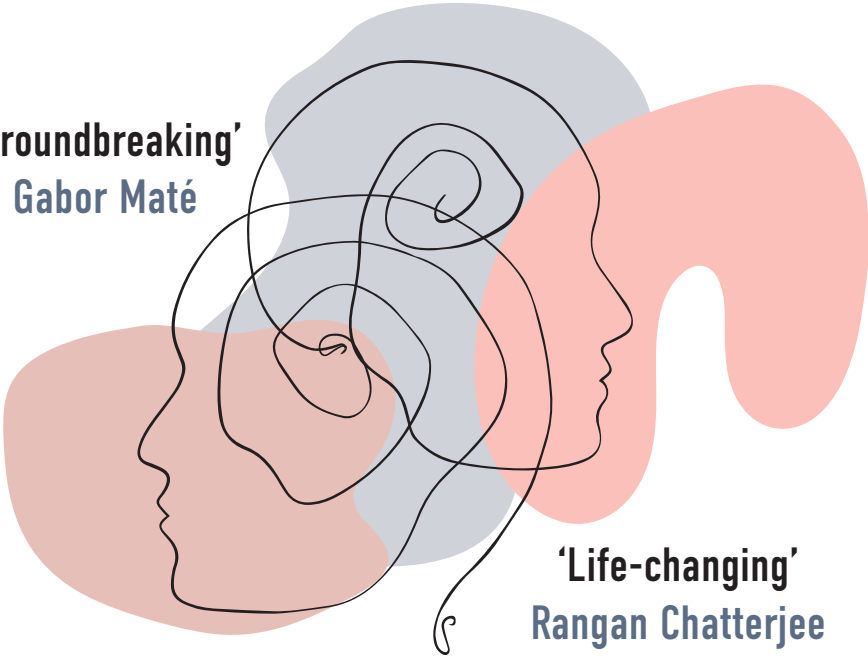
Richard C. Schwartz



'Groundbreaking'
Gabor Maté

'Life-changing'
Rangan Chatterjee

Introduction to

Internal Family Systems

A Revolutionary Therapy for Wholeness & Healing

Praise for
Introduction to Internal Family Systems

"As human beings, we are brilliant at torturing ourselves with the multitude of our inner wrestling voices and at hiding parts of us that, if revealed, make us more authentic. Dr. Schwartz gives us a gift, a way of finding more spaciousness to enjoy life by getting curious and compassionate about the different parts of us. His stories and straightforward style on every page make this a book you'll treasure and want to read again and again.

In my twenty-eight years as a leadership adviser, it's rare to come across such a gem of a book. I'd love family, friends, colleagues, practitioners, and all the leaders I've ever worked with to benefit from Richard's insights and the questions he invites us to peruse—questions that left me wondering why I hadn't asked them throughout my life. Life is much more nuanced and fascinating for having studied our human intricacies."

JILL ADER
leadership adviser and chair of Egon Zehnder

"Rich in illuminating case examples and written with elegant simplicity and wit, this book is an ideal introduction for the general public to Richard Schwartz's groundbreaking IFS therapy—a unique way of getting to know, befriend, and learn to lead all parts of ourselves."

GABOR MATÉ, MD
author of *The Myth of Normal*

"It's all the buzz to talk about 'self-love' these days. But how are we supposed to love the parts of us that criticize us relentlessly, drive us to strive for impossible perfection, plague us with self-doubt and feelings of unworthiness, flood us with intolerable emotions, engage in self-harming or self-sabotaging behaviors, give us health problems, lie, cheat, indulge addictions, control others, hurt the people we love, or even engage in criminal activities? The Internal Family Systems model offers us the much-needed 'how' of self-love. IFS is a total game changer, not just as a transformational spiritual path but as treatment for every psychiatric diagnosis in the *DSM-5* and many medical diagnoses as well. *Introduction to Internal Family Systems* lays the foundation for how to learn to love even the most difficult parts of yourself, which opens you to a revolutionary kind of love for others in need of more self-compassion at a time when our world is in desperate need of more kindness."

LISSA RANKIN, MD
New York Times bestselling author of *Mind Over Medicine* and *Sacred Medicine*

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"Internal Family Systems has helped me in my healing process and opened me up to vast modalities of healing."

