

Unpacking the Steps of Healing Part 1

Toni: Hi everybody. Okay. In this segment, we're going to be talking about the first two steps in the healing process of IFS. The first is the trust and the relationship building, self of the client to the exile or to the vulnerable part, and then we're going to be talking also about the second step which is witnessing the story of the exile.

I'm going to start with trust building. This is really a very similar process as the one that we've been talking about or you've been learning with protectors. We go back to those F's that we talk about. If you can imagine as protectors, as the umbrella that I drew for you in the last segment, as that umbrella begins to fade, what's happening now is that the vulnerability in the system is beginning to be exposed. Sometimes this is really new for people. Sometimes it happens actually quite quickly and with some surprise because we really do believe as these protective parts feel like they are being honored they're tired and they have been waiting for help for these vulnerable parts for a long time so they begin to step back and then you're presented with a part that has a lot of vulnerability.

We want to go gently, we want to be respectful, we want to go at the pace of the client. We want to pay close attention to whether our parts are separated enough to be able to be present to the client as we're encouraging the client to be present to the exile. This is really, really important so I'm going to repeat it again. That it's time now potentially to be even more mindful about what's going on in our own system as we begin to guide a client to be present to their vulnerability.

We are being as present as we possibly can and inviting the client to be as present as they can from self to this vulnerable part. We're going to ask the client again that very important question, "How do you feel toward this part?" This is where you're going to find out whether protectors have really relaxed or not because if you hear something like, "I'm okay with it but I feel afraid of it," then you know they're still a protector and you have to go back and continue to work with those fears. Hopefully what you're hearing at this point is the language of self so, "I'm open to it, I'm available to it."

I think Pam said when I was working with her, "I feel very open hearted. I feel warmly toward it." Then we want to move into the relationship building so we want to make sure that it's safe to do the work. We want to make sure that this part, this vulnerable part, is also able to trust the self of the client. We ask the client to begin to extend that warmth or those qualities of self energy to create a holding space for the exile. Some of the questions that I like to ask the client is, "How close are you?" Sometimes you'll hear that people feel very, very far away from this young part. Then we might say, "Is there a way to move closer? Not so close that you get overwhelmed by the feelings of the exile but close enough that you can pick up on the feelings?"

Sometimes with people, with clients, I like to encourage how present can you be without being flooded with the feeling? We're really talking about playing with this idea of how present can you be without being flooded. Then we begin to ask, "Is this part aware of you?" I think that Pam and I have both talked about it. A relationship is a back and forth. It's not just about you being present to the exile but knowing if that exile is aware that there is help here, that there is a resource available to it.

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Sometimes I'll ask, "Is there anything that this part needs to trust you more?" So that we're really building, we're building a fear ... A fear. We're letting go of a fear, we're building a field of trust and present.

To really encourage this, encourage your clients to really listen to what is needed to create more safety and trust on the inside. Once we have established that there is enough trust, that the exile is become available, that the self of the client is available, we move to the witnessing phase of the healing process. I will ask my client, "Are you available to be present to whatever this part needs for you to know right now?" We're going to begin to invite the story. We're going to begin to invite the exile to let the client know whatever it needs us to know so that the healing can continue. This is very important that the agenda of the therapist is to decide. That we keep encouraging ourselves and our client to be open to the information that is coming rather than us making a decision about where we're going.

It's a really, really beautiful aspect of IFS which says over and over again, "We're collaborating with you, we're in partnership with you. You are in the lead and we are going to follow you." In my experience training therapists for a long time, this is a place where our own therapist parts might want to hurry up this process because here's where the healing is going to happen, we say to ourselves. Yes, the healing ... And I believe the healing will be much more integrative if we follow the lead of the parts instead of taking our own agenda here.

The witnessing phase, we're going to invite the story of the exile. Again, these young parts, some who may be non-verbal, will be communicating in all different kind of ways. For me, for instance, when I'm witnessing my parts it's very important for my parts that I feel the emotion and the sensation that goes along with the emotion in my body. Until my parts feel reassured that I have been present to both the emotion and the sensation they're not willing to move forward. I've learned that over the years so every client will be different in how their parts tell their stories or reveal the information about them. You can learn so much by continuing to ask your client what the part needs, how is the part showing up, can you receive the information in the way that it's coming.

Another thing is that often these young parts will need to be witnessed in a scene from the past in the very place where the wounding occurred. You will sometimes be asking the client if they, and they're with their self energy, can be present in the scene from the past as they witness the story and they're present to the story of the exile. Helping clients stay attuned and present to the witnessing of exiles does a few things and the healing is supported by a few things. One of them is that it addresses the original wound and the original trauma so we are going back in time to understand the original rupture in this exile's life.

The internal focus, as we now know from Brain Science reinforces self-regulation. Being able to be present to your emotion without becoming dis-regulated is an important aspect of this model and a healing aspect of this model as well so we might even say that this is brain changing. The other things that this does is it provides an internal emotionally corrective experience. This being witnessed is something that

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this child most likely never had. This kind of attunement, presence, understanding, and emotional resonance is a corrective experience.

Finally, just a few years ago I started reading about more on Brain Science and Dan Siegel was the first person that I landed on as maybe many of you did as well. I was learning more about attachment and thinking about IFS and what we were doing in the realm of attachment worked. I'm not going to go into a big, long explanation of this now but I do just want to say that when we are being present to the story of an exile, to the wound, to the trauma, to the burdens, to the shame, to the fear, to the places internally where people have been living and being protected from, what we're asking the client to do is internal attachment work.

Witnessing an exile from self provides inner attachment work with that exile. Empathic attunement, emotional sensing, focused attention, connection, making sense of an experience that the child cannot make sense of him or herself, understanding the beliefs and the burdens, really listening for what did I take on as a child that I've now been living with is deeply healing I believe brain changing so I will just say that. That I believe that this aspect of the healing process is powerful and is healing and is brain changing.