

WHERE SELF LIVES

A Client Conversation Guide

Two ways to notice how Self shows up for the client in front of you.

PART ONE — WHAT TO NOTICE

Many clients have a hard time naming their theory of Self, let alone putting words to it. They show it instead, in a word choice, in the way they light up or go quiet when a question touches something bigger than a part.

Some clients talk about Self the way you'd talk about a soul: something placed inside of them, prior to circumstance, put there by something larger and unnameable. This is an **Intrinsic Self**. Others build Self as they move through life, their experiences, observations, and relationships shape them, and over time a Self emerges. This is an **Emergent Self**. And plenty of clients sit somewhere in between, or simply can't point to where it comes from at all, they just know it when they feel it, steady and leading, even if they've never called it anything. This is **Self as Energy**: agnostic about origin, unmistakable in the feeling.

None of these is more correct than another, and none needs your correction. What matters clinically is noticing which one your client is already living inside of, so the language you reach for, the metaphors, the questions, even the pace of the invitation toward Self, can meet them there.

PART TWO — QUESTIONS FOR THE CLIENT

Context to offer:

In IFS, we use "Self" to mean a steady, grounded way of being that isn't actually a part of you, but, when it's available, takes good care of all your parts. Maybe it's the real you. Maybe it guides you. Or maybe it feels like the wisest, kindest parent you could imagine.

Questions to invite a response:

- When have you felt most grounded, most calm, most like your "best self," most like yourself? What was going on? Where were you? Describe the feeling.
- Has this Self been there all along, even if you can't always access it, or does it feel more like something you're building and growing, something you already have versus something still under construction?
- If you had to point to where this steadiness lives, inside your body, somewhere above you, somewhere else, where would you point?
- Does language like "true self," "core self," or "inner wise and kind adult" fit for you? Or is there other language that feels closer?