AN INTRODUCTION TO INTERNAL FAMILY SYSTEMS

# Meet your inner *family*

*Understanding yourself from the inside out*




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WHERE THIS BEGINS

# You're not one *voice*

Have you ever noticed you don't always feel like the same person? Clear and grounded in one moment; self-doubting, reactive, or withdrawn the next.

We're often taught we have one single mind — and that when we feel divided, something must be wrong with us. Internal Family Systems offers a gentler idea, the *multiplicity of the mind*: you're not one fixed "me", but a natural system of parts — each with its own role, its own history, and its own good reason for being there.

> *The conflict you sometimes feel is human by design.*

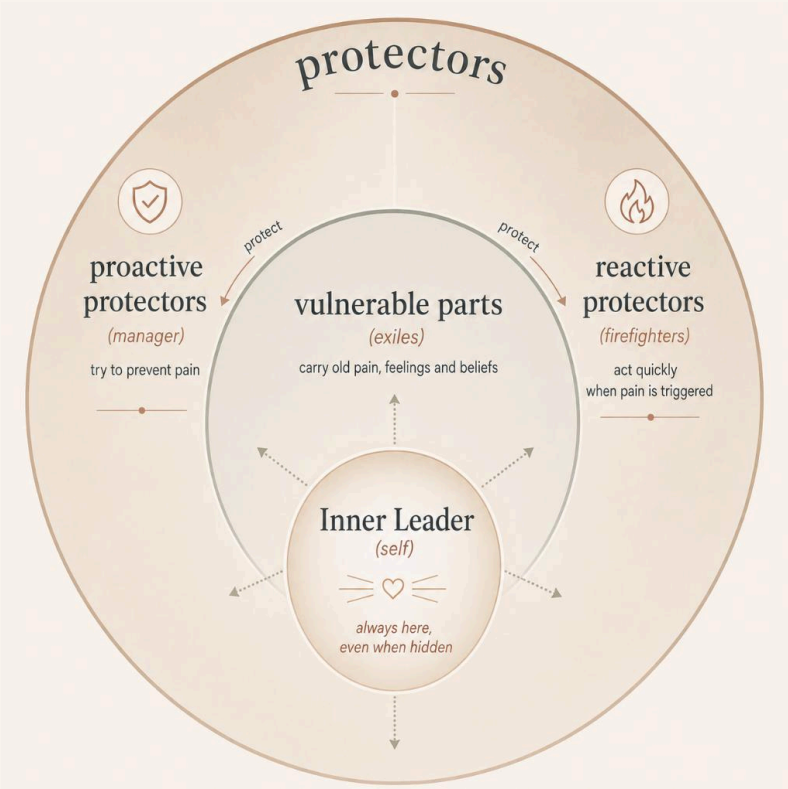
Something shifts. You react a little less automatically, you're kinder to yourself, and you connect differently with others — because you've begun to understand what was always trying to help you.

This map is a way to meet that inner family. From the outside in: the parts you show the world, the parts that step in when something hurts, the tender parts underneath, and — at the center — the calm, open presence from which you connect to yourself and others with an open heart.


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THE MAP

# Your inner family, at a *glance*




### Proactive protectors *(managers)*

the perfectionist · the pleaser · the caretaker · the controller · the overthinker · the achiever · the inner critic · the judge

### Reactive protectors *(firefighters)*

drinking · overeating · scrolling · overworking · overspending · shutting down · raging

### Vulnerable parts *(exiles)*

"I'm not enough" · "I don't belong" · "I'm alone" · "I'm not safe" · "I'm unlovable" · "I'm worthless" · "something's wrong with me"

### Inner leader *(Self)*

calm · curiosity · compassion · clarity — always here, even when hidden

*There are no bad parts. Every part belongs.*


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# The parts that *protect*

## Proactive protectors *(managers)*

These are the parts you meet first — the ones that keep you steady and functioning in the world. They plan, they please, they strive for perfection, they keep everything under control. From the outside they often look like strengths, and in many ways they are.

Underneath, they're doing something quieter: working hard so that older, more vulnerable feelings never get touched. You learned to lean on them a long time ago, and they've been loyal ever since.



TAKE A MOMENT

*Which of these parts do you know best in yourself? You may notice more than one – and there's no need to change anything. Just meeting it is enough.*

## Reactive protectors *(firefighters)*

The other protectors work ahead of time; these work in the moment. When something touches an old, tender feeling, they jump in fast to make it stop — with a drink, a screen, a burst of work, a sharp word. They can look like the parts you'd rather not have. But they're doing the same job as the others: protecting you from pain that feels like too much, right now. Both are protectors — sometimes one steps forward, sometimes the other — and neither is the enemy.



