



## **Finding Your Safety Zone in Marriage**

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In all of our years of working with married couples, I have rarely heard anyone say directly: "I feel unsafe with you and that's why I'm acting and talking like I am." And yet, in reality, many married couples go through their daily interaction with each other doing just that. Why would that be? Lurking just beneath the surface of many marriage relationships is a fear of being at personal risk (usually emotionally) in our conversations.

According to Drs. Les and Leslie Parrot, authors of an excellent book called "Love Talk," couples who are experiencing this uncomfortable, guarded way of relating to one another are in need of finding their "safety zone." A safety zone can be defined as a place where a couple can talk about anything and everything--whether meaningful or not--and still feel connected deep in your soul. This is what the Parrots call "love talk," which has everything to do with feeling safe. When you are in this safety zone, you are neither having to weigh your thoughts nor measure your words because you know that your partner will not inflict pain on you for what you say.

Sound like heaven? It does to me.

Couples should work toward finding that place of safety. Once you do, you will feel protected, relaxed, and welcome. You can eliminate what the Parrots call your personal fear factor—the fear of losing what you value the most.

Trustworthy research has identified four specific areas of life from which people tend to select a particular view of what is valuable to them. These four values give us the acronym

"Love TALQ":

- **T**ime
- **A**pproval
- **L**oyalty
- **Q**uality

Conversely, it is in these same areas that people experience the highest levels of fear—if what they value the most is at risk. Let me expand on that concept: If you have a

high need for approval (and thus need a lot of it from your mate and others), you will tend to say and do what you need in order to avoid disapproval and to gain approval. Or, if you highly value Time, you may go overboard in trying to protect your calendar from interruptions, become extremely frustrated when you are forced into a “time wasting” activity, etc.

To illustrate, suppose Suzie (who highly values approval) is married to Tom (who highly values quality, above all else). Unless Tom is extremely sensitive to the way his wife is “wired” in this regard, he will very likely be sending constant signals to her that what she is doing (housework, appearance, projects, parenting, etc.) does not measure up to his standard of excellence (Quality). Suzie will become a “walking wounded” wife if she rarely hears the approval that she so highly prizes and constantly tries to earn. Sound like anyone you know?

So, here are a few starter questions to help you find your groove among the value factors:

### **Do You Value TIME?**

- Do you live in fear of wasting your time?
- Do you feel that if you don't aggressively protect it, your time will soon slip away?
- Do other people often see you as impatient and short?
- Do you prize efficiency and like brief, to-the-point communication?

### **Do You Value APPROVAL?**

- Is the question of other people's approval on your mind (at least subconsciously) most of the time?
- Do you find safety in the approval of other people, especially those you deeply respect?
- Do you fear doing or saying something that might offend or put off others?

### **Do you value LOYALTY?**

- Are your safety needs met primarily through commitment and the stability of what is known?
- Do you fear change — at least the kind that comes without warning and affects relationships?
- Do strong connections make you feel secure?
- Do you prize “being there” for people who need you?

### **Do you value QUALITY?**

- Are your safety needs met primarily through maintaining a high standard and impeccable reputation?
- Do you fear making a choice that might tarnish your reputation?
- Do you approach decisions with a great deal of thought?
- Do you know that there is a right way and a wrong way of doing things, and you're determined to find the right way, no matter how much time it takes?

For a great discussion of this whole concept, along with an excellent on-line assessment tool of your “TALQ” values, I highly recommend you order the Parrots' book, “Love Talk.”