

## IFS TALK WITH PAUL NEUSTADT ON SELF-LED PARENTING

**Tisha Shull:** This is IFS Talks, an audio series to deepen connection with the Internal Family Systems model through conversations with lead trainers, authors, practitioners and users.

**Tisha:** Today on IFS Talks, we're interviewing and talking with Paul Neustadt. Paul Neustadt is a senior IFS co-lead trainer and AAMFT approved supervisor. In his private practice he specializes in couples' therapy, parent coaching and IFS consultation. He co-leads a monthly seminar for Level 1 graduates focused on integrating the skills learned in Level 1. Paul has led workshops on Self-led parenting, The Therapeutic Relationship in IFS, Direct Access: an essential skill of IFS, IFS and Climate Change, The Power of Presence in IFS therapy: transforming our reactivity to challenging clients and deepening our capacity to be present and attuned and The Gifts of our Exile's.

For 17 years, Paul was director of a community counseling and prevention program for children, adolescents and their families. Paul has also worked in a college counseling center in a community mental health center and taught couples and family therapy in a family therapy institute and two graduate programs. As an IFS trainer, Paul creates a safe, accepting atmosphere, attends thoughtfully to group process and ensures that all parts are welcome. He is known for his clear down to earth and open-hearted manner. Paul has also authored a chapter called From Reactive to Self-led parenting in Martha Sweezy and Ellen Ziskind Innovations and Elaborations in IFS. Paul, thank you for having us. Thanks for being with us today.

**Paul Neustadt:** Yes. Thank you for inviting me. I'm happy to be here.

**Aníbal Henriques:** Thank you, Paul, and Tisha for having us. How is it for you Paul to hear this bio? What parts come up? You are doing a lot around the IFS. I'm impressed. How is it for you to hear this bio?

**Paul:** It feels good. It feels good. Just one thing I'll say about that, part of my transformation through IFS...

**Aníbal:** Yes.

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**Paul:** I think...My whole life, including my whole adult life, I really, I did not believe I had anything worthwhile to offer. I had a part of me that was trying to convince me that I did. But basically, I didn't believe it. And not until I found IFS and did a lot of my own inner work did I come to realize what I had to offer.

**Aníbal:** Wonderful.

**Paul:** And so now I do believe I have something to offer. And what's interesting is I have a lot of humility actually about it because it feels like we all have something to offer. We all come into this world with certain gifts. And I'm just grateful. I feel a lot of gratitude at getting in touch with what I have to offer. But I also have a sense that what I have to offer, a lot of it is kind of coming through me. It's not...It's like I just open to letting the gifts come through me. So, my parts kind of enjoy it. They like this feeling that we have something to offer, but it feels like it comes from some deep place rather than like an ego part of me that's doing this.

**Tisha:** Paul, can you share with us a little bit about your journey to becoming a therapist to begin with?

**Paul:** Sure. So, I grew up in a pretty dysfunctional family. My father had bipolar disorder and was hospitalized twice and had a really bad anger problem. You know, he would go into rages.

**Aníbal:** That might be scary for you as a child.

**Paul:** Yes, I have memories of very frightening episodes with my father. And my father sexually abused both my sisters.

**Aníbal:** Oh, that is sad, yes.

**Paul:** So, there was a lot of dysfunction in my family growing up. So, what I know is I went into being a therapist, really because it was a way for me to try to heal myself. That wasn't conscious at the time. I wasn't consciously saying all this, but that's why, I know that's why I was drawn to doing it.

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**Tisha:** Had you had your own healing experience in therapy? Had you found anyone to support you and what you've been through before you became a counselor?

**Paul:** Honestly, I have to say that the therapy that I did experience wasn't that great.

**Aníbal:** It wasn't IFS, it was another...

**Paul:** [laughs] No, it wasn't. It wasn't IFS. I always thought therapy was pretty mysterious. I didn't really understand it, how it worked until IFS. You know, IFS really helped me to feel like "Ok, this really does make sense. I get how it works and both as a client and as a therapist."

**Tisha:** And how did you meet the IFS model?

**Paul:** So, 1999, my younger sister, who I was very close to, I feel like she and I are soulmates. She got cancer and died very quickly in 1999.

