

The Art of Survival: Caring for Your Parts of Self

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Part I: Learning to Create

When we're driving down the highway, so zoned out that we miss our exits, there is still some part of our minds that is controlling our hands on the wheel, and our foot on the gas peddle. Think of it...isn't that amazing in a way? Otherwise we would do more then miss our exit. We would crash into a guardrail or into the car ahead of us. But imagine if you stayed zoned for hours or even days like that? And along with making sure your hands stay on the wheel and that your foot doesn't leave the gas peddle this section of your brain also pumps your gas, stops in rest areas to allow your mind some rest, and stops into McDonald's to keep your body nourished? Pretty crazy, huh? Thank god for the ability to focus, and pay attention, or else we might all be pretty screwed.

Remember when you were first *learning* to drive? However old you were when that took place ... maybe 16, 17...somewhere around there?

Go back there. You're with someone that taught you how to stop at red lights, how to wait for oncoming traffic, and how to parallel park. You'd never done any of this before so you needed them to be patient with you. They needed to be strict enough with you in the beginning so that it became automatic for you not pull down a one-way street headed the wrong way. As you got better that someone was able to let you drive, for the most part, more independently. But they probably still nagged at you when you were driving "too fast" or what they felt was "too recklessly". Adults can be pretty lame after all. Every kid that age dreams of the day that would surely come when they could drive without this lame-ass, breathing down one's neck like a vulture. Then they could go whatever speed you wanted.

Now imagine a three year old in the same situation...we'll make childhood into an metaphor of "learning to drive". A child that young would need help in being able to figure out how to put the keys into the ignition, how to shift gears. All this would take them much longer...it all would need to be mastered before they could even get out on the road. Once they do get out on the road, they would zone just as we all do sometimes, missing their exits. But God, children have incredible imaginations. They can go in places inside their little minds, which we wish we could only return to. Back then all we needed was our favorite blanket and a teddy, and life was good. Remember how huge everything was... it was all so bright and amazing. There were no limits to the possibilities. We could fly through the air in our backyards and not pay any attention to the adults or older kids smirking. They never seemed to get it that we REALLY could fly.

Okay, this is where we stop smiling to ourselves and things turn serious and dark. Sorry to have to do this to you, but I don't know how else for you to comprehend my eventual stance on things.

So, this child is learning to drive in their little car. Bright eyed, with that hair that was perfect...perfect skin. Way better than being a teenager...definitely better than being an adult. But then things go terribly wrong.

Imagine you're this kid, but your aheaded caretaker/driving instructor is far from patient, or understanding, and really they really just want to hurt you. Your little car has tinted windows so no one can see this crazy person screaming and freaking out on you. Although sometimes the people in the car next to you look over, offering you strange expressions due to all the shouting. But they can't see. God, you wish they could see. What would it be like in their cars? What would it be like to be them? Maybe if they could see they would help you out? Maybe not though.

No one sees when this psycho holds a gun to your head, threatening to kill you when you can't manage to shift into drive fast enough. Keep in mind; this is all just a metaphor. The point is just that this instructor is very, very sick. We don't know why. We don't really care why, because we don't want to know what would make someone turn into such a monster. We get mad at ourselves for provoking them. Perhaps they sometimes force us to head into traffic the wrong way when they're feeling particularly sick. With all this chaos, would you not think that any child would escape sometimes, perhaps through this zoning out and imagining themselves far away? Maybe in a similar fashion to the way that we still get lost in our thoughts and miss our exits?

But remember, a three-year-old's mind isn't wired the same way...they are just not anywhere close to being as emotionally or intellectually developed as we adults are. That's why they're kids, right? When they retreat into their imaginations to do some backyard flying, much less to escape this yelling and feeling this nauseating terror, there should still be the same part of their minds that keeps their hands holding the steering wheel and their foot on the gas peddle.

However, this child would still be learning how to cope with everyday life. That part of their minds still holding the steering wheel might stick around longer sometimes...and still longer other times. It could get to the point to where this kid is four and they go days this way because it's the only way they can cope. They come and go, with some other part of their brain usually taking over. But, eventually that part of their mind gets worn down also. So a new one develops, because kids can be anything and anyone up there. Superman, a dog...it doesn't matter. Only things continue this way for years and decades...could you imagine? What would become of that child who zoned out all that time?

In and out, in and out...holding on to the moments when the driver stopped to use the restroom -- when they could just sit alone in peace for a while. Or maybe when their "driving instructor" was in a better mood sometimes. But this chaos always started up again, and this dreaming reflex became automatic. So now what?

Part II: The Building of a Masterpiece

In the end there are those of us who end up with a dissociative disorder due to childhood circumstances such as the above scenario. If you're curious, or have someone close to you diagnosed with dissociative identity disorder, feel free to read ahead. If you're diagnosed however, and feel you're losing your mind, please pay attention. This may help you to get a grip on how your life really isn't over. It really will all be okay.

