

# *Inner Active Cards in Therapy*

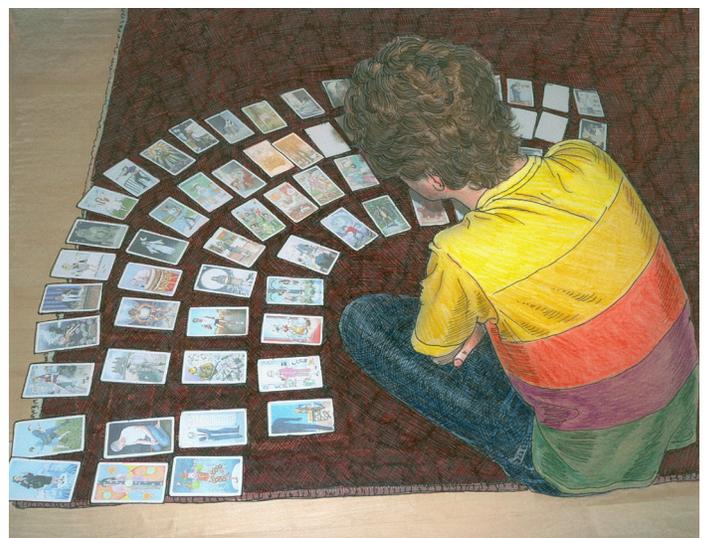
The role of an IFS therapist is to guide clients through their Internal Family System of parts to Self leadership. This is not done by the therapist telling clients how to do it, explaining what parts they have and which parts are troublemakers and how to fix them, but rather through experiential processes in which clients select their own cards, feel them, hear them, understand and appreciate them, and come to trust Self to lead. The therapists needs to listen closely, watch body language and facial expressions, and ask the appropriate questions as they gently guide their clients to Self discovery.



There is no set way to use the cards, but this is how I use them and often with amazing results. I have worked with established clients who are familiar with their inner world, and I've worked with first time clients. I usually have new clients read *Parts Work* or I use the book and highlight the concepts. I also like to warm up with a guided imagery exercise in which they experience a "safe place." This exercise helps in a number of ways: to relax them, to get them comfortable with the world behind their eyelids, and to give them a safe place if the therapy process needs

to take a break or where problem parts can go to chill while other parts are speaking. I always let clients know they are in control and can stop the therapy session at any time.

Once you understand why clients are seeking therapy, have them select cards that resonate with the voices in their heads, or the feelings they are experiencing, or what cards represent people in the outer world such as a boss or a spouse. I like to have clients spread the cards out on a table, or if they are able, to sit on the floor. I tell my clients that there are no set meanings to the cards: They give the cards their own personal meaning. They may select as many as they want, and they can arrange the cards any way that makes sense to them. I tell them to go on their gut feelings and don't think too hard about it.



Explain the blank cards are for parts they cannot find in the deck. Or, they might choose a blank card to express feelings they can't articulate. You may offer the art supplies to create a special part on a blank as part of therapy, or simply have them write the name of their part on the blank and have them create an image of their part as homework.

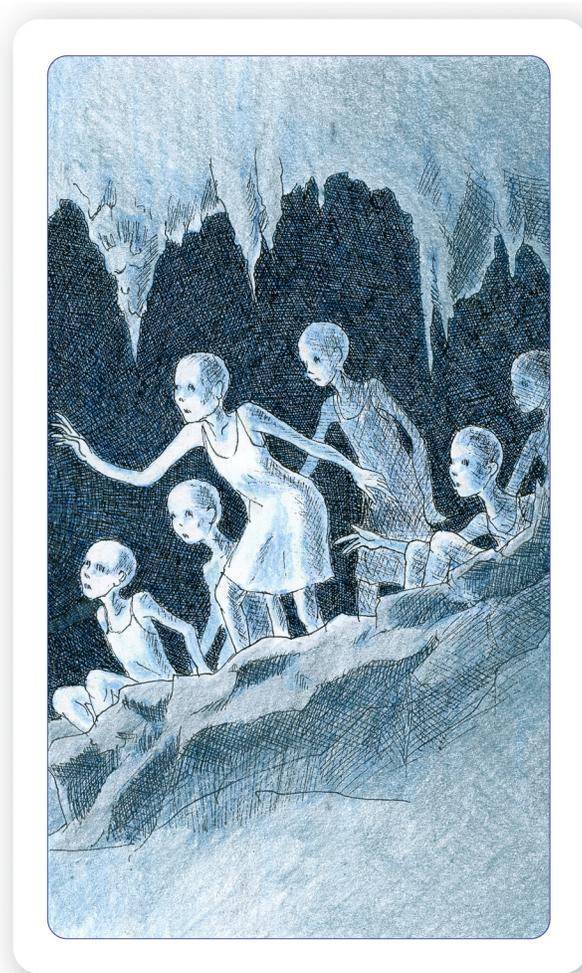
Now have your clients tell you their story using the cards. It's best to listen to the whole story first so that you get a full picture of how their parts function as a family. If clients go off on a tangent, gently bring their attention back to the cards, but take note why and where this happened. Watch body language and facial expressions carefully and listen for voice changes and comments, especially critical ones. Ask clients what part they would like to work with first. Once this card is selected, the nature of this part will determine how you proceed. Each client will present with unique inner dynamics and challenges. This is where your skills as therapist, and Self-leadership are applied. Although it is impossible to give specific procedures - every therapy session will be different - I can give you these 12 basic guidelines:

1. **IDENTIFY THE PART AND ITS ROLE:** Have the client tell you about this card. Then have the client talk to the part: What does it want to be called? How old is the part and what age does it believe the client is? What does it believe about the client, the issues and what purpose does it serve? Ask your client where and how the part feels in the body when it is active?
2. **TAKE MENTAL NOTES** about what you hear and see. What role (Protector, Manager, Child part?) does this part serve in your client's inner system? Is it somatic? What is your client's affect when talking about or with this part? Did you hear more than one voice when your client was telling his/her/their story?
3. **PERMISSION TO WORK:** Discuss how therapy is for helping the Inner Family, how no part will ever be destroyed or exiled and that every part has a valuable role to play. Let the part know that you recognize how hard it has been working for your client, but now it needs to work in a different way to help make things better. Assure the part that it is safe. Then ask if it will give you and your client permission to work with it and other parts.
4. **UNBLENDING:** Have your client ask the part to step back, to separate from them/ her/ him. This opens the opportunity for Self space.
5. **ADDRESS THE FEARS:** Have your client ask the part what it fears, or what will happen if it steps back.
6. **CHECK FOR SELFLEADERSHIP:** Have your client look at the card and ask how (they) feel towards this part. Listen closely to the client's response; are (they) speaking from another part (eg., critical, angry etc..) or if Self is being heard. Is your client showing compassion for this part?
7. **ADDRESSING PARTS THAT INTERVENE:** If you hear another part, have your client identify this part with another card and ask it to step back for a while, go to the safe place. If it refuses, work with it first before continuing. Follow the same protocol. In some cases this may have to happen many times before SELF can be accessed.

8. **OPEN THE HEART:** Have your client show the part that it is understood, appreciated, accepted and cared for. What does the part need ?
9. **TRUST:** Have your client ask if the part trusts SELF to lead ? What needs to happen?
10. **SPIRITUAL GUIDES:** Sometimes it is helpful to ask a Spiritual Guide to join the process. Lead your client through guided imagery to their safe place and ask a Spiritual Guide to come and help. Have the client choose a card, or make a card to represent the Guide. Then have the Guide help the part however necessary.
11. **CLOSING:** Have your client place the cards in a circle and check in before closing. Thank the parts for cooperating and the work they have done. Assure them that they are appreciated and safe.
12. **HOMEWORK:** It is helpful to have clients keep a journal of the work done in the therapy session, listing the cards by name. Some clients record the session and photograph the cards with their smart phones. Some clients purchase a deck of their own and keep the cards they worked with pinned to a bulletin board or carry them in a purse or pocket. Remember, the Inner Family keeps working after session, often unconsciously. Have your clients keep track of dreams and changes in perspective and behavior, and take note when they observe parts being activated and how they handled it .

Be aware that Inner Active Cards can easily expose Exiles, parts that can carry intense psychological pain or that pose a behavioral threat to your clients. They may or may not be aware of these parts and many therapists are tempted to push the process and get to the root of the problem ASAP. But doing so may flood their clients' system with emotions the ego is not strong enough to contain.

Pushing the process before protectors and managers are addressed and brought into Self-leadership within a trusting relationship with you, the therapist, will only lead to defensive reactions and/or therapeutic collapse. These parts, when left unconscious, can easily convince themselves and other parts that therapy is too dangerous. Many parts have functions related to vulnerable parts and exiles and the inner system can be thrown into chaos. Your clients may cancel the next appointment, or in extreme cases, may engage in harmful behaviors or even suicide to quell the stress.





When dealing with exiles, proceed cautiously, helping your client build ego strength through Self-leadership. Guides can be of great service when its time to bring an exile into your client's conscious awareness, assuring the exile that it is loved and safe, and finding its place in his/her Internal Family System. It is helpful to place the guide card next to the exile or child card when you are working with them. I have had clients who have purchased the cards and keep their guide card with them in a shirt pocket or near their bed at night. This brings an added sense of security into the outer world.