

# The Gate Keeper



For teen girls, young women  
and the people who love them

# The Gate Keeper

Setting boundaries and  
building healthy friendships

**Elly Malaxos**

The Gate Keeper  
Copyright © 2024 by Elly Malaxos  
All rights reserved.

Published by:  
Professional Woman Publishing  
*[www.pwnbooks.com](http://www.pwnbooks.com)*

ISBN: 979-8-218-97746-7

# *Dedication*

**To Mom**, who championed my independent, self-reliant spirit. She cultivated my capacity to think, make decisions and pursue goals. Recognizing my capabilities long before I did, she set high expectations for excellence. While her rules were strict yet rightfully, and thankfully protective, she graciously gave me room to grow, explore and become the unique person I am today. Though she's no longer physically with me, her love and support continue to shape my life. In memory of the extraordinary mother whose legacy resonates in the tapestry of my life.



# Acknowledgements

Read the last paragraph...it's to YOU!

There are many, many people who touched my life and helped make this book become a reality. I have a wide support network of friends, mentors, coaches and family members who encourage and challenge me, and share their wisdom. There are a few special people who I leaned on the most for this book:

Liana Malaxos, Michael Malaxos, and George Malaxos...I thank you for all that you are to me and all that you do for me. You are my rock, my foundation, my encouragement, and motivation. I love you with all my heart.

Joyce Trimble, Simone Ulmer and Ashley Ortega...Your special contributions, insights and feedback mean more to me than I can express in words. Thank you!

Alli Onni, Linda Ellis Eastman, Grace Majewski, Terri Laseter, and Joyce Trimble (again!) Michelle Debenport, Megan Griffis, and my Dad... Thank you all for your encouragement, support, kindness, respect, love and laughter. Thank you for believing in me even when I was unsure of myself.

And to all the young women who read this book, I thank you for allowing me to be a part of your life and to share my stories. Thank you for keeping an open mind and an open heart. Even if someone told you to read this book, I thank you for taking the time to read and reflect. With all sincerity, I want YOU to be a confident woman.





# Contents

Introduction	1
Chapter 1	Here it is: Set the Stage...
	Your House and Your Yard 5
Chapter 2	Own your House...
	Who's in Your Yard? Who's in Your House? 14
Chapter 3	Your Yard, Your House...
	They're Unique as Fingerprints 21
Chapter 4	Boundary Criteria...
	Your Yard, Your House, Your Rules 31
Chapter 5	Letting People In...
	Using Your Gate and Door Criteria 49
Chapter 6	Kicking People Out...
	Who Needs to be Evicted? 61
Chapter 7	Kicking People Out...
	Evictions with Confidence 69
Chapter 8	Look in the Mirror...
	Are You a Good Friend? 84
Chapter 9	Conclusion 93
Appendix	99
About the Author	111



# Introduction

One of the first times I had to challenge what was being taught to my children at school was when my daughter was in pre-school. A little boy in her class hit her and took her toy, leaving her understandably upset. She relayed the story to me later in the day. While the teacher addressed the issue by punishing the boy, the teacher's verbal lesson was "We don't behave that way because we're all friends here. We don't hit our friends."

Your first reaction may be: "So, what's wrong with that?!?" It was an appropriate response on the teacher's part you may be thinking. Well, here's where I bristled: "We're all friends here." My little preschool age girl was agonizing over being told that we're all friends here while she was angry and, in her heart, didn't want to be friends with a kid who just hit her. She was struggling to process it with her little-kid deference to authority and socialization, but she was upset and confused. I realized that I needed to unteach that lesson right away.

I explained to my daughter that the teacher was part right and part wrong. "Yes, the boy who hit you was properly punished, but he did NOT behave like a friend to you, and you do NOT HAVE to be his friend." She did not have to be friends with anyone who hurt her or is mean to her. He is a classmate, not a friend. There is more to being friends than just classmates.

This was just the beginning of a long process of keeping

Careful watch over messaging which, to me, dangerously reduced the power and confidence of a young girl to set boundaries for herself. Throughout her school years, I had to continually reinforce empowerment strategies to my daughter and her friends, even if it contradicted what she heard from teachers, coaches and media.

Our culture and society often encourage girls to be friends with everyone, much more so than boys, but that is neither safe nor prudent. It removes power and personal autonomy! Throughout her school years, especially during middle & high school and continuing into college, my daughter faced various friendship problems and conflicts with other girls. Middle school was definitely the crescendo of my empowerment teaching. We all know that middle school is a drama-filled, highly emotional and challenging doozy-of-a-time for all of us as we are growing and building new social structures.

I consistently reinforced and made it clear that she deserved respect, and if she didn't receive it, those individuals were not her true friends and may not have a role in her life. And that was perfectly OK. Not everyone is a friend.

To help my daughter visualize and understand how to categorize her friends and what being a friend means, I created an analogy involving a house and a yard. This analogy, explained on the following pages, served as a useful tool to guide her in controlling who she let into her life, as well as defining and maintaining certain boundaries, and deciding what she shared with others.

The House/Yard analogy is a visualization tool that quite effectively helped my daughter understand her worth and to build real friendships and relationships. It gave her confidence

to expect proper kindness, respect, love and support from friends, and how to set boundaries as she's getting to know new people. She developed the confidence to acknowledge that if someone didn't meet her criteria of being a friend, she felt empowered to distance herself from them. The analogy proved valuable not only during her middle and high school years but also through college and beyond.

She's even used the analogy to coach her friends through their challenging social relationships. I've shared it with friends in their 40's, 50s and 60s, too. It's been amazing how helpful such a visualization like this is for everyone, of all ages! This concept empowered my daughter and others to recognize their power in demanding respect and determining who earned the privilege to be called a friend. It also helps recognize the boundaries set by our friends and how to respect them and be a good friend. I've seen it instill strength and character in young women.

In this book, I am sharing my House/Yard analogy and personal stories, mine, my daughter's and those of other young women around us. (All names have been changed) I believe this messaging is so important for parents, educators, counselors, coaches, etc. to share with young women. The analogy is another tool in the toolbox that you can use to help empower young hearts and minds.

The last chapter for the book, the Appendix, is especially for parents, coaches, counselors, etc. who may be raising and guiding a young woman, to reiterate their role in her growth.

My goal is to disseminate the idea that young girls have the ability to set boundaries, demand respect, and define their friendships. Confidence, self-worth and boundaries are great

powers every woman should take with her into the world. While this is written from the viewpoint of a woman and targeted to other women & girls, it is not just for girls. It's for anyone and everyone who may be struggling with boundaries and friendships.

Empowering girls to define friendships based on respect, kindness and support is a vital lesson. By teaching young girls to assert their boundaries and decide who they allow into their lives, we equip them with the strength and character necessary to navigate the complexities and challenges of relationships throughout their lives. Through sharing my analogy and stories, I hope to inspire and guide young girls, their parents, family members, and educators in fostering strong, empowered young women who understand their worth and the importance of cultivating healthy and respectful friendships. Let us embrace the power within and create a world where girls can confidently choose their friends and shape their own destinies.

# ONE

## **Here it is: Set the Stage... Your House and Your Yard**

Imagine you have a house. It's a very nice house. You love it there. You feel comfortable in that house, and it makes you feel happy and warm when you are inside.

Imagine that you also have a big backyard surrounded by a fence and a gate. It's full of everything you need and want to throw great parties with all your friends. Perhaps you have a pool and a big grill for cookouts. Maybe a bounce house, ball courts, a trampoline, heck, why not roller coasters, food trucks, and live celebrity performances! Why not? It's your imagination! Whatever sounds fun, imagine it in your backyard. No limits! It's always sunny and the weather is perfect. This is where you invite friends over to connect and have fun together.

You may have lots of friends with you in your backyard party, or just a few. It doesn't matter. It's for you and the friends you enjoy being with. (And remember, there's a fence and a closed gate to protect the yard. Not just anyone can come in off the street, only the people you let in.)

Now, here's an important rule: you may have friends in the yard, BUT you don't allow most of them into your house. Not

everyone at the party is allowed in the house!

You see, your house is your heart. Only the closest friends, people you love and trust, and who love, respect and support you in return should be allowed in your house, or, in other words, allowed that close to your heart.

As for all the others partying out in the yard, yes, they are friends too, but they just aren't close enough to come into the house. They are, and may remain forever, "the backyard party friends."

Maybe, over time, you'll become closer to one or two of the backyard friends and allow them into the house. But it takes time; they certainly must *earn* their way in.

Sometimes, and this does happen, people in the house no longer deserve to be there. There may come a time when you have to kick someone out, either out to the backyard party or all the way out of the backyard gate. (I call that "an eviction" and I'll dive deeper into that in later chapters.)

Sure, over time you can let them back in if you like. Or maybe you never do. And that's OK. It's YOUR decision who comes close to you as a backyard friend and even more so, who you let in your house. You are the boss of your gate, your backyard party and your house.

That's the House/Yard analogy. It's a simple visualization to demonstrate different categories of friends and personal boundaries (i.e. gates, doors.) The analogy also has a subtle elegance to demonstrate that friendships can change, and people can, and often do, become closer or more distant over time. Most importantly, it is designed to remind you that you are in control of your heart. You set the boundaries and the criteria to be a close friend, and you have the power to defend those boundaries.



This is quite contrary to most messaging that little girls receive growing up. Frankly, I know quite a few adults who still haven't mastered this concept of owning their own boundaries. Nonetheless, the analogy is effective and easy to grasp, and even helps adults.

### **Where It Started...Ugh, Middle School**

Somewhere around middle school, most of us really begin building our social structures. For most people, those middle school years are NOT remembered fondly! It's tough, and confusing, even in the most stable social & familial environments. These social structures and new friendships can be hard to figure out.

And, for those of you who are having, or have had the unfortunate opportunity to be a middle-school age girl, and/or simply been around groups of them, you'll know to your core when I say, girls are MEAN! Those pre-teen/early teen years are the worst ages. One day they're "best friends forever", the next day there's backstabbing, gossiping, jealousy, online bullying, perfecting sarcasm, you name it! Building & navigating social relationships at that age is guerilla warfare.

Oh, the hurtful words they spew, sarcasm, cattiness, fickle friend-switching...the list goes on! Yes, most are quite lovely from time to time, but they all have their fangs that pop out, too.

To be fair, it's not just girls; Middle school isn't so great for the boys either. The boys have their own rough style. Same pre-teen challenges in building their social structures, but it typically presents differently from the girls. In groups of boys there's less

cattiness and more fists, sarcasm, general cruelty, hazing, etc. (Any guys reading this: Do I have it right, gentlemen?)

Am I stirring up some unpleasant memories? I'll bet, and thank goodness when it's over! But I'm reaching back into those dark pre-teen and early-teen days because that's where this analogy really begins for most of us.

In reality, we're not all horrid wild beasts at that age. We also learn how to be friends. We learn what friendships mean. We each have the capacity to create deeper friendships than ever before. We start to build those "pre-sexual" relationships. It's all new and different AND it's all more complex than little-kid elementary school friendships.

We're simultaneously learning about our wildly changing selves and building our social structures. We're learning and creating boundaries with the people around us. Every mistake, every broken heart, every joy is part of the building process. And this analogy, the House and Yard, is a visualization to help you identify and manage your boundaries.

## **Friend**

In English, we only have one word for "friend", but in reality, there are many types of friends. There are different levels of friendship, and different depths of relationships with friends. Friendships have seasons, they come and go with the changes in our lives. There is SO much to sort out in this big world of friendships.

In my own life, and my kids, I see that it is easy for teachers, coaches, parents, etc. to toss out the line "were all friends here" and "We all should get along because we're all friends." Yeah

yeah yeah, and here we are, trying to undo that teaching. (since pre-school!) Really, anyone who says that isn't really teaching, they're lazy and not helping kids work on setting boundaries, managing anger, coping with social issues. It's unaware and insensitive.

In middle school, my daughter tried to be a good friend. Yes, she did grow her own little devil-horns on occasion, but in general, she worked hard to build her friendships. She expected the same kindness and love that she gave from girls she made friends with. On occasion she had her feelings hurt by cruel words or actions of another girl. She'd come home either angry or upset. Fortunately, we have a good relationship, and she would share the stories with me. Through the tears, we spent time discussing the actions and behaviors of true friends. And this is where the House/Yard analogy began to really help her sort things out.

All through elementary school she, of course, was taught about friendships and being friends. She and her friends played together, laughed together and they were generally fine. Then middle school hit like a bomb. It blew up her idyllic, sweet, pink-tinted cheery childhood world.

My daughter is a "visual" person like me (likes to learn through images rather than just words), and the analogy worked. I wanted her to feel empowered to own and control the door to her house and the gate to the backyard. She, and she alone, is empowered to decide who is a friend and what kind of friend they are. She can demand respect from friends, and she can protect her heart from those who are not good for her.

Through the tears she'd talk it out. I'd ask her about her decisions, but never make them for her. After mean words

or a betrayal, she learned to make her own decisions on who deserved to be close to her heart. She learned to keep people at a comfortable ‘distance’ or ‘recategorize’ friends if necessary. She decides who is a friend. No one else can dictate it for her.

Today, in her early 20’s, she’s not easily coerced or manipulated by others. She has a good amount of confidence as she enters the adult world today. It takes practice, reflection and of course, support. Confidence grows over time. I want the same for every young woman!

Bonus: She also learned how to be a good friend in return.

Back to how the boys are different for a sec: My son, and most of the men in my life, never had a problem sorting out who was a true friend or not. He was born with some innate friend filter. From the time he was a toddler just beginning to socialize to the grown man he is now, he requires friends to earn their way into his ‘inner circle’. Once earned, he expects complete loyalty and dedication to the friendship exactly as he will give in return. 100%, and no less. One betrayal, and he’ll shut the friend out. I never had to teach him any of this. He’s wired this way as some people are.

But for my daughter, and the same for many of her friends, (some male friends too) it isn’t always so clear. For the most part, it tends to be more of an issue for young girls. Society demands from us girls that we “get along.”

## **The First Friends Story**

Emily and Olivia met each other in elementary school. They played together well and had a fun happy friendship. In middle

school, the two found even more common ground, fun, food, music, classes, etc. Their friendship grew. Emily was sure they were close lifelong friends. They shared their secrets, their frustrations, their likes and a lot of laughs.

Olivia was definitely a friend in Emily's house. They were close! For a couple years all was well with the two friends.

Then one fateful day, a mutual friend, a boy, contacted them both to say hi. Neither girl had seen this boy since he moved away in elementary school. He had grown, a lot...and he was cuuuuute! The competition for his affection started immediately. Olivia started to bad-mouth Emily to the boy, saying disparaging things about her. Emily only found out about some of them because he asked her about them. Then Olivia began saying more things to a broader group of mutual friends. Of course Emily heard about it! Emily was devastated. Hurt, betrayed, shocked, violated. So many adjectives, so many tears. Emily talked through the house, and the yard analogy with her mom who also reassured Emily that it was OK if she decided to kick Olivia out to the yard or even out of the gate.

Note: Her mom didn't recommend that she do it. She let Emily decide for herself. It was her choice to make. New friends will take Olivia's place in the house very soon, and they would be quality friends. And if, at another time, Emily wants to let Olivia back in her house, then that's OK too, as long as Emily knew on what criteria (boundaries) she'd accept her.

Emily agonized over evicting Olivia from her house for a short time, then finally decided to do it. As a matter of fact, she not only kicked Olivia out of the house, she took a page from her brother's book and kicked Olivia to the street! She didn't talk to Olivia for several years. Yes, it hurt at first. Yes,

Emily missed her friendship, and was aware that it was never going to be the same again. She decided it was better to feel a loss than to feel the pain of a repeat betrayal. She also kept faith that new friends would soon take Olivia's place in her house, which they did. Many years later, Olivia and Emily reconnected and shared fond childhood memories, but they've never had a close friendship since, and likely never will.

Friendships change, and that's OK.

There are a million nuances to this, but the general analogy holds strong for people of any age. Through the school age years, and throughout life, things change. We grow, we change. So do other people. Circumstances change, and so do relationships.

