

BIPOC Leadership, Healing and IFS with Crystal Jones

Today on IFS Talks, we're happy to be speaking with Crystal Jones. Crystal Jones, LCSW is a certified IFS therapist and Assistant Trainer. She has 18 years of clinical experience and owns a private group practice *Life Source Counseling Center* in Fredericksburg, Virginia. She's known for her compassionate heart-led approach to her work. Crystal is passionate about creating safe spaces for BIPOC women to feel connected, seen, heard, and valued as they do their own healing work. She also enjoys providing IFS clinical consultation to therapists and practitioners learning the model and pursuing certification.

Tisha Shull: Crystal, thank you so much for being here with us today and being willing to join us on IFS Talks. We're happy to have you.

Crystal Jones: Thank you all so much for inviting me and having me here with you.

Aníbal Henriques: Welcome Crystal. What parts come up today listening to your bio?

Crystal: I have parts that say, “who is that woman?” I have parts that are like in the cheerleading section saying, “go girl.” I also have parts that like totally disassociate and just don't want to hear about all the things. And parts that just kind of just want to focus on just being here with you all. Right. So, I guess you can say I have parts that are all over the place and some shy parts too.

Aníbal: All welcome.

Crystal: Yeah. Yeah. Thank you. Thank you.

There's also thoughts that, yeah, I was just thinking, just also have some thoughts just back to that wild part is just like, “girl, you've done a lot,” you know? And maybe not even knowing how much I've done until I listen to it and just parts that are really reflective of that work and that journey that it took to get into this space right now. Yeah.

Tisha: Crystal, could you share with us about that journey to becoming a therapist, a counselor?

Crystal: Yeah, well, you know, my mom is a social worker and she was pregnant with me when she was in her master's program. So I often say, I think some of that instruction to seek through, you know, it's interesting because I always watched her and listened to her sharing and saw the way she gave of herself so much to her family and to her clients and how she mentored people so they could be in leadership as well. And I just watched that and, you know, and she also put us in spaces and exposed us to different cultures and to traveling and that just really expanded my system. And I think that that's just what brought me on my journey to social work. When it was time to go to school, I already knew. I was like, “whatever she's doing, that's what I want to

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do. I want to do what my mom does.” And my mom and I are very close, but I wanted to do what she did. I wanted to impact lives. And you know, I would see people, we would be out and somebody she had worked with would come up to her and say, “miss Linda...”, or “remember me” or “your mom is amazing.” And you know, when I went to school, I said, I want to do that. I want to serve people. I want to support people. I want to care for people. So that was the start of my journey to becoming a social worker. I didn't always know that I wanted to do private practice and counseling though.

Anibal: And Crystal, when did you come across with IFS?

Crystal: I want to say around 2013, 2014. I had a friend who was receiving IFS therapy. And at that time, we didn't even know that it was IFS therapy. I just continued to listen to her process and her journey. And I was just amazed at how deep they were going. And I had never gone that deep in therapy, you know, because I had always done talk therapy, but I would just listen, and she would just share and I'm like, “how are you all going that deep? What is that thing called?” And so, further along in her journey, she asked her therapist and her therapist wasn't an IFS trained therapist, but she was using some of the interventions and it just, it was just a transformation in my friend and she finally told her it was IFS. And so, when my friend told me it was IFS, I was like, bam. I looked things up. And by that time, I think I was already using some of the things that felt good, like parts of us. And you know, you're not all one thing, there are different parts. And so, I started using that language, but when I learned about it, I began to dive in, and I remember going to my first intro to therapy, I mean, intro to IFS therapy with Frank Anderson. And so that was a big leap for me. And I was his assistant during that training. And so, I got to meet him, and I got to learn more about IFS. And at that training, there were people there who are getting ready to go into the level one and mind you, I had never paid more than whatever a PESI training is. Right. And so, when I heard how much that level one was, I was like, I've never done that before. And that just, it just felt really expensive to me at that time. And so, but with some encouraging, I kind of just jumped in. I got a scholarship and I was able to take the level one training and I don't think I've turned back since.

Tisha: And then you went on to become an Assistant Trainer now. What has that been like? And how many parts have you encountered in that leadership role?

