

- WESTERN CANADA MENTAL HEALTH SUMMIT -

IMPROVING SKILLS & COMPETENCIES FOR MENTAL HEALTH & EDUCATION PROFESSIONALS

WEDNESDAY, MAY 24, 2023 – FRIDAY, MAY 26, 2023

Best Western Premier Calgary Plaza Hotel & Conference Centre

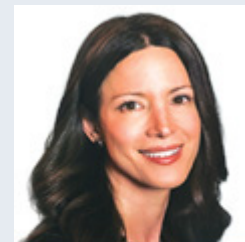
1316 33 St NE, T2A 6B6, Calgary, AB

ALEXIA ROTHMAN, PH.D.

WORKSHOP #1

Internal Family Systems: Healing Through Compassionate
Connection

Day One | 8:30am - 11:45am



ALEXIA ROTHMAN
PH.D.

Alexia Rothman, Ph.D., is a clinical psychologist in private practice in Atlanta, GA, since 2004. She is a Certified Internal Family Systems therapist, an international speaker and educator on the IFS model, and a professional consultant for clinicians seeking to deepen their knowledge and practice of IFS through theoretical discussions, case consultation, technique practice, and deep, personal experiential work with their own internal systems. Dr. Rothman has received extensive training in the IFS model, primarily from IFS developer, Dr. Richard Schwartz. podcast, Explorations in Psychotherapy.



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Disclaimer

Materials that are included in this course may include interventions and modalities that are beyond the authorized practice of mental health professionals. As a licensed professional, you are responsible for reviewing the scope of practice, including activities that are defined in law as beyond the boundaries of practice in accordance with and in compliance with your profession's standards.

Conflicts of Interest

As required by several accrediting boards, speaker and activity planning committee conflicts of interest (including financial relationships with ineligible organizations) were disclosed prior to the start of this activity. To view disclosure information, please see activity advertising or the copyright and speaker biography pages in the front of your program materials.

What is IFS?

- 1 Non-pathologizing model for understanding organization/operation of our psychological systems
- 2 Empirically validated psychotherapy
- 3 Simple, relatable, comprehensive
- 4 Easily integrated with other models
- 5 Powerful

Workshop Aims

- 1 Origins and Development of IFS
- 2 Empirical Support
- 3 **IFS Theory:** Principles & Assumptions
- 4 **IFS Therapy:** Procedures & Techniques
- 5 Experiential Exercise
- 6 Therapy Demo: Clips & Discussion

Origins of the Model

- Richard C. Schwartz, Ph.D.
 - Structural family therapist, academic
 - Originally avoided intrapsychic work
 - Past not considered very important in healing process
- *Originally no emphasis on therapist-client relationship* nor presence of the therapist
- Must attend to the past



Origins of the Model

- Clients with Eating Disorders
- Clients mentioning "Parts"
- "Diane"

Do people have an
inner wisdom
that could become a
source of healing?

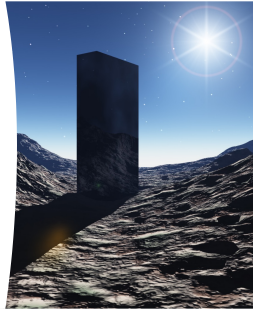
Composition of the Internal System

Parts
Burdens
Self



Multiplicity of the Mind

- Not a monolithic personality
- Our psyche is composed of **multiple "Parts"**
- We have not been taught to be aware of, pay attention to, extend compassion to, or work with these Parts



Parts

- **Subpersonalities**
- Can understand them as tiny people inside you.



Types of Parts

Exiles

- Parts that carry unresolved pain.
- Vulnerable
- Wounded

Protectors

- Parts that manage our interactions with the world and defend against underlying pain.
- Managers: **PROACTIVE**
- Firefighters: **REACTIVE**

Exiles

- **Hold the feelings we never want to feel**
 - Pain, shame, sadness, grief, loneliness, anxiety, fear, out-of-control, lost, unworthiness, guilt, humiliation, abandonment, panic, rejected, unloved
- Wounded Parts, very often young.
- Often frozen in time at original point of wounding, and experiencing trauma over and over
- Carry memories, sensations, and emotions of traumas/painful experiences

Exiles

- Protectors lock them away for their own safety and safety of the system.
- Often our most innocent, open, intimacy-seeking Parts
- Contain qualities like joy, liveliness, playfulness, spontaneity, creativity
- **Long for connection** but also **fearful of it.**
- Many seek **redemption** – fixate on someone like the person who wounded them