**Tisha:** So sorry to hear that.

**Paul:** And going through her dying with her was a very powerful experience for me. I had actually had cancer myself a year and a half before she got cancer. Fortunately, I survived. That was also a powerful experience. So, I think the two things, my own cancer, facing the possibility that I might die and then going through my sister dying, the two together were very powerful. And it just there was some shift in me as a result of that. And not too long after my sister died, I got a brochure in the mail that there was going to be an IFS training in Connecticut...

**Aníbal:** That was your 30s? How old were you?

**Paul:** I was, I think I was forty-eight.

**Aníbal:** Scary.

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**Paul:** Yeah. Anyway, when I read that brochure, I just knew that this is something I needed to do and I was usually very cautious about, I mean, this is a lot of money to pay for training and, you know...

**Aníbal:** New models, new trainings.

**Paul:** But I just had this inner knowing, like, this is something I needed to do. So, I really connected to having gone through that experience with my own, you know, facing death, my sister's death. Somehow it got me more in touch on a deeper level with, you know, what is it then I really need to do in life? And came this brochure, so...

**Aníbal:** It landed well.

**Paul:** Yeah.

**Aníbal:** And when did your special interest on parenting styles come up in your life?

**Paul:** So, I have two children now grown and my oldest has had a very, an extremely difficult life journey. When he was a teenager, he went through a really, really rough time. He was acting out a lot. And we really didn't understand what was going on with him. I have to say it was very humbling as a therapist to have a son, a teenage son, who...I was totally at a loss for how to respond to what he was going through.

**Aníbal:** Want to help him.

**Paul:** So, really, it was my own experiences struggling with parenting, I think, that got me focused. Also, you know, I had been trained as a family therapist. So, I was interested in families and parenting anyway...

**Aníbal:** Since the beginning.

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**Paul:** Yeah, but that really deepened my interest in working with parents, my own experience. So, I had a lot of very powerful experiences. The shift that I went through once I learned IFS, it dramatically changed the way that I was parenting.

**Aníbal:** So, for you, there is a before and after IFS, clearly.

**Paul:** Right. Yes, absolutely. Absolutely.

**Tisha:** I remember in that initial training that you taught, that I took, you're talking about how the language of parts was so effective in parenting your son and something in that really landed for me, you know, just thinking about our parts as parents having that language. It seems like that is a really good home base for you and you've written a lot and taught a lot about parenting. Are there any key points that are good takeaways that you'd like to share with parents or families?

**Paul:** Sure. So, one is that my son was very, very good and he had a part who was very good that was very good at provoking me. And I had a part that would always take the bait that he would put out. So, he would provoke me and then I'd react, and we'd get into an argument. And once I learned IFS, I understood that was really just one part of him that was provoking me and that it was a protective part, I didn't know exactly what it was protecting, but I knew that it was just a part of him and I knew it was a part of me that was reacting. So, once I understood that I was able to kind of step back and be curious, like "What would happen if I didn't react, if I didn't play my part in this drama that we were enacting?" You know, what would happen? So, I chose not to respond when he provoked me. And very quickly, that provocative part of him...

**Aníbal:** Fade away...

**Paul:** Would kind of fade away, it didn't succeed in getting me into the argument. It would just fade away and then something else would emerge in him.

**Aníbal:** Amazing.

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**Paul:** So, that was like such a dramatic shift, just that one dynamic. And then I'll just share another one. Another thing he used to do, he used to have these rants. He would just go on and on saying things that parts of me thought were absolutely ridiculous. I get really frustrated and really annoyed with him because my parts would say "Oh, I can't believe he's saying all these stupid things."

**Aníbal:** Yeah. Hm mm.

**Paul:** So, again, with IFS, I was able to step back from my reactions, the parts of me that were reacting so strongly. And I would acknowledge them. I would accept them, of course. I would say to my Self "Of course you're reacting that way, makes sense. And could you just kind of let me be curious right now?" And actually, I also asked my parts, did they have, like what was this about for them? Did they have anything to offer me about what was going on with my son? And then I had this insight, and so I asked my son one time, I said "Joseph, I'm wondering, when you're ranting, are you afraid that nobody is going to really listen to you? Are you afraid you're really not going to get heard?" And like, it's just sort of went right underneath the ranting and it was like, true, it was like yes, he said "Yes, that's it." He hadn't understood that himself. But when I said that to him, it was like he recognized the truth of that, and I won't say he stopped totally ranting...

