

Online group-based internal family systems treatment for posttraumatic stress disorder: Feasibility and acceptability of the program for alleviating and resolving trauma and stress

[Alexandra Comeau¹](#), [Lia J Smith¹](#), [Lydia Smith¹](#), [Hanna Soumerai Rea¹](#), [Mary Catherine Ward¹](#), [Timothy B Creedon¹](#), [Martha Sweezy¹](#), [Lawrence G Rosenberg¹](#), [Zev Schuman-Olivier¹](#)

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Abstract

Objective: Demand for trauma-focused therapy continues to increase, especially in community mental health care settings where group treatment models can be cost-effective and increase access to care. The Internal Family Systems (IFS) model for posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) may offer an effective therapeutic approach. The purpose of this proof-of-concept study was to evaluate the feasibility and acceptability of a novel, trauma-focused, group-based treatment approach and investigate potential mechanisms of action.

Method: Study participants completed the Program for Alleviating and Resolving Trauma and Stress (PARTS), an online-delivered program including 16 weeks of 90-min IFS-based groups with eight 50-min individual IFS counseling sessions. Participants completed assessments including clinician-administered and self-report measures of PTSD, common comorbid conditions (e.g., complex PTSD [disturbances in self-organization], depression, anxiety, and suicidality), and potential mechanisms (e.g., decentering, self-compassion, and emotion regulation).

Results: Most participants ($n = 11/15$; 73%) attended 12+ group sessions, with 92% (12/13 responders) reporting they would recommend PARTS to a friend. All respondents reported the program was helpful (13/13; 100%). PTSD symptom severity was reduced from baseline to Weeks 16 ($d = -0.7$, $p = .005$) and 24 ($d = -0.9$, $p < .001$). A clinically meaningful response (i.e., 10+ point reduction on the Clinician-Administered PTSD Scale for *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* [5th ed.]) was demonstrated in 53% of participants (8/15) by Week 24. Decentering, self-compassion, and emotion regulation all improved ($p < .05$).

Conclusions: PARTS was feasible and acceptable as a group-based, online intervention in an urban, public community health care system. While PARTS showed promise in reducing

overall PTSD symptom severity, well-controlled efficacy research is needed. (PsycInfo Database Record (c) 2024 APA, all rights reserved).