Day 1

# Week

12

# Day

1

# Day Title

Meeting the Inner Family: Introduction to IFS

# Lesson Name

Wholeness: Parts Work

# Meme

(insert meme image)

# Summary

IFS teaches us that we are made up of many parts, each with positive intentions, even if their strategies are unhelpful. Beneath these parts is the Self, our compassionate core, which has the power to bring healing and harmony to the inner family.

# Daily Passage

Inside each of us lives an inner family. Some parts of this family are loud and active, directing our lives with strong opinions. Others stay quiet, carrying memories and feelings we try to avoid. At times, this family feels chaotic. One part pulls us in one direction while another pulls the opposite way, leaving us torn. Internal Family Systems (IFS), a model created by Dr. Richard Schwartz, offers us a way to understand this inner family and bring it into harmony.

The foundation of IFS is simple yet profound: we are not one single, unified personality, but a system of parts. Each part has its own perspective, feelings, and strategies. One part may long to take a risk, such as starting a new job, beginning a relationship, or expressing a creative dream. Another part may be terrified of failure and hold us back. A third may criticize us for hesitating. None of these parts are wrong. Each is trying to help in its own way.

All parts carry positive intentions, even when their behaviors seem destructive. The perfectionist part that criticizes us is trying to keep us safe from rejection. The angry part that lashes out is trying to protect us from being hurt again. The part that numbs with food, alcohol, or endless scrolling is trying to shield us from overwhelming pain. Instead of labeling parts as bad, IFS invites us to see them as protectors, doing their best, even if their strategies are outdated or extreme.

IFS recognizes three broad types of parts: Managers, Firefighters, and Exiles. Managers work tirelessly to control life, keep us organized, and prevent pain. Firefighters leap in when pain breaks through, distracting us or soothing us through impulsive behaviors. Exiles are the parts that carry wounds, shame, or vulnerability from the past. Because their feelings can feel overwhelming, Exiles are often locked away, hidden deep inside.

Beneath all of this activity lies something deeper: the Self. The Self is not another part, but the calm, compassionate core of who we are. Self carries qualities that Dr. Schwartz describes as the “8 Cs”: calm, curiosity, compassion, clarity, courage, confidence, creativity, and connectedness. When we access Self, we have the ability to listen, understand, and heal the parts.

Imagine a household where every family member is fighting for control. Chaos reigns. Now imagine a wise, caring leader stepping in. Someone who listens to everyone, honors their needs, and helps them work together. The family begins to relax. This is what happens inside us when the Self takes the lead. Our parts no longer need to fight for control because they trust that someone is listening.

It may feel unusual at first to think of ourselves as having many parts. Yet if we listen closely, we notice that we already speak this way: “A part of me wants to go, but another part feels scared.” Or, “There’s a part of me that just wants to give up.” IFS helps us bring more awareness to this inner dialogue and relate to our parts with curiosity instead of judgment.

The goal of IFS is not to get rid of parts but to help them transform. Each part has wisdom to share once it no longer feels stuck in an extreme role. The critic can become a voice of discernment. The angry protector can transform into a source of strength. The numbing part can become a source of rest and self-care. When we listen with compassion, we give our parts the space they need to soften, and they begin to contribute to our wholeness.

Meeting our inner family is the first step in this process. As we get to know our parts with openness, we begin to see that every part belongs. Every part holds a story, a role, and a gift. And deep within us, the Self waits patiently, ready to lead with love.

# Alternative View

Some perspectives suggest that focusing too much on inner parts may encourage over-identification with them, reinforcing fragmentation rather than wholeness. From this view, practices that emphasize mindfulness or non-attachment may better support integration by helping us see through the illusion of separateness.

# Activity

What parts of yourself do you notice most often in daily life?

Can you recall a time when two parts of you wanted opposite things? How did that feel?

Which part of you tends to speak the loudest, and which one often feels silenced?

