
Restoring Connection

When you think of your most important relationships, do you feel more critical than loving? More frustrated than patient? More despairing than hopeful?

Why are the people you love most also most likely to provoke distress?

Because you expect them to meet your needs, and that doesn't always happen. Sometimes, needs go unmet for a long time. Or, there's a sudden violation, a betrayal that causes a rupture, and it feels like your needs will never be met.

When significant people don't consistently meet your needs, members of your internal family will work to protect you from the resulting pain.

Common Protectors

Blamers

These protectors jump in when someone (e.g., your spouse) lets you down. They committed to doing something and did not follow through. You hoped for something, and they dismissed it. Blamers are angry, and they react to your distress by cataloging all the ways your partner failed you.

Shamers

More fierce than the blamers, these protectors are like vipers. They strike out at the other person when the person's behavior provokes your shame. Shame is the emotion associated with distorted beliefs such as "I'm unlovable" or "I'm not good enough." When shame and distorted beliefs surface, a shamer will attempt to wound the other person to protect you.

Distancers

If the fire is hot, move back. These protectors block connection with the person who let you down. Their strategies disconnect you from the source of pain.

Caretakers

The opposite strategy from distancing is to seek validation through caregiving. This protector will focus intently on meeting the other person's needs, hoping that will get your needs met.

Critics

When there's a longstanding pattern of unmet needs, you will likely have a critic in your system who is diligent about pointing out other people's faults. This is a proactive strategy to diminish the importance or value of the other person, minimizing the impact of their inattention to your needs.

Our protectors will do whatever it takes, using whatever strategy they can, to keep us from being overwhelmed by pain. But, despite their positive intention, their activity blocks our hearts, keeping us from getting what we most need: loving connection.

How do you restore your relationship when your protectors are in charge?

Make a "you-turn." Shift attention from the other person to yourself. Your protectors have focused all their energy on the other person, on the ways they've let you down. And that keeps you stuck. To shift the pattern, you need to regain the leadership of your internal family. Then you can draw on the resources you possess as a bearer of God's image to move towards the kind of relationship you desire.

Here Are The Steps:

- **Notice how you are responding to the other person.** If you're not curious about why they're acting a certain way, you have no desire to connect with them, and your heart is blocked, it's time to make a "you-turn."
- **Shift your attention *from* the other person to your inner experience.**
 - What emotions do you feel?
 - What sensations or impulses do you notice in your body?
 - What thoughts do you have about the person?

- **You are starting to connect with one of your protectors.**
 - Ask yourself, “How am I feeling toward this part of me? Am I curious to know more about her?” (I chose a feminine pronoun, but parts can be any gender.)
 - If you don’t like her, are afraid of her, or as soon as you try to focus on her, you go blank, other parts are blocking your heart. Ask them if they would be willing to step back so you can get to know the protector.
- **When you are open to learning more about one of your protectors, have a conversation! These are some questions you can ask:**
 - Why do you show up around (person)?
 - How are you trying to help me?
 - Do you like your job?
 - What are you afraid would happen if you didn’t do it?
- **Notice how she responds to you.** This is not an interrogation; it’s a conversation. If you patiently and persistently connect with her, she will show you what she’s afraid would happen if she didn’t do her job. She will show you a time when you were hurt, either by this person or in the past.
- **When you learn why your protector is doing her job and you see the vulnerable part of you that got hurt, you can do a few key things to restore leadership of your internal family.**
 - Let the vulnerable part of you know you see her and you are sorry she’s hurting.
 - Tell your protector how much you appreciate her efforts.
 - Let both of them know you will continue to connect with them.
 - Ask them if they will let you lead the relationship with the other person.

Befriending protectors enables you to turn back to the other person with a different perspective. You will be clear about why they provoke your protector(s), and you will recognize that they, too, have protectors. You can approach the person with confidence, compassion, even playfulness - restoring the connection you need.

Note: This process is a general approach and is not intended to represent all of the nuances involved in relationships where abuse or violence occurred.