



Internal Family Systems Resource Guide

A Companion to
Living From My Centered Self,
An IFS Wisdom Journal

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**Welcome to your companion guide to
*Living From Your Centered Self, an IFS Wisdom Journal.***

We will continue to add more resources so please continue to come back on a regular basis to find new information and new ideas This guide is meant to help you explore...

- the Eight Characteristics of Self. You will gain an overview of what they are and how we use them in the four quarterly editions.
- your Connection to your parts and how to effectively connect with them and set the tone for your experience.
- suggestions for getting the most out of your daily journaling practice.
- how to order your own IFS Wisdom Journal on Amazon.

With appreciation in following your path to your centered self,
Elaine and Karin

The 8 Characteristics of Self

Living From My Centered Self: An Internal Family Systems Wisdom Journal includes four quarterly editions throughout the year. Each edition's theme is based on two of the eight characteristics—or 8 C's—of Self: curiosity, clarity, creativity, courage, calmness, compassion, connectedness, and confidence. It is important to keep in mind that they are intricately interconnected, each characteristic mutually influencing the expression of the others. We will describe each of these characteristics individually in greater detail in their corresponding journal, but here is a brief introduction.

□ **Curiosity:** We are in a state of curiosity when we feel naturally inquisitive about something or someone. In this state our inquisitiveness is free from judgment or preconceived notions about the object of our curiosity. We are purely interested in gaining a deeper understanding of the thing or person that has captured our attention. In the Buddhist tradition this innocent state is called the beginner's mind, when we can allow ourselves to be open to whatever arises in the present moment without expectation.

□ **Clarity:** How we think about experiences, people, or ideas is often clouded by our past experiences and opinions. Achieving a state of clarity means letting go of the distortions we developed in the past. These distortions are often triggered by intense emotions and faulty assumptions. Similar to curiosity, clarity requires that we release our preconceived notions and see people, things, or ideas as they are in and of themselves. In other words, clarity leads us to see a situation or interaction as the centered Self would see it. It requires that we remain open to new possibilities instead of replaying the limited stories we have been telling ourselves for years. Clarity can also be enhanced when we take time to reflect—on our inner experiences and interaction with others; and on our ideas, goals, and life dreams.

The 8 Characteristics of Self

□ **Courage:** It has been said that courage is not the absence of fear but the willingness to move forward despite the fear, or with fear at our side. Courage is also the belief that, while an action may be difficult, we will nonetheless be able to meet that challenge, however imperfectly. Courage allows us to look at the parts of ourselves that cause us guilt, shame, or fear. The state of Self is open, compassionate, loving, and kind

Love, compassion, and kindness can also lead to the desire to advocate for others who are being treated unjustly in some way. Engaging in advocacy from the state of Self often leads to non-violent resistance—what Andrew Harvey calls Sacred Activism. Sacred Activism requires that we summon the courage of Self in the service of creating positive changes in our world.

□ **Creativity:** Creativity is the state of creating something new or different than what has existed before. We are creative when we produce a piece of art. Creativity also describes the creation of a new or revised idea, strategy, or way of moving through life. Often, these innovations arise out of our experiences of intuition, dreaming, or deep immersion in our work or play. In other words, we access our creativity when we can quiet the ramblings of our mind and be in a state of timelessness—when we give ourselves fully to the activity at hand and access the courage to let go of our limiting beliefs about ourselves.

□ **Compassion:** In her book, *The Gifts of Imperfection*, Brené Brown reminds us that the root of the word compassion means to suffer with. Compassion asks us to open our hearts to the suffering of others, while extending empathy and kindness. Doing so requires that we have the courage to look at their pain without blame or judgment. In doing so, we recognize our shared humanity. When we are in the state of Self, we are able to extend love to our parts, as well as to others. We practice self-compassion when we accept the emotions, perspectives, and actions of our parts with kindness and, in the same attitude of patient kindness, help them to release their suffering when they feel safe enough to do so.

