

Utilizing Internal Family Systems in the Treatment of Risky Behaviors: Substance Use Disorder, Self-Injury, and Eating Disorders

Individual, Marriage & Family
Counseling

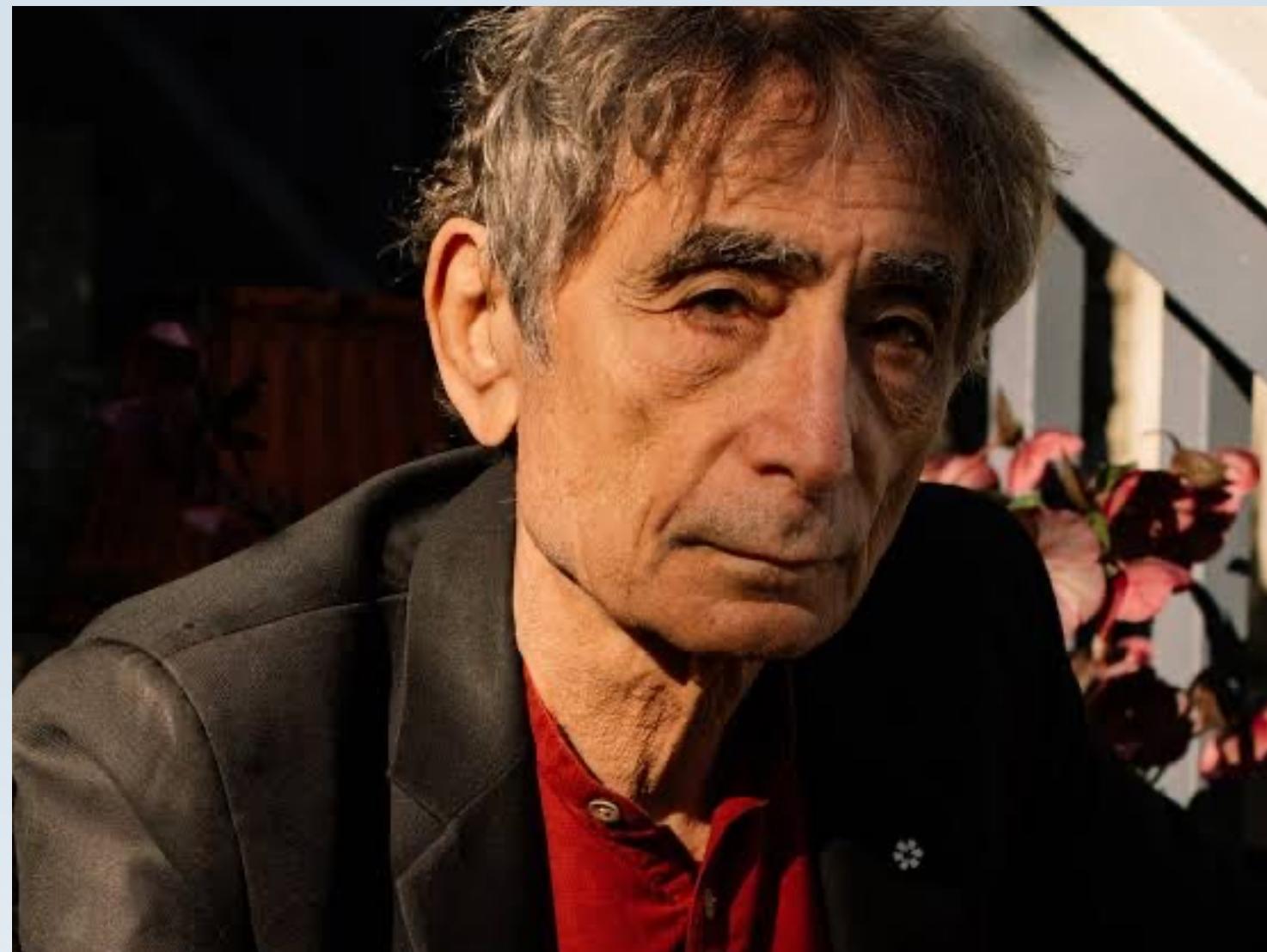
Megan Colvin, LPC
Dre Wiele, PLPC

Let's Drop In



“It is impossible to understand addiction without asking what relief the addict finds, or hopes to find, in the drug or the addictive behavior.”

— **Gabor Mate, In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts: Close Encounters with Addiction**



A word about trauma...

Big “T”

vs.