Of course, the analogy can be applied to dating and family relationships. But for simplicity's sake, I won't delve deeply into that area. Those relationships are very complex with very deep emotions. The analogy still can apply, but it's not as clear because of the emotional complexity, so I'll stick to relationships with friends.

Many stories throughout the book are about kids, teens and early adult friendships to illustrate the analogy with clarity & simplicity. Since we've all been kids, it's common ground for understanding to at least some degree.

As you understand the analogy and apply it to your own life and relationships, you'll also begin to see your place in other people's lives. It's for both sides of a friendship. For example, I know when I'm in someone's 'backyard party' but not in their house. I respect that and for the most part, they're also in my backyard rather than my house. I like to keep my friendships balanced like that. Maybe over time we'll become closer

friends, maybe we'll stay backyard party friends forever!

Bottom line, understanding your own criteria for backyard and house friends will not only help you be more confident, improve your self-worth, and empower you to enforce your own boundaries, but also be a better friend to others at the same time.

• • • **THINK BREAK** • • •

One of the best ways to visualize the House/Yard analogy is to draw it! Take a couple pieces of paper and draw the inside of your imaginary house! Describe and draw a cozy, comfortable homey place for you where you would be happy to spend time with very close friends?

Draw the backyard party! What kind of fun would you include for you and your friends? Remember, there's no limit to your imagination, so let it fly!

## T W O

### **Own your House... Who's in Your Yard? Who's in Your House?**

Now that you know the analogy and you've imagined your own house and backyard, what do you do with it? The first step is to figure out who is in your yard & house right now.

#### **Think about Who's in Your Backyard**

This is the easy part. All your friends are backyard party friends! That can be filled with as many people as you like. Friends, family, classmates, neighbors, colleagues from work well as people you've known all your life. It includes anyone who you enjoy spending time with.

You can also include people you haven't known for long. Perhaps you're still getting to know them, but so far, all interactions are positive. It's up to you!

Backyard party friends can really be anything that makes sense to you. For example, I might include people I like but just don't necessarily need or want to see all the time. I have some friends I enjoy going to dinner with a couple of times a



year and that's enough. You may not have people like that in your life. Defining this collection of friends and people you interact with is a completely individualized process and it is unique to each and every one of us...a lot like fingerprints! Similarities, but each one is different.

Some people prefer smaller backyard parties, while some super-social folks I know would describe a backyard party with thousands of people! Compare Lily and Marcie for example. Lily keeps a very small group of friends that she enjoys spending time with and finds that too many friends becomes tiresome and annoying. Marcie, however, feels best with the biggest group of friends around! She makes new friends everywhere she goes and finds a way to always have fun with a ton of people around, all the time. She's the extroverted life of the party vs. a more introverted Lily.

Marcie and Lily are two extremes. You may find that your preference may be more or less friends or somewhere in the middle. The main point is, it doesn't matter how big or small your group of friends is. What matters is how you feel about how YOU personally define your circle of friends. It's your backyard party and you really don't have to explain it to anyone.

Other names for backyard party friends include:

- Casual Friends
- Fair-weather Friends
- Buddies
- Good acquaintances

## **Now, Take Stock of Who's in Your House**

The second step is to figure out who is in your house today. Remember, the house is where your heart is. It is a protected space which should only be reserved for those closest to you. The phrase “near and dear to your heart” applies well!

Think about all the close friends and family you have first. Most of us have a mix of friends and family in our house. Old friends, new friends, various family members, maybe not all of them, perhaps not any of them. A spouse, boy/girl-friend or significant other will probably be in the house, too. (Oh, hope so! If not, you might want to think hard about that relationship.) Since romantic relationship and close family relationships are typically more complicated than friendships, I strongly recommend first focusing on friends as you're understanding how you define your boundaries within this analogy. Usually, that's a simpler way to start. Take your time and think about the people in your life, one by one. Some might even surprise you. “Wow, yeah, she's totally in my house and I'm happy for her close friendship!”

For some friends, it may be a little hard to figure out. I have some good friends, I love them dearly, and I enjoy my time with them. But are they really “in-the-house-friends?”

As you're thinking about it, ask yourself questions about the people in your house:

- Would I go to them if I had a broken heart?
- Would they be able to offer the warmth & support that I need if I was crying my eyes out because of a loss or disaster?

- Could I tell them an inner-most desire or fear and have complete faith that they would respect me enough to keep it to themselves and not tell other friends or share it on social media?
- Would they support me in school or at work, too? Will they support me and offer encouragement, or will they compete with me?
- Will they consider and celebrate and help me hash-out my crazy ideas rather than trash, ridicule or devalue my ideas in favor of their own?
- Do they see more potential and value in me than even I can see in myself? Do they challenge me to be better and encourage me when I'm afraid to push myself forward?
- Do they accept and enjoy the quirky that makes me, and not try to change or re-mold me?

In general, those questions work for me to think about people in my house. You can start with those and add or change them up for your own unique life. For the record, I'm friendly, but it's not easy to earn your way into my house! I don't keep many people in my house. I have always had a very small group of close friends. I'm a bit introverted, I don't like to have my heart broken, so I protect it. That's comfortable for me. That's how my house is designed, and I fully expect yours to be different.

Some people I know say all family members are welcome in the house, and I know some people with zero family members in their house. Some have lots of people in the house, some have very few. That's OK! It's your house, your yard, your imagination. The goal is to make it work for you. We're all different. Relish the uniqueness of you!

Some of the common descriptors of people in the house are:

- Close Friends
- Dear Friends
- Treasured Friends
- Loved Ones
- Besties or BFF
- Confidant

### **Who Is outside the Gate?**

Remember that the backyard has a fence around it. We don't want just everyone in our backyard party. It's for our friends and for us to define. Of course, like all backyard fences, there's a gate to let people in and out. We'll get to that part in the next chapter. But first, we need to understand who is outside the gate. That defines people not in the backyard, and not in the house. These are people you don't know or don't really know.

Out there, there are also people you may know, but are only acquainted with. You don't know them well enough to call them friends. For example, I have some neighbors down the street, we chat from time to time out by the mailbox. There are familiar faces I meet at the dog park every Saturday and chit-chat. They might be people you work or have class with. They could be teachers, doctors, ministers, servers, etc. Just because you are acquainted with them doesn't necessarily mean they are friends to invite into your life or in other words, into your backyard party. You can be friendly to people outside the gate, but bottom line, you don't know them well enough or trust them to respect you and your friends at your backyard party. So, keep them at a comfortable distance...outside the gate until you do.

People outside the gate:

- Acquaintances
- Colleagues or co-workers
- Classmates
- Neighbors
- Contacts
- Strangers

## **Your House Defined**

This is the first introduction to applying the analogy: taking stock of who is in your yard and your house. In the house are the closest people to your heart despite however many people you keep in the backyard. You can have a hundred people in your backyard and only 1, 2 or 3 close friends in the house. It should be what makes YOU comfortable in YOUR house. You should be feeling happy, warm and fuzzy thinking about the friends in your house. You should feel the warmth of respect, love and trust when you think about them, because that's what you need to not only fuel but also protect your heart.

The analogy is easy-enough to explain and visualize. I've shared it with many people in just a few minutes. They get it, but then sometimes it's difficult for some people to apply to their lives. I know people who are so extroverted that they allow everyone they meet immediately in the house! They can't distinguish between the backyard party and the interior of the house! A couple of these lovely, extroverted friends of mine challenged me and said that there's no difference between "the backyard party" and the "house." Everyone is my friend! "They're all in my house!" they proudly declare. Then they'll

very quickly explain (or should I say ‘realize’) that there are SO many people in their house, that they mentally divide the house up into imaginary rooms and different friends qualify to enter different rooms of intimacy. Some of their friends stay in the living room or the kitchen, and very few are allowed in the bedroom or bathroom. It’s an interesting variation on the visualization, but they are essentially saying the same thing: defining different categories of friends and understanding how our friends fit into these categories.

As I proceed with this book, I’ll stick with my 3 spaces: House, Yard and Outside the Gate for consistency and simplicity. The analogy is easily communicated in its simplest form. But, of course, in your own heart and mind, adapt it any way that suits your life!

## • • • THINK BREAK • • •

Make list of your friends.

Are they all in your backyard party now? Or are some of them probably just acquaintances that might be still outside the gate.

Next, look at that list and circle the friends who you think are in your house now. You can look back at the bullet points in the chapter for help. Don’t worry if it’s hard to figure out right now, and there’s no right answer. You might even figure out later that some people are really in the backyard. (Surprisingly, even at my age I found this difficult to figure out.)

# THREE

## **Your Yard, Your House... They're Unique as Fingerprints**

### **You Get to Define Your Network**

The House, the Yard, the gates, the backyard parties...in other words, our social networks (circle of friends) are as unique as each of us are as individuals. As unique as fingerprints. It might be big or small, tightly knit or loosely organized. Do you have a lot of friends or just a few? Do you have lots of people in the yard but only one or two in the house? Do you have a tight-knit group of friends, or a disparate collection of interesting people who don't all know each other?

Who we collect as friends, where they are in our House and Yard, how we define our relationship with them and how they all inter-relate with each other is all part of a big invisible network. It doesn't happen by design; it just happens as we grow up and grow through life. It doesn't need a lot of explanation because it just develops and exists, and we all intuitively know it. Nonetheless, it's worth pointing out because we all get reactions and interactions from other people who build their networks differently. Consider my super social friends that I

described earlier who allowed EVERYONE in their house. They probably don't understand how I can live happily with just a few close friends, and fewer people in my backyard party.

Here's an example. Some people are lucky to have a tight group of friends that they stick with as a group for years. Some don't. Either way is fine and unique. My brother had a tight-knit group like that, but I never did. It didn't work for me. I always preferred a very diverse collection of friends and they didn't become a cohesive group. A few of us get together on occasion, but for the most part, my friends are a wonderful tapestry of a wide variety of people and I really like it that way. To be frank, I don't understand how my brother, well into his 50s now, still talks regularly to his old high-school buddies. I'm glad for him but it's completely weird for someone with a network like mine! And it reinforces my point that we're all different...even people as close as brothers and sisters can be very different and it's OK.

We have and will build our own networks to suit ourselves, but it's equally important to recognize that everyone's networks are different. The challenge for each of us is to learn about ourselves, learn our boundaries (rules), learn what works best for us to help us internally accept and value ourselves.

How do we do that? The first step:

### **Don't Compare Your House, Your Yard and Your Rules with Others!**

Sometimes easier said than done, but don't compare your social network to others to judge yourself (or others). Especially don't judge yourself down.



Let's look at a generalized example: Extroverts re-energize from being around other people, so they'll likely have a lot of people around them. Introverts, on the other hand, recharge by being alone. When you see an extrovert, they are probably popular, everyone knows them. They are the captain of the Cheer team, always a lead in the school plays, sports stars, and always have things do to and people around. You think they have a million friends. It looks like they have the entire school as friends in their backyard party! They are popular! These might be the "cool" kids.

The introverts may have very few friends. They have a small circle of friends. They will probably prefer to work alone. They are often called "unpopular," "loners," or even "dorks" or "losers," It gets worse in high school. This has been going on for generations, so today's kids may have different slang words for it, but they're still doing what kids did 100 years ago. It's a part of building social networks. But nothing is wrong with either way.

But, here's a thought to consider: Whatever you are, extrovert or introvert, you'll look at everyone else and judge them by your own House and Yard design. If 80% of your small group of friends are in your house because you're an introvert, you'd probably assume that 80% of all those popular extroverts' friends around them are similarly in their house and they are overjoyed with so many close relationships!

In reality, you could be dead wrong. Those popular girls just might be introverts in disguise. They might even be intensely lonely. Perhaps that popular girl makes casual friends easily but has an excruciatingly difficult time trusting people who she wants in her house. She may not be able to form close,

supportive friendships due to some other reasons you don't know. It's just a good backyard party and they don't have any more close friends than those of us with a small party. And surprisingly, they might be comparing their lack of ability to form close friends with everyone else and getting down on themselves.

Or, those super introverted people you call losers and loners, may very well be completely secure and content with their social network...aside from nasty classmates calling them names, of course.

I don't want you to look at others and say to yourself "what's wrong with me?", or "why can't I be like them?" The process of considering the House and Yard and building your boundaries is a practice of looking internally, to understand yourself and to build yourself up and to gain self-confidence and self-worth. In doing so, we can all look at others to better understand ourselves, not to compare and wonder what we are doing wrong.

## **No One Can Tell You Who Is in or Should Be in Your House**

Another important point to make is that others can't tell you how to build your social network. It's a personal and internal process; it is unique to you. Yes, your social network will overlap with others, but they just won't be 100% the same.

You might hear advice from others such as your parents or your other friends, or in my earliest examples even as early as pre-school teachers trying to tell kids that "we're all friends here." What makes a strong person is a person who builds

confidence and value in themselves. You learn to listen to your own heart and intuition about who is good for you, who is a friend, and what makes those friendships and networks work well for you. That is, other people can't tell you who is or should be in your house.

Parents may have the very best intentions to help, but sometimes it might not be quite right.

Here's a simple example. A family with a young girl about 10 years old moved into a new neighborhood. Nicole was rather shy, so her mother coordinated an introduction with some other neighborhood girls. The other girls weren't friendly to Nicole at all. They weren't kind, considerate or inviting in any way to the 'new girl.' In fact, they were mean to her, saying things like, she shouldn't have moved here, and why does she wear those clothes? She went home feeling bad, rejected and insulted. It was clear to Nicole that they weren't going to be her friends from the first moment. Her mother, however, persisted in the belief that all little girls about the same age living in the same neighborhood will all magically become friends. Nicole simply had go over to play with them again and again and it would all turn out great. Day after day, obeying her mother, poor Nicole went. For her, it was like being force-walked into abuse, teasing, and belittling every day. Nicole cried by herself in her room after each encounter. Finally, one day, she couldn't hold it in any longer and voiced her protest to her mother. She told her mom again how mean those girls really were, and she never wanted to go near them again! Despite Nicole's protests her mom still insisted that they could be friends and tried to convince her, but little Nicole knew deep in her heart that these girls were NOT it. Her mom eventually gave up and

stopped pushing Nicole to be near those girls.

From my perspective, despite what were probably good intentions to help her daughter build a social network in their new neighborhood, the mom actually played a part in *dis*-abling her poor child rather than enabling her emotionally. By insisting that she should be friends with those girls, she was taking Nicole's personal autonomy away. She was not supporting Nicole's better judgement, and in terms of the analogy, not letting Nicole manage the criteria for who should be in her Yard and House. I knew Nicole, and back then, I could see that sometimes her mother pushed too hard to help, and in turn, cut out a chunk of the poor girl's confidence. The whole situation created a good amount of stress and conflict between Nicole and her mom, causing them to argue about everything for a while.

Eventually it all ended well. Her mom learned to be more supportive, and Nicole has grown into a lovely young woman with a MUCH better set of friends that she personally selected! She still needs confidence boosts and support because she didn't have a chance to build confidence when she was very young.

There aren't rules about how you internally define who's in your House and Yard. Like I mentioned earlier, some people may tell kids that all their classmates are their friends, or everyone on their soccer team is their friend. No, no, no! A couple of kids on the same soccer team may simply not like each other! It's totally natural and OK. BUT, what they have to learn is how to play the game together anyway. For the team to succeed, they still have to learn to work together. The same holds true in the adult professional world. Over my career I've been stuck with colleagues who I didn't like at all. They were

WAAAAY outside my gate! Nonetheless I had to figure out how best to work with them to get the job done.

Back to another kid example: Emily and Hailey are very good friends. Emily always enjoys her time with Hailey, and they are very close. Both girls, close friends for many years now, have both had other friends, too. However, Emily never really liked Hailey's other two close friends, nor did Hailey enjoy the company of Emily's other friends. Of course, Hailey and Emily extended open invitations to get to know their other friends, but they understood that there is no obligation. Hailey's feelings weren't hurt if Emily didn't want to join her and Anna, Nor was Emily disappointed if Hailey didn't want to spend time with her and Maria. When they were very young, Emily doubted herself, wondering if she was wrong for not wanting to be around Hailey's other friends. Her mom assured her she was not wrong and there was no obligation. And Hailey, also a wonderful girl, never made Emily feel guilty about it.

