

Healing Approaches

I. Alter-centered approach

This approach focusses the healing process on the alters. This seems logical because the alters experienced the trauma.

A. Weaknesses

1. While this approach can help to lessen pain, it does not serve to lessen dissociation.
2. It also does not bring healing to the overwhelm of the primary identities, which is why it does not lessen the need for dissociation.
3. Also, working with virtually every single alter, which can be in the hundreds or more, is very time-consuming.

B. Adaptation

In order to bring healing to the dissociation when using the alter-centered approach, you need to go to the Primary Presenter and process whatever has been learned from the alters and ask what it means to the Primary Presenter if these things are true. This is the only way to bring healing to the primary level and end the need for dissociation. Starting with alters, while sometimes necessary, is a less efficient route to healing, however, than starting with the primary identities.

II. Memory-centered approach

This approach focuses on learning the memories of what happened and bringing healing to them.

A. Weaknesses

1. This approach can also serve to lessen pain but generally focuses on the alters that hold the memories and thus does not address the intolerable psychological conflicts and overwhelm of the primaries necessitating dissociation.
2. If, in using this approach, the survivor is required to dig for memories, imagination is more apt to play a role, which can increase the survivor's tension over whether his/her memories are real.

B. Adaptation

When working with memories, healing can take place at a primary level if the memory is processed not only with the alter holding it but also with the Primary Presenter, always asking this key part of the person what it would mean if the memory is true.

III. Primary Identity Approach

This is the most efficient way to address the whole gamut of issues the survivor must resolve to obtain healing; including healing memories, relieving pain, and eliminating dissociation. It also brings healing directly to the primary identities, who are the most important to the person's identity and function. That healing flows to all of the alters created to handle each intolerable conflict, and they are all healed at once.

A. Advantages

The Primary Identity Approach starts, when at all possible, by looking at the effects of the trauma in the person's life instead of searching for the hidden trauma memories.

1. By working with the issues reflected by these effects and resolving the underlying conflicts experienced by the primary identities, the alters formed to handle what was overwhelming to the primaries are healed as well and usually integrated without even going to them individually.

Multiple alters can be healed by resolving a single primary-level conflict, making the healing process much more efficient.

2. By starting with the issues in the person's life and then going to the underlying intolerable belief and then the memory where it is rooted, the reality of the memories is less apt to be doubted.
 - a. When the memory makes sense out of the problematic issue and underlying intolerable belief in the person's life, it is much more believable than when it is accessed all on its own.
 - b. When Jesus speaks truth to the belief rooted in the memory, it validates the reality of the memory. (Jesus doesn't speak to imagination.)
 - c. When the problematic issue caused by the intolerable conflict in the person's life disappear as a result of addressing the belief rooted in the memory, that also validates the reality of the memory.
3. All of the necessary memories will be addressed but from the perspective of the primary identities and the issues the traumatic events have caused in the person's life.

B. Challenges

1. You can't always approach what is happening in the system from the perspective of the primary identities. Sometimes the system is too instable, and the alters are too active and prevalent in life, interfering with the process.
2. You can't always approach what is happening in the system by starting with the effects of the trauma (issues). Sometimes the memories are erupting and too prevalent to ignore.
3. You often have to address what erupts in the system, whether it is alter issues or triggers or spontaneously emerging memories.
 - a. However, you want to keep the IMB-Truth process in mind and follow it as much as possible from wherever you start.

IMB-Truth = Issue→Belief→Memory→Truth

- b. You always want to get back to the Primary Presenter and involve him/her in the process, asking what it means to this key part of the person if what has been revealed or dealt with is true.

Healing memories and addressing the needs of alters are wonderful tactics, but they don't resolve dissociation. Resolution of dissociation will only occur as the primary identities resolve their intolerable conflicts so that they are no longer overwhelmed by any part of their history.

Changing to the Primary Identity Approach is harder for those who have worked for a significant amount of time using another approach.