you? For example, you may see yourself as submissive, inferior, agreeable, etc.	Step 2: Other Person's Role in this Relationship List some adjectives that describe the other person's role in this relationship? What kind of person are they? For example, s/he may seem demanding, judgmental, superior, etc.
Independant Free Flexible Avoidant Inferior Weak "Keep the Peace"	The "Good" child Responsible Superior Judgemental Tough "In Charge" Available

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Step 3: How does this type of relationship feel? Check all that apply.	Step 4. The Rules of this Relationship What rules do you have to follow to be this relationship? E.g. maybe you cannot be critical or assertive and have to hide your feelings.
☐ Sad ☐ blue ☐ depressed ☐ down ☒ unhappy ☒ Anxious ☐ worried ☐ panicky ☐ nervous ☐ frightened ☒ Guilty ☐ remorseful ☐ bad ☐ ashamed ☒ Inferior ☐ worthless ☐ inadequate ☐ defective ☐ Lonely ☐ unloved ☒ unwanted ☐ rejected ☐ alone ☐ Embarrassed ☐ foolish ☐ humiliated ☐ self-conscious ☐ Hopeless ☐ discouraged ☐ pessimistic ☐ despairing ☒ Frustrated ☐ stuck ☐ thwarted ☐ defeated ☐ Angry ☒ resentful ☐ annoyed ☐ irritated ☐ upset Other feelings (positive or negative):	I should avoid talking about why I left. I can't be critical or say anything about my parent's care. I shouldn't talk about my life.

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