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Drs. Henry Cloud and John Townsend offer solid guidance for making safe choices in relationships, from friendships to romance. They help identify the nurturing people we all need in our lives, as well as ones we need to learn to avoid. Safe People will help you to recognize 20 traits of relationally untrustworthy people. Discover what makes some people relationally safe, and how to avoid unhealthy entanglements. You'll learn about things within yourself that jeopardize your relational security. And you'll find out what to do and what not to do to develop a balanced, healthy approach to relationships.

Safe People: How to Find Relationships That Are Good for You and Avoid Those That Aren't Details

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Leah says

This was an interesting book. I tend to end up in "unsafe" relationships with assholes, so I had to ask myself, "Self, you idiot, what is it that causes you to be drawn to those people?" The book answers this question and so many more. It's a very practical guide for how to find good people and how to be a good person as opposed to being/finding a total jerk. I would highly recommend.

Tess says

Okay first of all, I listened to the audiobook of this and it was hilarious. Like, just imagine a really calm and encouraging book talking about personality disorders and other psychological phenomena and giving lots of examples and case studies, but READ BY A GAME SHOW HOST. That is what this audiobook is like. So seriously, listen to it, because there are parts that are unintentionally laugh-out-loud funny. When he does women's voices it's the BEST. Or when he says things like "Bob had a secret gambling addiction" way, way too enthusiastically.

But content-wise it's great, too. It's really sad that there even needs to BE a book about this. But there does. Naive idiots like me need it to at least SPOT the red flags so we can smartly decide how to interact with narcissists / sociopaths / victim-blamers and all the rest, instead of just being willy-nilly about it to our own doom. I hope that most of you wouldn't need to read this, and would be like "Uh, duh. Obvious. Why are you telling me this?" if you do read it. But for the rest of us, you can benefit from hearing things named and called out so that you can overcome them, be kind to yourself, be forgiving, and get through life with less damage to yourself and your family.

David Stevenson says

To preface, I've LOVED two books by Cloud/Townsend. Also, I listened to the audiobook, so perhaps that colored my experience.

I think this book should've been called "Unsafe People," because it concentrated a lot on the negatives. It also seemed to be from the perspective of a victim mentality - people are unsafe, and there's nothing you can do about it unless they change. There was a *little* about what you can do if you're in an unsafe relationship, but very little in comparison to simply getting out.

That said, I don't disagree with its points. It did accurately describe a lot of unsafe behavior and motivation, and it is fairly quotable in tiny little chunks.

Catherine Richmond says

This would be great for a small group with a professional facilitator. Yes, we should avoid toxic people. But what if it's someone you're related to? What if it's someone who's been great for decades, then suddenly betrays you? What if it's someone in your care, like a child or person with a disability? After all, Jesus hung out with some unsafe people, including one who betrayed him.

Amber says

There is a lot of good, thought-provoking content in this book, which is about discerning character and also becoming a person of better, "safer" character yourself. Some quotes:

"The Bible contains the keys to understanding how to tell safe people from unsafe ones. it also teaches how to become safe people for others" (12).

"If you're attracted to critical people, you may find relief in their clarity of thought and purity of vision. But you'll also find yourself guilt-ridden, compliant, and unable to make mistakes without tremendous anxiety" (23).

"For every irresponsible [person], there is an enabler, someone who protects them" (24).

"Beware of people who only tell you your good points, justifying it by a desire to be 'positive.' They aren't loving you enough to tell you when your attitude or behavior is driving your life over a cliff, even though you desperately need to know it" (49).

"...time is indeed the best judge of character. Who we are and what we do are very, very related" (54).

"If you have a pattern of bad relationships, it may not be the other person's fault but actually be a sign of your own spiritual immaturity" (108).

"The perfectionist tries to live in the land of ideals.... He is in bondage to a demand that says, 'If you do it right, you'll be loved.' ...the antidote to perfectionism isn't being good -- it's being loved" (132-4).

"What many Christians do not understand is that relating to each other is a spiritual activity.... We need to include in our evaluation of our spiritual lives the question, 'How am I doing with other people? How are my relationships going?'" (148).

"...one of the major pieces to healing any emotional disorder is grief" (152).

"It is only as we relate intimately to others in the body of Christ that we find out how unloving we can actually be.... If we never have close relationships, we can be under the delusion that we really are loving. It is only in the testing ground of real love, not concepts, that we get stretched and tested" (158).