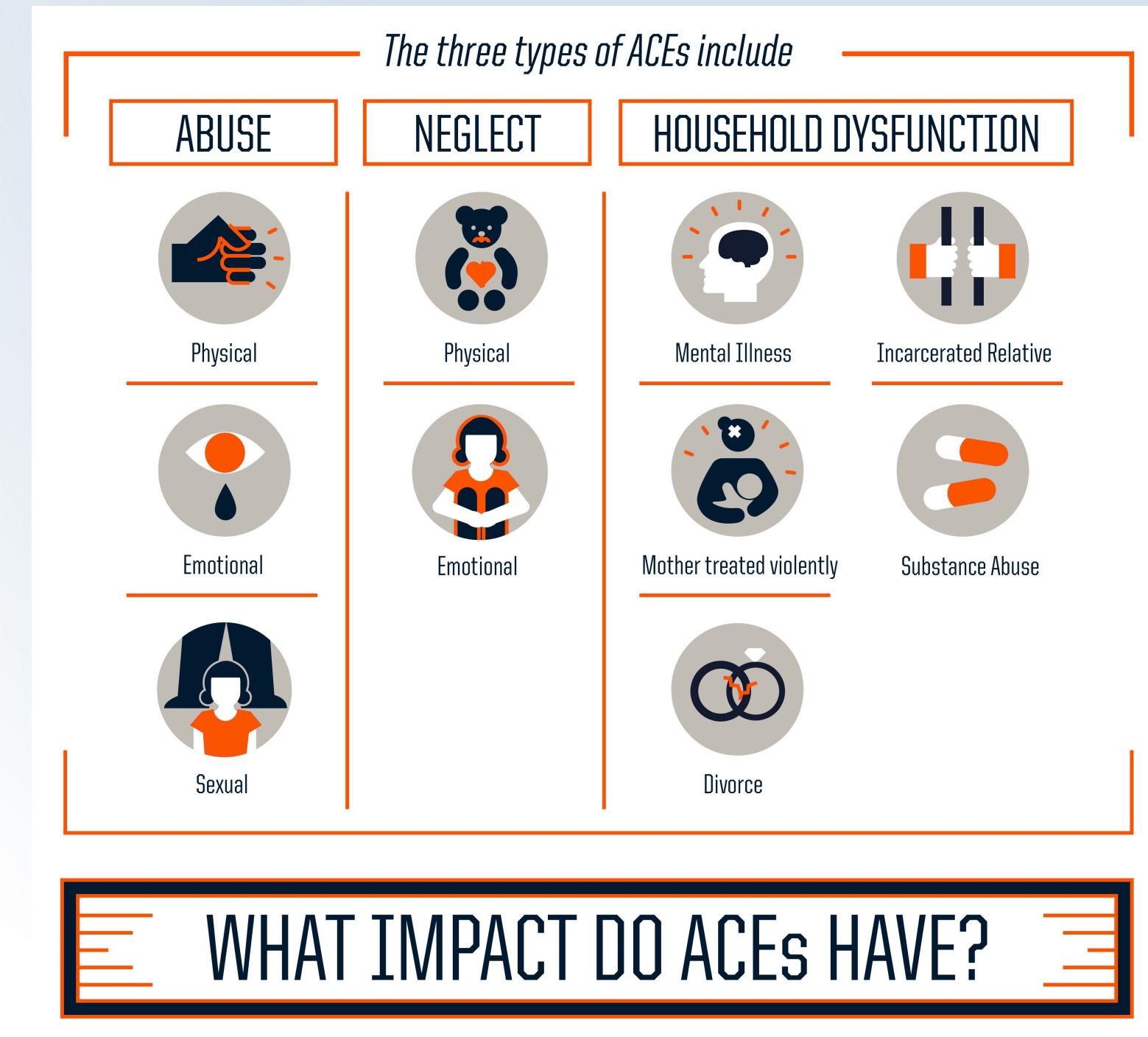
Little “t”

- ▶ Natural disaster
- ▶ Life threatening events
- ▶ Abuse (Verbal, Physical, Sexual)
- ▶ Violence
- ▶ Car accidents
- ▶ Terrorist Attacks

- ▶ Bullying
- ▶ Negative interactional pattern with family/parent
- ▶ Conflict
- ▶ Divorce
- ▶ Infidelity



Aversive Childhood Experiences Study (ACES)





What if we could address the trauma *and* the risky behavior?

Internal Family Systems



RICHARD C. SCHWARTZ, PHD

Foreword by Alanis Morissette



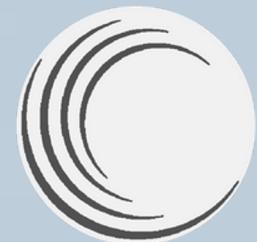
Healing Trauma &
Restoring Wholeness with
**THE INTERNAL FAMILY
SYSTEMS MODEL**

No Bad Parts



Dr. Richard Schwartz

Assumptions



Self



Multiplicity-PARTS



Inner world is a system of interacting Parts



All Parts have positive intentions but can become burdened with extreme beliefs, emotions and behaviors

Self

Calm
Curious
Compassionate
Clarity
Creative
Courageous
Connected
Confidence



Self



Core of consciousness; seat of consciousness



Inborn quality of calm, compassion, clarity, confidence etc..



Always present though blocked by parts at times

Managers

Proactive
Daily functioning
Prepare
Learn
Prevent exiles from being triggered and overwhelming



- Vigilant in trying to prevent pain from exiles being released
- Often young, stressed out Parts froze and stuck in time (Critic, Judge etc...)

Firefighters

Reactive
Balance manager energy
Shift to relaxation
Pleasure & soothing
Distract



- Extinguish emotional pain via extreme methods/behaviors (dissociation, alcohol, etc...)

Exiles

Embody vulnerability
Trusting
Sensitive
Carefree



- Parts that hold experiences of being abused, neglected, dismissed etc.. and have been exiled so as to not overwhelm the internal system with pain
- Often young and frozen in time

