

# Trauma-Informed Stabilization Treatment (TIST): Treating Unsafe and Addictive Behavior in Clients with Histories of Trauma

MODULE FOUR

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## Establishing Relationships Between Adult Self and Parts

- The relationship between **Going on with Normal Life self and child parts begins with mindful curiosity** about the parts' feelings, thoughts, and impulses.

- Curiosity about who these parts really are naturally enhances empathy:** *"How old might this part be? Very young? Middle-sized? A teenager?"* **The therapist's curiosity has to be a role model for the patient**

- As curiosity challenges the automatic animosity toward parts and they come to be better understood, the therapist can ask an Internal Family Systems (Schwartz, 2001) question: *"And how do you feel toward that part now?"* Fisher, 2011

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## Establishing Relationships Between Adult Self and Parts, p. 2

- As the client expresses empathy, pride, respect or sadness for the part, we can encourage communicating that internally: "Can you let the Fight part know that you understand why it was trying to help you out?"

- "What is that like for the Fight [Attach/Flight/Submit] part to feel you 'getting' it?"** By heightening awareness of the relationship between Adult and younger part, we begin to establish that there is a new resource here for parts

- Remember that because information flow is disrupted by dissociative compartmentalization, **we can't assume that the parts know there is a Going on with Normal Life self!**

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**Working with Conflicts between Vulnerable Parts and Fight/Flight**

- Ideally, **Fight and Flight** first need to be welcomed and befriended before work with Submit and Attach is attempted. Ie, defenses must be addressed first before vulnerability is heightened
- **The positive intentions and contributions of Fight and Flight must be acknowledged**, no matter how destructive their behavior and how much a threat to safety. Thanking them, appreciating their point of view, generally is always regulating
- The positive intentions of Freeze, Submit, and Attach must also be brought to the attention of Fight and Flight

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**Soothing vulnerable parts = safety**

- **If unsafe behavior is driven by the Fight and Flight parts** in response to some threat or hurt to vulnerable parts, then it makes sense that safety can be achieved by learning to soothe and protect the young parts.
- When the little parts are offered comfort, connection, and protection, the Fight and Flight parts are calmed, too. When the client can keep the prefrontal cortex engaged even when triggered, the Fight and Flight parts are also less activated
- **The first steps in TIST are unblending and mindfulness, but the final step is inner compassion and comfort**

Fisher, 2021

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**Internal Communication**

- Ask the client to focus on the distressing thoughts and feelings and assume that they belong to a part.
- Ask the client to notice what thoughts, feelings, or beliefs is this part communicating?
- Next, encourage some curiosity: what kind of part would feel or think this way? A very young one? An elementary school child? A teenager?
- Then, ask the client to connect to that part just by letting it know s/he is there: “Perhaps you might want to tell this part that you’re here and listening—that you will take the time to listen to whatever she has to say.”

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### Internal Communication, p. 2

- **If the client is too blended, then he or she can ask the part to 'sit back a bit'** and make room for the "Normal Life Part." This step can be repeated whenever the patient becomes 'blended' with parts or starts to report confusion or overwhelm.
- **States of confusion, disorientation, overwhelm, and anxiety should always be re-framed as parts**—and also depression, shame, sadness, anger, dread, guilt, and self-criticism. Once the patient feels less 'blended,' i.e., less confused or anxious or overwhelmed, we go back to Step 1: establishing awareness of and interest or curiosity in the part that is currently most activated.

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### Internal Communication, p. 3

- **The therapist next facilitates an internal dialogue by asking the client to "ask inside,"** focusing on a series of questions designed to cultivate greater understanding and compassion for the part. Some clients understand the term, "Ask inside," easily, while others will need help.
- **"Asking inside" can be taught as a skill:** "Let's find out more about this part: did you know you could just ask her questions? All you have to do is just think the questions inside your mind and body."
- **The best starting place for most clients is to ask the part in distress what s/he is "worried about."**

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### Internal Communication, p. 4

- **Next, ask the Adult to report the exact words the part has said,** rather than give an interpretation because these can be a way of distancing from parts.
- The Normal Life self is asked the part, "What do you need from me right here, right now to not be so afraid of \_\_\_\_\_?"
- In most cases, the answer the part gives is some variant of the following: "I need you to be there," "I need you not to be afraid each time I get afraid." "I need to know that you will be there—that you won't go away."