Crystal: As I think about the journey, I didn't know the journey was leading me here. I was just so happy to just do all of the intensive work. I've done all my parts. I've been so happy about being in community and meeting so many amazing people and being in spaces where people are doing their healing work and supporting one another. So, I just felt good doing that. And then when I became a PA, you know, I got to support others, I got to teach the model, you know, and spread my wings a little bit. Then I got tapped on the shoulder and when I was asked, “Hey, do you want to go a little bit further?” And I was in my year of yes, I was saying yes to everything because by then my parts were letting me do more and letting me be more present because I have big parts that wanted to hide. And I was like, “yeah, let's go.” And so, I got asked, invited

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to the Assistant Trainer Program and it was just an amazing, amazing group of folks who, you know, I think it would just help me be better, helped me be bolder, you know, helped me be more courageous. And that felt really good. And it has helped me kind of shift into this space, seeing them do their thing, people like Fatimah Finney and Kim Paulus and Natalie Gutierrez, and you know, just all these great people who have been great models for me and Tamala Floyd...

Aníbal: That came forward as well.

Crystal: Yeah. Yeah. They've all been really encouraging to me and help me to know that I can, I can do it. They pulled out my strengths and I've kind of seen that I can do it because I see other people who look like me and who have the same cultural experiences as me doing this work. And that's felt really good. So, I don't even know how I feel yet about being here. I still think I'm taking it in, but it feels scary. It feels good. Parts that are saying "you don't even know IFS." Like there are parts that are telling me "you haven't done all you've done. You don't know anything." I have all of these parts, but today I'm just feeling really good about this space today. I'll say that.

Aníbal: So beautiful.

Tisha: I can really resonate with those parts that sometimes, in conveying the model, that come up and just say, "you don't know anything." Like they just won't let me access the information. And so, you know, knowing how to work with them is really cool.

Crystal: Yeah. Those parts just don't want me to mess up. They want me to get it right. And then when I can sit with that, I can just hold them with a lot of love and gratitude for them, for what their concerns are, you know.

Aníbal: You define yourself as a culturally attuned therapist specialized in creating safe spaces for BIPOC clients to feel connected, heard, seen and valued. You say you are interested in seeing more BIPOC folks in leadership and integrating BIPOC cultural experiences in this model. So, you, like Black Therapists Rock, you are helping to spread the IFS model to underrepresented communities and more specifically black communities across the United States. In your experience, how does the IFS model land in this African American community?

Crystal: Well, I'll say this for the African American community that I've been in connection with when doing this model. First off, I feel like this model is already like ancestral wisdom. Right? I feel like it's a developed model, but I feel like, I feel like what we're learning in this model is already instinctual. Right? And sometimes we get away from what's instinctual because of distractions, because of the world, you know, because of dominant culture. But what I love about this model is it brings us back to the wisdom of our body. And I always say that it brings us back to the wisdom of our body and that feels really simple. And it feels ancestral to me, it

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feels like I'm coming back home. It feels like I'm coming back home. And so, I think the IFS model has landed well because it's all, we're already, this is what we're already innately supposed to be doing. Instinctually supposed to be doing. And somewhere along the way, kind of got away from it. And so, I think when people are in connection with the wisdom of their body and can just find that quiet, still place, and begin to trust it, man that can be revolutionary. It's been revolutionary for me. It's been revolutionary for the circles that I've been in. And also, it can put us back in connection with the gifts of our ancestors, as well as those things that don't belong to us. So that, and that's getting into legacy and cultural burdens, right. Or legacy and cultural heirlooms, but it can just put us in alignment with so much healing that's transcendent, that's beyond us. So that's what I, and even as I talk about it, that's what I've experienced in my system. And then to be in community and experience that, when you share the same cultural burdens or, you know, cultural...When there're similar cultural experiences, right, and we're in community working to do unburdening, I think that that experience in African American settings and in BIPOC settings has been just powerful. And when one person gets that we all get it. So, it's been really powerful.

Tisha: I'm getting the sense that you've worked with the model in groups in a way that's really powerful and healing with BIPOC and African American groups. And I'm wondering if you want to share any more about that experience.

