

your inner parts

before we begin, please note: the concept of parts is borrowed from a type of therapy called IFS (internal family systems). the 'parts' strategy i share now is an adaptation, a helpful notion, and is not the full picture of IFS, nor is it therapy. it is simply a way that i believe may help us to be more compassionate with our self and our suffering.

what are "parts"?

Richard Schwartz, author *no bad parts*, developed model of the self and parts called *internal family systems (IFS)*, which is sometimes also called parts work or parts psychology. rather than a "mono-mind" approach (that we have one mind with different thoughts, beliefs, feelings), this approach says we have a Self and a number of discrete minds or parts that have unique feelings, thoughts, behaviours.

in other words we have a Self – a true self or inner self – and we have parts.

Tom Holms, author *parts work*, describes Self as the conductor of an orchestra "all our parts are musicians playing the instruments that make the music of our lives. without musicians there is no music. without the conductor the music becomes chaotic, if it begins at all."

as i introduce this idea of parts to you, know that you don't have to use the word parts if it doesn't really resonate. think of this in any way that works for you! you likely already use this idea to some extent:

- there's a part of me that...
- there is a me who...
- there is a spot in me that is...
- my inner rebel is... my inner child...
- rebel me wants to... introvert me wants to...
- the rebel in me... the romantic in me...
- the rebel one... the worried one...

as you explore your parts, notice the phrasing you seem to instinctively use or practice the way that you prefer to think of your parts... have a play with it and see what feels right.

some ideas: friends, pals, players, troupe, team, roles, characters, elements, aspects... like a CEO at the head of the table with their team, the driver of the bus with many passengers, the coach and the players, the guide holding the space of the inner circle, a family with many beloved members.

how it helps to know your parts

the prerequisite of self-leadership is to know your self. if you've done that work at all you may notice there may be parts of you that don't feel like your soul self or true self – for example the controlling or angry or judgemental or lazy or worried qualities that might rear their heads from time to time.

it's helpful and empowering to see those parts of us simply as parts - not as our true self or even in opposition to our true self, but just one part of us that we can offer compassion.

in other words – when you are struggling with a hard thing it is not our whole self struggling, rather it is simply one part of us.

for instance, you may have experienced something like this...

- ugh! why am i avoiding doing this thing that i know and i say i want to do?
- why am i having so much trouble letting go of this thing that i am so ready to be done with?
- why can't i bounce back from this hard thing i experienced, why am i still struggling with a thing that is over?
- it's so frustrating to watch myself stay stuck.
- i am so sick of this story but i just can't seem to change it.
- i want things to be different but i just keep doing the same old thing.

it is frustrating isn't it. we're like: *what is wrong with me!*

we find that we are struggling with something and that mindset/belief/behaviour/inner struggle doesn't match who we think we are, so we begin to question our self or lose our sense of self, and then we struggle even more.

i believe it is liberating and empowering to shift from feeling like we are the problem or we can't seem to fix the problem - like there is something wrong with us - to instead realise that it is just one part of us that is struggling. now we can turn towards that suffering part with compassion, just like we would a suffering friend.

viewing parts as separate entities can allow us to gain perspective and have better understanding of our selves, especially as it comes to understanding our suffering and resistance as well as creating more mojo, more direction and meaning (doing more of what we say we want to do).

knowing our parts allows us to practice self leadership – we can engage our true self or soul self and approach our inner parts with compassion, curiosity, and confidence... we got this! we can let our true self take the lead.

why your parts do what they do

the most important thing to know is that you are good inside, your parts are good... as Richard Schwartz says, there are no bad parts. each part of you is quite simply trying to help you. perhaps to: manage, protect, keep you safe, get shit done, perform a role, to follow rules, to be free.

each part

- has a useful function;
- possesses gifts and strengths;
- needs a chance to shine, play, feel, express;
- and finds different things to be soothing, interesting, igniting, annoying.

so be sure to treat your parts like a dear friend, an honoured guest, a valuable part of your inner family or inner circle. just like with a grouchy aunt or difficult cousin, it may be tempting to wish they weren't around, but instead you need to find the good in them.