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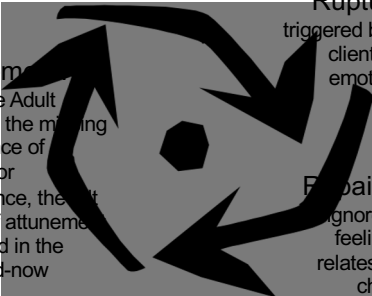
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### Rupture and repair of internal attachment



**Attunement:** when the Adult provides the missing experience of comfort or acceptance, the client's sense of attunement is evoked in the here-and-now

**Rupture:** a part is triggered by something; client feels it as an emotional reaction

**Repair:** rather than ignore or suppress feelings, the Adult relates to them as a child's feelings

Sensorimotor Psychotherapy Institute

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### Diagnosing the causes of difficulty with clients who are stuck

- When clients are not progressing, we have to get **MORE CURIOUS!** (Rather than judge the client as 'stuck')
- We have to ask:
  - **Am I assuming that the client is mindful when s/he is not?** Am I using sufficiently mindful language?
  - **Have I been making enough of or the right kind of contact to regulate the system?** To foster co-regulation and mindfulness, contact is essential. Too much 'support' may not be helpful
  - Did I start with interventions or steps that were too difficult** instead of 'baby-steps' that can be built upon?

Fisher, 2014

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### Diagnosing the causes of difficulty with dysregulated clients, p. 2

- Have I been consistently using the language of parts?** Or do I go back and forth from 'parts' to 'you'?
- Have I been too enthusiastic?** Too anxious? Am I failing to 'bite-size' interventions?
- Have I offered too much? Has the client become used to being regulated by staff rather than using his/her resources?** Have I inadvertently awakened the longing of Attach to be cared for? Or threatened the Fight part??
- Or have I threatened the Fight/Flight parts** by increasing emphasis on emotional vulnerability or relying on others in the therapy?

Fisher, 2021

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### Challenges of working with a system, not an individual

- A frequent cause of stuckness or empathic failure is our misperception of the client as a single integrated person
- The key is to always treat the client as a system, not as an individual, consistently communicating to the parts that they are pieces in a larger whole**
- At the same time, **we must consistently communicate that this system shares one body and mind**—not just as a fact or piece of psychoeducation but as a reassurance to parts that they are not alone, that help is nearby: “I want all the parts to notice that Julie is there, making your back strong and your head high.”

Fisher, 2013

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### Repetition Builds New Pathways

- Consistent use of these techniques, like the Four Befriending Questions, is necessary to build neural pathways holding the experience of attunement**
- As the client is able to use the Four Questions to build connections to the parts, s/he is asked to become more aware of the many ways that parts communicate
- Dreams, nightmare, flashbacks, and images are also framed as communications from parts.** “If that memory was a communication from a young part of you, what would that part be trying to tell you?” “If that body sensation [or emotion] was a communication from a part, what would s/he be trying to tell you?”

Fisher, 2013

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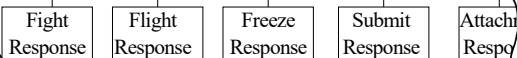
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### Common Ground: ‘we are all held by a stronger, wiser person who cares’

Curious, compassionate, clear,  
calm, courageous, confident, committed

“Going On with Normal Life” Part



*Trumatized Part of the Personality*  
becomes more compartmentalized: separate sub-  
systems or parts reflecting the different  
needs needed in a dangerous world

Van der Hart, Nijenhuis & Steele, 1999

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