

INTRA-TP
INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF TRAUMA
AND PERSONALITY DISORDERS

How to structure the work with dissociative parts. A guide for therapists

Dolores Mosquera

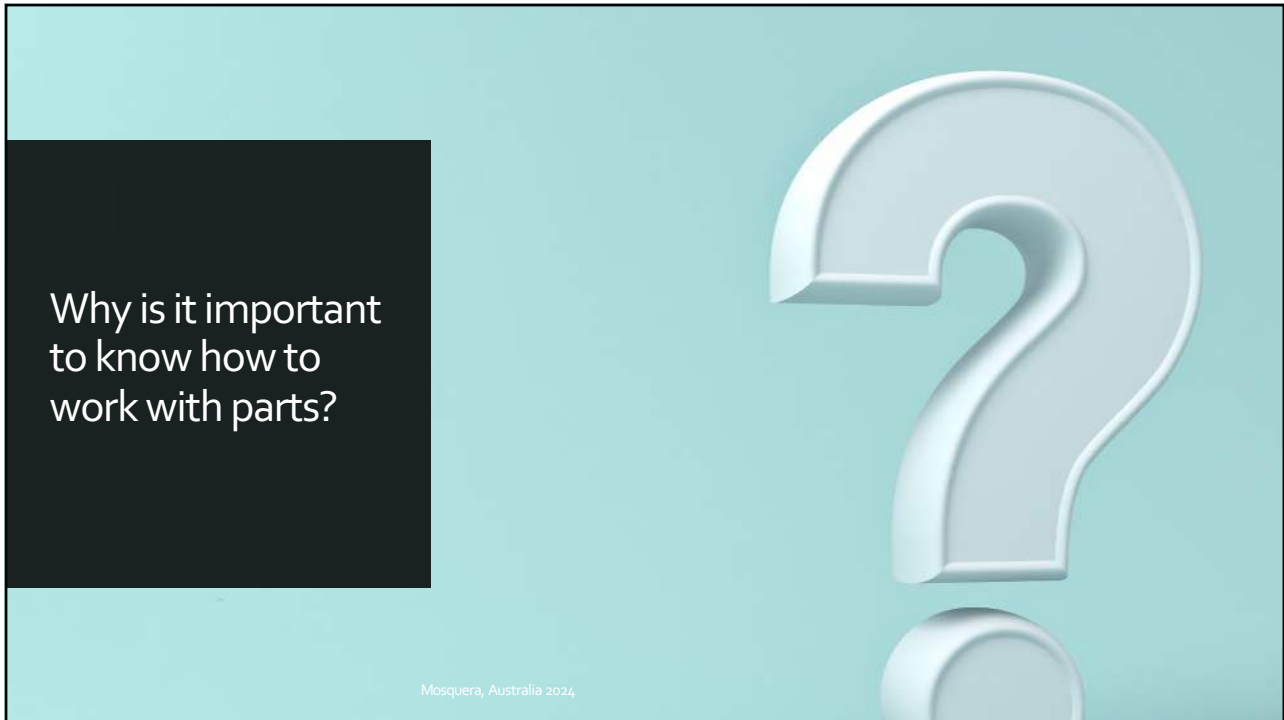
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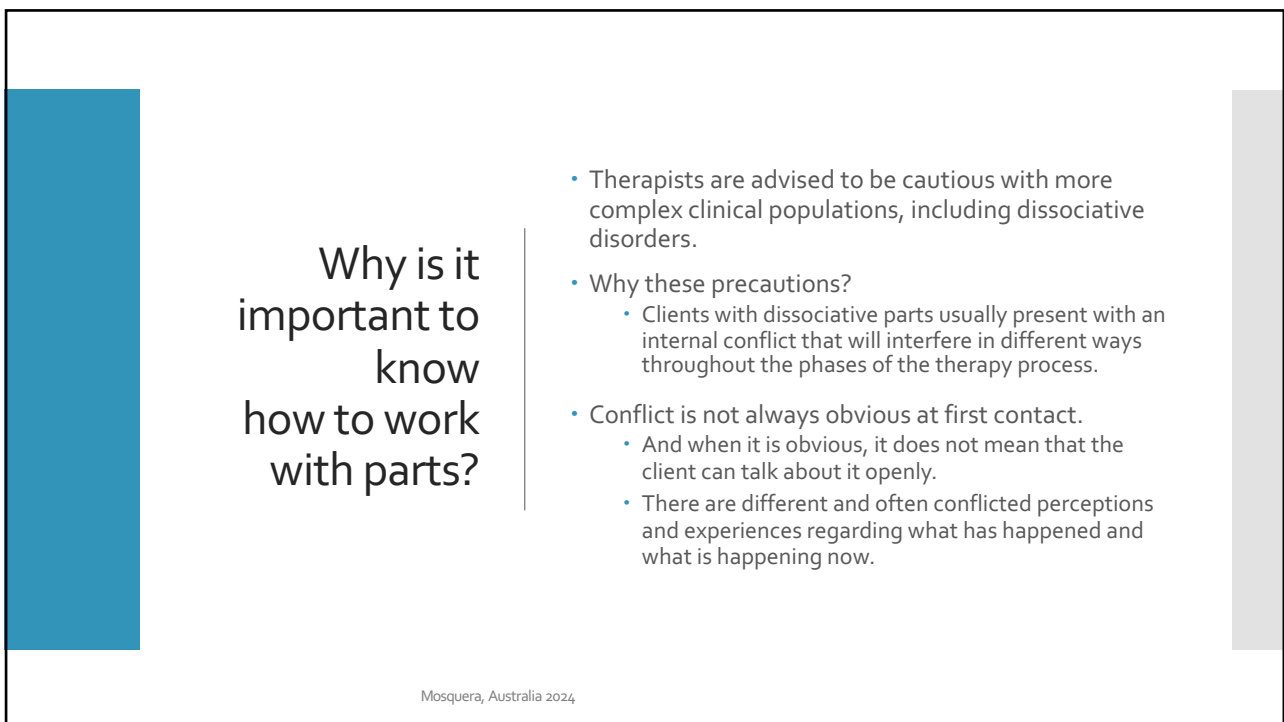
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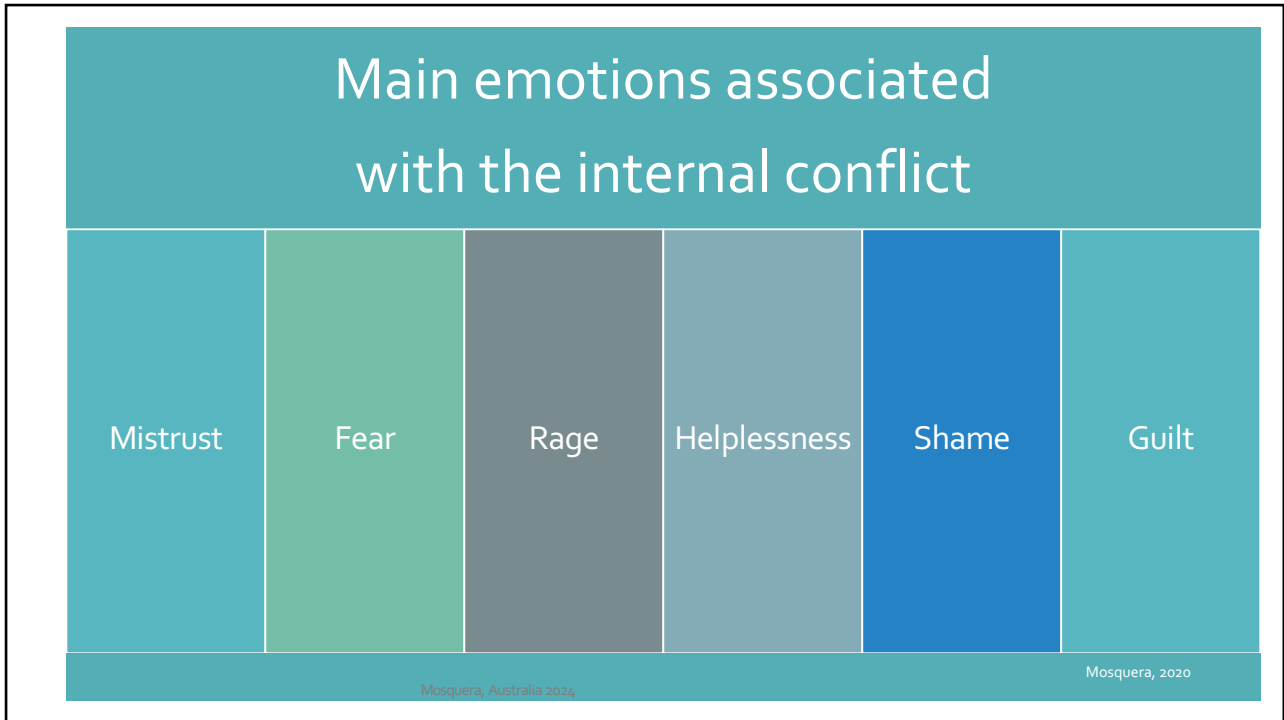
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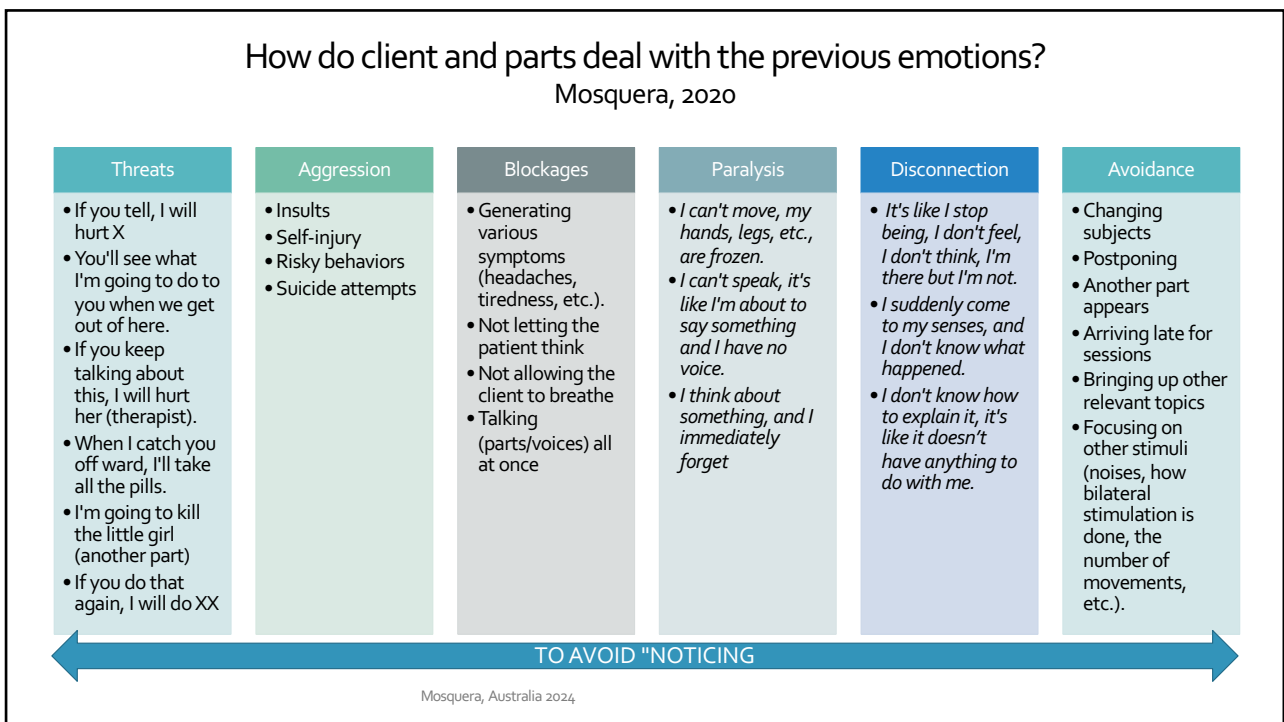
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Why is it important to know how to work with parts to do trauma work?

