

Boundaries Exercise for Listening to Self – Becoming Aware of Body Signals

This is a simple exercise to help us become aware of our body responses to feeling unsafe. Our bodies pick up on danger signals far more rapidly than our conscious minds. Sometimes as survivors we have learned to be hypervigilant and tend to perceive and react to danger even when it is not there. This can lead to panic attacks as our bodies can react even when there is no danger. Learning how our bodies feel when we sense danger and developing tolerance for these feelings can help us to manage panic attacks more effectively. Instead of flipping into a panic attack we can sit with the feelings in our body and ask ourselves if there is any reason for this body feeling. Body awareness is a vital resource to enable us to know whether or not we feel safe and comfortable. This exercise can help us to experience our body's reaction to feeling unsafe in a safe situation. It is normal for our bodies to feel unsafe and uncomfortable when our personal space is intruded upon.

It is good to do this exercise slowly to give yourself plenty of time to be aware of your body responses.

Break into pairs. Find a space where you can be about 3-4 metres apart. Face one another and one person (A) moves slowly, small step by step, towards the other person (B) only as (B) indicates that it is OK to do so.

(B) "listens" to their body for signs of comfort or discomfort and only signals another step forward if they are still comfortable.

When (B) begins to be aware of discomfort they say or signal "okay stop".

Remember this is about B's reactions not about A. You are not being rejected. Don't take it personally.

Reverse roles. Let A be the person who is moved towards.

Some questions to think about:

- How close can the other person come?
- How do you recognise when you want the other person no closer?
- Is it different if you imagine the person to be someone you particularly like or someone you feel unsafe with? (Our minds and imagination are powerful tools.)

If there is time:

Try moving towards side to side instead of face to face, or from behind. Swap partners. Try the exercise with someone of a different gender or size and see if there is any difference in your responses.

Debrief together in pairs and in larger group if time is available.

– Meryl Lee and Debra Battersby