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Safe Relationship Spaces

By Margaret Paul, Ph.D.

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Title: Safe Relationship Spaces
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Copyright: © 2003 by Margaret Paul
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Word Count: 1529
Category: Relationships

SAFE RELATIONSHIP SPACES

By Margaret Paul Ph.D.

I have been counseling individuals, couples, families and business partners for the past 35 years and have numerous published books on the subject of relationships and relationship communication. Most of the couples I work with, even those in deep trouble when starting counseling with me, resolve their difficulties because they learn to create safe relationship spaces through a process called Inner Bonding (see how to download a free Inner Bonding course at the end of this article).

In the depths of our souls we all yearn for love and connection with others. That yearning reflects a basic, even biological, human need. Infants, for example, thrive physically only when they feel deeply loved and cherished. As adults, we experience wrenching, soul-level loneliness when we don't have love and meaningful connection in our lives, yet all too frequently we don't have these things. Not with our parents or siblings, not with a mate, not even with a best friend.

We all intuitively know that the highest experience in life is the sharing of love. However, we often confuse the idea of sharing love with the idea of getting love. We try to get love when we feel empty

Safe Relationship Spaces

inside and can share love only when we learn to first fill ourselves with love. We cannot share that which we do not have within. The wounded part of us seeks constantly to get love and avoid pain, resulting in an inability to share love. Until we each accept the full responsibility of becoming strong enough to love, we will not be able to share love. This means creating inner safety by learning how to love ourselves and take responsibility for our own feelings, so that we are not constantly trying to get love.

Most people have deep fears of rejection and abandonment, as well as of domination and engulfment. These fears stem from childhood experiences and from defining our worth externally through others' approval, rather than internally through spiritual eyes of truth. We will be unable to share our love to the fullest extent until we heal these fears of loss of other and of loss of self. We will be unable to create the safe relationship space in which to share love, and a safe world in which to live, until we learn how

to create safety within.

Inner Bonding, which is a six step spiritual healing process, is a profound process for healing our fears, creating safety within, and for creating safe relationship spaces, spaces where each person feels free to be fully themselves, to speak their truth and grow into their full potential.

It is possible in all relationships to create loving connection. Family, friends, co-workers, employers and employees, who are willing to learn the skills necessary to heal the blocks to connection can all create safe relationship spaces.

A relationship space is the environment in which the relationship is occurring. It is the energy created by the two people involved. I think of this environment, this relationship space, as an actual entity that both people are responsible for creating. It can be a safe relationship space, which is open, warm, light, and inviting, or it can be an unsafe relationship space, which is hard, dark, unforgiving, and full of fear. The kind of environment in which our relationship takes place is crucial to its success—or failure.

At the heart of all relationship issues is our intent. We are always choosing our intent, but most people are unconscious of the fact that they are making a choice each moment. At any given moment there are only two possible intents to choose from:

- o The intent to avoid painful feelings and responsibility for them, through some form of controlling behavior.
- o The intent to learn about loving ourselves and others and take full responsibility for our own feelings and behavior.

Every relationship has a system. The system may be open and loving, or controlling and unloving. Relationship systems start surprisingly early, sometimes within the first minutes or days of meeting.

A safe relationship space exists when two or more people intend to learn and are willing to take full personal responsibility for their own feelings, while accepting that their energy and behavior affects others. When both individuals fully accept that they are a part of an energy system, i.e., they recognize

Safe Relationship Spaces

that each person's energy affects the other, and they are willing to take responsibility both for their own controlling behavior and for their responses to the controlling behavior of others, they create a safe relationship space. Such a space is a circle of loving energy that results from each person's deep desire to learn what is most loving to themselves and others. To create a safe relationship space, all persons involved need to be deeply committed to learning about their own controlling behavior, rather than focusing on what another is doing. Rather than giving themselves up to avoid rejection or attempting to get others to give themselves up to feel safe, each person is devoted to their own and the other's highest good, supporting themselves and each other in becoming all they can be.

Many of us have spent a great deal of time in unsafe relationship spaces. In fact, some of us have never experienced a safe relationship space because many, if not most, of us have not learned to create a safe inner space by staying in a loving adult frame of mind when our fears are activated. When our fears of being rejected, abandoned, engulfed and controlled are triggered, most of us are triggered into a child state and immediately retreat into our learned controlling behaviors. We may move our focus into our minds to avoid our feelings; we may attack, blame, defend, demand, explain, deny, judge, criticize, shut down, withdraw, resist, give in and comply, placate, lie, become overly nice, and so on. Of course, the moment we act out in controlling ways, our behavior may trigger another's

fears of being rejected or controlled, and that person may then react in controlling ways as well, creating a vicious circle and an unsafe relationship space.

If, when these fears are activated, we focus on who is at fault or who started it, we perpetuate an unsafe relationship space. Blaming another for our fears (and for our own reactive, unloving behavior) makes the relationship space more unsafe than ever. Then both people in the relationship end up feeling bad, each of us believing that our pain is the result of the other person's behavior. We feel victimized, helpless, stuck, and disconnected from our partner. We desperately want the other person to see what they are doing that (we think) is causing our pain. We think that if the other person only understands this, they will change—and we exhaust ourselves trying to figure out how to make them understand.