- Trauma-related disorders primarily involve **lack of awareness**.
- The traumatized person is unable to realize:
 - Traumatic events **happened**, or traumatic events **happened to "me."**
 - Some aspect of the events happened to "me."
 - My actions in the present belong to "me."
 - Events have ended, meaning that the past is not happening now .
 - The "I" of then is part of the "I" of now.
 - I am here and now, not in that moment.

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Not Real, Not True, Not Mine, Not Me

The inability to realize is a central feature of dissociative disorders, which have been called:

- Syndromes of non-realization (Janet, 1935)
- Multiple reality disorder (Kluft, 1983)

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Trauma-related Phobias and avoidance

- Traumatized clients develop an extreme (phobic) avoidance of their experiences over time.
 - Because they do not have the skills and support to understand and manage inner conflicts and strong emotions
- They tend to either space out, shut down, or switch to another part in order to avoid inner experience.
- Treatment should address these phobias from the beginning, as not tending to them can result in destabilizing the client (Kathy Steele).
- Therefore, processing trauma will be complicated without addressing these difficulties.

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Relevant concepts for the therapeutic work

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Relevant concepts for the therapeutic work

Regarding the internal system

- Trauma related phobias
 - Phobia of traumatic memories
 - Phobia of inner experience
- Internal conflict
 - Phobia of parts
- Low mental efficiency
 - Difficulties thinking and processing information
- Internalization of messages
- Problems with differentiation
 - Perpetrators from real life are often confused with parts of the self.
- Problems with differentiation and time orientation
 - Some parts don't know "the danger is over", while others don't know "it happened"

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Relevant concepts for the therapeutic work.

Regarding preparation

- Lack of basic Adaptive Information in some/all parts
- Different degrees of realization in different parts
- Difficulties tolerating all range of emotions (including positive ones)
- Dysfunctional positive affect
 - What seems positive might not be adaptive like idealization or defended "alternative realities"
- Reducing the conflict
 - Promoting empathy, cooperation and collaboration

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Relevant concepts for the therapeutic work
Regarding processing trauma

Different view or meanings of the traumatic event/s and different experiences in parts Often in conflict- hence, can block processing	Which parts can be present or want to be present but need help Which parts don't want to be present or cannot Sometimes it can be as simple as validating that it is voluntary
Difficulties to notice the body and/or tolerate body sensations in some parts Sensations from other parts can be experienced with overwhelm	Difficulties maintaining dual attention / dual awareness Some parts have more difficulties to stay present or interfere with the capacity of other parts

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Based on the book (2019):

Working with Voices and Dissociative Parts
A trauma-informed approach
Dolores Mosquera

- Section One: Laying the foundation
- Section Two: The building blocks
- Section Three: Challenging parts and voices
- Section Four: Differentiation, Co-Consciousness, and Integration
- Section Five: Clinical Case Examples, conceptualization

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Important aspects in the development of the Adult Self

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The Adult Self: A seed

We proceed from the implicit understanding that the future self is already present, as a seed.

Being confident in the client's capacities and possibilities of improving.



