

Understanding your inner parts

A compassionate introduction to parts work in therapy

Have you ever felt two ways at once?

“Part of me wants to speak up, but another part is scared of being rejected.”

Parts work is a therapeutic way of exploring these different feelings, beliefs and responses with curiosity rather than criticism.



It is a way of understanding experience - not a claim that you have separate personalities.

Common parts you might recognise

The inner critic

Pushes for perfection, points out mistakes or tries to prevent failure.

The people pleaser

Prioritises others' approval or needs, sometimes at your own expense.

The angry protector

Uses anger or distance to protect against hurt or vulnerability.

The overwhelmed part

Withdraws, freezes or shuts down when things feel too much.

You can have multiple reactions at the same time. None needs to define your whole identity.

Why do these parts develop?

Exploring protection, learning and emotional needs

In parts-oriented approaches, a reaction that seems unhelpful today may once have helped you cope with a difficult situation.

Protection

A cautious part may scan for criticism. A distancing part may try to prevent rejection. These responses can feel automatic.

Past experience

Repeated experiences of stress, disconnection or pressure may shape familiar emotional and behavioural patterns.

Competing needs

One part may seek closeness while another seeks independence or safety. Both may be trying to help in different ways.

Self-leadership

Parts models describe a capacity to respond with calm, curiosity, compassion and clarity rather than being driven by one reaction.

A different way to speak to yourself

Instead of: "I am weak."

Try: "A part of me feels frightened right now."

Instead of: "I am always angry."

Try: "A protective part of me becomes angry when I feel unheard."

This language creates room to notice a feeling without treating it as your entire identity.

Getting to know a part

A gentle five-step reflection to try

01**Notice**

When a strong emotion appears, pause and name it: "A part of me feels..."

02**Locate**

Notice whether you sense tension, heaviness or another body sensation. You can skip this step.

03**Get curious**

Ask: "What is this part worried could happen? What is it trying to protect?"

04**Respond kindly**

Acknowledge the feeling without agreeing with every thought or acting on every urge.

05**Choose**

Consider what would be helpful now, guided by your values, needs and safety.

Example: "A part of me wants to avoid this conversation because it fears conflict. I can listen to that fear and still decide how to respond."

Bringing parts into therapy

Practical prompts, safety and support

Try these conversation starters

Who shows up?

“Which part of me is most active?” “When do I notice it?” “What does it say?”

What does it need?

“What is this part trying to prevent?” “What would help it feel heard or safer?”

When to slow down

If you feel overwhelmed, disconnected, unsafe or highly distressed, stop the exercise and return to grounding in the present. You do not need to uncover memories or revisit traumatic experiences alone. More intensive parts work should be guided by an appropriately trained clinician and paced for stability.

Flourish Horizon Psychology & Counselling

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Source: Noosha Anzab (2024), Parts work, works: Exploring the parts of our clients & ourselves within the therapeutic setting. Adapted into independently written client psychoeducation. Concepts reflect parts-oriented therapeutic models; not all claims or techniques have the same level of empirical support.