JONATHAN VAN NESS
Emmy®-nominated television personality, comedian, *New York Times* bestselling author, podcaster, hairstylist, and hair-care innovator

"In this updated *Introduction to Internal Family Systems*, Dr. Richard Schwartz succinctly introduces the reader to his paradigm-shifting model in an accessible and readable volume. The model reframes the historical internal dialogue between conscious intentions and bodily drives that lead to actions often experienced as unintentional. Dr. Schwartz provides—especially to those who have had a severe adversity history—an intuitive road map to explore the benefits of naturally integrative attributes of being a human. Through sharing personal experiences and therapeutic examples, he compassionately leads the reader through an effective strategy to solve the monumental intrapersonal struggles that have distracted many from experiencing safety, trust, and love."

STEPHEN W. PORGES, PHD
Distinguished University Scientist and founding director of the Traumatic Stress Research Consortium, Kinsey Institute, Indiana University, and author of *Polyvagal Safety*

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No Bad Parts: Healing Trauma and Restoring Wholeness with the Internal Family Systems Model

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Dedicated to the growing IFS community who teaches, learns, shares, and uses the model, including the IFS Institute trainers, partners, staff, and foundation.

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CHAPTER ONE

The Internal Family Systems Model

Have you ever heard someone say, "Before I can love someone else, I have to learn to love myself" or "My problem is that I lack self-esteem" or "I didn't want to do it, but I couldn't stop myself"? Who is the Self that we need to learn to love and esteem, and why is that so hard? Who is it that makes us do things we don't want to do? Will we be forever hounded by the critical voice in our head that calls us names all the time? Is there a better way to deal with the sense of worthlessness that sits in the pit of our stomach? How can we turn down the noise inside that keeps us anxious and distracted?

The Internal Family Systems (IFS) Model has a set of answers to questions like these that helps people begin to relate to themselves differently—to love themselves. It offers specific steps toward more control over impulsive or automatic reactions. It can transform your inner critical voice into a supportive one and can help you unload feelings of worthlessness. It is capable of helping you not only turn down the noise in your mind but also create an inner atmosphere of light

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and peace, bringing more confidence, clarity, and creativity to your relationships.

The IFS Model does this by first getting you to focus inside. By "focus inside," I mean to turn your attention toward your thoughts, emotions, fantasies, images, and sensations—your inner experience. This is a big step for many of us because we've been conditioned by Western culture to keep our eyes fixed on the outside world, looking out there for danger as well as for satisfaction. That external focus makes sense because we have a lot to worry about and strive for in our environment. But there's another reason many of us don't enter our inner world—we're afraid of what's in there. We either know or suspect that deep within us lurk memories and feelings that could overwhelm us, making us feel horrible, impeding our ability to function, making us act impulsively, changing the way we relate to people, and making us vulnerable to being hurt again. This is particularly true if you were ever humiliated and made to feel worthless, or if you have suffered losses or traumas in your life. To avoid revisiting any of that, you make sure you're always active or distracted, never giving the painful memories an opportunity to bubble up. You organize your life in ways that ensure nothing happens to trigger any of those dreaded memories or emotions. You strive to look and act acceptably, work hard to prove you're valuable, control how close or distant you get in relationships, take care of everyone so they'll like you, and so on.

Michael considers himself a competent professional, so he can't believe the way his mind goes blank every time his boss walks into his office. He can't stand the fact that her mere presence makes him feel so young and inept. He knows these feelings come from inside him, and they are not due to anything specific his boss has done. In fact, she is one of the best bosses he has ever had. He has given himself pep talks before she comes in, has tried breathing exercises, and has criticized himself for being so fearful, but nothing works.

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Jonas is very invested in making sure his children like themselves, so he hates the way he sometimes "loses it" with his son. Every so often his son will do something small—leave his clothes lying around or come home late—and Jonas finds himself yelling at him. He often feels his strong reaction coming on, yet he just can't stop himself. Afterward he's wracked with guilt and hates himself for it, but it keeps happening.

Despite all they've accomplished, Kyle is plagued by an underlying sense that they're worthless. People constantly praise them and tell them what a great person they are, but they can't take it in. They put on a good front for others, but inside they're convinced that if others really knew them, they'd be disgusted. Intellectually, they know they're well-liked and they try to convince themselves of that, but the powerful feelings of worthlessness persist.

