

the
**internal
family
systems
workbook**

a guide to discover your self
and heal your parts

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SOUNDS TRUE INNER WORKBOOKS

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introduction to IFS

I contain multitudes.

Walt Whitman

Welcome! I'm so glad you had the curiosity and courage to pick up this workbook. I want to start by welcoming you and all your parts on this internal journey of Self-discovery and healing. Internal Family Systems (IFS) is a dynamic way to connect with your own Self-energy, heal your parts, and engage the world with greater compassion.

You probably picked up this book for a reason. Maybe a part of you is longing to be seen and understood on a deeper level. Perhaps you hope to heal from past wounds that just won't seem to go away. Part of you may be desiring a spiritual connection or maybe you're just wanting simple strategies to live with more inner peace and harmony.

Another part of you may be looking for ways to be more courageous in your personal or professional relationships. Maybe a part of you is curious to see what the IFS hype is all about. You might even have a skeptical part that doesn't believe anything will help or change your current situation.

It's possible that some, if not all, of the above are true. That's because we all have a system of parts inside us, and those parts are

working to help us, but sometimes they lead us astray, and they require us to dig deep to find out what those parts need from us.

Perhaps you've found yourself in a dilemma where one part of you says, "Do it," and another part of you says, "Don't you dare!" Or maybe you find yourself doing or saying something that you know will make a situation worse, but you can't stop yourself. Why do you do this? These aren't just random thoughts or impulses. If you focus on the impulse—ask questions of it—you'd learn that it's much more than that. It's actually a part simply trying to protect another part(s) of you.

IFS offers a way to befriend and embrace your entire inner system of parts. We can call this "parts work." In this workbook, you'll be doing your own parts work. A basic assumption of IFS is that everyone has a Self. This Self we refer to is similar to what others have described as the higher self or the soul. It is the core of you that exudes what we call the 8 Cs: Calm, Clarity, Confidence, Curiosity, Connectedness, Creativity, Compassion, and Courage. This Self cannot be damaged and has the ability to heal your parts. In addition to Self, you have an inner system, or your family of parts. These parts are often younger parts of you that developed strategies early in life in order to keep you protected, and often no longer serve you. When you learn to access the Self through this work, you will find that you have the profound ability to lead with Self rather than letting your parts run the show.

It may feel sometimes like some parts of you are trying to sabotage or harm you, but as you get deeper into the work, you will find that even your seemingly destructive parts are actually trying to help you. In IFS, all parts are welcome.

There are no bad parts.

Parts are well intentioned even when they take on extreme roles that end up doing more harm than good. Parts are like inner children thrust into extreme roles that are beyond their capacity to manage or cope. Even as you age, they get stuck in the age that the trauma took place, and from there, they take on burdens and responsibilities for protecting you, the family, or the system that are completely out of

their scope. A lot of them are like parentified inner children—inner children who have taken on the roles of parents, even though they don't have the experience or maturity for these responsibilities—who need to be loved and finally relieved of these roles. When we learn to see them this way, to listen to their stories, we can become compassionate, offering comfort to them and connection with Self.

As you learn to access your Self-energy, you will be able to connect with your parts, and extend healing to them so that your parts can more consciously choose how to help you navigate life instead of overwhelming or burdening you. It is possible to live with your parts harmoniously. This simple yet transformative approach has not only become a proven model of therapy, it is a way of life.

The IFS practices you will learn in this workbook can help you:

- Stay calm when your parts are activated
- Gain clarity in your life purpose
- Keep your heart open
- Be more vulnerable
- Develop more Self-confidence
- Face your fears with courage
- Feel more integrated with your body, mind, and soul
- Overcome anxiety
- Heal from past wounds and trauma
- Extend more compassion toward yourself and others

Developing and sharing IFS with individuals and communities around the world has been my life's work for the last forty years. It's been a joy and a privilege to witness the spread of IFS, and to see

the ways it is bringing healing and hope to so many. I am beyond thrilled to share these life-changing practices with you.

I am convinced that the IFS model has the ability to heal because I've seen it for myself, and I've heard from people all over the world who have used it to discover their Self, heal from trauma, and become more compassionate people. It has worked for me and countless others. I trust it can work for you, too. Packed with over fifty interactive exercises and meditations (visit [soundstrue.com/the-ifs-workbook-bonus](https://www.soundstrue.com/the-ifs-workbook-bonus) for guided audio meditations—watch for the QR code throughout the book), this workbook is uniquely designed to help you and your parts find harmony, inner healing, and hope.

Overview of Your Inner System

Your internal system consists of your Self, parts thrust into the roles of hardworking protectors called *managers* or *firefighters*, and your most vulnerable parts (that get hurt and then locked away inside) called *exiles*. Protector parts want to keep you safe. They'll do anything to protect you from pain, shame, and emotional overwhelm. Manager parts (like perfectionistic parts or inner critics) work preemptively to keep you out of your body and away from uncomfortable emotions by controlling and ordering your life, while firefighters (like confrontational or overindulging parts) are reactive to painful emotions or situations that activate you. Firefighters want to rescue you from uncomfortable feelings or unsafe people by fighting, comforting, soothing, or numbing. The exiles are the vulnerable, young parts of you that carry wounds and emotional burdens. They are often locked away inside for fear they'll be hurt again, or their pain would be too much for you. Exiles hold your deepest sadness, disappointment, and sorrow, so it can take time to gain their trust and heal them.