**Aníbal:** Of course.

**Paul:** But it decreased so much.

**Aníbal:** Amazing.

**Paul:** And he would start catching himself ranting.

**Aníbal:** Amazing.

**Paul:** So, he would catch himself and then he'd say "Oh, I'm sorry".

**Aníbal:** Wow.

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**Paul:** So, that was again, it was very powerful.

**Aníbal:** It is.

**Tisha:** He was met with your compassion instead of the critic.

**Paul:** Yeah, I'll share another. You know I have so many stories.

**Tisha:** I love it.

**Paul:** Yeah. So, when he was 30...So, he had both mental health and pretty severe substance abuse problems. And when he was 30, he had a breakdown. He had kind of a breakdown, which is actually his second time, you know, the second breakdown. And his drug use had been pretty bad. I was part of it. He was living out in Oakland, California. And I went out there and I took him to the treatment place.

**Aníbal:** Yeah.

**Paul:** He had actually found it, but he couldn't actually get himself there. So, I took him there. And then, after he got out, it was a few months later and he hated talking on the phone. He would not talk to us on the phone. So, this was like two or three months after he got out and we were worried about him, like, what's going on?

**Aníbal:** Of course.

**Paul:** We flew out to see him. And I had made myself a list of questions to ask him about how he was doing. So, he takes us on a hike and the first day were there and I immediately started asking him these questions and he got very uncomfortable and defensive and just shut down. And I realized "Oh, this is a managerial parenting part of me." This is a part reacting to...So, there was a part of me that was really, really worried, afraid for him and then there was this part of me who

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was going to manage that by, you know, trying to find out all these things that were going on in his life. So, because it was a managerial part...

**Aníbal:** Trying to be a very good parent.

**Paul:** Trying hard to be a good parent, but it just, you know, it just triggered parts of him that, you know, felt intruded on by me and I think, I don't know, I don't know all the things he was feeling, but whatever it was, made him feel very uncomfortable. So, again, I was able to step back and thank that part for trying, but ask it to relax and notice I'm here, too, and acknowledge the fear underneath...

**Aníbal:** Shifting to Self.

**Paul:** Yeah. And once I did that and I just thank these parts for sharing with me, I just got this sudden insight, which is he just needed us to love him.

**Aníbal:** Wow.

**Paul:** He needed us to love him and actually enjoy being with him. He needed us to enjoy him.

**Aníbal:** Show him how much you can enjoy him, yes.

**Paul:** And just enjoy being with him.

**Aníbal:** Yes.

**Paul:** Like, I needed to totally drop my agenda and just have a good time, help him feel loved and help him feel like we were really enjoying being with him.

**Aníbal:** Wonderful.



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**Paul:** So, I told my wife that and she said yes. She said that totally makes sense. So, that's what we did. We just spent three days doing fun things, enjoying each other. And the last day we were there, that night, he came into our room and just started opening up and talking to us about what was going on in his life. And basically, you know, we found out all we needed to find out. But it was on his terms when he was ready and when he was feeling close to us.

**Aníbal:** As we say, Self contaminates Self.

**Paul:** Hm mm.

**Aníbal:** Yes. Wonderful. Thank you so much for sharing Paul.

**Tisha:** Those are such beautiful illustrations of shifting out of reactive parts and parenting and moving into the Self-led parenting that you teach so beautifully.

**Paul:** Yeah. Thank you.

**Aníbal:** Paul, you work with parents as much I understood, right? You have so much to share and teach them and help them. Bu, Paul, parents usually wants us to change their sons and daughters. They don't want to do inner work or change themselves in any way, right?

**Paul:** Often that's the case. Yes.

**Aníbal:** How often? I don't know, in Lisbon is so often.

[laughs]

**Tisha:** In Burlington too.

**Paul:** Yeah. Well, my understanding of that is that most parents, if their child is having difficulty, somewhere inside, there is some inner critic. There is some shame, you know, that I have a child who has problems.