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Key aspects in the development of the Adult Self (Mosquera, 2019)

- Keep the whole system in mind
- Always be respectful
- Develop healthy curiosity through modeling
- Validate all parts
- Be compassionate
- Promote dialogue, communication and understanding
- It's all about teamwork

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Always be respectful

- Accept how the client experiences what happens, even if we do not agree with it.
- Respect the feelings and thoughts of every part, and do not take sides
- Use the language preferred by the client to talk about their inner world
- Avoid name-calling and dismissive comments
- Respect the timing of the different parts
- Encourage clients to make decisions
- Avoid interpreting as much as possible

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Accept how the client experiences what happens, even if we do not agree with it. Examples

I understand why you see it that way, it must be very scary to have a voice that keeps telling you to hurt your self, but it's possible that it might be repeating what it learned to say

I see why you feel that way, it sounds very confusing, but I wonder if there are other reasons behind that behavior

Sure, that is not the best way to help you right now, but the part might not know how to do it differently yet. I think it can learn

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Respect the feelings and thoughts of every part, and do not take sides Examples

Don't worry if the part says those things about me. Maybe it did not understand what I was trying to explain. Can we be curious about why it thinks that?

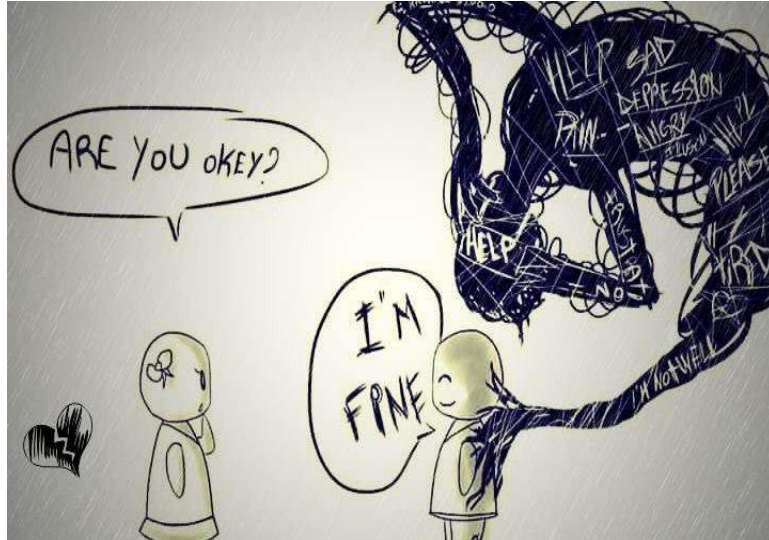
I am glad that the different parts can express what they think and feel; that is very important for therapy.

I understand it is confusing to notice all those different needs and goals inside. I think they are all valid and we can find a way to understand them and have them met. How about we take turns to listen and work with each one?

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Talking about
what happens
inside is not
easy



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Scheme to explore
the internal system
and understand
the conflict



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Lack of integration and the internal conflict

- Many of our clients live in a constant battle with themselves and their inner experience is not easily understood.
- Working with dissociative disorders requires an understanding of their internal structure on the part of both therapist and client.
- Learning to understand these parts of the self and their function is a crucial aspect of treatment.

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History taking in these cases

In addition to taking a clinical history, learning to pay **attention to the parts** of the self and **understanding the function and meaning** behind their disruptive behaviors becomes a crucial aspect of treatment

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An example

A client says: the part does not want me to feel better

What do we do with this statement?

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Possible answers

T: So **you think** the part doesn't want you to think that you can feel better.

Why would that be? What makes you think that there is a part of you that doesn't want to feel better?

T: Can we try to understand why the part might think that?

T: What is the part concerned about? Could the part be concerned about something?

T: What does the part think could happen if you were to feel better?

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Scheme to Explore Parts

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Scheme to explore the system of parts

Moment of onset	Information about the characteristics of the part or voice	Identifying the message from the voice
Exploring communication/interaction style with and among voices and parts	Identifying where the messages were learned	Exploring the function
Exploring the needs in the different parts and in the Adult Self	Exploring alternative ways of responding	Exploring the logic of change in parts

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Setting up the Therapeutic Work and Structuring Clinical Sessions

GENERAL STRUCTURE OF THE THERAPEUTIC WORK (TW)

1. Exploring the voices and parts (content, tone, message, age, moment of onset, etc.)
2. Encouraging clients to listen to the voices and pay more attention to the parts.
3. Exploring the triggers (what was happening when the part showed up or when the voice spoke)
4. Exploring and processing dissociative phobias
5. Assessing the degree of differentiation and time orientation in client and parts
6. Exploring and validating the function of the voice
7. Identifying and validating resources, feelings and needs
8. Exploring, modeling, and practicing alternative ways of responding. Offering suggestions when needed
9. Identifying and exploring missing pieces
10. Reaching agreements, developing cooperation and team work

Reference: Working with voices and dissociative parts. A trauma-informed approach. Mosquera, 2019

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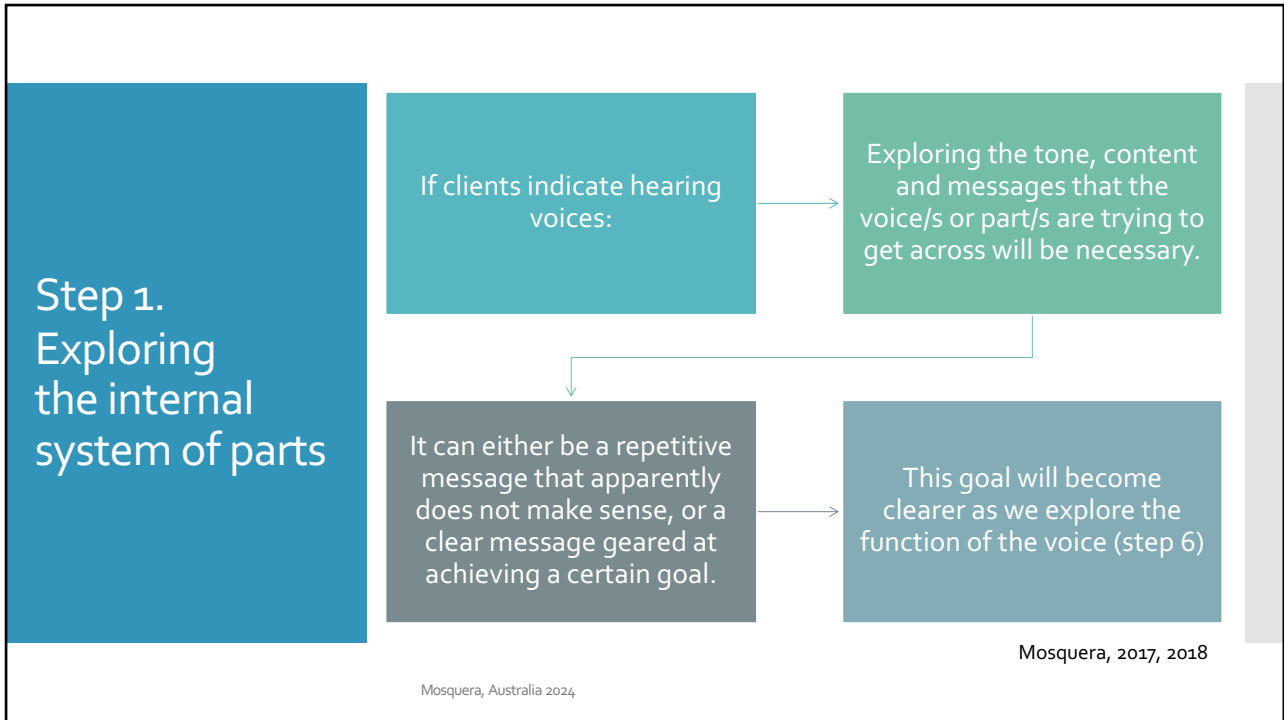
**STEP 1. EXPLORING THE INTERNAL
SYSTEM OF PARTS**

The first step is geared at getting **an idea** of the **internal representation** of the parts and how clients make sense of what happens inside.