Just because you're friends with one person doesn't mean you are obligated to be friends with their other friends, and don't expect them to be friends with yours. If all of you get along and become good friends, great! But you can't force it. You can't tell someone who their friends should be. It's not going to work. It's not going to make your friendship stronger by doing that. Let the other friend have the space they need to build their own social network. They'll likely cherish your friendship even more because you are showing her that you respect her boundaries.

On the flip side, you may have a friend who drops an ultimatum, that to be her friend, you have to like this other person. Or you can only date football players, or you can't

be seen with the artist kids. That is another form of trying to tell you who should be in your House and Yard. It seems ridiculously simple when I write it in two sentences, and of course, very clear when we see it happening to characters in a movie, but it gets harder to identify in real life. There are feelings and emotions about disappointing the other person. There's the self-doubt that we all have that makes us second guess ourselves. There's also a fear of losing that other person as a friend, a fear of losing some social status, a fear of losing a bunch of things. We all do it.

But when you grow to understand your own yard, house, your network, your categories and the friends within, when you understand why people are your friends and what to you value about them, and what do they value about you...all of this will help you become more comfortable and less doubtful about yourself. It will help you make better decisions, your OWN decisions, about who should be your friend.

## **What if You Want to Make a Change**

Do you want to change the people in your House and Yard? Do you want to re-work your social network? Reinvent yourself? That's OK, too!

Here's an example: Amy had been part of a tight-knit friend group with Sarah, Jenny, and Amanda. They did everything together for a couple of years – sleepovers, trips, hanging out together at lunch. But after some time, the group started to divide. Sarah and Jenny grew close and began to pick on Amy. Amy didn't have the confidence to stick up for herself and the other two thought it was amusing to upset her, like typical

bullies. She couldn't even rely on her friend Amanda for support. Amanda was always a lone wolf, siding with whoever benefited her most. The bullying went on for a year, and Amy's parents even intervened several times. When confronted, Sarah and Jenny gave hollow apologies and things went back to the way they were the next day. You might wonder why Amy chose to endure this treatment for so long instead of simply walking away. The truth is, she felt obligated to remain close to these girls and blamed herself for provoking their cruelty.

When COVID hit months later, Amy was of course forced to be away from that friend group. The time in isolation was a relief and made her realize she deserved better. Over the summer, she made the effort to get to know other girls in her neighborhood, branching out socially. By the time school reopened, Amy had nurtured healthy new friendships and cut contact completely with her former bullies. Years later, Amy is still surrounded by this same wonderful group of better friends.

There are a lot of reasons why you might need to make a change to your social network, bullying is one of them.

If you do, know this. It starts with you, just you. It's internal. Understand yourself, your goals and dreams, your fears and loves. Learn about the best parts of yourself and what makes you valuable, wonderful and unique, and what kind of people would make a great update to your social network. When you are comfortable with yourself, you'll become a magnet for other people. I don't mean to sound cheesy, but it's true and basic psychology: confident, happy people are attractive.

This is also a nice segway into the next chapter. Work on yourself, and at the same time, reflect on the people in your House and Yard and why they are there and how do they help

you be you. Do they deserve to be there? Are they following your rules to be close to you? Have you defined those rules? Keep reading. The more you understand yourself, you'll be able to build the best Yard and House social network to fulfill your life, whether it is an extension of what you've already built or an updated version.

• • • **THINK BREAK** • • •

How would you describe your network of friends? Tight-knit group, or wide range of different people who don't all quite gel with each other, or somewhere in between? How is your network different from your brother, sister or other friends' networks?

Do you get down on yourself about your social network or your friends? Why? Do you think you are doing something wrong? Do you compare yourself to others? Is someone telling you that you are wrong?

Look back at your list of friends, especially the ones in the house. Think about each one and why he or she is a friend. How and when did you become friends? What do you like about them? What do they do that makes them a good friend?



## FOUR

### **Boundary Criteria... Your Yard, Your House, Your Rules**

By now you have taken some time to imagine your house, your yard, and reflected on your social network...and chances are, some self-reflection has crept in as well. In this chapter I'll deep dive into defining the rules for your House and Yard.

The rules, also called “boundary criteria” or “boundaries,” are the behavioral rules that you expect your friends to follow to become and stay friends with you. For the analogy, the boundaries are the rules that define when you let people in and out of the House door or the gate in the Yard.

They are your rules, your unique boundaries. These rules are also private and personal. You don't necessarily share them; you subconsciously test people against them as your friendship with them grows. It is the set of behavioral and emotional criteria that you expect and trust from your friend. Most of the time we don't ever take the time to assess what the actual rules or criteria are, but since we're deep in this analogy anyway, let's get into it.

I'm NOT referring to action rules like a queen or a boss ordering people around to do everything she says. They aren't rules such as “you must always answer my snap within 15 min.”

or “you should never go to the mall without me.” Frankly, if anyone imposed a rule like that on me, they’d be kicked out of my house AND yard immediately! Rather, I’m talking behaviors that make great, quality friendships such as kindness, respect, support and love.

These are the ways you can expect friends to treat you, and when they don’t anymore, you should reconsider that friendship. If someone is no longer treating you with kindness, you have the power to no longer consider them a friend. You have the power to control over who you allow close to your heart. Control! There’s power in that word!

Each of us can control who is close or not close to our heart. We also control how we ultimately build and structure our network of friends, and it supports a sense of autonomy (self-reliance) and self-confidence. It also supports a sense of self-worth, that you are *worthy* to be treated well. All of these will help you today, and as you grow older in life. These are hard things to teach us girls. We females, tend to be so self-critical, doubtful and try so hard to fit in, right? We’re working so hard to fit into another social network or role, that we don’t always pay attention to what we need, inside, deep in our hearts. So many women neglect themselves to accommodate other people. Well, here you are, taking this journey with me looking at your friends and basically, how they meet the needs of your heart.

### **House Rules / Party Rules: Defining Boundary Criteria**

When applying this analogy to yourself, remember it’s YOUR house, YOUR yard, and YOUR rules. I strongly believe that this is a very private and personal decision. Friendships grow

organically and naturally. Nobody can tell you who is in your house. They can try, but no matter what they say, in your heart and mind, YOU decide who is in your house.

I'll start with the rules of the House in this chapter rather than the Yard. There are more boundaries the closer someone is to your heart. That's where we are all most vulnerable. Setting boundaries is also how we protect our hearts. After that, I'll show you how that translates to the rules for the Yard and people outside the gate.

You've already thought about and probably know who is in your house, but what is it that keeps them there? What is it that makes them such a good, close friend?

I mentioned some of my own test questions in Chapter Two...but let's define it further.

### **House Rules: Kindness – Respect – Support – Love**

These are key elements to most successful friendships that you would need to keep people in your house: KINDNESS, RESPECT, SUPPORT and LOVE. You'll need to receive all of them from a friend in your House, and you'll also need to give the same in return. With all four elements, you will build TRUST. You might want to add trust as a key element as well, but that's up to you. You may want to include other words such as generosity, selflessness, compassion, open-mindedness, etc. I'd probably also add the word funny to my list because ALL my close friends make me laugh. But you define yours. It's your house, your heart, your rules.

A quick way to understanding your existing criteria: take a piece of paper and write a list of several close “in-the-house” friends'

names. Next to each name, write down the adjectives that best describe that person and your friendship with them. Attempt to write single adjectives rather than sentences if you can. Think about the time you spend with each person. Your highs, your lows, how you became friends, how the friendship has grown. Do you go to that person in times of challenge? Do you seek their advice, and for what? Do you enjoy helping them when they are in need? How do they make you a better person? Chances are, you'll start to see the themes, and I'll guess that they include the words above.

Kindness, Respect, Support and Love. Like I said before, you may have more criteria to define a very close friend, but I highly doubt anyone would omit the 4 above. Seriously, who doesn't want all four from a good friend? And if you don't give all four in return, you're not being a good friend.

## **Kindness**

Kindness is the very first rule/criteria by which you can evaluate someone that you're getting to know. It's a boundary for both the yard and the house. Is that person kind? Are they kind to you, to your other friends, to strangers and their own family? It's a great test that can happen without conversation, just observation. What does being kind mean? It's more than civil. It's polite, friendly and considerate, and it has a warmth about it.

Have you ever heard someone be mean to the waitress at a restaurant for a problem with the food, even though it isn't the waitress' fault? Have you ever met someone who was nice to you, but made fun of your other friend for being overweight (or something else?) Are they kind to you but not others? Think about being friends with someone like that.

## **Respect**

To me, respect is the most important criteria for both the gate and the house door. Respect. My friends respect me and I respect them the same. My friends respect that I live and love differently than they might. My friends respect that I have other friends. My friends defend me when I'm not respected by others. My friends also support my physical boundaries. (If I'm not a hugger, they don't always insist that I hug everyone!) My friends don't tell me who or what I have to like. My friends respect my autonomy.

My friends who respect me DON'T try to coerce me to do things I don't want to do. They don't think I'm less than what I am, or less capable than what I am. My friends respect me and aren't jealous of anything I succeed at doing, or awards I win. Real friends believe in me even more than I believe in myself sometimes.

Yeah, OK. Some of these are big asks for middle school and high school friendships, but respect is needed and important to think about. It is still a very important foundation for any relationship. It is a primary boundary for everyone.

My friends respect my boundaries on other things too. Here's an example from my friend Andi. Andi grew up in a big family without a lot of money or resources. She had to take jobs and work from an early age, but she always knew that her life would be better if she stayed on track and finished school. That certainly was, as it is today, a challenge in high school. Nonetheless, she promised herself that she'd stay away from the alcohol and drugs...she preferred to stay in control of herself, her health and security. But so many of her friends around her during high school liked to party. Not always, but on weekends

and breaks, absolutely! They'd never miss a chance! Over time, Andi maintained a group of friends that were very good friends to keep in her House because they RESPECTED her wish to be away from the partying. They even *protected* her from it. When new people were around and invited all to join in, her friends defended her from any pressure and said firmly "She doesn't do that! Leave her alone!" They never pressured her to change her mind and never mocked her for not partaking. They remained good friends throughout high school, especially because they respected her. Of course, there were times when doubt came into Andi's mind, like "why am I so weird?" But it was that same group of friends who liked to party that supported and encouraged her to stick with her plan and stay clean. True support and respect, and she's grateful every day for them.

Respect is a fundamental boundary and basis of every relationship, including romantic and family relationships as we grow up. All of us girls should be able to identify it and expect it in friendships no matter how young or old, and it will give us the confidence to identify and require it in our romantic relationships, too!

An example of my own, I was dating a fellow in my mid 20's. He was generally nice and there was a lot about this guy I was VERY much attracted to. But something always felt a little not-quite-right-for-me, but I couldn't quite sort it out in my head. Other than that little nagging doubt which I thought I could ignore, I liked this guy a lot. I happened to be talking about him to my Dad one day. Now, understand, I have a very old-fashioned father...sometimes like from the 1800's old-fashioned! He wasn't involved much in raising me,

for most of my childhood he worked, a lot; he worked all the time. He was very career-driven and future oriented. And besides, in his world, raising a daughter was women's work which he left mostly to my Mom. But that day, on the phone, he asked if I was seeing anyone, because, of course old-fashioned-Dad wanted to be sure I would find a man and settle down soon (eye-roll!). Nonetheless, I described the guy I had been seeing. Dad listened, then asked me one question: "Does he respect you?"

"Oh yeah, everything is great" I replied. Of course I said that, BUT, here's the kicker: that one question triggered a tsunami of thoughts, and by the end of the week I broke up with the guy. Turns out, and dear old Dad sensed it somehow, that, no, this fellow, despite the smile, the humor, the physique and everything else I liked, no, he didn't respect me for who I was and what I could do. He didn't respect me. Sometimes he showed up late to our dates with an excuse every time. He didn't respect me or my time. He didn't want to hear about my work, and one time I recall, I told him about a new job offer that I received. He was very surprised when I shared the salary offered. "Wow," he said. I figured you made a lot less, like just barely above minimum wage." For heaven's sake, he never respected me enough to consider that I had a computer science engineering degree from a top school in the country, sheesh! I realized that he also had a man's mindset from the 1800's and he only wanted a girlfriend to swoon over him. It wasn't a partnership and that is a hard and fast boundary for me that I had been ignoring. He didn't respect me. It violated my boundary and I called it off. Thanks, Dad!

Once I looked at it through the lens of respect, the whole

relationship was over. And thank goodness, too! And not long later I met a wonderful man to whom I am still married today. He respects me and I respect him even after all these years.

My Dad, though. Wow. He packed decades of fatherly support into one little question: “Does he respect you?” And then he trusted me to figure it out. This is an example of the impact a father can have on a daughter. I was lucky that day. But even if you don’t have a Dad there to ask that question, I’m here to remind you that you deserve respect.

So, what does a friendship look like when there isn’t proper respect? Take Andi’s story, the kids around her would coerce, insist, guilt Andi into drinking or taking their drugs. They could have ridiculed her, humiliated her and taken some revenge or bullying against her. They might have stopped talking to her if she didn’t “play along” with their partying ways.

Other things people who don’t respect you might do is talk down to you. Make you feel dumb, maybe even tell you that you are stupid or broken in some way. They might not listen to you, but they sure want you to listen to them. They might make you feel like your problems are dumb, trivial and unimportant. They don’t show up for you, or they are always late. They say they’ll hang out with you on Saturday but forget about you and never call to arrange a time...basically leaving you hanging when you could have made other plans. That happened to me, and to my daughter, and pretty much everyone I know at some time. Nobody likes that one bit. It’s a complete lack of respect for me and my time. I don’t treat my friends like that. I am always on time. I always follow through with what I say.



I have learned that no matter what, some people do not manage their time well or follow-through with what they say they'll do as I would. We each get to decide if we want to accept that in a friend. For me, they won't be in my house because I don't accept that, I can't get it out of my head that it is disrespectful to me. That's my decision, for me. You may not think it's a big deal and that's OK. I have some backyard friends who are always late and a few who frequently cancel on me when we make plans. I know that about them and I don't expect promptness when I meet them. I set my expectations when I feel like meeting up with them. But again, it is a strict requirement for people in my House. They'll never be in my house because that's one of the ways I define respect.

Here's another example. Emily broke the rules at home and was grounded one week in high school and couldn't go with her friends to the football game. Her friends really wanted her to join them, and one of them even suggested that she sneak out of the house. Emily assured her friend that sneaking out would only make the punishment worse. She'd just have to miss the game this time. And that was that. The friends went on to the game without her and did not give her any grief about it. Yeah, they commiserated with her "Yeah, your parents are so mean!", but they respected her family boundaries and sent her plenty of photos from the game to help her feel included! That's respect with love!

Another time, Emily happened to be preparing for the SAT exam. The exam was scheduled for early Saturday morning and there was another home football game that Friday night. She wanted to do well and chose to stay home to be well rested for the test. Her friends who weren't taking the exam on Saturday,

respected her decision and went on to the game without her. Again, they didn't give her any grief about her decision. No begging, no coercion, no guilt trips. They respected it and let her rest and prepare.

RESPECT is the most important house and yard rule. Without that, the structure of the friendship starts to fall apart.

## **Support**

Surround yourself with people who believe in you. Support you. Respect what you are and what you can do. We need to be with people who grow with us and support us.

Support also goes hand in hand with respect. Our real friends should respect our boundaries and our goals and our uniqueness among other things, but following that, they support us in defending our boundaries. Like Andi's friends, they support and encourage and sometimes help us move forward towards our goals. Real friends in the House support us to be the best version of ourselves.

For me and my daughter alike, my independence and autonomy are critical. My friends and family know that I don't like to feel dependent on people. I always want to challenge myself and achieve more on my own. I like the feeling of accomplishment! My friends and family respect and support that about me. If I meet people who don't, well, that's my gate and door criteria that they don't meet, so, they don't gain entry into my House, and probably not my Yard either. Let's put it more simply, I don't like to be controlled, and I do want to try new things by myself, and I need people around me who let me be me.

