

Mindful Medicine Corner With



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Parts of a Whole Part 2

Last month I wrote an article framing all the different “parts” of us that make up the whole, or the concept of the multiplicity of self ([hyperlink here](#)). We explored a theory in clinical psychology called Internal Family Systems (IFS) that uses these different parts of self in gaining insight about our inner beings, especially in relation to the suffering and struggles we experience in life - why does everything always seem so hard sometimes? If you are feeling this way more often than not, there is a good chance that you are not tapping into the enlightenment of your Core Self. Rest assured, it’s in there I promise, though sometimes eclipsed by the shadows of all our fears, insecurities, and past traumas. Think of the **Core Self** as a pure, bright light of wise energy that radiates from the depths of our body and soul. It was present at our birth, though life experiences and self-doubt can dim its essence.

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What does it feel like when we tap into the **Core Self**?? Think back to a time when you felt in “flow” with the world, whether it be at a concert for a musical artist you admire, or maybe after giving a successful presentation at work, or just being with good friends you haven’t seen in a while. Take a minute to remember what this was like in your body. You might describe feeling calm and at peace. Maybe confident and connected to others. You may have felt it for a minute, or maybe even a day or two... but you felt it. Imagine being able to find this feeling more often. What would this do to how you show up in your everyday life?

What is actually happening in these moments is that your protective parts are stepping down and allowing your inner lightness (or **Core Self**) to shine brightly. Need a roadmap to finding a way out of the darkness?

Internal Family Systems, there are qualities that can get you there. These are known as the “8 C’s”.

- **Compassion** Being Kind to others and ourselves.
- **Clarity** Being able to see what we truly want for ourselves
- **Calm** Being centered and at peace despite the chaos
- **Connectedness** Feeling in sync with others
- **Confidence** Believing in ourselves
- **Curiosity** Being open-minded without judgment
- **Courage** Being brave enough to face our fears
- **Creativity** Seeing things in a new way

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How does one use the 8 C's to our advantage? Think about something that is particularly challenging to you. Maybe you didn't get your dream job and you are using alcohol to numb the pain associated with this. The parts of ourselves that are awakened are those vulnerable aspects of our personality that carry shame, loneliness, and even disgust. These are the "Exiled" parts of ourselves that often came into being when we were young and often tell us that we "don't matter", or "are worthless". In order to suppress these uncomfortable feelings, protective parts emerge to try to squash the vulnerable parts back into exile. But what really needs to happen is for us to connect with and lean into these difficult feelings (exactly the opposite of what our protective parts want though--yikes!!).

This is when the 8 C's can serve as ammunition... Bring in **Compassion** for shame, **Curiosity** and **Creativity** for the possibilities for what can come next, **Connectedness** by sharing how we feel with others, and the **Courage** to face something that is hard. Once these Exiles are seen and understood, we can become unburdened from the weight they impart to a situation. Some Exiles are harder to heal than others, especially those deep-rooted in childhood trauma, so this is when a trained therapist can help one connect to the tools that can turn these scared "inner children" into the curious, delightful children that they were meant to be.

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For me, I have an Inner Critic (a protective part) that is extremely judgmental and frequently tells me that I am not good enough at my job. This part keeps me at the office late into the night, so I do not let down my patients and co-workers. This does not feel good, but the Inner Critic thinks that she is protecting me from feeling embarrassed and incompetent. I have a sneaking suspicion that I am not the only one that feels this way. After all, this protective part looks good to others, and it gets lots of approval from the outside world -- It has served us high achievers very well. However, all this hard work leaves us feeling exhausted and empty, something that is not sustainable.

What I have started doing is looking at the 8 C's, and picking one quality that comes easily to me. **Curiosity** is often my "go-to". I ask my inner Critic part in a curious way, "what role are you serving me right now and when did this serve me in the past?" I also ask this part: "what is the worst thing that could happen if I went home and didn't finish my paperwork this evening?" What the inner Critic really wants is to be heard and acknowledged, which is what happens when you are curious and engage with it. Frequently, this protective part can even learn to trust you and then step aside and let you meet up with the young, scared Exile underneath. Once the burden of the Exile is released, then the Inner Critic doesn't have to work so hard and therefore the **Core Self** is allowed to shine just a little brighter.