

Passing Up The Poison
(Getting Back Your Personal Power)

Here on the Gulf Coast in Texas in September 2008, the daily question was not "How are you?", it's "Do you have power yet?" Friends and neighbors on the same street didn't all have power. Some people in a community got power back the Tuesday after Hurricane Ike, 10 days later- others in the same community were still waiting.

It's funny how our "vision" changes once things like this happen. The little things like flipping on a switch or using your hair dryer become huge.

Electrical power is one thing. Personal power can be even more important. Today, we cover one of the most difficult areas of struggle for individuals- dealing with what others say about us and to us.

When I began to really apply this message of "don't take it personally" into my life, it changed me. I used to get my feelings hurt so easily, even as an adult. When I became a single parent, and again, when I joined a stepfamily, I had people say things to me that were extremely hurtful. Some well-intentioned and some not. Finally, I had to get it that it wasn't about me- otherwise, it would drive me crazy. It really is about others. Here's to more power in your life- and not just the electric kind!

"Whatever happens around you, don't take it personally. You take it personally because in some way, you agree with whatever is said to you or about you. As soon as you agree, the poison goes through you, and you are trapped. What causes you to be trapped is what we call Personal Importance. Personal importance or taking things personally, is the maximum expression of selfishness because we make the assumption that everything is about "me". During the period of our education and life, we learn to take everything personally. We think we are responsible for everything. Me, me, always me!

Don Miguel Ruiz

Don't take anything personally. Are you kidding me? "How can I not take things personally?", you say to me. Yes, I know. It is an easy statement to make but VERY hard to do. However, no one I know needs to adopt this agreement more than single parent and stepfamily adults. There is nothing harder than dealing with an ex-spouse who is rude to you, a stepchild that is angry at you, former in-laws that talk badly about you, your exes' friends who insult you or whoever is creating difficult moments for you.

And, in this day and age with email, instant messaging, cell phones, and texting, verbal assaults between exes and other parties can be angry and often.

But rather than reacting and returning the assault, remember that it is not about you (even if they say it is), it is about them. Don't take things personally.

If you find that you struggle or are sensitive to this particular area, then read this tiny book, "The Four Agreements" by Don Miguel Ruiz, and learn more about this agreement (as well as the other three).

When I first started reading this book, it changed how I looked at things. I stopped seeing others words as directed at me, and started seeing them as a reflection of themselves. Hateful people say hateful things. Hurting people say hurtful things.

In the end, we are only responsible for ourselves. As parents, we are responsible to our children for how we act and how we treat others around us. If you can learn to not take things personally (even when it feels personal), then teach this idea to your children, and eventually, they will be able to introduce into their own lives. What an incredible gift you could give your kids and yourself.

Here are a few key steps to not taking things personally:

- Create a clear disconnect between what people say about you or to you, and the fact that it is about them.
- Vow to STOP reacting and responding to hateful words or actions by other people.
- Do Nothing. Do not return the email, phone call or hate. What kind of person do you want to be?
- Wait 24 hours before you EVER respond to any kind of problematic call, text, email, etc. While my brain tells me to defend myself, I just ignore it. After 24 hours, I usually find that I don't need to do anything. It really is just about that other person.
- If someone has said something that is particularly hurtful to you, is it true or does it really trigger a feeling from a different person or time?
- If you do respond to someone, remember that hurtful and hateful words and actions are not EVER going to get anyone to change. Plus they are extremely disrespectful. (And what are we teaching our children?)

For those of you who are still struggling with how to not take things personally, below are some thoughts straight from the book.

The book, "The Four Agreements" is a wonderful example of simple ideas that make a lot of sense, and can make a huge difference in the quality of your life.

If you need help "passing up the poison" or can share where you have done this, I'd love to hear from you.