**Aníbal:** Yes. Yes.

**Paul:** And, you know, for a lot of parents, it's just like, it's unbearable. It's unbearable to have a child with problems. And so, who's to blame? I mean, people are so caught in the somebody is to blame for this.

**Aníbal:** Yeah. Always about shame and guilt.

**Paul:** Yeah. So, if it's, you know, the only way I can...It's not me that's to blame is if it's the child. There's something wrong with the child. You have to fix the child. So, I think it's just a very, you know, it's a very intense protector that's trying to protect that parent from feeling the shame themselves of being a bad parent. And the problem is, when they come in, that protector is so effective that we don't sense the shame in the parent. We don't see it. All we see is a parent who's just, you know, it's all about the child. And so that can provoke us. Right. That triggers parts of us who say "Wait a minute, how can you totally blame your child?" Like, you know "How can you be so blind? Aren't you seeing, you know, your role in this?"

**Tisha:** They didn't grow up in a vacuum.

**Paul:** Yeah. Yeah. So, it triggers a part of us, particularly because we tend to be protective of the child, right? Parts of us are very protective of the child. The child is the vulnerable one. Right? I mean, this is the same thing if you're going, if you're working with a client inner system and you have a part of them who is very shaming and critical of the exile, the young part of them. We can do the same thing working with an individual where we feel, we can...

**Aníbal:** Of course.

**Paul:** A part of us gets angry at the part of them that is shaming themselves.

**Aníbal:** Yes.

**Paul:** That is hurting themselves.

**Aníbal:** Yes. So, Paul, how do you sit with those parents that sit with you and start blaming the children? This is really a challenge for...

**Paul:** It is a challenge. It's definitely a challenge. And yeah, I mean, you know, it varies. It really varies. But, you know, the main thing is I have to spend time just with the parents, you know. I used to when I was first a family therapist, you know, one of the approaches I learned is that you meet with everybody in the same room.

**Aníbal:** Yes.

**Paul:** But IFS really changed my understanding, especially when you have parents who say this is all about the child. So, basically, I don't argue with the parents about it. I just say...First of all, I say I'm not a child therapist. So, I say "You're with your child all the time. And..."

**Aníbal:** Absolutely.

**Paul:** "So, if I can help you with how you parent your child, that will be the most effective way that we can help your child." So, that's how I work. I mean, if parents are not willing to work with me then, ok, well, so, they won't work with me. So, I focus on the parenting piece and I'll talk about it as guidance. Given what your child is going through, this is really hard on you. It's really hard. Parenting is the hardest job on earth.

**Aníbal:** It is.

**Paul:** I do a lot of sharing with parents. I'm very open about my own struggles.

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**Aníbal:** It's the best way to teach, right?

**Paul:** Yeah. Yes. I want them to be clear I am not sitting in the chair of judgment because that's what I think...I think when they come in, they're assuming...

**Aníbal:** They are going to be judged by you.

**Paul:** That as the therapist, I am sitting in judgment of them.

**Paul:** And so, I have to immediately shift that dynamic. I have to help them feel like "no, I am not the judge. I'm also a parent. I've been through tough times. You know, I struggled as a parent too, you know, I'm in this with you." Yeah. So, I have to help them feel safe with me.

**Aníbal:** Safe, that's the words. And so, you share with them your experience and your parts as a father.

**Paul:** Yes, yes.

**Aníbal:** We should all expect having parts and being reactive parents, right? It's the only way to become less reactive.

**Paul:** Yes. Well, so this is the other thing that for me has been so fundamental in changing the way I understand and the way I work, which is our reactive parts, how we respond to our reactive parts, because I think basically the way we grow up and even our professional training before IFS is to be critical of our own reactive parts. You know, they're just they're just getting in the way. They're creating a problem.

**Aníbal:** Exactly.

**Paul:** For me.

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**Aníbal:** For me too.

