

# DID, MPD, OR MULTIPLICITY: Responding to parts inside, with a focus on the kids

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Having parts inside can be challenging, but it can also be inspiring and wonderful! Getting to know your parts inside and fostering some kind of internal communication with them can help you feel better overall.

## WHY DO PEOPLE CREATE PARTS?

The human body and mind is unable to cope with overwhelming pain—emotional, mental, and physical—and so provides us with a number of avenues to escape pain. Numbing, splitting off, becoming unconscious, going into shock, and dissociating are all examples of the body's way of helping us survive unbearable pain.

When emotional pain and trauma get too intense, you must find other ways to cope. Creating parts allows survivors of trauma to survive events that they could not bear otherwise.

## WHY SHOULD I GET TO KNOW PARTS INSIDE?

It is important to get to know parts inside because they are a part of you and they effect how you are, how you feel, and how you act. Getting to know parts inside can also enrich your life. You may find yourself seeing things from a different point of view, or gaining insights into reasons for your or parts' reactions. Parts inside hold your history, your experiences, and some of your emotions and thus they are a vital part of you and shouldn't be ignored — to ignore them is to ignore yourself.

## HOW DO I GET TO KNOW PARTS INSIDE BETTER?

Some people are visual and see parts inside. Some hear voices, or just know or sense that there are others inside.

- If you are visual, see if you can let yourself look around inside. Some people do this with their eyes closed, some like to keep them open. You could draw or write out what you see.
- If you hear things, write down what you hear. Try putting different voices into different categories or lists that make sense to you.
- If you sense parts inside, what do you sense or know about them? Try writing it out.
- Sometimes there are parts inside who know all or most of everyone else inside. These parts are often willing to tell you about the others if you ask them. Take your time at this. If you begin to feel overwhelmed, you can stop and take a break. Going slowly and gently is very important. You've been pushed enough in your life; there's no need to do that now.
- If you approach your internal world with a spirit of openness and curiosity, and take it as slowly as you need to, you may find that you enjoy learning about yourself. It can be very validating. You may find that you begin to understand why you've felt a certain way, or why you've had certain needs. You may discover your own inner playfulness and joy.

## LEARNING MORE ABOUT YOUR INTERNAL WORLD

After you've met or been told about various parts inside, you may want to find out more about them – what they like, think, feel, want, and so on. Some parts are very unique and have very specific jobs or ways of being. Other parts are more like fragments and are less definable. Some function by themselves, others may be part of a group(s). Everyone is different, and there is no right or wrong way to be. You don't have to be like the multiples in movies or books. You can just be yourself.

## WHAT DO YOU AND YOUR PARTS NEED?

At some point it can help to find out what parts inside need, besides your respect and compassion. For instance, kids probably need a place to play and someone to hug them. Upset or worried parts may need reassurance, angry parts may want a place to be angry, and any part may want to wear certain clothes that

feel more like them (though where and when they are worn should be negotiated). Parts inside may need to feel their feelings, and to hear from you that is a good thing to do. They may need to cry, scream, or stomp around. You'll feel better if you let parts do what they need to do (within reason, and always keeping yourself and others safe).

It may feel like a loss of control to let parts do what they want, especially for someone who has prided themselves in having control or who has kept a lid on parts. You may need time to get used to the idea, and to talk about it with a therapist or supportive friends. Don't forget to start small. For instance, if you're uncomfortable with kids, you can always start by letting a kid play inside first, and then let a kid out only part way while you stay in control and see how you feel. Going slow is really okay; no one likes to be overwhelmed.

#### WHY DO YOU HAVE KIDS INSIDE?

Kid parts, just like other parts inside, are created, first and foremost, to keep you alive.

Kid parts inside made it possible for you to keep aspects of yourself that an abuser (or abusers) probably tried to destroy – such as your ability to feel, dream, and hope – and kids hold on to creativity, playfulness, curiosity, awe, and gentleness so that you could still have those things when you were safe.

#### WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU DON'T LISTEN TO KIDS INSIDE?

Kids can bring joy and happiness, as well as sadness, fear, and anger. Any of these feelings can be hard to deal with, especially if it hasn't been safe to feel them in the past. When it hasn't been safe to feel good or proud of yourself, to explore and question what you see and hear, to laugh and giggle out loud, to stomp about loudly when you're mad, or to cry without shame (all of which are healthy and natural) it can be hard to know what to do with those feelings when they come up. Some people feel ashamed or embarrassed, and try to hold those feelings in.

That isn't good for anyone to do, but when feelings are held by kids (as they frequently are) it means that the kids are stuffed down and silenced, and that hurts them. They'll start to feel bad about themselves, and rejected, hurt, sad, and mad. When this happens, older parts, adult parts, or main parts also feel those feelings, but they may not be aware that they are because they pushed the kids away. That is one reason why it's so important to create a space for everyone inside.