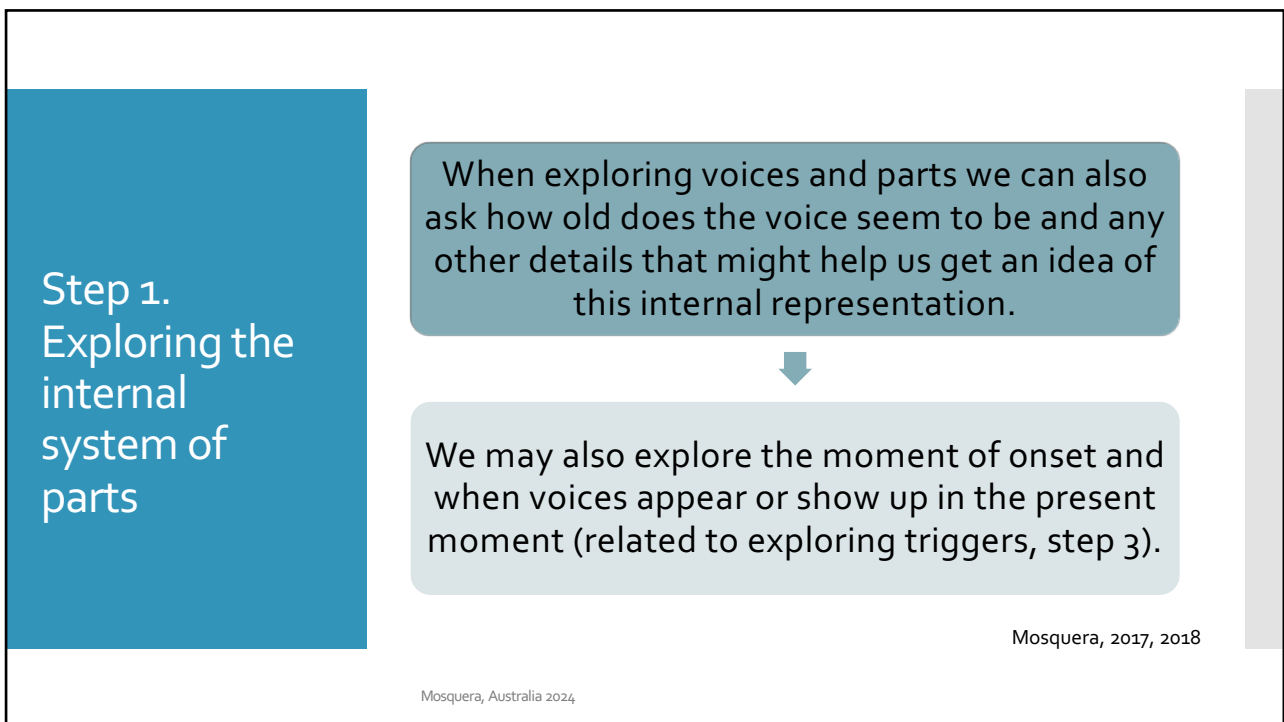
Without forcing anything or getting into too many details in the more complex cases.

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STEP 2. ENCOURAGING CLIENTS TO LISTEN TO THE VOICES AND/OR PAY MORE ATTENTION TO THE PARTS

To gather the information in the previous step, we also need to help clients become more curious and interested in their inner world.

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**Step 2.
Encouraging clients to listen to the voices and/or pay more attention to the parts**

- Would you be willing to try to understand what the part is trying to say?
- Can we explore those voices that show up sometimes?
- Can we try to be curious about what might be underneath those messages?
- I know it's difficult but can we try to be curious about what is happening with the little girl part?
- Is it possible to try to notice what that part might be feeling?

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STEP 2. ENCOURAGING CLIENTS TO LISTEN TO THE VOICES AND/OR PAY MORE ATTENTION TO THE PARTS

Promoting curiosity may
be a relatively easy
task with certain types
of parts.

However, it becomes
more complicated –and
for that same reason,
much more crucial– with
challenging parts.

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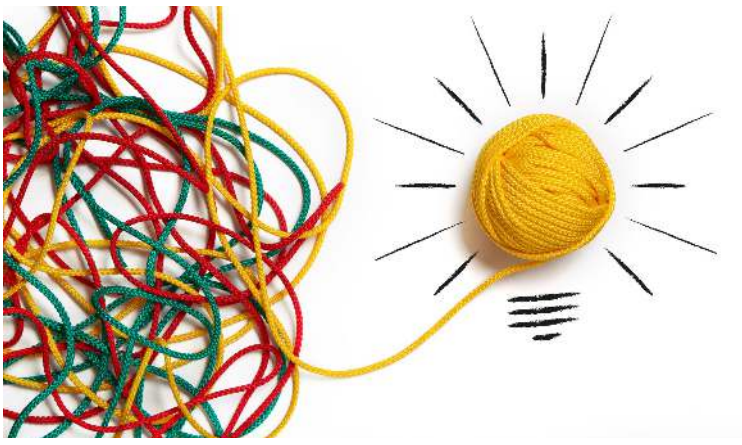


STEP 2. ENCOURAGING CLIENTS TO LISTEN TO THE VOICES AND/OR PAY MORE ATTENTION TO THE PARTS

Helping clients
understand that the
voices and parts
are actually trying
to help will be one
of the main
ingredients towards
developing
curiosity.

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STEP 3. EXPLORING TRIGGERS

The third step towards the beginning of the work must include exploring when voices or parts show up.

The best way to explore triggers is to explore **what was happening when the parts showed up.**

This is related to the triggers and therefore, the function.

We can identify point of conflict and possible targets.

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**Step 3.
Exploring
triggers**

Most of the time parts and voices get triggered when the client feels bad, frightened, or concerned or needs something that seems unacceptable (comfort, closeness, etc.)


Also, when something happens that reminds them of the past, especially those voices who are still stuck in trauma time.

There are some exceptions; for example, when clients have been punished for feeling good, parts will also get triggered when in pleasant or enjoyable situations.

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**STEP 4. EXPLORING AND PROCESSING
DISSOCIATIVE PHOBIAS**

Phobias among parts are one of the main obstacles that prevent the natural flow of treatment.

It is important not to assume anything or interpret what can be happening.

By checking how the different parts and the Adult Self feel towards each other we can get perspective into the process taking place inside.

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**Step 4.
Exploring and
processing
dissociative
phobias**

Exploring trauma related phobias is also a way to organize the work

It gives relevant information about the conflict inside and what needs to be addressed

Sometimes by exploring the process client and therapist can get perspective and understand better

However, in some moments, when the client is too frightened, it can be useful to desensitize the phobia (obstacle)

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Step 4.
Exploring and
processing
dissociative
phobias

When emotions are dysfunctional, such as when one part is frightened of another part, or feels disgusted or ashamed, we can use the **processing phobias procedure**, a tool developed to reduce the phobia.

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STEP 5. ASSESSING THE DEGREE OF DIFFERENTIATION AND TIME ORIENTATION IN CLIENT AND PARTS

Distinguishing between internal and external elements is not easy for clients with complex traumatization.

A crucial issue with differentiation is related to separating *what is happening now* from *what was happening then*.

Parts and voices are often stuck in trauma time, not knowing the danger is over.

Therefore, they keep responding as if the danger was still happening.

Using the same type of responses needed when the client was in trauma time.

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Step 5.
Assessing the degree of differentiation and time orientation in client and parts

Assessing time orientation in different moments of the work will be needed.


As well as helping clients be oriented to the safety of the present moment when they lose dual attention.

This is especially important when there are parts that never had dual attention and still need to learn that they are safe now—or at least start to consider the possibility that this may be the case

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STEP 6. EXPLORING AND VALIDATING THE FUNCTION OF THE PART/S

It is important to remember that parts/voices are there for a reason.

- When they are not needed anymore they start blending and eventually integrating.

Finding out **what parts are really trying to achieve** is a core aspect of treatment.