When have you felt connected to your calm, compassionate Self?

# Sources

Richard C. Schwartz, *Internal Family Systems Therapy*

Richard C. Schwartz, *No Bad Parts*

Jay Earley, *Self-Therapy*

Bessel van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*

Kristin Neff, *Self-Compassion*

# Domain

Psychotherapeutic and Cognitive

# Modality

Psychological and Therapeutic

Cognitive and Psychospiritual Education

Day 2

# Week

12

# Day

2

# Day Title

Exiles, Managers, and Firefighters

# Lesson Name

Wholeness: Parts Work

# Meme

(insert meme image)

# Summary

IFS describes three main types of parts. Exiles carry painful memories and beliefs. Managers work to prevent exiles from being triggered. Firefighters react when pain surfaces, distracting us in intense ways. Each role exists to protect us, even if its strategies are extreme.

# Daily Passage

Now that we have met the idea of the inner family, we can explore the three broad roles our parts often play in the Internal Family Systems model: Exiles, Managers, and Firefighters. Understanding these roles helps us see the hidden logic behind our patterns and develop compassion for the parts of us that sometimes feel overwhelming or confusing.

**Exiles: The Hidden Carriers of Pain**Exiles are the most vulnerable parts of us. They carry the memories, emotions, and beliefs we could not process when we were younger. These parts often hold experiences of shame, fear, abandonment, or trauma. Because their pain feels overwhelming, the rest of the system tries to push them away. They become “exiled” to the corners of our unconscious.

Exiles may carry beliefs like “I’m not enough,” “I don’t deserve love,” or “I’m not safe.” They may hold memories we would rather forget, along with the raw emotions connected to those experiences. Even though we try to hide them, exiles never disappear. They live within us, waiting for attention and healing. When they are triggered, they can flood us with vulnerability, sadness, or fear.

**Managers: The Protectors Who Keep Control**To prevent exiles from being triggered, managers work tirelessly. These proactive protectors try to control life so that old wounds never surface. They might show up as perfectionism, people-pleasing, overachieving, or hypervigilance. They push us to perform, to anticipate problems, and to stay within safe limits.

Managers are often harsh and critical, but their goal is protection. The inner critic attacks us to prevent others from doing so. The perfectionist drives us to achieve so that we never feel the shame of failure. The people-pleaser prioritizes others’ needs to avoid rejection. Even though managers can feel exhausting, they are trying to keep us safe from the raw pain of the exiles.

**Firefighters: The Emergency Responders**Despite managers’ efforts, exiles sometimes break through. When that happens, firefighters rush in to douse the emotional flames. Their methods are quick, intense, and often impulsive. Firefighters distract us or numb us through overeating, drinking, scrolling endlessly, shopping, binge-watching, or reckless choices.

Unlike managers, firefighters are not concerned with appearances or long-term plans. They act in the moment to stop pain at any cost. Imagine a firefighter breaking down doors to put out a burning house. They may leave a mess, but their goal is survival. In the same way, firefighter parts intervene forcefully when exiles overwhelm us, even if their actions create new problems later.

**Why These Roles Matter**

Understanding exiles, managers, and firefighters allows us to see our behaviors through a lens of compassion. Instead of blaming ourselves for procrastinating, overworking, or numbing, we can recognize these as strategies designed to protect us. Each role, Exile, Manager, Firefighter, makes sense when we see its protective intention.

For example, overworking may reveal a manager trying to prevent feelings of inadequacy. Late-night scrolling may reveal a firefighter soothing the loneliness of an exile. This perspective opens the door to self-kindness: “Of course this part acts this way. It is trying to keep me safe.”

This framework also explains why willpower alone rarely changes our patterns. Silencing the critic, repressing the painful memory, or stopping the addictive behavior without deeper healing does not work for long. Parts continue their roles until they feel safe enough to let go. That safety comes from Self, which is the calm, compassionate presence within us that can listen and lead.