Balanced
Unburdened
System

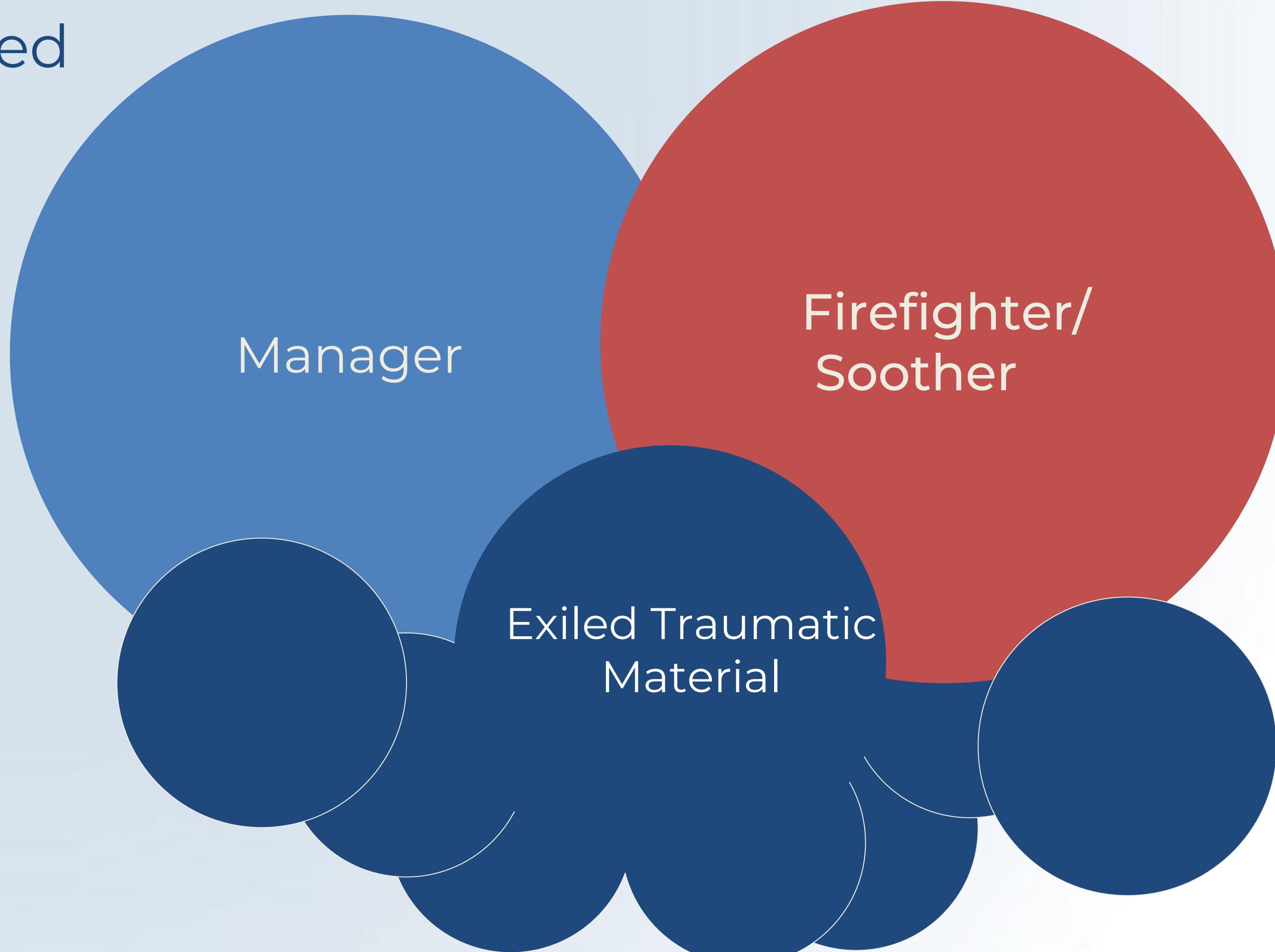


Burdened
System

Manager

Firefighter/
Soother

Exiled Traumatic
Material



Common Managers

Critic-Continual improvement, can become very aggressive and abusive

Judge – Externalize blame; use all types of ‘othering’ to help us feel acceptable, safe and included

Perfectionist – Cannot make mistakes, often afraid of disconnection

Logical/Rational – understand what to do; no feelings

Intellectualizer – prefer to think about the problem rather than feel

Striver- competitive, works hard, demanding of self

People Pleasers/Caretakers - job is to keep us in connection with others by focusing on others before ourselves

Fixer-Take personal responsibility for another’s problems

Hypervigilant/Anxious/overthinking-prevent negative surprises make sure we don’t get hurt or fail

Controller of Body (Restrict Food/Exercise), Events, People
Obsessor/Anxiety

Firefighters/Soothers/Distractors

Dissociating-Suppress the negative feelings of exiles by checking us out, becoming cloudy, sleepy or numb.

