

Ep #145: Beyond Habits: Using Internal Family Systems to Uncover Your Inner Parts (Part 2)



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With Your Host

Kristi Angevine

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Welcome to Episode 145. I'm your host, Kristi Angevine, and this podcast is here to help you uncover the "why" behind your habits, why you think and feel and act as you do, so that you can be intentional and deliberate with this beautiful life of yours.

Today, we're diving into part two of a series about using Internal Family Systems as a framework to deepen your self-understanding. Last week started the discussion about noticing the various parts of yourself, and this week we'll continue with more. Let's get right to it.

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.

Hi, everybody. First things first, I'm so glad you're here. If you didn't yet listen to Episode 144, that is part one of this series, I would recommend you go back and listen to that before this one.

If you are new and this is your first episode, thanks for checking out the podcast. And if the IFS framework is totally new to you, I recommend you check out Episodes 49, 75, and maybe 104 and 138 to give you a little bit of a foundation.

So today I'm going to pick up where I left off in the last episode and share some more common parts that you might notice that you have in your system. And then I'll talk about why parts can be difficult to detect in yourself and what you stand to gain by noticing them.

Let's start with a quick review. Internal Family Systems, or IFS for short, is an evidence-based model in psychotherapy that was originally created by Dr. Richard Schwartz over 30 years ago.

It's grown in popularity so much that the demand for training has outpaced the capacity to train. In the past, it wasn't uncommon for therapists and

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practitioners alike to wait for years without being able to get into a training. This model is both simple and filled with immense complexity and nuance. So a short podcast will often be an oversimplification of something people study for years.

That said, here is a quick refresher of the main tenets of the model. Now, you know how sometimes a part of you wants to hang out with and really connect with your kids while another part wishes you could have 18 hours of alone time and just hates reading *Dog Man* or children's stories in general? These are your parts.

IFS brings us the idea that all of us are made up of many parts, each part having a distinct personality. And although this can sound like what we used to call multiple personality disorder, it's just the natural state of the human mind.

Dick Schwartz discovered, through observation and tons of trial and error, that when he listened for these different parts to surface in his clients, and when he helped clients get some space from these parts, the parts softened as they felt seen and heard and appreciated. Just like a weary grouchy person softens when they know they're being taken seriously.

In his work, he found that even the most scathing inner critics were actually good parts with positive intention just working a terrible role.

Now, before I dive into the common parts that many of us have in our systems, I want to give you another reminder that frames this discussion in a really important way.

As people initially learn about IFS and parts, a common phenomenon is to conclude that parts, given that they drive problematic ways of seeing ourselves and problematic habits we find really frustrating, people will conclude that the parts are problems that we need to get rid of or fix, and think something like, "If we can just be part free, we're going to be better off." And this is understandable, but it's actually a tremendously unhelpful way to conceptualize your parts.

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The idea that parts are bad and we need to fix them or get rid of them can lead us to things like compartmentalizing parts that we don't like, trying to silence parts, trying to strong arm our way around some parts in an effort to feel better faster. Let me just assure you that all of this is totally counterproductive.

The truth to keep front of mind is that just like the title of Dick Schwartz's book, there are no bad parts. They're just parts stuck in bad roles. All parts have positive intentions, even if we can't appreciate it at first.

It's like when you run into a crabby person that rubs you the wrong way, but then, later on, you find out that they haven't slept all night because their kid was sick, a pipe burst in their house right as they learned that their best friend just died, and they'd already picked up a shift for a coworker, which is where you encountered them.

Parts are sometimes like this crabby but exhausted and grieving person; a grouchy exterior over the top of an intrinsically good core. Parts have gifts and strengths. And I will again paraphrase a brilliant Paul Neustadt when he says, "Our parts are part of our aliveness. Our essence is expressed through our parts. And our most triggered parts have wisdom."

So let's now move to listing off some more common parts that you can have a sense of are some of these parts that you have. Last week I mentioned inner critic parts, parts that discount or minimize difficulty, parts that label difficulty as "first world problems", parts that catastrophize, caretaking and people-pleasing parts, parts highly focused on physical appearance, escapist parts, and timekeeping parts.

As you listen to this next batch of parts, see which ones you can relate to. Everyone's parts present in ways unique to them. So as you take stock, consider the specific ways that you personally experienced the ones that I list here. And even with the ones where you can't relate, I bet you recognize some of these in other people. So here are some more common kinds of parts.

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Pessimistic or cynical parts. These parts show when things are not going well, urging you to give up, blame yourself, they blame others, and they exclusively see the abysmal disaster. They focus on everything that's wrong and they downplay anything positive, leading to a sense of futility.

