CLINICAL BRIEF · PATH TO FREEDOM ALONGSIDE

Internal Family Systems

Parts, layers, and one shared vocabulary

Internal family systems therapy conceptualizes the mind as a system of parts led by a core Self, and treats symptoms as the work of protective and burdened parts. The path describes layers a person built around themselves to meet the world. The two maps cover nearby ground without being equivalent, and a client benefits when the clinician keeps the maps distinct.

Clinical frame

- Parts (managers, firefighters, exiles) and a core Self within an internal system
- Unburdening: the client's Self relates to parts and witnesses the burdens they carry
- The therapist helps the client access Self led states in session
- Derived in part from family systems thinking applied to the internal world (Schwartz)

Path to Freedom frame

- Layers built around the person: masks, invisible contracts, and chains
- A self recognized beneath the layers, not treated as a system of parts
- No unburdening and no dialogue with internal parts
- Reflection done alone, in plain statements

Points of conceptual fit

Protective parts and masks DISCOVERY	Both describe a protective organization that once served the person. The units differ: a part is an internal subpersonality, and a mask is an adopted way of presenting to the world.
The Self and the self beneath DISCOVERY	Both hold that something intact remains under the protective structure. IFS specifies it as the Self with defined qualities, and the path leaves it as the person's own recognized self.
Language across the two frames REFINEMENT	Language gained in one frame can help a client notice a protective pattern in the other. The clinician decides how much crossing is useful.

Division of labor

The clinician

- All parts work, including unburdening
- Access to Self led states
- Choice of vocabulary in session

The path

- Naming layers built around the person
- No dialogue with parts
- Pointing the client back to the therapist

Coordination and cautions

Two vocabularies may blur. Clients can use the therapist's terms in IFS sessions and the path's terms on the path. Unburdening is clinical work and stays with the IFS therapist. Both frameworks use lists of C words that share four names (curiosity, clarity, courage, calm) and differ in kind: the IFS qualities describe a state, and the Six C's are an ordered progression.

Return to the clinician when a memory returns with more force than reflection can hold, when sleep, appetite, or functioning change sharply, when panic, numbness, or a sense of being unreal appears, when there is fear of someone in the person's life, or when there are thoughts of ending life or harming someone (988 in the United States).

A proposed conceptual integration offered by The Autonomy Commission. It is not a manualized protocol and has not been empirically evaluated. The Path to Freedom is not psychotherapy, offers no diagnosis or treatment, and defers to the treating clinician on every clinical decision. Nothing is shared without the client's written consent.

An institute for the self that was always there.

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