

What's mine is mine and what's yours is mine too...

Trespass at your peril

There is only one time in your life when territoriality doesn't matter, and that is when you are a baby and no boundary exists between you and your mother. After that, the demarcation of space, both physically and emotionally, becomes a big deal.





Recognise these?

Physical

- *Where have you moved my things?*
- *Don't alter the radio station in my car!*
- *Don't leave your clothes on my side!*
- *Leave my stuff alone!*
- *Why did you toss that out?*
- *Pruning the trees is my job!*
- *When you borrow my things, put them back!*

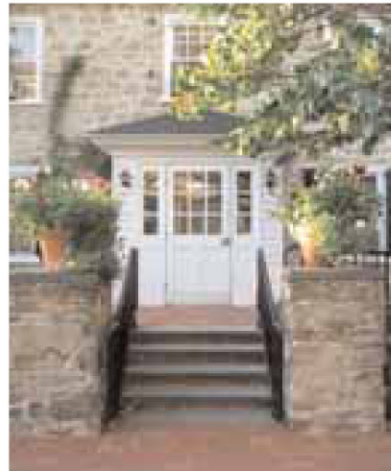
Emotional

- *I don't feel comfortable talking about that.*
- *I wish we could leave that topic alone.*
- *That is none of your business!*
- *Just because we are in a relationship, doesn't give you the right to interrogate me!*
- *I shouldn't have to justify to you why I think like that!*

Physical space can include personal space, such as your side of the bed, your chair in the living room, your car, your wardrobe, your tasks around the house, your tools, your room - or shared space, such as the living room and the bathroom - and then there's neutral space, such as the front verandah.

We all seem to have a need to call somewhere our own or some things our own, and whether we are conscious of it or not, it's as if there is an invisible piece of masking tape delineating the "go" and "no go" zones, or invisible post-it notes on certain items, which we deem important and want to have respected.

Violation occurs when your partner unwittingly or deliberately trespasses on what you consider to be your personal spaces, or when your partner tries to commandeer the shared areas, or treats your space or things in a disrespectful manner.



Emotional space refers to the psychological boundaries that you would like to have respected, such as taboo subjects, or painful experiences you want to leave alone, or particular convictions that you want to retain, irrespective of whether they are logical or not.

Conflict arises when there is little or no discussion about where those boundaries start and finish, or about how each partner would like certain areas/things to be acknowledged and respected.

The solution lies therefore in partners talking through this detail so that each set of needs can be met.

Warning! The flip side is that one partner can become so territorial that they refuse to share their space/things under any circumstances, which then creates a feeling of exclusion, which leads to distance within the relationship.

Good relationships reflect a balance between sharing and exclusiveness, so that differing needs can be accommodated.

in other words...

Create and
respect both
go and
no go zones...



Action items

- Discuss what you and your partner consider to be personal, shared and neutral spaces and things... and also discuss the reasons for inclusion in each category.
- If there is disagreement about what falls into a particular category, this needs to be further explored to try to reach consensus.
- Explore together whether these spaces have been violated in the past and the reactions this has caused.
- Discuss how you can each show respect for these identified areas.
- Discuss how you can alert each other when either feels their physical or psychological space is being disrespected in the future.
- Agree to revisit the categories in a month to see if any detail needs to be altered.
- Monitor improvements and congratulate yourselves when either has succeeded.