

The Internal Family System (IFS) model was developed in the early 1980s by Richard Schwartz. Schwartz began his career as a family therapist where he discovered that family therapy patients were plagued by what they called “parts.” These patients described how their parts formed networks of inner relationships that resembled the families he had been working with. He also found that as they focused on and, thereby, separated from their parts, they would shift into a state characterized by qualities like curiosity, calm, confidence and compassion. He called that inner essence “the Self” and was amazed to find it even in severely diagnosed and traumatized patients. From these explorations the IFS model was born. IFS is now evidence-based and has become a widely-used form of psychotherapy, particularly with trauma. It provides a non-pathologizing, optimistic, and empowering perspective and a practical and effective set of techniques. Schwartz is now on the faculty at Harvard Medical School.