Another side of SUPPORT is to remember that good people in the yard don't try to convince us to do bad things, the wrong things like hurt people, break the law or hurt ourselves with drugs. Undoubtedly, you'll meet people who make it sound so fun, exciting or even funny. If you're around someone like that, or one of your friends starts to do that, what do you do? Like Andi, you know deep in your heart you know it's wrong, but you're afraid not to. If you don't go along that so-called friend might tease and humiliate you in front of others, call you stupid, or worse, threaten you. Well, that's not a friend. That's a bully. And if you ignore your boundaries and go along with them, it won't get better. They will continue to take more and more control away from you and break down your boundaries. They should not be in your Yard and definitely not in your House. Be strong, and never give up finding help to keep them away! I'll talk more about how to do that in later chapters.

Friends and family who SUPPORT you have your back. They believe in you. They encourage you to succeed and be your best. They help you defend your boundaries. They support you! It doesn't mean they won't hold you accountable if you mess up, and it doesn't mean they do your work for you, but if you are feeling discouraged or unsure of some goal you are trying to achieve, they will support you. Or, if someone else is testing your boundaries, pushing in your gate or your door, your supportive friends and family will stand by your side. They'll help you extricate a toxic situation from your life. They'll support your personal decision when they know you need it...even if they would do it differently for themselves. They'll support you when you need them.

In-the-House friends are expected to be great supporters, it's a big bonus if your Yard-friends have your back too, though you may not be close enough to them for that yet.

SUPPORT can also be a part of friendly competition amongst friends. Competition among friends can be fine if it is good natured and motivating for both friends. SUPPORT helps friends be better! Think about the female athletes who are all friends even when they compete against each other. They are the perfect example of friendly competition. They RESPECT each other performing their best in their sport, they SUPPORT each other, partially because they may both be playing the same sport and understand what it takes to progress. Think about the top female tennis players. They can be friends, or sisters like the Williams sisters (Serena and Venus) who practice together, play a match against each other, and share a hug at the end even though one of them will lose the match. It certainly would be awesome if all our young female friendships could be just as supportive and professional, but it usually isn't the case. Competition over friends, boys, grades damage the friendship more times than not. Something is dropped: kindness, respect, support. Boundaries are crossed and the damage is done. Competition can turn ugly...and often does amongst teen girls. Friends can become enemies very quickly.

One way to fend off the damage of competition, if it is possible...take stock of the friendship early on. If the friendship is more important than the affections of a new boy, or the higher grade in the class project, or the promotion at work, then take care to mind the boundaries. You may even need to talk about it together to reset the boundaries and expectations. Honesty, openness, problem solving together are far more productive

than backstabbing, talking behind the friend's back, playing unfair in a game to win, or sabotaging a project. It isn't kind, supportive or respectful.

But I want to be clear on this too: never short-change yourself or give up on your dreams just to keep someone in your house or yard! Work together with your friends with honesty and openness to preserve the friendship, but you don't have to step back from the pursuit of your goal ...the support and encouragement should be there, or you may have to reconsider the friendship.

## **Love**

Love is one important component of friendship, but it isn't enough by itself. What is love? That's one simple question with a very, very complicated answer. Take family for example. There are times when family love each other but is short on respect and/or support. There can be, as weird as it sounds, love in an abusive relationship! These situations are not only confusing but also very challenging. I make a mention of it briefly here to encourage anyone in a difficult or confusing situation to seek professional help to sort it out. But here, in this book, I will reiterate, love isn't enough by itself for close friendships.

Did you also notice that I didn't list LOVE first in the House criteria? It is last. It is the icing on the cake when all other criteria are firmly in place. When a friendship grows based in KINDNESS, RESPECT and SUPPORT, LOVE will grow. Great friends share all that. If you are missing LOVE in your friendship right now, there could be two ways to look at it: First, the friendship may be lacking one of the other criteria:

kindness, respect and support. Or second, the friendship may still be a little too new, and the love is still yet to grow. It's NOT a switch to flip. Emotions are complicated, confusing and take time. Let the love grow over time and instead, focus on that which you can control: kindness, respect and support.

## **Trust**

This is a good place to mention TRUST. TRUST is no doubt an important part of friendships and relationships. I've had several people tell me that Trust is an overriding rule for their friendships. I say that's quite fine, BUT, TRUST cannot form between friends without RESPECT, KINDNESS, and some elements of SUPPORT and LOVE. Think about it. How can you trust someone who doesn't respect you or isn't kind to you? Start with that. If they don't respect you and think you are less capable than you really are, or not worthy of basic kindness, how can you ever trust them with anything? Clearly, they don't have any concern for your best interests right off the bat.

How can you trust someone when you figure out that you've been contorting and changing yourself to just stay in their friend-circle? As soon as you show your genuine self, can you trust that they'd still be your 'friend?'

Is there trust with someone who takes advantage of your kindness? Is there trust with someone who doesn't respect your privacy and blabs your secrets to others? Is there trust with someone who tells you what to do, how to act, what to feel because they think that's the best way everyone should be? Is trust built with someone who is urging and encouraging you down a dangerous path of drugs, alcohol, failing classes,

committing crimes not matter how small...just because they think it's funny and harmless? No, they aren't considering what is best for you! They aren't looking out for and supporting YOU! It's completely self-serving on their part. They don't want to be better people, so they urge others to join them to support their bad ways. It's not healthy, it's not balanced, it's not a good friendship, and it certainly doesn't build trust.

RESPECT, KINDNESS, SUPPORT and LOVE are foundations for TRUST in a relationship. Without them, real trust cannot be built.

### **Backyard Rules: Respect – Kindness**

OK, so all that was about the rules/criteria/boundaries for friends closest to you in your house. Next, we look to all our friends in that backyard of our imagination, but not the House. We're having a great backyard party with them! We like them, they're fun, but they aren't particularly close. Rules also exist to be friends in the Yard but not as many as for friends in the House. For the backyard friends: KINDNESS and RESPECT for me are paramount. Then for me, I'd add humor because I simply love to laugh. My backyard friends enjoy my humor and I enjoy theirs. You can add a lot more to your list including your shared faith, passion or hobby, work experience, etc. There are a lot of adjectives you can use here, but Yard rules/criteria are looser than those for the House or missing some key elements. They are friends, just not that close. Again, you should also flip it around to assess what kind of yard friend you are to others, too.

But, back to the first two: KINDNESS and RESPECT. People in your yard should be kind to you and your other

friends and respect you for as much as they know about you. Period. Any less should simply be unacceptable.

You can call out a Yard friend for an unkind action. Middle school girls are mean, we already know that, but they might not realize how mean they really are being. It's worth letting them know: "hey, that was really mean. I don't like when you are mean to my other friends." Yes, I know, it's really simple example, but we all have to practice on the easy simple stuff first! But if the unkindness continues, it's time to reevaluate that friendship. You don't have to keep anyone in your Yard.

### **Outside the Gate (the Rest of the World): Civility – Professionalism**

As much as each of us would like to rule the world, we can't. People outside the gate are a wild-card. You never know what kind of person you'll meet when you first meet them. They stay outside the gate until they earn their way in by meeting your criteria, first for the Yard, then for the House, or never. Building close friendships takes time, and it all starts with someone outside the gate.

Also, we may not have control over whether we HAVE to interact with people outside our gate: classmates, work colleagues, neighbors and various community members. Nonetheless it is completely appropriate to expect civility from people outside your gate as they should expect it from you. This is what makes a civil society, and a civil society will support and protect the people in it. The way each of us contributes kindness and respect for our fellow human beings builds a better place for all of us to live. Every single one of us contributes.



What is civility? It's basic politeness and courtesy in both our interactions with other people and our words. It is based on respect for not only the other person as a human, but also as a fellow member of our community. The community network only holds together to protect us and help us grow and thrive if the structure stays in place. We all have to play a part because we all live in a civil society. We build communities based on this civil society, and basic rules of interaction. And we all thrive within a civil society. It's appropriate to expect civil behavior from members of the community. Of course, we don't always receive it, but we can all still expect civil interactions.

It is also appropriate to expect professionalism in the workplace or in professional interactions. We expect the waiter or the banker to be polite, courteous, helpful and interested in helping us. Again, this goes in both directions. You are also expected to be professional in return.

What is professional, what is civil? What isn't? Being polite and courteous follows the manners of your community. Being professional includes politeness but includes good service and attitude to business customers and coworkers as well as respect for the overall company. Professionalism is proper behavior at work, and mature interactions with other people, especially adults.

Don't worry. Being polite doesn't make you wimpy or a pushover, nor is it a form of being timid. You may see great leaders who are exceptionally polite & professional, yet they are assertive and confident. He or she may be completely professional and civil but not tolerate nonsense or poor workers around them. They don't yell and scream when they are angry

at coworkers, but they can still express disappointment and give corrective feedback professionally. Do not worry that you will sacrifice personal control by being professional, polite or civil.

As you grow and advance in school and the adult workforce, you will be expected to follow the rules of professionalism, politeness, civility and responsibility as well. As you can expect it from everyone outside your gate, they will expect it from you, too. And that's how we keep our community working.

## • • • THINK BREAK • • •

Write a list of several close “in-the-house” friends’ names. Next to each name, write down the adjectives that best describe that person and your friendship with them. Attempt to write single adjectives rather than sentences if you can. Think about the time you spend with each person. Your highs, your lows, how you became friends, how the friendship has grown. Do you go to that person in times of challenge? Do you seek their advice, and for what? Do you enjoy helping them when they are in need? How do they make you a better person?

Do you have any other House Criteria you’d like to add to KINDESS, RESPECT, SUPPORT and LOVE?

Do you see all the criteria in your House friends? If not, what is missing?

What rules do you have for your Yard friends?

Can you recall examples of people in the community NOT being civil or professional? What should they have done differently, and how different do you think the outcome would have been?

## FIVE

### **Letting People In... Using Your Gate and Door Criteria**

Let's go back to your house and backyard party. Remember your Yard has a fence around it with a gate, and your House has a door on it. The gate and the door are how you protect who can come into your house/yard, in other words, your circle of friends/social network. You'll essentially use your boundary criteria that we defined in the last chapter to qualify people to enter your world!

You have set the criteria for who you call friend...who you let into the backyard for fun.

Some people are more 'open' and inviting than others and include hundreds of people. Others keep the circle of friends fairly small. What matters is what works for you.

Marcie may let new acquaintances in the gate long before someone like Lily does. Again, it doesn't really matter.

You're the boss of your gate.

Let's say you meet someone new outside the gate. You're enjoying their company. You feel a friendship growing.

Now you can invite them in the gate to your imaginary backyard party! The party always starts in the backyard! In the

backyard, this is where you have fun with all these people, get to know each other, you talk and laugh and enjoy time with each other. Friends should always start out as backyard friends to give you time and space to get to know them better. And only people you invite are allowed in your backyard party. Everyone else stays outside the fence until you want them in your life. Building new friendships can be fun, but let it take the time it needs. Don't just let anyone and everyone into your life without making sure they meet your rules.

Remember, it's your yard, you are the boss. Only people YOU WANT to have there can be at your party, and like I said before, it doesn't matter how many or how few people you let in. It's the quality of the friendship that matters.

## **The Perfect Example**

Let's start with an example to illustrate the entire process. Let's say you sit next to someone new in class. You ask a question about the assignment and receive an answer from her with some genuine kindness. Awesome! First gate criteria, kindness, check! But, you don't really know her yet, so she's still outside the gate. Over the next few weeks in class, you sit next to each other and have some pleasant yet short conversations. Her name is Maddie. Over the semester your conversations become more fun, and you begin to learn more about each other. All signs are positive. This new girl is kind, respectful of the little she knows about you, and you're enjoying her company. Check! She just earned a ticket to pass through your gate and be a part of your backyard party!

Let's say she stays a backyard friend for the rest of the semester. That's reasonable because you need to get to know her a

LOT better before you consider her a close friend. No rush because all signs are positive, and you have great confidence in your own boundaries, i.e. rules to enter the House door, and you'll know if and when she earns a place in your house.

You don't see her over holiday break but share another class with her second semester. Fun! You sit together again and pick up where you left off. Your interactions are again so nice, and fun! You both decide to meet up and study together. You meet up more often to get ice cream or go to movies together! Awesome! Everything is great. You share more and more and more of yourself and your story with her, as she is with you. This continues over the next many months. More and more depth is building in your friendship. (At this point, I realize that some of you would have already let this new friend into your house. For this example, though, I'm taking the slow, more guarded approach to fully illustrate the process.)

So here are the tests for the door criteria now: She is still kind. She has been nothing but respectful of your unique family situation (you shared some stories). She's been supportive in helping you study for the class. You may struggle with this math class that Maddie breezes through, but the other class you share, you happen to easily ace it and she's not jealous, but instead seeks your support. You are supporting each other. Nice balance there! Very nice. And the friendship has been building like this for a long time now, and a mutually loving friendship has developed. She has earned her entry into your house! You can confidently let her in. Congratulations, you have a great new friend!

Now let's take the same example with a few twists.

## **Backyard Party Twists**

While Maddie is still in your backyard party, you introduce her to a few of your other friends. For example, second semester, you have Jace and Darla with you in class who've you've known for ages. It doesn't take long to see that Maddie is mean to your other friends. Downright mean. Turn-on mean-girl, claws, horns, social media bashing, mean! Weird, and a horrible surprise! It's like she's jealous of them spending time with you. When you interact with her alone, she's still awesome.

So, what do you do? First step, you let her know politely, civilly, that Jace & Darla are your friends, you care for them, and you don't appreciate that she's being mean to them. As friends, Jace and Darla deserve your support to defend them from this new mean-girl! Then, even after calling her out, Maddie's behavior doesn't change. Now she's knowingly violating your KINDNESS rule. She's breaking your rule to stay in your Yard. This is a good opportunity to kick her out of the party & back out to the street. (How to do that is in the next chapters.)

## **Who do you let into the yard?**

When someone meets the gate rules. This is when you get to know someone outside the gate for a while and decide to let them into your yard as a new friend. In the example above, you let Maddie in because she showed KINDNESS and RESPECT for you, the two basic rules. That's easy enough to understand. When she wasn't kind anymore, she got kicked out.

## **Who Do We Invite into the House?**

In general, don't let everybody through the door into the House. The House is very special. Not everyone in the backyard party should be allowed into the house. Most friends stay out in the yard forever. That's just the kind of friend they are, but that doesn't devalue them! They're still your friends and important to you.

Remember, the House is your heart. Your heart needs to feel secure, warm, respected, supported, protected and loved. You are the boss of who is allowed into your House, that is, close to your heart, and not everyone deserves to be in your House. If they don't handle your very special heart gently, and with kindness, respect, support and love, you should not invite them into your house. They are not good close friends yet and may never be.

The boundaries are the criteria to let them in the door to your House. The boundaries are unique to you. Nobody can tell you what you feel in your heart. I can write the words KINDNESS, RESPECT, SUPPORT and LOVE, but how you feel, deep down inside is what matters most. Some will try to tell you who should be in your house, or who should be your friend, but deep down, you know when they're wrong. Unfortunately, when others try to tell a kid how they are supposed to feel, and the kid realizes they don't feel that way, a lot of kids will begin to doubt themselves. They might begin to wonder "what is wrong with me?" This is where the parents, friends or other adults can be supportive. You as a friend can help your friends, too. Acknowledge & affirm their feelings and help them work with that to build self-confidence.

For you extroverts out there, it may be particularly difficult

to set the boundaries between the house and the yard. It is very important for you to reflect on and understand who is a better friend and who is not. Reflect on the words I have here as a start: KINDNESS, RESPECT, SUPPORT and LOVE. Once you learn and set your own rules/criteria, even if it has been subconscious up to now, you may need to add an extra layer of caution to protect your door criteria. Most extroverts I know don't set their own boundaries well and really struggle with defending them.

And if you struggle building trust with other people so much that it is difficult to build close relationships, I hope that the words above give you some comfort and support to take a calculated risk and let someone into your house who clearly meets your criteria. Let it take time.

And if you have a big close family, the boundaries get a bit blurry. Everyone is in your business & you are in theirs. But there are still boundaries if you look closely. There are some things that are never asked or talked about, right? There are some topics you never raise with Aunt June. Aunt June set a boundary there. If you need to, you can too. Take the same approach with the House and Yard and decide what are your house rules, your boundaries.

