

# Re-Parenting the Inner Adolescents with Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT): The DNA-V/IFS Model for Psychedelic Assisted Psychotherapy

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## Abstract

Recent advances in psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy (PAP) have reignited scientific and clinical interest in models that integrate neuroscience, experiential psychology, and transpersonal theory. This paper proposes a novel framework combining the **DNA-V model**—a developmental extension of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)—with **Internal Family Systems (IFS)** for use in psychedelic-assisted therapy. The integrative **DNA-V/IFS model** conceptualizes psychedelic experiences as catalysts for enhanced **psychological flexibility** and **Self-integration**, in which the roles of *Discoverer*, *Noticer*, and *Advisor* (DNA) interact dynamically with IFS *parts* within the overarching process of *Values* (V). Drawing on contemporary neuroscience, the model situates **ego dissolution** and **Self-as-Context** as overlapping constructs that emerge through altered activity in the default mode network, facilitating compassionate witnessing and transformation of protective subpersonalities. The paper outlines a triphasic structure—**preparation, psychedelic experience, and integration**—detailing practical methods for mapping parts to DNA-V roles and applying ACT hexaflex processes across these stages. This synthesis bridges transpersonal and evidence-based approaches, offering clinicians and researchers a theoretically grounded, psychologically flexible roadmap for working with complex inner systems in psychedelic contexts.

**Keywords:** psychedelic-assisted therapy, Internal Family Systems, DNA-V model, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, ego dissolution, psychological flexibility, Self-as-Context

## PREFACE

“The privilege of a lifetime is to become who you truly are.”  
— C. G. Jung (1954)

In the beginning, there were voices—bright, wounded, protective, searching. They are what Dick Schwartz<sup>[12]</sup> calls our *parts*: dynamic subpersonalities formed in response to life’s joys and injuries. Many carry the intensity and idealism of adolescence—impulsive, reactive, yet full of vitality and potential. Schwartz often describes them as **inner teenagers** still waiting to be met with compassion rather than control. The **DNA-V model**<sup>[4]</sup>—a developmental extension of Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT)—was designed to help *outer* adolescents thrive by cultivating

*Discovery*, *Noticing*, and *Advising* processes, guided by *Values*. However, the same framework can illuminate the path for our *inner adolescents*—those emotional parts within us that never fully grew under safe and curious guidance. If **IFS** offers the language of multiplicity and inner family dynamics, and **ACT** provides a process model of psychological flexibility<sup>[5]</sup>, then **DNA-V** contributes a developmental grammar of growth. Together, they form a living system that mirrors human consciousness—fluid, adaptive, and evolving. Through the **transpersonal lens**, this synthesis extends beyond psychotherapy into the territory of consciousness itself. Psychedelic states, by temporarily dissolving egoic boundaries, may grant direct access to what Hawkins<sup>[6]</sup> described as *higher attractor fields* of awareness—dimensions of consciousness

characterized by love, courage, and acceptance. In these expanded states, the *Self energy* of IFS and the *Self-as-Context* of ACT appear as parallel expressions of the same non-dual awareness:

- the **sky** that holds every storm,
- the **chessboard** beneath every move,
- the **field** in which all parts are already whole.

The integrative **DNA-V/IFS model for psychedelic-assisted therapy** proposed in this viewpoint state-of-art paper invites us to re-parent these inner adolescents—to meet curiosity with presence, fear with compassion, and protection with trust. It bridges developmental psychology, mindfulness-based neuroscience, and transpersonal inquiry, offering clinicians a psychologically flexible *map of consciousness*<sup>[6-8]</sup>. May this work remind us that the parts we seek to heal are not obstacles to awakening, but pathways through which the Self remembers its wholeness.

