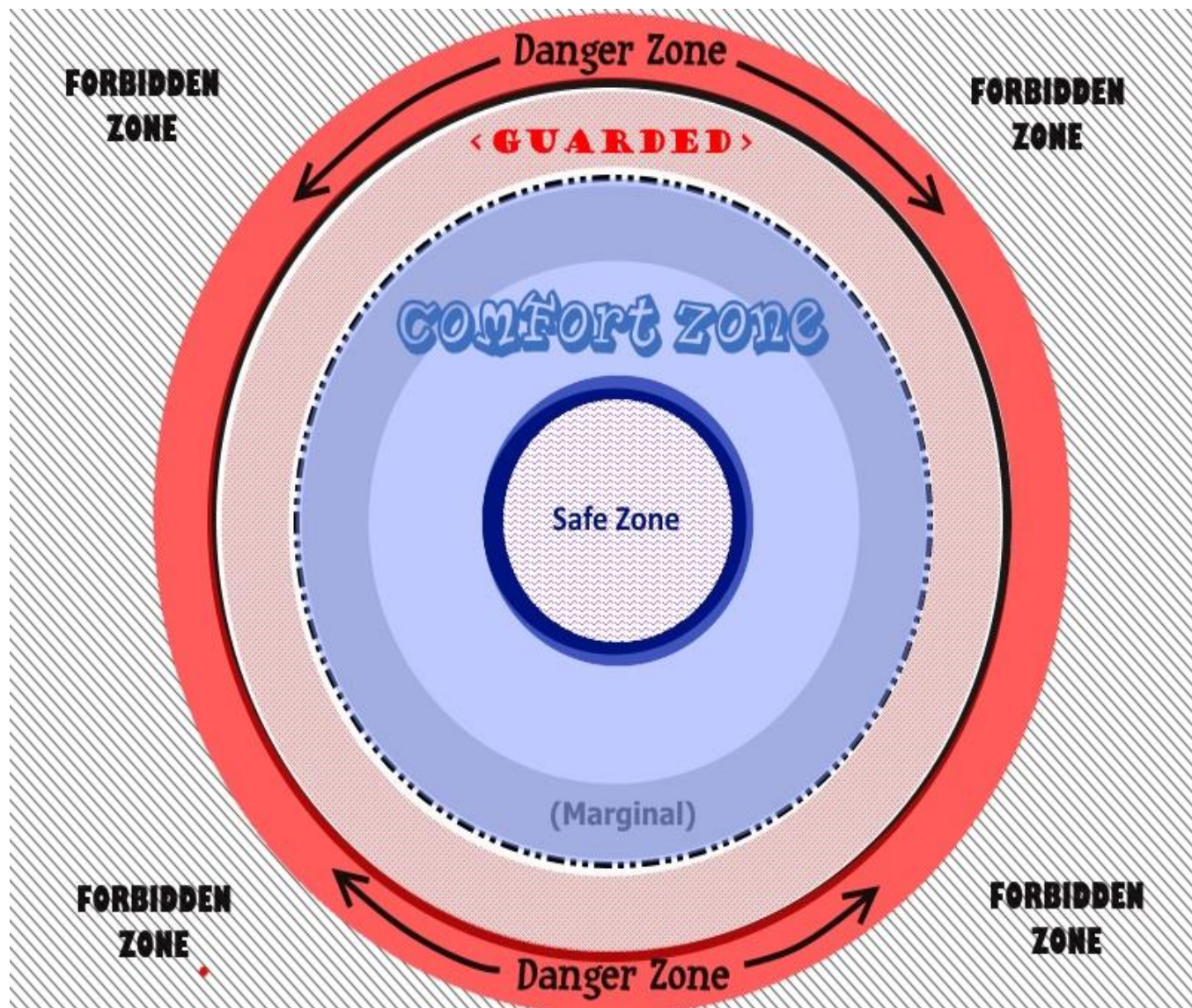




SUPPORT ZONES & INTERPERSONAL BOUNDARIES

Take a few minutes to look over the following diagram. Try to think about where people in your own life may fit in. The next page describes these SUPPORT ZONES in detail





Understanding Your Support Zones:

Comfort Zone – Definition: a situation or position in which a person feels secure, comfortable, or in control – www.dictionary.com. People tend to feel a sense of belonging with little or no stress when in their comfort zone. There are subsections to the Comfort Zone:

1. **Safe Zone** – Your safe zone is an even more sheltered subset of your comfort zone. People that you consider to be part of your safe zone are those people that really know the true person you are. You are completely willing to be yourself with those people in your safe zone. You are willing to share your fears, insecurities, anxieties, etc. with those in your safe zone. The safe zone goes beyond just feeling comfortable, as it involves a deeper sense of emotional security, trust and safety
2. **The “Marginal” Section of the Comfort Zone** – In the outskirts of your comfort zone are those people who you may feel comfortable with but you may not be all that close with. “Friendly, but not close friends” might be one way to describe people in this area. Social media has made this marginal section more prevalent in many people’s lives as it can be common to be “friends” with someone on social media without an active face to face, close friendship. Some neighbors, coworkers, classmates, etc. may fall in into this marginal zone as we may feel comfortable with them without being too close personally.

