

# 9 Working with Parts

There are a variety of therapeutic approaches that utilize the concept of “parts,” including Inner Family Systems Therapy (IFS), Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), and several schools of psychodynamic therapy. Similarly, the concept of parts can be integrated into EFT. For example, when clients are struggling with conflicting beliefs or when they show signs of internal conflict, one part of them is struggling with another part of them. In EFT, the term “parts” refers to any opposing or conflicting beliefs, attitudes, emotions, positions, or inclinations that exist within one person.

When using EFT with clients who are experiencing an internal conflict or struggling with conflicting beliefs, it is often helpful to recognize the parts of that conflict in your EFT language. For example, Kari recently worked with a client who was struggling to quit smoking. The woman, whom we will call Casey, wanted very much to stop smoking, and had already initiated the process of quitting before coming to see Kari.

Casey shared with Kari that she didn’t like smoking most of the time, but when she was at parties or at a bar, she believed she needed to smoke to be comfortable. As Casey was using language such as “Part of me hates smoking, but another part of me needs to smoke when I’m with a big group of people,” Kari incorporated the language into their tapping rounds, recognizing and appreciating the two conflicting parts of Casey. This can be as simple as: “Even though I really want to quit smoking, there is a part of me that still needs to smoke when I’m at a party, and I truly and deeply accept both parts anyway,” or “Even though one part of me wants to quit smoking, and another part doesn’t, I truly and deeply accept myself anyway, including the part that still needs to smoke.”

Many times, you can help clients move forward by helping them recognize and be respectful toward the conflicting parts or beliefs they are experiencing. In Casey’s case, recognizing and accepting that there was a part of her that experienced a strong desire to smoke, and understanding that it didn’t take away from the other

part of her that wanted to quit smoking, helped her recognize that the part of her that still felt compelled to smoke was a legitimate part of her. Casey did eventually quit smoking, and she reports that acknowledging all of her—even the parts that wanted to smoke and the reasons they felt compelled to do so—empowered her to find new solutions that didn't involve cigarettes.

Clients may want to “get rid of” a particular behavior, attitude, bad habit, or something else. They often discover to their dismay, however, that the harder they fight against a part of themselves, the harder it is to make that part go away. Rather than striving to get rid of a part, it is more effective to honor and appreciate why we developed that part in the first place. All of us, clients and practitioners alike, had good reasons for developing some strategies and beliefs for dealing with life's challenges that we no longer want to keep following because they no longer work for us. Sometimes, frankly, our previous strategies for solving problems and our previous belief systems have become serious problems themselves.

Instead of having clients focus on what's wrong with the parts of them that have now become problematic, clients benefit from learning to be open to themselves and to their previous need to develop those strategies and beliefs, given the situations they were in when they developed those approaches and ideas. When clients compassionately notice the needs they had that they were addressing by developing those strategies and beliefs, rather than disrespecting themselves for having developed those strategies and beliefs or rejecting those strategies and beliefs, clients more quickly give themselves permission to find more effective ways to solve problems and deal with life's challenges. Arnold Beisser (1971) noticed and wrote about what he called a paradoxical theory of change, which is that when people accept themselves as they are right now, rather than trying to be something they're not, they are actually more likely to make the changes they want to make.

Even if clients are highly motivated to make changes, they also are likely to have some reservations about changing. Any change means giving up or losing something. If there was no benefit to a particular behavior, thought, or belief, we would have already given it up. Finding, accepting, and addressing the “part” that holds the benefit is often what resolves the conflict and allows clients to move forward. Most of the decisions we face in life represent a conflict of pros and cons, challenges of “parts” that want to do one thing and “parts” that want to do something else. This internal back and forth is a normal part of everyday life. When faced with decisions, changes, and new things, we all have “parts.” Discover, address, and appreciate all of the “parts” that come up for your clients.

## **Visualization**

Visualizing the different parts can help. Many EFT practitioners regularly use “parts” visualization techniques in their practices with great success. If your clients are open to it, you can invite them to visualize and describe their parts. There are

no limits as to what their parts can be or look like; that is entirely open to client interpretation. Some clients will envision a shape or object. Encourage as much detail as possible, asking questions about what their part or parts look like. For example, Casey could have described the part of her that wanted to smoke as a “black lump in my gut,” and in that case, Kari would have tapped with her using that language and description.

