

The background is a dark blue gradient with a subtle pattern of small white dots. On the left side, there are several overlapping circular elements. A large, semi-transparent scale with numerical markings from 140 to 260 in increments of 10 is visible. The scale is oriented vertically, with 140 at the top and 260 at the bottom. Several circular patterns, some solid and some dashed, are scattered across the background, some containing arrows or partial arcs, suggesting a sense of rotation or movement.

INTERNAL FAMILY SYSTEMS (IFS) THERAPY:

AN INTRODUCTION

GERRY BAIRD, LCMHC

MANAGERS

are protectors of the system. They attempt to keep the person in control of every situation and relationship in order to protect them from feeling hurt or rejected. Examples: controller, striver, caretaker, judge, passive pessimist, planner, self-critic

EXILES

Hold painful emotions that have been isolated from the conscious self for protection of the system or for the parts' safety. Can become increasingly extreme in their efforts to be cared for and and share their story. Carry burdens from being wounded. Examples: rage, dependency, shame, fear/terror, grief/loss, loneliness

SELF

Core or centre of the person. When differentiated, acts as active, compassionate leader.

FIREFIGHTERS

also protect the system but act after exiles are upset to either soothe them or distract them. Any activity can be used to get away from exiles. Common examples include; sleep, shopping, work, sex, diet, exercise, computer, video games, addictions, bingeing, suicidality, self-harm, violence, dissociation, distraction, obsession, fantasy

IFS
INTERNAL
FAMILY
SYSTEMS

integrative

PSYCHOTHERAPY
WWW.INTEGRATIVEPSYCH.CO

COMMON PARTS/ROLES

- Substance abuse, self-harm, suicidal ideation, perfectionism, eating disorder parts
- “Why do we have to keep revisiting the past?” part
- Walls and other defenses – “talk to the defense mechanism”
- Groups of parts
- Wounded child
- “Bright side”, minimizing
- Inner “voices”
- Dissociative parts
- Inner critics/inner parents



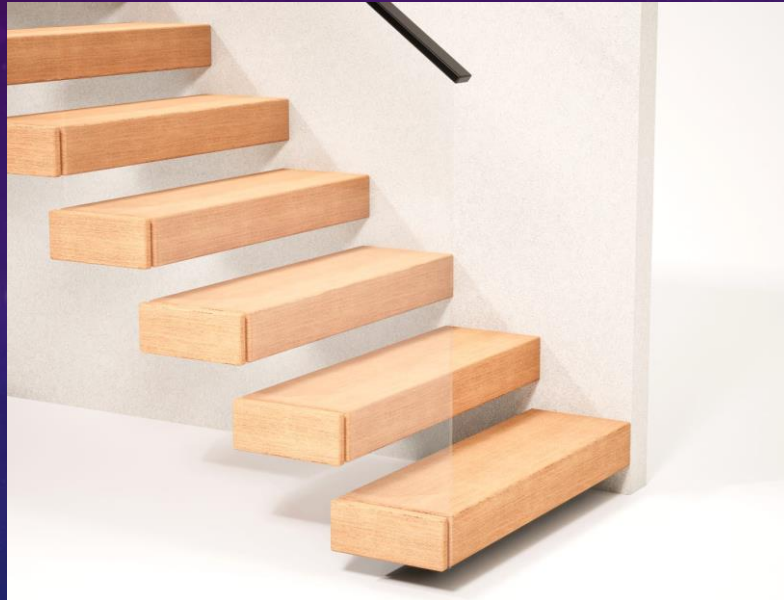
QUALITIES OF SELF

- Compassion
- Creativity
- Curiosity
- Connection
- Courage
- Confidence
- Clarity
- Calm
- Presence
- Persistence
- Perspective
- Playfulness
- Patience



THERAPEUTIC STEPS – PARTS WORK

- Find
- Focus
- Flesh Out
- Feel Toward
- beFriend
- Fear (what would happen if the protector stopped doing this job?)