#### LETTING KIDS' PARTS OUT

This is where the challenge comes in. How do you create space for kids when you work, go to school, have a partner or a roommate, and are just plain scared?

Everyone needs to find their own way to let kid parts out — but sometimes knowing what other people have done can help. However you go about it, it's a good idea to take it slow and gentle. No one likes to feel pressured — so take little steps, one at a time. You may need to get used to what it's like having kids inside, before you let them come out in your body and play; that's okay. You'll probably also need support from someone, and to be able to talk about how it feels to you. Being small can feel scary, especially when it wasn't safe to be small when you were a child. You may need reminders from yourself or someone else that it is different now. You have your own living space, no one is hurting you anymore, no one can control you, and so it's okay now to let your kids out and be small and silly if that's what they want to do.

#### WHEN YOU FEEL SILLY DOING KIDS' THINGS

Some people say they could never do kid things because they would feel silly, or their partner or roommate wouldn't understand. If you feel uncomfortable letting your kid parts out to play, see if you can remember times as a child that you did kid things or received what all kids need — such as being held, reassured, read to and nurtured. Were you taken care of in a loving way as a child? Were you reassured and rocked when you were scared? Was an adult there for you in a safe and real way after you were abused? If you answer "no" to any of these questions, then you didn't get what you needed, and parts of you still need them.

Abused children need even more reassurance and love than children who weren't abused. So even if you got a little of what you needed it probably wasn't enough. Perhaps, you could think about it as giving yourself things you needed as a child but never received. Allowing your kid parts to play and receive comfort will help you to feel better about yourself, and eventually, happier.

#### TALKING TO FRIENDS OR PARTNERS ABOUT KIDS INSIDE

When you feel more confident that taking care of your kids and letting them out to play is what you need to do, then you might find it easier to explain this to your partner or friend. Sometimes when things are explained with confidence or certainty, people accept it better. If not maybe s/he could read about the issue, including this article.

Roommates don't have to know what you do, for that matter neither do partners. But, it's usually better if your partner or a friend supports you. Your partner or friend could even help with reassuring the kids, reading stories to them, and holding them.

If your partner or friends help with supporting the kids, they will need to be aware of their boundaries, and be able to ask for what they need from you. Relationships need to be mutually supportive to feel good. And contrary to what some people say, multiples are perfectly capable of giving support to people in their lives. Problems can arise when friends, support people, and partners give and give, but don't say when they need a break, or ask for what they need. Problems can also arise when one partner asks for a lot without thinking about the other person's needs. Finding ways to balance the needs of both people is really important to do.

#### HOW CAN I GIVE TO MY KIDS WHEN I NEED TO BE TAKEN CARE OF?

Giving when you're feeling down or needy can be very hard. But remember, by taking care of your kids, even by reading them a story, you may find that you begin to feel better, too. This also applies to letting your kids out. If they get to come out and play, sing, or cry, you'll feel the benefits of that, too. Remember, you are all connected. What helps one part inside will help everyone else.

#### KIDS ARE WONDERFUL

Kids can be so wonderful—full of life, awe, creativity, and joy. We'd all be better people, and live in a much better world if everyone let themselves be more kid-like. Multiples have that ability built-in, and deserve to explore that to the fullest. No one should feel ashamed of being child-like. Instead of being a put down—"you're acting like such a child"—it should be a sign of creativity and freedom. It is a good thing.

#### NURTURING, CARETAKING AND "WISE PARTS"

Most multiples have parts inside who are nurturing, caretakers, protectors, or wise parts. Connecting with these parts can help you to feel more grounded, protected, and taken care of. There may be parts inside who will read to kids inside, or can hold them, give babies bottles, and put them to bed. Other parts may be able to nurture all of you by wrapping you in a blanket, reading a kids' story out loud, having hot chocolate or ice cream, drawing a warm bath for you, helping you to relax or to be kind to yourself. You'll need to find the things that make you feel good and safe inside.

Inner wise parts also give terrific guidance – they often know what to do and what you need, even when you don't. You've got all kinds of inner resources that you may not even be aware of. It can help to find out what everyone has to offer and often these parts will know. Everyone inside, even angry parts, has something to offer you.

#### ANGRY AND CRITICAL PARTS

Most people with parts inside have angry or critical parts – parts that may be mad or put you down with insults. These parts may call you names or even growl at you. Angry parts need ways to express themselves safely. Safe ways to get frustration and anger out can include tearing up unneeded paper or

phone book, scribbling hard and fast with black crayons, stomping, writing out mad stuff, or writing out angry feelings at a multiple site in the anger section.

Remember, while the anger may be directed at you and may feel scary, usually the angry part is a child who is mad about being abused. You may need ground rules before they come out in the body, for example, no hurting your body, or breaking something important.