They could sound like: It is such a monumental mess. There's no reality where it doesn't just get worse, so why even bother? What was I thinking bringing kids into this world?

Parts that take things personally. Benign comments like, "Hey, could you hand me the salt?" land as, "You are a terrible cook." A text that says, "Hey, I missed you at the game," really means "You suck for not coming along and I'm never going to invite you again."

Constructive criticism lands as ruthless judgment, leading to feelings of inadequacy and defensiveness.

Next, approval-seeking parts. These parts crave praise and acceptance at the expense of boundaries. They go out of their way to please others, sometimes over committing or doing things that conflict with their true values. All in the name of external validation, public recognition, or to be seen as smart, helpful, needed, or just good.

These parts show up as being overly available. For example, giving clients or patients your cell phone number when that's not the norm in your group. Working patients in when there's not actually time in the schedule. Promising extras or favors or exceptions, even if it totally deviates from your office policy.

And like so many other parts, approval-seeking parts can be really sneaky. Such that you don't see what you're doing as exceptional, as extra favors, as going out of your way. It just seems like the normal thing that you should do.

Next are parts with heightened sensitivity to rejection. Oh, these are such a sweet group of parts. When someone gives you a compliment, these parts dismiss it as insincere. They bring self-consciousness and amplify attention

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to others' tones and expressions and body language, and they assume the worst.

For example, someone says, "That was so good." This part will have you think they're just saying that because they want to be polite, and the truth is they don't know what else to say. "They feel sorry for me and they hate me. They actually think I did a shit job." Ask me how I know these parts so well.

All right, next are compare and despair parts. These are also opportunistic and they highlight unfavorable comparisons, making you feel less than in any situation. They drive feelings of inadequacy, inferiority, and missing out.

They're often activated by social media, when you're at a meeting, at the gym, at conferences, or when in any group or any social or public gathering.

Angry parts: These parts react when they detect injustice, disrespect, or a boundary violation. They show up when somebody has been mistreated or there's an unfairness. They can show up as anger, rage, frustration, defensiveness, or judgment. And they have tons of clarity about what is right and what is wrong.

Now I say "angry" parts just as a shorthand, but the more accurate way to describe these parts are parts that bring you the emotion of anger. These parts aren't just a ball of rage. Seth Kopsal calls these parts "truth seers". And this is important, since, culturally, anger has a negative connotation, but really can be very useful and bring good information.

Next are overly optimistic parts. Just like that character, Joy, in *Inside Out*, these parts quickly reframe challenges with a positive spin, sometimes to the point of ignoring or downplaying difficulties. They may insist on a bright side, even in uncomfortable situations. Your car breaks down in the middle of nowhere, your whole family is hot and tired and hungry, and who knows how long it will be before you can find civilization?

Things are not looking good, and this part says, "You know, I actually love walking, don't you?"

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Next are skeptical parts. These parts are very logical, rational, and they question everything. They dislike anything that could be wishful or magical thinking. And they need evidence before they can trust something.

All right, next ones are walking on eggshells, over-explaining parts. These parts use extra words and explanations to try to clarify and avoid misunderstandings. So instead of asking a straightforward question, they ask three questions. Instead of saying something simple, they add layers of disclaimers, anticipating and addressing possible objections before they arise, and they are very, very, very wordy.

For example, “Hey, I don't want to bother you, but I have a question. If you don't want to answer it, it's totally fine. But I was just wondering...” They sound like that.

All right, the next group of parts are socially anxious, perfectionistic parts. These parts are focused on avoiding judgment and failure, and they work overtime to ensure everything is just right. But these parts don't see what they're doing as working overtime.

They show up when, for example, you spend days on what you're going to say on your holiday card, or you repeatedly reread, revise an email or a text. These parts are really easy to miss because they don't always show up with a very obvious thought like, “This must be perfect.” But they come up with a sneakier sentiment like, “I just want to make sure this sounds okay.”

And the last part I'm going to mention for today are thinking and intellectualizing parts, which might break your brain a little just to even name.

Thinking and intellectualizing parts are notoriously difficult to spot. These parts analyze and speculate and use language and lists and narratives to understand things. They are the “figuring it out” department, so to speak. They love data. And they rely on thought and language rather than instinct to figure everything out.

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If you are puzzled by the idea of an intellectual or thinking part, you are not alone. These parts feel so natural, they can be hard to recognize as a part. A clue that they're present is that you say things like, "Intellectually, that makes sense." Or if somebody asks you how you feel about something, you start your answer with, "I think..."