The 8 Characteristics of Self

□ **Connectedness:** We connect with others when we approach them with genuine curiosity and compassion. In other words, when we listen to someone with the pure intention of understanding them, enjoying their company, and lifting them up, we experience true connection. When we extend this kind of presence to someone else, we often feel more centered in Self. Experiences such as these help us realize that interactions with others have an impact on our own inner states—we are interconnected with one another

From an IFS perspective, connectedness also means, from a state of Self, we can more authentically connect with our parts, as well as the Selves of others. Self-states can also facilitate meaning-filled connections with something greater than ourselves. For some people that means community or humanity. For others it means connecting to a spiritual source, whether that be called God, Goddess, Spirit, Adonai, or The Great Mystery.

□ **Confidence:** We experience confidence when we believe we can trust in something or someone—when we can trust in their abilities, loving care, commitment and/or consistency towards us. We experience self-confidence when we can trust in these same qualities within ourselves. According to the IFS model, Self extends these qualities toward our parts as parts are invited to share their experiences and release their burdens. Moreover, as Self displays its consistency in extending these qualities towards our various parts, the parts develop confidence in Self and are more likely to allow the Self to lead the inner system.

□ **Calmness:** Calmness is the state of feeling at ease, tranquil, peaceful, or serene. We feel free from agitation or worry and feel free from states of intense emotions or other disturbances. The process of letting go of agitated states requires that we experience calmness and safety, as well as many of the other Self characteristics we have already described. These characteristics together create an environment of acceptance and love where our parts can feel safe enough to release the patterns that hinder them and take on new and healthier roles.

Connecting with Your Parts

Among the main goals of IFS are to connect with your parts, invite them to release their burdens, and then help them take on new roles that promote the health of your entire inner system. As we move toward this goal, it is important to do so at a pace that feels right to all of your parts. For many of us, this means working with your manager-parts before working with the exiles they protect. When we try to work with an exile part before familiarizing ourselves with the concerns of their managers, the managers may cut off communication or we may experience a sense of emotional overwhelm from the exile. Therefore, the structure outlined below can be helpful when getting to know our parts and helping them to release their suffering.

The IFS Process for Connecting with Parts of Your Inner System

Please note that the process described below will likely take place over time. You may only connect with a part and express your gratitude toward him or her in a single sitting. That's okay. Go through the process in way that feels right for you and your inner system. If you are a client, you may want to simply connect with your parts during your reflection and journaling time and then work more intensely with them during your therapy or coaching sessions. Oftentimes, having a trained IFS therapist or coach guide you through the process can be more helpful than going through the entire process on your own. This is as true for coaches and therapists as it is for clients! We recommend that you work with your IFS therapist, coach, or consultant to determine the daily practice that works best for you

The IFS Process for Connecting with Parts of Your Inner System

Find a Quiet Space: First find a quiet space where you can get to know your parts without being interrupted by others. We recommend that you give yourself at least half an hour for engaging in this inner work and journaling about it. **Center Your Self:** When you're ready to begin, take a few minutes to calm and center yourself. Some people are able to feel centered by taking deep breaths, reciting mantras or prayers, or engaging in yoga. Use whatever activity is most helpful to you. If you enjoy guided meditations, there are a number of options on YouTube. We've included links to some of these videos in the IFS Resources page of this journal.

Find Your Parts: Turn your attention to your body, noticing any thoughts, emotions, or sensations you might be experiencing. Notice which of these experiences is calling for the most attention. Sit with that thought, emotion, or sensation for a moment or two and see if it begins to flesh itself out into a part. Notice where that part seems to be located in or around your body.

Extend Gratitude: Once you have identified a part, thank him or her for showing up and see if you can feel a sense of gratitude in your heart and body. Even when parts at first seem challenging or scary, it is important to welcome them all, extending them gratitude for their willingness to show up and share information about themselves.

