

RELATIONSHIPS · NERVOUS SYSTEM · BOUNDARIES

When Meeting in the Middle Becomes Losing Yourself

The difference between relational responsibility and self-erasure

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We hear a lot about compromise in relationships. Meet each other halfway. Consider the other person's feelings. Learn their needs and be willing to adapt. And yes, all of that can be part of a healthy relationship... but what happens when adapting starts to mean leaving parts of ourselves behind?

When keeping the peace consistently requires one person to become quieter, less expressive, or easier to be around, we need to look at what we are calling compromise.

This can happen gradually. We tell ourselves we are being patient or understanding. We consider the other person's history, stress, triggers, or capacity. Sometimes that consideration helps us respond with care. Other times, we become so focused on what they can handle that we stop asking what the arrangement is costing us.

Meeting in the middle is meaningful only when both people are moving. If the "middle" always requires one person to cross the entire distance, it is not the middle.

Two nervous systems are meeting

Whenever two people enter a relationship — romantic, familial, professional, or otherwise — their histories enter with them.

We bring what we learned about conflict, how we respond to stress, and what we have come to expect when we express a need. A difficult moment may stir up something familiar before we have had time to understand why we are reacting so strongly.

One person might process emotion out loud, while the other needs silence before they can respond. Questions may feel like an invitation to connect for one person and pressure for the other. When distressed, one may seek closeness while the other needs space.

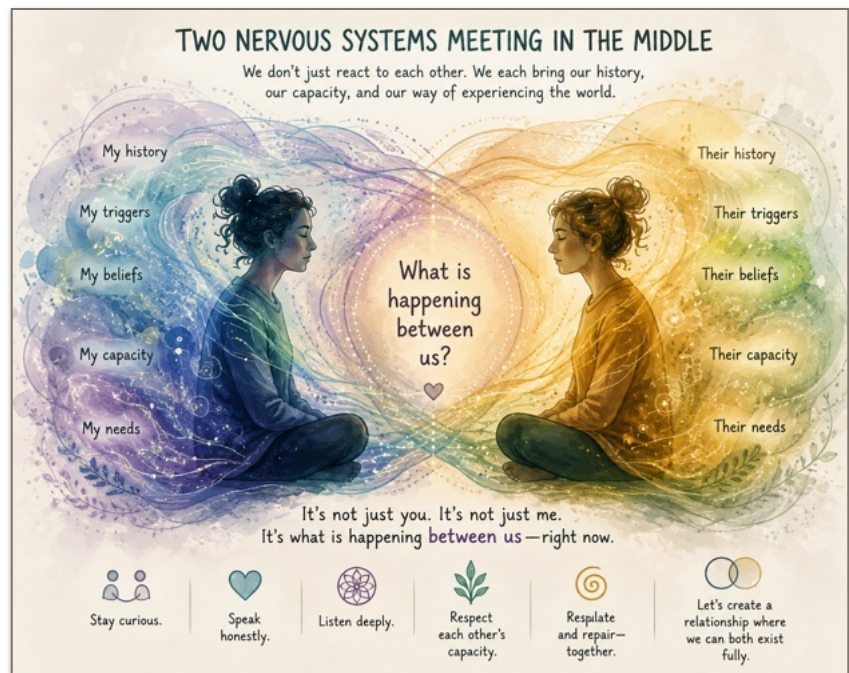
These differences can hurt, even when neither person intends harm. Asking “*What is happening between us?*” can help us understand the pattern instead of immediately deciding that someone is uncaring or “too much.”

But understanding the pattern does not mean assuming equal responsibility. We still need to notice how each person behaves, what happens when a boundary is expressed, and whether both people are willing to make changes.