Crystal: Yeah. Yeah. So, twice now I've been in IFS circles with Black Therapists Rock led by Deran Young and Requina Barnes, where Tim have Floyd has co-led or been Assistant Trainer with Chris Burris. And I'm just reflecting on how we come in, right. With all our internalized racism and just all our stuff. And how through the process, like we become lighter, right? It's like peeling the onion, like stuff comes off. We get to take stuff off and how we get to witness each other's healing it. Because I think in community, there's an aspect of witnessing and holding that aids in the process. So, I've been able just to be in that space. And then, I think being in community too, you just get so lost and it's like, I don't want to leave. It feels like utopia, right? It's like, I just don't want to leave. Like, I see you. I know this cultural burden you've been holding, I've held it too. And when I see you let it go, then my system shifts. Or when I see you do a cultural unburdening and you're passing that burden down the ancestral line, like, I feel like my ancestors get healed. When they're all letting that go and then when they're passing the gifts back up, I feel like I'm getting some of those gifts. My ancestors are getting some of that, some of those gifts. And so, imagine that with like 30 plus people in the room, like, I just want to do a hallelujah shout. Right. Like, it's been amazing, like to give words to it...It just doesn't feel like it does it justice, but we've done beautiful work in community.

Anibal: So good to listen to this. Yes. Thank you, Crystal.

Crystal: Yeah. And I'm thankful because, because of the work Black Therapists Rock and Deran Young, and everyone who supports her has done, right. Like that's a big reason why we've seen, you know, so many black folks able to get into leadership, you know, more black people on staff,

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you know, more black people in training programs and also just hearing different voices and different perspectives. I just think is so important.

Anibal: It is.

Crystal: And I think everybody wins, right? When we hear from different people, from different perspectives and different cultures, everybody wins, everybody learns.

Anibal: Absolutely.

Crystal, in your website resources, you suggest social justice readings like DeGruy's *Post-traumatic Slave Syndrome*, the DiAngelo's *White Fragility*, Resmaa Menakem's *My Grandmother's hands* and others like Cooper's *Eloquent Rage: a black feminist discovers her superpower*. So, we can see how topics like slavery, racism and feminism matters to you and became central in your personal and professional life. So, Crystal, when you look at the world and to the United States in particular, what are your expectations regarding social justice?

Crystal: What are my expectations... That is a tough question. Because I think as a, as a black woman, I have parts that, that have been taught you can't have expectations. I have parts that don't trust and say it's dangerous to have expectations of a society who doesn't care about you. So, and I almost feel like those parts really lead and they want me to be safe. And they want me to be okay. So, I get that, but I think that doesn't, and at the same time, I believe that doesn't leave me powerless. And so, those parts feel like I still can play a role. And that role is really focusing on people who hold those same kinds of parts. Those parts that don't trust, those parts that are scared and rightfully so. Those parts who have experienced racial trauma. And so, I really feel like part of my role can be working with people and holding those parts in great care, loving up on those parts, witnessing those parts, being in community with those parts, so they can walk into the world in a different way. I won't say in a different way, I'll say in a more informed way, because I really think when we're knowledgeable and aware of our systems, right? We can walk in the world a different way. And that doesn't mean that the world isn't going to change, but when something in us changes, we walk with a different awareness.

Anibal: That's so true. Yeah.

Crystal: Yeah. So, I don't know, and there are parts of me that just like, "gosh, girl, you can't have expectations in the world?" I do. But I feel like my work is to... Like when I think about my children, my work is to prepare them the best way I can for this world. By letting them know that their blackness is important. That things that, you know, they've learned culturally, and experienced culturally are important, you know, that they can hold their head up, you know, and there will be adversity. So, the way I prepare them to go into this world, like, I feel like that's my part. And that's my part with my community as well. The world is going to do what the world is going to do.

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Aníbal: So inspiring, yes.

Crystal: Yeah. That makes me feel sad too. But I think that's just where I am in the moment. Do I have hopes? I have hopes and I think this part that says don't have any expectations, it's also covering up a hopeful part that's been so hurt and so let down. Because that hopeful part, she wants to change the world. I just see her like running around with an S on her chest and just wants to change the world. But she's been really like, she's just kind of watching,

Aníbal: Thank you, Crystal.

