

IFS Case Presentation

Toni: Okay, welcome back. In this segment I am going to present a case to you. I am aware that learning the unburdening process, and we have no expectation that you're going to take those steps of healing and take it back to your offices if you are new to this process, that it takes some time to learn and it's best to do that under supervision. I'm going to use this case example to walk you through all the steps. I chose this case because, and I call it the angry critic. Often when we start working in IFS or this has been my experience, that one of the very first parts that we encounter that have a hard time relaxing or stepping back are the angry critics, the ones that go after us.

This is a case of a young man who came to my office. I want to qualify this first by saying that you're going to see a flow of one session and this was by no means the end of working with this critic or the exiles that the critic was protecting, but this is an example of one session that we did. At this point in time we had a good relationship, his protectors trusted me to a certain extent, and he had already done some internal work so this is not a first session.

He came in one day feeling really, really hopeless so as we always do when we're starting a session is to try to flush out, tell me more about what's going on. What he basically said to me is, "I can't stop this voice in my head. I have a part that hates me. I have a part that would love to kill me." A really aggressive, angry, critical part of himself and he was now feeling so hopeless about it. As an IFS therapist the very first thing that you want to do is recognize that you're speaking to a part, that the hopelessness is a part of him, it's not all of who he is. If we're going to work with this angry critic we're going to need to help the hopeless part unblend. You've heard that word over and over again in these last few months about the importance of unblending.

First I want to find out from him, "Do you want to get some help for this critic?" Of course, this hopeless part would love to get some help from the critic so we're going to work with the hopeless part to unblend from the anger. That is to say things like, "Are you willing to relax and soften so we can get to know this very, very angry part that's taking you on in the way that it is?" This part was willing to step back because it was desperate. Now we're sitting with the angry critic and I asked him, "What do you think is the very important question that I'm going to ask him right now?" That is, "How do you feel toward this angry critic? How do you feel toward him?"

Of course, there's going to be another part that hates this critic and that makes so much sense, doesn't it? Now we have a critic of the critic and we can't work with this big, angry critic as long as there's a critic of the critic. Hopefully, that makes sense to you too. Once again we're going to need to do some unblending work. We're going to need to see if we can get the part that hates the critic to begin to unblend. We want to do some negotiating, this is what we talked about for the last two months, is how do you begin to negotiate with another protector that's taking on the original protector, so we're going to do some negotiating. "What are you afraid would happen if you stepped back?"

That is an important question to ask this part that's so angry at the original angry part, what are you afraid is going to happen? Of course, we hear things like, "You're going

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to give it permission. You are going to give this part, this angry, angry critic more permission to beat this guy up," and this is just not acceptable. Now, that makes sense that there would be some fear. What we want to reassure this second angry part is, the purpose of getting to know the angry critic is to help it to become less reactive, not more reactive. In other words, we wouldn't want to take you into a process where you would get more of what you're already upset about. Our hope is that we're going to be able to lessen this reactivity in the system.

Over a period of time, the critic of the critic did believe us that this was possible and basically said, "I have a little bit of trust and so I'm going to hang out and I'm going to watch what you do but if this starts to get worse there's going to be hell to pay." You want to say, "Got it." That's right, you get to let us know if this feels like it's getting worse instead of better. That part was also willing to unblend.

As the critic of the critic began to unblend and the hopeless part began to give us a little space, I started to notice that my client had a little bit more self energy. He was able to bring some curiosity to this angry, angry part of himself. Was he in love with that part of himself? No. Was he embracing that part of himself? No. He had some curiosity, and that felt like enough, to me, to proceed with him. We brought some curiosity and we started with those six F's.

After some relationship building with this critic the client self became more available and he moved from being curious to having a little kindheartedness as he listened to the job of the protector. The job of this protector, this protector's been around a long time, this protector took on the role of protecting him to try to prevent him from getting into more trouble as a child. The protector is overworked, the protector felt under-valued. The more under-valued this protector felt the more angry he got. This is another thing to remember, that as protectors feel either shamed themselves, dismissed, isolated, not respected, they just get bigger. They don't actually get smaller, they get bigger, and you may notice this in your own self from time to time.

You can see in this slide the three pictures, and I just happened to get three pictures like this which is great. For the top picture we have the angry critic, the picture underneath he's beginning to soften, until this final third photograph here, you can see the change in the face of the protector. This is then when the client can start to ask the question, "What are you afraid will happen if you don't get so angry with me? If you don't try to beat me, beat the hell out of me all the time? What are you afraid is going to happen?"

