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The Nature of Exiles

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Hi, welcome back. We've spent the first several segments of this month learning how to deal with the common fears of Protectors so we can help reassure them and invite them to step back and give us some space to begin to heal the Exiles, or the young, vulnerable Parts. Let's talk a little bit more about what Exiles are. I know I covered this briefly in the second month when we did the general overview or the flow of the model. I think it's important to discuss Exiles a little bit more so you have a little better understanding of them.

Exiles are young, wounded parts. They're the Parts that carry all the pain and all the wounding from whatever has happened to them in their lives. They can actually be quite young. They can be pre-verbal. They are stuck in the past. They're stuck in the past at their original point of wounding. These Parts, these young Parts, they get wounded and they get locked away. Remember, Protectors lock them away for their own safety and for the safety of the system. When they're locked away, they're locked away in their entirety, right? They're locked away because of the pain that they have. What's really interesting is that they're not just this pain that they have. They're also often our most loving, our most sensitive, our most creative, and our most joyful parts, but to lock away the pain you have to lock away all those other qualities that they carry also.

Again, they get locked away for their own safety, but it doesn't often feel that safe to them. They feel isolated, they feel alone, they feel that way because they are, right? They long to have their stories told. They long to be heard. They long to be connected with. While they have this longing to be heard they can get louder and louder and more and more demanding in their need to be listened to, so locking them away does the exact opposite of what the Protectors are trying to do. They're trying to keep that pain away, but when it's locked away it just gets louder and louder and louder, right?

Sometimes I'll use the example of, have you ever seen a parent with a young child and the young child wants their attention. I have two boys and when they were young, I'd be talking to someone and they'd be standing there going, "Mom. Mommy. Mommy. Mommy," and they'd get increasingly louder until I stopped what I was doing and paid attention to them. That's the exact same thing that happens in our internal system, which is why over time, it makes it harder and harder for those Protectors to keep those Exiles quiet. They'll burst through because they've gotten so loud and they're so desperate for connection.

Now, the other interesting thing about Exiles that you should know is that they're really kind of in a bind because they long to be listened to, they long for connection, but they're also very fearful of connection because it's through connection that they've been wounded. They're kind of in this bind about—some more than others—about how willing they are to get to know the Self, right? They can have fear about it. Sometimes when we meet these Parts, they're very eager to get to know us. Sometimes they're not so eager to get to know us because they're afraid they're going to be hurt again.

As I said earlier in this training, that's why it's really critical to follow the tempo of the Exile. If we assume that every Exile wants to be loved and taken care of, that can be too terrifying for some of them,

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so while we're with these young Parts, we need to be gentle. We need to have patience. We need to offer a relationship to them and let them come to us in the way that feels most comfortable and safest for them. Again, I'm going to start sounding like a broken record here, but this is why it's important for us as IFS therapists to really be clear about *our* Parts that might want to jump in and rescue these young Parts, that might want to jump in and make them feel better, that might want to rush them through this connection and witnessing of their story.

Now, Toni's going to talk a lot more next month about the whole process that happens with Exiles in terms of relating to them and unburdening them, but I think these are really helpful things to know before we launch into that. There's one other thing that I think it helpful to know. I'm sure Toni'll talk about this more next month. In that Exiles have what we call a drive for redemption. They'll often have ... remember, they have these burdens or mistaken beliefs about who they are and they often feel less than or worthless, and so they're often very fixed on someone in the outside world. They often look for people who are similar in some way to the people who wounded them, because their belief, their desire to be redeemed tells them that if I could just get you, who is similar to the person who wounded me, if I just get you to love me, then I won't have to feel so worthless or so valueless any longer. I could be lovable then.

They're quite driven by this drive for redemption, which also creates the situation where they seek out people who look like, act like, behave like, sound like the people who originally wounded them, so they can be redeemed. The problem with that is that because these people that they get connected to are ... look like, act like, sound like the people who wounded them, the exact same thing happens all over again to them. They keep getting into these relationships where they're hoping to be redeemed and what happens is that they get hurt again. That's why it's important that we're offering these Exiles a relationship with the Self that actually can witness them and redeem them and help relieve them of these misconceptions that they have about themselves.

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