

The Social Times

WHAT IS PERSONAL SPACE?

I Second That Emotion!
Degrees of Sadness

Coming to Our Senses:
"Space Invaders"

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HOW CLOSE IS TOO CLOSE? PERSONAL SPACE

“**P**ersonal space” is the space between people. It can be tricky to figure out who likes how much space. It’s hard to know when it’s okay to be close and when it’s best to stay farther away. Getting this right can be frustrating!

You might wonder if there is a system to help you figure out how far or how close to be from another person.

Actually, there are some things that can make it easier to figure out what is the right amount of personal space. Learning the difference between *intimate*, *personal*, *social*, and *public* space can help.

Is it ever O.K. to be super close to someone? The people you are *intimate* with are those you can get closer to. Your parents, your brothers, sisters, other family members, and really good friends are in your *intimate* group. They feel O.K. when you get within **zero to 18 inches** from them, which is a really, really close – or an *intimate* distance.

When should you stay a little bit farther from people? People you know *personally* include classmates, teachers, and pretty good friends. They are people you know and like, but are not as close to as your *intimate* group. People you know *personally* like to have a little more space when talking to you. A distance of **18 inches to 4 feet** is comfortable for most people you know *personally*.

There are other people you might know and like but who are not close friends; you don’t hang out and do stuff together, so you don’t know them personally. These are people in your *social* circle; you are around them at school or in other activities, but



you don't really know them personally. Try to remember to give the people in the *social* circle at least **4 feet to 12 feet** of personal space so they don't feel too crowded.

If you are around *the general public* — people that you don't know *socially, personally, or intimately* — try to stay far away from them unless you are with a trusted adult. You should stay at least **12 feet away**. If they seem mean or threatening in any way, you might want to move farther away toward someone you know better.

These tips are guidelines that can help you keep acceptable personal space. It is a good idea to remember these tips, but don't forget that the distance doesn't have to be **exact**, just approximate. There will be times when you can't follow these guidelines exactly. If you have problems remembering about personal distance, it is a good idea to practice with your parents or a teacher so you are comfortable with the idea. It's not easy, but hang in there; it is worth it to figure out **personal space!**

Exception: Sometimes you have to be closer to people you don't know; for example, on a bus or subway, in a crowded restaurant or hallway, or riding an elevator.

In these situations, you will have to stand close, but try hard not to touch anyone. The general public is not comfortable when others touch them, nor do they like it when others stare at them.

TRY IT!

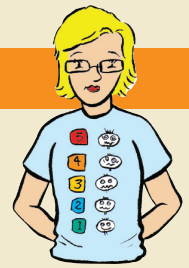
Watch other students in the hall during passing time.

Do some students touch other students?

If so, what does the touch look like?

How can you tell if it is a friendly touch?