### **But who don't you let in?**

Keep people out who you don't know. If someone gives you a 'bad vibe', don't let them in. It doesn't matter if all your other friends like that person, if it doesn't feel right for you, keep them out. What does it mean to keep someone out, or in other words, HOW do you keep someone out, especially when they



may be persisting to be your friend? I'll cover more of this in the next chapters but, here's the idea. Imagine if you close the door to your house to a stranger, they can't see inside... if you close the door to your heart, they can't see inside. So, essentially, don't share deeply personal, heartfelt information with someone who should not be invited into your House. Be polite, almost formal, but not warm. Don't share personal information. Keep conversations short, courteous, and excuse yourself quickly if it is a challenge not to share. Limit the time that you engage with that person if you want to keep them out. By all means limit the amount of information you share with that person, that is the protection. And lastly, create physical distance as much as possible.

Real friends in your House should support your need and desire to keep that person out...even if they disagree. Expect and demand that they support your decision.

Here's a scenario: Nerdy guy has a crush on you and follows you around the halls at school and tries to talk to you to be your friend. You don't know him well and are put off by his pushiness. Don't share personal information with him. Prevent exposure of personal info on social media that he follows. Block him.

Be direct, firm and civil. Plainly state that you want him to stop following you. Please leave you alone. You can let him know that any further advances ruins (or has ruined) any possibility that he could create any friendship with you. You can be firm and direct and still be civil. If he still doesn't listen, by all means take the matter to authorities or teachers for guidance and extra watchful eyes. This persistence on the boy's part can lead to a stalking situation. Don't share information

with him. Create distance. Maintain civility and keep other people around you when he's around. OK, so that's an extreme example of someone trying to push their way into your gate or your House door.

Most people outside the gate simply go on with their lives and your interactions with each other always stay superficial and civil. But, remember to limit the amount of personal information you share with outside people. You don't know who you can trust out there.

## **Trust Your Gut**

If someone gives you the creeps, the willies or however else you call it, listen to your internal reactions. Trust your gut. Listen to your intuition. Maybe they shouldn't be in your Yard or House.

Sometimes, we get a bad feeling about someone, nothing more. There's no 'evidence of wrongdoing' to speak of. They didn't do anything specific. There's nothing to say about him or her, you just get that feeling. It's a little feeling, you can't really describe it or why you get it.

It's a very natural feeling, and you should feel it and *honor* it. That's when we say "trust your gut." Don't ignore it. It's your "Spidey-sense" like Spiderman. We all have it, and it kicks in to protect us. Unfortunately, we are all usually taught to ignore those feelings, especially if there is no evidence of wrongdoing, "You're just being silly!" It's a shame because it is a God-given, natural defense mechanism that we all have. I say, trust your gut! Keep your distance and don't doubt yourself.

Some new friends may seem great at first, but somewhere down the road they become manipulative, demanding, or

perhaps sometime later you find out they are turning to drugs or something else you don't like. Think hard about that. I suspect your gut will tell you that you might have misjudged that person, or things simply changed, and now you need to create some distance (That's an "eviction." More on that in the next chapter).

If a coach, a teacher, a classmate, a boss, a relative, or anyone gives you the creeps, trust your gut. Don't let them in your House, or probably even your Yard. Keep your distance.

Here's an example: Destiny was a great high-school basketball player. She was on track to be scouted for college scholarships. To help secure her future, Destiny and her parents decided to hire a coach for private lessons to fine tune her skills. Coach Jim came with great references. He helped a lot of kids advance into the best college teams. He was expensive, and the family had to make sacrifices for the additional coaching, but they were all so excited for the opportunity.

Coach Jim had a lot of rules for the lessons. He insisted that Destiny was on time, wore specific shorts and t-shirt, tied her hair up, no jewelry, no phone, and the lessons were held in his instruction gym. No parents or friends were allowed in during the session to minimize distractions. Coach Jim was great at first, tough and demanding, and even after the first few sessions, Destiny noticed improvements in her skills. So did Coach Jim. He began to compliment her more and more. As the weeks went on, he complimented her and started to pat her on the back, then her shoulders, then more and more often. He began to give her hugs, then insisted on more hugs.

In her gut, Destiny thought he was starting to get "too friendly" or "touchy." It was a little weird, a little uncomfortable,

but he was a good coach. Her gut was telling her this was getting really weird, but her head was telling her the opposite: he was a good coach and she was improving, so it's probably no big deal. He was just proud of her, right?

Coach Jim asked her parents for more private sessions, and extra strategy time where he and Destiny would just sit and talk, not actual skills practice. Fortunately, Destiny had a good relationship with her parents. Before they stretched the family finances any further, she mentioned to her mom that Coach Jim was hugging her a lot. It was kind of weird, but it was probably nothing. Destiny's mom was sharp! She caught on that her daughter was uncomfortable, and hugging was well beyond normal coaching relationship boundaries, especially since parents weren't allowed in the sessions! It was a red warning flag for manipulation and potential future abuse.

Destiny's parents listened and supported her. First, they taught Destiny to confidently tell the coach "I don't want to be touched or hugged any more. I don't like it." Coach Jim protested of course. He told her she was being silly and childish. He was only trying to motivate her. He tried to make her feel bad for defending her boundaries. She held strong and said it again: "I don't like to be touched. Stop it. I'm asking you to stop and respect my boundaries." Coach Jim was grumpy and didn't help her as much after she said that. Destiny told her parents. At that point, they still had a few coaching sessions left, they demanded that they sit in and observe the practice. He canceled the rest of the sessions and gave the parents a refund in an angry fit.

Destiny and her parents found another coach, and as it turns out, Coach Jim was arrested on charges of molesting

another student just a few months later. Destiny listened to her gut. Destiny told someone, who, in her case, happened to be her mom. There are other adults she could have also asked for advice, too. She could have asked others if they agreed that Coach Jim was getting weird to validate her gut feelings before she told her parents.

Coach Jim was a manipulator and an abuser. He set up a private coaching environment away from parents' eyes. He took his time to build Destiny's trust, to break down her boundaries and ultimately take advantage of her, as he had with others.

She did trust him at first. She let him into her backyard. But he was trying to get too close, and she listened to her gut. It felt weird, and wrong. Luckily, she had support to help put up a boundary and defend it. He was not going to get any closer to her. In essence, she had to make sure that she didn't let him in her house and not to get any closer.

Manipulators of all kinds (from self-serving narcissists to groomers) try to get others to lower their defenses, to remove boundaries, to get into your house (to get into your head) and take advantage of your doubts and your weaknesses.

Setting your boundaries, understanding your gate and door criteria, helps you build the confidence to know that you are right, and you can defend your boundaries. Hopefully before they take advantage of you. And it's not just coaches, and authority figures, it's also friends, boyfriends and girlfriends. The relationship might start off great, then starts to get weird.

Sure, it's great that I can write a story like this describing certain behavior that is so easy and clear to explain. I'm completely aware that real life scenarios are much more nuanced, complex, and really hard to figure out. I've heard many sad

stories of abuse victims who didn't find the support they needed to get out of a bad situation. It can be very hard, but remember, this isn't about politeness, this is about you and your safety.

Defending boundaries takes practice. Tell someone when your gut, your intuition, is sensing something isn't quite right! Don't suffer or doubt alone. Your gut feeling may well protect you from physical and/or emotional abuse. Please trust yourself and lean on your support network to help defend your boundaries. And don't beat yourself up if you misread or misjudge a situation at first. Maybe you let someone into your Yard only to figure out later that they shouldn't be there. Life is complex. We may not get it right the first time, but we can fix it and learn from any mistakes. We grow stronger and more confident in ourselves over time.

## • • • THINK BREAK • • •

Reflect on a time recently when you invited someone into your Yard because they met your gate criteria

Think about one of your friends in your House...how did the friendship build to the point where you invited them into your House? How long were they a Yard friend before they were invited in the House?

Have you had a situation when you had to be forceful and prevent someone from 'pushing' their way into your Yard when you didn't want to be their friend? How did you handle it? How did that feel? Did you have any 'gut' feelings that you listened to (or ignored?)

## SIX

### **Kicking People Out... Who Needs to be Evicted?**

You can collect friends and invite them into your life with your boundary criteria for the gate and the door, but the boundaries work in reverse, too. Sometimes we need to evict people from either our house or the yard or both. The boundaries aren't just entry criteria, they are also standards of behavior that you will insist upon from all your friends (i.e. "House rules"). Oooh, that sounds bold, doesn't it? But it's true. You *deserve* kindness, respect, support and love from your friends and family, and they deserve the same from you. When it falls short, it's time to evict them. More commonly, people today say you need to remove "toxic people" from your life. I'm talking about the same thing. It needs to be done from time to time. Sometimes it's tough to do, sometimes it's not. Sometimes it's one-sided, sometimes it's mutual. And often, the idea of removing someone from our social circle is a tough pill to swallow.

It's important to recognize that over the course of our lives, people come in and go out of our lives. It's very natural as we grow. Our elementary and preschool friends are not usually our close friends in middle school. Then, our friends change

again in high school, then college and again as we grow into adulthood. For many of us. Some friends endure, some don't. Friendships "recategorize."

An "eviction" (kicking someone out) from your house or yard is a recategorization of that friendship. From close-friend to distant-friend. From occasional friend to someone we don't keep in contact at all. From close-friend to not a friend at all, almost an enemy. It's best to remember that it's OK to move on and let friendships shift and recategorize. Friendships have seasons. As you are growing and changing, so are all the other people in your peer group. Things will change. This entire analogy is a way to visualize and help manage that change.

Hanging on to a friendship that is shifting away can be detrimental to your self-worth.

Some evictions happen naturally, some happen without any event or drama, some are chaotic, difficult and painful.

### **Natural, Drama-Free, Fade-Away Mutual Walk-Aways**

These are the easiest, and they are usually mutual. It's like each of you walks quietly out of each other's House. Time and life's normal changes result in friendship changes. It's uneventful, two friends grow apart as they grow up. Most of the time it isn't even discussed, it just sort of happens gradually and uneventfully, and it's quite fine and natural. Let it happen.

Emily and Mia were friends in elementary school but as soon as they started middle school, they naturally began to cultivate new friends and grew apart. Emily was concerned that something was wrong, that Mia didn't want to spend



time with her as much. She felt rejected by Mia. Her feelings were hurt. The funny thing is, at the same time, Emily was building her own new middle-school social network, quite naturally, just like Mia was. It took some time for young Emily to understand that we grow out of our old friends sometimes, and it's OK. It's natural. Her mom reminded her not to look at Mia as a lost friend, but just less close. She and Mia will slowly walk out of each other's houses, with no anger or real loss. And there would be plenty of room in her house for all the new friends she was making. People come and go in our lives. She eventually came to understand that. She and Mia maintained a friendly relationship, not close, but friendly, until Mia's family moved away a few years later. After that, their friendship faded away completely.

Karin, and I were very close in high school, but our close connection faded away after I left for college and she stayed more local. I do happen to keep in touch with her from time to time. She is as much a wonderful person today as she was back in high school. But, when I left for college, we both began to grow into our own lives which happened to be different. We are no longer close. I don't call Karin for a broken heart, or advice or anything other than to occasionally say hi. In essence, she, over time just floated quietly out my House door into my Yard. And since we still keep in touch from time to time, I consider her a friend in my backyard party. It's very mutual, and I know it. Not because we talked about it, but we don't share our lives with each other like we did when we were besties. No drama, no event, just a fade-away.

I promise you this kind of mutual walking-out will, and probably already has happened to you too. It's so quiet and

gradual that you may not even notice. It happens naturally. Friends shift around and recategorize relationships over time. That is a fact of life, and frankly I think it's a beautiful fact of life. There's no need to lament a loss. Think of all the fond memories of past friends! Memories of good friends and good times in your life are a wonderful treasure you should be grateful for. It is a chapter in your life that has ended. Turn the page and look forward. Maybe you're still friends but not the same way, not as close. And as some friends shift out of the house, there's room for new ones... the new friends who are there to love, respect and support you in THIS stage of your life. Enjoy them thoroughly and wholly today because, someday in the future, that friendship could also fade. (That's a part of "being present," another phrase used frequently today.) Let it flow.

You can also expect the people who support you to also "let it flow" rather than coerce or urge you to stay friends with someone else.

### **No Event...Just Internal Evaluation**

Have you ever wondered why spending time with some friends is exhilarating and with others it is exhausting, or draining? Some friends I can't get enough of their time, and some friends make me want to be alone for a while after I spend time with them. I like them, but they are draining. Maybe they were house friends, maybe just yard friends. Either way, it was weird that I liked them, but they were sucking my energy.

What if it's a pretty good friendship, but something is just a little off about it. You can't really put your finger on it, so you maintain the friendship as always. This is a "listen to your gut"

moment. In this case, I say take some time to think about it a little deeper. Now that you've identified your yard and house criteria, you can evaluate some of these "fun but a little off" friendships a bit better. Do you really have all the Kindness, Respect, Support and Love from this person that you need? It's an internal evaluation only. It's a time for you to decide how the friendship works for you. These are the hard ones. There may only be subtle things that don't align with your boundaries. In that case, you get to decide if the rest of the friendship is worth keeping, and to work on.

Did you ever feel like you are making all the effort in a friendship? Gina's friend Linda never called to invite her to hang out in high school. Linda was a great friend. Gina and Linda were close and loved each other dearly, but for some weird reason, Gina always had to call her and invite her to go do something. At first she ignored it, but more and more, it felt a little out of balance for Gina. Why was Gina always making the effort? So, for a month or so didn't invite Linda to hang out at all to test the friendship. They talked at school, and online, but Linda NEVER invited Gina to an event or to hang out. Not once. When Gina realized that it bothered her, she thought about it further. Before making a big issue, fight or drama about it, was the friendship worth keeping in the first place? Yes, Gina, thought. For everything else, absolutely everything, Linda was worth keeping in her house. Gina felt that this one thing, that Linda never invited her out, was annoying, and somewhat disrespectful of Gina's feelings but maybe it was something they could discuss together.

The next time Gina and Linda had time together, Gina asked Linda about it. She mentioned to Linda that it felt like

she was always an afterthought to Linda and was worried that Linda didn't value their friendship as much as Gina did. Linda was surprised that Gina felt that way and explained that she never regarded Gina as an afterthought. She explained her challenging and controlling relationship with her mother, and as a result, was always hesitant to make plans because her mother would cancel them on her. Linda's behavior became more a habit in defense of her mother's demands than any reflection on Gina as a friend. Gina understood and supported Linda, but asked if Linda could try to initiate more. Even if Linda's mother canceled the plans, Gina would support Linda and not be angry about it. The relationship held strong and they remained close friends all through high school.

Some other behaviors of friends that may cause you to internally reevaluate the friendship:

Is your friend unkind to your other friends?

Has your friend changed? Does she have new friends that you don't want to be around?

Do you find yourself "walking on eggshells" around a friend? You like them, but you're always worried about triggering their anger or some emotional outburst? Are you contorting yourself just to avoid a conflict with them? Do they lose their temper, yell, hurl insults, or even threaten any sort of physical violence? That is a basic display of disrespect. It is belittling, insulting and selfish.

Passive aggressive anger is no better. It is just as disrespectful, insulting and selfish.

Manipulation, coercion and guilt are also disrespectful, insulting and selfish.

Do you find that you are always accommodating the desires

and whims of the other person, and not your own?

Do you suppress some of your own thoughts and ideas to make sure the other person isn't threatened by you? Or are you too often following the demands of your friend and no longer making your own choices on where to go, how to dress, who to talk to, etc.? The housewives in the movie "The Help" all followed the despicable demands of their one friend Hilly Holbrook. All the housewives simply let Hilly tell them what to do, where to go, how to dress, and how to treat their African American house maids. Find a clip of that movie. You'll see that Hilly is the WORST example of a bully, manipulative, coercive, self-serving, disrespectful, unsupportive "friend!" All the other ladies accommodate her to avoid her backlash, her anger and her emotional outbursts. The other ladies need to reevaluate their boundaries and their friendship with Hilly. Ideally, they would all evict her from their houses. Imagine what would happen to Hilly if all the women did that?