**Meeting the Roles with Compassion**When we meet these roles with curiosity, they often begin to soften. Managers and firefighters need reassurance that we can handle what exiles carry. Exiles need to know they will not be abandoned again. Healing does not mean eliminating parts. It means creating space for each role to transform. The critic can become discerning. The firefighter can bring vitality and play. The exile, once healed, can become a source of creativity and tenderness.

# Alternative View

Some approaches caution against categorizing inner experience too rigidly. From this perspective, labeling parts as “exiles” or “managers” may risk oversimplifying the complexity of the psyche. Others suggest that mindfulness practices that notice emotions without analysis can also support healing.

# Activity

Which role—Exile, Manager, or Firefighter—feels most familiar to you?

Can you recall a moment when a firefighter part stepped in quickly? What pain might it have been protecting you from?

How do your managers try to keep life in control? What fears might drive them?

What might shift if you approached these parts with curiosity rather than judgment?

Today’s practice is to take a few quiet minutes and notice if you can sense an exile within. It may feel like a small, sad voice, a childlike image, or a wave of vulnerability. Gently acknowledge it and say: “I see you. You are not alone.” Nothing more is required. Even this small step begins to shift the pattern of exile toward healing.

Today’s practice is to notice a firefighter part in your life. Perhaps it shows up as a craving, a habit, or a sudden urge to distract yourself. Instead of shaming or indulging it, pause and ask: “What are you trying to protect me from? What pain are you afraid I’ll feel?” Simply listening is the first step toward transformation.

Today's practice is to choose one manager you notice often: perhaps the critic, the perfectionist, or the planner—and spend a few minutes writing to it as if it were a character in your inner family. Ask: What is your job? What are you afraid of? What would you rather be doing if you didn’t have to work so hard? This exercise shifts the relationship from resistance to dialogue.

Tool to create:

Getting to Know Your Parts tool

# Sources

Richard C. Schwartz, *No Bad Parts*

Richard C. Schwartz, *Internal Family Systems Therapy*

Jay Earley, *Self-Therapy*

Bessel van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*

Janina Fisher, *Healing the Fragmented Selves of Trauma Survivors*

# Domain

Psychotherapeutic and Cognitive

# Modality

Psychological and Therapeutic

Cognitive and Psychospiritual Education

Day 3

# Week

12

# Day

3

# Day Title

The Self: Inner Leader and Source of Compassion

# Lesson Name

Wholeness: Parts Work

# Meme

(insert meme image)

# Summary

The Self is the inner leader and healer at the core of who we are. It cannot be damaged, and it naturally carries the qualities of compassion, calm, and clarity. By unblending from our parts and relating to them from Self, we create safety, trust, and the conditions for healing.

# Daily Passage

In Internal Family Systems, much of the focus is on our parts, exiles, managers, and firefighters, because they are the ones we notice most. They carry strong emotions, drive our behaviors, and shape how we respond to life. Yet at the core of who we are lies something deeper, something that is not just another part. This is the Self, our inner leader, healer, and true center.

The Self is not an idea or a role we play. It is a felt experience of presence. When we are resting in Self, we feel calm, curious, compassionate, and connected. We are not blended with a part, nor are we lost in reactivity. Instead, we are able to observe our parts, listen to them, and respond with clarity. Dr. Richard Schwartz, the founder of IFS, describes Self as embodying the “8 C’s”: calm, curiosity, compassion, clarity, courage, confidence, creativity, and connectedness. These qualities are not traits we need to manufacture. They are natural to us whenever parts are not overwhelming the system. The Self is always present, like the sun behind the clouds. Even when stormy emotions obscure it, Self does not disappear.

One of the most profound aspects of IFS is the belief that every person has a Self, and that it cannot be damaged. Parts may carry pain, trauma, or extreme roles, but the Self remains whole. This means that healing is always possible, because the Self knows how to lead with compassion and wisdom. Our parts may be burdened, but the Self is never broken.