**Paul:** So, with IFS I now understand that our reactive parts are allies. They're actually allies. They're important. They help us. There is so much important, valuable information that our reactive parts carry when we welcome them. So, yes, temporarily they can get in the way until we have a relationship with them and listen deeply to them. And once we're in relationship to them, once we've really witnessed them, heard them, why how are they trying to help, you know, all of the things that we do with a part? And then I ask them a really important question. I say "Ok, So, what do you have to offer me about this client?" So, if it's parents "What do you have to offer me about these parents?" But I do this with all my clients when I have parts that react to them. "What do you have to offer me about my client or about my work with my client"

**Aníbal:** Or about myself also.

**Paul:** Yeah, well, right. Because sometimes my parts are resonating with my client's parts and other times they're just reacting. They have a strong reaction because of something they're picking up in the client. And it might be more about me, you know. So, sometimes basically the message is there's an issue that's very close to home for you. That's what the part is telling me. You have to work on something here in order...If you're going to be able to be with this client, you have to do your own work. So, sometimes it's a deep insight about the client and what they're actually really needing. I'll just share one example. This is not a parenting case, but this is a client who told me that he wanted IFS. But then, any time I would try to guide him into connecting with parts or focusing inside, would get extremely annoyed with me and critical of me and tell me it wasn't working. So, I had parts that got very intimidated by him because of how hard she would be, how critical he would be of me. So, I had to do a lot of work with my parts and I realized he was triggering for me memories of my father and how intimidated I felt by my father. Had lots of parts triggered by this relationship with him. After I spent all this time with them and listening to them and wondering what was going on for me, taking care of, I had to take care of a lot of my parts. And then I asked all my parts "Ok, so, now what do you have to offer me about this client?" And what I got was I've been totally ignoring the relational piece of my work with him. I had been so focused on just trying to get him to do IFS that I totally was missing that for him a lot of what was happening was about our relationship, and that he was trying...His parts were trying to put me into a particular role in relationship to him. He was trying to work through stuff with his father.

**Aníbal:** Ok, yes.

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**Paul:** He had a very complicated relationship with his father. And he wasn't conscious of that. You know, his parts were trying to recruit me into being in a particular role that he can work through. And once I understood that and that came from asking that question "What do you what do you all have to offer me about my client?" And then I just like this is what this is what's going on. It just shifted entirely how I could approach him. I could relax the part of me that was trying to get him to do IFS, and I could begin to focus on trying to understand the parts of him that were doing this and what was the dynamic they were recruiting me into and then I'm just curious. So, what is he needing from me?

**Tisha:** You really bring into focus the value, it sounds like, in your teaching and in your clinical work, the value of honoring those reactive parts.

**Paul:** Yes.

**Tisha:** There's a lot of emphasis on that in your work. It sounds phenomenal. Would you be willing to talk about a little bit about the work with Direct Access that you teach us as an essential IFS skill?

**Paul:** Sure, I would love to do that. So, I teach this seminar for people who've graduated Level 1. And one of the things that is so common for people after Level 1 is that there's so many clients who don't take to going inside right away.

**Tisha:** Yeah.

**Paul:** You know, coming out of Level 1, most people don't know what to do. You know "what do I do?" They're not going, you know...There're clients who take IFS easily "ok, yeah, I can handle that." But what do we do when it's hard for them to unblended, when you know, they don't get it right away. So, that's where we have to do Direct Access and you just get introduced to it a little bit in Level 1, you don't really learn it. But as it turns out, for a lot of our clients, that's really where we need to start. You know, we need to really be doing Direct Access. And then we have clients who we have to do Direct Access with for quite a while, because often they've had so much trauma that their system is just too protected. But I have clients even who can do the insight work, and

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work with their parts, can even access Self- energy. But there are times when, still, parts totally take them over.

**Tisha:** They won't unblend.

**Paul:** So, we have to be able to bring in Direct Access when it's needed. Again, people often get stymied, they get stuck like "I just don't know what to do." And so, being able to be comfortable with bringing in Direct Access at those moments, when it's needed...

**Aníbal:** It's precious, yes.

**Paul:** Is really, really important.

**Tisha:** Yeah.

**Paul:** So, yeah. So, I think it is a very essential skill. I also say I think it's harder. I think it's a lot harder than following the protocol and guiding people to go inside.

**Aníbal:** Paul, do you sit with parents and can parents, give you some space to do some Direct Access? That happens?

**Paul:** To do Direct Access with parents?

**Aníbal:** When you are working with parents about their children?

**Paul:** Well, so, just to be clear, So, there're two different kinds of Direct Access, right? There is...

**Aníbal:** Explicit and implicit, yes.

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**Paul:** Explicit and explicit. So, the explicit is really when people are already pretty familiar with their parts. So, then if I say to them "Can I can I talk to that part directly?"

