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**Do you use protection?**  
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No, not that kind.

This kind:

Developmental psychologists say almost every child experiences some type of emotional, psychological, or physical wounding, hurt or pain as part of their upbringing - even that child who says their family was "perfect." The child's experiences may include a parent or primary caregiver who was physically or emotionally absent some or much of the time, or overbearing and bullying, or one who was a taskmaster, rarely complimentary, or was "guilting," shaming, or overly judgmental and critical, or was a betrayer, or physically or sexually abusive.

The level of wounding can range from unacceptable, but tolerable, to extremely inappropriate and intolerable. Whatever the degree, it was wounding and affected the child's psyche. As the child moves into adolescence and adulthood, there is a part of their psyche that consistently, yet unconsciously, chants the mantra: **Never again!**

**Protection**

As adults, many of us view life – at work, at home, at play and in relationship – from a defensive posture. We view our world as obscured, with a veil of protection over it that shields us from (re) experiencing the wounding, hurt and pain of childhood. Protectors are the inner parts of us – voices, judges, critics, authority figures – whose role is to keep us safe, in a comfort zone where we won't experience hurt, shame or fear. Protectors are the inner parts of us that initially arise when we look "inside" ourselves. Our protectors have no idea we're adults so they operate as though we are still children who need protection from continued hurt and pain.

**How do protectors operate?**

Protectors are mental or physical ways of thinking, doing and being. For example, protectors help us shut down emotionally while we show up as smart and intellectual; close down our heart while we act out physically through exercise and sports; move us into a denial, "all is right with the world," posture when it's not the truth; project our feelings and emotions on to others so we don't have to own our "stuff," shop, drink, eat or work excessively to mask our inner pain; make us need to be "good," successful and perfect so others won't judge us as less-than or deficient; be lovable so others won't abandon us; be busy so we won't sense our emptiness; or fawn over others and meet their wants and needs in order to deny our own emptiness and needs which were not met as a child. Protectors attempt to keep us from being harmed by others and/or from confronting our own feelings and emotions.

**So, we control**

Protectors are all about control. Our protectors attempt to control our internal and external self so

we can push away real or perceived threats – from bosses, colleagues, friends, spouses/partners, or others, so we can experience some sort of "faux" comfort – autonomy, approval, acceptance, admiration, and not be judged, abused, or blamed. We abhor feeling vulnerable.

### **Working with protectors**

In working with protectors, we acknowledge them for their positive intention, appreciate their roles and see how they've worked tirelessly for us over the years to keep us feeling safe and secure. The next step is to develop an open and trusting relationship with our protectors – telling it/them we understand their intention: "I understand why you do what you do;" "I appreciate what you did for me when I was young;" "I see how you contribute to how I live my life;" etc. As you acknowledge and befriend a protector, you'll begin to sense a "moving away," a separating from it at which time your True and Authentic Self arises. This experience can be tricky at first as the protector thinks it is the whole of you, not a part. You may feel this protector, this voice, is, in fact, "me." Well, it isn't .

As you breathe, sense into your body, allow whatever you experience (i.e., be curious, not judgmental) and begin to notice a "relationship" between your True and Authentic Self and your protector. You may begin to experience a sense of harmony, balance and well-being. As your protector becomes aware of "you" (your True and Authentic Self), you'll experience a shift. The protector becomes more relaxed (quiet), and eventually you (the real "you") might notice a difference in the way you relate to your world.

### **In real time**

In everyday situations – at work, at home, at play and in relationship – when you feel a protector is arising to keep you safe and secure, notice its arising, acknowledge it, ask it politely to separate from you, so your True and Authentic Self can emerge. Tell it you will handle the situation (giving it permission to relax) and, allowing your True and Authentic Self, your "adult" self, you'll begin to experience qualities and capacities that will support you in the moment - strength, courage, will, wisdom, compassion, love, discipline...and "right knowing," "right understanding," and "right action."

The more consistently you acknowledge, appreciate, trust and reassure your protectors that you can "do" or "be" from the place of your adult Self, your protectors will relax and allow you to lead – as an emotional, spiritual and psychological adult – not the fearful, scared or wounded little child in an adult body, wearing adult clothes. From this place you'll find yourself engaged in relationships – with your self and others – from a place of openness, honesty, trust and authenticity – without a need for protection.

### **So, some questions for self-reflection are:**

What are one or two protectors that often show up for you to keep you feeling safe and secure, away from harm?

What are their roles and how do they guide you to relate to others (i.e., to protect you from pain? What do they tell you to (not) do or (not) be so you can feel safe and not threatened? What are they protecting you from (e.g., embarrassment, being judged, ignored or rejected, feeling small, stupid, or "not (fill in the blank with some quality or characteristic) enough?"

Choose one protector you know well (e.g., one that says people are untrustworthy; I'll be betrayed; I want to stop trying to please people; I need to be free of criticism...). When you experience/hear it, what does it feel like in your body? Where is it located in your body? What does it say, exactly, and how do act when you hear/experience it? What people, places, events or circumstances trigger it? What is it protecting you from?

What protectors do you remember experiencing when you were a child? And why were they there?

Can you envision a world where you can acknowledge, appreciate and understand your protectors and be able to separate from them to experience your True and Authentic Self? What would that be, feel, look and sound like?

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