

determine which parts are involved with an issue. In IFS, **issues** are sometimes referred to as **trailheads**. A *trailhead* is an experience or a difficulty in your life that will lead to interesting parts if you follow it. It can be a situation or person that you react to, an emotional or bodily experience, a pattern of behavior or thinking, a dream, or anything else that indicates parts to explore. We call it a trailhead because it is the beginning of a trail that can lead to healing. It usually involves both a life situation and your response to that situation.

A trailhead indicates the presence of a part (or parts) in an extreme role, where your behavior or emotional reaction is dysfunctional or problematic.

1. A part might misperceive the situation. For example, a part sees your boss as judging you when he is actually just trying to help you, because he reminds you of your judgmental father.

2. A part might overreact emotionally. For example, your boss might be moderately judgmental, but the part becomes extremely upset.

3. A part might take action that is extreme or inappropriate. For example, the part becomes angry or rebellious with your boss because it perceives him as judging you, and this behavior causes problems.

One of my trailheads is feeling shy in large groups of people I don't know very well. I tend to be withdrawn and not very expressive or open.

Here are some examples of trailheads from people in my classes:

1. A particular person at work who upsets me.

2. A situation in which I was afraid that whatever action I take, someone would feel hurt. I ended up feeling paralyzed because I felt like I had to choose between two people.

3. Fear of flying on an airplane.

4. Difficult work projects. When some piece of a project is more complex and taking longer than I thought, I focus on it intensely for hours trying to get it done while ignoring my bodily needs, any awareness of myself, and any other tasks that need attention. I watch myself getting sucked in, but I can't pull away.

5. Controlling people. When I feel like someone's trying to control me, I withdraw and get away as soon as I can.

6. Thoughts about rejection. Sometimes when I feel rejected by someone, I obsess about it, trying to figure out what I did wrong and what I should have said instead.

When you are at a trailhead, there is at least one part activated and often more than one. For example, when I am in a large group of strangers,

I have at least three parts activated—one that is scared of being hurt, another part that wants to withdraw to protect me, and a third part that wants to reach out and talk to people despite the fear.

## Identifying the Parts at a Trailhead

By examining your experience and behavior, you can make an initial identification of the parts that are involved in any trailhead you want to explore. There will be parts corresponding to feelings and body reactions triggered by that situation and thoughts and desires you have about it. There will also be parts that determine the way you behave in that situation. Let's look at each of these in turn:

**Feelings.** You are likely to have at least one emotional reaction to the trailhead situation, perhaps more than one. You may feel angry, sad, or afraid, for example. In addition, you may notice certain attitudes you have in that situation; you may feel judgmental, thoughtless, stingy, careful, zany, doubtful, or mischievous. Each feeling, emotion, or attitude indicates the presence of a part, except for those attitudes that come from the Self, such as being kind or centered. Furthermore, if you feel cut off from your feelings, that is probably caused by a part. For example, if you feel dead, closed, or cold in a trailhead situation, there probably is a part causing this.

**Body Sensations.** Most body sensations that come up in response to a trailhead are related to parts. The exceptions are purely physiological sensations (like a stomachache because of something you ate) and the bodily experiences of Self, such as feeling peaceful, open, or energetic. Parts can cause muscle tension, such as tightness in your shoulders or back. They can produce heat in your arms or cold in your belly. There are many possible body sensations—hardness, heaviness, nausea, emptiness, or holding, for example. You might experience them in certain places in your body or in your body as a whole. In addition, if there is a deadness or lack of feeling in your body (or a part of your body), that is also caused by a part that doesn't want you to feel.

**Thoughts.** Many thoughts that arise in response to a trailhead situation come from parts. This includes thoughts about people in the situation, "He is certainly intrusive," or about yourself, "That was a stupid thing to say." Many *patterns* of thinking also indicate parts—for example, obsessing