

What to do when someone pushes your buttons

By Laura L. Barry, MBA, MMsc, and Maureen Sirois, MSN, RN, CEN, ANP

Why is it that some things don't bother us, while other things catapult us from an emotional 0 to 60 mph in a heartbeat? We all know what it feels like when someone says or does something that gets our juices flowing. We feel it in our bodies, emotions, and mood. We have an overwhelming urge to react. We may express it in words at the time or take our frustrations out later on someone else. It just doesn't feel good. We want to explode, set the record straight.

If the button pusher is your boss, you may internalize your reaction. Your mind is still buzzing with what you'd like to say, but you're not likely to express those angry words to a superior at work. On the other hand, if the button pusher is a sig-

nificant other, colleague, child, or friend, you may choose not to hide your feelings. Perhaps you'll have a minor explosion and let them know how you feel.

But what are you really reacting to? You might think it's the situation at hand, but it isn't. Instead, you're reacting to something about that situation. Maybe it reminds you of a past emotional wound. Perhaps you're interpreting it in a certain way. Whatever it is, it's usually something deeper. When someone pushes a button, there's always more to the story than just the current situation.

Having our buttons pushed is uncomfortable, and we'd prefer to avoid it. But the truth is, we can't avoid it. It will happen again and again, each time building on the last. So instead of trying to avoid it, try to embrace it.

Pause and dig deeper

The next time someone pushes one of your buttons, don't react instinctively. Instead, pause for a moment and dig deeper to try to find the cause of your reaction—something beneath the surface that needs to be excavated and studied gently.

Often, when a button gets pushed, we blame the button pusher for how it makes us feel—for what that person did to us to cause this reaction. We externalize the issue and don't take responsibility or own what our bodies are telling us. (See Button pusher as teacher.)

But what if we looked at our buttons in a whole new light? Instead of hiding them and never knowing when and where they will be pushed, what if we unearthed them and shone light on them?

To look at a situation honestly and gently requires compassion toward yourself. Getting to what's beneath the issue at

Having your buttons pushed can help you find invisible cords of connection that need your attention.



Button pusher as teacher

It's hard to like someone who pushes your buttons. But what if you view this person as your teacher—someone whose role is to help you dig deeper to find the cords that keep you tethered to hurt, disappointment, fear, or anger? When you pause to view this other person as your teacher, you shift and soften. You step out of the victim role. In this softness, healing can begin.

Pausing gives you the space and opportunity to see things differently, to operate out of love—not anger, the past, or fear. Instead, you're operating out of love for yourself. As you look on the other as your teacher, you may feel gratitude for that person—or perhaps even love.

hand or the surface emotion is a growth opportunity. It gives you the chance to look at the situation differently. It means you've opened yourself up to learning and healing.

Unearthing unresolved wounds

Recently, a most tender button of mine was pushed; someone made a comment that was unexpected and unappreciated. That's it. But it really bothered me. I immediately thought, "This person always does this to me...never has anything nice to say. This feels humiliating."

I restrained myself from responding (although I'm sure my body language and facial expression spoke volumes). Instead, I paused, and once I was away from that person, I did some deep breathing to release my feelings. I thought about what was said and how I felt. During that pause, I realized my body was telling me there was more to this than just the unappreciated comment. I realized the intensity of my feeling was out of proportion to the comment.

As I let myself sit with this disturbing emotion, I asked myself, "Why does this bother me?" I realized it bothered me because it made me feel I hadn't been

heard. So what does that mean and where else in my life do I feel I haven't been heard? As I continued to dig, I remembered many of the other times I'd felt this way. I realized that not being heard is an old wound coming from my childhood in a big family. To me, not being heard means not being loved or cared about—or at least that's how I interpreted it.

The current issue had brought up those old, unresolved hurts and beliefs from childhood so they could be healed. As an adult, I can look back at that childhood "me" who was hurt and tend to the wound so it doesn't have to keep resurfacing at unpredictable times. And when it does arise, I can lovingly say, "Oh, it's you again." I can pause, honor my feelings from the past, and give myself permission to feel what I'm feeling. I can remind myself that this is an old wound surfacing now for healing.

This perspective helps me realize the experience is happening for me, not to me. That shift in my perspective allows room for investigation, curiosity, and most importantly, healing. When something happens for me, it implies it's good; when it happens to me, I'm a victim. "For me" comes with intention and purpose. "To me" comes with blame and hurt.

Cords of connection

In a sense, invisible hollow cords connect us to every experience and relationship from our past. Even when an experience or relationship is complete (perhaps you'd describe it as "over"), those invisible cords of connection remain. I use the word complete rather than over because when we complete something, we acknowledge a finality, sometimes with a sense of accomplishment, and move to the next door that's

opening. We complete grade school and move on to high school. We complete an exam and become certified in a field. We complete grocery shopping and go home to make dinner. Complete removes judgment.

The invisible cords of connection can be a drain if they are cords of fear, anger, hurt, resentment or if they carry a “should-have” implication. Those cords need to be cut—with kindness—by a willingness to look deeper into our reactions. They’re energy drains. When the function of the umbilical cord is complete, it must be cut for the greatest good of mother and child. So, too, with past experiences or relationships that are complete. For the greatest good of all involved, the cord that no longer serves a loving, peaceful purpose must be cut. Only cords of love, compassion, peace, and joy can sustain.

Pause, digest, reflect, and respond

Having your buttons pushed can be a wonderful way to find out what invisible cords of connection need attention. Through a willingness to excavate the underlying cause of our reaction, we begin the healing process.

So for today, I will notice and be grateful when someone pushes my buttons. I will pause, digest, reflect, and respond. Knowing it’s being done for me and not to me, I’ll be grateful for the growth and awareness it can bring, grateful that my body speaks to me.

And you? What buttons will be pushed for you today? When they are pushed, will you pause, digest, reflect, and dig deep to find the cause of your reaction? Will you cut the invisible cord? ■

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Make your patient-teaching idea a patented reality

One nurse turns her innovative idea into a successful business.

By Joy Hooper, BSN, RN, CWOCN, OMS

Have you ever had an idea for improving patient care that you wanted to market? You may have lacked confidence or know-how, as I once did. But one patient, a crafty idea, and a trip to Walmart put me on the path to becoming a successful nurse entrepreneur.

A challenging patient

Several years ago while employed as an