

Ep #144: Beyond Habits: Using Internal Family Systems to Detect Stealthy Parts of Your Personality (Part 1)



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With Your Host

Kristi Angevine

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Welcome to Episode 144. I'm Kristi Angevine, your host, and this podcast is here to help you understand why you have the habits you have. Join me today, in part one of a series of episodes all about noticing the parts of you, some of which may be quite subtle.

Put on your student hat and get ready to play detective as we use Internal Family Systems as a framework to better understand yourself. Let's get started.

Welcome to *Habits On Purpose*, a podcast for high-achieving women who want to create lifelong habits that give more than they take. You'll get practical strategies for mindset shifts that will help you finally understand the root causes of why you think, feel, and act as you do. And now here's your host, Physician and Master Certified Life Coach Kristi Angevine.

Hello, hello, everybody.

I am so glad you're here listening and taking some time just for you. If you are new to the podcast, welcome. I'm really glad that you're here.

If you end up enjoying what you're listening to, you need to join my email list. I send emails with extra ideas that don't get shared on the podcast, and it's where you'll learn all about the places that we can meet up in real life, workshops and webinars that I'm running, and other things that I think you'll find really useful.

The way you join the email list is just to go to HabitsOnPurpose.com, and you'll see a button that says something like, "Join the Newsletter" or "Join the Email List," and that's where we can connect.

Before we dive into this episode, I want to take just a minute and name something. As immersed as I am in the study and practice of coaching on habits and patterns, even with doing this work with clients and in my own life, I struggle, just like everyone does.

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When I feel overwhelmed or flooded, it's torture. I jump to conclusions. I get all agitated. All to find out later on that I totally misinterpreted something. Sometimes I'll have the intention to show up one way, and then find myself right back doing the same old thing. Sometimes I cannot access my intuition to save my life, and I feel more loss than I could ever fathom was possible.

So if you ever feel this way too, this is completely normal. I have the tools and skills that make it so much easier. Yet, this type of getting lost and floundering around, it's sometimes just a part of being human. And I think it's really important that all of us own up to being human.

Now, today's episode draws on the Internal Family Systems framework, a model in psychotherapy that was created by Dr. Richard Schwartz, a psychologist and family therapist in the 80s. It was created as he grappled with the limits of his Family Systems Theory training.

Whether you have a casual understanding of IFS, or you've never heard of it, this episode will increase your understanding of your own way of being in the world, and of your own tendencies and patterns.

I'm going to briefly describe some of the key tenets of IFS, but Episodes 49 and 75 are some really good starting points for you if you just want to get a basic understanding of what IFS is. And Episodes 104 and 138 take everything a little bit deeper. These will be linked in the show notes. Again, that's Episode 49, 75, 104, and 138.

IFS is an evidence-based approach created over 30 years ago by Dick Schwartz, a family therapist who noticed a pattern with his clients. His clients described the behaviors, concerns, and fears of their most extreme parts, aspects of themselves that seemed disruptive or out of control.

As he listened, what he found was surprising. These parts they described weren't actually trying to cause harm, but all of them had positive intentions for the client. These parts were just trying to keep the client safe, even if it

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meant taking on extreme roles. When these more extreme parts felt seen and heard and appreciated, they would soften and become more cooperative and less disruptive.

IFS operates from the premise that we all have a variety of parts or sub-personalities inside of us, and this multiplicity is completely normal. Every part, no matter how challenging, has a positive intention and has unique value, even the harshest inner mean-girl critic. And parts that drive things like self-destructive behaviors, they house positive intent and gifts just waiting to be found.

Now, let me give you an example so this makes sense. You know when you set up a coffee date with a friend, a part of you is really excited, but then the time comes and you're behind on something and another part of you really just does not want to go?

Or say you've got a goal, and a part of you loves to plan and research and loves to map out the steps, but another part of you is more like a teenager rebel and they don't like any rules, they don't like plans, doesn't like being told what to do and says screw it, and wants to do anything besides that dumb plan?

Well, these are parts. And having them does not mean you have what we used to call "multiple personality disorder", now known as "dissociative identity disorder". Knowing that you have discrete parts simply helps you understand yourself as a whole better.

It also helps you realize that even your most counterproductive habits are not proof that there's something broken or bad about you. So if you're like I am sometimes, and you have a tendency to make grand plans but then not follow through, this isn't because you lack self-discipline or drive.

Rather, it's because one part of you loves making grand plans, but another part thinks you have to do it perfectly otherwise you're going to fail and be

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judged and be rejected. Therefore, getting started and actually following through is quite difficult.

But until somebody teaches you how to detect these different parts, how to distinguish one from another, you don't realize what's going on and you can easily conclude that you are just irreparably screwed up.

As I've incorporated more IFS into my life and into my work as a coach, I've realized that it's more the rule than the exception to have parts that are hard to notice and therefore extremely easy to miss. Sometimes parts of us are really easy to notice and name and other times they're so subtle we can't even tell they're present.

