

Getting to Know Your Parts

A first, friendly map of your inner world

You already talk in parts. *Part of me wants to say yes, and part of me is dreading it. A part of me knew better.* Richard Schwartz, the family therapist who developed Internal Family Systems (IFS) in the 1980s, took that everyday phrasing seriously. His starting point: the mind naturally comes in parts — something like an inner family — and that is not a flaw or a disorder. It is simply how minds are built.

Schwartz's signature idea is the title of his 2021 book: *No Bad Parts*. Even the part you like least — the critic, the procrastinator, the one reaching for the phone at 1 a.m. — took its job on to protect you, usually long ago, in the only way it could find. In this model, parts don't need to be defeated or deleted. They need to be known. This page is a first introduction.

How to use this

1. Read the map first. The two short sections below give you the words; page 2 is where you meet a part of your own.

2. One part at a time. Start with whichever showed up loudest this week — not with the oldest or scariest one.

3. Lead with curiosity, not fixing. The question that matters here is *what is this part for?* — not *how do I make it stop?*

4. Know when to stop. If you start to feel flooded, foggy, or far away, close the page: feet on the floor, name five things you can see, let your breath out slowly. Stopping early is doing it right.

Nothing to hand in, no right answers. If you'd like, bring whatever you find to a session and we'll meet the part together.

Three jobs parts tend to take

Schwartz noticed that parts cluster into three roles.

Managers run your daily life so old pain never gets touched. They plan, perfect, please, over-prepare — and often criticize you first, so nobody else gets the chance. The inner critic is usually a manager working overtime, not an enemy.

Firefighters take over when pain breaks through anyway. Scrolling, snacking, drinking, snapping at someone, going numb, working past midnight: the methods vary and can cause real trouble, but the goal is always the same — put the fire of feeling out, fast.

Exiles are the young parts that carry the old hurt itself — the shame, fear, or loneliness of moments that were too much at the time. Managers and firefighters do everything above to keep exiles out of sight. That is why the whole system works so hard.

And who is doing the noticing?

Underneath the parts, Schwartz says, there is a *Self* that isn't a part — the you who can watch a part with a little space around it. He describes it with eight C-words: **calm, curiosity, compassion, confidence, courage, clarity, connectedness, creativity**. You don't have to manufacture these. The practical test is modest: if you can feel even a flicker of honest curiosity toward a part — rather than fear of it, or a wish that it would vanish — enough Self is present to begin.

Meet one part

Pick one part that has been active this week. Moods and habits leave footprints — the procrastinating, the harsh inner commentary, the worry spiral, the urge to scroll — and each is usually a part at work. Write your answers if you can; point form is fine.

- Which part am I getting to know, and what could I call it? (*A plain name is fine: “the planner”, “the critic”, “the one who goes quiet”.*)
- When did it show up this week — and what had just happened?
- Where do I notice it in or around my body? (*A tight chest, a clenched jaw, a fog, a restlessness...*)
- What is its job? What is it trying to do *for* me?
- What is it afraid would happen if it stopped doing that job?
- How long has it been doing this? Does it seem young or old?
- If it trusted me for a moment, what would it want me to know?
- What might it need from me — patience, rest, being taken seriously, a lighter load?
- Before you finish: thank it for showing itself, however the conversation went. In this model, parts respond better to being greeted than to being fought.

If you keep finding more parts

People often do, and it can start to feel like the goal is to catalogue the whole cast. It isn't. This work is about your relationship with the few parts that matter most right now, not the count. And if one part seems to want another part *gone* — pause there. In IFS no part needs destroying; even the wish to destroy one comes from a part that is exhausted. That one is worth bringing to a session.

Can I do this alone, or do I need a therapist?

Honestly: both answers are true, at different depths. Noticing parts, naming them, getting curious about their jobs — everything this page invites — is reflective work most people can safely do on their own, and it makes good between-sessions practice. Deeper IFS work is different, especially approaching exiles: the pain they carry can be bigger than expected when it finally surfaces, and protective parts tend to step back more willingly when a trained person is in the room to help you stay grounded. If a part feels frightening, floods you with memory, or leaves you far away from yourself, that is not a cue to push through — it is the portion of this work that sessions are for. At TEO Counselling, parts work sits with Mohamad Shabib, who is trained in IFS Levels 1 and 2.

Good to remember

Having parts is not a sign that something is wrong with you — in Schwartz's model it is simply what a mind is. The aim was never to become one seamless person with no inner disagreements. It is for the inner family to be led, gently, by you — instead of running the house on old orders no one has updated in years.

This handout is educational — a reflection practice, not therapy, not an assessment, and not a substitute for professional care. If things feel like too much right now, support is there: in Canada, call or text 9-8-8 (Suicide Crisis Helpline) any time, day or night. In BC you can also call 1-800-SUICIDE (1-800-784-2433).