A part of Kim feels like her eating is out of control. She's tried different diets, worked with nutritionists, and started new exercise programs, yet when the urge for sweets takes over, she's powerless. She detests the inner voice that seduces her into going to the refrigerator for pints of ice cream, but she can't resist its siren song.

Isabella complains that she's only attracted to men who are bad for her. Plenty of nice guys are interested in her, but she only feels the chemistry with charismatic men who wind up treating her badly and rejecting her. She feels "doomed by her heart to a life of heartache."

What do all these people have in common? All of them were clients of mine who came to me because of an emotion or impulse they couldn't control. Not only that, they fought with it constantly and were furious with themselves for not being able to control it. The uncontrollable impulse was bad enough, but the relationship they formed with it—their frustration with it and with themselves for having it—permeated their self-concept and made them feel worthless. I find this is often true. The way we relate to a troublesome thought or emotion not only doesn't succeed in controlling it but also compounds our

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problems. As Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh puts it, "If we become angry at our anger, we will have two angers at the same time."

To better illustrate this idea, let's use an analogy to human relationships. Let's think of your anger as a child that you are watching over. Suppose you were not able to control this child—say they threw tantrums every night. That would be bad enough, but suppose that because those tantrums really bothered you, you constantly criticized the child and tried to keep them locked in their room for fear that they'd embarrass you in public. You stayed home on weekends to make sure the child didn't run away, and you felt like a terrible caregiver because of the child's behavior. Suppose also that all of your reactions just made the tantrums worse because the child sensed that you'd like to be rid of them. Because of the way you relate to the child, the problem comes to consume your life. The same is true with our extreme emotions and irrational beliefs—they're difficult enough, but the way we try to handle them often exacerbates them and makes our lives miserable.

It may seem strange to think of having a relationship with a thought or emotion, but we can't avoid it. Thoughts and emotions live with us, and we have to relate to them one way or another. Just as with difficult people in your family or work environment, how they affect you and how you interact with them will make a difference. Consider how you feel toward your various thoughts and emotions. Maybe you like the inner voice that reminds you of all the things you need to do and strategizes how to do them. You listen to it and use it as motivation; you relate to it as if it were a valued assistant. What about when you start to relax and that same voice becomes stridently critical, calling you lazy and saying you are not worthy if you don't get back to work? How do you like it then? What do you say back to it? If you're like most people, you argue with it internally as if it were an oppressive manager. "Get off my back! Can't you let me sit still for even one minute? Lighten up!" Or you try to drown it out by watching TV or having a few drinks. The

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part of you that wants you to achieve makes for a wonderful servant but a terrible master, so you have a love/hate relationship with it.

We have ongoing, complex relationships with many different inner voices, thought patterns, and emotions that are similar to relationships we have with other people. What we call "thinking" is often our inner dialogues with different parts of us. Let's take another example. Think of someone you love who has died. How do you feel toward the grief you have about that person? Maybe you fear being overwhelmed by it and hate the way it brings you down. You try to keep it locked up somewhere in your psyche and avoid anything that might remind you of the dead loved one. You also get impatient with it: "Why do I still feel this way after all this time? I thought I'd already worked through all that." You try to turn it into an intrapsychic exile. Yet, like an exile, it keeps popping back up, overtaking you when you're not looking and throwing internal coups.

What about the part of you that gets extremely defensive when you argue with your intimate partner or close friend? In the middle of the fight, you suddenly become that part—seeing your partner or friend through its eyes; taking on its distorted, black/white, blame/guilt perspective; stubbornly refusing to give an inch; and saying nasty things. Later you realize you were out of line and wonder, *Who was it that took over and behaved so obnoxiously? That wasn't me!* How do you feel toward that inner defender? If you're like most people, you don't like some aspects of it, but you feel so vulnerable during a fight that you rely on it for protection. You let it take over because you believe that without it your partner will humiliate you. Your anger becomes like a tough bodyguard you like having around but wouldn't invite to dinner.

All the people I have described in this chapter came to me at war with themselves. They were knotted in dysfunctional inner relationships and, not surprisingly, their outer relationships paralleled their inner ones. By changing the way they regarded and interacted with

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