For some clients, it may help to invite them to take their parts out and place those parts in front of them. This can offer clients an opportunity to experience the degree of separation they need to visualize more clearly. In an example like this, Casey could have taken both conflicting parts concerning smoking and placed them on the table in front of her. An ashtray, a scared little girl, or any imagery that came to mind could have represented the part of her that wanted to smoke. On the other hand, an angel, a shiny glowing light, or a confident picture of herself could have represented the part of her that didn’t want to smoke. Any imagery is acceptable.

Either method of identifying the parts works; it all depends on what feels more comfortable to your clients. As always, take your cues from clients, use their descriptors and language, and encourage them to notice details about their parts through responding to your questions.

Note that your questions could encourage clients to better visualize their parts whether they agree that your questions are on the mark or they respond by saying that your questions are off the mark. For example, you could ask clients questions about the black lump in their gut, perhaps asking if the lump has always been the same size or has changed in size. Clients could respond by saying, “It’s not the size that’s important; it’s how heavy it is” or “Now that you mention it, it seems to have gotten bigger recently” or “I can’t tell what size it is because it’s buried in my gut and I can’t get a good view of it even when I try to put it in front of me.” Whatever way clients answer your questions provides helpful information.

## **Case Study: The Parts in Chronic Back Pain**

A client with chronic back pain told Karin that nothing she had ever tried had helped, and tapping wouldn’t help either. Karin responded, “Then you have nothing to lose, right? I’d like to try something.” She asked the woman to close her eyes and pretend that the pain in her back was an object. (This is similar to the technique described in the Level 2 book called “Color of Pain.”)

The woman laughed and said, “You won’t believe it...It’s Sponge Bob Square Pants. He’s in my left lower back, but I have pain on both sides.” Karin asked her to look at the right side as well. The client said, “I don’t see anything...oh wait, it’s hiding. It’s a long red balloon-looking thing. It’s got eyes but no arms or legs—this is crazy.”

Karin then asked her to take the two objects out of her back and pretend to set them in front of her, one on each knee. She instructed the client to tap around her points while she imagined listening to the two objects talk to each other. Instead, the client stopped abruptly and almost gave up because she felt strange doing this technique. Karin paused and tapped, saying, “Even though this is crazy, I’ll pretty much do anything to get rid of this pain, even talk to an imaginary Sponge Bob and a red balloon.” After a few rounds, the client laughed at how ridiculous it all seemed and went back to listening to Sponge Bob Square Pants and the red balloon talk to each other while sitting on her knees.

The story became very elaborate. Sponge Bob hated Red Balloon because Sponge Bob loved to play and Red Balloon hated to play. Red Balloon, on the other hand, hated Sponge Bob because he never did any work, and Red Balloon felt it had to do everything. As the story went on, Sponge Bob invited Red Balloon to a playground, and although Red Balloon didn’t have time to play, it agreed to take 5 minutes, but only if Sponge Bob promised to do some work at least once. On the playground, they first went to a slide; however, Red Balloon couldn’t climb up the ladder without arms and legs. Sponge Bob offered to carry him up. Red Balloon insisted that he was too heavy, but Sponge Bob said he would work really hard so that Red Balloon could finally have some fun. Red Balloon squealed with happiness as it slid down the slide.

When it was Sponge Bob’s turn to go down the slide, he was afraid he would hurt himself. Red Balloon said, “I’ll stay here and you can land on me, I’m soft.” This newfound partnership continued to a small lake by the playground where there were paddleboats. Of course, Red Balloon had no legs, so Sponge Bob offered to pedal so that Red Balloon could enjoy the boat ride.

Karin reminded the client to continue tapping while telling this story. After a while, it was time to leave the playground, but Sponge Bob didn’t want to go. Karin asked if the client would be willing to put the playground in her back with Sponge Bob and Red Balloon so they could play now and then. This made everyone very happy. Red Balloon shared how proud and grateful it was to Sponge Bob for helping it, and Sponge Bob was so happy that Red Balloon would finally play with him.

Karin asked the client how her back was feeling. The client was shocked that she no longer felt any pain. She expressed her doubt that she would remain pain free. Karin suggested that she allow Sponge Bob and Red Balloon to play on the playground anytime her back hurt. The client contacted Karin a few weeks later to report that the pain did return, but it wasn’t nearly as bad as it had been. She also shared that she had actually tried the “playground trick” again and, much to her surprise, it had worked. She laughed, “I’d much rather have a playground with Sponge Bob and Red Balloon than pain.”

## Identify the Parts as People

Another, more literal method for identifying and working with parts is demonstrated in an article by psychotherapist and EFT practitioner Masha Bennett (2011) who often uses parts work in her EFT practice. When she senses that a client is struggling with an internal conflict, or the client uses language that indicates that parts may be a viable option for the session, she asks the client to identify the parts as people. She asks questions like:

- If the part of you that is responsible for [the undesired behavior or negative feeling] were a person, what would it look like?
- Is it male or female?
- What is he or she wearing?
- How old is he or she?
- Does he or she have a name? What would you call him or her?

