Connecting vs Protecting

Moments that Hurt	React or Respond	Consequence
Criticism	Defend / Attack / Understand	Debate / Counterattack / Curious
Forgotten Promise	Defend / Attack / Understand	Resent / Trust / Repair
Raised Voice	Defend / Attack / Understand	Louder / Tone / Listen
Feeling Ignored	Defend / Attack / Understand	Shutdown / Validate / Attention
Feeling Controlled	Defend / Attack / Understand	Despair / Leave / Autonomy
Feeling Unimportant	Defend / Attack / Understand	Shame / Cope / Remember Wins

Instead of the question – who is right or wrong, perhaps a better question might be:

"Am I protecting something in myself or moving towards connection with my partner"

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What are my patterns of dealing with my partner:

- Do I move toward or away from my partner?
- Is Vulnerability a strength or weakness? Why?
- Am I emotionally honest or emotionally protected – am I keeping safe?
- Why is protection so important to me?
- Is protection helping or hurting our relationship?

Protection does offer:

- Safety to my image
- Respect to be given for me
- Validation that I am good enough
- Value to be maintained for myself

Question: What does my reactiveness, protection protect?

There are different protection styles:

Criticism Defensiveness Withdrawal Silence Anger Logic Control People-Pleasing

<u>Protection offers Value:</u>

- Avoids Veing hurt again
- Reduces feelings of rejection and abandonment
- Allows you to stay in control when life feels uncertain
- It prevents embarrassment or shame
- Avoids conflict or emotional overwhelm
- Keeps others from seeing my weakness
- Feels less vulnerable
- Prevents painful emotions by shutting down or keeping busy

<u>Protection Costs:</u>

- Prevents acceptance by others
- Prevents joy from companionship of others

- Prevents resolution of problems
- Prevents intimacy
- Self-Respect – holds secrecy, sometimes allows us to believe lies
- Growth beyond my fears / comfort zone
- Stop receiving encouragement from those who support us
- Reduces connections

Protection asks: "How do I keep from getting hurt" while **Connection** asks: "How do I help us be closer?"

Connection Looks Like: Vulnerability Staying Present Curiosity Being emotionally safe Listening
Validating Being Responsible Repairing Shared Meaning Intentional Daily Choices

Connection Feels Like: I feel seen I feel heard I matter I don't have to pretend We're a team
Honesty without punishment I belong in a struggle I can be my real self Safety Trust

Connection requires courage
What Courageous Connections Sound Like: I'm hurt I miss you I'm afraid I was wrong I need you
I forgive you I'm confused Help me understand Let's try that again I made a mistake I don't feel safe

The Great Ironies: Self-Protection = Loss of Connection / Protect Pride and Lose Intimacy / I defend myself and lose alliance with those closest to me / Threats prevent Truces / I might win the debate and lose a friend / Using curiosity = care and love / Being vulnerable and showing weakness builds trust.

Question: If both me and my partner both have no intention of harming one another, What Am I Protecting?

HOW DO I CHANGE

During conflict, don't go to "who's right?" Instead ask, "What am I protecting?" – Pride, Respect, Rejection, Failure, Shame

Connection Habits
- Uninterrupted conversation – validate the other person's position
- Thank your partner once daily and show appreciation
- Share One Fear – Be vulnerable

- Repair quickly – admit your fault or misunderstanding
- Stay emotionally available – don't shut down, or leave
- Schedule space / time for one another – to build connection
- Shared interests, friendships, activities

Closing Reflections

- What did I learn about me today?
- What did I learn about your partner?
- Where do you believe your relationship is strongest?
- Where do you believe protection has replaced connection
- What is one courageous step you could make this week?

In Conflict: Will I Protect Myself, or Move Towards Connection

Protection Builds Walls. Connection Builds Bridges

WORKSHEET

Reflection 1: My Protective Patterns

When conflict begins, my first instinct is usually to:

☐ Defend myself ☐ Criticize ☐ Withdraw ☐ Become silent ☐ Get angry ☐ Try to control the situation
☐ People-please ☐ Other: _____

What do you think this reaction is trying to protect? _____

Reflection 2: Looking Beneath the Surface

Complete the sentence: **When I become protective, I am usually afraid of...**

☐ Rejection ☐ Shame ☐ Losing respect ☐ Feeling unimportant ☐ Failure ☐ Being controlled
☐ Being hurt again ☐ Other: _____

Reflection 3: Moving Toward Connection

Circle one connection habit you want to practice this week:

- Listening without interrupting
- Being emotionally honest
- Repairing quickly
- Remaining emotionally available
- Showing appreciation
- Staying present
- Asking curious questions
- Sharing one fear

The specific situation where I will practice this is: _____

Reflection 4: Courage

Which of these statements would be hardest for you to say? ☐ "I'm hurt." ☐ "I was wrong." ☐ "I need you."
☐ "Help me understand." ☐ "I don't feel safe." ☐ "I forgive you." Why? _____

Reflection 5: My Next Step

Where has **protection replaced connection** in our relationship? _____

What is **one courageous step** I will take this week to move toward my partner instead of protecting myself? _____

Remember During conflict, don't ask, "Who's right?" Instead ask, "What am I protecting?"