



Internal Communication When Dissociated

Having a Healthy Relationship
with Yourself

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**This book is dedicated to
survivors of childhood trauma and abuse.**

*You are braver than you believe, stronger than you seem, and
smarter than you think. – Winnie the Pooh*

**If you experienced trauma or abuse in your childhood, you may
have a Trauma Coping System. This system is part of God's
design to allow children to cope with devastation, trauma,
abuse, and fear.**

*I believe God was both happy and sad when He created the
Trauma Coping System as a response to childhood trauma. He was
happy that children would have a strong internal resource in the
face of unthinkable situations, but He was incredibly sad that any
child would ever have to use it. - Melissa Finger*

Internal Communication

Why Internal Communication is Important

Internal communication is an essential part of the healing process when you have a Trauma Coping System. Each of the parts that you experience internally is an aspect of who you are. Communicating with these parts allows you to become more and more connected with who you are. As you connect with who you are, you are in a better place to receive healing from the past trauma and beliefs that these parts of you experienced.

It can feel a little bit strange when you first began to “talk to yourself.” This is normal. The reality is that you have been communicating internally your entire life, you just didn’t know it. Being intentional about your communication shows value to yourself and allows you to learn things about yourself that you didn’t know before.

Internal communication can also lead to identifying unmet needs, learning to self-comfort, and becoming aware of safe and unsafe situations in your present-day life. Each part of you holds a different awareness of yourself and the world around you. It is hard know and understand what they are experiencing if you are not trying to communicate with them.

When you are going to the grocery store, a part may be experiencing abuse related to food. When you are attending church, a part may be experiencing wrong beliefs they were taught about God. When you are trying to work a job, a part may be experiencing the fear of punishment for not doing something exactly right. Each of these experiences leaves you with emotions that don’t always match your present-day situation. Without internal communication, it can leave you feeling confused and unable to function.

As you listen to the concerns, thoughts, and needs of your internal parts, you better understand your trauma, find hidden trauma beliefs, and can seek healing for these specific needs. In this process, you will build trust with your parts, and you will all learn to work together. Earning trust with yourself is an important part of the healing process.

Ways to Communicate Internally

There are four primary ways we recommend beginning internal communication.

- 1) Listen to your own thoughts: this can be very overwhelming at first. Your thoughts may be jumbled, flying fast, or your mind may go completely silent when you try to listen. That's ok. It may take time to connect with your own thoughts, but you can do it!
- 2) Write down what you are thinking about: it can be unsettling to read your own thoughts. Some of these thoughts you have spent your life pushing away, and many of these thoughts have been hidden for your entire life. Writing them down is a way to acknowledge what is happening internally.
- 3) Acknowledge needs: when you are beginning to listen internally, you will discover a variety of needs that your system has. These needs are usually for comfort or safety. Sometimes it may be as simple as wanting a toy or an ice cream cone. While other times it may be more complicated like the need to quit your job or run away from your life. Acknowledging these needs exist does not mean you have to meet them all.
- 4) Negotiate meeting the needs you have acknowledged: regardless of how odd the need may seem to you, find a way to meet it. If the need is one that can be easily met (toy, snack, blanket, etc.) you can easily find a way to accommodate. If the need is a bigger issue (unsafe job, fear of driving, etc.) then you must look at the root of the need and find ways to assist your parts in feeling safe. *This is usually done best with the help of a counselor or an educated support person.*

These internal communication skills can be done casually or more formally. You can casually listen throughout the day or when you notice an increase in anxiety or depression. You can have more formal listening sessions when you have some quiet time to yourself. These times can be internal meetings or simply a one-on-one with a part.

One-On-One Communication

Sometimes there is a specific part that needs attention. This may be a scared child part, an angry protector part, a neglected infant part, or another part with a specific need or concern. In these cases, it is important to be a good listener.

You should start all of these conversations with a desire to learn and understand the part and the role they have played in your life. Begin with respect and concern for the well-being of the part – after all, this part is part of you. The more you learn about yourself, the easier it will be to find healing for the deep wounds you have been carrying.

Internal Meetings

Internal meetings are meant to include any and all parts that are willing to join. No one is forced to join. No one has to talk or participate even if they do join. Remember, you are earning trust with yourself throughout the communication process.

- 1) Set a time to meet. This can be nightly before bed, first thing in the morning, every Saturday, or even “let’s meet in 5 minutes.” Setting the time allows your system to prepare and gather.
- 2) When the time for the meeting arrives, do a general announcement inviting all aspects of your God-given identity to come together for a meeting. Assure them no one has to talk, but you will do your best to give everyone an opportunity to have a voice. It is highly advised to ask the Lord to join the meeting as well. God is your Creator, He knows you best! Who better to have at your meeting?
- 3) Once everyone has gathered, you can go around and ask a general question like “do you have anything you want us all to know?” or “tell us something about yourself.” Or you can ask something more specific like “how was the experience we had this morning for you?” or “what do you think of our new co-worker?” Whatever the question it should accomplish one of two goals: getting to know yourself or assessing your response to a specific situation.