The Guarded Zone – Notice in the diagram that there is a dotted line between the Comfort Zone and the Guarded Zone. That is because most people are willing to venture in and out of the guarded zone if it is necessary or important to do so. The guarded zone is just like it sounds because when someone is in the guarded zone they are “on guard” socially in the sense that there is a focus on being cautious, watchful and selective with regard to what is spoken about and shared with others. In the guarded zone an individual may be more focused on being polite and discreet than on being open and accessible about personal thoughts, feelings and opinions. A good example of being in the guarded zone could be how someone might act when invited to their significant other’s family for a social event in a new relationship. Another example could be for someone who is in a situation where they are “on guard” around their superiors at the workplace.

The Danger Zone – This is characterized by strong discomfort, anxiety, fear, distrust or apprehension. People usually do not voluntarily enter the danger zone because of the stressful feelings related to these types of relationships. In the danger zone the primary focus is survival and escape rather than being concerned about managing socially. Most people go out of their way to avoid the danger zone

The Forbidden Zone – Social situations you absolutely refuse to put yourself in and people you refuse to allow yourself to socialize with under any circumstances are in the dreaded forbidden zone

Additional Thoughts to Consider:

Closeness or family relation does not automatically dictate support zones. For example, a lot of people might automatically consider someone who is an immediate family relation to be part of the safe zone. In reality, however consider how family members can be classified in different zones. For instance, your mother, who may be one of your most encouraging, reliable and, loyal supports could be in your safe zone, but your father who barely says two kind words to you, might be in the danger zone despite living in the same house! . Based on your relationships with siblings, cousins, aunts/uncles., grandparents, etc. different family members can be in different support zones in your life. The same goes with friends, co-workers, neighbors, etc. Physical closeness or involvement does not necessarily automatically translate into support and comfort.

Individuals are not necessarily locked into one support zone for life: Our close friend since childhood could get a promotion and become our boss, for example, which could totally alter your comfort level with that person. As time passes and circumstances change, people in our comfort zone one day could be in our danger zone the next. This can also work in reverse as you could be thrust into a situation where you form a close bond with someone who was once in your guarded zone as you build trust over time



Support Zone Scenarios: See if you can identify the appropriate support zone for each person by placing the correct letter in each line below:

Choices:

A – Safe Zone

B – Comfort Zone

C – Comfort Zone (Marginal)

D – Guarded Zone

E – Danger Zone

- _____ **Jamie:** Jamie has been your next door neighbor since you were a kid and you used to walk to school together for your entire childhood. Currently Jamie is dating your ex who recently dumped you so you still feel awkward about seeing them together. Because you are mature about it, you have learned to be polite and friendly and even make some small talk when you see either of them but you feel like you will never fully trust Jamie again. What zone is Jamie in?
- _____ **Abbey –** She is your second cousin who lives across the country so you rarely see her, but when you do, you always have the greatest time talking about whatever is on your mind as you feel like you can openly tell her *anything and everything* with no fear of being ridiculed, judged or gossiped about
- _____ **Mrs. Green –** She was your 9th grade English teacher and later as an adult you ended up running into her at the mall and reminiscing about old times. Since that chance meeting you have become Facebook friends and often you and Mrs. Green will comment on one another's posts as you have similar viewpoints on life. You always say "hello" to one another and when you see each other by chance around town but otherwise you don't really see each other too often
- _____ **Barry –** You have worked with Barry for about 2 years and from day one you guys just clicked as soon as you met. Due to different life circumstances you never really see each other outside of work but at work every day you and Barry joke around and talk about your interests with one another to pass the time. Barry knows the basics about your life but not any of your innermost deeper secrets and feelings however overall he is a cool guy that you feel like you can trust for the most part.
- _____ **"The Manager"** – You are friendly with everyone in the local coffee shop next door to your work except that the one part time manager is really loud and opinionated. Fortunately you rarely have to even see him as he is usually in the back doing paperwork or counting money. But when you look through the window of the shop whenever you are walking by and you see him behind the counter, you won't even bother to go in just to avoid him because you just don't feel comfortable around him.

Answers: Jamie - D (*Guarded*), Abbey - A (*Safe*), Mrs. Green - C (*Comfort- Marginal*), Barry - B (*Comfort*), the Manager - E (*Danger*)



Increasing Support by Expanding Your Comfort Zone:

This exercise is focused on looking at ways to increase support where it may be lacking in your life. This may not be easy but increasing support can be critically important when it comes to changing your life for the better.

Directions: Fill out the grid below and discuss when complete:

WAYS TO INCREASE SUPPORT	<u>YES:</u> In my COMFORT ZONE	<u>NO:</u> Not in COMFORT ZONE	WHY OR WHY NOT?
Attending 12 Step Meetings			
Get a sponsor			
Socialize with sober people – (People who do things with their spare time other than drinking, smoking, partying, etc.)			
Make new (Positive) friends – (Going to new places and attempting to meet new people)			
Spend real time with family members who are a good influence (Stay in on Saturday Night and watch TV with Grandma?)			
Get involved with a sober, social hobby – Sports team, exercise, taking a class, etc.			
Help others – Volunteer work, Tutoring, Supporting someone else in need with their troubles			
BRAINSTORM at least one of your own ideas in the box below ↓			

FINAL PROCESS: Discuss the above grid together. People who have some of these ideas in their comfort zone should help those who are less comfortable by sharing how and why these areas became part of their comfort zone. If you successfully overcame something that was uncomfortable for you at first, *how did you do it?*

- **FINAL THOUGHT – WHAT IS ONE THING THAT YOU WILL BE WILLING TO TRY TO EXPAND YOUR SUPPORT?**