Today I'm going to name and describe some really common parts that many of us share so that you can start noticing their unique presentation in your life, so that you can better understand why you react as you do in certain situations.

In part two, we'll talk more about why parts are hard to notice, and what you stand to gain by noticing them, so that ultimately you don't waste your time, money, and energy pursuing solutions that don't actually help you change a habit, because they don't actually address what's at the heart of the issue.

So what are some common parts that many of us have? I'm going to list about 9 or 10 that are very common. And then, in part two, we'll keep this list going so you can familiarize yourself with some of the parts that you might have.

And as you listen, I want you to ask yourself: Do I have this part? Do I have a part similar to this part? Is it obvious? Is it subtle? And once I go through this list, I'm going to give you some key things that you can do once you do know that you have a part.

All right, so the first part, this is probably one of the ones that most everybody can relate to: These are critical parts. Critic parts scrutinize,

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evaluate, and comment negatively. And if it's an *inner* critic, they scrutinize, evaluate, and comment negatively about you.

They're usually very serious, humorless, and they are relentless in their vigilance for problems. They want continual improvement. They can offer insults, be really harsh, be pretty sharp, and they are perhaps some of the most opportunistic of parts.

Any chance to jump in and offer something negative and they will be there. They often have an all-or-none perspective and say things like, "You never get it right. See? Yet again, you can't even do something simple without making a mess of it."

All right, the next one: Parts that discount or minimize difficulties. So when something is hard, these parts dismiss it as no big deal. They gloss over challenges, brush them aside. They will shrink problems that are really big by comparing them to even bigger problems or comparing them to other people's problems. And they'll explain away painful things with generalizations.

They might sound like, "You know, it's fine. Really, it was no big deal," even though it wasn't fine and it really was a big deal. They say things like, "Anyone could have handled it. Yeah, my dad used to beat all of us when we would come home late from school. But hey, we're Scots and that's just the way it was."

These parts can seem to have a great perspective and therefore they're oftentimes easy to miss. A specific variant of a part, that discounts or minimizes difficulties, is what I call the "first-world problem" labeler.

When something is really stressful, it says, "Oh please, this is nothing. Think of the people who are worse off. You shouldn't be complaining about something so petty, so trivial." These parts list off positive things that you should appreciate more and worse situations that you aren't in. They say

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things like, “Don't be a whiner. You wouldn't make it one day if real shit happened. This is such a first-world problem.”

Now I want to take a minute just to point something out. As you're listening to these parts, you might notice that sometimes parts are offering something that is really, really true and valid that you relate to. You might say, “Well, it's true, right? If I stubbed my toe, that really is not as big of a problem as, say, sex trafficking or war crimes.”

That's true, but by noticing when a part that has a particular way of showing up shows up, is present, you get to know yourself better. So by labeling something a “part”, I just want to point out that it doesn't mean that we are invalidating the perspective that the part brings, we're just noticing that that particular part is present.

All right, next part: Catastrophizing parts. These parts want to predict and prevent disasters and negative surprises. They bring to mind the top 10 worst-case scenarios that might happen in any scenario, and they can do it in two seconds flat. They rattle off gruesome details of imagined catastrophes. They are full of warnings. They are anticipatory, because they want to make sure that we don't get caught off guard or get hurt or fail.

This is your inner “Chicken Little”. Or if you have children who watch the *Trolls* movie, this is your inner Branch. You know, the character who starts off pretty glum and builds a bunker to prepare his family to be safe from invasion. Branch is filled with catastrophizing parts.

All right, next: Caretaking parts. Caretaking parts focus on the welfare of others before thinking of ourselves. They think our value comes from helping others and believe it's selfish to tend to yourself first.

These parts ignore your own needs without being aware that you're doing so, and they might rationalize caretaking over self-care. These parts might have you overextending to make sure you're doing everything you could possibly do to make sure other people are okay.

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In a similar department of parts are people-pleasing parts. People-pleasing parts are very attuned to the needs, expectations, and wishes of other people. These parts worry about disappointing people.

They say yes at your own expense, and find boundaries really uncomfortable. They fear rejection. They dislike conflict and confrontation. And they do things like agree to help when you don't actually have time or energy. They make choices that you know others will be pleased by, even if you are ignoring your own wishes or preferences.

Next are parts that are highly focused on physical appearance. Now, these parts evaluate your looks, evaluate other people's looks, and focus on how we might look or appear to other people.

They compare you to others, compare the “today you” to the “you of yesterday”, and opportunistically check the mirror openly, or maybe in a sneaky way. They scrutinize photos of yourself, spend lots of time making sure your makeup and hair and clothes and purse and how you stand and how you move are just right, and they want attention, approval, safety, and to be loved.

Next are escapist parts. Escapist parts want to numb emotional pain, distract us from any sort of inner conflict, and seek escape from whatever is uncomfortable. It sounds like, “I just need a break. F-it, after the day I've had, I deserve it. Just a little longer/Just one more bite, it won't matter/it won't hurt.