The role of Self is not to exile or silence our parts but to lead them with understanding. Imagine a loving parent with children. When the children are upset, the parent does not try to get rid of them or pretend they do not exist. The parent listens, soothes, and helps them feel safe. The Self does the same with our inner world. It listens to the critic with curiosity, comforts the exile with compassion, and reassures the firefighter that it no longer needs to work so hard to protect us.

Many of us are not used to treating ourselves this way. Instead, we often meet our parts with judgment. We see the critic as an enemy, our anxiety as a flaw, or our numbness as laziness. But when we connect with Self, we recognize that every part is trying to help in its own way. From Self, we bring understanding instead of rejection. This shift in perspective can be life-changing, transforming the way we relate to ourselves.

Accessing Self often begins with a practice called unblending. When we are blended with a part, we believe we are the part itself. We might think, “I am angry,” “I am worthless,” or “I am anxious.” In those moments, the Self feels hidden behind the part. By pausing and noticing, we can step back enough to say, “A part of me is angry,” or “A part of me feels worthless.” This small shift creates space for Self to emerge. The Self can then turn toward the part and say, “I see you. I want to hear your story.”

Over time, as we practice relating to our parts from Self, our inner system begins to trust. Managers, firefighters, and exiles start to relax when they feel the steady presence of Self. They no longer need to work in extreme ways because they know they are not alone. Healing happens not because the parts disappear, but because they no longer have to carry their burdens by themselves.

The experience of Self is a profound reminder that at our core, we are not broken. Beneath the protective strategies and wounded parts, there is always a center that is calm, compassionate, and wise. When we learn to lead our inner world from Self, we discover a way of living that is grounded, resilient, and deeply connected.

# Alternative View

Some perspectives question whether an inner Self exists as a distinct entity, suggesting instead that qualities like compassion and calm emerge through mindfulness or secure relationships. From this view, the Self may be seen less as a core identity and more as a state of presence that can be cultivated.

# Activity

When have you felt calm, compassionate, or curious toward yourself or others? Could this have been a moment of Self-energy?

What parts of you feel hardest to approach with compassion?

How does it feel to say, “A part of me feels \_\_\_” instead of “I am \_\_\_”?

What qualities of Self (8 C’s) do you notice most easily? Which feel harder to connect with?

Take a few quiet moments today to invite your Self forward. Close your eyes, breathe slowly, and ask: “Who is here right now? What part is most active?” Then gently step back and see if you can sense the calm, compassionate presence that wants to listen. Even if it is just for a moment, this taste of Self can be deeply healing.

Connecting with Self tool

# Sources

Richard C. Schwartz, *No Bad Parts*

Richard C. Schwartz, *Internal Family Systems Therapy*

Jay Earley, *Self-Therapy*

Janina Fisher, *Healing the Fragmented Selves of Trauma Survivors*

# Domain

Psychotherapeutic and Cognitive

# Modality

Psychological and Therapeutic

Cognitive and Psychospiritual Education

Day 4

# Week

12

# Day

4

# Day Title

Burdens: What Parts Carry and How They Let Go

# Lesson Name

Wholeness: Parts Work

# Meme

(insert meme image)

# Summary

In IFS, burdens are not who we are, but painful beliefs and emotions our parts carry from past experiences. Shame, fear, guilt, hopelessness, and anger weigh down our parts, shaping how they behave. When we recognize that the part is not the burden, compassion arises naturally. Healing comes through unburdening, when parts feel safe enough to release what no longer serves them. Burdens are survival strategies that once made sense, but they are not permanent truths.

# Daily Passage

In Internal Family Systems, we come to understand that no part of us is inherently bad. Every part holds a positive intention, even if its strategies feel painful or extreme. Yet many of our parts carry what IFS calls burdens—painful beliefs, emotions, or energies that weigh them down. These burdens are not the essence of the part. They are like heavy coats the part put on long ago to survive.

