

Internal Family Systems – Fundamental Skills and Interventions



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Internal Family Systems Model



- Founded by Richard C. Schwartz, PhD in the 1980s
- Uses a systems perspective
- The mind is multiplicitous
- Everyone has a Self
- Non-pathologizing
- Evidenced based model of psychotherapy
- Has spiritual underpinnings
- Internal attachment work



Anatomy of Parts with Extreme Roles

Firefighters are **reactive** and protect the system by numbing, distracting and avoiding

“When all else fails”

Parts can communicate through images, thoughts, beliefs, emotions, physical sensations, urges, impulses, behaviors. They are sentient “beings”.

SELF-Energy

8C’s

5P’s

“Don’t Forget”

Exiles hold burdened energy and emotional content that the protectors work to suppress

Managers are **proactive** and protect the system by planning ahead and making sure to avoid activating stimuli

“Never again”

“Blending” occurs when the person is absorbed by the part instead of observing it, and therefore speaks *from* the part instead of *for* it



Major Tenets of IFS

- All parts have Self-Energy, have a positive intention for the system and serve important functions.
- Everyone is born with a Self and parts. Parts can be adaptive, but can be pushed into extreme roles due to trauma.
- Each part has its own cognitions, narrative, interests, opinions, experiences, behaviors, and memories.
- Everyone's parts can communicate differently.
- Healing lies within the relationship forged between the Self and parts.
- Intentions of the IFS model:
 - “Liberate parts from their extreme roles,
 - To increase trust in the system,
 - To achieve balance, harmony and wholeness, and
 - To bring more Self-Energy to external systems.”



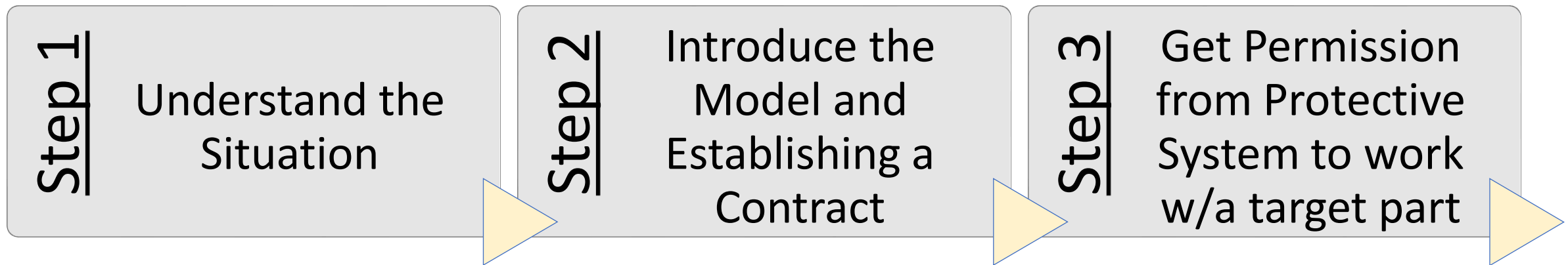
Skills and Interventions

- Use parts language
- Become a part's detector
- Become a Self-Energy detector
- Use the 6F's
- Contract with parts and gaining permission and consent to work within the system
- Un-blending using insight, implicit direct access and explicit direct access
- Facilitate a "U-turn"
- Work with polarizations
- Use the 9 healing steps
- Be a "hope merchant"
- Facilitate a dynamic Self-to-part relationship
- Understand the client's system constellations
- Monitor your own system and working with your own parts during sessions



IFS Interventions

Flow of the Model



Flow of the Model





Goal: Create Connection within the Internal System

- Differentiating between Self and parts is un-blending. Un-blending accesses and increases Self-Energy.
- Build trust by fostering Self-to-part relationships.
- Extend Self-Energy towards parts, notice parts' reactions.
- Understand the internal system; the structure, polarities and alliances.
- Understand the role of parts and their fears.
- Have parts feel acknowledged, understood and validated by the Self.
- Allow for a corrective experience by witnessing and unburdening.



Use Parts Language

- Dick Schwartz used the word part because his patients referred to “parts of themselves”.
- The use of parts language helps the client begin to think of themselves as multiplicitous with many parts holding beliefs, emotions and experiences. It aids in un-blending to access Self-Energy and differentiate parts from each other.
- Clients tend to pick up parts language as the therapist refers to the client’s parts.
- Some clients do not like parts language and therefore the therapist adopts the client’s language or uses implicit direct access to suit the client’s preferences.



