

Speaking Up For Yourself

By Jennifer Timpe of First Unitarian Church of Alton, Illinois

Opening Words & Chalice Lighting

“To be beautiful means to be yourself. You don’t need to be accepted by others. You need to accept yourself.” ~*Thich Nhat Hanh*

Check In

What you share may be about your physical or spiritual health, cares or concerns for yourself or loved ones, or issues you are facing.

Reading

When I was 8, my mom went to a parent-teacher night at school. When my teacher saw my mother, she smiled and walked over to her. "So how are Susan's swimming lessons going?"

My mom frowned, confused. "Susan isn't taking swimming lessons - perhaps you've confused her with someone else?"

"No, I'm sure," my teacher insisted. "Susan told me that she has to leave at 3 o'clock every afternoon, right when the bell rings, to make it to her swimming lessons on time."

Leaving at 3 o'clock gave me a head start on Ivan, the towering taunting bully who walked home the same way that I did. If I got outside fast, sprinted up the outside stairs and off the school property, I could be around the corner and home free before he even walked out the classroom door.

It never occurred to me to tell the teachers or my parents about Ivan. I don't know that they could have done much, anyway. The way I saw it, if I complained about Ivan to the "authorities" they might scold or penalize him, but one day I'd eventually be on that street alone again. Alone with Ivan, that is, with 10 defenseless blocks between me and my house. And then, because I'd complained or tried to stand up to him, I'd be worse off than ever.

Some people seem to naturally stand up for themselves. They radiate this quality through the way they stand, talk and even look at others. Bullies often avoid this type of person, seeking out another type - the person whose gaze is a little less direct, who has a more passive stance, who apologizes too quickly and works too hard at keeping the peace at all costs. Someone more like me.

~Do you Need to Speak Up? (edited by Susan Biali, MD on Jan 27, 2011 in Prescriptions for Life)

Discussion & Sharing Questions

- Are you someone who finds it easy to speak up for yourself? Why do you think that is?
- Are you someone who sometimes finds it hard to speak up for yourself? If so, what are your fears about speaking up for yourself?
- Is there something you've been scared to say? Is there someone in your life you need to stand up to or tell how you really feel? What is stopping you?
- Perhaps you have a story about a time that you spoke up for yourself when you were scared, but did it anyway. Or maybe you have a story about how you wish you had spoken up for yourself, and how that event may have gone differently.
- Have you ever been particularly inspired by watching or hearing about someone else speak up for themselves?

Closing

Take notice the next time that the thought of speaking with someone about a difficult subject makes you want to run and hide. Notice when you feel tempted to compose long wordy agonizingly over-edited emails instead of speaking to someone personally. Could this be the moment that you stand up and speak out instead?

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