

Step P1: Accessing a Part

You begin an IFS session by accessing a part that you believe will be helpful to work with. It might be related to an important trailhead, or it might be causing you intense feelings at the moment. The emphasis in this chapter is on how to make simple contact with the part. Getting to know the part fully will be covered in succeeding chapters. Though these methods can be used for accessing any part, we will emphasize protectors because that is the overall focus of Part 1. It is best to close your eyes during this process and for the rest of any IFS session. I also recommend doing this work in a private room where you won't be disturbed by people, pets, phones, or computers. This cuts down on distractions and allows you to focus completely on the protector you are accessing.

Go inside and make contact with it experientially, through your emotions, images, body sensations, and internal voices. There are a variety of internal channels for accessing a part:

Feelings. You feel the emotion, attitude, or desire that characterizes the part, giving you a felt sense of it.

Body Sensations. You sense the bodily experience that goes with the part.

Images. You see an internal image that represents the part. This may arise spontaneously, or you may look for an image that represents the part. This could be an image of yourself with a certain body stance or expression, such as droopy or muscular. It might be an image of you at a particular age. It could also be an image of a famous person, a cartoon character, a mythical figure, or an animal. Images of parts can also be more abstract—for example, a wall, an ice chest, a brilliant sun, or a garden full of weeds.

Internal Voice. You hear the part speaking words silently inside. It might be speaking to you or to someone in your life, or even to another part.

Sometimes the body sensation or image that you access isn't very clear at first. That is fine; it just means that you haven't fully accessed the part. As you proceed to get to know it (as described in Chapter 7), the part will become clearer.

To understand more fully how to access a part, let's look at an example from one of my IFS classes. Here is Julie's description of her experience.

Julie: I'm getting ready to end a relationship I've been in for a year.

My boyfriend just seems too needy and demanding, and I've been acting like a control freak.

Jay: How do you feel that part in your body?

Julie: There is a kind of hardness to that part. I don't have any feelings toward my boyfriend. It's an overall sense of not having compassion. And it seems like a hardness because I'm not feeling soft and loving. I'm just kind of closed off, not connected, rigid. I don't feel my heart or anything below my head.

Jay: See if an image arises that corresponds to that part.

Julie: I see the Tin Man from *The Wizard of Oz*. I'm getting more of a connection to it now.

Notice that the image is male. It isn't unusual for certain parts to be the opposite gender of the person. It is well known in psychology that we all have qualities of both genders inside us.

In this example, Julie accesses the part using three channels. She feels a hardness in her body, a feeling of being closed off emotionally, and an image of the Tin Man. However, it isn't necessary to use many channels to access a part; just one is enough.

You may find that certain channels are easy and natural for you, and others are more difficult. For example, I am poor at visualization, so I don't get much useful information about my parts through images. However, I have good access to parts through sensing my body, feeling my emotions, and hearing my parts speak to me. Other people are great visualizers but don't have good access to body sensations. Furthermore, different parts may communicate through different channels. You will know intuitively which channel or channels to use with each part. IFS allows you to use whatever channels work best for you, unlike many methods of psychotherapy that work with only one channel.

Activation of Parts

How you access a part depends on whether or not it is activated at the moment, so we must first understand activation. At any given moment, there are one or more parts that are *activated* because of a situation you are in or are thinking about. Each activated part influences your feelings, your body, your thoughts, and your behavior. The rest of your parts are dormant but can be activated at any moment. For example, in this illustration, Julie's