

Internal Family systems Therapy (IFS)

"I am the sum of my parts. Everything I've ever done and everything I've ever achieved and everything I have ever been."

— Jen Larsen, Future Perfect

"I'm still learning to love the parts of myself no one claps for"

Rudy Francisco

What is IFS?

IFS state;

At the heart of Internal Family Systems therapy is the belief that there is a calm, compassionate core 'Self' within each of us that cannot be damaged.

We also have many 'parts' that help us through life and protect us. Sometimes these parts can become extreme because of our experiences in the world and it can then be harder to access the calm core Self. These parts can also make us behave in ways that cause conflict, distress or unhappiness in ourselves or those around us.

The IFS therapist's job is to help the client disentangle themselves from their parts and access their core Self. The Self can then connect with each part and heal it. This allows the parts to let go of their extreme or destructive roles and enter into a harmonious collaboration led by the Self.

IFS therapy explicitly recognizes the spiritual nature of the Self, allowing the model to be helpful in spiritual development as well as psychological healing.

IFS identifies five basic assumptions

1. It is the nature of the mind to be subdivided into an indeterminate number of subpersonalities or parts.
2. That everyone has a Self. That the Self can and should lead the individual's internal system.
3. The non-extreme intention of each part is something positive for the individual. There are no "bad" parts and the goal of therapy is not to eliminate parts but instead to find their non-extreme role.
4. As we develop, our parts develop and form a complex system of interactions amongst themselves, system theory can be applied to the internal system. When the system is reorganised, parts can change rapidly.
5. Changes in the internal system will effect changes in the external system and vice versa. The implication of this assumption is that both the internal and external levels of system should be assessed.

IFS Identifies four basic goals to their intervention

1. To achieve balance and harmony within the internal system
2. To help parts release their burdens so they can find their preferred roles in the system.

"You are mistaken if you think we have to lower ourselves to communicate with children. On the contrary, we have to reach up to their feelings, stretch, stand on our tiptoes."

Janusz Korczak 1925



3. To differentiate and release Self. When Self is in the lead, it respects input from the parts, who in turn respect self to effectively lead the system.
4. To effect the external systems to have more Self energy.

IFS Research base

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