

THE
DAVIS FOUNDATION
FOR PROVIDING
EMOTIONAL COMFORT

Letter of January 11, 2006

Dear Reader,

Many discomforts are caused by confusion over personal boundaries or by different conceptions of personal space, either physical or emotional. When people with different senses of boundary are together, some may feel intruded upon while others feel distanced.

Certain people habitually stand very close to others as they talk sometimes causing others, feeling an intrusion, to step back. Some people “borrow” others’ possessions without asking. And judging from the amount of litter that we see it appears that many people consider the streets to be their personal wastebaskets.

All of these boundary violations are disequilibrating, even those that are so minor that we are barely aware of them. They contribute to the mental static that is caused by chronic disequilibrations. Out of awareness everyone has a sense of accurate boundaries and those who commit violations are just as disequilibrated by their actions as those who are victimized by them.

Some major boundary violations are obvious: burglaries, robberies, attacks, rapes and, the ultimate violation, murder. Others are internally generated. People with post-traumatic stress disorder have an exaggerated startle reflex. A normal sound that is associatively related to a past trauma evokes the disequilibrating startle reaction.

Boundary violation can be thought of in various ways. Technically, any stimulus that is overstimulating could be thought of as a boundary violation but it will be more useful for us to think in terms of inappropriate stimuli caused by other people.

A woman talks too much at her place of work. She stops by others’ cubicles and chats seemingly oblivious to their need to concentrate on their work. If confronted she apologizes but does it again later. For her talking is a *partial solution* to a chronic disequilibration. She can’t help herself because this habit pattern has been locked in as a way of coping with distress. But it creates a new stress because, out of awareness, she knows that she is bothering people. She knows because she knows that this behavior would bother her if someone else did it to her. It is a boundary violation because she is using their time and attention to take care of her own need.

Many of the ways that parents fail their children involve boundary confusion. One type is transference. A mother may transfer feelings of anger or hatred that she had toward her own mother onto her daughter. Or romantic feelings that she had toward her father onto her son. The daughter feels disliked; the son feels sexually stimulated. A father may push his child to excel academically or athletically to provide vicarious gratification of his own need to star. Or he may place an unspoken expectation on his



The Davis Foundation for
Providing Emotional Comfort
30 North Michigan Avenue
Suite 1125
Chicago, IL 60602

Tel: (312) 230-0114
Fax: (312) 230-0168
www.davis-foundation.org
info@davis-foundation.org

child to admire him. All of these inappropriate needs encroach on the boundaries of children and cause chronic disequilibrium.

Sometimes, in confusing boundaries, people place inappropriate expectations on themselves. A person may erroneously feel that she is responsible for the welfare of others and become anxious about her inability to protect them from danger. Or she may feel guilt over the misdeeds of relatives.

Boundary confusion is ubiquitous. We have all been subjected to it and we have all, at times, committed some of these errors ourselves. This is to be expected because often during our development *true solutions* are not available for the disequilibrium that we experience. The mental apparatus matches these discomforts with partial solutions. Some partial solutions are specifically related to a particular discomfort as when a parent transfers feelings toward his own parent onto his child. Other partial solutions serve as non-specific responses to stress. The woman who talks too much at work is using this partial solution to diminish all of her discomforts.

Our Inner Guides, by providing true solutions for our disequilibrium, allow us to discard the various partial solutions that we have used in the past. Boundaries will become clear and we will be spared the additional disequilibrium caused by the knowledge that we are making others uncomfortable.

QUESTION:

A prisoner writes, "My cell is small. There is really no place on my walls where I can focus on a spot...whenever I begin to stare, there are always other objects in my vision. Can you suggest some way I might be able to work around these conditions?"

ANSWER:

It is all right if other objects are within your vision. All you need to do is focus on the spot and think about it. Just consider those other objects irrelevant.

QUESTION:

How long should it take before my eyes would (or should) begin to close?

ANSWER:

Because you are looking up your eyes will become tired within a couple of minutes or even sooner. When they feel tired they will want to close. Just let them close. As you continue with self-hypnosis, you may find that they close almost immediately.

I welcome your questions and comments, and will publish as many of them as possible. I look forward to hearing from you, either by post or at info@davis-foundation.org. If you would like to be anonymous, just let me know.

Cordially,

Judith M. Davis

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