### **What Are Burdens?**

Burdens are the beliefs and feelings that parts absorbed during painful or overwhelming experiences. They often formed in childhood when we had no choice but to adapt.

* An exile may carry the burden of shame after being criticized.
* A manager may carry the burden of fear after growing up in an unpredictable home.
* A firefighter may carry the burden of desperation after years of trying to soothe pain.

Exiles carry the burdens of painful emotions, memories, and beliefs from past traumas. These burdens, such as shame, fear, sadness, and worthlessness, are what the exiled part holds onto, often pushed away from conscious awareness to protect the overall system.

Managers and Firefighters carry burdens, not in the sense of being wounded, but by being burdened by their protective duties.

Common burdens include:

* Shame: “I am not enough.”
* Fear: “I am unsafe.”
* Guilt: “It was my fault.”
* Hopelessness: “Things will never change.”
* Anger: “I must always fight to survive.”

These burdens shape how parts behave. A perfectionist manager may drive us relentlessly because it carries shame. A numbing firefighter may seek escape because it carries fear. An exile may collapse into despair because it carries hopelessness.

### **The Difference Between the Part and the Burden**

A burden is not the same as the part that carries it. The exile weighed down by shame is not shame itself; it is a tender part that once learned to survive by taking on shame. The firefighter who drinks to excess is not addiction; it is a desperate protector carrying fear. The critical manager is not cruelty; it is a frightened part carrying rejection.

When we see this difference, compassion begins to flow. Instead of saying, “I hate my inner critic,” we can say, “This critic is carrying fear of rejection.” Instead of saying, “I’m weak because I avoid pain,” we can say, “This firefighter is carrying desperation.” Seeing parts and burdens separately opens the door to healing.

### **Unattached Burdens**

Some burdens do not belong to any one part. These are called unattached burdens. They are energies or beliefs that seep into us from the collective, from family systems, or even from intergenerational trauma. For example, a child growing up in a family marked by war may carry the burden of fear or scarcity without ever having experienced the original event. Unattached burdens can feel like heavy atmospheres within us, beliefs we cannot trace back to a personal wound. Recognizing them helps us see that not everything we carry is truly ours.

### **Unburdening: The Path to Healing**

IFS teaches that healing comes through unburdening. When a part feels safe enough to share its story with Self, it can release the heavy beliefs and emotions it has carried for so long. This does not erase the past. Instead, it allows the part to live in the present without being weighed down by old survival strategies.

Unburdening often happens symbolically. A part might imagine laying down a heavy stone, washing away shame in a river, or releasing fear into the wind. These images help the part let go of what never truly belonged to it. Once unburdened, parts often take on new roles:

* A harsh critic may become a wise advisor.
* A perfectionist may become a source of motivation and care.
* An exile carrying grief may become a wellspring of tenderness and empathy.

### **Why Parts Hold Burdens So Long**

If burdens hurt us, why do parts hold onto them? Because at the time they were formed, these burdens felt necessary for survival. A child might believe, “If I think I’m bad, maybe I can do better and be loved.” Or, “If I expect danger, maybe I won’t be caught off guard.” Burdens were once protective strategies, even if they limit us now.

This is why we cannot force a part to let go. Unburdening happens only when parts feel the presence of Self: calm, compassionate, and trustworthy. Parts need to know that it is safe now, and that the system has new ways to care for them.

# Alternative View

Some perspectives caution that focusing too much on past burdens may reinforce a sense of victimhood or overemphasis on trauma. From this view, healing might require more emphasis on building new habits, practicing resilience, and cultivating present-moment strengths rather than revisiting old wounds.

# Activity

Reflect on a part of yourself that feels heavy or extreme. Ask: “What belief or feeling are you carrying? When did you first pick this up?” Imagine gently separating the part from its burden. What would this part look or feel like without the weight it carries? Even imagining this begins to create space for healing.