You may both feel safer if they express their anger inside for a while before coming out in the body. You can create a safe place inside that they can release their anger without scaring other parts. Or maybe they can stay inside while they dictate what to write down. That gives you control while letting them express themselves.

Sometimes you may feel like you can't relate to or understand an angry or critical part. They are probably very angry, maybe even abusive. It's important to remember that such parts usually took on more of the abuse, or more of the particularly hard or sadistic abuse. They have good reason to be angry. They may have been told that the abuse was happening because of you. They might have had to identify with the abuser(s) in order to keep you safe, and now that the abuse is over they don't know how to stop. Or, they may not believe that the abuse is over and are preparing for the next attack by being tough and guarded.

Angry or critical parts may have been programmed through great torture to act this way and may believe that this is the only way to keep safe. Deep down they are trying to protect both themselves and you from abuse, and they definitely worked to protect you when you were being abused. They kept you alive, and they deserve your respect and understanding for that.

However, it's easier to say this than to do it, especially if angry parts are being really abusive and this is causing you and others' inside great pain, panic, and fear. Finding ways to compartmentalize parts inside can be helpful in this instance. For example, maybe you could imagine tucking the kids away in a safe and soothing place, while you imagine a barrier between you, the kids, and the angry or critical parts. But if you do this, you might want to explain that you don't think they are bad; it's just their anger is upsetting or scary. Letting them know that you understand that they're angry, and that they have a right to be angry can help. Letting them have constructive ways inside to express their anger is also a good idea. And listening and responding to their requests, if you can, can help them feel heard and respected — perhaps for the first time — and lessen the anger directed at you.

What works for you really depends on your internal system, but it's important to approach the situation with calm respect. This can be hard to do if you're feeling abused, so you might need to find a way to ground or reassure yourself and to feel safe before you interact with these parts. It takes time, practice, and a little creativity to find what works. Again, while it's important not to talk down to anyone inside, it might help to remind yourself that this abusive part is most likely a child — possibly a child imitating an adult, but still a child. How would you handle an angry or abusive child? You might isolate her/him from other kids, ask them what is going on for them, get them involved with another task, have them take time-out and then check in with them, give them one-to-one attention, give them options or explain they are not bad and that their behavior is hurtful.

#### IS THERE ENOUGH TIME FOR EVERYONE?

Many people think that they don't have the time to let all their parts out and still be able to work and do other things — but you may be surprised at what little time is needed. Sometimes letting just one part out can help other parts inside to feel better. For example, some people can have different kids come out to play at the same time. For others, switching happens a lot and quickly, so a number of kids are able to be out in fifteen minutes. Or other people may need to let kids take turns being out at different times and on

different days. One thing you might want to try to do is ask kids inside to all listen at a particular time – and then read to them or have them be read to at that time, thus letting many kids experience some comfort. If your parts know that they can count on you to let them out at some point, they can usually wait until their turn. This may require some coordination and remembering whose turn it is, but usually there are parts inside who are willing to keep track of this and keep you informed. If something comes up and you can't let them out when planned, tell them. Explain your reasons, briefly, using age-appropriate language, and let them know when they can come out next. Parts inside, especially kids, are often very understanding and reasonable if they are included in the conversation. They know that you work and don't want to disrupt that; they just want to know when they can come out and play.

#### WON'T OTHER PARTS TRY TO TAKE OVER MY LIFE?

Parts inside don't want to take over your life; they just want to express themselves, be able to do what makes them feel good, and sometimes be taken care of. Angry parts usually want to protect you, and if they think you aren't doing a good job at that, they'll usually tell you (in so many words) and may try to intervene. But for the most part, they, too, are content to have you handle all that outside stuff. Parts inside usually just want time out where their needs or concerns can be addressed. By listening to parts inside, responding to their needs, and considering their advice, you might find that you want to know more often what they think.

Taking the time to let parts out actually gives you more control, even though it may, at first, feel as though you are losing control. When parts inside know that they have times they can come out, they will be less likely to come out at times when you need to be adult or in a specific role. The more you attend to their needs, the better you will feel and the less demanding they will be in the long run. When they first get time out, like the neglected kids they are, they may want more and more, and you may feel overwhelmed. But eventually, by being consistent (like a good parent is), they'll come to trust that you are there for them and that they'll get their turn out, and this will help them to feel less anxious or demanding.

#### SOME LAST THOUGHTS

Listening to parts inside and giving everyone a turn out can help you to feel better over all, and can decrease inner struggles about who has time out, when. And in getting to know parts of yourself, you may discover wonderful things you never knew you had – wisdom, strength, the ability to protect yourself, the ability to play and to trust, and more. So, be yourself in all your multiplicity and know that you are doing something brave and healing for yourself.

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