

STOP SCREAMING AT PEOPLE FOR THEIR OWN GOOD

"Protect the ones you love."

Our *highest* priority.

We tell ourselves, "I have to protect my friends and family. That is my highest priority, the reason I am here."

But sometimes...this can lead to problems. Sometimes...we accidentally hurt the people we are trying to protect.

This is *especially* true for trauma survivors. They tend to "over" protect. They feel like they've lost so much, that sometimes, they hold on too tightly.

This is written for them--all the people trying too hard to make sure nothing bad ever happens again.

How can we hurt people while trying to protect them?

Why does this happen repeatedly?

What are we doing wrong?

Why do we sometimes feel like screaming at people we care about?

*Why does it seem **so important** they listen to us?*

To understand, let's look from another angle. Is it ever appropriate to be harsh with people? Does it ever make sense be controlling?

Is there ever a time when it is useful to *scream* at your spouse? Or *shove* your child? Or take control of your friend's life against their wishes?

Can you imagine *situations* where these intense behaviors make sense?

Of course.

- We might *scream* at our spouse, "Get out of here!" if the building is on fire.

- We might *shove* our child to safety out of the way of an oncoming car.

- We could *forcibly* take away our friend's keys because they are too drunk to drive.

In life-or-death situations it is okay, even appropriate, to be harsh and controlling.

That is where the problem is.

When is it *really* "life-or-death?"

How are we making that determination?

And...what happens when we get it wrong? What happens when we over sense the threat? What happens when sense "life-threatening" when it really is only "mildly destructive?"

The answer...we over-react, we over-protect. We behave more harshly than is required. And that harshness, that intensity, becomes the focus. Our "solution" is now the problem.

Some examples:

- Raising a voice to a spouse for moving our things.

- Grabbing a child harshly for slouching in church.

- Forcibly taking a teenager's phone because they didn't clean their room the first time they were asked.

And even if we contain ourselves, even if we don't actually *do* these behaviors, people can still sense, on some level, that we want to. They can *feel* our intensity.

That urgency makes people uncomfortable. It puts them on alert. Makes them feel like they're walking on eggshells, like one misstep will lead to disaster.

In some ways, that is *exactly* what we are trying to convey. That is what we feel in these moments, a life-threatening situation that demands quick, decisive action. In our minds, there isn't time for contemplation, debate, or even compassion. This is an emergency! Everyone needs to act quickly and follow our instructions, without question. If not, we believe there will be serious and immediate consequences.

But many times, even most of the time, we're getting this wrong. We're moving to *fight-or-flight* too quickly. These aren't *true* emergencies. We still have plenty of time to take a breath, to think and communicate, all while maintaining compassion and composure.

Things aren't that horrible.

We don't have to get nasty.

You might start remembering some of the moments you've over-reacted, some of the moments you've over-protected, moments that felt so big that you tried too hard. Moments you look back on as false alarms.

So how do we change this?

How do we stop it?

Well...that *is* the hard part.

We have to change something that *feels* permanent. We have to rewire something that *feels* immovable. We have to let go...slightly...of the most important thing in our lives...protecting the ones we love.

This will be very difficult.

Letting go of protection, even the tiniest amount, will feel like we are dooming our loved ones to disaster. It will feel like we are turning our back on them. It will feel like we are letting them die in front of us. That protective impulse is so hard-wired in our DNA that we constantly return to it and intensely resist letting it go.

I am not going to try and tell you to stop protecting your family.

But...I am going to ask you to do something that is going to feel almost as hard.

I'm going to ask you to make protection your *second* job.

You have a new first job.

Are you ready?

Your new first job...drum roll please...is

"BE NICE"

Protecting your family is no longer **first** job.

It is your **second** job.

Your first job is to be nice to your family.

Repeat after me.

"I have to be nice to my loved ones first."

"I have to be kind to my loved ones first."

"I have to love my loved ones first."

"After I'm nice, after I'm kind, after I've listened to them, then, and only then, can I try to protect them.

And if I have to be harsh, if I have to be controlling, if I have to be intense in order to help them, I really have to second guess my actions and maybe get some help. If I feel like it is time to get nasty, I may be getting it wrong and I may end up just being a jerk without a good reason."

We're replacing our first threat response...quick decisive action with compassion and contemplation.

Acceptance.

Radical acceptance.

Slightly letting go of something...likely the most important thing in our lives...and replacing it with something that feels *less* important.

Let's look at those "emergencies" above again. And this time with kindness as our first priority over action.

- You may yell at the top of your lungs, "Honey, I love you. You need to wake up our house is on fire!"

- You might cradle your child gently and cushion the blow before *pushing* them out of the way of an oncoming car.

- You could grab your friend's keys and run away while singing, "You're my best friend and I'm taking these because I love you." and singing and dancing down the street because I care about you."

You aren't saving them at all cost. You loving them first *and then* trying to save them.

Let's look at other examples using this approach.

- When your spouse moves your things you say while hugging them, "I've come to appreciate all the Easter Egg hunts you send me on looking for my stuff."

- You hug your child in church while whispering in their ear, "I know you're tired but the marathon is almost over champ. Come on, we'll cross this finish line together."

- You hug your teenager and say lovingly, "You know when you're an adult and out on your own and looking back at this. You'll think, *Gosh...I wish I cleaned my room more* and appreciated how awesome my parents were for not restricting my privileges because of it."

Could this strategy backfire? Could it delay a reflexive life-saving reaction by a half a second?

Of course....it's possible.

Not very likely...but possible.

We must accept the fact that our loved ones could get hurt or even die because we focused on being kind as our *first* priority. There is a very small chance this philosophy could end up hurting them...that half a second of kindness might delay a needed decisive action in a very rare true life-or-death situation that demanded a split-second reaction.

But...it is very unlikely this will happen.

Just like there is a very small chance your seat belt could end up killing you instead of saving you. But you should still wear one because...more often than not...it's going to do a lot more good than harm.

Most of the time making our first impulse kindness, our first impulse being nice, will help a lot more than it will hurt. When you've survived trauma, you need to let go of *protection* as your first impulse. Replace it with kindness.

Replace action with compassion as your first threat response.

If we have to scream at someone for their own good our first job is to question just how much good we'll be doing by screaming. We start by hardwiring softness and kindness as our initial response to threat.

Again, this will be very difficult. It will take near constant work and reinforcement. You will naturally keep returning to protection mode. But the more you stay in "nice mode" the easier it will become.

We have a new most important job now.

Be *nice* to the ones we love.