What burdens do you notice your parts carrying—shame, fear, guilt, or something else?

Can you recall when these burdens might have first formed?

How does it feel to imagine your part without this burden?

What small step could you take to begin lightening this burden today?

Tool to create:

Unburdening tool

# Sources

# Richard Schwartz, *Internal Family Systems Therapy* Robert Falconer, *Many Minds, One Self* Bessel van der Kolk, *The Body Keeps the Score*

# Domain

Psychotherapeutic and Cognitive

# Modality

Psychological and Therapeutic

Cognitive and Psychospiritual Education

Day 5

# Week

12

# Day

5

# Day Title

Unblending: Creating Space for Self to Lead

# Lesson Name

Wholeness: Parts Work

# Meme

(insert meme image)

# Summary

Unblending creates space between us and our parts, allowing Self to step forward as the leader of our inner system. By shifting from “I am anxious” to “A part of me feels anxious,” we soften the grip of overwhelming emotions and make room for compassion. Unblending does not exile parts but gives them space to be seen without taking over. This practice restores perspective and allows us to respond with clarity rather than react from reactivity.

# Daily Passage

In Internal Family Systems, we often talk about being blended with a part. Blending happens when a part’s feelings and beliefs take over our awareness so completely that we mistake them for the whole truth of who we are. We say things like, “I am worthless,” “I am anxious,” or “I am furious,” because in that moment, the part’s voice feels like the only voice.

Unblending is the practice of stepping back so that we can see the part rather than being lost inside it. Instead of “I am anxious,” we begin to say, “A part of me feels anxious.” That simple shift changes everything. It creates space for Self, the calm, compassionate center of who we are, to show up and lead.

When parts blend with us, they are trying to protect us. An exile may flood us with shame to stop us from taking risks. A manager may fill us with self-criticism to keep us in line. A firefighter may overwhelm us with cravings or anger to distract us from pain. These parts are not trying to harm us, they believe they must take over to keep us safe.

The problem is that when we are blended, we lose perspective. We cannot see that this is just one part’s story, not the whole truth. We react impulsively, get stuck in old patterns, or feel hijacked by emotions. Blending keeps us from leading our lives from Self.

Unblending does not mean pushing parts away. It means acknowledging them while staying rooted in Self. When we say, “A part of me feels angry,” we are not denying the anger, we are noticing it from a place of compassion and clarity. The part no longer has to carry the weight of being all of us.

This creates a profound shift. Instead of drowning in shame, we can listen to the exile that carries it. Instead of being consumed by criticism, we can speak to the manager behind it. Instead of acting out impulsively, we can hear the firefighter’s desperate plea. Unblending allows us to respond instead of react.

There are simple practices that support unblending. When you feel flooded by emotion, pause and name it: “A part of me feels anxious,” or “A part of me is furious.” This naming alone loosens the grip. Then, bring in curiosity by asking gently, “What are you afraid would happen if you did not feel this way?” Curiosity signals to the part that it is safe to share its burden. You can also invite Self forward by breathing into calm and compassion, noticing if you can feel just a little more space around the emotion. Finally, reassure the part that it does not have to carry everything alone. You are here now, and you want to listen.

Unblending matters because it restores choice. When we are blended, we believe we are the part, so we act automatically from its perspective. When we are unblended, we realize that the part is just one voice in the inner family, and that Self can lead with balance. The anxious part is not our identity. The critic is not the truth of who we are. The angry protector is not our core. Each part is welcome, but none needs to take over.

In psychedelic journeys, unblending is especially important. These experiences often bring intense emotions to the surface. Without the ability to unblend, we may feel consumed by fear, grief, or rage. With unblending, we can step back enough to notice: “A part of me is terrified right now.” It is not uncommon for exiles to be released during psychedelic journeys, sometimes before the system is ready to hold them with compassion. When this happens, the experience can feel overwhelming or destabilizing. Unblending helps us create enough space to witness what is arising without being swallowed by it. Integration then becomes easier, because we can reflect on what each part revealed without being trapped in its perspective.

