

Parts between Partners & Therapeutic Communication with IFS

What's standing in your way of healing connections?

Spring 2023

Internal system vs. internal system in relationship pt 3

Major Points:

Relationships give us the opportunity to reveal and heal parts of ourselves that otherwise would remain unseen.

Though our cognitive programs feel "locked in place," we CAN change together. The ANS, itself, can be remodeled through relationship.

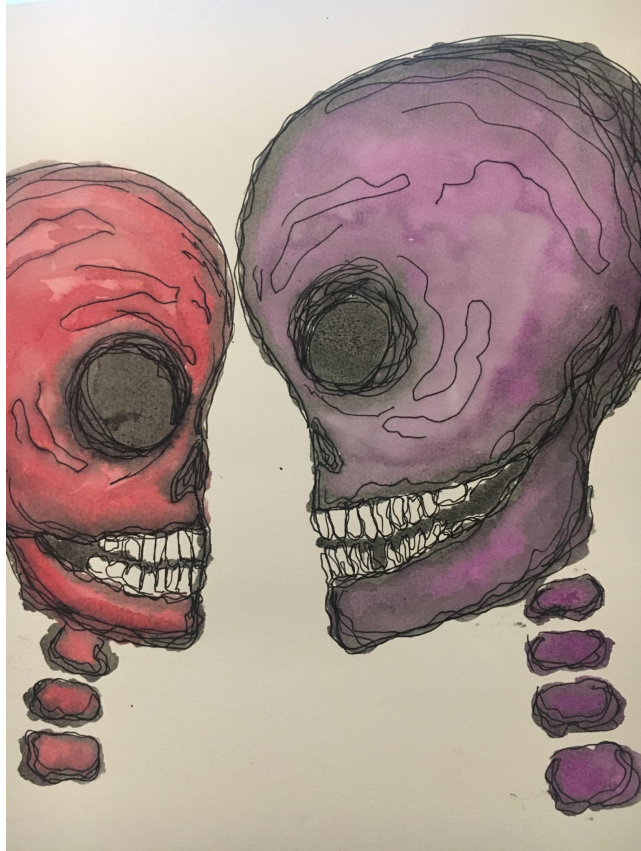
The degree of conflict between partners indicates the level of internal polarization in each system. The content, itself, is less important.

We can benefit from learning to speak FOR parts (not FROM them), delaying reaction, waiting to respond, naming projections, noting our own internal polarizations, considering the truth in what they're saying, and opening emotional space for them without taking on their feelings ourselves.

Self-regulatory skills must be built to manage system reactions. When we dip out of reactivity and tap into Self energy, we're released from the parts' battles and enable reconnection.

The U-Turn to relationship Re-turn is a process to self-regulate in difficult conversations, and return to our partner with Self energy to allow for authentic communication.

Beginning the relationship with commitment to overcome the inevitable challenges of partnership - together - creates conscious relationships. Our goal.



Transcript:

Alright, last time we spoke about the utility of seeing our relationship partners as parts, rather than wholes. We heard about the dangers of protectors as they meet interpersonal relationships that require VIT. We learned a bit about the power of just goddamn LISTENING to make parts feel less edgy... but the reality that it rarely happens, since we're all programmed to conflate "correctness" with "survival."

So I think it's become obvious that Protective parts hang on for dear life in relationships, trying to force us into safety. Unfortunately, that often also forces us away from our partners, as we're trapped in self-defensive strategies also unable to access our full Selves (capital S). Which really bones our attempt at connecting.

The fleeting nature of the Self is a huge obstacle to relationships. As we said two shows ago, we first connect deeply through the big S Self. Then we lose our Self somewhere along the way, and all the strengths that it gives us, as we're triggered back into our cognitive programs that react harshly to life pressures. Including our partner.

So, being able to reconnect to the Self is a key part of reconnecting with our partner. We're able to dip out of the Protective parts and instead relate to them wholly. IF we can return to our full, authentic, Self thing. Which has a lot of obstacles, itself.

Let's hear more about that.

Our buddy, John Welwood, returns to our ears and says:

"The Sufi tradition contains an important distinction between STATES - qualities of being, like peace, joy, trust, inner strength, or confidence (Self characteristics), which emerge spontaneously for a short time, as when we fall in love - and STATIONS - these same qualities when they have become permanently integrated into our lives.

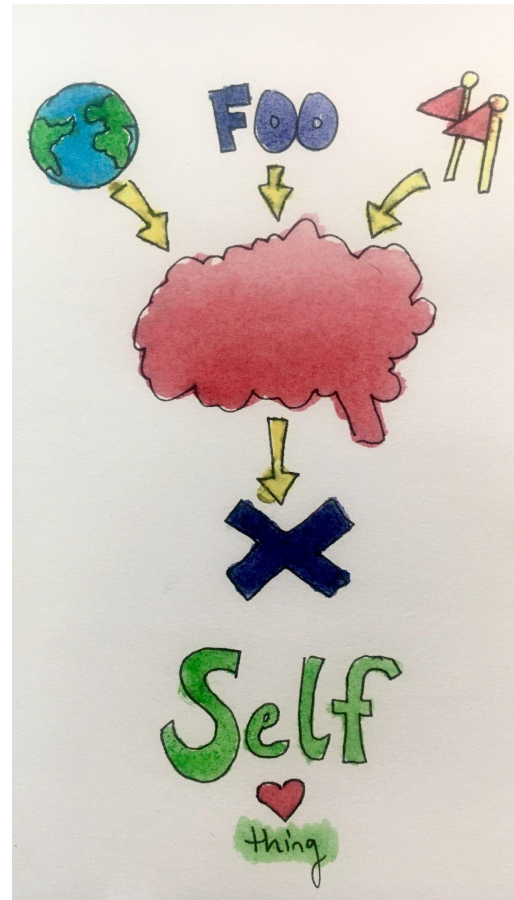
Once a state has passed, we cannot readily call it back. But a quality that has become a station is one that we have access to whenever it is needed. If love and presence are to become stations in our lives and in our relationships, rather than just passing states, we need to understand what we do to obstruct them and how we can remove these obstructions. This is the path of conscious relationship.

When two partners with a deep bond choose to work with the obstacles arising between them, this deepens their connection with themselves and each other, and it can provide a lifelong, mutual sense of path and direction. On the other hand, if they refuse to work with the difficulties in their relationship, they lose a precious opportunity to let the fire of their love refine their natures and forge their inner gold."

So, with all that in mind, what do we do?

TODAY... let's keep taking lessons from Sweezy, Herbine-Blank, and Welwood, and get into the real practices that DO lead to these accurate parts discoveries... and why they matter for our own good AND the good of the partnership. We're going to hit all these sources to pull out some of the processes, problems, and benefits they describe by utilizing IFS for couples counseling. With a big focus on the Self, playing an instrumental role.

