

Firefighters

Firefighters are protectors who leap into action after the exiles have been activated. They are heroic, impulsive, frantic, reactive, and often destructive in their attempts to put out the fires: like firemen in real life, they will break down doors, smash windows, and spray torrents of water to stop the fire and save the vulnerable beings inside.

They are evident in activated nervous systems, extreme or compulsive behavior, addiction, disease.

They are often polarized with managers, internal and external, who are afraid of their extreme behavior. They prefer more harmonious roles, but they feel a strong sense of duty.

They are not parts, but extreme roles parts take on, out of desperation, and not knowing what else to do to save you. Firefighters want to be of service, and their intention is immediate relief: distraction, self-soothing, numbing out, overeating, addictive behaviors, even suicide if the pain is too intense.

We try to find out what the positive intention of firefighter behavior is, by asking the part. Then we explore the consequences of the extreme behavior and try to help support that intention in a different way, so that the outcomes are closer to the intention.

We try to help the managers and firefighters come to a more balanced and harmonious relationship. We engage the firefighters as an ally and consultant in advance, rather than waiting for a crisis to trigger an extreme reaction.

Working with Firefighters

1. Don't try to manage them. Develop a tolerance and appreciation for how hard they work and their positive intentions.
2. Differentiate, come into Self energy: How do you feel toward this part?
3. Ask: Why is the firefighter taking this role? Who is it protecting? How does it protect the part? What is the firefighter part afraid would happen if it didn't do this?
4. Who is polarized with this firefighter? You may need to get permission to work with polarized parts.
5. Negotiate to work with an exile: "If we could do something about this, would you still have to...engage in such extreme reactions?" The firefighter is likely to respond, "No, but I don't think you could." "I know, but if we could..." Give them hope and reassure them there is no way to fail. Go slowly and make sure the managers are able to step back so that you can get to know this part and help it.

Exiles

Exiles are young parts that have experienced trauma and other overwhelming pain. They often become isolated from the rest of the system for their own protection and the system's protection from feeling the extreme feelings of these parts. There are many sources of the pain that creates exiles: it could be from before birth, birth trauma, accidents, illness, neglect, or abuse in development, attachment wounds, or a moment when a young child is just not met with an appropriate response. These are usually the most sensitive, vulnerable, playful, innocent, creative, and intimacy-loving parts.

But they become increasingly extreme and desperate in an effort to be cared for and to have their story told. They might show up in dreams, in body sensations, panic attacks, illness, flashbacks, pain, extreme emotion, distraction. Exiles crave redemption from the person who hurt them or reminds them of the one who hurt them.

They are isolated by the protectors, who are concerned either that they will be hurt again, or that they will flood the whole system and threaten the self or others with extreme emotion or behavior. The protectors got the message early that these exiled feelings or thoughts were unacceptable or dangerous or unbearably painful.

Exiles are frozen in time: they are stuck back in the place and time of the moments or experiences that formed them. They carry painful, distorted beliefs—about you, about other people, about the world. Until exiles have been unburdened, the rest of the system can't be released into their wholesome roles. It is necessary to have permission from the protectors to work with exiles.

Working with Exiles

1. Differentiation: How do you feel toward this part? Check the 8 C's to be sure you have access to Self energy. Separate out other concerned parts.
2. Develop a trusting relationship: Ask the part in advance not to overwhelm the system or flood you with feelings or memories. See whether the part knows you are there and can feel your concern and interest.
3. Witnessing: Ask the part to show you anything it needs to show you about the past. Watch the scenes, remembering that this is all in the past now. Get the feelings and sensations.
4. Retrieval (optional): If you get the sense that the part is stuck somewhere in the past, enter the scene as Self (or an ally of Self). Ask the part what it needs to leave that situation.
5. Unburdening: Ask where is the burden in or on the body? Are you ready to unload it?
6. Invitation: Would the part like to invite back into the body what it lost when the burden came in? What does the part need now?
7. Integration: Ask what the part would like to do now? Where does it want to stay?
8. Appreciation: Thank the parts that gave permission and stepped aside. Work with them if they have reactions. Thank the exiled part for its courage and patience.