Protectors: Managers

PROACTIVE:

Work to prevent exile activation

- Run our day-to-day life
- Intend to create stability, good functioning, improvement, control environment to preserve safety
- Want to keep us in control of situations and relationships to protect parts from hurt/rejection and to protect system from their feelings/memories
- "Never again"

MANAGERS IN EXTREME ROLES	
Striving	Controlling
Perfectionism	Driving (taskmaster)
Criticizing	Obsessing
Seeking reassurance	Seeking approval
Evaluating	Caretaking
Organizing	Terrorizing
Restricting	Manipulating
Avoidance	Procrastination
Guardedness	Pessimism

Protectors: Firefighters

- **REACTIVE:** Take action when exiles are activated to **stifle** or **numb** us to their feelings or **distract** us from them
- In *preferred* roles, seek to balance the system: rest, soothing, novelty, pleasure, fun

FIREFIGHTERS IN EXTREME ROLES

Drug/alcohol abuse, self-harm/mutilation, bingeing, purging, starvation, sex binges, overspending, video games, TV, internet, gambling, violence, suicide attempts, lashing out, fighting, hoarding, dissociating, procrastinating, oversleeping.



Protectors: Firefighters



- **Impulsive** – not really concerned with consequences
- **Highly burdened**
- Can feel rejected, shamed, lonely, isolated
 - Often misunderstood and rejected internally and externally

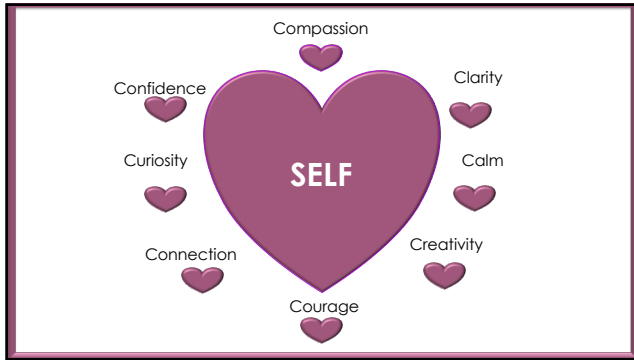
Burdens

- **Negative/extreme emotions, beliefs, or energies** that enter system from a direct experience in life or are absorbed through the culture or family lineage.
 - Arise from **the meaning** parts make of external events.

**A PART IS *NOT*
ITS BURDEN**

Assumptions about Parts

- Each has a **full range** of emotions
- **Not** created by trauma, but may take on roles in response to traumatic experiences
- Have a function in our system
- No part operates in isolation
- Take on **burdens**
- **No bad Parts** – only Parts in extreme roles
 - Parts in roles **for a reason**, which we should seek to *understand*
 - Parts can transform/revert to preferred/natural state when Exile(s) they are protecting are healed or in care of Self



Structure of the Psyche Before Therapy

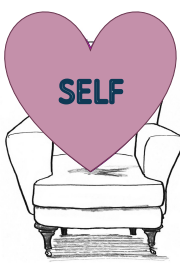
Self (heart) obscured by **Protectors**, who determine thoughts, feelings and actions.

Exiled Parts hidden behind the Curtain of Consciousness.

Structure of the Psyche after Therapy


Self now the center of the psyche and all parts cooperating under its guidance.

Parts in *preferred, non-extreme* roles can lend valuable qualities to the system.



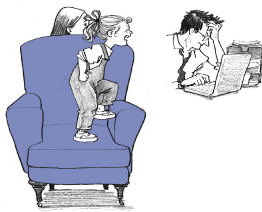
SELF as Natural Leader of the System

The Self is the natural leader of our systems and occupant of the Seat of Consciousness when none of our parts have taken its place.



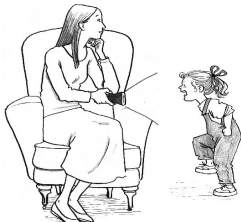
Blending

A Part can **hijack** the Seat of Consciousness and act as if it were you. Feelings and energy of part **obscure Self**. Think Part's thoughts, feel its feelings, see world from its perspective. Make decisions/act from that place



Unblending

Separating from a part so that you can relate to it or to another person from Self.

