

PROTECTING YOUR PERSONAL SPACE

by Deb Elkin, LPC

We all have an invisible space that surrounds us that is “our space.” It defines how close people can physically get to us. If they pass through that boundary, we feel uncomfortable. We say that “our space has been invaded.”

We also create a boundary around us that protects us emotionally. It protects our hearts from getting too deeply hurt, too often, by other people’s words and deeds. For some people, it is a thin wall, easily permeated, and they get easily or frequently hurt. Others create a big thick wall around themselves, sometimes called armoring, to be sure no one EVER gets in or hurts them. And of course some people have learned how to create a balance between the two.

We all need protection. Without it we would be like a turtle without its shell – very soft and squishy and vulnerable. Some people need more protection than others. They are more “sensitive ” or more easily hurt. Others are stronger and not so easily hurt. They in fact may be “tougher”, or they may be using that tough exterior as a way to protect themselves from getting hurt.

Those of us with boundaries that are easily invaded need to get them stronger. Living in the world in this way is a drain. We let people in too closely and too easily. We don’t discriminate well. We often don’t say no very well. We tend to get taken advantage of. Life feels out of our control. Our self-esteem usually suffers.

Those of us with thick or too strong boundaries need to learn to relax them some. Living in the world from this place is constant, hard work and can be exhausting. We are on guard, watching, keeping ourselves safe from hurt. We don’t often get to relax. We may live in our heads, using words or humor to keep others at a distance. We hesitate to open our hearts fully to others. We only let people in so much. We will not get hurt!

So what kind of boundaries (do you) have you constructed for yourself? If you are not sure, ask a few people who you are close to and trust for some feedback on how they see you. It might be very enlightening and will certainly be helpful.

If you need to build your boundaries up, here are a few things you can do.

- ◆ Identify the people in your life with whom you have the most difficulty maintaining your boundaries and personal space.
- ◆ Notice how they “get into” your space. Is it physical or emotional? Is it through constant bombardment? the use of guilt? intimidation? helplessness? Get clear so you have conscious awareness of how they “do this” to you.
- ◆ Create an imaginary shield that surrounds your body. It may be one of light energy. It may be a thicker, heavier wall. Or it could be anything in between. See what fits your needs for each situation and each person. Be creative with it. Decorate it. Play with it. Let it work for you.

- ◆ When you are in the presence of these people, surround yourself with your shield. When you feel their attacks or their neediness coming your way, send up your shield so that what's coming towards you doesn't come inside of you. Let the shield deflect it off of and away from you.

This may take some practice, but it will definitely help you feel stronger and more in control of yourself.

If you need to break down some boundaries:

- ◆ Get a mental picture of what kind of wall or boundary you currently have in place. How thick is it? How close to or far away from your body does it extend outward? How long has it been there? (More than likely, a long time.)
- ◆ Notice who are the people with whom you most need it? Does it change with different people and in different situations or is it always the same?
- ◆ Know that this wall has been constructed to keep you safe in the world. Your internal "little kid", or perhaps your heart, doesn't feel safe. But you ARE ! (If you truly aren't safe, then begin to take steps to get yourself safe. Get help if you need it. And if you have a really hard time truly believing you are safe, you may also need to get help working through the issues that have created this for you.)
- ◆ Imagine what it would look like/be like to let go of some of those layers of protection. Be sure to reassure your little kid, or your heart, as you are doing this, that you, as the adult, will protect it. Go slowly. Take baby steps. Start with safe people. Find out that you will in fact be OK. It doesn't mean you won't get hurt, but you'll find out you can handle it if you do!

Again, this will take practice, but it will help you soften and open, and your relationships and experiences of the world will deepen.

You may need help making these changes. Get it! They are big changes. And they will change your life. Do what you have to do to give yourself this gift!

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