

Making and Deepening an IFS Map

Many clients come into session with some story top of mind. They need to share, but they also want help sorting, unblending, and finding relief. You can help them do it all at the same time rather than waiting til the story is done to “begin” the IFS work.

Listen and Witness

As you listen to the client’s story, begin to notice parts that feel important or stand out. List some yourself and/or name them together as they arise. Reflect. Ask questions. Let the story unfold.

Together, Draw a Rough “Bubble Map”

Using pen and paper, white board, or digital canvas, get words or phrases that feel like parts down on the page. Use bubbles for each part as a way of helping you both clarify. *Is this a part? Is that? What will you call it?* Consider the size of the bubbles and consider where they are placed in relationship to each other. Allow this to be rough. Just get curious.

Reflect and Refine

Look at the page and reflect on the drawing so far. Invite the client to add parts, rename, tweak or delete. The storytelling part begins naturally to loosen its hold as other parts begin to feel seen and heard. This the draft from which to deepen.

Deepen the Understanding

Start with a new page, or edit what’s there with these deepening questions:

1. Do some of your parts deserve a particular shape or color or rendering other than a simple bubble? What will help that part come alive for you on the page?
2. Are the parts named appropriately? You might check with *them*. Did they name themselves? Did some other part name them? Who was doing the naming?
3. Are any of your parts connected to each other? Link or group allies; depict antagonists.
4. Check to see if any part is moving. Does it bounce or buzz? Expand or contract?
5. Where is Self or Self-Energy in relationship to all these parts? Is that on the map? *Where* does it belong? *How* is it depicted?
6. Do you notice a typical causal chain? Grooves, pathways, or patterns? Does this have meaning for you?
7. Did you notice any very tender younger and/or fearful parts? If they have an agenda, they are likely young protectors. If there's no agenda and they just feel bad, scared, or lonely, they are likely exiles. Notice this. Star these parts as trailheads to further work.

Once complete, you and your client will understand their system more fully and be ready to work with parts from a less-blended place. Trailheads for further work have emerged.