So can you relate to any of these parts I just listed? Do you notice them in other people? I bet you will now start detecting them more in your day to day now that they are named.

For me, when I hear a description of a part that I have in my system, that I haven't yet appreciated as a part, I start noticing it so much more. So if you were in my head, you would hear me go, "Oh, wait, I think that's my intellectualizing part. I'm totally in my head right now. Oh, okay, I see now."

So now let's pan back and review how you can tell, in general, that a part is present. Here are some clues. You have a response that seems out of proportion to a situation? That's a part. Do you have an agenda? Parts always have an agenda rather than a goal to simply understand or connect. Are you in your head? If you are in your head, more likely than not there's a part there.

Are you open-hearted? Oftentimes, when you're open-hearted but not in a caretaking, anxious way, there's less likely a chance for there to be a part. Instead of calm and clear-headed, parts bring a sense of impatience, agitation, frustration, confusion, and stress.

Parts often have an urgency to do something. So when you are in that pressure cooker rush to get out the door, that's a part of you feeling overwhelmed. Parts can feel like impulses. That desire to check your phone? That's a cue that there's a part present.

Next, how are others responding to you? Other people's responses are sometimes just about them and say nothing about you. But sometimes we can use other people's responses to us as a clue that our parts are present. I'm going to share a personal example.

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If I ask one of my kids if they're doing okay, if they need any help, and the response that comes back is, "I said I'm coming. Why can't you trust me? This is the worst day ever," that is almost always a clue for me that instead of matter of factly saying, "Hey babe, you doing okay? You need anything?"

What I actually sounded like was, "Hey, are you doing okay in there? Do you need any help?" See the difference? The latter is definitely one of my irritated, impatient, judgmental parts, and it's coming out under the facade of being kind and helpful. And here's the thing, our parts are contagious. Parts beget parts. My irritated part is going to elicit in my kid a defensive, nagged part.

Now, why are parts hard to notice? There are two main reasons. At the most basic level, when parts are present, we see the world through the eyes of that part. We experience that part's reality as if it's the only truth. It's kind of like when we're asleep... with the exception of that rare lucid dream. When we are asleep, we usually don't notice that we are asleep.

The second reason that parts are hard to notice is we overlook parts sometimes because it just seems like part of our personality to be a certain way: I'm just a perfectionist. I just like to reread my emails. I can't help but be so competitive. As an introvert, I just need 18 hours away from humans. That's just me. These things that we assume to be personality traits aren't often examined because we just assume they're intrinsic and unchangeable.

Now, why bother noticing your parts? Is it worth the effort just to realize, wow, I have a lot of parts? The answer is a solid yes. I'm a pragmatist, I do what works, and noticing parts genuinely works. It's actually essential if you're trying to create real and lasting change.

So here's why you should bother. Recognizing your parts helps you deeply understand yourself. Awareness of your parts allows you to track recurring patterns and spot why you react a certain way. And with that insight, you can then anticipate certain responses, you can plan accordingly, you can plan for how to support yourself, and how to respond differently.

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Noticing your parts also keeps you from falling into the common traps like thinking that a new planner will fix your overwhelm. Or that throwing out Halloween candy will stop emotional eating.

Noting parts is kind of like taking roll in class. Just as you get to know people or characters when you watch a film or documentary or read a book, as you note your own parts, eventually you get to know each part; their stories, their concerns, their strengths.

And as nutty as this might sound, if the IFS world is new to you, you learn to relate to your parts, collaborate with your parts, and ultimately support the parts that need it most. Which, ultimately, is the most effective approach I've found to transforming habits and patterns.

So this is your work for this week. I want you to go be a parts detector. You can do it with other people or you can do it with yourself. The goal is simply to identify your different parts as they show up.

Name the presence. "Ah, that's a part here."

Notice what that part feels like, what that part thinks, what that part drives you to do, how that part presents in your body. This is how you get to know yourself on a deeper level.

Now, if you find yourself asking, "But then what? What do I do when I notice this part? What if I don't like this part? How do I address it? What's my next step?" This may be your self-improvement/fixer part talking. Now you've identified another part.

Here's the thing. The first and most important step is to start detecting your parts. The detection is sufficient and effective without you having to do anything else, so just start there.

But if, as you do this, you want just a little something else, I want to leave you with this. When you notice your parts, who's doing the noticing?

Until next week, take care. I'll talk to you soon.

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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. Now 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, "Oh, I'll do it later," and later never comes.

So my challenge to you is pause me mid-sentence, and go add a rating and a review. It doesn't need to take more than 15 seconds, but it will have a lasting impact that will help more than you know. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Talk to you soon.

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.