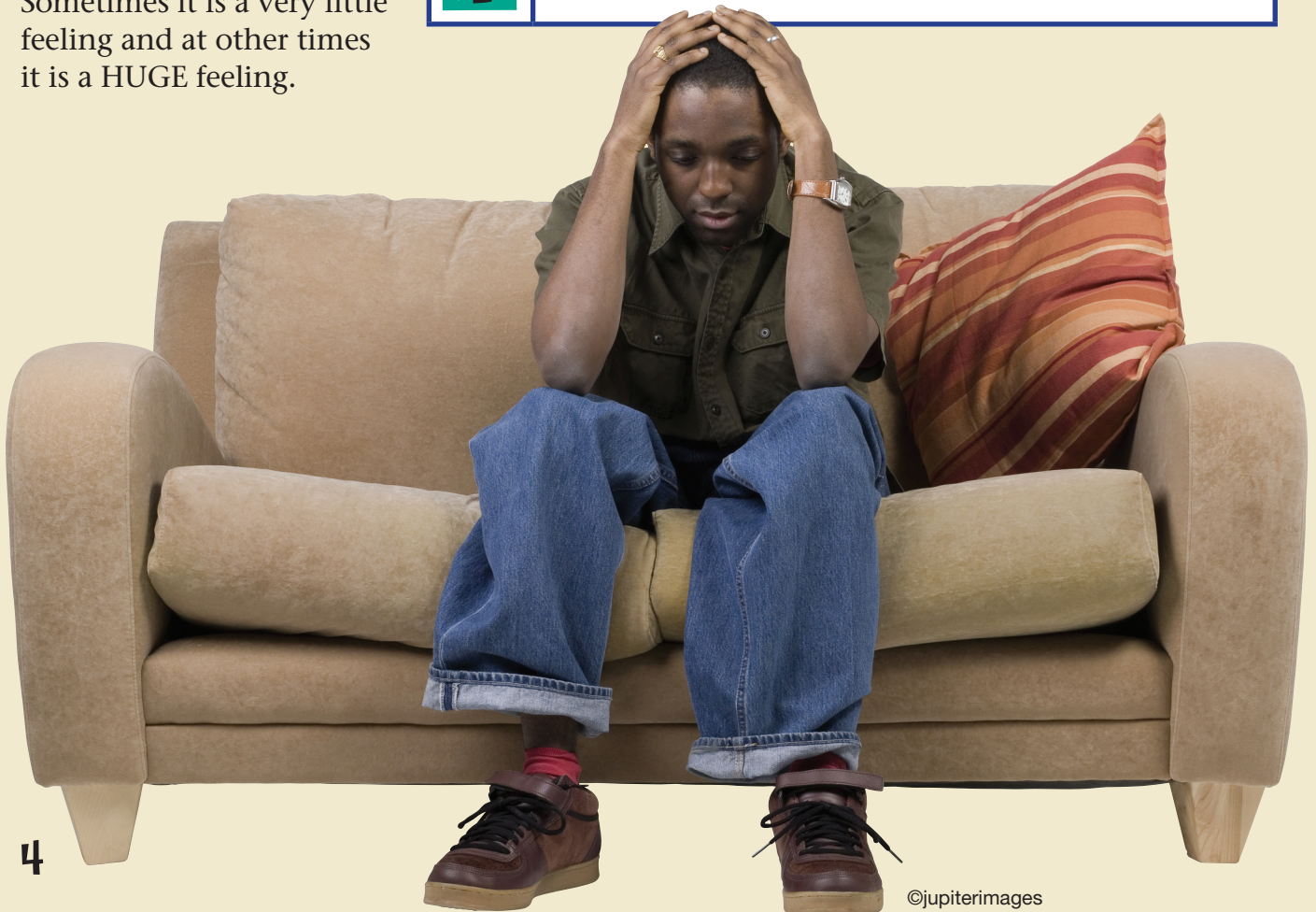
DEGREES OF SADNESS

Everybody feels sad sometimes. This does not necessarily mean we are depressed. Being sad has many levels. Sometimes we are not sad at all, sometimes we are a little sad, and sometimes we are very sad.

Here is a scale that can help you think about the things that make you sad and the various degrees of sadness you feel. Sometimes it is a very little feeling and at other times it is a HUGE feeling.

Sadness Scale

5	Devastated or depressed. This might happen if someone you know dies. Feeling this sad is very hard to deal with and usually requires help from someone, such as a parent, counselor, or other trusted adult.
4	Very sad. This might be if you have to move to a new school or you lose something you care about. Very sad could also be a scary sad. You will probably need help with this.
3	Basic sad. This level of sadness might happen if you get a bad grade on a test. It might take a while before you feel happy again, but you'll be O.K.
2	A little sad. This might be a small sad feeling that you are not even sure why you have. Maybe your favorite show is cancelled or maybe you don't like the lunch menu. You will be O.K., even though you are slightly sad.
1	Not sad. This is when you don't feel sad at all. It might not be a great day, but it isn't a sad day either.



SPACE INVADERS

In this issue of *The Social Times*, we talked about personal space. You can think about your personal space as your own personal “space bubble.” This is the space you like to have around you to feel comfortable. Some people need a lot of space around them to feel comfortable, and others only need a little bit.

You might not like it when people bump into you or when they sit really close. Some people may pat your arm to get your attention or put their hand on your back when they talk to you. If this bothers you, you can let them know in a nice way. You could say, “Standing close makes me nervous. Please give me just a little more room.”

If you feel too cramped in a group and you have a choice, you might want to move to another area of the room. If you know that you are heading into a situation where it might be crowded, like an all-school assembly, you can talk to your teacher ahead of time and explain that crowds make you feel stressed. Maybe you can sit off to the side of the group and still see the event.

It is also a good idea to do some sort of relaxation or calming sequence before going into a crowded event. For example, you can take some long, deep breaths or close your eyes for a few seconds and think of something you really, really like.

TRY IT!

Pick a partner.
Take turns deciding who is going to stop first.
Walk towards each other, and if it is your turn, stop when it “feels” comfortable.
Did you both stop at about the same place?
How did you know when to stop?





Dear Roger –

This is hard to write about, but it is really a problem for me. Sometimes when I am out among people, I feel like I have to “pass gas.” I have been told many times not to pass gas at the table and not to pass gas in the classroom, but nobody ever told me what to do instead. I am afraid that some days I just can’t help it.