Mood altering substances

Sex-using sex to distract, soothe inner emptiness

Working

Social Media Scrolling

Purging/Binging/Restrict

Compulsive exercising

Gambling

Pornography

Exiles

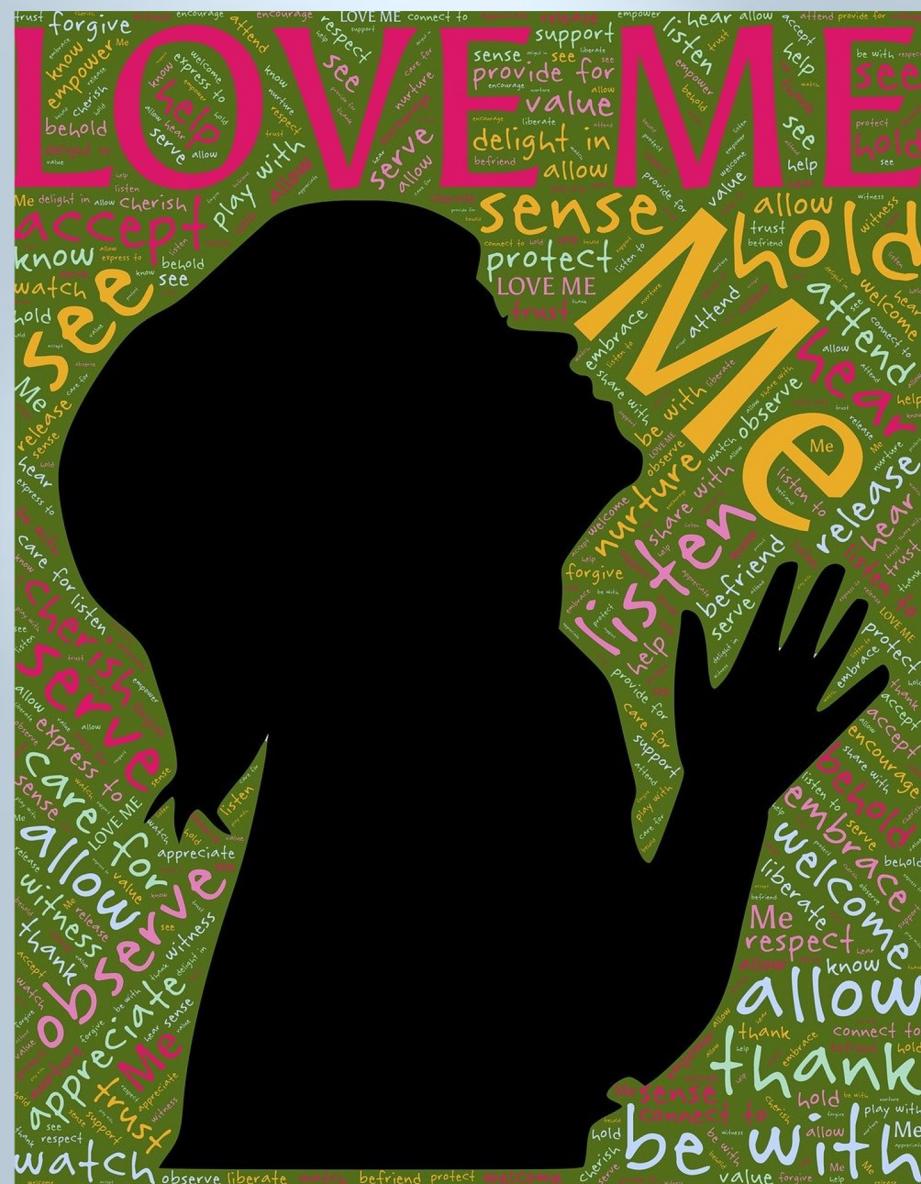
“I’m not safe”



“I can’t trust anyone”

“I’m worthless”

“I’m trapped”



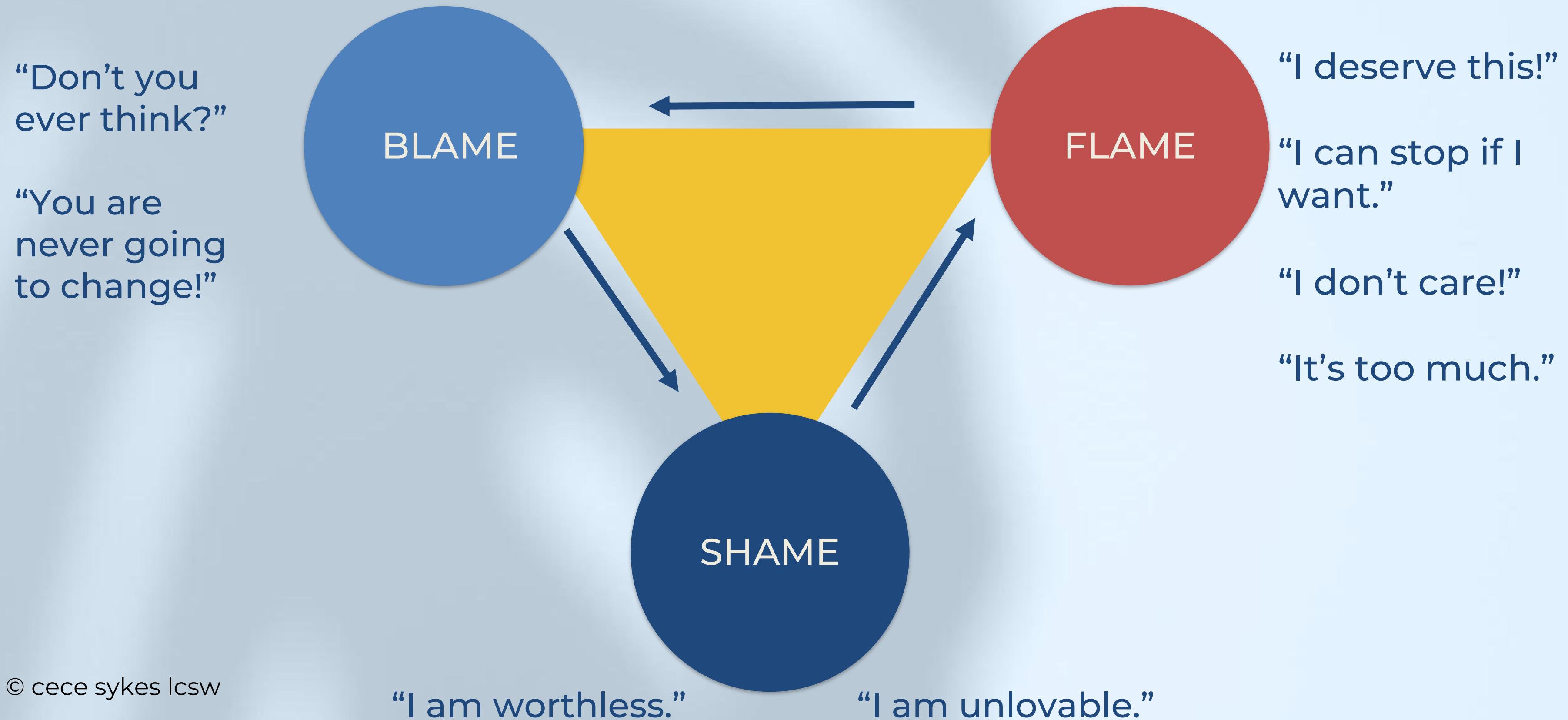
“I’m alone”