All of which is also crucially being done with an end goal in mind for the relationship that *isn't* the delusional expectation for "magical, spontaneous, healing thanks to this association."



And we'll discuss the ways to heal relationships that may have already been negatively affected by unmanaged parts activations. Which, you know, we've already heard, the Protective bits aren't super stoked to consider.

Now let's talk about how to do it. How to heal our parts, and even broken relationships. First, individually, so we can eventually do it more wholly together. And with better communication tactics that bring us from a disintegrated, parts' reactive place back into our Selves. With a defined relational purpose that keeps us committed to allllll the bullshit.

First up, let's hear about the "point" of all this. And the broad "how-tos" as described by practitioners.

Back to the book: **Internal Family Systems Couple Therapy Skills Manual** by Toni Herbine-Blank, MSN, RN & Martha Sweezy, PhD

They say:

"Research in the field of neurobiology tells us that the ANS (autonomic nervous system) can reshape itself (Porges, 2007), which means couples who are entrenched in repetitive patterns of fighting and disconnection because of early relational trauma can change."

Hey! Good news already, I'll take it. "Entrenched in repetitive patterns of fighting and disconnection because of early relational trauma CAN change."

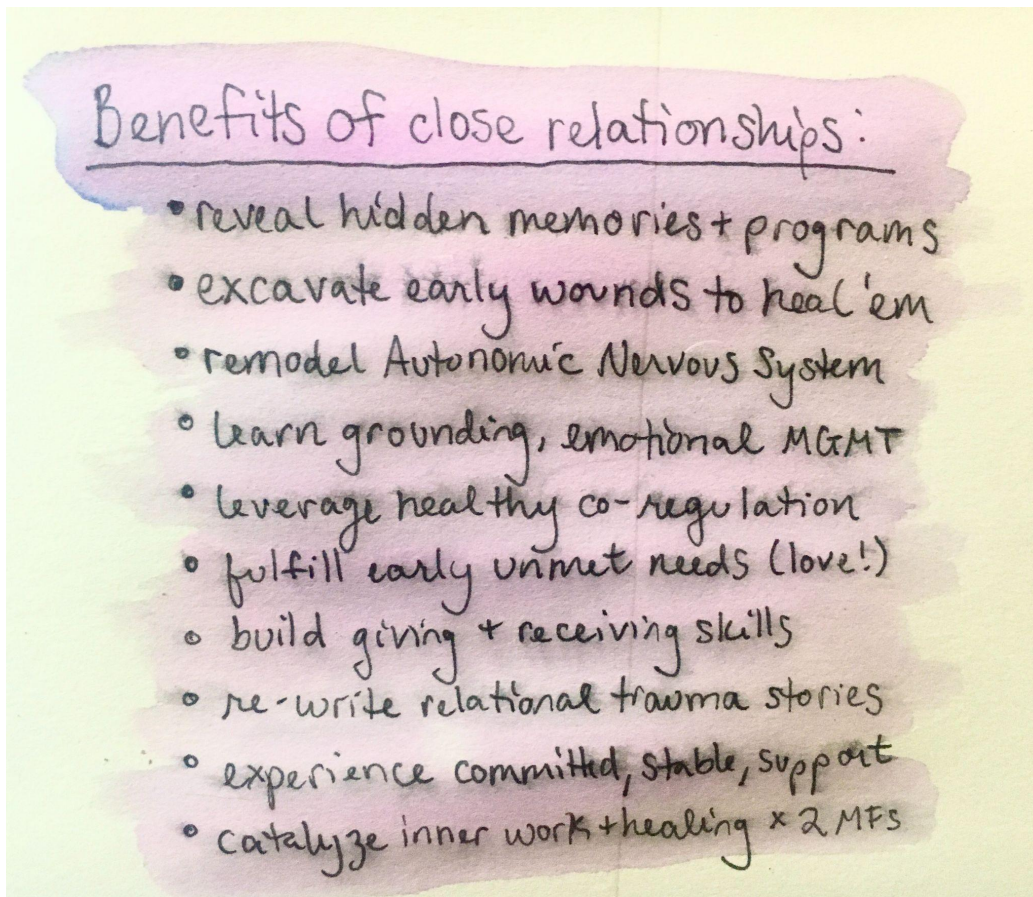
They continue"

"In IFIO (intimacy from the inside out, their therapy model), we explain to couples—using simple, comprehensible terms—that neurobiology underlies behaviors that feel compulsive to them, and their neurobiology is plastic and will change as they practice new behaviors.

In our view, these concepts help couples heal and grow in several ways, including by:

1. Decreasing self-condemnation and partner-blaming while increasing partners' knowledge about how the brain and the ANS affect their ability to stay safely connected.
2. Helping partners stay present with themselves and each other as they learn to modulate the ANS and soothe distress in the body and mind.
3. Illustrating how the team approach to regulating the ANS—which we call co-regulation—is a powerful path to feeling safe and connected at any stage of life."

All of which, sound incredibly pertinent to trauma healing, as well. Wouldn't you say?



“In IFIO couple therapy, we aim for partners to experience a slew of benefits that come with thinking in terms of parts.

First, the therapy can bypass the repetitive prologue of parts who spend time in therapy explaining, justifying, rationalizing, criticizing, or disowning problematic protective behaviors.

Second, by thinking in parts and seeing their faults and imperfections as just one small part of a robust, vital, and larger whole, clients can challenge paralyzing global judgments like “I’m worthless.”

Third, when a client is able to feel curious about a firefighter’s (Distractor’s) motives, they discover the real problem—the underlying one of vulnerability and emotional pain—and have the (often new) experience of feeling grateful to their firefighter (Distractor).

Fourth, by validating that they needed protection in the past and by being kind to the firefighter (Distractor) parts who provided that protection, partners gradually earn the kind of influence with their firefighters that manager parts can only dream of.

Finally, as protectors unblend, partners gain the courage to open their hearts in their relationship.”

Alright, ended on a lame note... but it's one that we're going to hear a few times. When they say “partners gain the courage to open their hearts in their relationships” what I really hear is “open them Selves in relationships.”

Along the lines of what Welwood and I said at the beginning of last episode - the relationship shittery all starts when we withdraw ourSelves because our parts get too turned up. We pull back with our “wholeness” or our “unconditional lovey” or our “soul connection” or whatever the fuck you want to call it. And we start hunkering down against our relationship partner, as we hunker down against the world, as they hunker down against the world and our self-protective instincts.

And then Distractors pop in to save the system from recognizing its own inner distress.

So, it appears as though our relationship probs are due to EXTERNAL conflicts. But, as we're about to hear... the reality is our relationship probs are due to INTERNAL conflicts.

