

IFS and Your Parts



**Developing a healthy
relationship towards your Self**

IFS and Your Parts

In IFS, the goal is to help clients understand, listen to, and heal their internal parts, especially those carrying pain or trauma, which might manifest as parts holding difficult emotions like fear, shame, or sadness. These parts, called “exiles” usually develop as a result of some type of trauma during childhood and/or adolescence. We also develop other "protector" parts - parts that try to shield you from experiencing pain by managing behavior or suppressing memories.

IFS seeks to foster harmony among the parts, leading to greater self-understanding, healing, and ultimately, Self-leadership where the Self, rather than individual parts, guides the person's responses and decisions.

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In a scenario where a person grew up with a parent who always conveyed disappointment, a painful sense of "not being good enough" could develop into deeply wounded exiled parts. These exiles carry the raw pain of feeling flawed, unlovable, or inadequate, leading to an intense desire to hide and protect themselves from further hurt. In response, protective manager parts emerge to shield these vulnerable exiles from being exposed or triggered. Managers in IFS adopt proactive, often controlling roles to prevent emotional pain from surfacing, based on early experiences or situations where the person needed to protect themselves.

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Here are examples of common manager roles and how they develop:

Perfectionist Manager

- Role: Strives for flawless performance to avoid criticism, rejection, or feelings of inadequacy.
- Origins: Often develops in response to environments where approval was conditional on success or where mistakes were met with punishment or shame. The perfectionist manager believes that achieving high standards will prevent judgment or rejection.

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Inner Critic Manager

- Role: Constantly critiques and judges, pushing the person to “do better” to avoid failure, embarrassment, or rejection.
- Origins: May arise from external criticism received in childhood or from a parent’s critical voice internalized over time. The inner critic aims to protect against potential rejection or disappointment by preemptively pointing out flaws.

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Caretaker Manager

- Role: Focuses on meeting others' needs and keeping everyone happy to maintain stability and avoid conflict.
- Origins: This manager can develop in environments where the person felt responsible for others' emotions, perhaps in a family where conflict or unpredictability was common. The caretaker believes that by prioritizing others, they can keep things calm and avoid emotional upheaval.

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People-Pleaser Manager

- Role: Aims to gain approval and avoid rejection by accommodating others' desires, even at a personal cost.
- Origins: This role often forms in response to early experiences where acceptance felt conditional on meeting others' expectations. It believes that being agreeable will keep relationships secure and prevent abandonment.

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Hypervigilant Manager

- Role: Keeps constant watch for threats, scanning the environment for any sign of danger or instability.
- Origins: Often develops in response to traumatic or unpredictable environments, where safety required being aware of potential risks. The hypervigilant manager believes that constant alertness will prevent harm or unwanted surprises.



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Taskmaster/Workaholic Manager

- Role: Drives the person to stay productive, focused, and constantly busy to avoid facing underlying emotional pain.
- Origins: Common in people who grew up in environments where worth was tied to productivity, or where being idle left room for painful feelings to arise. This manager believes that achievement will bring value and help avoid feelings of inadequacy.



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Rational/Analytical Manager

- Role: Prioritizes logic and reason over emotions, often suppressing feelings to stay in control.
- Origins: Often develops in response to early messages that emotions are “weak” or unsafe. This manager believes that by focusing on rationality, they can avoid the perceived vulnerability that comes with feeling emotions.



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Avoidant Manager

- Role: Keeps the person away from situations, people, or tasks that might bring up difficult feelings or memories.
- Origins: Often a response to traumatic experiences, the avoidant manager believes that by avoiding certain triggers, they can prevent re-experiencing painful emotions.



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Self-Sacrificer Manager

- Role: Puts others' needs above their own, often leading to burnout or resentment, but with the intent to maintain relationships and avoid confrontation.
- Origins: Common in those who grew up feeling their needs were less important or that asserting themselves could cause conflict. The self-sacrificer believes that by neglecting their own needs, they can secure others' approval or avoid discord.

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These manager roles are protective strategies that develop from past experiences where control, approval, or vigilance were necessary for emotional survival. In IFS, the therapist helps clients recognize that these parts took on these roles for protection and survival but can now trust the Self to take the lead, allowing the person to meet their needs in healthier ways. The Self can be what you consider your best version of you is - a feeling of confidence, clarity, self-compassion, courage.

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As you start to get to know your parts, you begin to see how each one shows up in different situations, revealing the coping patterns that have developed over time. In IFS, this self-awareness allows you to identify the roles each part has taken on to protect or manage your inner system.



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At Work or School

You might notice the perfectionist part takes the lead, pushing you to over-prepare or set high, often unrealistic standards, hoping to avoid any criticism. The taskmaster might also push you to keep going without rest, trying to prove worth through constant productivity.

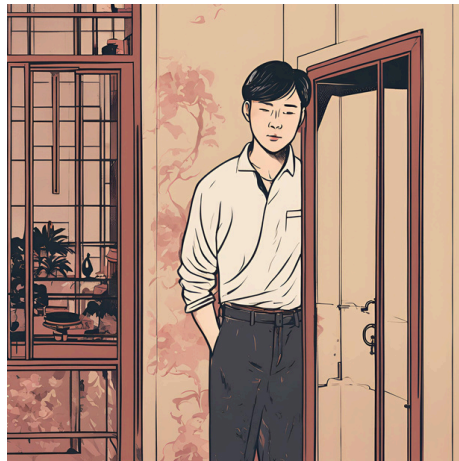


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In Social Situations

The people-pleaser manager may show up, urging you to put others' needs first to gain approval or avoid rejection.

Meanwhile, an avoidant manager might pull back, causing you to avoid gatherings where you feel you might be judged or come up short.



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In Relationships

In close relationships, you might notice the inner critic's voice getting louder, making you feel you're not “good enough” for your partner or friend. To cope, you might lean on caretaking behaviors, trying to make yourself indispensable to ensure the relationship feels secure.



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When Facing Failure or Criticism

This is when firefighters may jump in to shield you from feeling exposed. They might resort to numbing behaviors like overeating, procrastinating, or other distractions to escape the uncomfortable emotions associated with failure or criticism.



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In Moments of Rest or Solitude

When you're alone, these protective managers might step back, and exiled parts can start to surface with feelings of sadness, shame, or inadequacy. You might notice the urge to distract yourself or keep busy to avoid sitting with these vulnerable feelings.



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Over time, recognizing these patterns helps to uncover how each part has developed specific coping mechanisms to protect you from pain or perceived threats. This awareness allows you to pause, acknowledge the parts' intentions, and start building a relationship with them based on curiosity and compassion rather than judgment or resistance.