Self-Led Facilitation: Detecting Self and Parts

- To be an accurate Self and parts detector, the facilitator needs to have a critical mass of Self-Energy.
- Being curious from the head may mean a therapist part is trying to figure the client's part out. Curiosity from the heart has more spaciousness without the need to know or having an agenda.
- Facilitators use the 8C's and the 5P's to explore their client's system:
 - Curiosity, compassion, calmness, clarity, connectedness, courage, confidence, creativity
 - Patience, presence, perspective, persistence, playfulness
- Facilitators work with their own parts during session and ask themselves, "how do I feel towards the client?" to identify the presence of parts.

The 6F's in Working with Protectors

The target part is chosen by the client by asking: What part has the most energy or needs your attention the most?

Find

- Go inside and notice any parts that need attention
- How does this part show up? How do you know it's there?

Focus

- Stay and notice, focus your attention on it
- How are you experiencing this part?
- Describe the quality of the part.

Flesh
Out/Fine
Tune

- What does it say or do? Any emotions or physical sensations? Shape? Color? Etc.
- Ask the part what it wants to share with you
- What does it do for you?



Find, Focus and Flesh out/Fine Tune

The Part with the Most Energy is the Target

- Invitation: Close your eyes or soften your gaze to go inside and find a part
- Where do you notice that part in or around your body?
- How do you notice it?
- Can you see or sense it?
- What does it say or do?
- Ask what the part would like to be called (be careful of gendering)
- Notice if there are other parts around... what else do you notice?
- Get curious about this part and its role in the system (what is its job? when did it start? ask it to share its story)



The 6F's in Working with Protectors

The Self is relational and the feel towards question gauges connection.

Be mindful of language, as the “feel about” or “think about” may activate a thinking part to answer.

Feel Toward

- How do you feel towards the part?
- This is the main assessment question to gauge Self-Energy and identify the presence of other parts.

BeFriend

- Extend Self-Energy to the part. How does the part react? Ask, is there more?
- Ask “what it was like for that part to experience what it has?”

Find the Fear

- What is it afraid of if it doesn't do its job?
- What does it want for you?
- What is its positive intention?



Befriend and Finding the Fear

- Befriending the protector means that the client is curious about the protector's job and positive intention for the system.
- Holding space for the protector to tell its story and how/why it got its job.
- Once the client understands the protector's job, ask:
 - What would happen if you didn't do your job?
 - And then what? And then what?
- The invitation: ask the part how it feels about its job and if it would be interested in not working so hard, etc.
- Let the part know that you can help the part it protects. Notice how it responds. Get permission from protector to work with the exile.



Working with Protectors IS the Work

- We must work with the protectors that emerge as they are the “gatekeepers” to the exiles
- Blowing past protectors with the agenda of unburdening exiles will result in “backlash”
- IFS is a model of permission and consent; make sure parts are onboard throughout the process
- You can always ask: are there any parts, known or unknown, that are concerned about working with “the exile”?



Contracting with Parts

- Obtaining permission and consent while working with protectors is critical. Contracting occurs throughout the session.
- Ask questions like:
 - Is it okay if we focus on that?
 - Ask the part if it's okay to explore that more.
 - What does the part need in order to feel more safe sharing with you?
 - Ask the part not to overwhelm you.
 - Ask the protector if we could work with the one it protects. Ask what it needs in order to allow us access. We can help it not work as hard. We don't want it to go away.



Blending and Un-blending

- Cues that the client is blended:
 - The client identifies as the part without differentiation
 - Speaking *from* the part instead for it
 - Using language that is incongruent with the client's age
- If a part emerges and is reacting while working with the target part, ask the client if it would be willing to soften back and to give more internal space.
- If the part will not soften back, ask it why it is emerging now and what it would like to share.
- Notice if client uses “I” or “the part”.
- Notice shifts in energy, physical and emotional changes, or quality of voice.



Insight and Implicit & Explicit Direct Access

- Insight-oriented IFS:
 - This is when you are using parts language and developing the Self-to-part relationship. The client has a critical mass of Self-Energy and converses directly with their parts.
- Implicit Direct Access:
 - This is when you know you are talking to a part but are not using parts language because the client is so blended with the part they think they *are* the part. This sounds like regular psychotherapy.
- Explicit Direct Access:
 - This is used when the client knows a part is present but has difficulty gaining enough internal space to connect with the part. The therapist asks to speak directly to the part with the client listening.