"The chief theme of the entire Bible is reconciliation of unsafe relationships" (189).

Natalie says

I knew this was a good read when my initial reaction to it was anger. I was angry at a book! Clearly, it made an impact and like eating an elephant, I had to absorb it piece by piece. Many of the pages are covered in ink and have writing in the margins. This book should be considered an active read. Really get into it and take notes, recognize the emotions that spring up from its pages and work through them. I would and have recommended it to others.

Evan says

Easily retitled "Safe vs. Unsafe People", while reading this book, I had the eery feeling that someone had videotaped my relationship and took notes...because the book identified the subtle unhealthy attributes of my (now Ex) spouse in great detail one bullet point to the next, and I came to view her (often unexplainable) behavior in a completely new way. Reading this was a "light bulb moment" in our separation, and one hopes a guiding light for the next relationship.

The book identifies the qualities of unsafe people even better than those safe to have relationships with - whose qualities seem rather common sense.

While the book comes somewhat from a Christian/Biblical perspective, a non-believer can read around the bible quotes and get a mountain of knowledge from this tiny book.

While some people who are problematic to have relationships with are obvious; 1) "I'm never responsible for anything and am always the victim of life/others" and 2) "The world revolves around me...hey listen up", other Unsafe people are hard to spot! This book also details another category 3) I'm perfect, cannot accept any proof I'm not, and the world had better change itself to be perfect for me - or else - because that's what I deserve! (unfortunately such people are close to perfect on paper/reality, utterly responsible and hardworking, but these beliefs make them impossible to live with).

Rather than generally categorizing, it specifically analyzes the actions and thoughts of those safe and unsafe people so you can identify them generally by their actions rather than labels. Examples "Safe people are ever changing, unsafe people are stagnant and unwilling to try/learn new things" "Safe people are spiritual, unsafe people are overly religious" "Safe people treat others as near equals, unsafe people treat others as children who need their instruction", "unsafe people seek forgiveness, safe people then REPENT", etc.

Jeff Bobin says

We all want people that we feel safe with. As a pastor I want people to feel safe when they talk with me and at times share intimate details of their lives with me. I picked this book up because I was serving a church where there seemed to be a mistrust of pastors from the time I arrived. I was a little taken back by that since everywhere else I had served people tended to trust me from the time I arrived and that trust would even deepen as we developed relationships and learned to be vulnerable with one another. I was looking to understand why people felt unsafe and to help them know that I was a safe person in their life.

What I discovered that there had been at least 3 pastors that had inappropriate relationships while serving this

church and one of them ran off with two different women within a few weeks of one another. I also found that they suspected that at least one pastor had used funds inappropriately as well. They had reason not to trust and I wanted to rebuild that trust so I bought a book on safe people to make sure I was one of them.

Before I began to read the book two men in my life that thought I could trust and be vulnerable with betrayed that trust and used it to create further harm for me and my family. I had trusted them because of the position that held and one that I had know for more than a decade I thought of as a friend. I obviously needed to learn about who to trust and how to develop better boundaries in my life. Who better to turn to than Cloud and Townsend, the experts on boundaries. They did not disappoint.

What I have discovered it that I need to listen more carefully about what other people are telling me about someone and their experience with them. Looking back I can see a pattern in many of the relationships that have caused me pain that I could of avoided if I had been paying more attention to the traits these people exhibited not just with me but many others. Safe People will help you better evaluate your relationships and how to see when someone can't be expected to be a safe person for you to share with.

I also learned a number of things about myself that may have made other people feel unsafe with me and I think I will be a better spouse, parent, pastor and friend because of what I have learned. Everything I read I tend to look for myself in it so that I can grow and become a better person.

I tend to believe that the majority of relationships are worth the investment to try and make them better and the final chapter challenges us to do exactly that. It takes a few pages to help us understand when to continue investing in a relationship and when we should walk away and be willing to give it up. The truth is that both come with costs.

I recommend this book to anyone that wants better relationships but to those especially that have been hurt by people they thought they could trust. It will help to develop the courage to try again if you are willing to take the risk and experience the rewards.

Vicki Garza says

This book was eye-opening to me. I never understood my need for isolation, why I chose friends who weren't good for me, etc. After reading this book, I understand why God created community and how important it is to have safe people in my life who are God-given, loving and accepting. I highly recommend this book to anyone who has struggled with the need to be self-sufficient and isolated.