Identify concerns: Before getting to know this part more fully, ask your inner system if there are other parts who have concerns or fears about you connecting with this part. This is a particularly important step if the first part with whom you have connected is an exile. If so, checking in with the manager or managers who protect the exile will help you work with your inner system at its own natural pace and avoid feeling overwhelmed. If managers appear, it is important to familiarize yourself and work with their fears and concerns first. You can return to your work with the exile part once the managers trust that you have addressed their concerns.

The IFS Process for Connecting with Parts of Your Inner System

Assess Self-Presence: As we've mentioned earlier, it is important to connect with your parts from the experience of Self.

A quick way of checking to see if your Self is present is to ask yourself the following question: *How do I feel about the part I wish to connect with?* If your answer is consistent with the 8 C's of Self—for example, you are curious about the part, you feel compassion toward her or him, you want to connect with him or her, and so on—you are likely to be experiencing Self-presence. However, if your response is negative—you don't like this part, you just want this part to go away, and so on—then another part of you is likely present. At this point you have a couple of options. You can choose to connect with the part who is expressing its dislike for the other part, or you can ask this part if it is willing to step back and give you space for Self to connect with the part. If you choose the latter option and the part is unwilling to step back, begin by thanking the part for letting you know that she or he has concerns about your connecting with the initial part and then see if you can get to know this protector a bit more. You may find that many parts show up at once, leading you to lose connection with Self. We all have this experience at times. When this happens, you can take a brief break to engage in some calming activities and then go back to your inner system from a more centered place. Or you can ask the parts to select a spokesperson to tell you about all of their concerns. Once a spokesperson appears, you can ask all the other parts to step back.

The IFS Process for Connecting with Parts of Your Inner System

Get to Know Your Parts: When you experience the presence of Self and identify which part you want to get to know, once again thank that part for showing up and extend your curiosity and compassion. Depending on how much time you have to connect with your part, try some of the following activities or questions:

Notice...

- what the part looks or feels like. You can experience parts as images, sensations, or an intuitive sense of presence.
- the gender and relative age of the part. It is normal for both men and women to have male, female, and/or androgynous parts.
- any other quality or appearance of this part that stands out to you.

Let the part know that you are here and be present with the part as if you were sitting with a good friend or a child who needs your empathy and support.

Ask the part...

- what do you want to tell me about yourself?
- what are your current surroundings?
- what was happening when you first came to be?
- what are you feeling right now and what caused these feelings?
- what are your fears and concerns?
- what are you afraid will happen if you stop impacting me in this way?
- what would help you feel safe enough to tell me more about yourself?
- what would help you feel safe enough to allow me to connect with one of the exiles you are protecting?
- what do you need or want from me?

The IFS Process for Connecting with Parts of Your Inner System

- Thank the part for all the ways it has protected you throughout your life.
- Thank all the parts who presented themselves to you—the ones you got to know better as well as the ones you were not able to focus upon today. If it feels right, tell the parts you didn't get to connect with that you will do so at another time.

Retrieve Parts and Help Them Release Their Burdens:

Once you have become familiar with the way a part has carried burdens—or suffered—over the years, ask the part if she or he is ready to release these burdens. The first step is to find out where the part experiences itself in space and time. Some parts who have carried the burdens of past traumas experience themselves as living in the place and time where the trauma took place. If this is the case, it will be important to take the part to a safe place before helping them release their burdens.

You may ask the part if he or she is ready to leave the current location and go somewhere safe. If the part is ready to relocate, it can be helpful to ask the part where it wants to go. Some parts choose a natural location like the beach or the mountains. Others may choose a room that feels safe or simply to be in the presence of someone who can protect them. Once you know where the part wants to be, imagine taking the part to that location. Sometimes a part may not want to leave their current location, even when there is quite a bit of pain or fear she or he continues to experience there. If this is the case, ask your part if there is a manager or a spiritual being he or she would like to remain with him or her. It is not uncommon for exile parts to choose nurturing and protective parts to serve this role. It is important to continue checking in and working with this part until she or he is ready to relocate.

