Unblending and Working with Protectors Cheat Sheet

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Some of this is borrowed from "Internal Family Systems: Skills Training Manual" by Frank Anderson, M.D, some from "Somatic IFS" by Susan McConnell, MA and some from "All Parts Welcome: The Queer and Trans IFS Workbook" by Sand Chang PhD. I will be adding more to it so feel free to check back occasionally.

Pre-work: Find your Self energy to meet the client's Self. The Self is characterized by what IFS calls the 8C's: Compassion, Curiosity, Clarity, Creativity, Calm, Confidence, Courage, and Connectedness. This is not a static state, but one that can be turned up. This state is something to keep coming back to again and again, throughout our sessions and is not only our north star, but is energy we are sharing with and lending to our client. When our parts arise, it is our duty as practitioners to tend to them and find Self again. Life long practice.

Note: Sometimes this process will not work if the client's Self is too hard to access, and instead we do Direct Access. I encourage you to look up what that means, this cheat sheet is not about how to do that.

1)Flesh it out:

First some mindfulness to feel where you feel the part, who is it? How do you feel it? I will often say, OK let's flesh it out a little.

Is it:

- Living in your body? (Always ask this step, it is part of accessing the foundation of the neural network)
    - Are there sensations or impulses or movements?
- Does it have a figure, an archetype, a form?
- An emotion
- Or memory attached?
- Pronoun that fits best?

Deepen into and get to know the part. The more you can flesh it out the better - names, outfits, look, posture, archetype, etc. Not all parts have physical forms. Can also be a message, an energy, an emotion, a somatic sensation or impulse.

2) Unblend:
Have the client ask the part if it would be willing to talk to us by coming out of their body with a good conversational distance so we can get to know it better. (Not get rid of it or challenge it, just witness, support and get to know).

3) Finding Self:

- Lets cultivate some curiosity towards that part
- **How do you feel TOWARDS it?**
    - This is a very important step. Many parts cluster together, sometimes many many parts when dev trauma is present. Healing can only happen when Self energy is on board.
- The Self is characterized by what IFS calls the 8C's: Compassion, Curiosity, Clarity, Creativity, Calm, Confidence, Courage, and Connectedness.
    - Of course they might not use these exact words (although oddly they often do) but you want to get towards these wheelhouses of feelings.
    - If you are not getting Self energy responses, a protector part is present. See if the part will either:
        - Go sit in the waiting room
        - Hang out on the couch
        - Soften and hang back
        - If not, does it have something it wants us to know?
            - You might have to work with this part first
            - “What are you concerned about? What are you worried might happen if I give attention to this part?”
            - This part may need to be tended to first

Do not proceed until Self energy is onboard - very important. You will not get very far without Self. If there is too much trauma for the client to be in touch with Self or at least a high volume of Self energy, do direct access. Meaning you connect with your Self energy and talk to the parts either protectors or exiles yourself. Very similar to RSH and Hakomi.

4) Getting to know the part:

- Befriend the Part
- If you want to know if it's a protector or exile - Protectors have jobs, and exiles carry burdens - and are often hidden in the basement - they are often children, scared, shame, feel unsafe. It is best to work with protectors first if possible, as if you are working with exiles without their permission, you can piss them off and they could cause problems in and out of session.
- If the part is violent, angry etc, ask it to titrate so you can hear it. Ex: “In order for us to get to know you, we will need you to turn the volume down so we can hear you better” The first question I am asking lately, is “Ask the part if there is anything it would like you to know,” (for exile): “like anything about its experience, any memories it carries?”
- This could be information about the burdens it holds, feelings they suffer with, feelings they have towards themselves, beliefs, trauma, jobs, etc.
- Important - we are not here to get rid of, we are here to support them
- Questions to have the client (or you, if direct access) ask the part (if protector):
    - What is your job or role in system?
        - Spend a moment appreciating the part’s intention (not necessarily how they do it). Appreciate, check in with client about if they also appreciate, and see how that feels to the part “How is that part responding to the

gratitude?". Slow down here and immerse in the gratitude.

- Questions you can ask:
    - Anything you would like to share about yourself? (Here you can get a better idea if it is an exile or protector. Exiles carry burdens and protectors have jobs/roles)
    - What do you want for _____?
    - Whats your job?
    - How are you doing that?
    - Name - intention and the action - How is that working?
    - How effective is that job?
    - Do you like the job?
    - Where did you get the belief that you had to do this job this way? (origin story)
    - What do you like about your job? (Chang, 2025)
    - What do you dislike? (Chang, 2025)
    - How do other parts respond to you? (Chang, 2025)
    - How do other people in my life respond to you? (Chang, 2025)
    - If it was possible, would you be interested in a path of not doing this job (usually the parts are very tired and want to rest, if the exile didn't need to be protected so much)
    - What would you rather be doing, if you had the chance - the system was ok
    - Anything the part needs from you?
    - How old is part?
    - How old does part think client is? (If different age, have them update part on what age they really are "give them a slideshow of your life now" (If inner critic - we aren't looking for approval just update) and what their life is like now. This can be really profound!)
    - Do you feel me?
    - Are you open to hearing other ways to support me?
    - Do you want to keep doing that?

        - What else does it want you to know?
        - **FEARS**: What does this part fear? (Addressing fears is an important step before you move into anything shifting)
            - What is it afraid would happen if it stops doing its job?
            - (If you went on vacation for two weeks)
            - What does it want for you?
            - What are you protecting client from?
            - What else does it want you to know?
- Befriending:
    - It makes sense that you would feel the way you do (Chang, 2025)
    - I hear you (Chang, 2025)
    - I really get what you are saying (Chang, 2025)
- Move towards helping the part not work so hard
    - Question: If you can do any job in the world, anything at all, what would it be? (it is often something opposite of the current job)
    - The part might be worried about the vulnerable parts being overwhelmed, so figuring out how to get Self on board to help the exiled parts can be really helpful to help the part relax

I sometimes set up the part with a new job, if it has one, and sometimes I set it up with a place to be, too, asking the Self to talk to the part and find out what environment it would like as a new place to hang out.

Working with Exiles is next, but it takes a few sessions at least to get to the exiles usually. The protectors need to trust you a bit first. Usually. Sometimes the exiles will appear. The healing of exiles and retrieving them to be in the care of Self is the real healing of the protectors and the system. I will not go into that here, but if you do a deeper dive into parts work, you will find much written about it.

- **Closure (VERY IMPORTANT)**

Make sure and do this part!! I learned the hard way, parts can wreak havoc if they feel left out from one of these parts work sessions and start creating symptoms for the client.

Say something like: “Ok we are getting ready to close out, so I want to check in and see if there are any parts that have anything they want us to know as we end?” You can call out different parts that might have showed up earlier or just leave it open.

Or, you can have them send gratitude to their parts.

There might be a lot of content and if you are out of time, let the part know you hear it and table it for next week, but don’t forget to come back to it.~

This sheet is just a beginning of parts work, there’s lots more theory I could share here, but I just wanted to create this for a starting point/general overview of how to start to unblend.

I let people know this is just the beginning, not a quick fix. To check in with their parts when they can. Let it integrate. Try and check in with the part next week.