



UNSAFE NEIGHBORLY RELATIONSHIPS

Suppose you are sitting on your patio, just minding your own business, enjoying the warm sun and a cold glass of iced tea on a beautiful summer day. You've worked all week and it was a tough one. The neighborhood you have chosen to build your dream house in is a bit upscale and you expect some peace and quiet. Warm summer days are awesome. Hearing the birds chirping, your kids' laughter, and the soothing drone of a lawn mower off in the distance - all makes you think, "ah, it is summer!"

Then it happens: Lady Gaga or Guns 'n' Roses comes blaring from your neighbor's outdoor speakers. These speakers are cleverly disguised as rocks, so they blend in nicely with the landscaping and no one can actually see them. They blend perfectly and are completely unobtrusive, except for the loud and annoying constant thumping of the bass drum. To make matters worse, you are downwind, so that annoying Backstreet Boys tune you are hearing is especially annoying and intrusive to you. The endless commercials and the vulgar commentary from the shock DJ is enough to put you over the top. Leading the offensiveness are the inappropriate lyrics from some crazy Gangsta Rap tune. They're singing about shooting somebody, dropping F-bombs left and right, beating up a girl friend, and spewing out nasty, sexual, racist, and violent lyrics. All coming your way via your neighborhood radio broadcast – compliments of your neighbor. Then your young daughter, upon hearing the vulgar lyrics, drops her ball and asks you why the guy on the radio is singing about how fun it would be to kill somebody? Oddly, the neighbor is inside their house most of the day – not even actually listening to the music. It seems that they are doing it on purpose and that is the part that is most annoying about this situation. The loud music goes on all day and when evening comes the neighbor goes to bed but forgets to turn off the music – and it plays all night long on the same side of the house as your daughter's window.

RESPECT YOUR NEIGHBOR'S SPACE

There you have it. Your neighbor has just gotten into your space. He has violated many things that you hold dear. Your peace has been disturbed and you could not enjoy the serenity of your own patio. He has corrupted your child. He has disturbed your child's sleep. He may even be effecting property values, since potential buyers of another neighbor's house hear this music and think 'well, this must be a party neighborhood full of delinquents.' Property taxes are paid equally by everyone in the neighborhood yet not everyone is having a similar and fair experience living there – you certainly don't think so. Now you are upset about this, but you don't want to make waves by bringing it up with the neighbor. What if he has had too much to drink and goes psycho, pulls out a gun, and shoots you over it? Or what if this neighbor retaliates in some way?

All this hassle comes about over someone else's insensitivity and their warped sense of entitlement. How often does this scenario unfold? How often does it unfold in subtle ways but with really huge consequences? Maybe it is you that is the offender?



Maybe it is you that shoots fireworks that hit someone else's house? Maybe it is you that is playing your music so loud so that others must listen to it? Maybe it is you that does not pick up your dog's poop from the neighbor's yard? Maybe it is your kid that is shooting a BB gun that hits someone else's house even the neighbor's cat? Maybe it is you dribbling your basketball on the driveway at 2:00 AM or running a machine in the garage at 5:00 AM? Maybe it is you that stores a boat or RV on the driveway all summer long with the homeowner's association clearly forbids it? Maybe it is your dog that bark's all night while the neighbor is trying to get their newborn child to sleep?

What is happening here is that one neighbor is getting into another neighbor's space. This is the root of all failed neighborly relationships. Getting into your neighbor's space is an unsafe relationship practice for sure. If you want to have a bad relationship with your neighbor, then get into their space! Bad relationships cause undue stress and usually only the violated neighbor feels this stress. A big component of relationship safety is to protect your relationships and to not provoke someone to cause you stress or physical harm. At the very least you want to have a cordial relationship with your neighbor - that is how everyone gets along, how we watch out for each other's property, and each other's kids. They say it takes a village to raise a family – well who wants to live in a neighborhood where everybody gets into each other's space? The least that will happen is that you just don't get along with the neighbor, and this is going to cause you mental stress and possibly physical stress (think blood pressure). Far worse things could happen, and do happen, such as a lawsuit, violence, and property damage. Unresolved neighborly violations of space never end well – they go on and on for years, driving a huge wall between the neighbors (sometimes neighbors the offended neighbors build offensive fences and walls over stuff like this!).

So what do you need to do to be safe and to protect your neighborly relationships? For starters, stop and think the next time you want to do something because you think you are entitled to do something because you are “on your property.” You can usually get away with that attitude only if you live on a 50-acre farm out in the boonies. But if you live in a regular neighborhood like most people do, where everybody is a few feet away from each other - guess what, you don't have that right. Your house is joined by the same air and line of sight. That is a common space between neighbors that live close to each other and it must be respected and protected. Let me say it again, you don't have the right to do whatever you want to do when your actions involve other people. Don't be a perpetrator or instigator of bad neighborly relations. Don't be a jerk. Ask yourself how what you are doing is going to appear from someone else's space? Would you do this to a friend or family member? Resist the urge to retaliate or make a scene if you are the one whose space is getting violated. If the matter is minor, try talking with the neighbor. For bigger issues that involve property damage, code or ordinance violations, or your physical safety you should call the police or city hall. I often get criticized over my suggestion to call the police, but you have absolutely nothing to lose when a neighbor's actions threaten your property or your welfare or your property value. Address all neighborly concerns tactfully, respectfully, and legally.

- Mark M. Kowaleski