And there's a lot of brain-rewiring potential in being able to spot those internal battles, through examining the relationship, and working through old wounds with that reflective surface available to you.

They also told us that once we learn to feel safe in our relationship, disagreements can be relieved of explaining, justifying, rationalizing, criticizing, or disowning problematic protective behaviors.

However, it turns out that the level of disagreement between both parties can give us some major clues about what's going on down below, in the subconscious identities. Let's hear more about how the content of the misalignments doesn't matter as much as the degree of them.

Let's hear about it. Revisiting an article from last time.

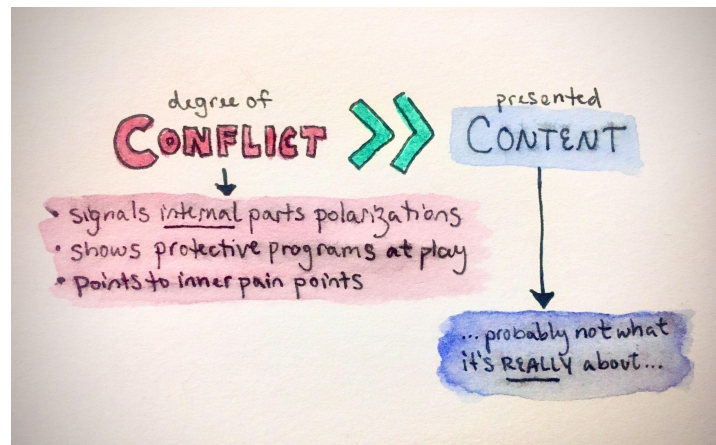
Parts and Self in Relationship: IFS with Couples | Toni Herbine-Blank, MS, RN, CS-P

“The level of differentiation between partners in the couple is a barometer for the more opaque level of internal differentiation between parts and Self.”

Which is to say, the level of disagreement between partners hints at the level of disagreement within each partner... and what their own actual, polarized, views and wounds may be.

If we aren't fighting inside of us, we're not so defense outside of us.

So THE conflicts they come in for aren't THE conflicts that need to be addressed. But they are useful for understanding the internal systems involved.



She continues:

“Even though the external relational field is our first point of contact with a couple, we *first prioritize the internal*.

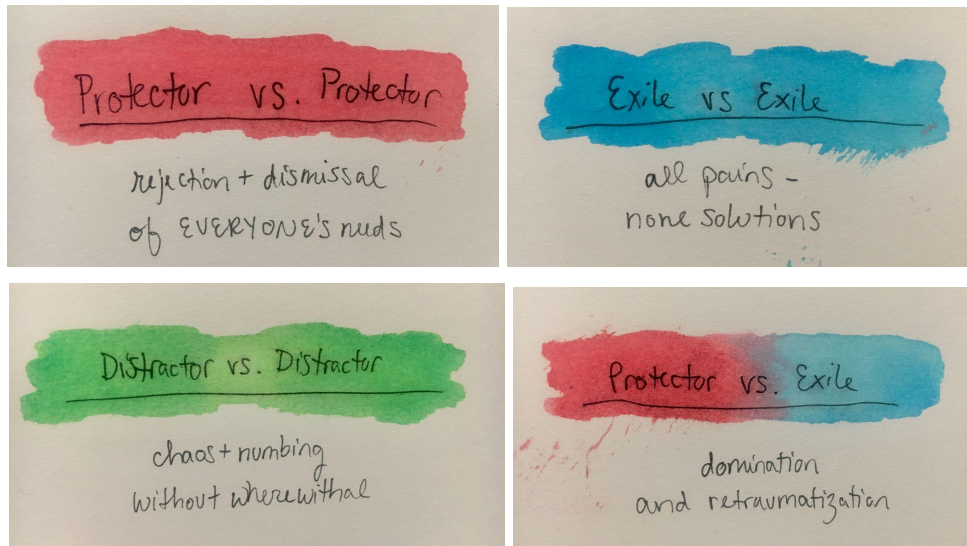
In IFS therapy, we see the external mirroring the internal. The painful polarizations that entrap couples, the fears, the conflict, the adaptive but dysfunctional ways of coping, the rage and withdrawal, are also occurring internally between each client's parts, causing pain and confusion, followed by feelings of loss, division, and rupture.

While this synchrony between external and internal experience will, later in the therapy, begin to feel advantageous, it is initially a source of deep pain. Work with parts through the Self is needed to launch *internal* differentiation (unblending).

The experience of compassion for one's own inner family brings empathic recognition and tolerance for the dilemmas of our partners.

I invite couples to imagine what life might be like with less internal reactivity toward one another. It is often a stretch for people in pain to believe that they can change from the *inside out*, and that in so doing, they will change their experience from the *outside in*.

Protective parts, in my experience, get frightened when they hear my invitation to stop focusing on changing the partner and instead to move inside.”



And then she gives us a few great pointers for getting started:

1. Re-doing conflict in the office. This is suggested so Protectors and Distractors can be called out and communication can take place fairly. Including real listening without all the dismissive tactics we talked about last time. Hopefully, teaching partners to do it on their own, as well.
2. Learning to speak for (instead of FROM) parts. This is huge. When we speak from activated parts, we get one perspective that's frozen in time and reactivity level from them. When we speak FOR parts, though, we reveal their perspective while also maintaining our present day awareness, so our brain isn't so limited in what it can see and how it can respond.
3. Naming projections. We spoke about this a good bit in the last few shows. When we're protecting something inside ourselves, we project it onto others. Stopping to notice what you're saying and considering if it applies to YOU is a critical skill.
4. And identifying polarizations. So, we contain conflicting perspectives and strategies in our parts. Being able to notice them when they emerge is going to save everyone a lot of trouble, and points towards hidden parts inside of the individual. If one party thinks THIS one day and THAT 5 minutes later, it's worth noting that those opinions reflect the views of discrepant parts and they have a lot more story to tell.

So, store those points away for later. Practice healthy conflict with a mediator if possible. Learn to speak for your parts, not from them. Name projections. Identify polarizations in your system.

But those skills are not everything.

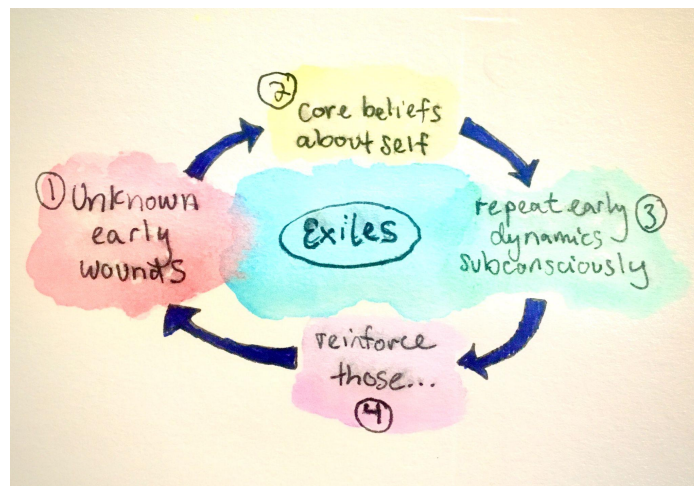
She continues:

“Although re-doing conflict in the office, learning to speak for (instead of from) parts, naming projections, and identifying polarizations are important steps in IFS couples work, they are not the end of the story.

