

Being Imperfect Together – 01-22-15

Press Reset

by Sue Self, LCSW

I finally learned to translate my mother right.

She and I have such a history of not understanding each other, of not being direct, of not expressing our care for each other in authentic ways, that what we do say is most often taken in with a negative slant.

Here's what happened: We are on the phone, and she is inviting me to breakfast. "About 9:30. Your Uncle Joe and his girls will be there." "Well, Ma, I'm sick. I feel really awful." "Well, can't you take an aspirin and feel better?" On any other day, I would be thinking, 'Like, yeah, easy as that. I'll just take an aspirin. You don't care how sick I am, you don't want to be embarrassed by my absence' - you get the idea.

But that day, I managed to pause. What is she really trying to say? Or, not saying, that if she did, might end our wrangling? But she's said what she said, and if it's ever going to be different, I need to do something different.

She was telling me she really wanted me to be there. It doesn't matter why really. It's important to her. This dawned on me, I don't know, maybe it was the fever. So I said, "Okay, I'll be there."

So many times, our history with people predicts our future. We come to expect that what they say or do will hurt, and we strike back, or strike first, not considering the idea that maybe we have it wrong. Maybe a moment of compassion, or empathy, or forgiveness - call it pressing RESET -- will make a difference in who we are to each other.

"I'm really glad you're coming."

Bingo. Got it right that time.

"I know, Mom. See you in a while."

Sue Self, LCSW, has been a social worker in mental health for more than 20 years. A graduate of Webster University and George Warren Brown School of Social Work at Washington University, she currently works for BJC Behavioral Health.