Over time, practicing unblending teaches us that we are not defined by our parts. We are the spacious awareness that can hold them all. This realization brings both freedom and compassion. Our parts no longer have to run the show, and we no longer have to live at the mercy of old survival strategies. We discover that Self is steady, compassionate, and always present, waiting to guide us into wholeness.

# Alternative View

Some traditions suggest that labeling and categorizing parts may overcomplicate our inner experience. From this perspective, the practice of simply observing thoughts and emotions without identification—such as in mindfulness meditation—may be enough to loosen their grip, without the need to explicitly name or “dialogue” with parts.

# Activity

Choose one moment today when you notice a strong emotion. Pause and shift from “I am…” to “A part of me is…” Feel the difference this makes. Even if just for a breath, notice the space it creates. That space is Self stepping forward.

Recall a recent moment when you felt completely taken over by an emotion. How might it feel different to say, “A part of me felt…” instead?

Which parts of you tend to blend most strongly—anxious, critical, angry, or others?

How do your relationships change when you pause and unblend before reacting?

What helps you access the calm, compassionate qualities of Self?

# Sources

Richard Schwartz, *No Bad Parts*

Kristin Neff, *Self-Compassion*

Tara Brach, *Radical Acceptance*

# Domain

Psychotherapeutic and Cognitive

# Modality

Psychological and Therapeutic

Cognitive and Psychospiritual Education

Day 6

# Week

12

# Day

6

# Day Title

Healing the Inner Family and Living from Self

# Lesson Name

Wholeness: Parts Work

# Meme

(insert meme image)

# Summary

Healing in IFS begins when we welcome all parts with compassion, recognizing that even their extreme behaviors arise from positive intentions. Through the steps of unblending, befriending, witnessing, unburdening, and integration, we help parts release painful burdens and return to balance. The “6 Fs” (Find, Focus, Flesh Out, Feel Toward, Befriend, Fear) provide a structured way to connect with parts and understand their deeper motivations. At the heart of this process is Self-energy, which leads with calm, compassion, curiosity, and clarity. Living from Self does not mean parts disappear, but that they no longer carry their burdens alone. Healing becomes a lifelong relationship in which we move toward harmony, authenticity, and wholeness.

# Daily Passage

At the heart of Internal Family Systems is the understanding that all parts are welcome. None are bad or broken. Even when their strategies are extreme, every part is trying to help. The critic works hard to protect us from rejection. The perfectionist pushes us to avoid shame. The numbing firefighter distracts us from unbearable pain. Exiles, though wounded, long for love and connection. Healing means restoring each part to its rightful role, not silencing or erasing them, but helping them release their burdens and return to balance.

The process of healing often unfolds in stages:

* **Unblending** – We step back from parts enough to see them clearly.
* **Befriending** – We listen with curiosity and respect, even to our harshest protectors.
* **Witnessing** – Parts share their stories and reveal the burdens they carry.
* **Unburdening** – When they feel safe, parts let go of painful beliefs or emotions.
* **Integration** – Freed from burdens, parts take on healthier roles in our inner family.

Through this process, the inner system begins to trust that Self is present to lead. Managers soften their grip. Firefighters no longer need to act in desperation. Exiles feel safe enough to emerge and receive the love they have always longed for. Harmony grows not because the parts disappear, but because they finally feel cared for.