There will always be internal protectors whose job is to prevent vulnerable young parts from flooding the system with unbearable emotion.

It is therefore necessary, just as it is in individual IFS therapy, to attend to the extreme, toxic beliefs of exiles. As couples therapy progresses and exiles surface, it is often necessary to do individual work with one partner or the other. However, many couples can create enough safety to do this work in the presence of their partner. Witnessing another’s deep healing work is a profound experience. It is a vicarious journey toward the Self.”

So we have to get into those hidden wounds of Exiles that are being re-enacted through the relationship.



And we benefit from solo work, it’s crucial if we want the relationship effort to matter. Otherwise we’re pointing and shooting blindly, unable to target what’s really driving all the reactivity, projection, attachment issues, and unfair fighting.

But seeing someone else actually changing? Brings us to a place of excited empowerment. It motivates us to keep trying and allows us to open some of our walled off spaces, ourselves. By, you know it, allowing us to get back INTO our long-lost Self.

And THAT'S where the healing happens, naturally. Just like it started the relationship, naturally.

Our Self thing is our connective capacity. And, if you remember from a February, it innately holds the information, courage, and confidence we feel we're lacking about how to help ourselves move forward.

She says:

“Once the individuals in a couple have more access to Self, transformation is natural. For example, being clear in saying *yes* and *no* becomes less threatening. Anger turns out to be a resource for change rather than a weapon. The courage to hear feedback without rigid protection grows, as does the skill of speaking truths with care and respect.

Our hope is that couples in this process are learning to accept *what is* and to be in connection without pushing, striving, and judging either themselves or each other. (Manager problems.)

When requests for behavioral change come through Self rather than from a protective part, the delivery and tone can be so different that our partners are better able to listen and more likely to feel willing to respond.

When relationship ruptures *do* occur, the internal connection to Self can foster the grace of low reactivity. With access to Self energy, we find the space and capacity to choose a response, even when our partner is not able to do the same.

Being less vulnerable to shame, we are better able to stay connected and attuned internally as well as externally. And if we ourselves have been hurtful or misattuned, we can make the needed repair. The drive for individuality joins the relational dance of your parts, my parts, and our access to a resourceful Self.

In short, the IFS couples therapist trusts that the client system has its own innate intelligence and capacity for healing. The power of differentiated attachment in an inner system is the accessible, inherent capacity for love and care that comes with Self energy.”

And then here's something I think we'll all sigh a breath of relief about:

“While the relationship between clients and therapist is fundamental to the healing process, it nevertheless follows that we do not believe insight on the part of the therapist to be crucial—or even particularly useful—for healing.”

And here, we have a nice reiteration of the IFS process. It's not about the therapist *telling you what to do*, it's about a practitioner staying in their Self so the clients can access the same non-fearing condition. From there, the answers to the issues emerge innately from the individual, based on their personal history rather than that of the therapist.

That means, you aren't relying on the knowledge or beliefs of another person. Only their ability to help YOU get in touch with your OWN, and the changes naturally flow from there. Which is relieving for me, considering all the not-so-healthy views that therapists often haven't healed in themselves.

So. Now we're getting into the goods.

Healing and healing relationships? Are all about being able to access the Self place, rather than relying on Protectors to try to manage us and our partners into submission. And that's something we can teach ourselves to do, reliably, until the Self becomes a Station rather than a fleeting State.

Yeah I said that for a reason earlier. John Welwood wasn't irrelevant in this conversation afterall.

But... there's more to say, let's talk about engaging healthily with a parts understanding.

Let's hear even more about this by going back to **Internal Family Systems Couple Therapy Skills Manual** by Toni Herbine-Blank, MSN, RN & Martha Sweezy, PhD.

They continue discussing the methods of healthy interpersonal parts communication, saying:

"In IFIO, we help partners tune in to their parts and help them unblend so they have the bandwidth to tune in to their partner and deepen their intimacy, both verbally and nonverbally.

Listening is powerful, calming behavior. It invites the same treatment in return. Ironically, the parts who long to be heard also tend to be protected by parts who associate listening with being powerless and, therefore, refuse to listen.

They are afraid of being influenced, controlled, humiliated, or never having the opportunity to be heard. Repetitive patterns of conflict, therefore, involve each partner having an ongoing inner experience of not listening carefully, which is linked to a history of not speaking skillfully.

Even as fighting couples accuse and injure each other, they are wondering, "Do you hear me? Am I safe with you? Will you meet my needs?" But they can't hear this in themselves because

their protectors are busy looking outward, chanting, “You can’t be trusted! You aren’t safe! You won’t meet my needs!””

Yeah, yeah, mine have been chanting that. Increasingly, for the past three years.

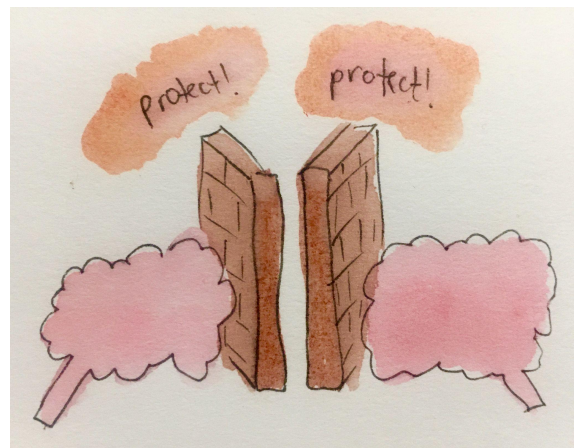
“To get to those essential underlying questions, we first help protectors settle down. We start by asking them about their hopes and fears. We listen to them carefully. Wary protectors fear change, and angry protectors like the energy and power of righteous anger. We check for these parts proactively and listen to them carefully too.”

So we can do this, ourselves, too. Individually and together. If Protectors are fronting, we can at least get to know what they’re riling about. And wouldn’t you know, listening to them allows them to drop the self-defense strategies so we can actually gain traction in our conversation.

Be on the lookout for righteous anger, which is self-protection taken to the umpteenth degree. Ask about hopes and fears. Listen carefully. Be aware of their resistance to change or relinquishing perceived power. Don’t push those points, and if they have to be discussed, do it in a non confrontational way that speaks to those hopes and fears.