sometimes, especially when we are experiencing hard things, one part or another can become overly active, rigid, or extreme... they take up too much space at the table, appear too often, get too loud... our inner circle becomes unbalanced. this can be particularly true when our parts feel shamed, unseen, abandoned... when their needs aren't being met, when they carry burdens.

i heard someone say it this way: *when you resist something in you it goes to the basement to lift weights*. that's what our parts do when they aren't seen, honoured, validated... they just get more fired up! and a part that doesn't trust the SELF to lead is going to try to take over driving the bus of life.

when to meet your parts

you can meet your parts at any time! it is particularly helpful to do this in a moment of struggle or stuckness – when you are aware that you are reactive, defensive, resistant, agitated, shutting down, avoiding, judging, blaming, critical. this is a sign you are not coming from self but rather a part of you needs to be acknowledged.

when you notice the struggle the aim is to shift away from "i've got to fix this problem" and instead ask: what part of me is struggling, agitated, reacting?

the more you get to know your parts the more you might also like to notice your mojo – when you are feeling ignited, motivated, empowered, hopeful, inspired... which part of you is activated at those times? your parts have gifts that can help you (just like their resistance can hinder you).

who are your parts

your parts may be based on:

- the roles you play, or jobs you do in different parts of your life, or who you have had to be in order to manage life (the mom role, the organiser, the one who gets shit done)
- different aspects of your identity, any traits or qualities that you have (the homebody, the artist, the social butterfly)
- any archetypes/personas that resonate - have you ever done an archetype quiz? those archetypes are just parts of you, we all can have all or any of them... some archetypes may be stronger than others (the explorer, the rebel, the celebrity)
- even different ages or stages of our life (your 10 year old self, 16 year old self, 21 year old self)

Martha Beck says we all have a wild child part and a dictator/controller part...

Richard Schwartz says we have a protector, a manager, a firefighter... i believe we have our lighthouse keepers: our warrior, our sage, our earth mama etc.

as you get to know your parts you can recognise them and name them in any way you choose. there is no right or wrong way to know your parts – just the way that is meaningful to you.

how to meet your parts

again, the best thing to do is to do it your way. you might like to grab a journal and write about your part, talk out loud to your part, draw a mind map or diagram of your part, or simply visualise your part in your mind's eye. you might like to consider where you find this part within your body, what this part looks like, sounds like, feels like, what age, gender, or any other identity your part has.

remember to engage your true self before you meet your part - you can do this by engaging the Cs of self: calm, compassion, connection, curiosity, clarity, care, confidence, creativity, courage – and turn toward your part with these very qualities in mind.

when i notice i am in struggle i will grab my notebook and write: which part of me is agitated? i close my eyes and feel into that part, allow that part to come forward, to be known, to share. and then i explore. martha beck says: address the one that is distressed as "you" – this helps your true self to be a compassionate witness.

where you can explore

the place to begin is simply:

- what's up? why are you agitated?
- what are you feeling, thinking, believing?
- what are your fears, worries, doubts?

remember our goal is to lean in, to turn towards our part with absolute compassion, to allow for their full experience, to seek understanding. i believe the 3 most important things to know about your part are:

- what's their "go to" behaviour or response? (they feel x so they will y)
- how are they trying to help?
- what do they need?

but i also have 3 more interesting questions that you might like to ask your part:

- what age do you think we are? (retain old beliefs; limited view of help)
- what haven't i done for you/how have i let you down?
- what is soothing/interesting/igniting to you? (ie glimmers as well as triggers)

from here you can think about how your self might lead your parts away from the struggle and toward more of what you want instead.

- can you give your part more of what it needs?
- can you show your part why self can be trusted to lead?
- can you give this part a new job?

to conclude:

remember: this is simply a new way of thinking about our own inner resistance or inner struggle.

life is full of all sorts of hard things. we all have things we must face and bounce back from as well as things we want to and have to work towards. when we find ourselves in struggle we can remember:

i am not my struggle. i am not a problem. i don't need to be fixed. my whole self is so much more than this one thing.

we can tap into our sense of who we actually are (remarkable humans with strengths, values, and desires that empower us) and we can turn towards the part of us that is suffering with compassion, curiosity, and confidence. we can show our parts: we got this!

that's self-leadership. you lead your self when you lead your parts and you lead *with* self – your true self and all of those remarkable qualities you possess.