

Insight Two: I Have Parts

May I be open to the idea that they have differing needs and perspectives

The IFS model recognizes that our psyches or personalities are composed of an “internal family” of different parts, sometimes called subpersonalities or ego states. Like a family member, each part has its own opinions, attitudes, thoughts, feelings, memories, points of view, beliefs, motives, assumptions, and perspectives about the world. For example, a part of you may suddenly want to binge watch a series on Netflix. A different part may think, “You haven’t cleaned the house yet!” Another part says, “It’s a bad idea to start watching Netflix; You know what will happen.” Another part may angrily shout, “Don’t turn on that TV!!” Finally, a voice in your head may declare, “I don’t care, I’m watching my show!” Which part is the real you? Why, all of them! You are a whirlwind of thoughts, emotions, and behaviors!

The idea that we have many different “parts,” “voices,” or “selves” is not new. Virginia Satir (1975) called these parts *our many faces*. William James called our subpersonalities, “the various selves.” Transactional Analysis suggests we have five main ego states called the adapted child, the free child, the adult, the controlling parent and the nurturing parent. Hal and Sidra Stone (1989) developed the Voice Dialogue Method to embrace and accept our many “selves.” Richard Schwartz developed Internal family systems and uses “parts” language.

According to Schwartz our parts have motivations for everything they do, even if we are unaware of those reasons, in an effort to keep us feeling safe and secure. He claims that every part has a positive intent for us, no matter how problematic its behavior seems. With this insight, we gain clarity about parts of ourselves and begin to recognize that they are doing the best that they can. There is nothing pathologizing about having parts. It is normal.

As we accept that we have parts, we can also see that they have differing perspectives. There are three categories of parts: *managers, firefighters, and exiles* who each play a different role. Some Managers work to help us present ourselves as capable in the world. They keep us on time, monitor our diet, and pick up birthday cards for our family members. They help us manage our day-to-day life. We see these parts as proactive.

Other parts, called Exiles, are wounded, typically in early childhood. These parts of us long to have their stories told, to have their pain taken away. The parts are often

burdened with feelings such as shame, rage, or terror, and beliefs such as they are unworthy or unlovable.

Firefighters are on the lookout for the pain of the Exiles. These parts are reactionary, and if the pain threatens to flood the system, they will do whatever it takes to stop or numb the feelings of distress. These parts often cause us to act in ways that are not seen as socially acceptable or in ways that our other parts don't like, such as drinking too much, cutting, gambling, or overeating.

Through the Internal Family Systems Model, it is possible to get to know our parts, develop relationships with them, and ultimately help them heal.

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