“I’m unloveable”



“I am powerless”

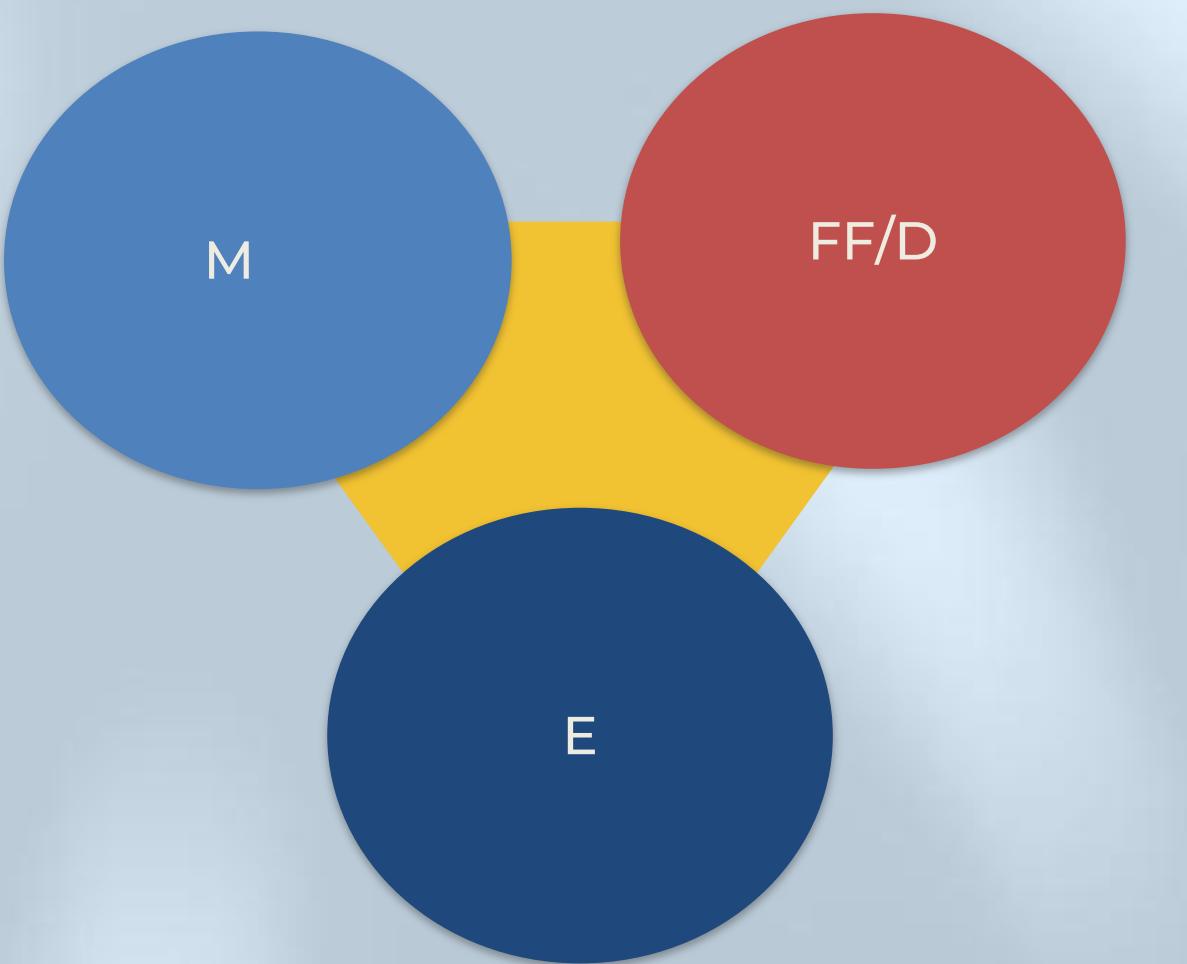
The Polarization Battlefield



Addictive Process:

A chronic polarity between two sets of extreme parts: critical, controlling(M) and avoidant, soothing(FF/D); both try to protect exposure of buried (E) emotional pain.

(Cece Sykes '06/'16)



