

# TRAUMA: IFS & THE NERVOUS SYSTEM

Internal Family Systems

PolyVagal Theory

## FREEZE PROTECTORS

**COLLAPSE** e.g. chronic fatigue, inertia, fainting, narcolepsy, seeking sleep, oblivion or death.

**SUBMIT** e.g. apathy, keeping quiet, depersonalisation, delusion, spiritual bypassing, depression, fawning, going blank, numbing addictions.

## EXILES

Without the support to process them, overwhelming feelings must be stored away. This creates a reservoir of banished, often young, parts holding **unprocessed rage, terror, grief, shame & hopelessness**, sometimes as physical symptoms. In exile, they keep trying to be heard & helped, activated by familiar events.

**Protectors** try to keep Exiles away, either as **proactive 'Managers'** or **reactive 'Firefighters'** - using whatever survival strategy they originally found to help.

## FIX PROTECTORS

e.g. hyper-vigilance, bullying, bracing, controlling, rebelling, manic, rushing, OCD, 'ADHD', quitting, lying, cynicism, perfectionism, inflammation, anxiety, tics, self-harm, distraction addictions.

## SELF-CONNECTED

Parts feel safe to relax & work as a team. Needs & feelings can be spoken & met. Resilience develops. Possibility for individuation, play, trust, growth, spontaneity, intimacy, learning, healthy boundaries, creativity, rest, repair & flourishing.

## SELF

(aka soul / inner knowing / core self)  
A mindful, embodied reservoir of clarity, curiosity, compassion, calm & confidence. Being not doing.

I CAN'T

I HURT

I MUST

I CAN

I AM

FREEZE

• **COLLAPSE**

Dorsal Vagal (PNS)

• **SUBMIT**

HYP0-aroused  
Sympathetic NS

Seeking safety via  
**DISCONNECTION**

FIX

• **FIGHT**

• **FLIGHT**

HYPER-aroused  
Sympathetic NS

Seeking safety  
via **ACTION**

FLOW

**SELF/CO-REGULATION**

Ventral Vagal (PNS)  
with flexible access to  
other ANS states

Finding safety in  
**CONNECTION**

# THE SURVIVE/THRIVE SPIRAL

Ruth Culver © 2020 - Download PDF at: [www.calmheart.co.uk](http://www.calmheart.co.uk)

SURVIVAL

RESILIENCE