“Once they feel heard, we can offer to help the parts they protect. Although protective extremes undermine secure attachments and safety, keep in mind that this is not how protectors see it. They operate in a realm—the psyche—where time travel is the norm, and they may be spending more time in a dangerous past than in the present.

For them, negative feelings in the present, like fear or shame, simply reinforce storylines from the past (e.g., “I’m being attacked!”). By reacting accordingly, they recreate the kinds of interactions they intended to prevent. In this way, protectors keep the past very much alive and active inside the partners who sit before us.



While we honor their urgency and good intentions, we also help them stand down. In particular, we arrange for safe, respectful, and courageous communications by using the U-turn. As protectors stand down, couples gain confidence that they can differ safely and have difficult conversations productively, which, in turn, helps them find a more openhearted perspective on living and being in a relationship.”

A more Self based perspective on living and being in a relationship - my less gagworthy words.

But, again, we can't get to this stage unless we can differentiate our parts to see what we're really working with.

They say:

"After unblending, each partner practices returning from inner exploration to listen from their Self and speak for their parts. If partners are highly reactive and not well-differentiated internally, this process can be slow. But over time, the whole practice—self-examination, openhearted listening, and unblended speech— generates curiosity about the other person's experience, as well as a growing acceptance that there is no danger in having different perspectives."

Huhhh... acceptance that one brain's views can't hurt another brain's views. That's a nice place to be. At times when the Protectors still aren't always convinced, that means they're still feeling insecure and unseen.

So when you react harshly to others or can't accept others' opinions, take a look at what you're really shielding inside yourself. Find out that there's no danger - literally - if someone holds different neural connections and perspectives than you. Then, you can relate to each other more wholly again, from the non-brain-defined, Self place.

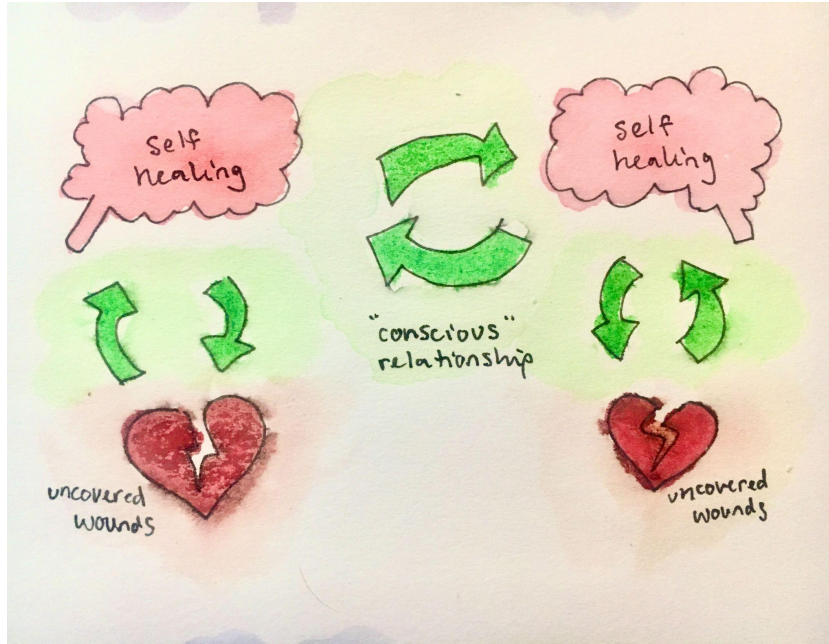
Once we can differentiate and identify our parts, the real work begins. Communication. Let's find out how to do that.

They continue:

"When protectors no longer believe that a partner's differences threaten their survival, dialogue becomes natural and comfortable. IFIO's courageous communication borrows from the Imago Dialogue technique (Hendrix, 1988), which was designed to promote a feeling of safety and reveal childhood wounds under troubled interpersonal dynamics.

The IFIO version of courageous communication, however, adds an inner dimension to the process by cultivating relationships between each person's parts and their Self. With healthy inner differentiation and attachment, partners feel safer differentiating from each other and are better able to practice behaviors that create secure interpersonal attachment.

Courageous communication requires attuned listening and responsible self-disclosure. Listening and speaking skillfully are both necessary. No one can be present and attentive if their internal system is fighting, fleeing, or numbing.



We help the person in the role of listener first by asking them to: (1) listen to their partner's experience without reacting, (2) wait before responding, and (3) consider the truth in what their partner is saying rather than disagreeing or engaging in self-attack."

So take those points home with you. Listen to partner's experience without reacting. Wait before responding. Consider the truth in what they're saying, rather than disagreeing or attacking.

These are some pretty basic, yet necessary, pillars of relationship communication. Which is to say, we all need to hear them. I'm sure you're yelling "my partner needs to hear this too." And I'm sympathetic. Trust me.

But, remember, if you start changing... they have to start changing too. Be the example. And they'll either catch up, or drop out. Either way, you can move forward with these practiced skills under belt.

So listen to partner's experience without reacting. Wait before responding. Consider the truth in what they're saying, rather than disagreeing or attacking.

Now. Let's hear about the real point - how to engage in empathetic communication. They say:

"Brain science tells us that empathetic communication rewires the brain (Siegel, 2007) and supports changes in patterned behavior. Empathetic communication means "feeling with" someone else without getting overwhelmed by their feelings.

When we empathize, we feel with—but we don't confuse ourselves with—the other person: "I can imagine what's happening for you and resonate with your feelings. Though I know I'm not you, I have these feelings sometimes too." When we feel compassion for someone else, we care and feel concerned. We want couples to be able to empathize with and feel compassion for each other.

Feeling known and understood initiates a positive cycle of connection and caring because it feels so good. That said, staying curious and open-minded while listening to someone who feels hurt and angry describe the impact of your behavior takes willingness and courage. Speaking and listening well, which both require physiological regulation, call for a level of skill and patience that many couples have not had the opportunity to cultivate."

So communication is, of course, the key to it all. If we can't feel together, we can't easily communicate. We need to be able to dip out of the self-survival programming, to stop seeing our partner as a threat, and to shut down our reactions so we can respond to them, wholly and without feeling threatened by their differentiated programming, instead.

And that's the ticket to mutually recovering.

Conversing, not from parts, but from the Self. Even though that thing feels like it was lost back in the honeymoon period. That's the key to empathetic communication rather than cognitively dismissive conflict.

So the Self is key. And all the communication tactics that it opens up to us.

Speak FOR parts, not from them. Name projections. Be mindful of polarizations. Listen to partner's experience without reacting. Wait before responding. Consider the truth in what they're saying, rather than disagreeing or attacking. And open up some emotional space to relate to them fully, with your body, too, rather than just reacting mentally.

Good pointers so far.