Crystal, the IFS Institute has been doing a significant effort to integrate underrepresented communities, both at participants and practitioners' level and at staff and trainer's level. Also, through a very successful partnership with Black Therapists Rock. How do you see these efforts? Are there developments you'd like to see?

Crystal: I just want to see more, right? I'm really excited to see the direction in which the Institute is moving and see the commitment. And I just want to see more. I want to see more. And I think I just have to be honest and speak for a part that says the commitment level is high because there's a lot of catching up to do.

Aníbal: Exactly.

Crystal: And I say that they can catch up, right? But we're in, I think we were in 2020, 2021 when some of these changes have been implemented, right? But when you think about all of this time, you know, there've been different races and different cultures here forever. But I just feel like we're just starting to focus here. And I think that's what happens when more people of color are coming in saying, "what about me? How does this model reflect me and my experience?" So, more people came, there was a call to action, not only a call to action, a push for action. And I think IFS Institute has really opened the door, has really heard and opened the door. But again, this is what happens when more people are included. And I'd love to see it and I want to see more.

Aníbal: Exactly.

Crystal: Yeah. Yeah.

Aníbal: Beautiful.

Crystal: And I think it starts in spaces like this too. When, you know, I think it starts with the invitation. I think there are a lot of spaces in IFS that need to hear other perspectives and see other faces that don't just look like them.

Aníbal: Well said.

Crystal: Yeah.

Tisha: It feels so good to have your presence and your voice and your energy on the show. And just, I don't remember sitting with another interviewee where both Aníbal and I are grinning ear to ear the whole time that the person we're sitting with is talking, even though you're tapping into some challenges that the community faces. Challenges with outreach and inclusivity, but you're also naming this sort of universal connection of Self-energy and the healing potential of the model. Is there any sense of like a course of action for opening the door more that you have a template for? Is there a way to create more inclusivity?

Crystal: Yeah. You know, I think in any movement, everybody plays a role. And so, I think if everybody's asking themselves that question, like, "what's one thing I can do to contribute to inclusivity, even if it's a small thing". Like, I remember when everyone was protesting, I was like, "well, okay, I might not be marching, but what else can I do?" Like, "can you write up a sign? Can you donate financially? How can you participate?" And so, for me, I asked myself that question and my thing is, okay, I can develop programs to support folks who are coming into leadership. I can mentor. As an AT I can invite staff, you know, from different cultural backgrounds on my team. You know, I can specifically serve as an AT for, you know, for affinity groups. So, there are different things that I can do personally to create to the larger collective. And so, I encourage everyone to ask themselves that question, "what can you do? What can you do?" Because I don't think it's up to the folks who have been historically oppressed. I don't think it's all up to them to figure it out, right? And so, I think it's important for, you know, for white folks too, right? Like, it's just as important for white folks to say, "what can I do? How can, how can I contribute? how I make this space more inclusive?"

Aníbal: Thank you.

Crystal: Yeah. Because I know as a black woman, I just want to, you know, I just want to be here. I want to feel welcomed. I want to be able to say, you know, when my parts have been injured, you know, I want to be respected. Yeah.

Aníbal: Crystal, do you see yourself as a racial trauma specialist and also, do you find IFS effective to help those carrying slavery, racist and patriarchy burdens?

Crystal: You know, I don't think I see myself as a racial trauma specialist. Not in my head anyway. I really see myself as someone who has really worked hard to learn this model, to hold parts that have been impacted by racial trauma and to support to the whole in community, individually. And so, you know, some might call that a racial trauma specialist, but it just feels more like healing work to me. And so, you know, something else added into the bag, right.

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There's IFS, you know, I use Reiki, you know, we might do some meditation, but it's all in the bag of healing and holding and witnessing for me. And so, I don't call it a specialist, but it might be, it might be right. But I just try to use what I know to support people in their healing journeys.

Tisha: Do you incorporate Reiki with IFS at all? Do they overlap in any way in your work?