Responsibility, without carrying everything

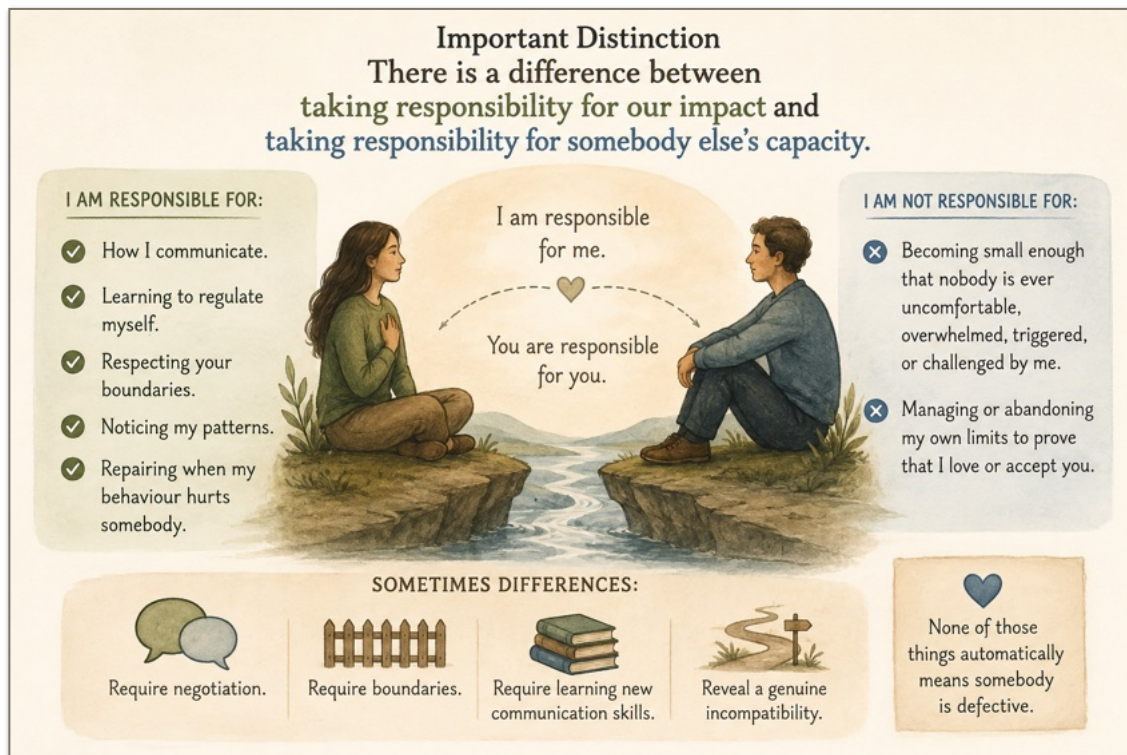
We are responsible for how we communicate and for the impact of our behaviour. That does not mean we can prevent another person from ever feeling uncomfortable.

If one person’s discomfort always determines what can be discussed, the relationship begins to organize itself around them. The other person may rehearse every sentence, soften every request, or apologize before they have even said what they need.



Eventually, they may decide that bringing something up simply isn't worth the fallout. The relationship looks peaceful, but there are things that can no longer be spoken.

I think of the distinction as care without carrying. We can listen, consider someone's capacity, and adjust how we approach a conversation. We cannot do all of their emotional processing for them, and their discomfort cannot always mean that our needs have to wait.



Self-erasure can look like kindness

Self-erasure is not always obvious. It may show up as agreeing when we don't agree, saying "it's fine" when it isn't, or constantly editing ourselves to avoid a reaction. We might look calm while feeling anxious, resentful, or disconnected inside.

For some people, these habits have a history. If expressing emotion once led to criticism, withdrawal, or punishment, silence may have helped preserve safety or connection. Becoming agreeable may have been the best option available at the time.

Understanding that history gives us somewhere to begin. We can appreciate why a response developed while also noticing whether it is still helping us. Perhaps we are exhausted from anticipating someone else's reactions. Perhaps we struggle to name what we want because we are so used to deciding whether it will upset them first.

Those costs deserve attention too.

