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GET TO KNOW A PROTECTOR

A Self-directed journaling exercise

Find a time to sit quietly with a part that got activated recently or that you simply want to know better. If you're still activated, don't do the exercise yet. Wait until there's enough distance to allow some curiosity and separation. This process needs at least a modicum of Self-energy so you are present with the part. The part you're curious about may be what we call a "trailhead" to something deeper, but you don't have to go there in this exercise. Just getting to know the part itself is enough.

1. Choose the part to work with. Notice how you experience it in or around your body. You might close your eyes to visualize the part or feel it more deeply. Maybe it's a **sensation** (a heavy weight in the chest). Perhaps it's a **personified character** (a mean old man shouting at you), or maybe it's just **words** (whispering, 'you are so dumb'), etc.
2. Open your heart to this part with curiosity and interest. Parts often think they are you. They don't have any idea that they could actually *talk to You*, much less have a *relationship with You*. Bring enough Self energy to the experience so the part is willing to show up and engage. Parts won't engage unless they feel genuinely safe, know that you truly care, and understand that you don't want to change them. From this state, let the part write or speak without censoring it.

If other conflicting parts interfere, like parts who do want the part to change, acknowledge those voices and let them know you can come back later. Maybe write them down ("name it to tame it"). Soften any resistance, judgment, or criticism. Then go back and gently listen with genuine curiosity to the part you want to work with.

3. Deepen your understanding of the part and your connection with it by asking these questions and maybe others that occur naturally as you go (Note: Not all of the questions will get clear answers from the part. Don't worry about it. If you don't hear anything, just move on to another question.)
 - When does the part show up and what does it typically do?
 - Are there certain times or certain triggers that really upset the part?
 - How does the part believe it's helping you?
 - Does the part know how old you are?
 - What is the part afraid would happen if it didn't keep doing its job, or if it did the job in a softer way?
 - If the part could be relieved of its current role and could do or be anything in the world, what would it rather be doing?

At this point, a more vulnerable or wounded part might show up (as sensation, feeling, or memory). We call these hidden parts "exiles." If you encounter one, or think you might have stumbled upon one inadvertently, see if you can name it, and let it know you see it ("OK, five year old me on the stairs outside our apartment, I see you there. I know you matter.") If it feels right, you could promise to come back and be with this part soon.

4. When the part has shared all it wants to say, write back to it with kindness and appreciation. Let it know you understand its intentions, even if you don't love how it operates. Your Self-led response to the part will deepen the relationship between you. This is one of the most profound offerings of IFS: not *simple awareness of parts*, but coming into *true connected relationship with parts*. They have wisdom for you and you have wisdom for them. Plan to work together more gently and collaboratively going forward.