

IFS Background

Over the past 40 years, Dr. Richard Schwartz, Ph.D., developed the Internal Family Systems (IFS) model by gently setting aside traditional assumptions and listening deeply to peoples' inner worlds.

IFS invites you to reconnect with a natural state of inner clarity and compassion, *your Self*, from which genuine healing and connection become possible. From this place, you can relate to the parts of you that become critical, anxious, shut down, or overwhelmed with curiosity and care. When approached with patience and respect, these parts often reveal surprising wisdom and become more flexible in their roles.

While IFS is widely used as a *non-pathologizing psychotherapy model* in clinical settings, its principles extend beyond therapy. Professionals from many fields use IFS as a framework to support personal growth, improve relationships, and cultivate compassionate leadership.

At its heart, IFS offers a hopeful and empowering message: *every person already has within them the capacity for healing, balance, and connection.*

By leading our inner systems with compassion and curiosity, we can create greater harmony within ourselves and more meaningful relationships with others.

We look forward to welcoming you into the growing community of professionals using IFS to bring more Self leadership to the world.

Parts & Self

Parts

Sub personalities or aspects of our personality that interact internally in sequences and styles that are similar to the ways that people interact.

All parts are valuable and want to have a positive role. We are born with them or their potential -it is the nature of the mind to be subdivided. It is good to be multiple.

Parts become extreme and can be destructive because of life experiences, intergenerational trauma, and cultural conditioning.

Self

Self is the felt sense or embodied state of being – i.e. the seat of consciousness. It is not a part, and unlike parts, Self is invisible because it is the Self who is observing.

The 8Cs of Self: *calm, curious, creative, courageous, confident, compassionate, clarity, and connected.*

These are the core qualities of Self. When a person is in Self, these qualities are naturally present.

Everyone has a Self. Self can be obscured by the extremes of parts, but it cannot be damaged or destroyed.

Self is like the sun, and parts are the clouds. Even when the sun is covered by clouds, we know it is still there.

Goals & Assumptions

The Four Basic Goals of IFS

- 1 Help parts out of the roles they've been forced into, so they can be who they're designed to be.
- 2 Restore trust in Self and Self-Leadership.
- 3 Reharmonize the inner system.
- 4 Become more Self-led in our interactions with others and the world.

Assumptions

Trauma doesn't cause multiplicity, though burdens from traumatic events make parts more extreme.

As we develop, our parts form a complex system of interaction with polarizations and alliances.

When the system reorganizes, parts can change rapidly.

Changes in the internal system will affect changes in the external system and vice versa. One can work with either to change the other.

Key Concepts & Terms

Exiles

Parts that have been sequestered within a system for their own protection or for the protection of the system from them.

Firefighters

Parts that go into action after the exiles have been activated in order to calm the exiles or distract the system from them (i.e. dissociation).

Managers

Parts that try to run a system in ways that minimize the activation of exiles.

Parts

The term used in Internal Family Systems for a person's sub personalities. Parts are best considered internal people of different ages, talents, and temperaments.

Self

A core of a person which contains leadership qualities such as compassion, curiosity, and confidence. The Self is best equipped to lead the internal family.

Self Leadership

Leadership characterized by the 8Cs of Self: compassion, calmness, clarity, curiosity, confidence, courage, creativity, and connectedness.

Key Concepts & Terms

Blending

When the feelings and beliefs of one part merge with another part or the Self. When we are blended, we experience the world through that part, and there is no awareness of Self.

Unblending

Unblending is the separation and differentiation between a part and Self. It creates the possibility of a relationship between the part and Self. When you can step back from a part's thoughts, feelings, or impulses enough to recognize, "This is a part of me — not all of me."

Burdens

Extreme ideas or feelings that are carried by parts and govern their lives. Burdens are left on or in parts from exposure to external people, events, and cultural conditioning.

Polarization

A state in which two members (or two groups) in a system relate in opposition to or in competition with each other, to the point where each party's access to the Self is constrained by fear that the other party will win or take over.

Three Groups of Parts

Exiles

Exiles are the young, vulnerable parts that carry the pain, emotions, and negative beliefs due to trauma, attachment injuries or societal imprints. They are isolated from the rest of the system for their own and the system's protection; other parts feel it is unsafe to feel what they hold. They are often stuck in the past at the initial time of wounding. Examples include: *feelings of shame, unloveability, loneliness, powerlessness, disconnection, and worthlessness.*

Managers

Protective parts that run the day-to-day life of the person. Managers try to keep negative feelings and emotions exiled by staying in control of events or relationships. Their main goal is prevent pain from reoccurring. Examples include: *perfectionism, people pleasing, caretaking, the inner critic, and hypervigilance.* No matter how skilled the manager is, the exile can still be activated.

Firefighters

These protectors react and respond immediately when exiles are activated. They aim to extinguish the negative feelings or dissociate the person from them. Common firefighter activities include: *addictive behaviors, numbing, self-harm, binge-eating, suicidal ideation, and rage.* They have the same goals as managers (to keep exiles away), but different, more impulsive strategies. They are often shamed internally and externally.

Resources & Books

IFS I
Program
Handouts

Resources

Register for IFS Institute Events & Trainings

<https://ifs-institute.com>

Find an IFS Practitioner

<https://ifs-institute.com/practitioners>

Insight Timer Meditations by

Richard C. Schwartz

<https://insighttimer.com/drrichardschwartz>

Books

No Bad Parts: Healing Trauma and Restoring Wholeness with the Internal Family Systems Model

by Richard C. Schwartz

You Are the One You've Been Waiting For

by Richard C. Schwartz

The Internal Family Systems Workbook

by Richard C. Schwartz

Introduction to Internal Family Systems

by Richard C. Schwartz