TAKE A MOMENT

*When a hard feeling rises, which part is activated immediately – before you've even thought about it? That reflex is a protector too, moving before you can stop it.*


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# What they protect, and who *leads*

## Vulnerable parts *(exiles)*

Beneath the protectors are the parts they work so hard to shield — usually younger, and carrying feelings from long ago. Long before you could put it into words, these parts learned that something hurt. The patterns you live with now — your protectors — first developed to keep you safe.

These are the beliefs they carry, not the truth about who you are. You don't need to explore them here — simply knowing they're there, and that they've been protected all along, is already a form of care.



TAKE A MOMENT

*You might notice which of these feels familiar, and then let it be. There's nothing to solve here. Being seen, even gently, is where this work begins.*

## Inner leader *(Self)*

At the center is something that isn't a part at all — a calm, curious, open presence. When you're in it, you meet yourself and the world a little differently: less easily thrown, more able to pause and reflect before you react. And from that place, the parts themselves can begin to soften — they no longer have to work so hard to protect you. You can't always be in Self, and you don't have to be — you don't stay in it, you return to it.

Life can obscure the Self the way clouds hide the sun — but the sun hasn't gone anywhere. You'll notice a part has taken over when that calm, curiosity, compassion and clarity are gone, and it starts to feel like the whole of who you are.



TAKE A MOMENT

*Think of a moment you felt fully yourself – steady and clear, even for a few seconds. That was this. It's not something to achieve – it's already in you.*


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IN REAL LIFE

# How this looks in a *moment*

AT WORK

### Imagine getting critical feedback on a presentation.

A *manager* may have been active long before — preparing endlessly, holding you to a high standard, not for perfection itself but to prevent criticism.

When the feedback lands anyway, a *firefighter* steps in: more emails, more busyness, more work — not to move forward, but to avoid feeling what was just touched.

And underneath both is an *exile*: a younger part still carrying "I'm not enough," quietly activated the moment you felt judged.

*None of these parts is the problem – each is trying, in its own way, to help you.*

*It shows up just as often with the people closest to you.*

WITH SOMEONE CLOSE

### Imagine your partner or a close friend offers you some feedback.

You know they mean well — but it doesn't land that way. In an instant, it feels like criticism.

That sting isn't only about now. It reaches an old, tender place — a younger part that once felt not-quite-good-enough, carrying a belief from long before this conversation.

Before you've thought it through, a *firefighter* jumps in to protect it: you react sharply, defend yourself, push back harder than the moment asks for.

*The sharpness isn't really about the feedback. It's a part moving fast to keep an old hurt from being felt – and, like the others, it's only trying to protect you.*

*Or sometimes it needs no one in particular at all.*

IN A GROUP

### You walk into a room – a meeting, a group of people you don't know well – and before anything has even happened, you feel yourself shrink.

A quiet voice says you don't quite belong here, that everyone can see it.

No one has criticized you. The trigger is simply being seen. An *exile* that once felt left out stirs, and a *manager* steps in to manage it — you go quiet, you over-prepare what you'll say, you watch yourself from the outside.

*Nothing went wrong in the room. A part is simply protecting an old, tender place – doing its best to keep you safe among others.*


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A SMALL PRACTICE

# Meet one *protector*

Pick one protector you recognize easily in yourself — a proactive protector (manager) or a reactive protector (firefighter). Then, gently, get to know it. Not to change it. Only to understand.

*01* Which protector do you notice?

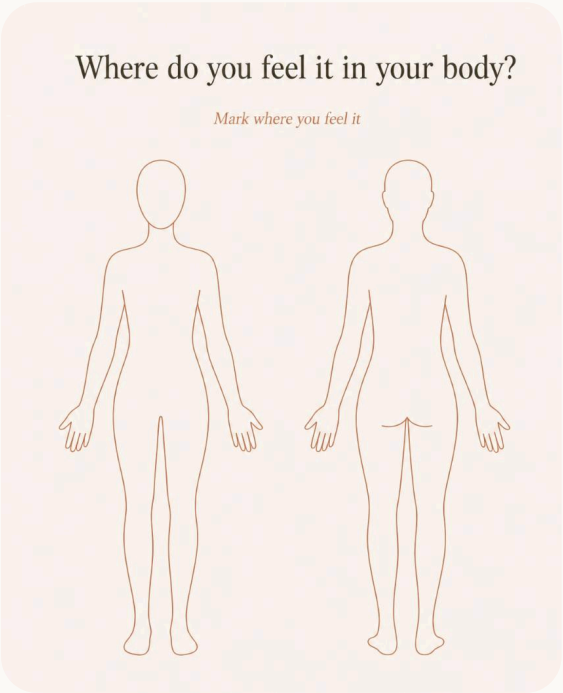
*02* What does this part do for you?