## INTRODUCTION

Psychedelic-assisted psychotherapy (PAP) combines classic psychedelics with psychotherapy to treat depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), addiction, and other conditions. As PAP develops, there is a growing need for psychotherapeutic frameworks to guide **preparation, experience, and integration**. Recent research highlights **psychological flexibility** as a key mediator of psychedelic outcomes<sup>[13]</sup>. For instance, psilocybin sessions embedded in ACT-based therapy produced significant increases in flexibility and experiential acceptance, strongly correlated with reductions in depression<sup>[13]</sup>. Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT<sup>[5]</sup>), therefore, offers a robust process model for understanding and structuring PAP. ACT's emphasis on acceptance helps clients *surrender to experience*, while **values** and

**committed action** ground integration work<sup>[11]</sup>. Parallel to ACT, **Internal Family Systems (IFS)** therapy<sup>[12]</sup> has been integrated into several MAPS-supported MDMA trials, offering a map of inner subpersonalities that emerge during psychedelic journeys<sup>[2,14]</sup>. Both approaches share compassion-based perspectives and process-oriented change mechanisms, suggesting strong complementarity.

We propose a **DNA-V/IFS model** unifying these paradigms. **DNA-V**—an ACT-derived developmental framework<sup>[4]</sup>—organizes coping and learning into three dynamic roles, *Discoverer*, *Noticer*, and *Advisor*, guided by *Values*. **IFS** complements this by describing the psyche's parts and Self-leadership processes. Integrating DNA-V skills within IFS's self-system enables therapists to support clients navigating **ego-dissolution** and **transpersonal phenomena** with greater structure. Below, we review relevant findings and outline how the models converge into a psychologically flexible framework for PAP.

## **ACT and Psychological Flexibility in Psychedelic Therapy**

ACT posits six interrelated processes—Acceptance, Cognitive Defusion, Present-Moment Awareness, Self-as-Context, Values, and Committed Action—that together foster psychological flexibility<sup>[5]</sup>. The ACT *hexaflex* model, in which each process interacts dynamically to enhance adaptive functioning. This framework aligns well with psychedelic work: clients learn to *open up* to internal experiences, *defuse* from intrusive content, and *commit* to value-based living post-session. According to Pilecki and Morris<sup>[11]</sup>, “acceptance is a core process for preparing clients for psychedelic experiences, while values and committed action interventions inform integration.” The **DNA-V model** simplifies these processes into roles that clients can intuitively grasp<sup>[4]</sup>:

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- **Discoverer (D):** explores novelty and experiments with new behavior.
- **Noticer (N):** mindfully attends to sensations, emotions, and thoughts.
- **Advisor (A):** internal dialogue representing learned rules or protective narratives.
- **Values (V):** enduring directions giving meaning to action.

In therapy, these roles cultivate *flexible strength*—the ability to persist toward values while adapting to changing contexts<sup>[4]</sup>. For example, during a psychedelic session, a client’s Advisor might warn of danger; activating the Noticer promotes calm observation, while the Discoverer encourages gentle curiosity. Values act as a compass for reintegration. Together, ACT and DNA-V offer a coherent structure for fostering flexibility before, during, and after psychedelic work.

### Internal Family Systems and Psychedelics

IFS conceptualizes the psyche as a system of *parts*—Managers, Firefighters, and Exiles—organized around a compassionate **Self** that can witness and lead<sup>[12]</sup>. Under psychedelics, this multiplicity becomes explicit: vivid sub-personalities, child states, or archetypes may surface. Recognizing them as *parts* normalizes and de-pathologizes these experiences. In MAPS MDMA protocols, IFS training has been adopted to help clients “follow the Self” during dosing and engage parts in post-session dialogue<sup>[2]</sup>. Such integration echoes ACT’s *self-as-context*: both encourage observing without fusion. As Oh<sup>[10]</sup> notes, ACT’s flexible experience of self supports the “transcendent experience of unity and ego-dissolution” often reported during psychedelic sessions. IFS thus provides a compassionate architecture for PAP: each part has a positive intention, even when maladaptive. By treating psychedelic-evoked imagery as parts communicating, therapists facilitate

unburdening and Self-leadership rather than resistance.

### Integrating DNA-V and IFS in Psychedelic Therapy

Merging DNA-V and IFS yields a structured yet flexible PAP model across three phases:

#### Preparation, Dosing, and Integration.

##### 1. Preparation—Aligning Values & Training Skills.

Clients identify values (V) and learn DNA-V roles. Parts mapping begins: protective Managers and anxious Advisors are acknowledged, their concerns validated. The client practices mindful noticing and self-dialogue, strengthening Noticer and Discoverer roles before the psychedelic experience.