None of these behaviors is worthy of maintaining a friendship. They aren't worthy of you!

That "drama-queen" is selfish, and pressuring her the other friends to accommodate her, suppress their emotions and their desires to bend to her will. It's out of balance and it isn't a good friendship.

Take note when a friendship has drama...are you being asked or expected to accommodate the other person's feelings and desires, with no consideration of your own? Do you feel like the relationship is out of balance? Have your own boundaries been breached? Do you think this is an unusual one-time misunderstanding that you both can talk through to clear it up? Have you tried but it still isn't fixing things? Is the relationship

worth it? Yikes, that's a hard question, but when a friendship is breaking down, it may be time to walk that person out of the house to either the yard, or perhaps all the way out your gate.

• • • **THINK BREAK** • • •

Can you think of friendships that might have grown apart? Did you grow out of some friends as your life changed from elementary school to middle school and beyond? Do you feel guilty that you still aren't good friends, or have you accepted it as a natural and a great memory?

Do you find yourself walking on eggshells or doing things just to prevent a friend from having an emotional outburst? Do you think it's time to reevaluate this friendship?

Are your friendships in balance? You receive kindness, respect, support and love as much as you give?

## SEVEN

### **Kicking People Out... Evictions with Confidence**

I shared the House & Yard analogy with my friend Michelle. She's a VERY extroverted person who surrounds herself with people. She's warm and friendly to everyone and by her own admission, she recharges by being around people and wants to be around people all the time. Michelle pondered the analogy for a few minutes and asked the question, "How? How do you kick people out of your house? I share everything. I'm an open book. I don't understand how to move someone to the backyard party or out to the curb, much less when." Good question, Michelle! Frankly, knowing Michelle, she didn't understand the difference between Yard-friends and inside-the-House friends either. She said that EVERYONE is in her house! She is a warm and lovely person, and I have yet to meet someone who doesn't say the same thing about her.

Well, in truth, Michelle doesn't really let EVERYONE into her house, but her question about how to kick people out is common! And it isn't just an issue for warm-hearted, friendly and open people like Michele; most young women today aren't taught how to identify their own boundaries much

less enforce them.

Up to this point, we've identified the different categories of friends: House friends and Yard friends. And we know there are people outside the gate of our Yard who aren't friends. We have also identified that there is a need for rules or criteria for someone to "qualify" to be our friend which helps us decide who we should let in the gate to the yard and the door to the house.

We've also learned that friendships can change over time. As we grow, our friendships change, and that's OK. And with that, some friendships just naturally fade away, and both parties walk quietly out of each other's house.

Then, sometimes we simply need to evict people from our house and our yard. They no longer meet our standards, our rules, our criteria for being in our house or our yard. They violate our boundaries, and they are no longer worthy of our friendship. This isn't easy for most of us. Most of us aren't taught how to recognize our boundaries, much less enforce them. But for every young woman, it is vital that she learn to do exactly that. To have the confidence to stand up for herself. To believe that she deserves the respect, love, kindness and support of House and Yard friends.

### **So, How Do We Do It? How Do We Kick People Out?**

There are lots of ways to escort someone out of your House and Yard, and it depends a lot on the people involved, the situation, and how close they are to your heart. No matter what, though, I can sum it up like this:



**1 Decide:**

- Decide that they need to go. Decide for yourself that you need to evict them from your House or Yard
- Decide if it's an eviction from the House to the Yard, or from the House all the way out the gate
- Decide the closure that you need...do you need a discussion about it or not?

**2 Create Distance:** physical, attention and emotional distance

**3 Gather Support** if needed

**4 Stay Strong,** follow through and stay true to yourself. Use your support as needed.

**1. Decide**

The first few steps are all about you and your mindset...long before you take any action you have to make up your own mind. Sometimes this is easy, sometimes this is the hardest part. Did a friend violate your boundaries? How do you feel about it? Is it a big deal to you? Are you a little mad, kind of insulted or very angry? Do you think it was intentional? You might need to find someone to talk to about it. Someone who will listen (not persuade).

Of course, if there's grand drama, you can finish a fight with an "I'm done!" declaration, and the decision is easy. Otherwise, you can take it slow, take your time to decide or to walk them out slowly. The trick is following through to be true to yourself. If you say I'm done, then *be* done, and you

might need some help to *stay* done. Either way it all starts with your decision.

My daughter always talked to me when she was having friend issues, and she had a wide group of other friends she also used as sounding boards. She had lots of people who let her work through her own thoughts. (btw, that is a form of SUPPORT) As a parent, I let her describe the story. I asked her to tell me how she felt. I asked her, what would she rather have happened? Did she think the actions that upset her were intentional? Did she think they'd happen again? What did she do in the situation? What did she think would happen if she told the other girl how she felt? How would she react...would she get angry? Apologetic? Dismissive? Accusatory? Flat out denial? The other person's response says a lot about what they think about you, too. We talked about all the different options she could take to this situation. Some took more effort than others. And bottom line, did she value the friendship enough to keep that girl in her House or Yard? If the answer was no, then we talked about ways to distance herself.

- a** Decide what you want to do.
- b** Then, make up your mind about where the other person needs to go: Yard or outside the gate.

If the boundary violator is in your house, do you need to kick them out into the Yard for a cooling-off period? That leaves them in "friend" status, but not as close, that is, distancing the heart. There's a possibility that they may earn their way back into the House again.

Another strange situation is hard to figure out: when you

are *their* friend & confidant, but you don't want to be. If they want you in their house, to be there for them...but you just can't give that much. They need you, but you don't think they can equally be there for you. You can't pour your heart, love and trust into that person. You may also have to extricate yourself from some people who are very demanding.

Sometimes it can be so bad that is a co-dependency problem, or, as I call it: a one-way relationship. They want everything from me but can't give me the same love and respect in return. I can't work with that imbalance, so I can't have that person as a close friend to me. Sometimes I can keep them as a Yard friend; that is ok, as long as there still is mutual respect. When I was younger, I might have stayed friends with them longer than I should have, and later evicted them because it was so uncomfortable. Now that I'm older & more self-confident, I can figure out very soon if someone is a 'taker' like that. Do they want all my time and attention to fill their ego or dump all their problems, but can't give me the same in return? If so, then I never get that close with them from the beginning. That comes with time, practice and self-confidence. You'll get there with practice.

And finally, if a 'boundary violator' has made you so angry, or hurt, or perhaps you've come to realize that the connection with them no longer suits you, you may want to remove them as a friend altogether...move them all the way out the gate just to protect your heart. You have to be sure that you no longer value that friendship. Is it time to be completely done with them?

**c** And finally, decide if you need some kind of closure.

## Emily's Epic Eviction:

Emily and Katie met in class. They laughed and talked and began to get to know each other and were in each other's backyard parties very quickly. They spent more time together, and eventually became good friends. They had a lot of fun together when things were going well, but they were very different people. Although it did take work to maintain their friendship, Emily felt that Katie became a close friend in her House, and she was a close friend in Katie's House for a while. But over one summer, something started to change. Katie stopped calling and texting. Emily saw photos of Katie and other friends at events posted online that Emily wasn't invited to or even aware of. Emily was quite aware of the new cold distance that Katie had implemented but didn't understand why. After months of trying to figure it out, and a conversation with a mutual friend, Emily began to learn the reason. Katie began to take offense at the different way Emily spoke about things, and Emily took offense that Katie took offense and talked to other friends about it behind her back, but never bothered to mention it to Emily. They each handled the conflicts differently. Finally, after 2 months of silence, Katie, out of the blue, sent a LONG text of grievances to Emily.

Emily was horrified at all the perceived slights, all her words twisted and taken out of context, and all of it peppered with insults. Katie let it all out in a long string of texts.

Emily finally saw how the friendship really was: Katie wanted Emily to accommodate her but not acknowledge that Emily was also hurt or insulted. It was WAY out of balance. And for the good times they had together, the laughs and heartfelt insights they had shared in the past, Emily came to

realize that she did walk on eggshells around Katie too often. She wasn't being her full self lest she upset Katie. She was usually accommodating Katie's whims and found herself seeking time away just to relax. After much reflection, Emily decided that the friendship with Katie wasn't a well-balanced, healthy friendship for her. Emily had faith that she could find other friends to replace her if she kicked Katie out of her house. It took Emily a few weeks to decide, but she finally made the decision to evict Katie. (Take note, here. It may take more time than you expect to decide, but it's hard to take action unless you decide.)

The second part of the decision was also hard to choose... whether Katie should be a Yard friend or sent out the gate altogether. Would she miss Katie? She didn't really know yet. Emily decided to recategorize Katie as a Yard friend and see if that worked. It would put the needed distance in their friendship but leave open the opportunity to have fun together again in the future. Like a cooling off period.

Next, typical for Emily, she wanted closure. She really wanted to have a discussion with Katie to hash out both sides, especially on how Katie misinterpreted her intentions, and how Katie's response was hurtful.

So, Emily tried to have a discussion with Katie, but Katie refused. She would not meet with Emily to clear the air.

Well, Emily tried anyway. When Katie refused to have a discussion, Emily realized that Katie only wanted Emily to apologize and took no responsibility for her own hurtful words and actions. So that crossed the line. The last boundary for Emily. It was a clear lack of support and respect. It wasn't balanced. It was clear that Katie didn't have enough care and

concern for Emily as a person to even talk it out. So Emily decided to end it all and evict Katie all the way out to the gate.

## **2. Create Distance**

Create Distance. Once you've decided that you have to evict someone, there are several ways to do it. Since the House/Yard is just an analogy, and you can't really take this former friend by the arm and escort them out of any real place, we have to translate this action in the real world. In the real world, that means you need to create distance: physical distance, attention distance and emotional distance.

### Create Physical Distance

Creating physical distance is the best first step. Physically Separate yourself from that person. Don't be around them. Don't go to places where they will be for a while. You might even have to stop hanging out with mutual friends for a while.

What if you can't physically get away from them? What if they sit next to you in class? What if she is on your sports team or live in the same building? Ride the bus with you? What if you work together? Not an ideal situation, but not impossible. Gather up a new mindset of being just civil, as if the two of you are complete strangers. You can work together, talk about work, and not much else. Stop sharing personal information. Excuse yourself from the same old conversations. Something like, "Excuse me, but I need to study." "I need to get back to work." "I promised my Mom I'd help her with something and I need to go." Distance yourself.

Find legitimate distractions. Go ahead and promise your Mom to do something with her and go do it. Go invite another friend to spend time with. Get busy with other people and other things to keep yourself physically distant.

I know, it sounds like you are evicting yourself rather than the other person, but since you can't control the other person, you have to control yourself. If you need to evict someone out of your house and it's so bad that you need to evict them all the way out of the gate, you'll have to create the needed separation for yourself. Don't expect to control or change the other person. Focus internally to give yourself the confidence you need. Another way to look at it, you have to walk out of their House to get them out of yours.

### Create Attention Distance

Stop sharing personal information with the person you are evicting. And by all means, stop the electronic connections: phone, texts, social media, email. It's amazingly difficult but extremely important as you are trying to build up your own new habits of being away from that other person.

Distance your attention from them. Stop answering when they call, message or tag you. Just don't answer. You could say it's giving them the silent treatment, but it is more than that. You are taking back control over the situation, over yourself, to break old habits to respond to a person you've already decided is not good for you.

Silence them on social media and messaging apps. Un-follow, un-friend, un-add, and block them. Block them from communicating with you. Prevent them from watching

and following your posts and snaps.

And here's another important one...stop following them! Stop watching them, stop looking at them, stop stalking them! Stop it. Clear your phone of all their numbers and media. Stop it all! It's like turning off an annoying, depressing news show. Trust me on this one. This will clear your mind and your heart the fastest if you distance your attention from them. Break habits of responding.

Get yourself busy with other people and activities as a distraction. Put your attention elsewhere. Do things with other people. Treat yourself to something nice, a new outfit or a tech item. Reorganize your room (gives you another feeling of a fresh start). Dress nice for yourself. Visit someplace new in town that you have always meant to see or pick up a new book to dive into. There are lots of things you can do to capture your attention and steer it away from someone you need to distance yourself from.

One thing that most of us do is share the saga with our other friends. We do that for support and validation and it sure is helpful to healing the heart. That's a good time to need our House friends, when our heart is broken! But I'll give you a tip here, put a limit on how long or how often you'll talk about it with friends. It's not healthy to complain about it forever. Take the needed support, and the actions to evict, but train yourself to move on. You can't wallow on it forever, and your other friends don't want to listen to the same story forever, too. Emily gave herself a few weeks to feel bad about the eviction of Katie. She recognized they are legitimate feelings of anger and sadness at the loss of a friend, but the best healing comes from moving on and taking new actions.



When you set up both the physical and the attention distancing, rolling into emotional distancing is easier. This is when you can begin to heal yourself and close that door and that gate once and for all behind that former friend.

Now, if you are evicting someone from your house just to your yard, meaning, you're OK with preserving the friendship, just not so close as before, you don't have to turn off all connections, of course.

Just put some new limits on what you share and how much time you spend together. Change how you respond to the friendship. But, if you decided that this is a 'toxic' person and is not good for you, then, by all means, take strong action to break the old habits.

## Create Emotional Distance

First distance your body. Then distance your attention. Then, finally you can distance your heart.

Distance your heart by stop sharing your heart. Stop sharing your feelings. Stop sharing private information with that person. Treat them like a stranger and be more guarded with your private, personal and emotional self.

Every situation is different, every friendship is different. One method probably won't work for another. After even the slightest distancing, like Emily and Katie, the friendship fizzles away quickly. But that isn't always the case.

Sometimes you get a strong reaction from the former friend. They might go crazy on you and fight even harder to drag you back into that less-than-healthy relationship. They want to keep you in. They aren't confident in themselves to move on

from a bad relationship, or they are simply hungry for control over you. Follow-through is quite difficult for a lot of people. When you recategorize a friendship and create distance, the other person may get pushy and forceful trying to keep you together. This happens in friendships, relationships, and family. They don't want old patterns to break, and if the other person has some feeling of control, they'll be even MORE forceful to keep the relationship as it was. Some will try all sorts of things to bring you back to how it was. They'll be overly apologetic and sweet, or they'll be insulting and belittling. I've seen some situations where the other person threatens self-harm (suicide!), sickness, returning to drugs or alcohol, just to keep another person close. Even family members dump guilt and shame on each other to keep the relationships as they always were.

### **3. Gather Support**

And this is where I also say that you may need support. Your better friends, your supportive family members, therapists, ministry, etc. The more difficult the situation you are removing yourself from, the more difficult the eviction, the more support you probably need. Rare is the person who can do it alone. If you have that strength, know that you are a rare superpower!

### **4. Stay Strong**

Stay strong, stay confident, find support to help you keep your distance and break the toxic chains of that relationship. Support is very important in difficult situations. It is a difficult process to walk away from a bad relationship (evict someone from your life).

It hurts emotionally to sever a friendship. Sometimes you lose confidence that you are doing the right thing. You may doubt yourself, and the other person may at the same time be trying make you feel stupid or guilty, and you doubt yourself even more. Hold on to every shred of confidence and self-love you have, no matter how small! Pray for strength, and I say it again, gather support to help you stay strong. Once it's all over, you'll heal. You'll feel better. You'll feel better about yourself. You'll start to feel more confident and comfortable with yourself. And you'll begin to believe me, finally, that you deserve to be treated with Kindness, Respect, Support and Love. And I can assure you that there are people around you ready to give that to you.

Believe that even if you don't control the situation to get physical distance, you will always have the power to create attention & emotional distance. Be mentally strong to recognize that you are not in a good situation with this person. The boundaries for your gate and your house door are ideas to help you recognize when someone isn't good for you. When you are in control of your heart and mind, you have new power.

Part of that power is your self-worth. It is powerful to know that you are a valuable person, you are a worthy person, and you are a person who can be and should be loved and respected and treated with kindness. It is power when you learn to give yourself the grace you need to learn your boundaries, and to learn what YOU need to fill your emotional cup, and no longer need to be dictated by others. It is part of the growing process. You are unique, you may be different from so many others. Learn about yourself and I pray you learn to love all that makes you unique.