Extreme Managers & Firefighters/Soothers



Alcohol & Drugs



Disordered Eating and Eating Disorder



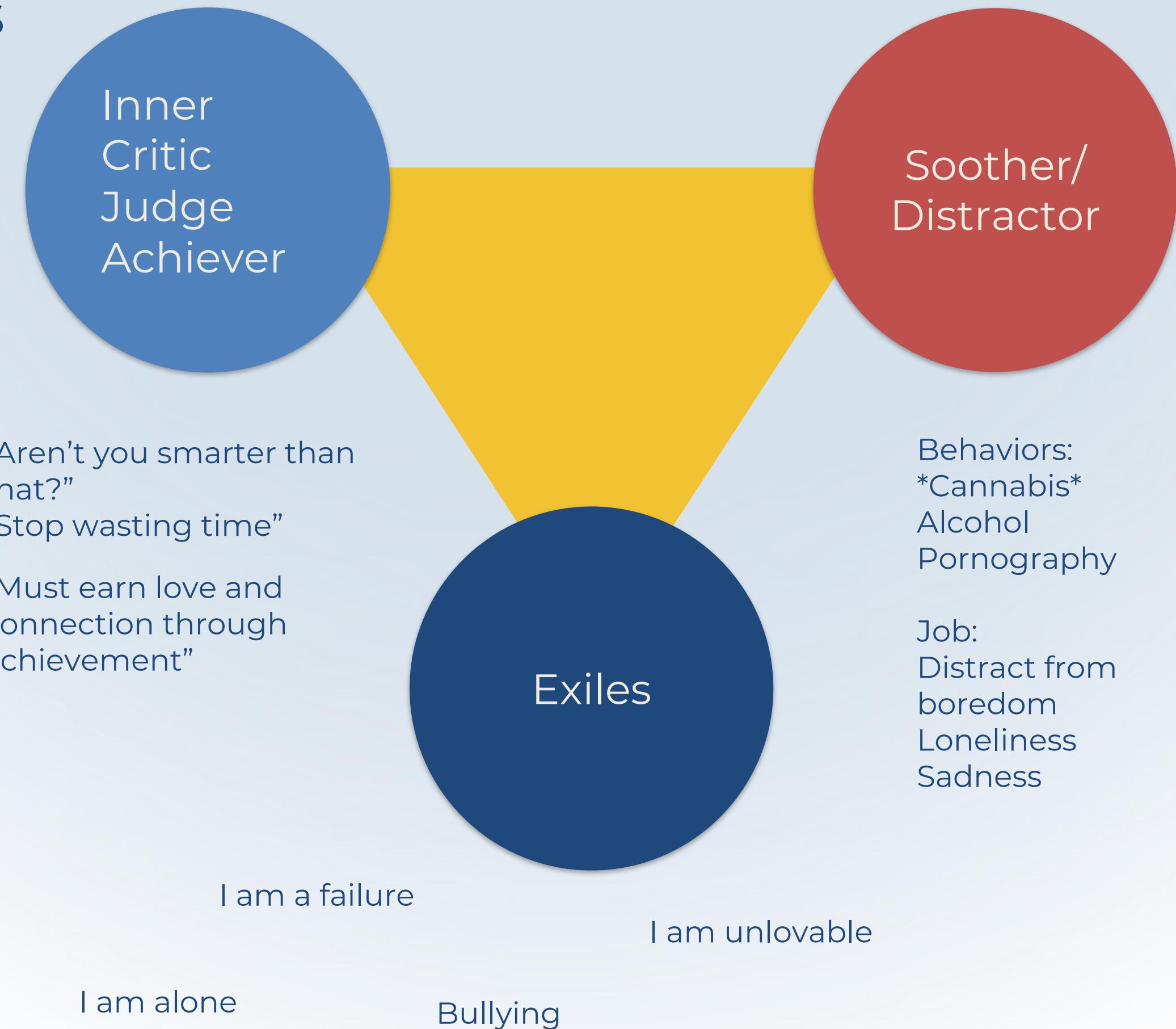
Suicidal/Self Harming

Substance Using Firefighters



Substance Using Firefighters

Case Study
26 y/o heterosexual cisgender male university student.
Substance of choice marijuana, 10 bowls/day (up to 30).
History of undiagnosed neurodivergence and history of interpersonal trauma, bullying.



Disordered Eating/Eating Disorder Managers and Firefighters



Eating Disorder/Disordered Eating

Case Study
20 y/o heterosexual
cisgender female
university student.
History of restrictive
eating (anorexia),
over-exercising, and
now overworking

