

Triggering Person/Part in a Room

Take a moment and think of someone who triggers you. It could be a family member, a friend, or a colleague. Make sure it's someone who really gets on your nerves.

Now in your mind's eye, take this person and place them in a room with windows and a door. You remain on the outside of this room able to see in. Know that in this scenario you are totally safe.

Once you have this set up, have the person do what they do that really gets to you. Notice how you feel about this person. What are the typical feelings that arise? Do you feel angry, afraid, judgmental, disconnected, or other?

Staying outside of the room, focus on one feeling you get when you see this person inside the room. After a moment, ask this feeling if it would be willing to give you some space and separate from you *just a little*.

If it did and you notice a withdrawal of that energy, notice how you feel now as you look at this person inside the room. If what you feel is not a quality of Self (curiosity, compassion, acceptance, calm, etc.) then ask this other feeling or thought to give you space, just as the first feeling did. Continue this way until you do feel a sense of curiosity, calm, and compassion.

If a feeling has a hard time separating, simply ask what it is afraid would happen if it did. Take some time to really hear its concerns. Often our emotions have good reasons based on past experiences. For example, a part might be afraid that you'd be vulnerable to this person again.

Reassure this emotion that this is only an exercise and you will not go into the room with the person in this exercise and won't take any risks with the person in real life. Also reassure it that you are not asking for it to change the way it feels. For now, you are only curious to get a small sense of what it is like when part let **You** be present outside of the room looking in.

If your protective and vulnerable parts gave you space, then you likely found yourself feeling the emergence of your Self. This may have felt like being curious now about this person instead of judgmental; calm instead of afraid; compassionate instead of angry; connected instead of disconnected.

You may have not wanted to interact with this person still, but maybe you could see a situation from this person's perspective or better understood their behavior. If these parts gave you space, extend some gratitude to them for giving you space for this exercise.

If your protective parts did not give you space, what did you learn about why they would not give space? Don't worry if they didn't, you didn't do anything wrong. Sometimes it takes a little bit of time for our parts to trust us and for them to give more information. Remember: all parts are essential, and all parts have good intentions. Likewise, extend whatever gratitude you can towards these emotions/parts.

The goal of this exercise was for you to feel a sense of your Self by asking your parts to separate, even while having a highly triggering person in mind. It's also an exercise in beginning a conversation with one or more parts. This genuine conversation builds trust from your parts in your Self as you respectfully listen to each part and their concerns. This inner dialogue of Self with parts is the key of IFS.

* Exercise adapted from *Introduction to the Internal Family Systems Model*, by Richard Schwartz, Ph.D.