These parts show up as a strong desire for something soothing; be it drugs, alcohol, food, screens, exercise, shopping, binge reading, binge TV, burying us in engrossing work, or anything to soothe or escape a painful experience. These parts can show up and take our attention out even when we're just in the grocery store line and our painful experience is boredom.

Now, the last group of parts, or part that I'm going to name, are what I call “timekeeping” parts. These parts track time; the passage of time, how much

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time is left. They keep us on track with how long things take, how much time remains before we need to transition from one task to another, and they tend to the external time over the internal experience.

So I'm curious, of these parts I mentioned, critical parts, parts that discount or minimize difficulties, the first-world problem labeler part, catastrophizing parts, caretaking parts, people-pleasing parts, parts focused on physical appearance, escapist parts, and timekeeping parts, which of these parts do you relate to? Which of these parts do you notice show up for you?

Now, in any talk about noticing parts, it is critical to say a few things. Parts are not problems. Noticing our parts is not done with the purpose of getting rid of them or fixing them like you might diagnose and treat a clinical problem.

Parts are not only *not* bad, but parts are actually really good. Parts are valuable gifts. And to paraphrase Paul Neustadt, 'our parts are part of our aliveness. Our essence is expressed through our parts. Our most triggered parts have wisdom.' We notice parts so that we can better understand ourselves, not so that we can get rid of a part or fix it.

Now here are a couple of clues to tell if you have a part that is present for you. A part has an agenda. Therefore, a part can feel kind of directional, like it's leaning forward, like it wants to do something, like there's a feeling of an impulse there. So if you have a strong impulse to yell at somebody, to read a book, to run away, to grab a drink, to get in one more 'I told you so' kind of comment, to run your to-do list, these are clues that there could be a part that is present.

To wrap up, if you notice that you have some of the parts that I mentioned, or if hearing about these parts helped you identify other parts in your system, here's what you do to take it the next step.

Once you've identified a part, you want to check in to see how this part shows up for you. Are there particular thoughts you have running through

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your mind when this part's there? How about emotions? Are there particular emotions that come along?

Do you get bodily sensations? Is there a particular location that you feel something in your body when this part is there? What's it feel like when this part is present? And how about impulses? What do you have the impulse to do, even if you don't do it? Lastly, what do you do when this part of you is active?

Then it's nice to check in to see, when does this part of you commonly show up? Knowing when it shows up, and then what it's like when it's there, helps you anticipate it so that the next time you notice it, your only job is to simply acknowledge it. And you can do this really easily when you use the language of parts to name it.

“Oh, that people-pleasing part is here. I see you. Hello there. Oh, the part of me that's really critical and judgmental, I notice it right now. Hi.”

Now, bonus for all of the high achievers who are listening here, calling parts by these labels and names that I mentioned is really useful to teach us to talk about our parts. But keep in mind, a label is just a simplification. A part that I call the “angry part” isn't just a ball of rage. A part with anger can also hold deep sadness. A part with anger can be excellent at clearly seeing the truth of a situation.

A part that people-pleases might also get great joy out of seeing other people's happiness, totally separate from any anxiety around needing to please.

A part that we dub “the inner mean girl” isn't purely a cruel bully, but could have a long memory of all the times that we were hurt or scared and has vowed to do whatever it takes to prevent that from ever happening again.

So just keep this in mind when you're naming parts with shorthand labels. It's very helpful when you're first getting to know them, but it is just an oversimplification.

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To recap: There is power in noticing our different parts. Today I mentioned a variety of parts that you may notice in you, or that may have prompted you to think about other parts that you notice. No parts are bad. And noticing them is not done so that you can get rid of them, but rather so you can better understand yourself.

In part two, we're going to talk about other common parts, why parts are hard to notice, how you can continue to notice your parts, and the really critical benefits of noticing parts and developing a life practice around doing so.

Now, if you liked this episode and you haven't yet left a rating, a review, or followed the podcast, please do. It would mean so much to me. And if you're interested in coaching and getting support to do the things that I teach in the podcast, hop on the email list so that you can learn about upcoming events, workshops, and read about things that I don't necessarily share on the podcast, delivered straight to your inbox. I'll talk to you soon.

If you liked what you heard today, please follow, rate, and review. As of this moment, there are thousands of listeners but just hundreds of ratings and reviews. Bridging that gap is not for vanity, and it's not for my ego, but it's so that people who are looking for help with their habits can more easily find a resource that's practical and transformative.

And hey, listen, I also let ratings and reviews slide. I listen to a podcast, and then I get busy, I'm running some errands, and then I forget. And a part of me thinks, "Ooh, I'll do it later," and later never comes. So my challenge to you is, pause me mid-sentence, go add a rating and a review... It doesn't need to take more than 15 seconds... and it will have a lasting impact that will help more than you know.

Thank you, thank you, thank you. Talk to you soon.

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Thanks for listening to *Habits On Purpose*. If you want more information on Kristi Angevine or the resources from the podcast, visit HabitsOnPurpose.com. Tune in next week for another episode.