Crystal: Well, you know, to me, Reiki is energy work. And everything is energy. And so, to me, you can use Reiki before IFS or after IFS when parts just might be a little activated or when the system needs some calming and grounding, you know, just working with the person's energy to clear some blockages. Because I really think IFS, if we talk about IFS, right? What I notice is that when we're peeling back the onion, we're creating space, kind of like to me Reiki is creating space in the body. And so, when I'm doing IFS work, you'll see people yarn, you'll see people take deep breaths, you'll see people get tired, right? Because their system is really getting clear. And so, to me, Reiki might just be just something to add to that, you know, or to help with that as well. But, you know, I really believe our system has what it needs already. And so, Reiki is just the aid. It can be just an aid to that.

Anibal: Crystal, looking to the future. What is coming to you as a trainer and as a social justice activist, are you interested or committed to becoming a lead trainer for the Institute?

Crystal: Hmm. All these big terms, my system is like Lead Trainer, social activists...Right? I think my parts... I'll just have to tell this quick story. My daughter, she had to be like five or six and we were in church and our pastor was talking to the young people and he was like, "well, what do you want to be when you grow up?" And the kids are saying, "I want to be a doctor and I want to be a fire man." And my daughter said, "I just want to be myself."

Anibal: Oh, so beautiful.

Crystal: At 5 years old she said, "I just want to be myself and that feels enough." And so, I hold that story so close to my heart because I just like, I feel like my daughter, like, I just want to be myself. I just, and wherever that takes me and however people experience me is what's needed. I just feel guided right now by... I just feel guided by spirit. And so, if you take something away from that, or if you feel something like this, I really feel that spirit permeating and radiating. So, I don't know. To answer your question. I don't know. I've never, I never like woke up and said, I want to be an AT, right? Like I just felt like spirit led me here. Right? Spirit encouraged somebody to tap me on my shoulder and say, "Hey, do you want to do this?" I was like, "okay." So, I want to be led and guided by spirit. I don't want to, I just don't want to spend my life just chasing, chasing, chasing, you know, like the durable on the wheel. I've done that, you know, I've done that. And it leaves me feeling exhausted. I really just want to move in the essence of spirit and not force anything. And that feels...My system, when I say that my system was like, "Ooh girl, thank you. Because you know, you can move in, you know, you can have your own agenda and race towards the finish line. And we just want you to enjoy this life and not like

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push yourself too far.” And so, I believe, you’ll see more me, but I want to take my time. I really want to take my time and just enjoy where I am. You know, like, I’ll say this, you know, like one moment, it’s like soon as people get married, somebody is asking somebody, right? “Do you, do you want to have a baby? Now? Wait, dude just got married.” So, I feel like that in this space, I really just want to sit and like experience this AT position and get that mentorship from the lead trainers. And I just want to build up that experience and be in that space and enjoy it. Just like I did with PAing. I felt like, “okay, girl, you’re a good PA now. You don’t know it all.” Right? But I felt confident and comfortable to say, “okay, I can move to something different. I want to have that same experience as an AT, before I jump to something else.” Yeah.

Tisha: You have any trainings coming up Crystal?

Crystal: Oh my gosh. So, remember I told you how my first formal training in IFS was with Frank Anderson and I was his PESI assistant at that time. Well, full circle moment. I get to be his real Assistant at his neuroscience training.

Aníbal: Congratulations.

Crystal: And so, I’m just like, to me, that’s the spirit like saying full circle moment, right? Like who would have thought, right? And so, I’m really excited about that. I have a training with Gwen Hurd and Leslie. I’m doing some work with Tamala Floyd. So, there’s some, a lot of great things coming down the pike. And so, I’m really, really excited about having that experience and working with all these amazing people and being mentored by them as well. Because that’s been a joy for me in the IFS community, just learning from people and getting to know more people. And now I can add you, Aníbal, to the list of people I feel connected to. My parts just love connection. I really do.

Aníbal: Thank you, Crystal. Thank you so much for having us and for sharing so much wisdom. It was an enormous joy to be here with you and Tisha. May we keep meeting and sharing this model, our work and our lives. Thank you so much.

Crystal: Yeah. I don’t feel like I’m ready to go.

Tisha: Oh, It’s time to go? You can come back. We would be happy to have you back. It feels so good to be in your presence.