**Aníbal:** Yes, the explicit one.

**Paul:** "Just let that part be blended and I'll just talk to it directly." You know, that's fine, because they know what we're doing. But with a lot of our clients and often with parents, especially in the beginning...

**Aníbal:** You go implicit.

**Paul:** It's implicit Direct Access.

**Tisha:** So, just talking about what parts you see and how to reflect kind of what's there and what you're hearing so that they can get the language?

**Paul:** Initially, I might not even be talking about parts.

**Aníbal:** Yeah.

**Paul:** Initially, if they're blended with a part, I just want them to feel...So, I'm being the Self for their system. And initially I'm just relating to that part understanding that that part needs to be heard, needs to be understood, acknowledged, before I can relax. So, that's all. I'm just trying to be as...

**Aníbal:** Validating.

**Paul:** I'm just trying to be as present and attuned to the part they're blended with...

**Aníbal:** Validating that.



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**Paul:** As I can so, that it really feels "Ok, he got it. He really got me." And once that part feels that, then generally it can relax and then something else might be possible depending on the on the client. But initially, I'm not talking about it as a part. I'm not mentioning parts at all. I'm just being as present from Self-energy as I can be.

**Aníbal:** Just present.

**Tisha:** Yeah.

**Aníbal:** I was just trying to understand how much this technique, so interesting technique Direct Access can be in your toolbox when you sit with parents talking about their children.

**Paul:** Right. So, the most important thing that I'm doing initially, in Direct Access, is working with my own parts.

**Aníbal:** Ok.

**Paul:** Because my own parts are the ones that are getting in the way of me being really in Self-energy with this blended part.

**Aníbal:** Makes sense, yes.

**Tisha:** The training that you do for the post Level 1 on Direct Access is that online? Do all Level 1 participants have access to you when they want to deepen their understanding and get less clunky with Direct Access? How can people find out and link up with that?

**Paul:** Yeah, so, no, I don't have a training on that online. The Level 2 called deepening and expanding has Direct Access in it.

**Tisha:** Yeah.

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**Paul:** So, people do that Level 2. They will get more about Direct Access. So, in Australia I'm going to be doing a two-day workshop on Direct Access.

Aníbal: That's right. You should come to Lisbon too. We have to plan that.

**Tisha:** Yes.

**Aníbal:** I'm just seeing these interesting topics that you have been visiting in your wonderful journey, the power of presence in Internal Family System Therapy, their experiences as a parent, as you said, the importance of honoring our reactive parts as a source of valuable information about ourselves and then IFS and climate change. Wow. And another one that I love, I don't know if we have time today or we have to schedule another talk, The gifts of our Exiles. That is huge. I am very curious about those topics. IFS and Climate Change and The Gifts of our Exiles. And you say, somehow, that, and I believe it's really a common experience that we fear approaching exiles and approaching exiles is frightening for most of the less experienced practitioners. Could you tell us a little bit more about IFS and climate change before we go into exiles? Huge topic.

**Paul:** Sure, I would love to. So, yeah, climate change. You know, at this point, we need to be really calling it our climate emergency. Yeah, that's something that I feel very deeply. You know, my own experience has been that it's really hard. It's just so hard to hold my awareness of the reality of it and hard not to not feel totally overwhelmed, totally helpless in reaction to it. But also, to feel isolated. I can also often feel isolated. Less so now, but, you know, there's this sense of we're all needing, you know, just living our daily lives take so much attention and energy.

**Aníbal:** It is.

**Paul:** I often have this very disturbing feeling of that we're all living in denial, like something, terrible things are about to happen and we're just going about our lives as if it's not, it's not going to happen. I hear people talking about things that are going to be happening in the future. And I say, you know, what about climate change? You know, how is that going to affect, you know, all these plans that you're talking about? Finally, cities are beginning to actually plan for climate change. And that's been some relief for my system, actually. When I see that actually there are organizations in cities that are finally taking it seriously...

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**Aníbal:** Some very, very seriously, some very slowly.