- 4) You can end at a specified time or go until everyone is done. Thank everyone for their participation, and remind them you are all seeking healing together. It may be hard and scary, but you have each other, and if any part of you has accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior, you have Him as well.

Talking with Protector Parts

Every Trauma Coping System* has protector parts. They can go by different names depending on what you have been taught. Some may call them fire fighters, protectors, defenders, or even warriors. Usually these parts appear fierce, unkind, or even harmful to you or to your life. But that is only at first glance. These parts are fierce, they are fiercely protecting you from things they have labeled as dangerous.

Experiencing childhood abuse or trauma can be very confusing for children. At that stage of life, there is not enough mental development to process or understand what is happening. Consequently, protector parts do their best to find cues of danger in an effort to stay safe from trauma.

If your abuser was a woman with blonde hair, the protector may label “someone with long blonde hair” as dangerous believing that if you don’t encounter this you will be safe. If the trauma happened while riding in a car, the protector may label cars as dangerous. If the abuse happened whenever alcohol was involved, then the smell of alcohol may be repulsive or the opposite could be true; the protector may use alcohol excessively to try to control or limit the danger. These “dangers” can be absolutely anything: a person, a smell, a place, a color, anything.

As an adult, you know that not all women with long blonde hair are dangerous, but your protector does not know or believe that. This “danger label” was created to keep you from the unthinkable. They will not give up the label easily.

You will typically feel the first warning that you have encountered something labeled dangerous with a sense of anxiety, depression, or maybe racing thoughts. If the encounter with the perceived danger continues this may escalate to internal insults and even swearing. If these warnings are still ignored, the protector may escalate to more

drastic measures in order to keep you away from danger. In her book *Trauma Coping Systems*, Melissa Finger discusses in great detail how to build a healthy relationship with these parts and how to find healing in these areas of trauma. For the purposes of this booklet, there are three keys to having a successful conversation with a protector part.

- 1) Always be respectful and kind. No matter how intense these protector parts may be, keep in mind that they have been carrying quite the weight of pain and an incredible responsibility to protect you from all danger since you were very little. They are likely exhausted and frustrated.
- 2) Seek to understand them before you try to express your own frustration with what they are doing. Ask genuine questions and show concern for the things they have labeled as dangerous whether or not you agree.
- 3) Try to find ways to honor their needs while maintaining healthy boundaries in your own life. *You may need help from a counselor or educated support person in order to do this.*
- 4) Seek healing for the root of the trauma and the beliefs that created the need for this self-protection.

Obstacles to Internal Communication

There may be obstacles you experience to internal communication. We will discuss three of the most common ones here.

- 1) Internal resistance – Your Trauma Coping System probably believes they have been doing fine this whole time without your involvement, so why talk to you now! Even though these are aspects of your own identity, internal trust generally starts at zero and must be earned by all. Be patient, be persistent, and seek external help when you feel lost or confused in this process.
- 2) Denial – The foundation of every Trauma Coping System is denial. This concept is too complex for the scope of this publication, but, in short, you will experience denial that your coping system exists, denial about the abuse or trauma, denial about who was involved, denial about the importance of your feelings, or denial in one of dozens of other areas. It is

important to push through this. Sorting out what is true and not quite accurate can be difficult, but it is an essential part of the healing process.

- 3) Overwhelm – When internal communication begins to open up, it can be very overwhelming. Your instinct may be to shut it all down. This is understandable, but it will not help you move forward. It is okay to disconnect from the internal dialogue for certain times of the day – like at work – but it is important not to neglect your internal system for long.

These obstacles may be very difficult to overcome on your own. It is important to seek help and guidance from someone who is educated in working with Trauma Coping Systems or with dissociation.

Final Tips and Suggestions

There are many different approaches you can take to healthy internal communication. Whatever your approach, remember to be kind to yourself. You have been through more than you realize, and every part of your Trauma Coping System was created to help you survive. They are doing their best, and so are you.

Seek to understand yourself better and find ways to connect with every aspect of who you are. You will encounter challenges all along the way, but if you persevere you may one day find yourself living a life you didn't think was possible.

Organizations You May Find Helpful

Deeper Walk International – www.deeperwalkinternational.org

Restoration in Christ Ministries – rcm-usa.org

Creatively Attached – www.creativelyattached.com

Lydia Discipleship – www.lydiadm.com

Trauma Healing Center, Inc. – www.traumahealingcenterkc.com

Books You May Find Helpful

Trauma Coping Systems by Melissa Finger

Trauma Coping System Devotional by Melissa Finger

Stranger in the Mirror by Marlene Steinberg M.D. and Maxine Schnall

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