Katie says

Let me be clear: I'm damn near atheist. My therapist (Christian) assigned me this for an upcoming group session. She thought it would be beneficial and give us specific language to start discussion. She was correct. Even if you aren't religious or operating in a Christian denomination, this book can offer you some sound content.

I just skipped over the biblical sections, skimmed the spiritual mumbo jumbo (and admittedly rolled my eyes whenever they mentioned that a relationship with god was required for safe relationships), and I still got a lot of good information. It's worth the read.

Patricia says

Evil is defined in the Bible as anything that is harmful, or not beneficial, to your spiritual growth. Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend apply this principle to relationships, with the challenge to evaluate yourself and your relationships with other people. God made people to be dependent on each other for love, encouragement, and support. A healthy relationship always involves honesty, acceptance, wise counsel, and confrontation. All of these are necessary for growth. The quality of your relationship with people is an indicator of your spiritual growth.

If the friendships in your life are not giving you the support and honesty you need, they are not helping you: they are not safe. Unsafe people don't see their problems, so they don't change. If you are too afraid to tell the truth to others, you will be taken advantage of, manipulated, and ultimately hurt. If someone is unwilling to face up to their part in things, you can't have reconciliation. Just as God has forgiven and restored us, we should desire restoration in our own relationships. Every healthy relationship is founded in mutual honesty and love. These relationships will be satisfying. They build you up and spur you on to great things!

Erika says

The subtitle of *Safe People* is exactly what this book is about: finding good people for all types of relationships. Part One explains what a "unsafe" person is by identifying personal and interpersonal traits. These individuals are typically categorized as abandoners, critics, or irresponsibles. Unsafe people do the following: believe they "have it all together" instead of admitting weaknesses; go on the defensive instead of accepting feedback; act self-righteously instead of humbly; apologize instead of changing their behavior; avoid working on problems instead of dealing with them; demand trust instead of earning it; believe in their own perfection instead of admitting faults; blame others instead of taking responsibility; lie instead of telling the truth; are stagnant instead of growing (related to self-awareness); avoid closeness instead of connecting; are only concerned with "I" instead of "we"; resist freedom instead of encouraging it; flatter instead of confronting others; condemn instead of forgiving others; stay in a parent/child role instead of relating as equals; become unstable over time instead of remaining consistent; are a negative influence on others; and gossip instead of keeping secrets. (So yeah...watch out for *those* people...) All is not lost though--Part One also explains how people lose their "safety", which leads to self-awareness and change. Part Two describes if and how one may actually attract unsafe people or fall into unsafe relationships. Just when it appears that hope is merely a distant echo, Part Three clarifies what a "safe" person is, how to be one, how to find one, and when to move on. Despite the religious overtones, this book was very informative, interesting, and provocative.

Violinknitter says

I would give this book 2 or 3 stars, except that a lot of the advice it contained could be absolutely devastating for people in abusive relationships (especially those with religious & emotional abuse, manipulation, and gaslighting). If you're just having "normal" troubles, there's some decent basic relational advice about finding "safe" people. But the advice for how to know when you need to get out of a destructive relationship?

Unclear (and therefore dangerous) in the extreme!

I expected much, MUCH better from Cloud & Townsend. Very disappointed.

(If only the second-to-last chapter had been the last chapter. It was good, and I was so hopeful the book was going to end on a high note, and then the last chapter started. Le sigh.)

Heather R. Smith says

The authors do a good job of identifying the behaviors of "unsafe" people, however I do not think they effectively cover how unsafe people can become "safe." I conclude, after reading the list of unsafe behaviors, that none of us are safe but rather all exhibit some forms of unsafe behavior. The authors attribute unsafe behaviors to the presence of sin, and since Scripture teaches all have sinned I think it's a fair conclusion then that everyone of us have unsafe parts of us to be addressed. I just wish authors would've dedicated more space to helping readers improve their own unsafe tendencies.

???? says

The title is quite humble relative to the wealth and depth of wisdom about not just relationships, but about how we should be, each of us, a mature person as God intended us to be.

Reading this book, you will inevitably discover that you yourself has traits of unsafe person, and almost everyone you knew, has traits of unsafe people.

Moreover, the book pushes us to take the courage to open up for others and express our needs in relationships. As this courage is essential to be part of community and friends.