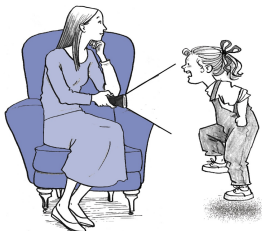


Relating to a Part when Unblended

When parts unblend, can turn **curiosity** towards a Part and seek to understand and build a relationship with it.

Allows for creation of healthy *internal attachment relationships* between Self and Parts

Emotion regulation technique



Relating to Another from Self



When differentiated from Parts, can relate to the world **from Self**.

Allows us to *respond* rather than *react*

Technique: Unblending



- Recognize and acknowledge when blended
 - Notice how you're experiencing the blending; focus there
- Ask directly if Part would separate and open some space for you to be WITH it
 - If flooding, ask it to draw most of its energy out of your body
- Used frequently with any type of part to increase access to Self-energy and open space for Self-to-Part connection

Assumptions of the IFS Model

- Human beings already healthy and whole
- Mind is multiple - the nature of the human mind is to be subdivided.
- *Everyone* has an undamaged Self
 - **Healing entity, inner wisdom**
 - **Natural leader** of our system
 - Inherently present – not developed because of relationship but becomes revealed and nurtured in relationship
- No part operates in isolation, - always working with multiple parts
 - If protection → vulnerability underneath
- No bad parts
- Not all parts wounded/burdened

Assumptions of the IFS Model

- Parts have relationships
 - Protect, allied, polarized
- System has wisdom about what needs to happen
 - **Stay curious** - client's parts will lead to where you need to be.
- Client and therapist in parallel process – both have parts that react.
 - IFS therapists work to know their own parts to be as Self-led as possible
- We can only love someone else's parts as much as we can love our own.

IFS THERAPY

The Six "F'S"

Unblending

- Find
- Focus
- Flesh Out

Relationship Building

- Feel
- BeFriend
- Fears

Find



- **GOAL:** Help clients begin to notice how they're experiencing Parts, how they are manifesting
- "Can you find that Part in or around your body?"
 - Includes the head
- "Where/how are you experiencing the Part?"

Ways Parts Can Manifest

- Emotions
- Physical sensations
- Images
- Words
- Body movements
- Some show up with all of these, some just one or several
- How they manifest may change

Focus



- "What do you notice about it?" "What's it like?"
- Invite them to just stay present with the Part.
- Wait and see what more information may arise.

Flesh It Out

- Not just a discrete step – develops over entire relationship
- Help client stay present with Part and get a felt sense
- "What more can you notice about it?"
- **Give client space** to see if more information naturally arises
- Promotes unblending
- Helps client connect certain feelings/thoughts/ sensations to Part
- Allows associated Parts to come out of the woodwork

WAIT

WHY AM I TALKING?

Feel

**HOW ARE YOU FEELING
TOWARD THE [PART]?**

Be-Friend**WHEN CRITICAL MASS OF SELF-ENERGY IS PRESENT:**

- Invite client to extend the curiosity/compassion to part
- See if part is aware of presence of Self
- Check how part is responding to Self being present
- Interview protector to learn:
 - Its role/job in the system
 - Its positive intention
 - What it's afraid might happen if it stopped using its methods

Fears

**"What are you afraid/concerned would
happen...?"**

[if you stopped responding/reacting in this way?]

WORKING WITH PROTECTORS

Protectors

- Believe they know how to keep the system safe
 - Hesitant to stop using their form of protection
- IFS has tremendous respect for Protectors
 - No expectation or demand for them to change until what they protect has been healed/is less vulnerable
 - Perceived (or actual) need for role must change first

Three Messages for Protectors

- **Empathy**
 - Honoring them, understanding why they don't want us to go there, why they're in this role, how hard they've had to work.
- **Control**
 - "You're in charge. If you don't want us to, we will not go to the Exile."
 - "If I can't convince you that it's safe to do it, then we're not going to do it." – Dick Schwartz
- **Hope/Possibility and vision**

Message of Possibility or Hope

- Most protectors extremely exhausted
- Start to bring them sense that maybe things can be different (possibility)
 - Here to help them: we can heal what they're protecting so they don't need to keep doing what they've had to do

SELF-ENERGY CAN BE MORE POWERFUL THAN ANY PROTECTION

If you would like to access my other **IFS live and on-demand workshops** and **podcast episodes** or be included on my **e-mail list**, please subscribe on my website:

DrAlexiaRothman.com



My cat, Tamino ©
