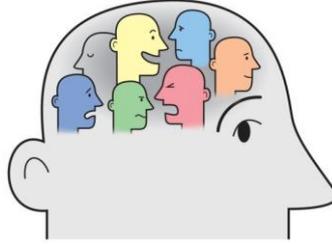


Internal Family Systems



Background

This exercise is based on the internal family systems (IFS) model created by Richard Schwartz. The principles are that we all have parts within ourselves, sub personalities like little people who have different goals and motivations; they have different levels of maturity, excitability, wisdom and pain. Every major school of psychology recognises that people have different sub personalities including Freud's id, ego, and superego, and the ego states model in Transactional Analysis (parent, adult, and child).

How we get along with these different parts of ourselves depends on our internal leadership skills; how we listen to our different parts, make sure they are taken care of, and keep them from sabotaging each other. We may have positive parts within ourselves like warmth, creativity, being a carer; but we may also have elements of behaviour we don't like in ourselves like aggression, self loathing or an overblown inner critic.

IFS sees consciousness as composed of various "parts" or subpersonalities, each with its own perspective, interests, memories, and viewpoint. A core tenet of IFS is that every part has a positive intent for the person, even if its actions or effects are counterproductive or cause dysfunction. This means that there is never any reason to fight with, coerce, or try to eliminate a part; the IFS method promotes internal connection and harmony.

The parts



Parts can have either "extreme roles" or healthy roles. IFS focuses on parts in extreme roles because they are in need of transformation through therapy. IFS divides these parts into three types—*Managers*, *Exiles*, and *Firefighters*.

Managers

Managers are parts with preemptive protective roles. They handle the way a person interacts with the external world to protect them from being hurt by others and try to prevent painful or traumatic

feelings and experiences from flooding a person's awareness. One example could be perfectionism which means we don't get picked up for making mistakes.

Exiles

Exiles are parts that are in pain, shame, fear, or trauma, usually from childhood. Managers and firefighters try to exile these parts from consciousness, to prevent this pain from coming to the surface.

Firefighters

Firefighters are parts that emerge when exiles break out and demand attention. These parts work to distract a person's attention from the hurt or shame experienced by the exile by leading them to engage in impulsive behaviours like overeating, drug use, violence, or having inappropriate sex. They can also distract from the pain by causing a person to focus excessively on more subtle activities such as overworking, or over-medicating.

The Self

IFS also sees people as being whole, underneath this collection of parts. Everyone has a true self or spiritual centre, known as the Self to distinguish it from the parts. Even people whose experience is dominated by parts have access to this Self and its healing qualities of curiosity, connectedness, compassion, and calmness.

IFS sees the therapist's job as helping the client to disentangle themselves from their parts and access the Self, which can then connect with each part and heal it, so that the parts can let go of their destructive roles and enter into a harmonious collaboration, led by the Self. IFS explicitly recognises the spiritual nature of the Self, allowing the model to be helpful in spiritual development as well as psychological healing.

Exercise

1. Draw a picture of your various parts; don't feel you have to label them in line with the categories above.

You could separate them into ones for example you like, don't like, they could be adult parts or child parts within yourself, they could be healing and compassionate or they could be inner critics

2. Reflect on the overall picture; be curious about each of the parts; what is good about them? What is unhealthy? How do you feel towards each of them?

3. Which parts do you struggle to "allow in"? How can you integrate/deal with these parts?

4. Can the overall healthy true self as the orchestra conductor talk to them, interact with them, ask them what they need?

5. Talk them through in a coaching or therapeutic context with someone you trust

An example

Here is an example of one that I have completed; I'm showing a level of vulnerability in sharing as I think it helps to see a worked up example and am more comfortable sharing than I used to be.

The "light side" has various elements of carer, educator, creator and humourist, and the dark side which I have got to know better over the years has elements of workaholic, anger and the inner critic. The picture also brings out both the adult and child that are part of me.