Over time, being in an unsafe relationship space creates distance between the people involved. When we have not created a safe space in which to speak our complete, heartfelt truth about ourselves, the joy between us gradually dies. And the more we hold back our innermost feelings and experiences, the shallower our connection becomes. Our intimacy crumbles.

In friendships, marriages, and work relationships, our joy, aliveness, and creativity get lost as we each give up parts of ourselves in an attempt to feel safe. In romantic relationships, passion dries up. Superficiality, boredom, fighting, and apathy take its place. We try valiantly to figure out what went wrong. But too often we ask, "What am I doing wrong?" or "What are you doing wrong?" rather than inquiring into the health of the relationship space itself.

Only when we look at the relationship space will we see what we are each doing to create the unsafe space. The dual fears of losing the other through rejection and losing ourselves through being swallowed up by the other are the underlying cause of our unloving, reactive behavior. These fears are deeply rooted. They cannot be healed or overcome by getting someone else's love. On the contrary,

Safe Relationship Spaces

we must heal these fears before we can share love—give and receive love—with each other.

The key to doing this is learning how to create a safe inner space where we can work with and overcome our fears of rejection and engulfment. This is a process, not an event. Practicing the six step process of Inner Bonding gradually creates inner safety as we learn to take personal responsibility for our own feelings and behavior. Inner Bonding guides us in defining ourselves internally through the eyes of our personal spiritual guidance, instead of externally through performance, looks, and others' approval. In addition, it provides us with a clear process for conflict resolution that can be used in any relationship difficulty. Instead of love eroding with time, love deepens daily, supporting each person in the sacred journey of the soul's evolution.

Any two people who are willing to learn to create their own inner sense of safety can also learn to create a safe relationship space where their intimacy and passion will flourish and their love will endure.

Margaret Paul, Ph.D. is the best-selling author and co-author of eight books, including "Do I Have To Give Up Me To Be Loved By You?", "Do I Have To Give Up Me To Be Loved By My Kids?", "Healing Your Aloneness", "Inner Bonding", and "Do I Have To Give Up Me To Be Loved By God?" Visit her web site for a FREE Inner Bonding course: <http://www.innerbonding.com> or <mailto:margaret@innerbonding.com>

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HOW IS MY RELATIONSHIP GROWING?

By Rhoberta Shaler, PhD

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When you choose your partner and commence a full-time relationship, you look forward to a future of love, support, encouragement, communication and intimacy. Right? After all, you are in love and you're both on your best behaviour—so how could there be any problems?

Learning how to establish and maintain a loving, supportive relationship is much like creating a beautiful garden. It takes information, planning, thought, skill, time, and most of all, attention. Like many gardeners, you learn your skills and styles from your parents, close friends and relatives. You watch them

Safe Relationship Spaces

from the time you are little. They teach you both your roles in a relationship, and how to play them, through their example. This happens in every family and much of the teaching is unintentional and unconscious. Many of you did not like what you saw and, yet, in your poorest moments, you may behave just that way. In angry, tense times, you revert to the ways you learned in those early days! No wonder your relationships provide you with challenges that cause you to forget the "honeymoon" period sometimes!

The good news is that you can learn how to have a full, rich, loving relationship that allows each partner to express his/her thoughts, feelings, wants, needs and vulnerabilities AND FEEL COMPLETELY SAFE!! You can learn to be assertive (not aggressive) and to collaborate with your partners. You can learn to listen with your minds and hearts. You can learn to fight fair and resolve conflicts equitably and sanely. You can learn to value and acknowledge both yourself and your partner. You can learn to speak from your hearts and be safe. You can learn to ask for what you need and want. You can learn to love more fully. You can learn to DEEPEN your love. It may take some unlearning, releasing habits, fears and beliefs that are blocks to experiencing and expressing love but YOU'RE WORTH IT!

Remember, too, that you are teaching your children how to have a relationship by the way you are conducting yours. What would you like them to learn? What are you showing them every day?

Healthy relationships allow you to fully express yourself and fully expand your capacity to love. Remember, most of your relationship skills are caught, not taught. So, if your

relationship is not what you know it could be, there IS a remedy. You can learn new ways—if you are willing and you really want to. What is it worth to you?

If love, acceptance, approval, respect, safety, trust, honesty, integrity, and wholeness are what you want in your life, begin by giving these things to yourself now so that you will have those gifts to bring to your relationships. You cannot give a gift you do not have, can you?

Rhoberta Shaler, PhD, Motivational Keynote Speaker, Corporate Team Builder and Executive Coach from San Diego, CA, is the creator of The Consociate Way™: Promoting Performance & Peace in Your Workplace. Call Rhoberta at 1.877.728.6464 or email at RS@SpeakingAboutWork.com. Visit: <http://www.SpeakingAboutWork.com> for further information and free ezines.



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