The IFS Process for Connecting with Parts of Your Inner System

Keep in mind, not all parts are stuck in the past. Therefore, not all parts will need to be retrieved prior to releasing the burdens they carry. Once a part has been retrieved, or once you have determined that the part doesn't need to be retrieved, it is time to initiate the unburdening process. This is when you invite your part to release the burdens or suffering he or she has carried for all these years. You can invite your part to release these challenging experiences to the wind, earth, sky, or sea.

Sometimes the burdens a part has carried appear as dust that is released from their bodies. Other parts have given their burdens to a spiritual being so that they can be transformed in some way. Ask your part what it wants to release and how it wants to release it. Then simply be with that part until it has released its pain. At times, parts may be ready to release some of their burdens, but not all of them. That is okay. Help them release what they are ready to release. It can then be helpful to ask the part what he or she needs to happen in order to be ready to release the remaining burdens he or she holds. It will also be important to check back with this part regularly to see if she or he is ready to release more burdens.

Take on New Roles:

Once a part has released the burdens, he or she may want to take on a new role. In other words, instead of reminding you of the importance of fearing or distrusting others, young parts may simply want to help you play or be creative. Other parts may want to help you become more discerning and judicious, making decisions from a place of wisdom instead of fear. Ask your part what new role seems appealing and thank the part for her or his willingness to transform. Once parts have taken on new roles, check in with them regularly to see how they are doing and, again, to express appreciation. Also notice any changes in your inner system that result from changes the part has made.

Suggestions for Getting the Most Out of Your Journaling Practice

Connecting with Your Inner System

When people are new to IFS, they sometimes wonder how to best connect with their parts. Usually, the first question I am asked is how do I even know it is a part? Parts communicate with us in any of the following ways.

- Some parts may initially appear as images, emotions, thoughts, attitudes, sensations or some combination of these. We recommend that you begin by sitting quietly and turning your attention inside. Then notice your inner experience. Often a part may start as a sensation and then flesh itself out to include thoughts, perspectives, images, etc.
- Sometimes we may experience an event ~ like a disagreement with someone or a challenging situation that leads us to experience conflicting emotions and perspectives ~ and a host of parts can appear all at once. When this happens, it can be helpful to identify all the parts that appear in your experience and then sense which one needs your attention the most.
- A part may even present itself to your awareness without you having to exert any intentional effort.

Your Journaling Practice

The more you practice tuning into your inner experience and noticing the parts who are present, the easier this process will become for you. Of course, it is most helpful when you can identify and connect with your parts from the experience of Self.

Once you can identify your parts while feeling connected to your Centered Self, it can be most helpful to follow the process described above in the page entitled “Connecting with Your Parts.”

The Five Aspects of Well-Being

Review the Five Aspects of Well-Being in the introductory pages of the journal and take the time to reflect on your experience of well-being. How would you define wellness in each of these five categories? We recommend that you use one of the blank “Notes” pages at the beginning of the journal to record your definitions of wellness, your responses to the questions in each category, and any other reflections or life goals you may have.

Daily and Weekly Pages

We included the “Other Insights, Inspirations, or Notes” section of the daily and weekly pages as a way for you to journal on experiences or reflections that are not captured in the structured questions. You can use this section in any of the following ways:

Your Journaling Practice

- Create a map or other visual image of Self, a part, or multiple parts
- Reflect on the weekly affirmation while noticing the parts that are activated by it.
- Record the parts who showed up during your morning journaling that you didn't get a chance to connect with as fully as you would have liked. You can then do so later in the day.
- Describe any additional experiences you had during the day with the part described in the morning section of the daily pages.
- Identify and reflect on any inspirations that came to you as you moved through your day.
- Record the part or system of parts with which you want to work further in your counseling, coaching, or consulting sessions.
- Anything else for which you want to use it!

Wrapping Up

In the end, we hope that you make this journal your own. Please let us know if there are ways in which we can make this journal more helpful to you in your efforts to live a more Self-led life!

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HOW TO ORDER:

Journal 1: Curiosity and Clarity

Journal 2: Courage and Creativity

Journal 3: Compassion and Connection

Journal 4: Calmness and Confidence

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