

Trust and Vulnerability

Based on the work of Brené Brown, Ph.D., LMSW

“Trust is choosing to make something important to you vulnerable to the actions of someone else.” – Charles Feltman

Or, when I share something with you, it is safe.

What is Trust?

Think of trust like a jar of marbles. Every person you meet will have a standard number of marbles, representing the amount you trust any person you don't know well. As you get to know a person, every time they do something that fosters trust, you put another marble in. Every time they do something that damages trust, you take a marble out. Some people may take the jar and pour the marbles out in front of you, with some marbles getting lost under furniture or falling into vents and being lost forever. The level of fullness in this jar measures trust, or the level to which you can be vulnerable with a person. Usually there are *only one or two people* in your life who have a full jar, most others are partially filled at most.

What is Vulnerability?

The opposite of vulnerability is shame, or a fear of disconnection: “is there something about me that, if other people know it and see it, will mean I'm not worthy of connection?” This is *terrifying*. Connection, love, and belonging are basic human needs. Humans are wired for connection; fear of disconnection threatens our most basic functioning. *Vulnerability is the antidote to shame.*

To be vulnerable is to believe we are worthy, to extend the same compassion we would to a loved one to ourselves. When we don't believe we're worthy, we push connection away. We find relationships that mirror our idea of our worth, which can quickly become dangerous if that self-worth is low. People who have a strong sense of love and belonging believe they are worthy of it, and they don't accept any less. They try and fail even though it hurts because they know they're imperfect, but that they're wired for struggle and worthy of finding that love and belonging.

Things Vulnerability is NOT:

- Weakness: To feel is to be vulnerable in a society that looks down on emotions, but holding it in is not strength. True strength lies in feeling, being scared and doing the thing anyway, admitting we're wrong. It is asking yourself, “*What is worth doing, even if I fail?*”
- Oversharing: True vulnerability isn't for everyone, it's only for the select few people who have proven their trustworthiness to you. In fact, telling anyone who will listen really personal details about your life is actually a way to protect ourselves from feeling vulnerable, “*If I tell you everything right off the bat, you can't use it against me later.*”
- Going it Alone: Our culture reveres the idea of independence, think Whitesnake's song “Here I go again on my own.” It's attractive! If we don't let anyone in, we can't get hurt. But the truth is, when we don't let anyone in, *we hurt all the time.* (Note: if you can't be vulnerable with the people in your life yet, practice with a therapist. It is their job to model a trustworthy relationship in which to heal and be vulnerable.)

To trust is to be vulnerable. Vulnerability is the key to creativity and change, to writing our own life's story.



BRAVING

THE SEVEN ELEMENTS OF TRUST

Boundaries | You respect my boundaries, and when you're not clear about what's okay and not okay, you ask. You're willing to say no.

Reliability | You do what you say you'll do. At work, this means staying aware of your competencies and limitations so you don't over promise and are able to deliver on commitments and balance competing priorities.

Accountability | You own your mistakes, apologize, and make amends.

Vault | You don't share information or experiences that are not yours to share. I need to know that my confidences are kept, and that you're not sharing with me any information about other people that should be confidential.

Integrity | You choose courage over comfort. You choose what is right over what is fun, fast, or easy. And you choose to practice your values rather than simply professing them.

Nonjudgment | I can ask for what I need, and you can ask for what you need. We can talk about how we feel without judgment.

Generosity | You extend the most generous interpretation possible to the intentions, words, and actions of others.

