



## **Internal Family Systems (Family Systems with Internal Parts)**

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Richard Schwartz is a family therapist who was observant enough to discover internal parts in many of his clients. His special genius was to realize that the system patterns and principles we have discovered for groups of people (families, churches, businesses, etc.) apply to how internal parts interact and relate to each other.<sup>1</sup> The internal family systems community has clarified valuable insights about how internal parts can be polarized and stuck in their interactions with each other, and how they can thereby interfere with the healing work. They have also identified valuable insights about how to apply family systems theory to help internal parts get unstuck so they can cooperate with healing instead of getting in the way. These insights have been a blessing for emotional healing work.

Many of the IFS community's beliefs, principles, and tools are consistent with my clinical experience and with what I have written about internal parts.<sup>2</sup> However, many in the IFS community believe that everybody is born with internal parts, that this is a normal and healthy part of the way our minds work, and that they normally function so smoothly that most of us don't even realize they are there. They believe that these internal parts remain even after complete healing, but that they then cooperate and work together smoothly so that the person does not feel fragmented any more. They believe that we should help internal parts work together more smoothly and release trauma burdens, but that we should not try to "integrate" them. I do not agree with those in the IFS community who teach these points. One concern is that utilizing this IFS framework could enable and rigidify a fragmented internal system, and that this could hinder a deeper level of healing. Another way to say this is that IFS work from this perspective might actually work to reinforce the separation of different ego states/self-states, which would hinder the progressive integration that I believe is ideal for all of the different types of internal parts. (Ideal progressive integration for all types of internal parts is discussed in more detail at the end of this document.)<sup>3</sup>

Most people working with dissociated internal parts believe that these parts are created in direct response to overwhelming trauma, and that when the trauma burden is removed then the parts integrate and are no longer separate from the person's core self. I currently perceive this to be the correct understanding *with respect to dissociated internal parts*.

To be very explicit regarding integration: My understanding regarding integration of dissociated internal parts is not that they are destroyed, but rather that they are integrated into the rest of the

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<sup>1</sup>See Schwartz, Richard C. *Internal Family Systems Therapy*. (New York, NY: The Guilford Press), 1995.

<sup>2</sup>See the essays described in "Internal Parts & Dissociation: Resource Guide" (available as a free download from the "Special Subjects/Advanced Topics" section of the Resources page of [www.immanuelapproach.com](http://www.immanuelapproach.com)).

<sup>3</sup>And remember that IFS insights regarding how internal parts can interact like a family system, and IFS insights regarding how to apply these principles to help get internal parts unstuck, are still very helpful regardless of whether or not all of their theory is correct.

person's self. The person can still remember and feel everything the part carried – it is all still present in some way – but the person no longer perceives a separate internal part distinct from her core self. I think computer hard drives provide a good analogy. If you have a hard drive that is partitioned, you have to follow special procedures to communicate across the drive partition. The partition barrier is so real that the parts of the drive on different sides of the partition are usually referred to as different drives. My perception is that integration after healing is like removing the drive partitions. All the hard-drive space is still there, all the files from the different drives are still there, but there are just not partitions any more. You can work smoothly anywhere within the entire hard drive without any special procedure for communicating across drive partitions.

I have seen this kind of integration on many occasions. For example, in one situation an internal part was relieved of a tremendous trauma burden and the Lord had just exposed and resolved the associated lie. This internal part then spontaneously asked, "Now what do I do?" I replied "Let's ask Jesus. Jesus, what do you want this part to do now?" Moments later this part commented "Jesus says that it's time for me to go back inside \_\_\_\_\_. Good bye." My perception and the perception of the person receiving healing was that this "part" was then "integrated" into her adult self in some way and was no longer present as a separate "part." NOTE: Sometimes Jesus does NOT ask them to integrate, but rather asks them to take on some other role for the time being. It is important to follow the Lord's guidance regarding the when and how of integration.

EMDR, Theophostic-based work, and Immanuel Approach emotional healing work appear to be fantastic for unburdening trauma from internal parts, for releasing polarization (usually based on guardian lies), and for resolving extreme behavior (usually caused by parts that are highly polarized). Furthermore, the techniques and tools for dealing with demonic “infection” that we teach about as part of our Immanuel Approach material systematically disinfect internal parts from any demonic infection. This is especially important because secular authors (such as Schwartz) do not address demonic infection. Our perception at present is that this component of Immanuel Approach emotional healing work enables more complete healing and integration.

**Addendum April 2026:** As described in “Dissociated Parts, Traumatic-Implicit-Memory Child-Ego-State Parts, Conflicted Self-State Parts, Mental Construct Parts, and Pseudo Parts,”<sup>4</sup> I perceive that there are several different types of *non-dissociative* internal parts, in addition to *dissociated* internal parts. And my observation is that many Internal Family Systems therapists work with all of these different types of internal parts.

***Progressively increasing coherence and integration is the ideal:*** With respect to all of the different types of internal parts, my perception is that God’s best plan is for us to experience steady, progressive integration as we resolve trauma, resolve internal conflicts, and build relational maturity skills – my perception is that *the ideal is to increasingly experience ourselves as the same integrated, coherent person across time and different experiences.*<sup>5</sup> And the really

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<sup>4</sup>Available as a free download from the “Special Subjects/Advanced Topics” section of Resources page of [www.immanuelapproach.com](http://www.immanuelapproach.com).

<sup>5</sup>For example, instead of feeling like I am a different person/part/subpersonality when I am worrying about a new venture turning out badly, my experience would be: “This is still just me. Right now I’m more connected to the concerns about how this plan might turn out badly, I’m a little triggered to painful childhood memories of how plans can look wonderful but then turn out badly, and my triggered anxiety is pushing my relational circuits offline, but

good news is that we can leave all of the most difficult judgment calls regarding integration to Jesus. For example, there is deep disagreement between the IFS community and other therapists regarding whether internal parts need to be truly, permanently eliminated as the person becomes more and more integrated, or whether parts sometimes remain in some subtle way that the recipient is not even consciously aware of. Furthermore, if integrating parts into the true/core self *is* ideal in some situations, when and how should this be facilitated? With the Immanuel Approach, we just leave all of this up to Jesus. We just coach recipients and all of their parts to keep engaging directly with Jesus, and He will sort out these really complicated, really difficult questions.

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this is still just me. This is not some separate “anxious part” with an identity organized around worrying about how any new possible adventure might turn out badly.” Furthermore, I know what the plan is: get a good connection with Jesus, and ask Him for guidance and help regarding all of this. And I don’t perceive any need to negotiate with an internal part/self-state/subpersonality regarding whether or not to embrace this plan.