You will have a chance to explore all these parts in the pages ahead and establish deep connections between your Self and all of your parts.

The Power of IFS

There are four goals of IFS that you will have the opportunity to explore in this workbook:

- 1.** The first is the liberation of parts from extreme roles. By showing compassion to your parts, they are able to transform. An overworked part can learn to relax and enjoy life. An overly critical part can offer helpful advice rather than scathing critique.
- 2.** Secondly, IFS helps parts know they don't have to run everything. Things go better when they trust Self. Parts need to learn that you aren't a little kid anymore. They can trust Self to lead.
- 3.** Third, IFS helps parts to know each other and live more harmoniously. Conflicting parts can learn to appreciate what other parts bring and you can experience more wholeness and peace inside.
- 4.** Lastly, IFS can help bring more Self-leadership to your external world. Self-leadership is the ability to connect with your Self and parts so you can live from a place of courage, compassion, and curiosity. When you have compassion for your own parts, you're able to extend more compassion outwardly to your family, friends, and community.

How to Use This Workbook

This workbook will help you apply these transformative tools to your own life. I invite you to explore the parts that make up your internal system and extend compassion to each part of your Self as you make progress on your unique healing journey. Though IFS is simple to learn, it can take a lifetime to master. Even those who have been practicing for forty years continue to work with their parts and gain new insights, so I encourage you to take it slow, and be patient with yourself as the wisdom of your Self reveals itself to you and you make new discoveries about your parts. You'll be surprised at what you find.

Remember, even a small amount of parts work can make a big difference in your well-being.

The exercises in the workbook build on each other, so make sure you start with Part One before moving on to Parts Two through Five. You can repeat exercises and go back to exercises to build your skill and confidence. There are guided meditations throughout the workbook to help you practice going inside and connecting with your parts.

You may connect with a few parts or many. There is no right number of parts. Some parts may indicate the names they prefer, or you may only become aware of an impulse, feeling, or image. Don't worry about doing this perfectly. If you're growing in curiosity and compassion toward your parts, then you're doing it right.

You can decide the pace and depth you want to go. If you are new to the IFS model, these practices might take some adjustment. Take your time. You may have parts that are not ready for an exercise. That's okay. Listen to your parts and only proceed when you have their consent. You may have parts that want to rush through the workbook or distract you from it. Find the rhythm that works for you.

For many, IFS is a daily practice of listening to, connecting with, and feeling compassion for parts, leading to a deep and soulful connection. You may even choose to utilize the meditations and exercises as a form of spiritual practice, or connect them with your existing spiritual practices. Whether you see them as tools for Self-discovery or something more mystical, this is an embodied, experiential model that works best when it is practiced regularly in the course of your everyday life.

Going Inside

Parts work is, in general, an opportunity to go within. Throughout the workbook, however, you will come across “Going Inside” prompts. These are further opportunities within exercises to stop, look inward, and practice any given exercise more deeply. We’re used to reading books to accumulate knowledge and build up our mental acumen, but this workbook is designed to be experiential, so you are invited to go inside and actually try this stuff out. Some of these exercises might seem foreign to you at first, but my hope is that you will find them useful for your journey, and they will encourage you to meet your parts with maximum compassion and curiosity.

IFS changes lives. It is an evidence-based approach with a proven track record to bring more healing, Self-energy, and hope to the world. Now it is your turn to experience this transformative tool for yourself. This might be the most important journey you ever take. You’ve got this!

Warmly,

Dick Schwartz

setting your intention

As you embark on this journey of Self-discovery, I invite you to set an intention. Think about what you hope to get from this process (for example, Self-awareness, healing, integration, spiritual connectivity, Self-leadership, compassion for Self and others, etc.).

Fill in your intention and sign your name to commit to the journey:

This workbook belongs to: _____

My intention for going on this IFS journey is:

In the IFS model, consent and contracting are very important. You and you alone decide the pace and depth you want to go. All exercises and meditations are optional. By signing below, you agree that you are taking responsibility for what feels best for your inner system.


I understand that this workbook is intended to support my own exploration of my inner system. It is not a replacement for therapy.

I hereby consent and commit to this journey of personal exploration and growth.

x _____ **date:** _____

IFS Self- assessment

To begin your journey, take a few moments to fill out this IFS Self-assessment. This will help you assess what areas you may find most useful to focus on in your healing IFS journey.

 **Answer as honestly as you can. Check the boxes that are generally true for you (check all that apply):**

- I often feel overwhelmed by my emotions
- I have trouble accessing my emotions
- I have difficulty communicating my emotions to loved ones
- I often work to the point of burnout
- I have trouble setting healthy boundaries with others
- I feel a lot of rage inside
- It's hard for me to speak up
- I sometimes don't know why I make certain choices
- I often regret things I've said to others or actions I've taken