

# The Internal Family Systems Model Outline

## I. BASIC ASSUMPTIONS OF THE IFS MODEL

- It is the nature of the mind to be subdivided into an indeterminate number of subpersonalities or parts.
- Everyone has a Self, and the Self can and should lead the individual's internal system.
- The non-extreme intention of each part is something positive for the individual. There are no "bad" parts, and the goal of therapy is not to eliminate parts but instead to help them find their non-extreme roles.
- As we develop, our parts develop and form a complex system of interactions among themselves; therefore, systems theory can be applied to the internal system. When the system is reorganized, parts can change rapidly.
- Changes in the internal system will affect changes in the external system and vice versa. The implication of this assumption is that both the internal and external levels of system should be assessed.

## II. OVERALL GOALS OF THERAPY

- To achieve balance and harmony within the internal system
- To differentiate and elevate the Self so it can be an effective leader in the system
- When the Self is in the lead, the parts will provide input to the Self but will respect the leadership and ultimate decision making of the Self.
- All parts will exist and lend talents that reflect their non-extreme intentions.

## III. PARTS

- Subpersonalities are aspects of our personality that interact internally in sequences and styles that are similar to the ways in which people interact.
- Parts may be experienced in any number of ways -- thoughts, feelings, sensations, images, and more.
- All parts want something positive for the individual and will use a variety of strategies to gain influence within the internal system.
- Parts develop a complex system of interactions among themselves. Polarizations develop as parts try to gain influence within the system.
- While experiences affect parts, parts are not created by the experiences. They are always in existence, either as potential or actuality.
- Parts that become extreme are carrying "burdens" -- energies that are not inherent in the function of the part and don't belong to the nature of the part, such as extreme beliefs, emotions, or fantasies. Parts can be helped to "unburden" and return to their natural balance.
- Parts that have lost trust in the leadership of the Self will "blend" with or take over the Self.

## IV. SELF

- Different level of entity than the parts -- often in the center of the "you" that the parts are talking to or that likes or dislikes, listens to, or shuts out various parts
- When differentiated, the Self is competent, secure, self-assured, relaxed, and able to listen and respond to feedback.
- The Self can and should lead the internal system.
- Various levels of experience of the Self:
  1. When completely differentiated from all parts (Self alone), people describe a feeling of being "centered."
  2. When the individual is "in Self" or when the Self is in the lead while interacting with others (day-to-day experience), the Self is experienced along with the non-extreme aspects of the parts.
- An empowering aspect of the model is that everyone has a Self.

## V. GENERAL GROUPS OF PARTS

- **EXILES**
  1. Young parts that have experienced trauma and often become isolated from the rest of the system in an effort to protect the individual from feeling the pain, terror, fear, and so on, of these parts
  2. If exiled, can become increasingly extreme and desperate in an effort to be cared for and tell their story
  3. Can leave the individual feeling fragile and vulnerable
- **MANAGERS**
  1. Parts that run the day-to-day life of the individual
  2. Attempt to keep the individual in control of every situation and relationship in an effort to protect parts from feeling any hurt or rejection
  3. Can do this in any number of ways or through a combination of parts -- striving, controlling, evaluating, caretaking, terrorizing, and so on.
- **FIREFIGHTERS**
  1. Group of parts that react when exiles are activated in an effort to control and extinguish their feelings
  2. Can do this in any number of ways, including drug or alcohol use, self-mutilation (cutting), binge-eating, sex binges
  3. Have the same goals as managers (to keep exiles away) but different strategies