

Parts Work

Understanding inner conflict and protective responses

1.



What do we mean by parts?

Parts work is a way of understanding the different reactions, feelings, beliefs, body responses, and protective strategies that can show up within one person. It offers a practical language for making sense of inner conflict with more curiosity and less shame.

Important note:

- It does not mean you have multiple personalities.
- Parts are not signs that you are broken.
- Different models describe parts in different ways.

2.



Inner conflict can make sense

Many people notice different responses showing up at the same time. Parts-oriented work helps us ask what each response may be trying to do.

You might notice:

- One part wants closeness; another wants distance.
- One part wants rest; another says keep going.
- One part knows you are safe; another stays on alert.
- One part wants to speak up; another fears conflict or loss.

3.



Protective responses often have reasons

Responses that feel confusing, intense, or contradictory often developed in the context of stress, trauma, attachment pain, or repeated overwhelm. They may still be trying to protect you now—even when their strategies have costs.

May help us understand:

- self-criticism or inner conflict
- conflicting needs or impulses
- patterns that once made sense for survival

4.

Common protective patterns



Anticipating

planning, analyzing, controlling, preventing



Fast protection

fighting, fleeing, shutting down, numbing



Carrying pain

fear, shame, grief, loneliness, helplessness



Seeking connection

reassuring, pleasing, reaching, repairing

5.

A helpful shift



Notice the conflict



Get curious



Understand the protection



Increase choice

The goal is not to get rid of parts of yourself. The goal is to understand them well enough that you have more flexibility, self-understanding, and choice.

Educational Use Only

This resource is intended for general psychoeducation and is not a substitute for individualized mental health care, diagnosis, or treatment.

How Parts-Oriented Work Can Help

Building understanding, safety, and more choice

1.



Notice what is happening

We begin by noticing thoughts, feelings, urges, body sensations, and protective reactions without immediately acting on them.

May involve:

- tracking triggers
- noticing body cues
- naming activation

2.



Get curious about the protective function

Instead of asking what is wrong with me, parts-oriented work asks what this response may be trying to prevent, protect, or accomplish.

May involve:

- fear of hurt or rejection
- attempts to stay in control
- efforts to reduce overwhelm

3.



Include the body

Inner conflict is not only mental. Therapy may include noticing tension, collapse, urgency, numbness, or movement impulses so responses can be understood more fully.

May involve:

- sensations
- impulses
- shutdown or alarm

4.



Different approaches may use different language

At CCS, parts-oriented work may draw from TIST, IFS-informed work, Sensorimotor Psychotherapy, attachment-informed therapy, and nervous-system-informed approaches. These models overlap in some ways and differ in others.

May involve:

- not one rigid model
- language may vary
- treatment is individualized

5.

A helpful direction



Notice



Understand



Soften shame



Increase choice

The goal is not to get rid of parts of yourself. The goal is to relate to them with more awareness, compassion, and flexibility.

6.

What this work may support



inner conflict



self-criticism



trauma responses



safer connection

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Research Notes & References

Parts Work

1.



A note about this resource

This handout presents an integrative, trauma-informed understanding of inner conflict and protective responses. It does not claim that every parts-oriented model explains the mind in the same way. Instead, it offers a practical framework for making sense of conflicting internal reactions with more curiosity and less shame.

2.



What this resource draws on

- trauma and dissociation literature describing self-states or differentiated responses
- Sensorimotor and parts-oriented clinical approaches
- attachment, nervous system, and trauma-informed psychotherapy frameworks
- emerging clinical literature on regulation, integration, and flexible responding.

3.



Selected references

1. Fisher, J. (2017). *Healing the Fragmented Selves of Trauma Survivors: Overcoming Internal Self-Alienation*. Routledge.
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3. Schwartz, R. C. (2021). *No Bad Parts: Healing Trauma and Restoring Wholeness with the Internal Family Systems Model*. Sounds True.
4. van der Hart, O., Nijenhuis, E. R. S., & Steele, K. (2006). *The Haunted Self: Structural Dissociation and the Treatment of Chronic Traumatization*. W. W. Norton.
5. Holmes, E. A., Brown, R. J., Mansell, W., et al. (2005). Are there two qualitatively distinct forms of dissociation? *Clinical Psychology Review*, 25(1), 1-23.



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This resource is not intended to diagnose a condition or determine an individual treatment plan. References to specific therapeutic models are for educational purposes and do not imply affiliation with or endorsement by their respective organizations or training institutes.