

Protectors that Need to Be Witnessed and Unburdened

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Krause:

Now I'm going to talk with you a little bit about these kinds of parts that need to be witnessed and unburdened. Again, don't worry about trying to decide who does and who doesn't. It will get clear to you if you keep revisiting that pod of parts who needs to have that happen, but it's often true that, in my experience it's true that firefighters, especially extreme firefighters, often need to be witnessed and unburdened because of what they've had to do.

Dick used to say that these kinds of parts, these firefighters, many extreme firefighters, are the parts that have taken the bullet for the system. They've stepped into a role that was required in the system that nobody else wanted to take, but they've taken on this extreme role and then they're generally reviled or hated, not only by other parts in the system but also by other people in the world. They've stepped up, they've taken on this role, and then they get hated for it.

Some examples of parts like this that might need to be witnessed and unburdened, at least in my experience this is what I've noticed about parts like this, they're parts that may have been rageful. Internal critics often need to be witnessed and unburdened. Sometimes, really extreme, what you might call addicted parts like parts that have been drinking or parts that are bingeing parts or parts that are purging parts, those kind of parts that in their desire to protect the system have often either hurt other parts or hurt other people.

What happens is, is you come back to them and listen to them. They often have extreme grief and extreme shame about what they've had to do. The question for us as IFS therapists, and you're probably going to get tired of hearing me say this also, but when you're dealing with parts like this, the first and foremost thing you have to do is be clear about your own internal reaction to these kinds of parts because some of them can be really extreme. Some of them may have been physically violent or other serious things that have hurt people, and so the very first thing we have to do is be aware of our own reaction and how open can we be to parts like this, because it's hard sometimes.

Sometimes you'll hear stories about what these kind of parts have had to do, and it's heartbreaking. It's heartbreaking for people who were hurt by these parts and it's also heartbreaking because, again, these sorts of parts really don't want to do what they've had to do but it's a job that's required in the system.

I have a client, a woman, who had a very young part, very young wounded part that was, felt unloved, not valuable, I mean really worthless and very unattached, disconnected from anyone, and that was because of the way this really lovely woman was treated when she was young. She was not seen for who she was but treated quite badly actually, and so we spent a lot of time developing a connection between my client, her self, and this young part and witnessing and unburdening it.

Yet while that was all happening, there was always this really intense

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internal critic just pummeling her, pummeling her, pummeling her, pummeling her. Even after unburdening, doing a significant amount of unburdening with the exile, that part was still relentless. It was a part that was quite reviled in her system, because it carried a lot of the same energy that my client's mother carried, and so there were many parts that couldn't understand why this critic had to behave the way it was and even once this exile was unburdened why did it have to keep behaving that way.

As we continued to come back to that pod, we came to the point where it was really safe enough for my client to connect with this critic. As we came back to this critic, what it said was that it couldn't relax, that it wasn't okay, like maybe this part, this little part felt better but in some ways that actually felt more dangerous to the critic rather than better, because what my client had experienced as a child is while there was not much kindness or praise from her family, if she would be praised by other people and this little part would start to feel good, there would be this assault or this attack from the outside minimizing that and so that when this exile started feeling good actually more criticism and more pain came from the outside world rather than less.

As this was all happening, I was really watching the parts of me that were struggling with the fact that this critic was not giving up some of its intensity. I even had parts that couldn't understand it, and I had parts that in a way wanted to criticize the critic. As all this was happening, I had to be really certain that my parts were not taking over and interfering with my ability to help my client listen with an open heart to this part that was really pretty relentlessly harsh.

Once my client heard what this critic, why it was actually not able to diminish its intensity, once she was able to hear that, she really softened to it and she could be openhearted with it, and she witnessed, she witnessed what happened for this part and why it was the way it was. That was a really profound moment, because in that moment you'll see the harshness of these parts will fall away and they'll often just weep. It really wept about what it had been forced to do, because if it hadn't criticized her, if it hadn't tried to suppress any of that good feeling, if she went home with that good feeling, the assault from the outside felt so much worse than the assault from the inside.

It was really trying to keep her from being attacked. It's a really very sweet moment, and we're continuing right now to continue to witness that critic and help it unburden, and as it does that, its intensity will decrease and decrease and decrease. That's one example of what that might look like, but again it's so dependent on your parts being able to step back so that you can be open to these parts that wreak havoc, that wreak havoc internally and that can wreak havoc externally.

I sort of want to tie this back to the decision tree that we gave you all a couple months ago. You remember on the in-sight side of the decision tree after you unburden a part you recycle back up to the top of the decision tree

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if you need to, and that's really what we were doing with this critic. We were returning to that pod as I was calling it, and then we're returning back to follow that same process again but this time with the critic.

We're not finished with this particular piece of work with this client. There may actually be other parts that we need to circle back around and witness and unburden following that same decision tree. Again, we can get all worried about like, "Oh, my gosh, what are we supposed to do and how will we know?" You don't need to worry about that. If you just keep going back and staying curious and being open, the system will tell you exactly what needs to happen.

In the next segment, I'm going to do a little meditation that I love to do with people that helps us begin to find parts in us that are similar to this critic and my client, because as therapists and as IFS therapists, we have the opportunity to help people and we have the opportunity to help and heal our own parts, and possibly through this meditation you can begin to get a different relationship with a part of you that a lot of other parts in you don't like. I'll see you for the meditation.