Middle school
experiences with 'healthy
eating' and diet culture

I am alone
/unimportant

I am a failure

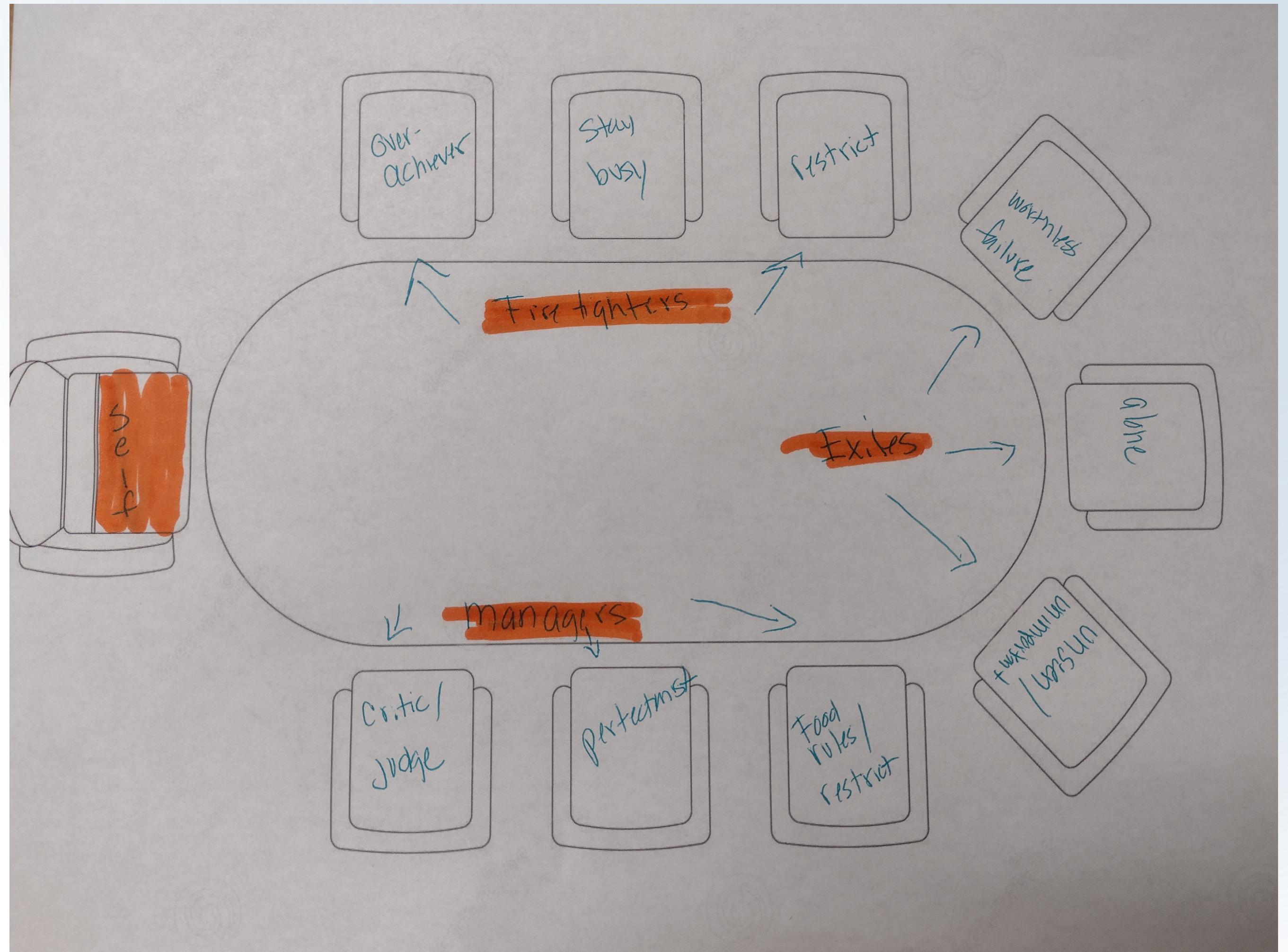
Experiences of abandonment



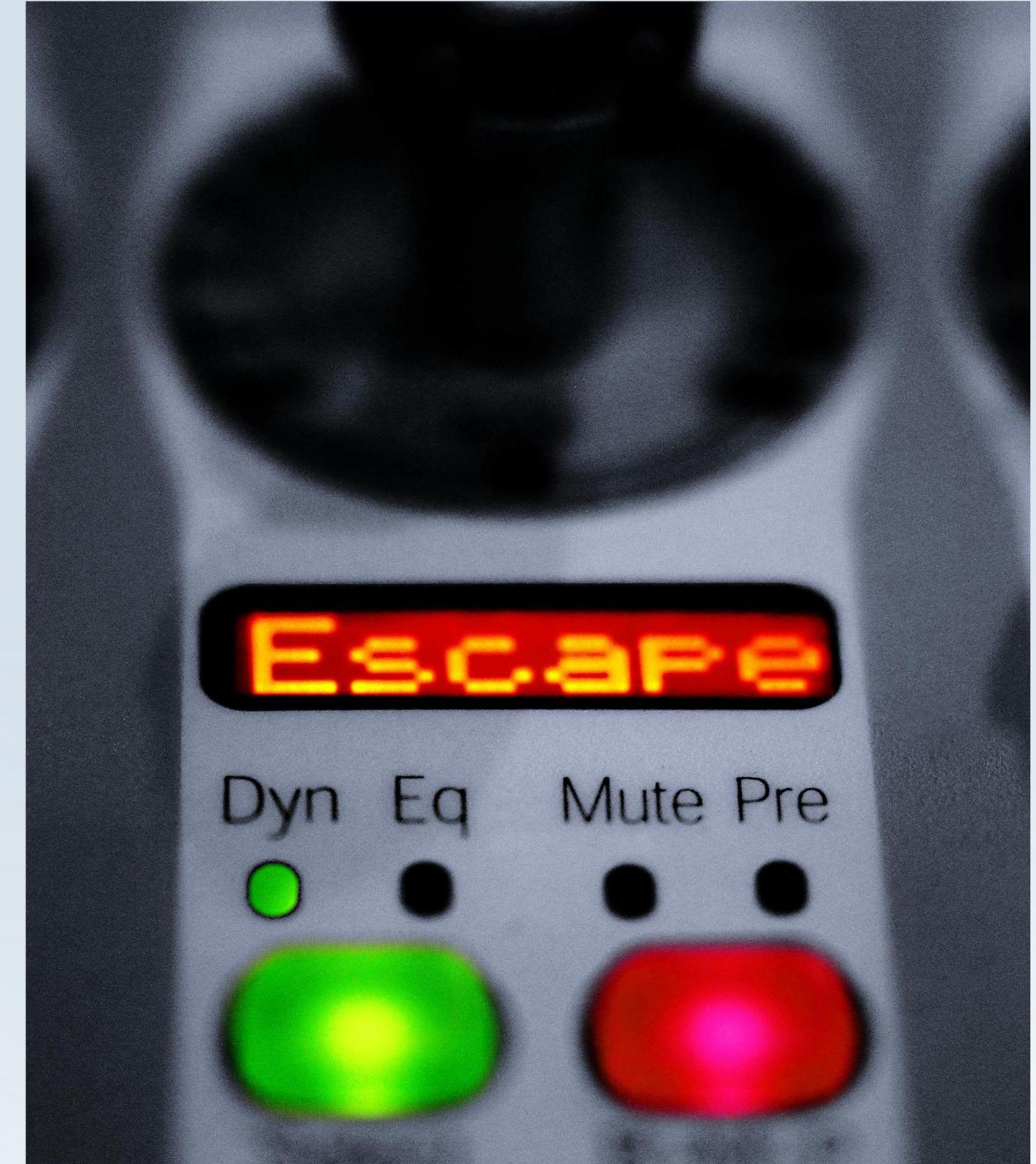
Critic highly susceptible to
diet culture feels justified in
criticizing weight to stay
safe/feel loved
Internalized cultural
messaging/burdens re. fat
phobia, diet culture and
healthism

Behavior:
Restricting
Over-exercising
Dissociate
Working

Distract/Soothe
shame from inner
critic for eating
Distract from
painful emotions