Once you're diagnosed as having dissociative identity disorder it can take a while before you eventually come to realize that you can come to function in cooperation with the various fragments of your splintered mind. You might find yourself asking, "This is crazy...what am I going to do?" Whatever you do, don't look at yourself as being a mere fragment of a person. Every single one of these "strangers" is just a part of you. "They" are merely your repressed feeling and/or memories magnified and separated from your conscious awareness. Hopefully the following information will help to give you some ideas on how you can begin to take care of yourself, including these pieces of consciousness that make up your mind. By stabilizing your brain's system of fragmented memories and feelings - split from your consciousness - you will enable yourself to live a more functional life.

LISTEN

After years of living in pain, there are parts of your mind that may "need to be heard". Sometimes these pieces hold one main emotion that may burrow itself around some past period of your early life. For example, these emotions can be sorrow, shame, or anger. But they're currently bottled up within hard to reach crevices of your subconscious, hidden where you can't feel them because you weren't quite "awake" when they formed. These deep emotions know nothing of what happened before or after this period of your life, be it having lasted an hour or ten years. So now, no matter how scary and uncomfortable it is, these magnifications need release, even if you're not necessarily consciously present when it happens. It can take crying, screaming, drawing, painting, making collages, writing, and the use of any other way imaginable to let out the pain. Each part exists behind a veil of suffering, and it's important that you to listen and process it.

KEEPING YOURSELF SAFE

Safety is huge. Especially for the parts of you still frozen in stages of your development as early as ages 2 - 12. These are often referred to as "Little's". They are you, only they're you stuck back there, within the context of these things that happened - obviously things too painful for you to handle as a whole. Try to remind yourself when you can that everyone has "parts". That's no big secret. But when you made it through by distancing yourself to the point of blacking out during these periods of your childhood there was still a part of you there.

It's rather possible that, in the past, these parts of you knew no safety what so ever, so its important for you to relay the message that things are different now. You need to be reminded that no ones going to hurt you now so that you can heal. Each part of you is in a new home environment with safe people. So you don't have to worry anymore. If you're not in a safe place, it's vital that that changes, or healing cannot begin. You might have all your inner parts practice grounding techniques for times when you get scared and triggered.

Create for yourself and your inner parts a place mentally, where you can go in your mind, when you're scared or hurting - a place where you can feel safe. You probably still have quite an imagination. Just do your best ... that's all that any of us as humans can really ever do. This place, for example, might be a room where the door can be locked. It just needs to be a safe place for you, within your own mind, away from your still ruminating sense of danger. Whatever you feel is best for you - try and be creative. It can help to draw this place...to make it more concrete and real in being able hold it in front of you and really see it.

A DIFFERENT LIFE

You have most likely known nothing but abuse so it's very essential that you be shown that life can be different. Go to an amusement park, play, and celebrate holidays. Given enough positive experiences, your outlook on life will start to change. This change will be an important part of healing for "all of you". By sharing these experiences within your inner system, you're building a new foundation upon which you can grow. None of the above can be done unless there is good communication between you and your inner parts of self. How can this puzzle of different needs be met if there is no way for you to be fully aware what they are?

One basic way of keeping the lines of communication open is by keeping a journal to write back and forth in. This is also a neat way to record your progress. Write as if writing a letter to your mental fragments. When you have dissociative episodes, you may come to find that you've written yourself back from a place that seems foreign... from a different age, with different handwriting, thoughts, and beliefs. Continue writing this way, back and forth.

Probably not right away, but eventually you may be able to develop some internal dialogue with your parts. Many of us who have dissociative identity disorder hear what seem like inner voices. But these are just nothing more than audible thoughts that, being so disconnected, sound like auditory hallucinations. Don't worry; you're not having a psychotic breakdown. Mentally "call out" to them, and respond, mentally, to what hear. See if you hear anything that seems to answer back. This might sound absurd and ridiculous, but your need to take charge and reconnect somehow. You aren't sharing your body with different people. Your memories and emotions are just fragmented and can be integrated through therapy and dedication. But also never lose sight of the fact that such unconscious entities prove that the human mind is an amazing thing.

PATIENCE

The process of healing for you and your parts can be very slow. There is no way to deny this. But always, you ARE making progress. The trauma you experienced went on for a long time so unfortunately its not going to heal over night. It's also going to be very hard at times. These are realities for any survivor of abuse and trauma. There might be times when you won't be very functional, and at those times you need to be patient and know that it won't last forever. Never forget that you're in charge of your healing, no matter how much it may seem otherwise. This is your mind, and each alter is part of you. It's your job to enforce behavior and coping skills that are acceptable, and to learn new ways of expressing strong emotions.

LOVE

Love, above all else, is the most important ingredient in healing. Without it your growth will be seriously stunted. Through all the listening, communication, patience, etc. your inner system will come to reconnect within the realization that each part of you – even the angry, bitter, vengeful parts - are lovable, and deserving of love. It's important that you love all angles of yourself equally. Remember that every human being has sides that can be difficult for a reason, and reconnecting with these sides may require extra attention. During your therapy sessions you can allow your therapist to try and communicate with your inner parts if you happen to have a dissociative episode during your session. If you don't have a therapist seek counseling immediately.

Always remember, the more you work with reconnecting with your inner system, the easier it will become. No goal is ever unreachable and no situation is ever hopeless. We as humans are living proof of that.