- Clients will often give filtered information (interpretations) about motives

Our position: Each part has its reasons for doing what they are doing

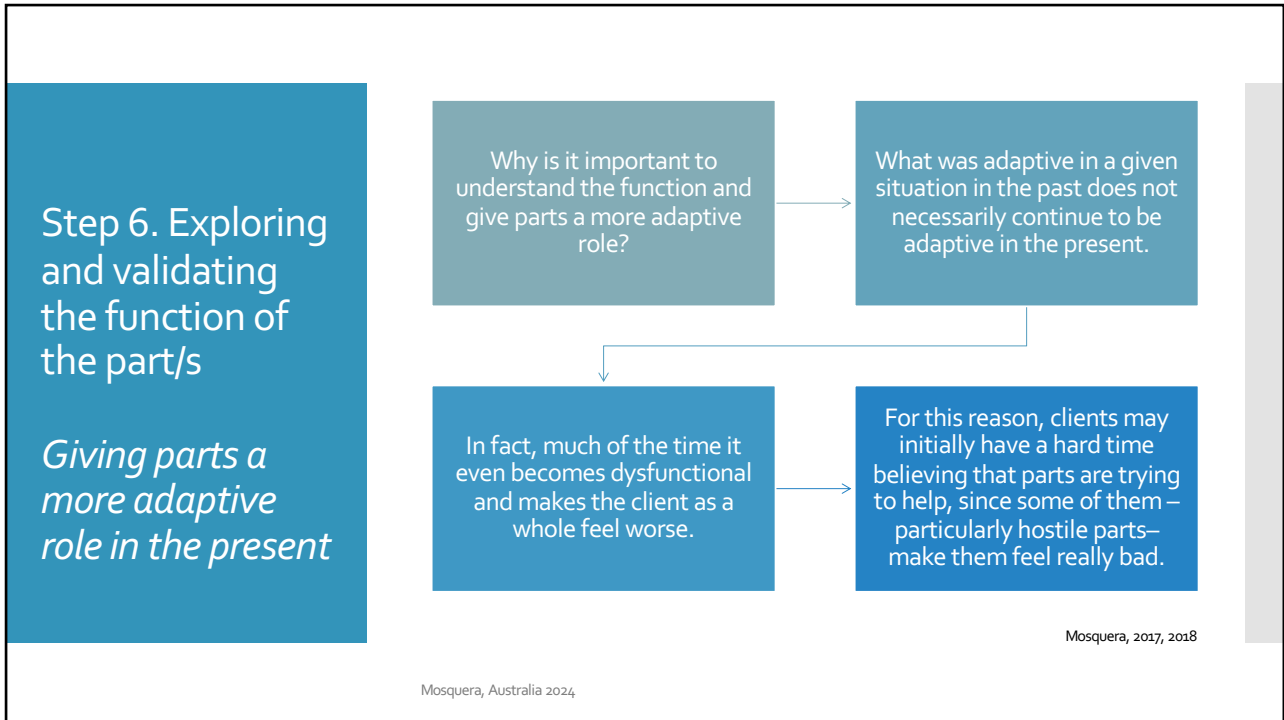
- Therapists must always validate the reasons
- Whether or not they are adaptive in the present

Remember that some parts were initially created to perform a certain role

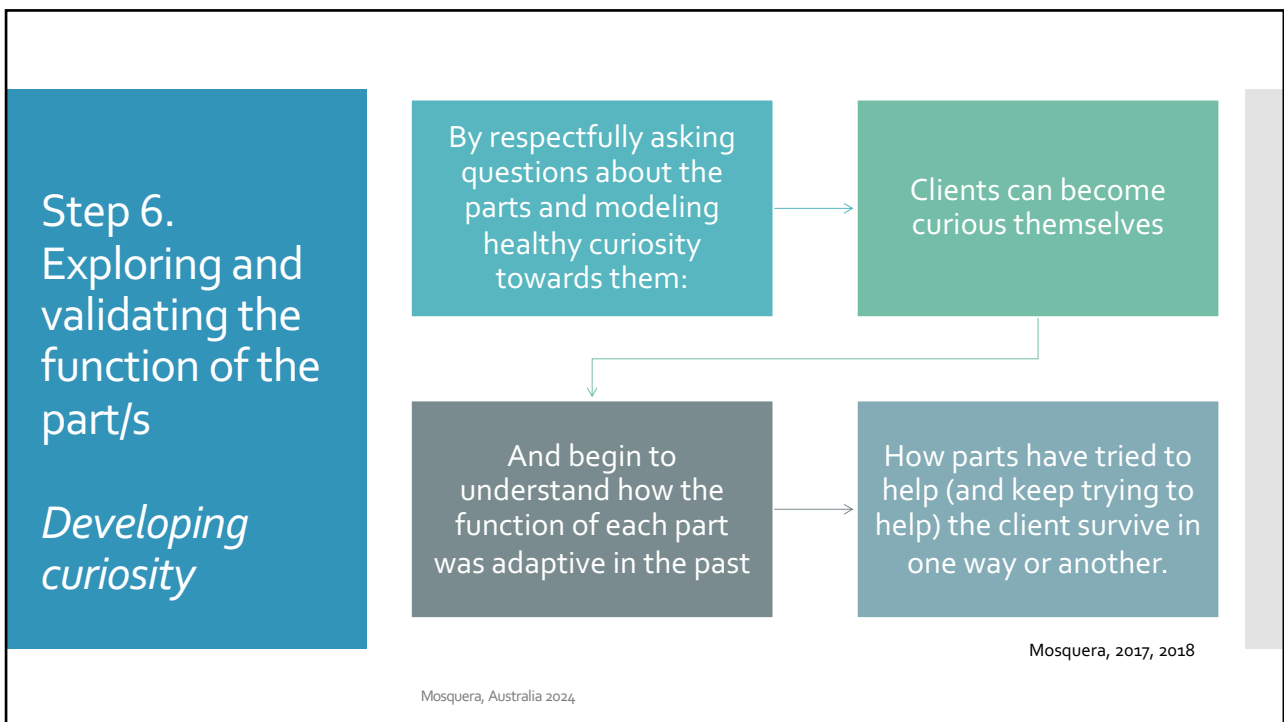
- And they have helped clients survive what they had to go through in their earlier years.

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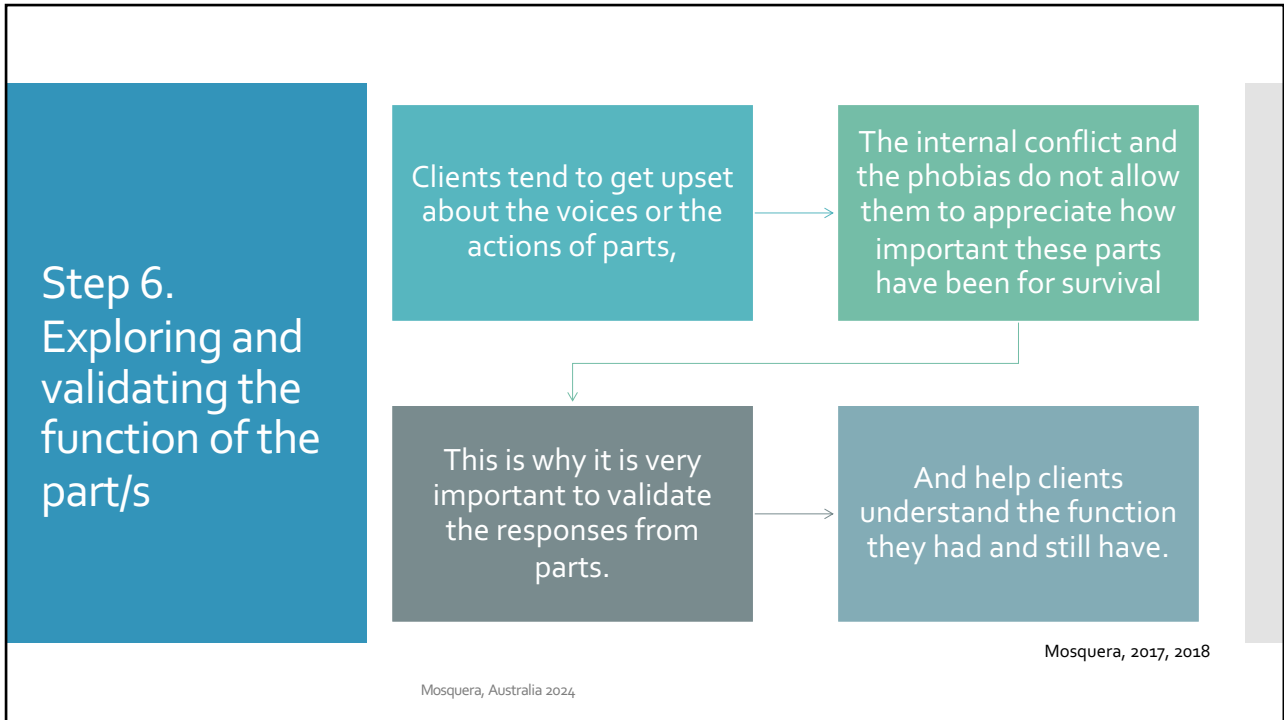
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STEP 7. IDENTIFYING AND VALIDATING RESOURCES, FEELINGS, AND NEEDS