Making room for both people

Sometimes a small change in how we communicate creates more room:

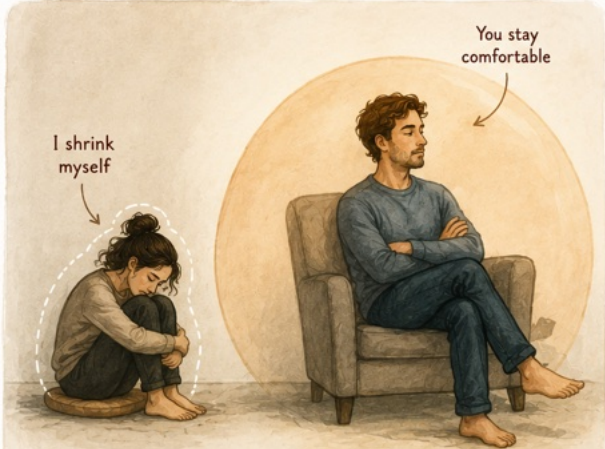
- “I want to hear you, and I need a few minutes before I can respond. Can we come back to this after dinner?”
- “I know this is difficult to hear. I still need to be able to talk about it.”
- “I can be more careful with how I say this, but I don’t want to pretend I’m okay.”
- “You need space, and I need to know we will return to the conversation. Can we agree on when?”

Taking a pause can be helpful when there is a way back to the conversation. Softening our delivery can help someone hear us, provided we still get to say what we mean.

We will sometimes disappoint, frustrate, or activate one another. What matters is how we respond when that happens. Can we listen? Can we acknowledge our impact? Can we repair without requiring one person to take all the blame just so we can move on?

SELF-ERASURE

I'LL BECOME LESS SO YOU CAN STAY COMFORTABLE.



WHAT IT CAN LOOK LIKE

- × Suppressing feelings, needs, or opinions
- × Over-apologizing or people-pleasing
- × Walking on eggshells
- × Avoiding conflict or hard conversations
- × Disconnecting from your own truth
- × Quiet outside, chaos inside

THE COST



Resentment, exhaustion, loss of self, disconnection, and eventual breakdown of the relationship.

VS. RELATIONAL REGULATION

HOW CAN WE BOTH REMAIN PRESENT?



WHAT IT CAN LOOK LIKE

- ✓ Expressing needs and feelings
- ✓ Respecting each other's boundaries
- ✓ Taking responsibility for our impact
- ✓ Regulating ourselves and asking for support
- ✓ Listening with curiosity and compassion
- ✓ Staying present without losing ourselves

THE RESULT



Trust, safety, deeper connection, more freedom, and relationships that can weather life.

The goal isn't to make either person wrong.

 The goal is to understand, communicate, and navigate our differences with respect.

Sometimes accommodation is not the answer

Some differences can be worked through with clearer boundaries, negotiation, or new communication skills. Others may reveal needs or capacities that do not fit well together.

One person may want more emotional engagement than the other can sustainably offer. One may need more space than the other can live with comfortably. There can be real care between them, and still a gap that neither person knows how to bridge.

Recognizing that can be painful. It does not require us to declare someone defective or uncaring. It asks us to be honest about what each person needs and what the relationship can hold.

Meeting in the middle is only meaningful when both people are moving. If one person is crossing the entire distance, we need to stop calling that the middle.

Questions worth asking

If you recognize yourself in this, consider:

- What happens when I express a need or disagree?
- Can we make room for a pause without abandoning the conversation?
- Are we both adjusting, or am I doing most of the accommodating?
- Can each of us acknowledge our impact?
- What have I stopped saying or doing to keep the peace?
- Is there room for both of us in the relationship as it is now?

You may not have immediate answers. Even noticing what you have stopped asking for can tell you something.

Gerald and I explored these ideas further in our #LaughandLearn conversations about sensitivity, processing, capacity, and relational responsibility. We kept returning to the question of how two people can care for one another while still making room for their own needs. It is a question worth bringing into our relationships, especially when being understanding has started to feel like losing ourselves.. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TfA8EFtzFzA&t=834s>

**YOU'RE
TOO MUCH?**

Too Much for Whom?



Continue the Conversation

You're Too Much?
Sensitive People, Processing & Capacity
with Gerald and Jennifer