The thing is... the OTHER key to actually working out a repetitive trauma-born relationship pattern? Is straight up commitment.

Refusing to abandon a situation out of parts pressure. Returning to the discussion with our best parts, even when our self-protective ones are screaming oppositional messages.

Let's learn about a particular skill detailed in both resources. First, we'll hear from Toni Herbine-Blank and then deepen the understanding with Sweezy throwing her two cents into the talk.

They say:

"It is a vicarious journey toward the Self. Schwartz calls it a *radical U-turn*. However, our goal is not to turn inward forever, but rather to re-turn to connection with more love and compassion.

The U-Turn to Re-Turn

We all have our exiles. IFS teaches therapists—and we invite couples—to embrace the *U-turn* and bring compassion to our own wounded inner parts, actively healing the past and ending its tidal pull on the present so we can *re-turn* to our partners in the here and now.

In addition, our unburdening of relational trauma invites our partners to access their Self energy and their inherent ability to re-turn, connect, bond, and provide loving, attuned behaviors."

Back to our book by Sweezy and Herbine-Blank.

"U-turn exercises reverse projection by asking partners to look inside for the driving force behind their conflict. Each exercise guides partners to attend internally, notice what their parts are feeling and saying, and inquire about their motives. U-turn exercises invariably reveal the old injuries (exiles) and long-held beliefs regarding safety that fuel protective reactivity.

By doing a U-turn, each partner has the opportunity to witness the other tracing their feelings and behavior from protective reactivity back to exiled vulnerability. Moments of connection around painful early experiences open the door for a relational re-turn that is replete with compassion, empathy, and understanding.

The term affect regulation describes an individual's ability to modulate strong emotional states and stay present. This skill is critical for couples. Having the faculty to pause, make a U-turn, and unblend from intense reactivity lays the groundwork for self-soothing and returning to calm connection during or following a difficult interpersonal interaction."

So the power healing move is to exist without reacting in a tense situation. To not turn away from the situation, but find the courage to investigate it further. To understand what parts are speaking and why. And doing so requires us to communicate with our nervous system to stay grounded and present in the body, so we don't fly off into our own parts.

In doing so, we co-regulate. We practice keeping ourselves stable and steady, and bring that skill to the table for someone else to tap into our energy and do the same thing.

In this case, we're aiming for Self energy, so both partners can show up with the same characteristics and tools that fostered the relationship in the first place.

Then, when conversation is flowing honestly and openly, we find other-acceptance. Which allows us to find self-acceptance.

But how?

“Because the U-turn is so important for couples, IFIO clinicians have developed a variety of U-turn questions, which are included in exercises and illustrated in many case examples.

The U-Turn

- Notice reactivity, thoughts, feelings, and sensations.
- Inquire about what the reactive part does and says inside.
- Invite the reactive partner to:
 - o Go inside and be curious.
 - o Ask the part to unblend.
 - o Ask who it is and who it protects.
 - o Listen and validate.
- Invite the partner who said or did something triggering to do a U-turn too.

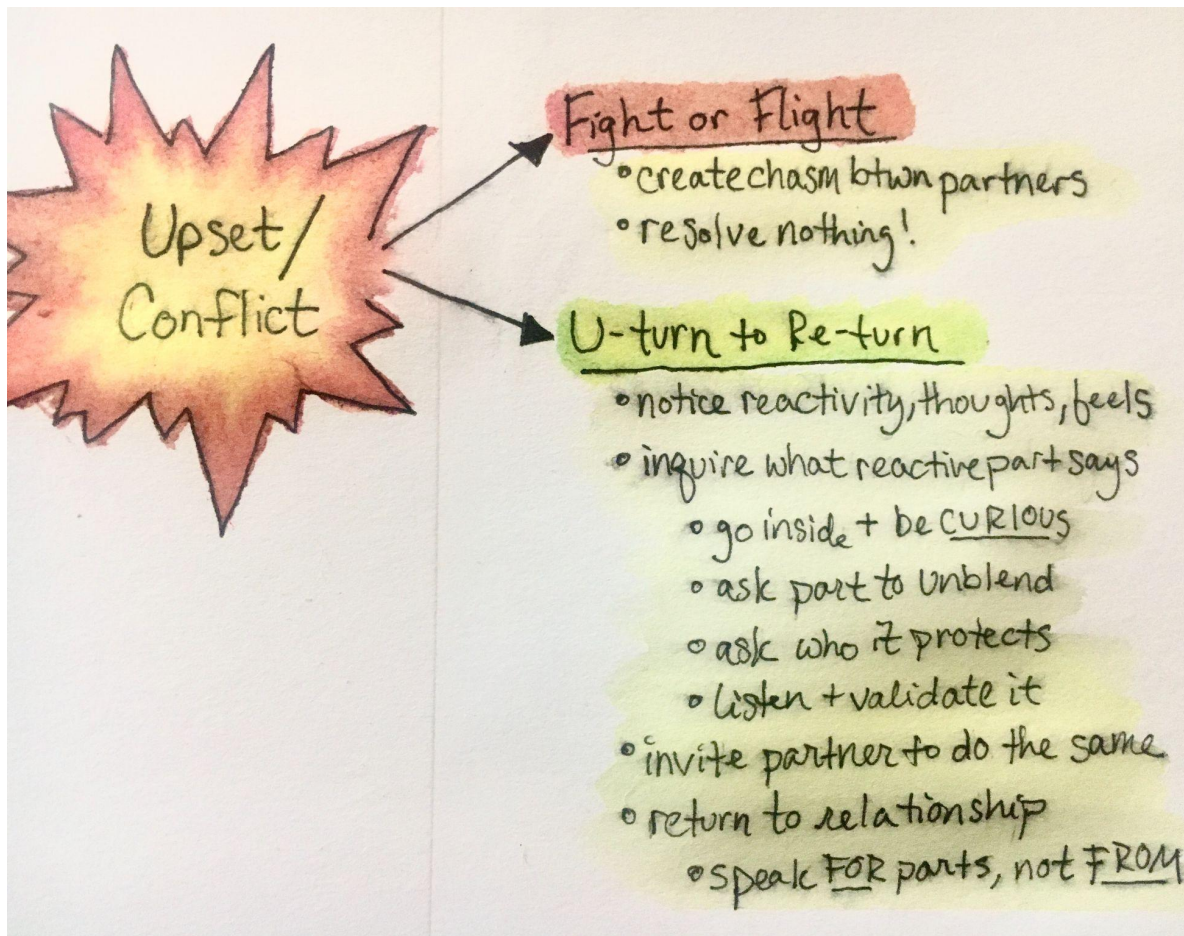
The U-turn will reveal what was going on for them internally prior to making the triggering statement or doing the behavior.”

