

INTERNAL FAMILY SYSTEMS MODEL

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I. Parts

- A. Subpersonalities or aspects of our personality that interact internally in sequences and styles that are similar to the ways that people interact.
- B. 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.
- C. Parts become extreme and can be destructive because of life experiences.

II. Self

- A. Different level of entity than the parts - the seat of consciousness. Unlike parts, is invisible because it is the Self who is observing.
- B. The Self contains qualities like compassion, confidence, curiosity, and perspective; i.e., qualities of good leadership. Everyone has such a Self, but it can be obscured by the extremes of parts.

III. Basic Goals

- A. To release parts from their extreme roles so they can find and adopt their preferred, valuable roles.
- B. To differentiate client's Self so Self can help harmonize and balance their inner and outer life.

IV. Assumptions

- A. As we develop, our parts form a complex system of interaction with polarizations and alliances. Systems theory and technology can be applied to the internal system. When the system reorganizes, parts can change rapidly.
- B. Changes in the internal system will affect changes in the external system and vice versa. One can work with either to change the other.

V. Three-Group Model of Common Parts Roles

- A. Exiles: Young, vulnerable parts that have experienced trauma and are isolated from the rest of the system for their own and the system's protection. Exiles carry the memories, sensations, and emotions of the events and are stuck in the past.
- B. Managers: Parts that run the day-to-day life of the person trying to keep exiles exiled by staying in control of events or relationships, being perfect and pleasing, caretaking, scaring the person out of taking risks by criticizing, apathy, worry,

- C. Firefighters: Parts that react when exiles are activated in an effort to extinguish their feelings or dissociate the person from them. Common firefighter activities include: drug or alcohol use, self mutilation (cutting), binge-eating, sex binges, suicidal ideation, and rage. They have the same goals as managers (to keep exiles away), but different, more impulsive strategies.

VI. Using the Model

- A. Assess external system to make sure it is safe to do work.
- B. Introduce language, ask about relationship with different parts, ask about what person would like to change.
- C. Work with managers first; discuss their fears and how they can be addressed; form collaborative relationship with them; and respect their pace.
- D. Ask about and defuse any dangerous firefighters.
- E. With permission of managers, begin working with exiles - retrievals and unburdening.
- F. After each retrieval, ask how everyone is doing.
- G. Throughout, keep your parts from interfering, and have client help you.

Selected IFS Readings:

Nichols, M. and Schwartz, R. Family Therapy Concepts and Methods. 6th Edition, Allyn & Bacon, New York, 2004

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Schwartz, R. Internal Family Systems Therapy. Guilford, New York, 1995

Breunlin, D., Schwartz, R., and Karrer, B. Metaframeworks: Transcending the Models of Family Therapy. Jossey Bass, San Francisco, 1992

Schwartz, R. (1992) Rescuing the exiles. Family Therapy Networker, May-June

Schwartz, R. (1988) Know thyself. Family Therapy Networker, 12, 21-29

Schwartz, R. (1987) Our multiple selves. Family Therapy Networker, 11, 24-31

Internal Family Systems Language and Concepts

Balance	A state in which members of a human system have equitable access to the responsibilities, resources, and influence they need.
Blending	When the feelings and beliefs of one part merge with another part or the Self.
Burdens	Extreme ideas or feelings that are carried by parts and govern their lives. Burdens are left on or in parts from exposure to an external person or event.
Constraining Environment	A human systems environment characterized by imbalance, polarization, enmeshment, and problematic leadership. Constraining environments impose burdens on the systems within them.
Self Leadership	Leadership characterized by compassion, calmness, clarity, curiosity, confidence, courage, creativity, and connectedness.
Enmeshment	A state in which two members (or two groups) in a system become highly interdependent, to the point where both party's access to their Selves is constrained because their parts are so reactive to one another.
Exiles	Parts that have been sequestered within a system for their own protection or for the protection of the system from them.
Feedback	Information received by a system from its environment.
Feed within	Information communicated among members of a system.
Firefighters	Parts that go into action after the exiles have been activated in order to calm the exiles or distract the system from them (dissociation).
Harmony	A state in which the members of a human system relate collaboratively, with effective communication, mutual caring, and a sense of connection.
Imbalance	A state in which one member (or a group) has more or less access to responsibilities, influence, and resources.
Managers	Parts that try to run a system in ways that minimize the activation of exiles.
Multiplicity	The recognition that the human mind is not unitary, but instead is naturally subdivided into a

Paradigm	multitude of subpersonalities.
Parts	The term used in Internal Family Systems for a person's subpersonalities. Parts are best considered internal people of different ages, talents, and temperaments.
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.
Problematic Leadership	A state in which leaders of a system have abdicated, are biased, are polarized with each other, or have been discredited.
Self	A core of a person which contains leadership qualities such as compassion, perspective, curiosity, and confidence. The Self is best equipped to lead the internal family.
Sustaining Environment	A human systems environment characterized by balance, harmony, and effective leadership.