##### 2. Dosing—Mindful Exploration of Parts.

During the session, the Noticer anchors presence, the Discoverer invites curiosity, and the Advisor provides context without domination. When Exiles surface with strong affect, the therapist encourages mindful observation and compassionate engagement. The Self leads; the therapist supports curiosity, safety, and value orientation.

##### 3. Integration—Meaning and Committed Action.

Post-session, insights are translated into daily life through values-based goals. Parts encountered during dosing are revisited through journaling or dialogue, honoring their messages. ACT exercises (defusion, acceptance) consolidate flexibility, while IFS techniques ensure each part’s needs are acknowledged and harmonized.

This model positions ego-dissolution not as pathology but as a **window of neural and psychological plasticity** where new patterns can emerge<sup>[13]</sup>. DNA-V language gives clients accessible tools (“Let’s notice,” “Let’s discover”) for navigating inner multiplicity; IFS ensures these processes unfold within Self-led compassion.

## Neuroscience and Transpersonal Psychology

Neuroimaging research demonstrates that classic psychedelics (psilocybin, LSD, DMT) disrupt the **default mode network (DMN)**—a neural hub for self-referential processing—correlating with **ego-dissolution** experiences<sup>[1, 3]</sup>. This dissolution parallels ACT’s *self-as-context*: awareness beyond identification<sup>[5]</sup>. Reduced DMN integrity predicts mystical-type experiences associated with enduring increases in openness and cognitive flexibility<sup>[9]</sup>. From a psychological standpoint, psychedelics may amplify the Noticer role—heightened awareness—and momentarily loosen the Advisor’s grip, allowing Exiles to express unmet needs safely under Self leadership. Ego-dissolution thus facilitates reconnection with neglected parts, expanding the system’s flexibility. IFS research suggests trauma resolution improves when self-referential rumination diminishes. Psychedelics can create a **hyper-plastic** state where entrenched defensive parts soften, enabling deeper Self-contact. This intersection of **neural flexibility** and **psychological flexibility** defines the core therapeutic opportunity of PAP. The transpersonal dimension further aligns with Jung’s concept of individuation<sup>[7]</sup> and Hawkins’s *map of consciousness*<sup>[6]</sup>, in which awareness evolves through attractor fields of emotion and insight. Ego-dissolution can be seen as temporary transcendence into higher attractor states—love, courage, acceptance—after which integration work

grounds these insights into embodied values and behaviors.

## CONCLUSION

Psychedelic-assisted therapy bridges neuroscience, psychotherapy, and spirituality, yet clinicians have lacked integrative frameworks that are both theoretically coherent and practically actionable. The **DNA-V/IFS model** addresses this gap by offering a comprehensive, developmentally informed map for navigating preparation, dosing, and integration phases. The synthesis operates on two levels. Conceptually, it links ACT’s psychological flexibility with IFS’s Self-leadership, providing a coherent framework for working with parts, values, and transpersonal states during altered consciousness. Operationally, **DNA-V provides the structured language for IFS dialogue itself**: rather than vague prompts to “ask your part,” therapists can inquire what each part is *discovering, noticing, advising, or valuing*—transforming abstract parts work into concrete, accessible inquiry. This linguistic scaffold proves especially valuable in psychedelic states, where clients encountering intense internal multiplicity need clear communication pathways that bridge Self-leadership with moment-to-moment psychological flexibility.

Each component contributes distinct therapeutic value: DNA-V’s accessible language empowers clients to engage their inner adolescents with curiosity and skill; IFS normalizes multiplicity and ensures all parts are welcomed with compassion; ACT anchors mystical or transpersonal insights in values-based behavioral change. Together, they create a framework that is teachable, flexible, and grounded in evidence-based processes. Future research should examine changes in psychological flexibility and parts dynamics following DNA-V/IFS-informed psychedelic interventions, ideally correlated with neural measures such as DMN connectivity and

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self-referential processing. Training programs could incorporate integrated DNA-V and IFS modules to enhance therapist competence across PAP phases, with particular attention to real-time navigation of parts during dosing sessions. Ultimately, this synthesis honors both science and spirit—uniting developmental, experiential, and transpersonal psychology under one canopy of flexibility, compassion, and conscious evolution.

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