And in doing all of this, we stop focusing on the external issue. We realize what's really inside of US, and what's inside of THEM, that's creating the conflict. We speak to the internal rage, fear, and withdrawal, and keep ourselves present rather than drifting away into disassociative defenses or historical replays.

We're able to see our behaviors and our partner's behaviors for what they really are. Representations and protections of the pain that each is holding inside. NOT actions that “they're making us take” or vice versa.

We learn to take responsibility for our parts. To keep our ANS in check. And to come back to the present moment, present discussion, and relationship rather than fleeing or distancing ourselves from it with endless fighting.

So, we want to use the U-turn ourselves when we end up in conflict! These are the basic steps to start practicing.



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- Inquire about what the reactive part does and says inside.
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 - Go inside and be curious.
 - Ask the part to unblend.
 - Ask who it is and who it protects.
 - Listen and validate.
- Invite the partner who said or did something triggering to do a U-turn too.”

And, ideally, if our partners *could* do it too... that'd be neat. Huh? Haha, spoilers, got a lot to say about that next month.

But even IF we can only do it with ourselves, for the time being, we can still gain a lot of self-information with this set of inquiries.

Including, what part is showing up and why? What are they pissy about? What are they projecting? What reactions inside of us are more historically based than presently? And what can we do in the future when this feeling starts to emerge, rather than running with it and getting ourselves into trouble?

So I'd say... The U-Turn to re-turn is also a skill we need to work on, within US, even when we're not in a conflictual relationship. So we stop abandoning our parts and leaving our body when we're triggered, in general. A way to build internal VIT, so we can extend it outwards. As well as necessary skills for beating the lifelong trauma-brain game.

But on the relationship end of things, this work is massive. Once we know the parts, we can start healing the parts. And we might even influence someone else to do it with us. Which then furthers our own healing, as both parties work TOGETHER even in times when their opinions seem like they couldn't be further apart.

We're looking for commonalities between our parts, or points where we can at least start to understand the dissimilarities. If we understand our own, actual, pains... and THEIR actual pains... we find out that they're not so different. Even if they present in completely discrepant ways based on the ways we've learned to carry ourselves.

And that brings us to their final U-Turn point. Why is it SO FUCKING HARD?

They say:

"In IFIO couple therapy, we foster a specific kind of unburdening: relational unburdening. As both partners unblend from their protectors and hold each other emotionally, they can take turns revisiting traumatic childhood events. Deep dives into relational trauma from childhood in which both partners' exiles share an emotionally corrective experience give couples a profound sense of connection and renewal.

Transference and countertransference can emerge at any time in therapy. From a parts perspective, these phenomena occur when parts respond to present-moment experiences as if the present were the past. They do this because the exile they protect is stuck in a kind of Groundhog Day existence in the past.

By helping the exile who is stuck in this way, the client's Self corrects the distorted views of protectors."

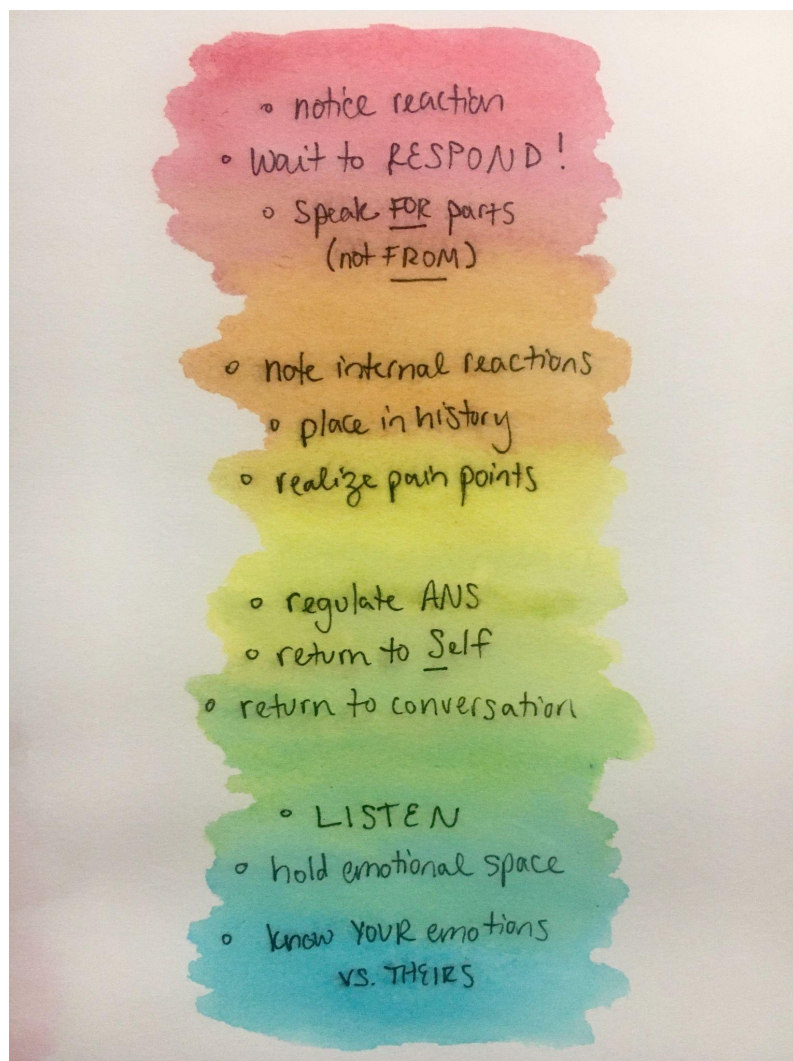
So by using the U-Turn to Re-turn, we can engage in relationally unburdening. Then we get to help our Exiles. In doing so, we better understand our Protectors. Get a better view of our

Distractor tendencies. And get closer to being our real Self - as a Station, not a momentary state - by dropping those masks. Escaping the forever-groundhog's day.

But I hope you've heard all along... none of this is easy.

Maybe there's one more point that can really pull this parts and relationship conversation together, to tell us how to approach it in a meaningful way without forfeiting at the first sign of parts playing unfairly.

Let's hear one last bittle from John Welwood, commenting again on the need to reframe relationships as having a mutual PURPOSE, as we WRAP this episode.



WRAP

“Of course, facing the challenges on this path takes great courage and daring. This is where a guiding vision becomes essential: it helps two partners take heart and gather their energies when they feel lost or bogged down. What can sustain a couple through the most difficult times is knowing that they are together for a larger purpose - helping each other refine the gold of their essential natures by working through obstacles in the way of their deepest unfolding. Such a vision can help them convert ordinary tribulations into what the Russian teacher Gurdijeff called “conscious suffering” - willing making use of the pain of encountering inner obstacles, as motivation to work on overcoming them.