The U-Turn

- The U-turn is needed when the client is blended with a part that is focusing on other people.
- The U-turn is especially helpful when the client has parts have difficulty staying within their own internal system.
- Some examples of helpful questions/statements are:
 - I'm really hearing that you feel very angry towards your partner, and that you wish they would change. What are you concerned about if they don't change?
 - It seems like your supervisor's statements in your review really had an impact on you and I'm hearing that you don't think he is right or qualified to tell you that you're not reaching your potential. What does it mean to you that he said that? What is happening inside when you think about it?



Polarizations

- Occur when 2 or more parts (or groups of parts) are opposed to each other.
- Their power struggles provide balance in the system.
- They may use different strategies to protect exiles.
- Often provide distraction from emotional material.
- Goals are to:
 - Acquaint them with each other if they don't know the other exists.
 - Improve communication between the parts and with Self.
 - Explore their roles and how they are trying to achieve similar goals.
 - Come to an understanding and contract.



Notes on Exiles and Unburdening

- Exiles hold burdens – they are not their burdens
- Burdens are energy from trauma and other life experiences (often stored implicitly)
- Symptoms of burdens are negative cognitions, somatic disturbances, hurt emotions, and also unhelpful behavioral strategies
- Differentiate part from the burdens it holds
- The unburdening process is *delicate*
- *Do not rush in to unburden an exile without working with the protectors!!*
- Going slow is faster – working with the protectors facilitates the unburdening process up-front
- Unburdening is from Self-to-part. Be curious about if the client is looking at the exile, or is seeing themselves with the exile
- Monitor your own parts' agendas



Healing Steps in IFS: The Unburdening Process for Exiles

1. Un-blend
2. Create trust between Self and part
3. Witnessing
4. Retrieval and Do-Over
5. Unburdening
6. Invitation
7. Integration
8. Appreciation
9. Reconsolidation



Un-Blending

- The client needs to have a critical mass of Self-Energy in order to fully be with the exile.
- The Self-Presence of the client is a vital piece for functional dual attention. Meaning that client can be aware of the present time while also holding the awareness of the exile in the past.
- Continue to ask the feel-towards question during the healing steps. This helps to identify the speaker.



Creating Trust between Self and part

- Creating trust between Self and part may take some time in the therapeutic process.
- Exiles may not know the Self or know the client.
- May need to ask the part if it knows who the client is and update the part on the client's life in the present.
- Do not try to convince the part of anything. Give it time and space.
- Ask the part what it needs to trust the Self more.



Witnessing

- Witnessing is the acknowledgement of the pain the exile carries.
- Client asks the exile to share its story and “is there more?”. This question creates openness with compassion to want to hear the story. The client can ask what it was like for the exile to have its experiences.
- Continue to guide the client to extend the exile Self-Energy and ask “how does the part receive that?”
- Ask the exile what it needed at that time and have the client provide that to the exile.



Retrieval and Unburdening

- Guide the client to ask the part:
 - if it would like to leave the scene it is in
 - if there is anything the exile needs before it leaves (do-over)
 - if the exile wants to come into the present or if it would like to go to safe place
- The unburdening process is guided by the client's Self-Energy as the client guides the exile to release all of the pain, negative energy, etc.
 - The client can help the exile release what it needs to by using one of the elements or however the exile needs to unload its burdens



Invitation and Integration

- The exile invites in any qualities or characteristics it needs. It can also invite in anything that was lost as a result of carrying the burdens.
- The integration process is when the exile re-orientes itself after releasing its burdens and calling in what it needs more of.
- Return to the exile's protectors that made themselves known to see what they need now that the exile has been unburdened. Ask them if there is anything they need to let go of and invite in.



Appreciation and Reconsolidation

- Thank the system and extend appreciation for their willingness to share their experiences.
- Have the client let them know that they will check in on the parts, and have the client make a viable contract of contact.
- Reconsolidation happens as the internal system reorganizes after the unburdening took place.
- If time constraints do not allow completion for all of the healing steps, ask the client to reassure the parts that they will be back to connect with the parts again, and send appreciation to all known parts of the constellation.



IFS is Deceptively Simple Yet Very Nuanced

- The Self-to-part relationship is the goal
- Connection is the main intention
- Parts are not “in the way” – they “are the way”
- The Self is not the absence of parts, it is the awareness of them
- Building awareness of parts is key
- Working with protectors is the majority of the work
- Looking to increase access to Self-Energy and develop a critical mass of Self-Presence
- Be careful of the “un-blend agenda” (B. Hersey)
- Un-blending is regulation