

BULLSEYE - Finding your inner magic

Sometimes we become so overwhelmed with stress, school/work, or relationships with other people, that we just want to shut down and run away from it all. For example, we might struggle with managing our anxiety or depression, have a hard time opening up to someone else about our true identity, or feel let down by the people we loved and trusted the most.

In all of these situations, we might want to hide out in our room and shut out the world. And it makes sense. After all, sometimes the world might feel too overwhelming to manage. That's what happened to Karolina from the Marvel TV Show, *Runaways*. Karolina found out that her parents were engaged in terrible and illegal activities, and that they were not the kind and compassionate people she thought them to be. Like a lot of people who feel betrayed by their loved ones, Karolina initially shut down, pushing away her friends, not wanting to talk about what she was going through.

When we are struggling, it makes sense that we might want to take a day or two to process what we are going through. In this case, hiding out in our room is essentially like spending time in a *Safety Zone*, where things are safe and comfortable. Taking a day or two to feel our emotions about what transpired, be it a break up, a falling out, or another painful experience, can give us the time that we need to process this experience and begin to heal some of our emotional wounds.

However, the problem arises when we spend too much time in our Safety Zone. If we start hiding out in our room (or another location) for too long, avoiding social interactions and meaningful activities, we are likely to feel much worse as a result.

You see, if we spend too much time in the Safety Zone, it starts turning into an *Avoidance Zone*. The problem with the Avoidance Zone is that it is exactly where depression lives, meaning that the more you try to avoid feeling depressed by staying inside your Safety Zone, the more depressed you are likely to feel over time.

But the opposite is true too – if you push yourself too far outside of your Safety Zone, you are likely to feel really overwhelmed and feel very depleted afterward. Karolina from *Runaways* experienced this firsthand. Her entire life she had to wear a bracelet on her wrist, restricting her access to her magic abilities, making her live in the Avoidance Zone. When she becomes fed up with this, Karolina pushes herself to face unsurmountable challenges without confiding in her friends or her girlfriend, she feels really overwhelmed and her magic explodes.

In many ways, our emotions are the source of our inner magic. Like Karolina, sometimes when we hide out in our Safety Zone for too long, we too might be limiting our magic potential. Yet, when we push ourselves too far, we might feel too overwhelmed as well.

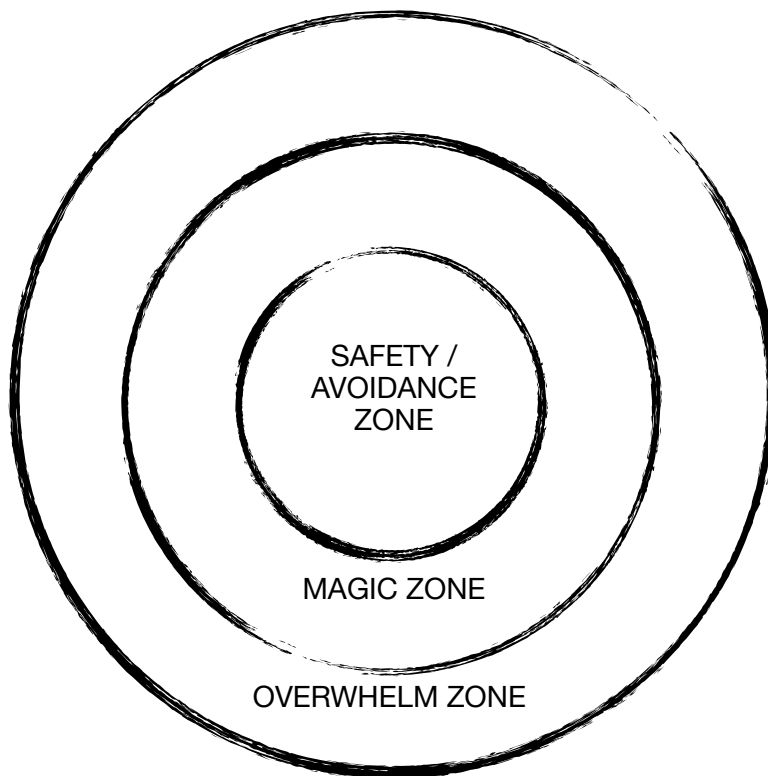
So then, what is the solution?

The key is to practice taking small steps outside of our Safety Zone. We can think of this process as a kind of a bullseye.

At the very center of the bullseye is the Safety Zone, where it's okay for us to spend 1-2 days at a time but if we spend too much time in there without stepping outside of it, then the Safety Zone turns into the Avoidance Zone, making us feel worse. This is where we might land when we think we are trying to take care of ourselves but inadvertently end up rooming with the very feelings we were trying to avoid.

Taking a small step outside of the Safety Zone allows us to step into the Magic Zone, where we can connect with other people and meaningful activities but without being too triggered and overwhelmed. It might mean being productive, connected, or playful without pushing yourself beyond your limits.

Then, outside of the Magic Zone is the Overwhelm Zone, that's where we might land when we ignore our needs and feelings. This Zone is also not helpful because it depletes us of our resources quickly and makes it less likely that we would be willing to step out of our Safety Zone again.



When we are in the Safety Zone, we might believe that stepping outside of it will automatically land us in the Overwhelm Zone. However, just taking one small step outside of our Safety Zone usually helps people to feel a little bit better. The hardest part is just taking that one step, either a literal step outside of your door, or a metaphorical step of confiding in a trusted friend, for example. And once we take that initial step, it might be easier to take other steps. And remember that should you ever find yourself in the Overwhelm Zone, it is perfectly okay to take a step back to the Safety Zone again, recharge for a day or two, and then get back out to your Magic Zone.

Let's take a look at what each of those zones might look like for you. First, let's identify what your Safety Zone is. For example, your Safety Zone might be your room, your bed, your house, or even a specific person or activity. Take a few moments to think about what your Safety Zone might be and write it down:

Now, take a few moments to think about your Overwhelm Zone. This could be being around too many people that you don't know, having to give a presentation, having to talk about yourself, or being around people or places you don't feel comfortable in, for example. What are some examples of your Overwhelm Zone? Please write them down.

Now, let's think of a few examples of small steps you might be able to take outside of your Safety Zone and into the Magic Zone. Some examples might be to go for a short walk, reach out to a trusted friend, or do just a tiny part of your assigned homework. Please write down a few examples of stepping into your Magic Zone here.

See if you can take some time over the next few weeks to track which Zone you are in and see if you can keep identifying steps toward your own Magic Zone. There is no wrong way to do this, every step you take is an important step. Every step you take is already courageous. So in short, please stay magical and thank you for being wonderful.