

IFS Coaching vs. IFS Therapy

For people familiar with Internal Family Systems (IFS) therapy, IFS coaching is similar in that both are grounded in a view of the mind as being made up of a Self and parts. They both hold the perspective that the system is healthiest when Self is in charge and when parts trust that they have access to and the support of Self. IFS coaching uses many of the same gentle, respectful ways of interacting with parts as IFS therapy as well as some approaches that come from coaching.

In a nutshell, IFS coaching with me is *different* from IFS therapy in the following ways:

IFS coaching is more goal-oriented. We get to know a part when it arises as an obstacle to achieving a coaching goal, always with the aim of understanding the part's concerns so either:

- those concerns will be addressed enough for the part to step back and allow the client to move forward toward the goal, or
- the concerns will inform valuable tweaks to the plan such that the path to working toward the goal is a better fit for the client and therefore becomes more achievable.

Coaching clients don't "go inside" for entire sessions. Coaching sessions are co-creative conversations that may involve checking with a part when appropriate in the context of exploring and designing steps toward a goal. Clients sometimes become aware of a part, find out its concerns, and work with me (and the part) to brainstorm how best to proceed. The process may involve giving parts an opportunity to voice their concerns, negotiating with parts, and other strategies.

I don't focus on unburdenings as the "gold" in IFS coaching sessions. As appropriate, IFS coaching sessions may employ approaches that are grounded in coaching methodology to acknowledge burdened parts and support them in expanding their sense of what's possible. This work may have a healing effect on these parts. In addition, a coaching session may, from time to time, naturally reach a point where unburdening is the next intuitive step. That may happen in a session or at home.

On a meta level, one aspect of my coaching is identifying how flow—movement toward goals—is obstructed. Exploring parts in sessions is grounded in that detective work. As we learn about what's impeding flow, we also strengthen identification with Self and reinforce differentiation from parts.

Along with exploring obstructions, we're looking for components that facilitate movement toward goals. Whether a belief, mindset, part's concern, habit, or anything else, we're looking for what will make the biggest difference if tweaked. It may require witnessing, a reframe, redesigned self-talk, support for having a difficult conversation with a loved one or coworker, or something else. Powerful coaching questions often generate new perspectives by prompting clients to think outside the box. They can also prompt parts to think outside the box.