Clients with different parts and voices, often have mixed and even opposite feelings.

The same goes for their needs; one part may have needs that could be in direct conflict with the needs from another part.

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STEP 7. IDENTIFYING AND
VALIDATING RESOURCES, FEELINGS,
AND NEEDS

Identifying and validating
feelings and needs is a
crucial part of the work .

It can help all the different
voices and parts to feel
heard and understood,
which tends to be a missing
experience for these
clients.

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STEP 7. IDENTIFYING AND VALIDATING
RESOURCES, FEELINGS, AND NEEDS

The key in this type of
validation is to make
sure *therapists accept
all the different
emotions and needs*

And help both clients
and the system of
parts to understand
them and accept them
as well .

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**STEP 7. IDENTIFYING AND VALIDATING
RESOURCES, FEELINGS, AND NEEDS**

To internalize a new way of responding to their feelings and needs, parts need to experience a completely new attitude

Which is done through modeling, so it can end up sinking in.

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**Step 7.
Identifying and validating
resources,
feelings, and
needs.**

Exploring the needs of the different parts of the system can help us:

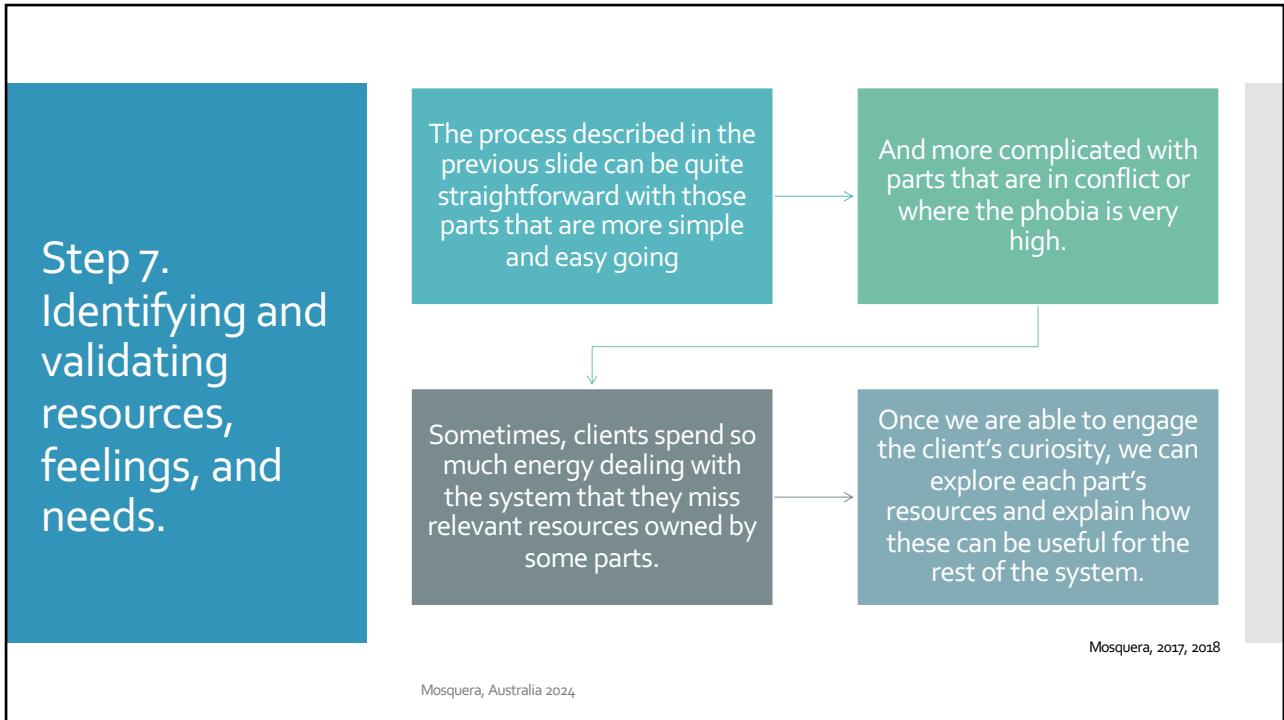
- Identify some of the resources that need to be developed
- As well as those that already exist, even though they may not be seen as such by the client.

When clients are able to understand the adaptive function of the part:

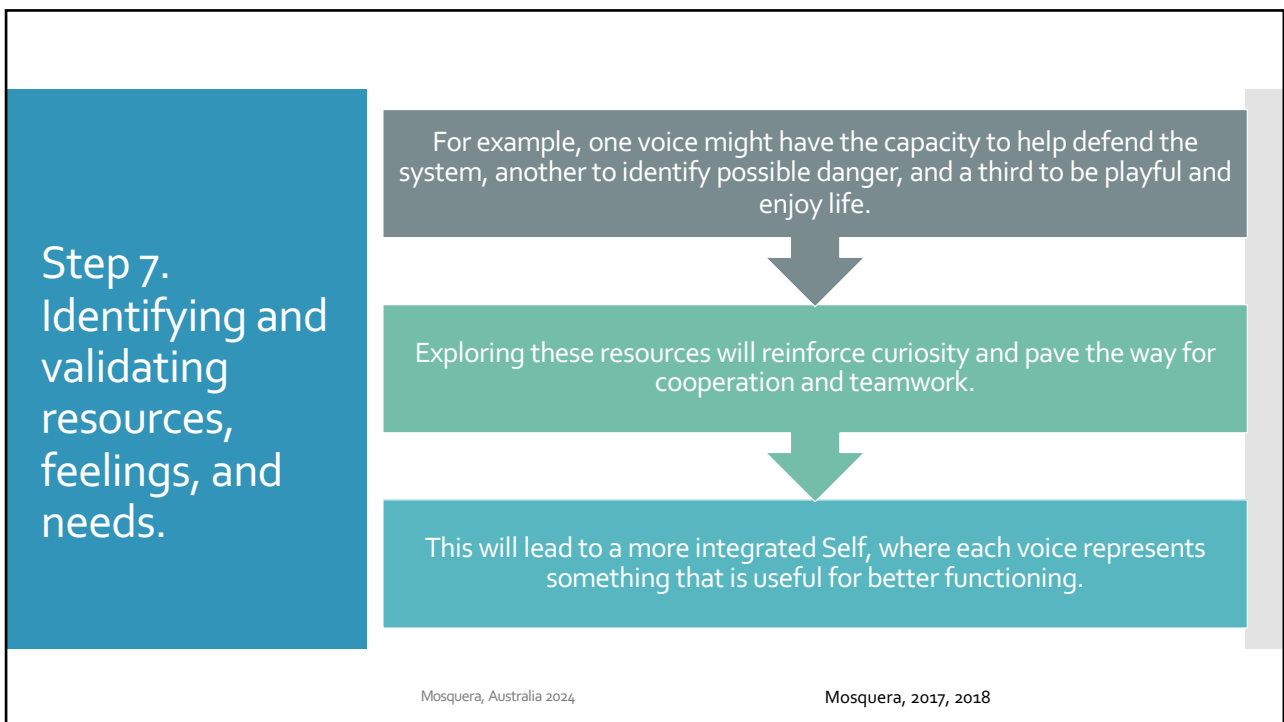
- We can begin to see its capacity to help and identify existing resources within the system
- Once these resources are identified, they can be reinforced; even shared with other parts that need them.