**Aníbal:** My city is all...Burlington is all fueled on renewables.

**Paul:** Yes. Yeah, it's a relief when people around me are like...So, my synagogue just made a decision to have solar panels covering our parking lot.

**Aníbal:** Right.

**Paul:** At what an important thing for just for my parts, like "Ok, we're doing something." But when we don't know what we can do and being helpless in regard to something so frightening is a really hard place to be. Anyway. So, two colleagues and I created a workshop. Beth Davenport and Corky Becker. We created a workshop and it's based on a model of dialogue created by an organization called Public Conversation Project. Their name has since changed to Essential Partners, but they created a model of dialogue in the nineteen eighties when it was a very polarized time around abortion. So, you had the pro-life groups and groups who felt that a woman's right to choose was really important.

**Aníbal:** It was.

**Paul:** And there was a shooting in Boston, people were murdered in clinics.

**Tisha:** Yeah, I remember that.

**Paul:** So, they created this model of dialogue and it was actually based on skills of family therapy.

**Aníbal:** Good.

**Paul:** And they brought together the leaders in Boston from both sides and they met with them for a year in these dialogue sessions.

**Aníbal:** Wow, that is huge.

**Paul:** And at the end of the year, they gave a press conference where they talked about how they still disagreed with each other, but they had become good friends and they all agreed that they needed to calm down the bitterness of the public conversation around this. And they agreed that there needed to be conversation and dialogue and to be able to deal with their differences. Anyway, so, we integrated that model and IFS to create a method for helping people talk with each other about their parts around climate change.

**Tisha:** Wow.

**Aníbal:** Interesting, make sense, makes a lot of sense.

**Paul:** So, it was a structured approach that would guide people through identifying the protective parts of them that come up around climate change and then help them go...Ok, so, what's underneath the protective parts? What are the most vulnerable parts? And can you be with them and hear their concerns and fears and then look at, how people look at what's their vision for how they would like to be engaged in around climate change and what gets in the way, you know, what parts of them get in the way. And so, it was a process that I would say universally what people went through this workshop. And they would come through it feeling so relieved that connecting with these parts and also feel like they don't longer felt so isolated in their reactions and felt more hopeful, felt like there was something that they could do.

**Aníbal:** Can make a difference. A huge difference.

**Paul:** Yes. Yeah. So, to me, it's so key to overcome our isolation and to connect with other people. I want to just recommend this book by Joanna Macy, who is a Buddhist activist, and she wrote a book called *Act of Hope*. And she has a wonderful model of guiding people through their grief and despair around what's happening to connecting with other people and finding a way to listen to your heart and really respond from your heart with other people. What is it that I can do? And she...There's one key piece that I think is really important. She says that there are three narratives that are happening in our world right now. One is the narrative is business as usual. There's nothing that we can't solve. We just keep doing what we're doing and...

**Aníbal:** And see what happens.

**Paul:** And any problems that we have will figure them out, will solve them. We don't have to do anything different. The second narrative is the narrative of doom. We're watching now our civilization fall apart. There's nothing we can do. It's hopeless. We're on a path of self-destruction and things are just going to fall apart.

**Aníbal:** That one is sad and is risky, yes.

**Paul:** And the third one is what she calls the great turning. Basically, she says we have to go through a dark time. Things have to look really bad and get bad. We have to go through it to come to the other side. So, that's the hope. The hope is that we can and will get to the other side if we have that understanding and approach. So, basically, it's dangerous, really. The first two are pretty dangerous if you, you know, she's not guaranteeing we're going to have the great journey and get to the other side. It's really, which narrative is going to win out.

**Aníbal:** Very interesting and very helpful.

**Paul:** And what I notice is that I have parts that spend time in all three places. I have parts who sometimes feel like, yes, the doom narrative. That's the true one. That's really what's happening. I have parts who say "you just have to focus on your life. You know, you have a lot going on in your life. Just do that. Just you have to business as usual. You just got to do what you got to do." And then, hopefully, the story I'd like to hang out in the most is the hopeful one. And one of the things that's helpful there is she says you have to stay connected to your heart and it's not a managerial place. It's not like you can't be measuring by, you know, how successful are you being? It's really more, you know, listening to your heart, listening to your soul, coming from Self, really. That's the place we really need to try to land.

