

full tilt living newsletter

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Here on the earth plane, two objects cannot simultaneously occupy the same space. We all know that.

I've noticed we use this critical understanding of distance and the non-occupation of two things in one space for more than just avoiding damage to vehicles. It plays a huge role in our view of emotional space as well. Have you ever tried that space-invasion game of stepping a few inches closer to someone when you're standing having a conversation? You can literally move your conversation partner all around the room if you close the distance enough to be inside their comfort zone. This is a sneaky, mean thing to do, of course, and we're all above such petty and intriguingly wicked behavior.

So there's this sense of personal space, a need for a certain distance we want to protect. We shift it with our mood, the people we are with, how many seats are left in the theatre.

We have our internal distance going on as well. And have learned to own and operate it through a lot of trial and error. So that when you were three and the language and interaction stuff was just getting under way, and say you strongly disliked the boy that grabbed your red sand shovel, you might just go ahead and sink your teeth into him. Or throw your arms around your best friend and hug her to Christmas. The hugging thing would have been good for some oohs and ahhs. Using your teeth to get your shovel back, not the same reaction.

Our little internal computers process these happenings and come up with a program to sort and choose how we go about laying out our feelings. What we share, what we keep at a distance--sometimes even from ourselves. It's with this stuff of events so minor and long forgotten we'd be surprised to know they had any impact that we build our model.

Once we've mapped out our plan for choosing distance, it usually stays unchanged, operating on autopilot for us. Gives a reassuring consistency to our interactions. Keeps us from plunging headlong into unfortunate displays that only three year olds can get away with.

That's the plus side of this distance system. There are times when instead of helping make our way safely through interactions, it clogs our jets. Can have us trying to convince ourselves that what we feel should be and therefore will be unfeeling. Because if we do feel it, we risk being back to doing the kind of stuff that got us what modern parenting primly calls a "time out." Which, truth to be told, is a shined up version of being ostracized.

I'm here to tell you, if that carefully constructed distance program has you squeezing something down, its gonna be oozing out somewhere like jelly from a squashed jelly donut and that somewhere could result in some mega trouble for you.

I myself recall a Thanksgiving dinner when, having been the dutiful daughter for twenty plus years, I suddenly hit that squeeze stage where the ooze begins to happen and shot out the "f" word for what reason I can't recall. Then me wondering how I could get it to go back in before anyone noticed and the silence all around the room only confirming that wasn't going to happen. All those years of sterling behavior trashed with one little bomb of a word. Well, okay, some interesting insights on profanity and shallow thinking were examined in excruciating detail and targeted in you-know-who's direction. The world didn't really end. It just would have been easier on all of us if I'd have recognized that I had reached that stage of feeling my oats and wanting to do a little challenging of a time-worn and tired parent-child dynamic and chosen a more manageable topic in advance. Before the jelly had no choice but to ooze.

Spare yourself moments like this. Or worse. And make yourself a promise knowing that autopilot has its limits. That you'll listen to what is going on inside. You'll notice when, no matter how uncomfortable you are beginning to feel, keeping those feelings at a distance is not going to give you what you need. And risk honestly asking yourself what will make things better for you. And then promise that you will step out of your fear and into acting. In a way that is confident and compassionate and full of care. For you and for everyone who would have been in oozing range.

And know that I'm behind you all the way.