Back to Emily and Katie: They were already physically distant since they were apart over the summer. After Katie's

text tsunami, Emily made her decision and cut off social media with Katie. Katie sent a few more text rants, but Emily forced herself not to respond. If she did, they would certainly just continue arguing over text. Besides, by this time Emily had made her decision to evict. She created attention distance!

While Emily was trying to hold strong, the second part of the distance came with a mutual friend, Emma. Emma and Katie were very close and had been friends long before the two met Emily. With the fallout with Katie, Emily tried to maintain the friendship with Emma, but it was too difficult to be completely open with her. They both felt like they had to dance around to avoid the topic of Katie. Emma still met up with Katie and they did things together. Emma had stopped inviting Emily, of course, and Emma didn't want to tell Emily the places they'd been and the things they had done together without her. Emily and Emma tried, but it was awkward, friendly but awkward. Eventually, Emily and Emma quietly drifted apart. No drama. They just walked out of each other's houses and went on with their lives. No animosity between them. Backyard-party friends, yes, Emma and Emily are still friendly when they see each other. But not Katie. Emily walked Katie all the way out the gate and declared it done.

For several weeks, Emily was mad and hurt. She doubted herself, was she being petty? She had a supportive mom who she confided in, and she had other friends she could talk to for support. She did stay strong, and the last of the friendship fizzled away completely.

For weeks after that. Emily felt lonely. There was a hole in her heart where two friends once were. That didn't make her feel good. But since she stayed strong, and confident that

she made the right decision for herself, she directed her time, energy and attention to getting to know some more people a little better. These were some backyard friends who she had recently met and liked. It didn't take long to replace Katie and Emma with another group of friends in her House who are kind, respect Emily for all that she is, very supportive and share a mutual love for each other. Emily's network of friends is better than ever!

Any loss from recategorizing a friend or relationship is a lesson learned, a character built, a power gained, and confidence reinforced. Be strong, woman! And have faith in yourself. Any void left by removing a toxic relationship will be filled with a better one...IF you stay true to your boundaries, and yourself.

The boundaries for your gate and your house door are ideas to help you recognize when someone isn't good for you. When you are in control of your heart and mind, you have the power.

## • • • THINK BREAK • • •

What are some of the ways you can distance your attention from someone?

If you are stuck in the same class or office with someone that you are trying to distance yourself from, what are the different things you can say to them if they keep trying to talk to you? What will their response be?

What kinds of things can you do to distract yourself, and keep yourself busy when you need to get away from someone?

## EIGHT

### **Look in the Mirror... Are You a Good Friend?**

Look in the mirror and ask yourself, are you a good friend? Now that you've read the other chapters, and you've started to figure out your own boundaries, your own rules for your House and Yard friends, can you give the same in return?

Can you start to see the boundaries your friends have for themselves...maybe not with you, but with other people around them? Do you support them and accept them as they are?

I have faith that you are a good friend, but just in case, we'll look at it another way. If you're NOT being a good friend, your friend might evict you.

### **Someone Walks out of Your House on Their Own**

Can other people walk out on you?

Yes. Sometimes it really hurts, too. Sometimes it's a big surprise, but by distancing themselves from you, they want or need to recategorize their friendship with you. They might not even tell you but have decided that they can't and don't want to give you their heart the same way anymore. In the

previous chapter the story of Emily and Katie: Katie walked out of Emily's house and months later told her why. Perhaps they think you're trying to change them, and they are uncomfortable. Or they think you don't seem to accept them as they are. They may need something different in the friendship. You may not be equally fulfilling the other person's needs but asking full support of your needs...it's out of balance. It may not be how you really feel, but it is how they perceive the friendship at this time.

People will begin to distance themselves from you to set a boundary. Then what? If it is a close relationship and the new distance hurts, take some time to reflect on how you have been as a friend. Seriously, this is a tough one. If you haven't been given enough clues from the other person, well then, you may never receive feedback to figure it out. Likely, it's a friendship that won't repair well.

But if your friend has hinted around or even come straight out and said what issues they're having with you...well, then... this is the time to reflect on that. You may not have intended your actions to come across that way, and you can yourself decide if you'd personally like to mend the friendship. Or maybe not (Emily/Katie story)

Kayla had a friend she met at work, Sonja. They hit it off right away and enjoyed each other's company. The friendship grew. They went out after work often. They spent more and more time together and had fun, a lot of fun. That backyard friend was getting super close to entering Kayla's House. Then, one day, Sonja stopped calling. She completely and suddenly shut Kayla out. She wouldn't answer calls. They didn't work in the same office building so there wasn't the physical presence

opportunity to work things out. Poof, the relationship just vanished. Sonja walked out on Kayla. Kayla never learned what the reason was. No words, no feedback, no messages. So, Kayla just let her go out the gate and they never spoke again. Years later, Kayla still shrugs with bewilderment as to what happened.

### **Can You Keep Friendships in Balance**

Good friendships have a great balance of give and take. Both sides need to receive kindness, respect, support and love to stay in each other's houses. We all subconsciously react when something is out of balance, or when the other friend is taking or demanding more than they can give. Unfortunately, some people are "takers" as I call them. She wants everyone to bend their will to her needs. She wants all her friends to do as she tells them. She wants power over others. She doesn't care about how everyone else feels, what's important is about how she feels. Frankly, that's not a friend. That's a one-sided relationship that is totally out of balance. (They can also be called narcissists)

Sometimes a friendship is out of balance simply because two personalities don't blend well, like Emily and Katie. You may not be aware of it, but others may feel like they are walking on eggshells around you. Do you lose your temper, have a hissy fit when plans don't go your way?

Jada's soccer coach called for an extra, previously unscheduled practice after school one day, but it happened to be the same day she was planning to go to the mall with Emily & Tiff. She told Emily & Tiff not to go to the mall without her.



No, she didn't ask, she *told* them. Emily & Tiff didn't want to sit around for no reason, so they went to the mall anyway and told Jada to join after practice. Jada had a complete hissy fit. She was so offended that they wouldn't wait for her, and it didn't matter one bit that she was still welcome to join them. It really was such a small thing, but she didn't get her way, and threw a fit. While Jada was steaming mad, the other two girls couldn't understand what the fuss was. They tried to ignore her texting tantrum and enjoy their visit to the mall. Jada stewed all evening, and to get back at them for not listening to her, she un-friended the others and blocked them online.

In the end, the only one hurt was Jada who lost a couple of friends by trying to demand that her friends cater only to her, with no respect for their time and desires, then guilt them later by not doing as she asked. Jada didn't have kindness or respect to give to her other friends. She was completely self-serving and out of balance, so her other friends left her.

In extreme cases, the takers, narcissists, manipulators, and abusers take and take and take...and try to maintain power over others. Any of us can get caught up in a friendship with one of these people for a while. But we all should, and likely will, eventually walk out on them. It does not make for healthy friendships. If you are the one throwing fits for not having your way, and are constantly having to replace friends, then may I suggest a different approach to friendships which include kindness, respect to start with. Having boundaries of our own helps us recognize when a relationship is out of balance, and we can take steps to remedy it.

If you don't evict BAD FRIENDS, Your good friends will walk out on you

Remember that you set the rules of your party, but in general the standard rules typically include kindness and respect for you and all the people in the backyard, that is, your other friends.

People in your backyard need to be nice to all your friends. If you bring in one terrible person who is offensive to other friends in the party, and you don't kick that person out, those other friends may eventually leave on their own. They don't want to be around someone like that! Then the good friends are gone, and you're left with the crummy person you just brought in who doesn't even meet your criteria.

Consider Makena, she was a very popular, outgoing kid in middle school. She was super involved in activities, sports, etc. She had loads of friends! She was outgoing, fun and everyone wanted to be in her circle. In high school, she made friends with some different kids. They had different humor and liked to do edgy things, like drink and drugs. At first she thought it was fun. Makena did not assess whether these kids met any criteria or breached any boundaries. They kept inviting her into their circles, pressured her to join in, guilted her when she stayed away, and swept her up into their lifestyle. While she was accommodating them, going along with them, her real friends were starting to distrust Makena. She brought in the druggies who weren't nice to any of them unless they joined in too. Soon, her real friends began to distance themselves from Makena. One by one they all walked out of her House and her Yard. After a while, the only friends Makena had left were the new ones who dragged her further and further into the drug lifestyle. She eventually did make it through rehab, and now is rebuilding not only herself, but her entire social

network with newly found boundaries.

That is certainly an extreme example that I don't wish on anyone. Another example, Megan made a new friend in class, Audrey, who had a hilarious sense of humor and made her laugh. It was great until Audrey started to make fun of Megan's other friends. She had plenty of fat jokes, ridiculed another's hair, and teased her nerdy friends. The last thing any of Megan's other friends wanted was to stick around and be insulted. They started to distance themselves from Megan. Megan saw what was happening and turned it around quickly. She told Audrey that she didn't want her to make fun of her other friends. Audrey, of course, laughed her off and said she was just joking. "Everyone needs to lighten up!" But Megan knew she'd lose her other (better) friends if this continued. They'd all walk out Megan's Yard just to get away from Audrey. Ultimately, she had to kick out Audrey.

If you keep that offensive person in your Yard, it shows your other friends that you don't care about them, and you are choosing the offensive person over them. Keep a sharp eye out for how people in your Yard treat other people, too. That's part of how you RESPECT and SUPPORT your friends, by making sure they are treated kindly, too.

### **Are You Being a Bully and Not Realizing It?**

If you ask your mom or your grandmother if they recall a time when someone was mean to them in middle school or high school, I'll bet you they will readily recall a story. And if you flip it around, I'll bet they can also recall a time when they were mean to someone and felt bad about it afterwards.

Like I mentioned earlier, girls can be mean. Sometimes, ugh, often times, young girls don't even realize HOW much the words hurt. They think some comments are funny, they make their close friends laugh at the expense of another. That other kid that just got made fun of or was the butt of a mean comment felt it. She or he felt it to their core. If you said something to or about someone, you may not remember it, but they might remember that comment for the rest of their life...like mom or grandma you just asked.

Words can pack a punch.

They can also create guilt, shame, embarrassment, insecurities, anger and resentment. Do you make fun of people? Sometimes it seems like a middle-school requirement is to make fun of other people. Imani made fun of a Muslim girl, Aisha, in her school. There weren't many Muslims, so this girl was different. Imani made jokes with her friends loud enough so Aisha could hear. It hurt. She also posted snotty comments about Aisha online. All Imani cared about were the laughs from her friends. One day, Imani was called into the counselor's office and was accused of bullying Aisha. Although she tried to deny it, she began to realize that she was being mean to Aisha for no better reason than a few laughs from her other friends. She suddenly realized that her words really hurt Aisha, and Aisha already had it tough being different. Imani reflected and decided to change her behavior. She changed her approach and treated Aisha with civility and kindness. Soon after, they became casual friends who could help each other with homework. They never became close friends, but it was a nice backyard-party friendship after that. Her other friends didn't leave her because she was polite to Aisha. She

simply told them that she's done being mean and moved on. One of Imani's friends, Bethany, persisted in being mean to Aisha. Once Imani made up her mind, she evicted Bethany from her Yard, and let her know that she didn't want to be around someone who is mean to others, especially now that she learned that Aisha is a nice person.

It takes some self-reflection and some empathy for others to change your ways if you've been a bully or too self-serving. I suppose we've all done it to some degree. But go ahead and start to replace the teasing and insults, and the demands and selfishness with civility and kindness. Find the value in the friends you have now (assuming they are good friends who are kind, respectful, supportive and loving to you). Try offering the same in return. Keep the relationship in balance. Defend them from other bullies. Accept them as they are. Support them and be kind and loving. Listen to your friends. Listening is a great first step to understanding another person. Try hard to look at the friendship from both sides, yours and hers. I'm sure you'll have a richer life for it...new friends, better friends.

• • • **THINK BREAK** • • •

Do you criticize, scoff, laugh, insult, put down someone? That someone is another person's friend. Have you ever said something that came out mean but you didn't mean it that way? Did you apologize? How did you handle it?

Are you willing to talk it out? No, texting back & forth doesn't cut it. Can you face the other person?

Do you value the friendship enough to admit guilt if you did hurt the other persons feelings? Are you humble and loving enough to say I'm sorry? Can you avoid repeating it?

Do you bend to the other person's will, or do you demand that your friends do what you want? Are you in balance?

Are you a bully? Did you ask mom or grandma to tell you a story of when someone was meant to them? If you were their friend at the time, what would you do to support them? Do you hurt other people? Do you make fun of people? Do you criticize, scoff, laugh, insult, put down someone? That someone is another person's friend. Have you ever said something that came out mean but you didn't mean it that way? Did you apologize? How did you handle it?

# N I N E

## Conclusion

Imagine you have a House, a really nice house where you feel comfortable. And you have a big backyard with everything you need to throw great parties. All your friends join you in your Yard for fun, and your closest friends are with you in your House, that is, closest to your heart. Your Yard has a fence and a gate, your House has a door. There are certain rules you have set up for anyone to become and to stay a friend to you. These rules are boundaries to protect not only your heart, but also your mind, soul and body.

Having good friends around is the social network that we all need very much. We all need KINDNESS, RESPECT, SUPPORT and LOVE.

As we grow through life, our network of friends changes and shifts around. Friends recategorize with and without drama. Sometimes it happens naturally and quietly, sometimes it is a painful eviction process.

My wish for all young women is to gain the confidence and sense of self-worth that comes with knowing that you deserve to have good, healthy relationships, and that you have the power to enforce your boundaries when those boundaries are being breached.

To evict someone from our House/Yard is tough. It's a tough

decision. It's hard to take action to distance yourself physically, and distance your attention and emotion. They are habits that need to be broken and followed through to ultimately put you in a better place. I trust that you have or can find the SUPPORT you need to follow through with an eviction and build up the self-love that will get you through it, even if there is a period of grief and loneliness from the loss of a friend. I believe you will replace a toxic relationship with much better ones!

I hope all of you start to "listen to your gut." Don't dismiss that nagging little feeling. Honor it, explore it, see what might be causing it...it just might save you from a bad situation someday.

And I wish for all you young women to be aware, guarded and to have defenses against manipulation, coercion, and abuse. Use all the tools shared in this book to build up confidence to defend against the takers: boundaries, confidence and self-worth, and trust your gut.

And finally, I hope that we all continue to practice being better friends, daughters, sisters, classmates, coworkers and citizens. It starts with kindness, civility, and respect for others.

• • •

*Confidence is a people-magnet.*

• • •

*A friend is a gift you give yourself*

— ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

• • •





*I was always looking outside myself for strength and confidence, but it comes from within. It is there all the time.*

— KAYLA FREUD



*It is worth remembering that the time of greatest gain in terms of wisdom and inner strength is often that of greatest difficulty.*

— DALAI LAMA



## **Setting Boundaries**

- Boundaries define what you will tolerate in your relationships with others
- Boundaries are the limits, guidelines, or rules that keep relationships healthy
- Boundaries help define your needs, limits and expectations in relationships
- Enforced boundaries will protect not only your heart, but also your overall well-being and help protect you from manipulators
- Identifying our own boundaries takes time and some trial and error
- Enforcing boundaries takes confidence and self-worth

ELLY MALAXOS

• • •

*Setting boundaries is a way of caring for myself. It doesn't make me mean, selfish, or uncaring just because I don't do things your way. I care about me, too.*

— CHRISTINE MORGAN

• • •

*If you're offended by my boundaries, then you're probably one of the reasons I need them.*

— STEVE MARABOLI

• • •

*“Daring to set boundaries is about having the courage to love ourselves, even when we risk disappointing others.”*

— BRENE BROWN

• • •

*“You can be a good person with a kind heart and still say NO to people.”*

— UNKNOWN

• • •

## **Building Self-Confidence and Self-Worth:**

- Self-worth is when you see value in yourself. It's when you can see that you are worthy of being treated well and loved
- Building confidence takes daily practice, taking action and frequent reflection

## THE GATE KEEPER

- Helps you avoid being manipulated, coerced and better able to stand up for yourself
- Helps you criticize yourself less, doubt yourself less, allow yourself to grow, change and always see yourself as valuable and worthy of great friendships and love
- Gives you confidence in your intuition (your gut)
- Helps to override ridiculous outside messages from people and media trying to tell you who you are not, and what to believe
- Helps you be a better friend, and later, build healthy romantic partnerships too



*Self-worth is so vital to your happiness if you don't feel good about yourself, it's hard to feel good about anything else.*

— SANDY HALE



*Sometimes the hardest part of the journey is believing you're worth the trip.*

— GLENN BECK



*The most beautiful things you can wear are your self-confidence and your self-love.*

— LETICIA RAE





# Appendix

For Parents, Counselors, Teachers, and Adults who love our young women

Chances are, you've picked up this book because you have, know, or are working with a teen or young woman who may need some extra help building confidence, building social networks, setting boundaries, etc. We're in this together. Most of the book is written for the teens and young women, but, really, since we've all been kids and teens, we all might benefit from a little confidence boost from time to time. I encourage you to read through the book too!