### **The 6 Fs of IFS**

One practical way to engage this healing process is through what Richard Schwartz calls the “6 Fs.” These steps help us connect with parts in a structured and compassionate way:

* **Find** – Identify the part of yourself or sensation in your body that is calling for attention.
* **Focus** – Turn your attention inward toward that specific part.
* **Flesh Out** – Explore its characteristics, its story, its role, and how it appears or feels.
* **Feel Toward** – Notice your feelings toward this part. Do you feel curiosity, compassion, or calm? If other parts are influencing you, invite them to relax so you can connect more fully.
* **Befriend** – Build a relationship of trust by asking questions such as, “How did you get this job?” or “What would you rather be doing if you didn’t have to protect me?”
* **Fear** – Listen for the deeper fear that drives this part’s behavior. Ask what it is afraid would happen if it stopped its job, or what it truly longs for.

These steps are always guided by Self-energy. Curiosity, compassion, clarity, and calm are what allow the 6 Fs to bring about real healing.

### **Living from Self**

Healing is not only about what happens inside us during quiet moments of reflection. It is also about how we carry Self into daily life. Living from Self means embodying the eight qualities of calm, curiosity, compassion, clarity, courage, confidence, creativity, and connectedness.

When we live from Self, we bring presence into our relationships. Instead of reacting from protector parts, we pause, listen, and respond from balance. We bring gentleness to our own struggles, noticing when a part is active and offering care instead of judgment. We also extend compassion to others, recognizing that they too are made of parts doing their best to cope.

Living from Self does not mean we never get blended. Parts will still flare up. Critics will speak, exiles will ache, firefighters will act. The difference is that we begin to notice sooner. We pause and say, “Ah, a part of me is here.” That simple recognition creates space for Self to return. Each time this happens, trust deepens—within us, and between us and our parts.

### **Healing as a Lifelong Relationship**

It is important to remember that this work never truly ends. The shadow will reveal new layers, exiles will surface with fresh memories, protectors will take on new roles. This is not a sign of failure, but of growth. Each moment of connection with Self is a moment of healing, even if only for a breath.

As we close this six-day journey with IFS, consider the practice not just as something you “do” but as a way of being in relationship with yourself. Your inner family is always with you, and Self is always present. Each day is an opportunity to turn inward with curiosity and compassion, to listen deeply, and to lead with love.

# Alternative View

Some people may feel uneasy with the idea of befriending all parts, especially those that express through destructive behaviors. It can seem dangerous or counterintuitive to approach these parts with compassion instead of control. Yet in IFS, rejecting or suppressing parts often makes them act out more intensely. Meeting them with curiosity does not excuse harmful behavior—it creates the safety they need to soften and transform. Healing does not come from force, but from trust and connection.

# Activity

Choose one part that feels especially strong right now. Go through the 6 Fs:  
 Find: Where is this part in your body or mind?  
 Focus: What happens when you pay attention to it?  
 Flesh Out: What does it look or feel like?  
 Feel Toward: How do you feel about it from Self?  
 Befriend: What does it want you to know?  
 Fear: What is it afraid would happen if it stopped its job?

Reflect on a moment in your life when you felt most aligned with Self. What qualities were present? How might you invite those qualities more often into daily life?

Write a letter from your Self to your parts, thanking them for their protection and inviting them to trust your leadership.

Take time to check in with your inner family as a whole. Imagine calling them into a circle. Notice who shows up first—managers, firefighters, or exiles. From Self, thank them for all they have done to protect you. Ask them if they feel ready to trust you as their leader. Notice what shifts in your system when you make this invitation. This is what it means to heal the inner family and live from Self.

# Sources

# Schwartz, R. C. (1995). *Internal Family Systems Therapy.* Guilford Press. Schwartz, R. C., & Sweezy, M. (2019). *Internal Family Systems Therapy (2nd ed.).* Guilford Press. Johnson, Jay Early (2012). *Self-Therapy: A Step-by-Step Guide to Creating Wholeness and Healing Your Inner Child Using IFS.* Holmes, P. (2020). “The 6 Fs: A Practical Framework for Working with Parts.” *IFS Institute Resources.*

# Domain

Psychotherapeutic and Cognitive

# Modality

Psychological and Therapeutic

Cognitive and Psychospiritual Education