Suicidal & Self Harming Firefighters



Suicidal & Self Harming Firefighters

Case Study 3

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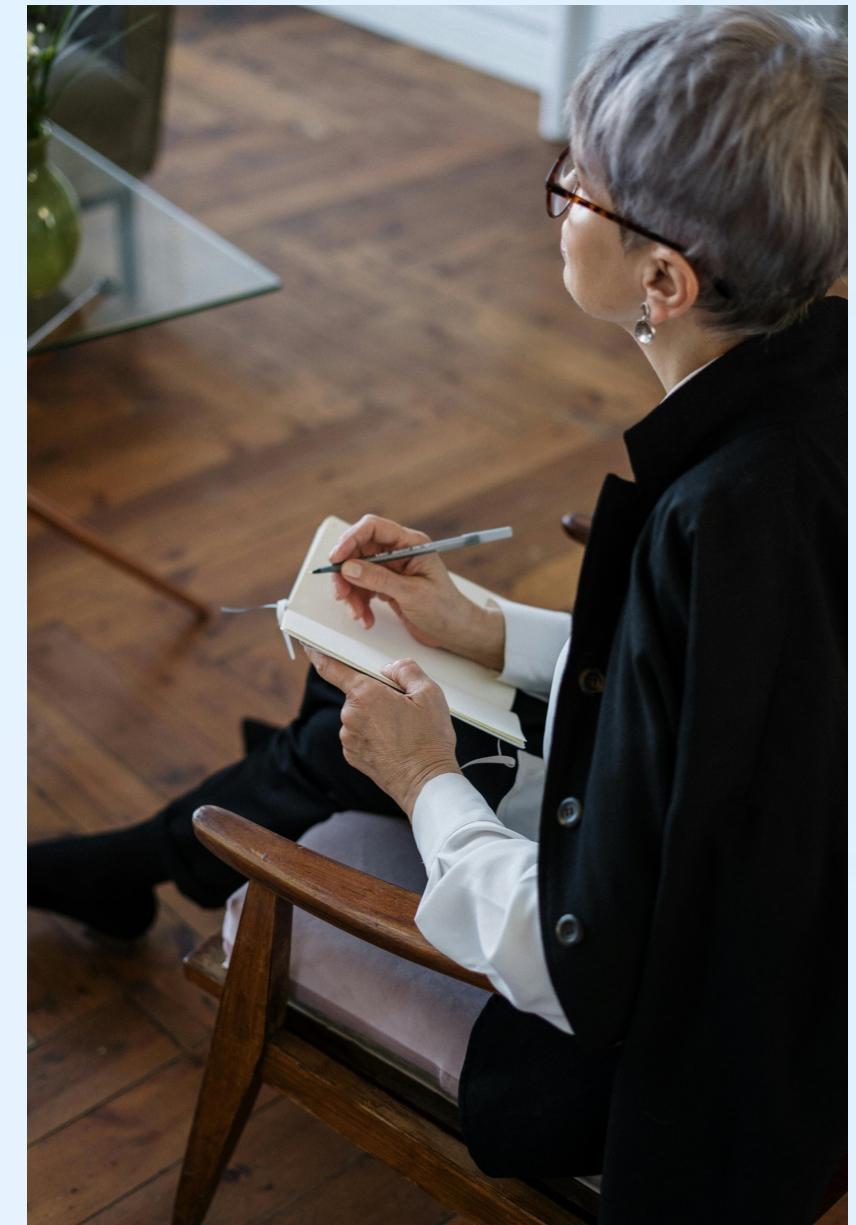
Self Harm/Suicidal Firefighters

Case Study

40 y/o heterosexual cisgender female professional.

Complex interpersonal trauma history, likely early (3-4 y/o sexual abuse)





Therapist Parts

Fire Drill Exercise



What can this look like in practice?





Decrease the power struggle with problematic behavior



Treating a SYSTEM not a symptom



Can have multiple types of compulsive soothing mechanisms/behaviors in the same group



Begin addressing trauma/pain while simultaneously addressing the behavior



Meet people where they are

Addiction shouldn't be called "addiction". It should be called "ritualized compulsive comfort-seeking." Dr. Daniel Sumrok; Center for Addiction Sciences at the University of TN College of Medicine; vets PTS (no D!)

Learn more

- IFS Institute [Trainings](#)
- IFS Institute's [IFS Circle](#) (online learning)
- *No Bad Parts* by Richard Schwartz ([book](#))
- We Can Do Hard Things, Glennon Doyle interview with Richard Schwartz ([podcast](#))
- Tim Ferris Show interview with Richard Schwartz ([podcast](#))
- Jonathan Van Ness interview with Richard Schwartz ([podcast](#))

Find an IFS Therapist

- [IFS Institute Provider Directory](#) (Global)

"FINDING YOURSELF"
IS NOT REALLY HOW IT WORKS.
YOU AREN'T A TEN-DOLLAR BILL
IN LAST WINTER'S COAT POCKET.
YOU ARE ALSO NOT LOST.
YOUR TRUE SELF IS RIGHT THERE, BURIED
UNDER CULTURAL CONDITIONING, OTHER
PEOPLE'S OPINIONS, AND INACCURATE
CONCLUSIONS YOU DREW AS A KID THAT
BECAME YOUR BELIEFS ABOUT WHO YOU ARE.
"FINDING YOURSELF" IS ACTUALLY
RETURNING TO YOURSELF.
AN UNLEARNING, AN EXCAVATION,
A REMEMBERING WHO YOU WERE
BEFORE THE WORLD GOT ITS HANDS ON YOU.

EMILY McDOWELL



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