In this case, the character that the client creates or describes functions as a metaphor for the part in question. Bennett taps with her clients to acknowledge the part, using the client's description and language as a guide. She tracks progress through the appearance of the person or character the client created. After the client has gained a level of acceptance concerning the existence of the part, she asks, "If this part were trying to help in some way, what might its purpose be?" (Bennett, 2011). She then uses the language offered by the client regarding the potential positive intention of the part during her rounds of tapping. For example, in the case about trying to quit smoking, Casey might have said, "Even though I don't like this part of me, I recognize that it is only trying to make me feel comfortable and accepted when I'm in a large group."

Many times, acknowledging the existence of the part and recognizing the positive thing it is seeking to accomplish (which could have to do with safety, love, strength, etc.) can help clients make dramatic changes. You might encourage clients to develop alternative methods to detect the positive intentions of the undesired part, or assign the undesired part an alternative job. That is, sometimes the undesired parts do not need to go away, but they function effectively if they undergo some changes. As always, take your cues from clients regarding what works best.

Bennett also suggests that, if there is a conflict present, it might be necessary for the client to create a visual image of the opposing part, tapping to integrate the two parts. For example, Casey could have created an image of an insecure teenage girl to represent the part of her that still felt compelled to smoke in social situations. To represent the part of her that does not want to smoke, she could create an image of a happy, healthy, confident version of herself. If it's helpful, you can ask the client to draw pictures of the two conflicting parts.

Bennett suggests then asking questions about the opposing parts, such as:

- How far away from each other are they?

- What are their facial expressions?
- What do they feel about each other?
- What do they want from each other?

All of these questions and visualizations provide valuable information on which you and the client can tap. Your role is to remain neutral and nonjudgmental about the imagery and words the client uses, continuing to ask questions to gauge how the imagery is changing as you tap. If you chose to have clients draw images to represent their opposing parts, they might make changes or adjustments to the images as their parts change. The parts might move closer to one another. They might change in their ages, expressions, or appearance. Feelings and emotions that were not previously felt might begin to be present.

As the process continues, clients might create an image in which the two opposing parts make a gesture of togetherness, such as hugging or otherwise accepting each other. Bennett (2011) writes:

The details of these transformations are utterly unique to each individual and the length of time that true integration may take can vary widely...In addition to the healing properties of EFT, this is the most important component of healing these internal wars that are such a common part of the process of human change, development, and transformation.

As always, take your cues from the client. Do not force integration if the client is not ready. Don't be afraid to end sessions without the parts being fully integrated. Integration can take several sessions. Tap on whatever information arises, allowing the integration process to be client led, which means that it will happen naturally and organically.

Kathryn Sherrod, PhD, shared a story with Karin about a client whom we will call Jennie:

Jennie came for treatment because she had developed PTSD and panic attacks that resulted from being assaulted at work. Simplifying Jennie's situation slightly, we can say that one part of her wanted to go back to viewing the world as a positive place so she could quit worrying about ever being hit again, while the other part of her wanted to remain permanently on guard, so she would never be vulnerable to being hit again. Notice that both parts were working toward the same goal (i.e., not being hit again); they just had opposing ideas regarding how to attain that goal.

After tapping, Jennie resolved her dilemma of having opposing parts by recognizing that it made sense for her to be a bit more wary about people than she had been in the past, in order to keep herself safe enough to recognize and benefit from being open to the positive people in the world.

A distorted belief that Jennie thought was true when she first came to EFT sessions was, "You get back what you give people." Jennie gave people her best. She was consistently considerate. She finally realized that being

nice to people invites them to be nice back, and increases the probability that they will be nice back, but it does not guarantee that they will be nice back. She learned that how we treat people affects the probabilities regarding the ways in which they respond to us, but other people have free will and they can choose to respond to us in a different way than the way we treated them. (Personal correspondence, 2014)

Working with parts can provide a powerful tool for clients who are dealing with internal conflicts. It offers ways to gather information about the client's struggle. Remember that every exercise, visualization, and round of tapping in an EFT practice is a way of gathering more information for the next steps. In other words, you don't need to be concerned about knowing the right words, the right answers, or even knowing how to reconcile two opposing parts. The information you need comes from clients. Whatever clients say is exactly that—more information. Your goal is to facilitate the process, regardless of how it takes shape within the session.