A dear friend of mine, well into her 70's, took great comfort after reading Chapter Six that she didn't have to feel guilty about growing apart from her old childhood friends.

This book and the House/Yard analogy is especially helpful for visual learners. If you know a young woman who is feeling down at the loss of a friendship, down on herself because she can't figure out why she's not popular, or why she's so different from everyone else, can't make friends, full of self-doubt, etc., she very well may benefit from a visualization like the House and Yard.

I felt that way, so did my friends, my daughter, her friends and all the women around me at some point in their lives. Like I said before, middle school for girls is like guerilla warfare.

It can beat a kid down! And life gets more complicated as we get older. So, let's help our girls early to build that confidence they'll need later in life.

## **The Mission**

Help teens and young women to identify the boundaries and requirements needed to build and maintain excellent friendships, a strong and supportive social network, self-worth, and build the confidence needed to enforce the boundaries.

## **When Does It Start? with Toddlers!**

Teaching kids self-confidence and autonomy starts long before middle school. Babies, toddlers & little kids explore the world through touch, taste, falls and bumps. They make mistakes, they take action, and they monitor parents' reactions, too. Through this active learning they gain confidence in their abilities & build knowledge. Even as they get older, they continue to build confidence by "taking action," that is, by actually doing something, not just watching a video about it. Enabling the courage to *try* starts when we are very young.

According to my mother, I exhibited this desire as a toddler. One of my first toddler phrases was "Mommy, me do!" which meant, "let me do it on my own, Mommy! I want to try it by myself!" My very supportive Mother let me do it most of the time and nurtured my desired independence, self-reliance, skill and confidence-building. She listened to me and heard my desire for independence. She supported my toddler exploration in the world.

I was lucky. My Mom supported my natural desire for independence. I know some parents who won't. They won't let their little ones pick their own clothes, they don't listen to their suggestions on which games to play, or book to read. The parent's need for control supersedes the development of the child's autonomy, and it's a shame. They are essentially crushing the child's self-awareness, confidence & desire to explore the world by taking away their control.

My daughter is much like me, with an intensely strong independent streak. It's become a bit of a family joke that I stopped picking out her clothes when she was toddler because she was so adamant about what she wanted to wear even before she could articulate it. I let her have control over what she wore, and I did not care if she wore purple plaid with red and black striped leggings. She liked it and wore it with pride! It was no reflection on me if she turned up at a neighbor's house dressed in her own way. Once she even went to preschool wearing her brother's superman costume, cape and all. It was a super-powered day for her! Frankly, even before she was three, I stopped buying clothes without her...it was a sure thing that I'd have to return anything I chose. To this day she won't wear polka dots, which she hated even as a 2-year-old!

The story about a toddler picking out clothes may seem trivial, but in a toddler's world, small things are very big. Parents and adults can do well by their little ones to observe and listen while they are building likes, desires, autonomy, confidence and per the topic of this book, boundaries...even in the tiniest little things. Once I was at the local park playground with my kids, and along came another family with twin little boys about three years old. The family was picture

perfect gorgeous as they walked up to the playground. Mom and Dad were well-put-together fashionistas, starched shirt & dress, compared to me sitting cross-legged on the bench in my sloppy old sweats. And the twins were just as beautiful, in their little matching collared shirts, pressed khakis and bright white sneakers. But here's the part that sticks in my memory even more. Those little boys, both of them, were afraid to step off the pavement into the playground mulch! They watched the other kids, their same age climbing, jumping, sliding and running in what I could only imagine was awe! Their well-starched father encouraged them to go play. Finally, one of the little dudes took a tentative step into the mulch, then another, then another! He looked back at his parents and smiled, clearly proud of his new accomplishment, while his twin watched with trepidation. Courage built and he took more steps to the playground equipment, and then he tripped on the unstable, unfamiliar mulch landing flat on his tummy. Mommy rushed over, stood him back up immediately and brushed off his clothes and told him to be careful and not to get dirty. I felt so bad for the lack of opportunity these little ones had to explore the physical world around them. It looked to me like their parents crippled them. They didn't even have confidence to walk on mulch. And they clearly knew mommy would get upset if they got their spiffy clothes dirty. I didn't parent like that. I encouraged my kids to gain confidence in their abilities by exploring the world and their abilities that grew and improved with their age. These little twins were so physically behind the other kids the same age and younger who could already confidently run on the mulch and climb the equipment. The second twin never stepped off the sidewalk.



To be fair, I did not know that family and never saw them again. Those parents weren't horrible, they were kind and clearly loving, but they seemed to have imposed a restrictive control on their little children that left me with an uneasy feeling. I still feel sad for those kids that didn't get the SUPPORT to fully explore their world & build confidence on the playground. It's my perspective from my observations only. I can only wonder what else the parents controlled in the boys' lives as they grew. Did they have an opportunity to find and develop their own supportive social network, or was that also restricted to only being friends with "the right families?" We'll never know, but of course, I wish them all well and expect that they have grown up to be good, successful people despite that day on the playground.

Even beyond the toddler years, we all need to continue to test, explore and learn from the world around us by doing things, by taking action, to build expertise and self-confidence. When middle school hits, our world shifts from playgrounds and play-dates to building independence and new social networks. It's a whole new game, but expertise and confidence is gained by taking action.

## **Your Role as an Adult: Support & Protect**

### **Support**

A special note to parents and guardians: *You* have the primary role in supporting your children to build and enforce their boundaries as they grow. Your support is important for your kids to build their self-confidence, self-discipline and self-worth. That said, your parenting has to grow and evolve with the children. The same parenting that works for toddlers will NOT work for middle and high schoolers! You have to grow with them. It's a *process* to grow into trust and loosen up the apron strings so the children can learn the self-discipline & confidence to navigate the world. As you demonstrate respect for their boundaries, and as they develop step by step, your support reinforces that those boundaries are valid. It's a process where parenting grows with children, and it really does start with you.

### **Listen, but Don't Tell**

Be the support a young woman needs. The most important support skill is listening. Listen carefully to what these kids say. They may not say exactly what they feel and mean in the first sentence, or ever. Feelings for some of us are really hard to figure out. Be patient, ask questions, listen. Also watch for changes in mood, behavior, that might give you a clue beyond the words they say or don't say.

For my daughter, I listened, I asked questions, but my

questions were asking her about how she felt. I'm by no means an expert, but it worked, so I'm sharing my approach that worked.

When she was angry after arguing with a friend, I asked her to relay what happened. I asked her how she felt. I asked her how she thought it might look from the other friend's point of view. I'd ask her what-if scenarios. What if she invited the friend over to talk about it? What if she evicted that friend and stopped being friends all together? Did she think they could reconcile? Did she value the friendship? Was it a balanced friendship? Was she respected by the other friend? Do they need a cooling off period, and maybe they'll be fine?

My role was to guide her through the reflection and evaluation process. I wouldn't give her the answers. I wouldn't tell her what to do. If she needed my input, I offered options of what she could do, but I let her choose. She tried. Sometimes it didn't work out well, sometimes it did. But *she* did it and every step of the way, and she with each step, her self-confidence grew. I was her support...as were all her other good friends that she confided in.

It's also very important to help our girls understand that good friendships are two-sided and balanced. She'll be a better friend to others if she can learn to respect and care for others, too. Also, being nice and being polite does not mean being a pushover. Each of us can be firm and civil when boundaries need to be enforced.

### **Don't Do It for Them & Don't Tell Them what to Do**

As we all grow, from babies to adulthood, we explore, test and learn about the world and the people around us. We fall

down, we crash our bikes, we misjudge, and we learn. As our relationships develop with people around us, we also have to explore and learn how to interact and maintain those relationships. We enjoy friendships and the warmth of loved ones, and we get our hearts broken sometimes. We learn to build and defend our boundaries. We gain self-confidence step by step, and with that confidence, we build a supportive social network and self-worth.

But for all you adult supporters out there, remember that confidence comes with *doing*, or taking action just like the toddlers. Parents can't step in and take care of everything for them. Nor can you prescribe the solution for them at every challenge. THEY have to come to the conclusion and take action. You guide, they execute.

There is so much opportunity for kids to build confidence. When you see a lack of lack of confidence, help them take action, no matter how small and build on it. Start with something as simple as saying hi to someone new.

It breaks my heart to hear teens down on themselves, comparing themselves to others, thinking that they are a failure even before they have a chance to really start life!

Therapists, counselors, ministers and teachers have all been taught techniques to help others. Parents, unfortunately, don't get a manual when that baby arrives. This can be very hard for parents. We try our best, and may have the best intentions, but it doesn't always help. I won't hesitate to tell any parent to seek professional advice on parenting, and to help your child. A book like this one and the House/Yard analogy is another tool in the toolbox to help.

## **Protect**

Wow the world has become a crazy place! We need to protect our kids from being manipulated, taken advantage of, abused, or coerced to go down the wrong path. BUT, I say, the best defense is to help build them up to be strong themselves. Let's empower our kids to be strong, and to set AND ENFORCE boundaries themselves. Start small when they are small and build up confidence over time. One key to doing this is to encourage their independent thinking, support their boundaries, their intuition and celebrate small success together along the way!

## **Respect the "Gut Feelings"**

In addition, we all need to encourage kids to learn how to listen to their gut, especially around creepy people. And we, as adults, really should acknowledge when a kid is creeped out and be there for support.

Here's an example: Little Jeanna's Uncle Ralph comes over for the holidays. Ever since she was very little he wanted her to sit on his lap to say hi during his visit. From the time she was 3 years old, she didn't want to. She liked to sit on her dad's lap, and her Grandpa's lap, but not Uncle Ralph. No, her little kid intuition picked up on something uncomfortable. Uncle Ralph didn't care to ask her brothers to sit on his lap, just Jeanna. Jeanna couldn't articulate it, of course, but she was clearly uncomfortable around her uncle. If her parents are supportive, they will notice Jeanna's discomfort and excuse Jeanna from sitting on Uncle Ralph's lap. If I were Jeanna's parents, I'd also make sure Uncle Ralph was never alone with Jeanna, too, just in case.

Unfortunately, too often, parents might not pay attention to or support the child. I've heard stories where a child like Jeanna was slapped and scolded by her parents for NOT obliging Uncle Ralph. Just because he's an "Uncle" doesn't negate the need for a watchful, protective eye. What if Uncle Ralph had bad intentions? What if he was a manipulator, an abuser, a pedophile that nobody knew about. Little Jeanna sensed something, but her parents, more consumed with keeping up image with Uncle Ralph, pushed Jeanna to ignore her gut, disarm her, and potentially put her into an unsafe position.

Empower, don't disarm. We adults won't always be there to protect them. Kids need to learn self-reliance all throughout life, little by little, and trusting our God-given intuition, that "gut feel," has a place in that development.

## **Let Them Be Themselves**

Your kids may be different from you. Shocker, right?!? Same family, same gene pool and everyone comes out different and unique. It's hard to understand when your kid is a complete extrovert, and you are a quiet introvert.

If you are a parent or an adult guiding a young person, be careful not to make a judgement on her if she's building a social network different from yours. For example, a parent, David, grew up with a tight-knit group of friends. He was always very sociable, and the group was always together. But David's middle-school daughter, Kaitlyn, hasn't formed her own similar group. Sure, she has several friends, and socializes with many of them, but she's only with one or two at a time. It didn't seem right to David because his high-school experience was

so different. He worried that something was wrong with her emotionally or if something was going on at school, like bullying, that kept her from having a tight-knit group like he did.

David decided his best first approach was to watch and listen to his daughter before verbalizing his worry. Is she happy? Are the friends she has good for her? Despite not having the same type of network as her dad, is she nonetheless building a quality friend-base and social structure, just in a different way? Also, if David were to verbalize his concern and criticize Kaitlyn about her friends and how they don't hang out together, or how he's worried about her because she doesn't have a group like he did...all David will effectively do is chip away at Kaitlyn's confidence. Instead of supporting her in building a supportive social network, he'd be seeding her thoughts with self-doubt... that maybe she's building her friends wrong. Maybe she'd start to think something is wrong with her, that she can't even make friends correctly. That's quite the opposite of empowering and supportive.

For the record, David didn't criticize Kaitlyn, he supported her despite his secret worry. As she advanced from middle school through high school, David observed that his daughter did indeed learn to set her boundaries well and constructed a very supportive and loving social network for herself. It just didn't look like his and that's OK.

It's a well-known fact that if the parents push too hard, it may very well backfire on them. Kids will rebel, do the opposite to make a statement of independence, master the art of sneaking around and lying, or simply crumble under the crush of disappointment and self-doubt. To be fair, there is a balance between being strict and appropriately protective, yet still give

kids room to become the unique individuals that they are.

Other examples can be more extreme where parents prescribe everything for the kids, from their clothes, their sports, the 'right friends' the 'right careers' etc. They are often shocked to find out that their kids don't have the same wants and desires that they do! It doesn't build great bonds between parents and children despite the best intentions. If parents push too hard, they may alienate their children completely. I know adults who have permanently severed their relationship with their parents because of this. It's a shame.



My goal is to help parents, grandparents, teachers, counselors, coaches, therapists, etc. by giving them one more tool, one more perspective to raise these beautiful kids of ours.

I want to see confident young women who can stand up for themselves, who value themselves and can build healthy relationships with people who also value them. I want our young women to be treated with kindness, respected, supported and loved. I want them to give the same to their friends and their social networks.

When our social networks run on kindness, respect, support and love, and civility, we will have a productive and safe environment for all our future generations. And you have an important role in building that environment for our young people.



# *About the Author*

Elly Malaxos is a mother, wife, consultant, innovative problem solver, world traveler and spirited presenter who loves empowering others, especially women, to amplify their voices, be confident and self-reliant and tackle the challenges of everyday life with less fear.

Elly holds a Bachelor of Science, Computer Science degree from Northwestern University McCormick School of Engineering. Professionally, she has held various management consulting & IT roles, most recently specializing in process automation and optimization. Throughout her career she has been called upon to bridge the communication gap between technical and non-technical business teams with clear, value-based explanations, storytelling, colorful examples, and a healthy sprinkling of humor. She's also empathetic to the pervasive fears of automation and AI in the workplace.

Elly is an experienced speaker and an active Toastmaster. She earned her Distinguished Toastmaster Award (DTM) and continues to coach others through their Toastmasters journey. She's won speaking awards and contests, even advancing to compete among the top 120 world-wide contestants in the Toastmasters regional finals. Her audiences light up over her upbeat style highlighting positive progress and possibilities through change.

Nothing, though, makes Elly prouder than being the mother of her two children, Michael and Liana, and married to her husband George for more than a quarter century. The joy and warmth of having such a loving, supportive, intellectually stimulating, and funny family is the ultimate blessing.

Elly is a lifelong learner, never bored, always busy reading, writing, speaking, coaching, traveling, taking long walks and learning something new. She has traveled to 23 countries and counting, gathering tales and experiences along the way. She's an active investor and the family "CFO" (and "CEO"), and follows future-looking trends areas like AI, automation, blockchain and geo-economics.

Elly is available to speak and conduct workshops at seminars, corporate events, retreats and other engagements to share a variety of professional and motivational topics, delighting in any opportunities to help support our young people to build confidence, resilience, self-worth and self-reliance.

EllyMalaxos.com  
*contact@ellymalaxos.com*