**Aníbal:** But we need to do it not alone. And maybe connected and in groups.

**Paul:** Right. Exactly.

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**Aníbal:** Because somehow, we need almost heal the world. We need to do it together.

**Paul:** Right. Exactly.

**Tisha:** This work and this this particular dialogue lands for me, for a lot of my clients who are up at the university, they're studying environmental science and natural resources and sometimes get so hopeless in learning about the world ecology that they want to change majors or drop out of school. And so, thinking about workshops that exist that can really get them in touch with their parts and create connections with other people it sounds so relevant for right now and I'm so glad you're doing this work and illuminating it. This is the first I'm hearing about IFS and climate change together. So, it's really exciting. Paul.

**Aníbal:** Very welcome, very necessary. Yes. Paul, I'm enjoying so much this conversation, and I'm just wondering if we need another time to sit together again, as soon as possible, for going into this wonderful topic of The Gifts of our Exiles. I think this needs a good space to be visited and for you to lead us on these qualities of exiles. You say, and I'm quoting you from your workshop in last conference, IFS conference. You say "for most people, the prospect of approaching exiles is frightening. Our protectors tend to see our exiles as dangerous, shameful or fragile. They are unable to see beyond the exile's burdens, and even the exiles often think they themselves, they are that burden. And so, this is a workshop where you, somehow, help us to see the aliveness, the joy, the passion, the qualities of exiles. So, this is so, important. I would like to invite you to sit with me and Tisha again.

**Paul:** Sure, I would love to.

**Aníbal:** Yes, that would be wonderful. And we have a couple of questions regarding future that we can, maybe, offer you for the second time together.

**Tisha:** We could do like a condensed interview so people can really focus in on the exiles if they're interested.

**Paul:** Sure.

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**Tisha:** Wonderful.

**Paul:** Ok. Sounds good.

**Aníbal:** Would you be willing to do it with us soon? We will find a time.

**Paul:** Sure. I would be happy.

**Aníbal:** Wonderful. So, by now we want so much thank you for all that you shared today with us. Is there anything that you want to share with us? As a link to our next conversation regarding the future of IFS? If you want to share with us, is there something that you'd like to share with us about the future in IFS as you see the model unfolding and exploding and also evolving, is somehow evolving.

**Paul:** But first of all, I want to say I'm grateful to the two of you because, you know, I'm just aware of how much passion there is in me around the things that I've been sharing today.

**Aníbal:** There is, yes.

**Paul:** So, yeah, that's felt good. You know, there is something in me that has felt good about this opportunity to share my passions with you. And, you know, whoever might be listening, the future of IFS is actually a pretty big topic.

**Aníbal:** I know.

**Paul:** You know, there's so much potential in IFS.

**Aníbal:** That would be another episode.

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**Paul:** Yeah, there's so much potential.

**Tisha:** Let's schedule two more.

**Paul:** You know, I'll just say that another area that I'm also passionate about that I didn't even mention yet is how IFS helps us deal with diversity and in particular in this country with...

**Aníbal:** So important.

**Paul:** Racism and the way that white supremacy has affected our culture and all of us. So, that's another huge area...

**Aníbal:** Topic.

**Tisha:** Great.

**Aníbal:** Wonderful.

**Tisha:** Thank you so much for your open hearted and vulnerable and really insightful talk today. I really appreciated it. And I appreciate reconnecting with you. It's probably been ten years. And, yeah, I've always wanted to take another workshop with you. So, hopefully that will happen. We had a mini version today.

**Paul:** Yeah. Yeah, yeah. Thank you, Tisha. It's great to connect with you and also you, Aníbal. This has been this has been great for me.

**Aníbal:** Thank you. Thank you so, much. We used to say it was a joy to be here with you and Tisha. We used to say, we hope we can keep meeting and sharing this model, our work and our lives, but we have to say speak soon.



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**Paul:** Yes.

**Aníbal:** Because we are going to have a second episode.

**Paul:** Yes, I look forward to that.

**Tisha:** It's necessary. Thank you.

**Aníbal:** Thank you so much.

**Tisha:** Take care.

**Paul:** Take care.

**Tisha:** This was an IFS Talks episode, an audio series to deepen connections with the Internal Family Systems model through conversations with lead trainers, authors, practitioners and users.