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Step 7.
Identifying and validating resources, feelings, and needs.


When resources or capacities are identified, they can be installed with BLS

We can also reinforce any relevant *insight* that the client and the system of parts achieve as a result of the work.

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STEP 8. EXPLORING, MODELING, AND PRACTICING ALTERNATIVE WAYS OF RESPONDING

Whenever any of the current strategies used by any of the parts or voices is not working in helping the client feel better:

The focus should be placed on helping the client and parts think of alternative responses.

Therapists can suggest/model more useful or adaptive ways in which the voice can truly help the person

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Step 8.
Exploring,
modelling, and
practicing
alternative ways
of responding

*A key message:
Now there are
options*

It is important to help clients and parts realize
that they **have options now**

That they can make decisions based on their
needs and wishes

And that this is okay now (not dangerous or
forbidden)

When parts are stuck in trauma time this is a huge
challenge

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Step 8.
Exploring,
modelling, and
practicing
alternative
ways of
responding

Another aspect to remember is that most of the
time, voices or parts are not aware of the effect
their comments/actions have on the rest of the
system


Or of the fact that their behavior/function is not
currently adaptive

Encouraging clients to communicate with parts
of self them about comments or behaviors that
are frightening or bothersome is a key aspect in
the progress towards better functioning.

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STEP 8. EXPLORING, MODELLING, AND PRACTICING ALTERNATIVE WAYS OF RESPONDING

Sometimes the simple fact of checking in with the parts or voices will have a positive effect

They are not used to having anyone be interested or to check in with them.

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**Step 8.
Exploring,
modelling, and
practicing
alternative
ways of
responding**

When clients can communicate what works and what does not work for them, voices and parts can modify their way of responding.

Initially this must be done with the therapist's help, using questions aimed at helping them realize this:

Does this part know how much this upsets you?

Is this voice aware of how frightened you become when he says those things?

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Step 8.
Exploring,
modelling, and
practicing
alternative
ways of
responding

Most of the time clients will say something like:

- *"Of course, it knows, that is why she does it"*
- *"Yes, the part knows, it just doesn't care"*

But this is just an automatic reply

- That reflects the way the system is used to functioning .

In these cases, it is important to say something such as:

- *I understand you see it this way, but could you please check if this voice really knows how upsetting this is?*


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Step 8.
Exploring,
modelling, and
practicing
alternative
ways of
responding

Psychoeducation can be useful but won't be enough with some of the parts.



The best way for the new attitude to really sink into the system of parts will take place through modeling (consistently).

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Example
ISN'T ANOTHER
WAY TO TEACH,
IT IS THE ONLY
WAY TO TEACH

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Step 8.
Exploring,
modeling, and
practicing
alternative
ways of
responding

Many clients have not had healthy models to learn from

Many of the basic elements we all learn as we grow up, still need to be developed

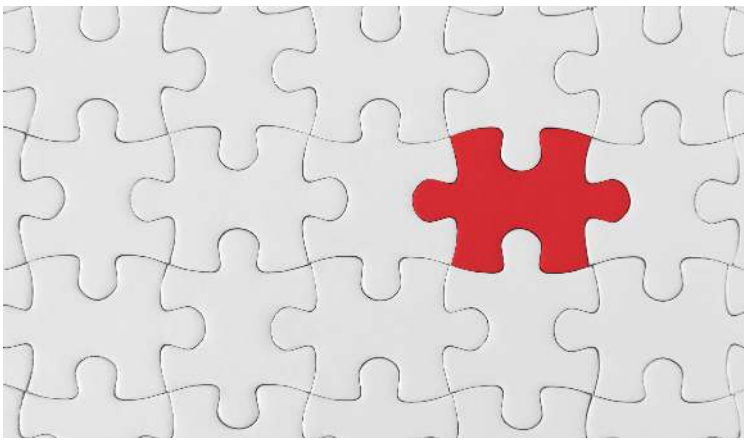
A frequent situation we will find in the work with this population is that some parts have very little repertoire to pull from.

As the therapist models a new way of responding, the Adult Self and other parts that are listening in, can observe how a new interaction would look and sound like.

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STEP 9. IDENTIFYING AND EXPLORING MISSING PIECES

Another aspect that can be relevant is to explore the missing pieces.

For instance, clients that never get angry or sad would be communicating a need in a very indirect way.

Sometimes it is obvious that there are missing pieces, other times, we find out later on in therapy, as we get to know the client and the system of parts.

It can be helpful to use BASK (behavior, affect, sensation, knowledge) model to explore what might be missing.

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**Step 9.
Identifying and exploring missing pieces**

When something does not fit it is important to point it out

- Be curious and check if there are any other parts or voices.

This can be done in a general way:

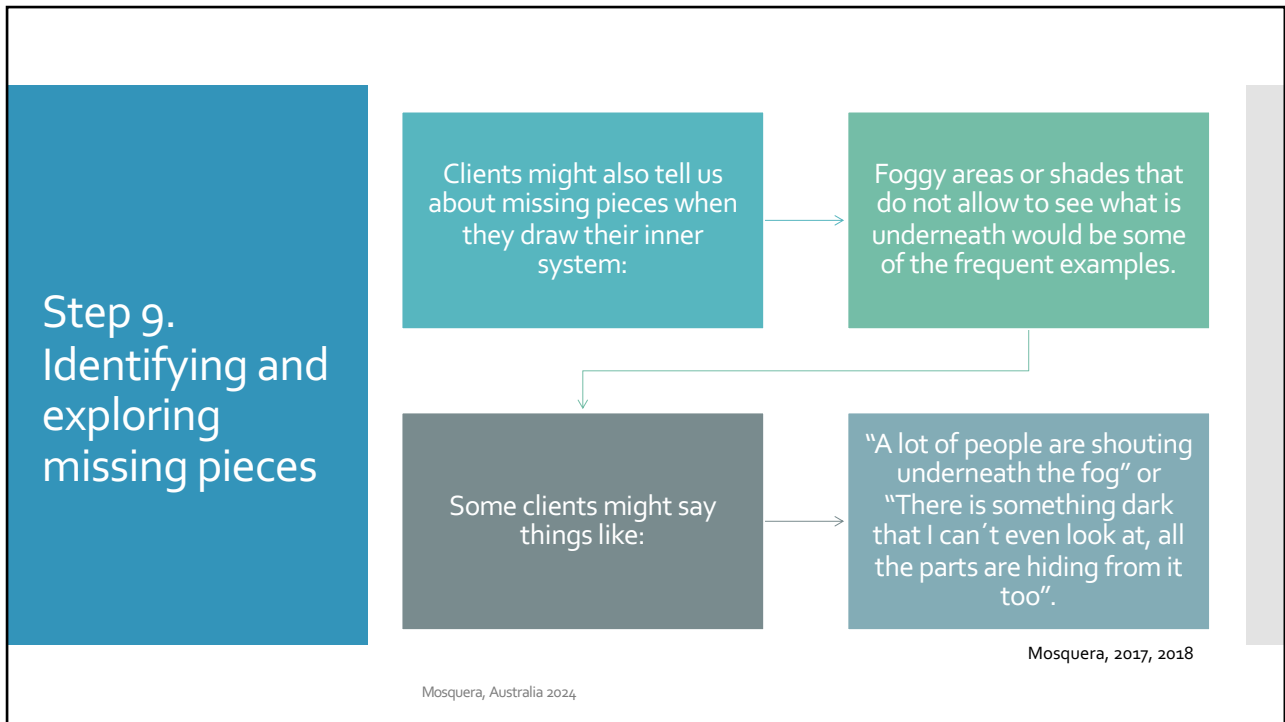
- "Is there any other part or aspect that is difficult for you to think/talk about?"