*03* How long has it been with you?

*04* Where do you feel this part in your body?

Parts often speak through the body before they reach words — a tightness, a heaviness, a flutter. Notice where you feel it, and mark it on the figure. There's nothing to analyze — just let your attention rest there for a moment.

tightness | warmth | pressure | heaviness | flutter | numbness





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A SMALL PRACTICE

# Meet one *protector*

*05* What do you think it's trying to do for you?

*06* How do you feel toward it right now?

That last question is the heart of it. If your answer is warm — curious, soft, grateful — you're meeting the part from your inner leader. If it's not, another part is simply standing with you; you can get to know that one first.

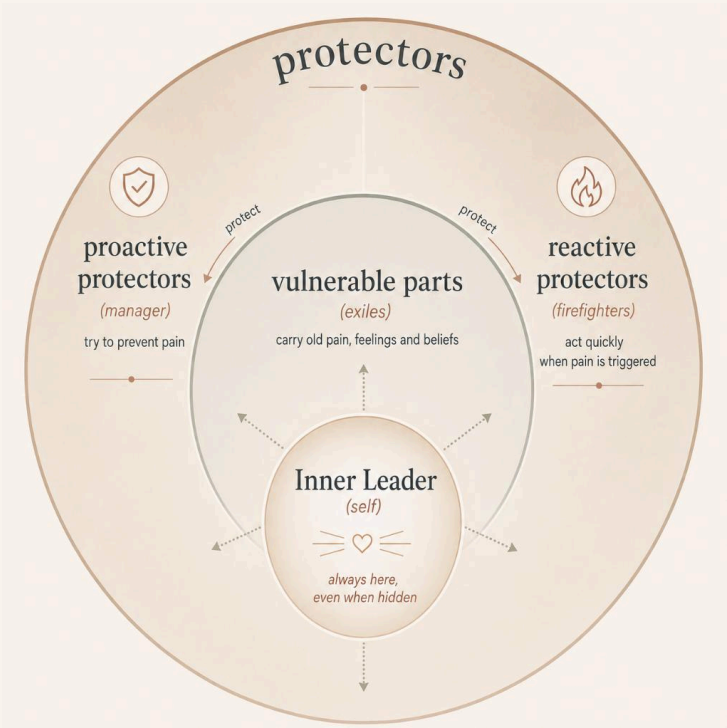
**A note:** we begin with the protectors on purpose. The tender parts they guard are best met slowly, and usually with someone alongside you — a therapist or guide. There's no rush to go further than feels right.


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YOUR TURN

# Map your own inner *family*

Which parts do you recognize in yourself? Write them into your own map – with curiosity, not judgment.




- Proactive protectors *(managers)*

- Reactive protectors *(firefighters)*

- Vulnerable parts *(exiles)*


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IN EVERYDAY LIFE

# Noticing parts in daily *life*

## How to notice a part

You'll often feel a part in your body before you can name it — a tight jaw, a pressure in the chest, a knot in the stomach, a sudden restlessness. The next signal is a reaction that's a little too big for the moment: a flash of irritation, a wave of not-good-enough, a sudden urge to leave, to fix, to please. When something lands harder than it should, a part has usually been touched.

In that moment, you don't need to do anything with it. Just noticing — *ah, a part of me is here* — already creates a little space between you and the reaction. That small pause is where choice returns.

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## Where this goes from here

This is the quiet heart of the work: *awareness itself is the change.* You're not trying to silence these parts or push them away. Each time you notice one and turn toward it with a little curiosity instead of judgment, it needs to work a little less hard — and slowly, the whole system settles.

You can practice this on your own, gently, with the protectors. The tender parts underneath are best met slowly, and often with an IFS therapist alongside you. But it begins here, with something surprisingly simple: paying attention, with warmth, to what was always trying to help.


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WHERE TO GO FROM HERE

# What you can do with this *map*

Use it not to analyze yourself, but to look at your inner world with a little more curiosity — to notice which parts you know well, and which stay in the background.

*For therapists and coaches:* this map works as a gentle introduction to parts language — a way to open a conversation, or to explore together which part is present today.

> *There are no bad parts, every part belongs.*
> *The parts need a leader, and the leader needs them too.*

### Would you like to go *further?*

If you'd like to get to know your inner family more closely, with someone alongside you, you're warmly welcome to **reach out for a conversation**.

naomichristina.com/contact →

### For coaches, therapists & *psychologists*

I'm creating a one-day experiential introduction to Internal Family Systems — with a workbook you can use with clients. If you'd like to hear when it opens, **join the waitlist**.

naomichristina.com/internal-family-systems-therapy →

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*Internal Family Systems (IFS) was developed by Richard C. Schwartz, PhD.*