

Special people light up our lives



THE DOCTOR IS IN
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I had a small-world experience recently when a fellow psychologist wrote to me regarding my recent column on grandparenting (“Grandparenting revisited,” November 11).

She and I have our best chats around 6 a.m., when many of our family members are still sleeping soundly, and we are crazily contemplating exercising before moving on with our day.

It was during this WhatsApp conversation that I discovered that this colleague is the daughter of a well-known, highly respected psychologist whom I had met many years ago. I had no idea that they know each other, let alone are related.

My colleague’s dad truly is a real mensch. By his unbridled kindness and caring, he was special enough to leave an indelible memory for me.

Memories are interesting. As we age, we discover that while we can barely recall what we ate at our last meal, this takes a back seat to those people who have come into our lives, touched our hearts and left us feeling blessed.

Minutes after laughing with this colleague about this coincidence, I happened to watch a TED talk by psychologist Susan Pinker, titled “What does it take to live to 100 or beyond?” She spoke of a researcher, Jullianne Holt-Lunstad, who looked at which variables have the greatest impact on reducing your chances of dying. Despite the significance that such factors as weight, diet and healthcare play in your life, Holt-Lunstad found that the top two variables were related to social relationships. Face-to-face relationships were highly predictive of longevity. In our post-COVID world, where more people look at screens than ever before, this message is even more critical.

So, who really are the people that you could call in the middle of the night, should you need to?

During the 10 years that my husband commuted from Israel to Canada for work, a friend who had once said “If you ever need me in the middle of the night, don’t think twice about calling” is credited with maintaining my sanity and sense of safety and calm. Thankfully, I never needed to reach out to her, but just her reassurance and knowing that she would be there meant the world to me.

It has been a rough few weeks for many. It is with this in mind that I ask you, whom can you reach out to, should you ever need to? Who makes you feel safe and why? In what way do they contribute to your well-being?

A safe person is not afraid of silence

MY RECENT column on grandparenting received a huge response from readers. People sent me amazing stories about the various activities they do or have done with their grandchildren. There are some really good grandparents out there and some very lucky children.

I realize that what we can offer to our grandchildren is the sense that we are always there for them, that we are working to make the world a safe place for them, and that they will be okay. We have the opportunity to accept them unconditionally for who they are and to provide a safe haven when others, for various reasons, may not always be able to.



A SAFE person acts as your cheerleader and wants what is best for you.
(Jacob Rice/Unsplash)

While we can and should set limits and help teach them to respect boundaries, we also have the ability to communicate with them in a way that can be a treasured gift, strengthening them as they grow within their other relationships.

We can also have this same type of relationship with others, both as “giver” and “recipient.”

Having recently celebrated Thanksgiving and now enjoying the lights of Hanukkah, we have much to be grateful for as we contemplate the people who are special in our lives.

Whether you are the safe person for others and reach out to them in your social interactions, are the recipient of that “safety,” or both, here are a few suggestions of what to aspire to.

SAFE PEOPLE...

- Can make you feel like you are one of the most special and loved people in the world.
- Notice what you do right (and not just what you do wrong) and are not afraid to tell you.
- Value your opinions, thoughts and feelings and respect you as a person.
- Try very hard not to embarrass you.
- Enable you to speak the truth without fear or backlash. They may go out of their comfort zone in order to make space to be able to hear you.
- Appreciate you for who you are. They “get you,” and in validating your feelings they accept you as you, and who you are in this moment.
- Act as your cheerleader. They also want what is best for you and will push you to be the best person you can be, even if it is something that they may not inherently value for themselves.
- Listen to you, are interested in what you have to say, and ask you lots of questions. They hear your answers, and you don’t have to walk on eggshells.
- Are good models of always trying to improve themselves and grow as a person. They look after their physical and emotional well-being

and take ownership of what they need to do for themselves.

- Acknowledge when they have made a mistake and apologize if they have done wrong. They are not afraid to take responsibility for their actions and do not lay blame on others.
- Are not afraid to disagree with you. They are honest and direct, but gentle, kind and humble. You feel that they care about you.
- Can criticize you in a way that makes you feel that they are helping you to become an even better person.
- Make time for you. Even when you sense they are busy and have so much to do, they let you think that they have all the time in the world for you and that you are not imposing or burdening them in any way.
- Are not afraid of silence, will give you that hug and let you know that they are there for you, without any conditions, if need be.
- Are reliable and trustworthy.

While the above may fit the role of a grandparent or parent, a close friend or a partner, hopefully in many ways it will describe how you, too, may want to be seen by others and give you thought for how you can work on yourself.

May you always see yourself as a work in progress and look forward to challenging yourself to grow in order to be the best person you can be. Isn’t that a wonderful thing to strive for? ■

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