– Embarrassed in Houston

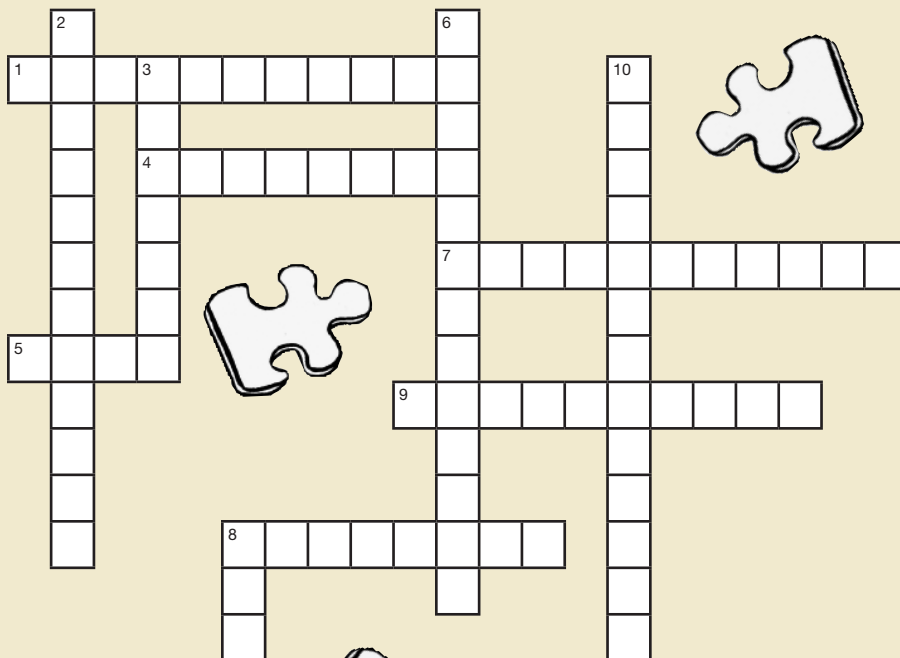
Dear Embarrassed –

That’s a good one! Just about everybody worries about this at one time or another. The proper thing to do when you feel that you have to pass gas is to excuse yourself from the room if at all possible. For example, ask the teacher if you can go to the bathroom. But no matter how hard you try, sometimes you just can’t help it. This is a natural thing. If you do accidentally pass gas in a group, just say, “excuse me.” Don’t try to pretend you didn’t do it, but don’t make a big deal of it either. If someone else passes gas, the proper thing is to ignore it and say nothing.

– Roger Gets-It



Puzzle Time

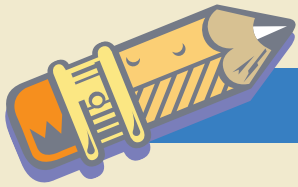


ACROSS

- 1) a good feeling; the way you feel when there is the correct distance between you and someone else
- 4) a word that means very close; like a parent
- 5) something you usually only give to someone who is intimate with you
- 7) not an exact measure
- 8) two words: like a handshake; two people touching the palms of their hands
- 9) general rules to follow; not laws

DOWN

- 2) two words: these are the people you hang out with at school
- 3) people you hang out with who you really like and who really like you
- 6) two words: people you don’t really know, but who you might see in your daily life
- 8) something you might give a good friend
- 10) two words: the space between you and another person



Puzzle Time



Word Bank: FAMILY, FRUSTRATING, INTIMATE, PERSONAL, PUBLIC, SOCIAL, SPACE, TRICKY

WEATHER FACTOID

**World's one-minute rainfall record:
July 4, 1956 (1.23 inches of rain fell in
Unionville, Maryland)**

A father sea catfish keeps the eggs of his young in his mouth until they are ready to hatch. He does not eat until his young are born, which may take several weeks.



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I don't remember exactly when this happened, but somewhere when I was around 12 years old, I started to give off body odor. I had no idea. To tell you the truth, I couldn't smell myself at all!

Well, apparently my mother could smell me, so every night she would tell me to take a shower. I got pretty tired of hearing that day in and day out. I even started to feel insulted. It seemed like she was picking on me, so I decided to quit taking showers.

I would go into the bathroom and run the water and then go to bed. I figured my mother would never figure it out; after all, I didn't really smell that bad.

About Day 2 of this plan, the other kids at school started telling me that I smelled bad. This made me feel awful and kind of embarrassed, but I didn't want anyone to know that I cared, so I just said, "I know I smell because I want to smell. I like the way I smell."

This was O.K. for about two more days, but by the fourth day nobody wanted to sit near me at lunch. By the fifth day, some classmates were asking the teacher if they could move their desks away from mine. Oh boy...

That weekend my dad had a talk with me about growing up. He explained that having body odor was a part of all that. He told me that everyone (even girls) gets smelly body odor if they don't take a shower. He pointed out that I was no different than anyone else and that we all need to shower or bathe often enough to keep the stink away.

I worked out a plan with my mother that I would shower every other night. This way I could stay kind of clean and still not take a shower every day. I really didn't like showers.

