

Sam's Corner

Advice for Fellow "Worry Warts"

"You are just a Worry Wart!"

If you have never heard these words before, then you need not read any further. If you have heard these words, I invite you to join the rest of us "Worry Warts," and be a part of our fellowship. We are also told that we are overprotective and unrealistic. On the contrary, we believe we are perfectly justified, and we are offended to be dismissed with a diagnosis of "Worry Wart."

Usually we hear these indictments of our caring from the people we care for the most, such our children, our spouses, and now those in the "Sandwich Generation" are actually hearing it from elderly parents, who are perceived as needing more protection than the parents think they need. A "Worry Wart's" job is never done.

Our adult daughter, who lives in the mountains of Virginia, was recently diagnosed with Lyme Disease. I was like a "Worry Wart on Crack." I admit that I was "over the top" for the situation. I was learning everything I could from the Internet, which can scare a "Worry Wart" to death. Yes, I called too many times, sent too many texts and too much information. Of course, she took care of herself and is recovering nicely. I am lucky she is understanding. I also need to know there are limits and "stop" really does mean, "Stop." She now refers to it as, "O'Sama Care."

I would like to call a truce between all the "Worry Warts" and their "victims." I think it is time for us to find some better ways of communicating so that we are heard and not dismissed. A "truce" means that both sides need to understand and change. We "Worry Warts" need to accept the fact that we can be a real pain in the backside. We can overwhelm others with our need to help, to fix, to protect, to advise etc. The trick to changing this is to understand that we are coming out of our fear and anxiety, which can easily hijack our brains and our communication. It is imperative both sides understand this process because the response to the worrier is a "victim" whose brain is hijacked by anger and defensiveness.

We need to challenge the assumptions that emerge after years of worrying and defending. It can actually get to the point that a simple question like, "Did you remember your coat?" is experienced as just beginning of the "Worry Wart's" attack. The response probably will be, "Of course I remembered my coat. Stop nagging me!" The worrier responds, "I was just asking a question." Usually this is followed by an irritated sigh and silence. On the other hand, it may escalate. This depends on the history and the intensity of the anger. It can get really ugly. I have not met one person who actually likes being stuck in the angry cycle of worrying and defending.

It is very difficult in any relationship to challenge our assumptions and choose to pursue a path of really talking and listening to how both people are feeling. This also may mean exploring the root of some of our fears and anxieties so the other person understands both our rational and our emotional realities. We worriers need to understand that our emotional realities can be overwhelming to the other person and there **does** need to be limits that both people understand and accept. This is so much easier said than done, but I know for sure it is not impossible if both people really want to stop.