Now that many of the traditional bonds holding couples together have been broken down, relationships can thrive in these difficult times only if they *reflect and promote our true nature*. This is the kind of connection our heart truly desires.

Do you really want a partnership that reflects and promotes only your personality, your concepts and beliefs about yourself - who you THINK you are? That is an unconscious relationship, based on ignoring and denying aspects of yourself that don't fit some image in your mind.

A conscious relationship is one that calls forth who you REALLY are. It is dedicated to truth, rather than to chasing after illusory images. Regarding relationship as a vehicle or path that can help two people access the powerful qualities of their true nature provides the new vision our age so urgently needs.”

John Welwood, **Love and Awakening**.



Remember this point coming up several times now? Starting in the first VIT episode and repeating throughout the rest of em?

How do we have healing relationships?

We go into them fully acknowledging that they're going to fuuuucking suck. They're going to pull up all the parts we don't want to see. They're going to spark parts wars with another.

And that is going to be a point when your parts want to run for the hills - everything has gotten too hard and fruitless.

BUT. If we *don't* let our fears and prior programming lead us towards relationship abandonment.

If, instead, we go into the partnership expressing that we know what's coming, knowing it's somehow for the betterment of both partners, and we're devoted to working it out to help ourselves get in touch with our *real* Selves at the same time...

Then we can heal. Together. With purpose. That keeps us circling back to the association. Making a U-turn away from our own reactivities and past pains.

Make the relationship a responsibility that you're committed to - for your own self-development? And you're more likely, apparently, to unburden some parts with persistent practice returning to the Self place after someone else's programming knocks you right out of it.

Learn to care for yourself.

Learn what that really means, first.

Learn to spot your Protectors in action.

And speak to the Exiles that they hide.

Find out what your core wounds, conscious and subconscious identities are.

Allow your partner to speak to their own.

Don't react.

Don't project.

Don't shut them down for rigid self-survival.

Learn to listen with empathy.

Which requires self-regulation down to your nerves.

Accept that their brain programming is different from yours, but that doesn't threaten your survival.

Aim for understanding their perspectives, even if "acceptance" feels a long way off.

Commit to the relationship, with all its internal system ups and downs.

Commit to your own healing.

Commit to coming back to your Self, even when times are triggering.

And commit to finally having safe, supportive, connective, long-lasting partnerships.

Even if you know they're going to hurt.

Even if some pieces of you aren't so sure (right now) you'll make it out alive.

You will. You'll show that reality to them. And you'll be a more you-informed person at the end of it. So long as you aren't relying on false versions of self, seeking nothing more than validation of what they already think they know about you.

Ditch the abuse patterns.

Let go of the dirty fighting.

And find out what this human need of “connection” is actually all about.

Which, I think... is the whole basis of being here, as upright apes, at all.

And that explains why life feels empty, shallow, pointless, and traumatic without them.

And I think that’s a wrap on Parts in Relationships, through the literature.

Til we meet here to cackle next time...

Hail Your Self. It’s been hiding since your relationship first got a little too real-world-relevant.

Read: triggering.

Hail your externally reflective parts, always trying to figure out who you really are. And projecting what they can’t fathom.

Hail Archie forever.

And cheers, y’all. It was a long research and writing sesh on this one. Appreciate you sticking around and committing to your own Self-relationship to do it.

Good luck out there and talk to you next month.

Reflection Qs

When in conflict, do you find yourself losing nervous system regulation? Can you sense the dysregulation of your partner before it's verbally expressed? Does your system respond similarly? Are you able to seek distance and re-regulate yourself?

Has your partner ever been able to re-regulate themselves to bring you back into a similar state? Have you done the same for someone else?

When the degree of conflict escalates in the relationship, does it seem to be wholly related to the disagreement? Or does it feel as if a myriad of unspoken oppositions are driving the presented conflict without being named?

Can you name any of the relationship reactions that crop up alongside "the major issue" and add layers of distress to the disagreement?

As you communicate in conflict, does it feel as if you're reduced in your potential responses? What skills do you lose? Which tactics and strategies tend to take over?

Do you feel as though you're able to maintain a "Self station" to talk things over? If not, what parts take over the mic? What do they reveal about your history, moreso than the present circumstances?

What does "holding emotional space for others" mean to you? What does it feel like when you receive it? What does it feel like when you do it? How does the connection (and ability for VIT) change when you're able to reveal your feelings and have them heard without negativity?

Do you struggle to maintain emotional boundaries with your partner? What does it feel like when you have a strong "sense of self" and "own your own energy"? What does it feel like when you're absorbing the upset of others? Are there tools you can use to maintain your emotional state without shutting out the feelings of others?

What's your commitment level in relationship? Are you "there for the good times" but likely to flee when things get fucky? Do you stay in the relationship, but have increasingly reduced commitment to fixing it? Do you return to your partner after disagreement, or feel as if conflict creates unmendable wounds between you?

Are you able to have difficult conversations without disassociating indefinitely? Can you bring yourself back to a centered space to re-engage with the relationship/discussion from a calm, curious, compassionate, expansive, and caring place?

What are the tools and skills that reground you into a Self-place? Can you build these into your relationship/disagreement patterns?

What are your views on relationships? Do they automatically heal you? Or are obstacles, conflicts, and re-woundings expected? Are they necessary? Or an exhausting burden on your life?

Can you reframe your views on relationship to include the inevitability of conflict AND the purpose of engaging with these confrontations to reveal and heal hidden parts in both of you?

Can you commit wholly to working with another, despite the likelihood of opening old wounds?

Do you doubt any potential partner's ability to truly offer this degree of commitment? Why? What historical events draw up those doubts?

Is it fair to stunt your own relationship attempts in the present and future, based on shit partners in the past? If someone told you the same thing, how would you feel about it?

How can you let go of those assumed future events, based on extrapolations from prior relational trauma? Do you believe you're the same person as you were back then? Do you believe you're doomed to connect solely with folks who will repeat prior abuses? Or do you feel like you've learned a lot, grown immensely, and therefore opened yourself up to connecting with a new variety of humans?

Ideally, if you met someone new and experienced a real Self connection, how would you frame the relationship after everything we've learned?

If you were to mutually (sincerely) agree to stay loyal, seek reconnection, and accept the hidden pains of your partner - how would that feel? Would it change your engagement with the relationship? Would it bring you a sense of safety? Could it settle some of your nerves? Would it smooth out your disagreements? Could you learn to mutually hold space for each others' parts, pasts, and present growth?

Can you see relationships as an opportunity to "refine your ore"? A way to gain deeper insights into yourself, heal past wounds, and get closer to being the best version of YOU, come whatever pain that may bring?

What resistance do you feel about the idea? What parts are those hesitations coming from? How would it feel if those aspects of you changed, and you were able to become open to conscious, committed, relationship? How would your life change? Is that what "being human" feels like?