Or introduce it while using some of the exploration tools. Examples:

- Drawing: Is there anything that might be difficult for you to draw/illustrate?
- Action figures:
 - Are there any figures that are more difficult for you to chose?
 - Are there any aspects that might not be represented there in those figures?
- Meeting place:
 - Do you think we should leave any empty chairs?
 - Could there be other parts/aspects that might me more difficult for you to look at?

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STEP 9. IDENTIFYING AND EXPLORING MISSING PIECES

Often clients do not speak about some parts or voices due to:

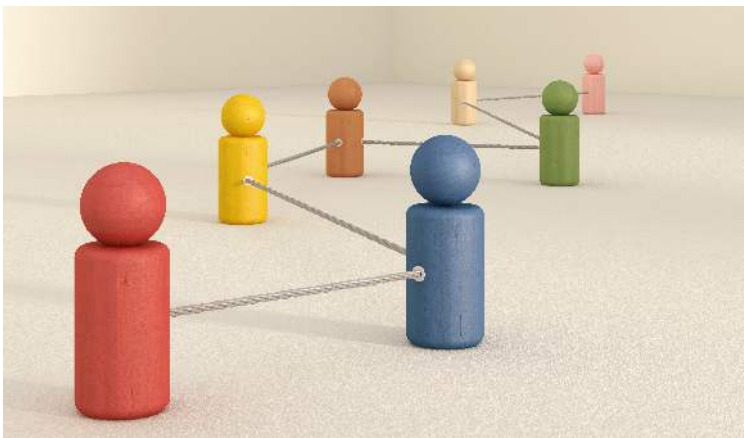
- Phobia of those parts.
- Being so used to censoring those aspects that it's automatic
- "Not me experiences" - it's unthinkable to think about them as parts of self.
- Not having permission from other parts - threats

Why explore missing pieces from time to time?

- It can be a huge relief to be asked about aspects they have difficulties bringing up on their own.
- When clients can acknowledge the existence of those parts or the conflict within them, we can help clarify
- Some parts finally feel the opportunity to be seen/heard which can have therapeutic effects.

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**STEP 10. REACHING AGREEMENTS,
DEVELOPING COOPERATION AND
TEAMWORK**

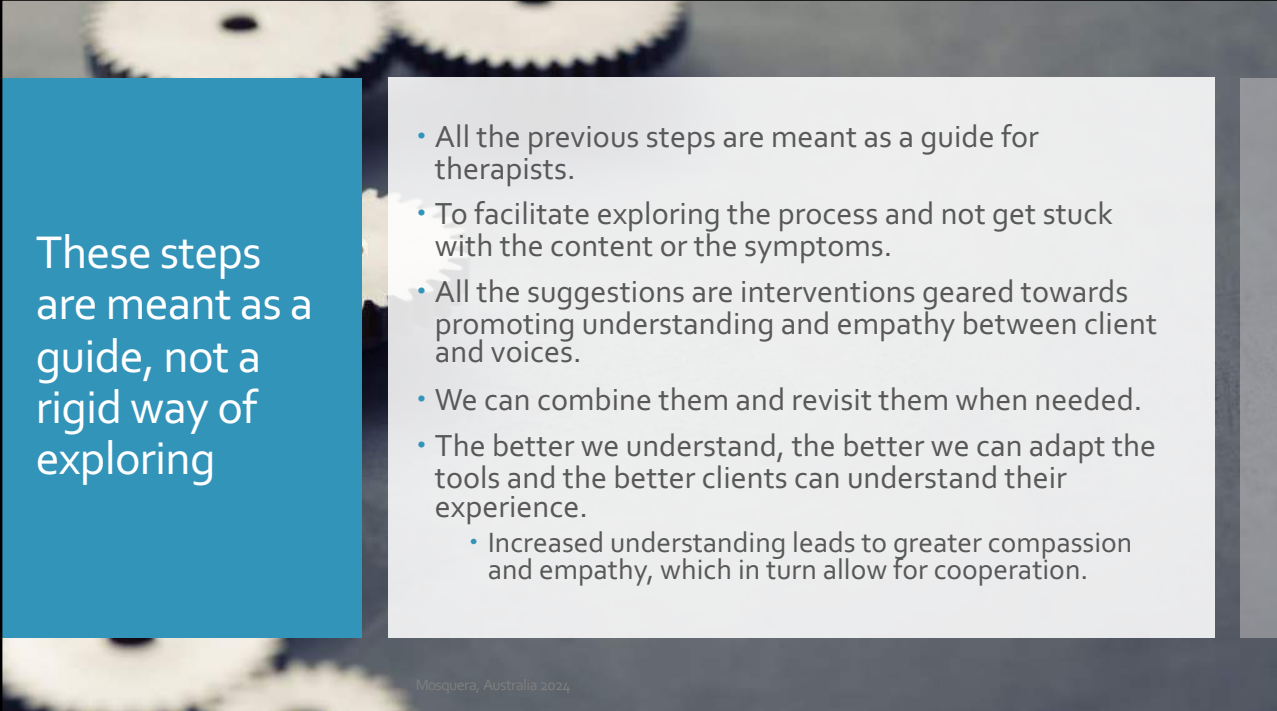
As a last step, the system must reach agreements or compromises that all voices can accept, for the benefit of the entire system/person.

This step is one of the final steps, but we can begin introducing this idea with the previous aspects.

Therefore, it is so important to model ways in which the system of parts in general can work together, so they can eventually learn to cooperate in a joined way towards achieving these goals.

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These steps are meant as a guide, not a rigid way of exploring

- All the previous steps are meant as a guide for therapists.
- To facilitate exploring the process and not get stuck with the content or the symptoms.
- All the suggestions are interventions geared towards promoting understanding and empathy between client and voices.
- We can combine them and revisit them when needed.
- The better we understand, the better we can adapt the tools and the better clients can understand their experience.
 - Increased understanding leads to greater compassion and empathy, which in turn allow for cooperation.

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GENERAL STRUCTURE OF A CLINICAL SESSION (CS)

- 1. Explore the effects of the work done in the previous session**
 - CS #1.1. Explore how the client and the parts/voices left the previous session
 - CS #1.2. Check how the week has been for the entire system
 - CS #1.3. Explore whether during the week the client has followed the indications offered in the previous session
- 2. Work on issues that came up during the week or come up during the session**
 - CS #2.1. Explore if the voices and parts were active or not during the week. Check how the parts are doing
 - CS #2.2. If the voices appeared during the week or during the session, we must explore what triggered the voices
 - CS #2.3. Explore the reaction of the system towards the voices or parts
 - CS #2.4. Address any issues or difficulties as they appear
 - CS #2.5. After any intervention, check how the rest of the parts feel about what just happened
 - CS #2.6. Check whether learned messages or behaviors continue to take place after the voice or part has started practicing new adaptive behaviors
- 3. Closure for the session.**
 - CS #3.1. Reinforce the work done throughout the session and validate the efforts made by each part of the system that was active/participated during the work
 - CS #3.2. Check on the usefulness of the interventions applied during the session
 - CS #3.3. Check that the client is stable and grounded, oriented in time
 - CS #3.4. Summarize what has been learned in order to help clients organize the work done during the session and to set goals for future sessions. Enhance realization
 - CS #3.5. Anticipate potential obstacles and problems to prepare clients for future difficulties

Reference: Working with voices and dissociative parts. A trauma-informed approach. Mosquera, 2019

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