

## Principles of Working with Sub-personalities or Ego States

1. Pain is contained within ego states and mental/emotional pain can be effectively resolved and removed if done on a sub-personality level (Badenoch, Emmerson, Forgash, Swartz, Watkins- Bibliography for Ego States). This is consistent with the triune brain model. Sub-personalities generate feeling states which give rise to schemas which produce our countless array of thoughts.
2. It is important to strengthen the core self while resolving pain in sub-personalities. Some term this ego strengthening, elements of which include life and coping skills such as self-assertiveness, stress management, meditation, and physical activity. The same strengths that were used to survive traumatic experiences can be used to overcome the trauma's effects. (Handout *Rediscovering Personal Strengths*).
3. A fundamental principle of working with Ego States is "Expression is healing, suppression is injuring." The natural tendency is to deny and suppress unwanted feelings. If these can be accepted and channeled into healthy expression healing is underway. Ego states are most often younger and they think and express themselves concretely. Art therapy, sand tray, and talking in concrete terms are often most effective.
4. Ego state functioning falls along a continuum. One way to represent this is as follows:

|                          |                           |                              |                             |
|--------------------------|---------------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Normal Well-Adjusted     | Neurotic                  | Personality Disorder         | DID/MPD                     |
| Adaptive Differentiation | Defensive Differentiation | Pathological Differentiation | Traumatized Differentiation |

As the individual moves to the right along this continuum the sub-personalities are less fluid and more rigid in their separation from one another and how they function.

5. If there are indications that dissociation may be playing a role in the daily functioning of the client it can be informative to measure the degree of dissociation. The *Dissociative Experience Scale* (included in handouts) can be a valuable tool.
6. It is important to make a distinction between general or chronic and discrete or acute traumatic events. Chronic traumatic events are most often childhood trauma and acute trauma is often an event like a car accident or assault. EMD/R is most effective with discrete or acute traumatic events. Other approaches are beneficial for chronic traumatic events.
7. Extremely painful discrete traumatic events must be broken down into the aspects or elements of the event in order to not overwhelm the client in the trauma resolution work. Repeated traumas such as in childhood abuse respond better to general pain removal with sub-personalities initially rather than EMD/R on the entire childhood trauma.
8. There are sub-personalities that can be extremely difficult to work with, such as "protector parts." It needs to be understood that these parts usually have taken some of

the worst and most chronic pain. When this is realized the therapist's resistance to them can turn to appreciation and respect and then the therapeutic relationship with them takes an important step forward. Validate their pain, listen. Encourage these Protectors to teach you and learn from them. They can become tremendous assets in the healing process.

9. Sub-personalities can often be identified by the client's more extreme emotional states or behaviors. For example, extreme anger or rage, dysthymia, helplessness and disempowerment, and dependency not infrequently can be manifestations of an ego state dealing with pain. This can also be the case with addictions, such as alcohol, food and porn.
10. Even as there are sub-personalities that can be difficult to work with there are inner resources that can be extremely helpful. (Handout *The Higher Self*).
11. Letting go of pain is not always desirable to sub-personalities for a number of reasons. Some of these reasons may become obstacles to letting go of pain. (Handout *Reasons People Don't Let Go of Pain*).
12. Energy work can contribute to working with sub-personalities. Einstein's formula  $E=MC^2$ , suggests that matter and energy are interconvertible. Quantum physics points to energy and consciousness being interactive and that energy behaves in ways that are consistent with choice. We are just beginning to recognize the ramifications of these theories for the healing process.