UNBURDENING STEPS

- Witness
- Reparent
- Update
- Retrieve
- Unburden
- Integrate
- Reassign



APPLICATIONS AND INTERVENTIONS



- Differences and similarities between IFS and EMDR
- In-sight
- Direct Access
- Parts Language
- Unblending
- Self-like parts
- Parts with parts
- Legacy burdens
- Trauma and attachment
- Eating disorders
- Addressing internal polarization
- Self-therapy
- Sexual abuse
- Self-acceptance and self-love (every part has a voice)
- Chronic pain/arthritis

THEORIES AND RECEPTION

- Origin story (family therapy, chair work, bulimia); evolution of gestalt therapy
- Living room model, stage model
- Deepens understanding of human behavior (self and others)
- All parts are welcome (but not all behaviors are welcome)
- Memory reconsolidation and trauma work: stabilized memories can return to changeable states (neuroplasticity)
- Limbic system change: does not differentiate between reality and fantasy
- Protector work = trauma resourcing, Exile work = trauma processing
- Obtain permission from protectors prior to doing exile work
- “Normal multiplicity of the mind
- Growing rapidly in popularity



DEMONSTRATION



CASE STUDY #1

- Complex trauma
- Significant emotional reactivity
- Fears of serious pathology (TBI, early onset dementia, fears of being “crazy”)
- Other modalities had failed
- The client spontaneously engaged in parts work during an EMDR session
- Frequent worries of being “crazy” due to the parts work (having parts)
- Working with groups of parts
- Protector work



CASE STUDY #2

- Domestic violence history
- 30 years of rumination
- Telehealth
- Trauma processing
- Significant guilt
- Forgiveness work
- Unburdening
- “Parts map” house
- “I don’t think about that anymore”



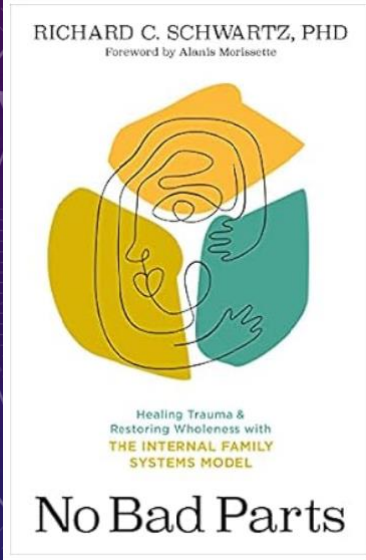
IFS TRAINING OPTIONS

- Understanding and Healing Trauma through IFS and Neuroscience (Frank Anderson online)
- IFS Immersion (PESI online)
- IFS Online Circle (IFS institute)
- Level 1 Training (official certification)



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- *Unburdened Eating* by Jeanne Catanzaro
- *No Bad Parts: Healing Trauma and Restoring Wholeness with the Internal Family Systems Model* by Richard C. Schwartz
- *Transcending Trauma: Healing Complex PTSD with Internal Family Systems* by Frank G. Anderson
- *Internal Family Systems Skills Training Manual: Trauma-Informed Treatment for Anxiety, Depression, PTSD and Substance Abuse* by Frank G. Anderson and Martha Sweezy



QUESTIONS/FOLLOW UP?

gerry.baird@uhsinc.com

REFERENCES

- Ally, D.; Tobiasz-Veltz, L.; et al. (2025). A pilot study of an online group-based Internal Family Systems intervention for comorbid posttraumatic stress disorder and substance use. *Front Psychiatry*. 2025 Mar 27;16:1544435. doi: 10.3389/fpsy.2025.1544435. PMID: 40212833; PMCID: PMC11983591.
- Buys, M. E. (2025). Exploring the evidence for Internal Family Systems therapy: a scoping review of current research, gaps, and future directions. *Clinical Psychologist*, 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13284207.2025.2533127>
- Comeau, Alexandra; Smith, Lia J., et al. (2024). Online group-based internal family systems treatment for posttraumatic stress disorder: Feasibility and acceptability of the program for alleviating and resolving trauma and stress. *Psychological Trauma: Theory, Research, Practice, and Policy*. 2024 Volume 16, Issue Suppl 3 (Dec).
- Dempsey, Shaun. (2022). Internal family systems therapy: Exploring the model in practice. *InPsych*. 2022 Vol 44. <https://psychology.org.au/for-members/publications/inpsych/2022/winter-2022/internal-family-systems-therapy>
- Jones, E. R.; Lauricella, D.; D’Aniello, C.; Smith, M. and Romney, J. (2022). Integrating Internal Family Systems and Solutions Focused Brief Therapy to Treat Survivors of Sexual Trauma. *Contemporary Family Therapy: An International Journal*, 44(2), 167–175. <https://doi-org.lopesalum.idm.oclc.org/10.1007/s10591-021-09571-z>