This is where he starts to reveal the exile that he's been protecting and basically says, "I stay critical of you to manage your shame." In other words, it's a moral dilemma for this angry protector. "If I don't keep after you, you are going to do things that are going to draw fire. This child, this bad, bad child that you were when you were small is going to draw fire to you. I'm going to keep being critical of you as a way to manage you, to keep you good." Make sense? "I'm going to shame you to keep you good."

Of course, this is heart breaking to hear but it makes sense to the part. "I have figured out a way to keep you from shaming yourself more in this lifetime by being constantly

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critical of you." I asked my client does this make sense and he could say, "Yes, this makes perfect sense. This part of me has been trying to control the amount of shame that I feel and the amount of shaming that I bring on myself." He could say to his angry protector, "Yes, this makes a lot of sense."

Then we began the process of negotiating with this angry protector who is now more available to be in relationship with my client because he was available to be in relationship with him, and we started the negotiation. What if there was a way to help this child? What if there was something that we could do here so that this child didn't continue to infect the system with all the shame that he carries or to attract more shame to you? Of course, parts like this are very skeptical and the negotiation took some time, actually took quite a bit of time. One of the questions that we can ask a protector is, "What does this part need from you in order to trust you with the boy?"

We had that in query with this part, what did he need? One of the things that he needed was the assurance that if things started going badly that he could interrupt the process. When a part makes a request like that we say of course. Of course, if you're new to this model this kind of negotiation can take some courage on the part of the therapist to really believe and trust that this protector is going to be able to keep relaxed as it watches you work, because the faith that we get as we do this model more and more and more is that the self of the client is actually going to help this dilemma, help this angry protector out of the dilemma.

We reassured him that he could stay nearby, that if it looked like the boy was going to be taking over or the boy was going to get more hurt, that he could come in and stop the process. Then my client began to start to feel the feelings of the boy and we went back to those first three F's that we talked about so long ago which is, "Can you focus on him? Just can you be present to him? How present can you be to him?" Then of course, "How do you feel toward him?" At this point in the process my client was now feeling very connected, very compassionate, and very willing to be present to the story of the boy.

Now it's time just to invite the process of healing, the steps of healing that we just went through. The first question is, "What is it that that boy wants you to know right now?" To begin to invite the story to come in whatever way the boy needs to tell it, show it or have you feel it. He was able to compassionately witness the entire story of this child who was criticized, was shamed, had many learning disabilities as a child. Back in the day when we weren't paying as much attention to learning differences as we do now, so he grew up hating himself. He just grew up riddled with shame feeling like he was worthless.

I just kept encouraging my client to stay present, to stay present, to just notice if his heart was staying open. We asked the question many times, "How are you feeling toward this boy?" Just to make sure that no protectors were encroaching on the process, just keeping a lot more space. Remembering always that when you're in the phase of witnessing that this process takes as long as it takes. Sometimes it takes

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many sessions, that we're coming back to the same exile over and over again, so remembering that witnessing takes as long as it takes.

Then as the boy felt hurt, and understood, and known, we began the next steps of the healing process which is to invite him into the present, which he did, and to begin that unburdening processing of unloading the negative beliefs, the shame, that story, "I'm bad, I'm unlovable, I'm worthless." We began that process of allowing that child to just begin to unload in whatever way felt right to him. Then once that was complete, invite the qualities into his body that he would need now or in the future. Some of those were things like the ability to love myself, to feel worthwhile, to have the courage to be alive, to have the courage to be alive.

We just encouraged the client to fill up with those qualities and to get that reference in his body, "It's okay to fill up with, it's okay to be alive," which was very moving to me actually. Now what does the boy want to do? The boy wants to play, the boy wants to be in nature, the boy wants to live an unconstricted life. Then I always like to say, "How is that for you?" I have never yet in all these years of doing IFS heard, "Not okay." These new roles, this new way of being is very freeing. Then of course we always want to go back, as you can see in this slide, to appreciate the parts that were willing to step back, the part that felt so hopeless, the part that felt so angry at the anger, and the angry critic himself. We're willing to allow my client to get close to this boy.

We send lots and lots of appreciation to those protectors for this willingness to allow the work to take place, to happen. Also knowing that we may be circling back to these protectors at some time to find out if they have their own stories, if they have their own burdens. These parts, these protective parts can also be offered new roles. Once they don't need to take care of the exiles in the same way they are also free to do what they were meant to do. If you've had this terrible hard job all your life of protecting the vulnerability in the system, it's a wonderful thing to be offered a different role in the system. I am aware that that's a lot of information that you just got in this month and I look forward to being on the call with you and hearing your questions or your concerns or your confusion. Make sure you write these questions down so you can bring them to the call. Thank you so much. Goodbye.