

Opening the Communication
so you and your kids can talk about *ANYTHING!*

Feeling Boundaries

Emotional boundaries are harder to wrap our heads around than physical boundaries, and often that boundary crossing includes some form of shame. Most kinds of “feeling bad” are types of shame, and we tend to react in one of four ways: *Withdrawal*, *Avoidance*, *Attack Self*, and *Attack Other*. This is known as The Compass of Shame.

The Compass of Shame

Adapted from D.L. Nathanson, *Shame and Pride*, 1992



It might be easier to identify the emotion you feel in yourself or from someone else. If you detect fear, the reaction is likely *Withdrawal* or *Attack Other*. If you sense anger, it’s probably *Attack Other* or *Avoidance*. Disgust is usually *Avoidance* or *Attack Self*, and distress is usually *Withdrawal* or *Attack Self*.

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Understanding The Compass of Shame can be tough; it's pretty abstract, especially for kids. Let's use animals as a portal, since kids intuitively love and understand animals. The animals have emotional boundaries too and we can relate to the ways they react when those boundaries are crossed.

Think of these as Animal Spirits. What spirit comes over you when you're reacting? Are there different spirits in different situations or with different people?

Animal Spirits for *Withdrawal*:

- Clam: walled off, hidden away, shielded from any interaction
- Turtle: withdrawn into shell, protected but aware, slow to reengage
- Mouse tense and ready to run: fearful, vigilant, energetic
- Deer leaping: powerful decisive retreat
- Hyena slinking away: powerful, resentful, saves energy to fight another day

Animal Spirits for *Attack Self*:

- Octopus shifting colors: changes self to suite the circumstances, blends in
- Penguin huddled: suffers through a bad situation, just takes it, powerless, resigned
- Pig in mud: wallows, immersed in the muck
- Tick gorging: binges until incapacitated
- Lizard losing tail: sacrifices a piece of itself, mild or moderate self-harm (biting nails, scratching skin, plucking hair, cutting)

Animal Spirits for *Avoidance*:

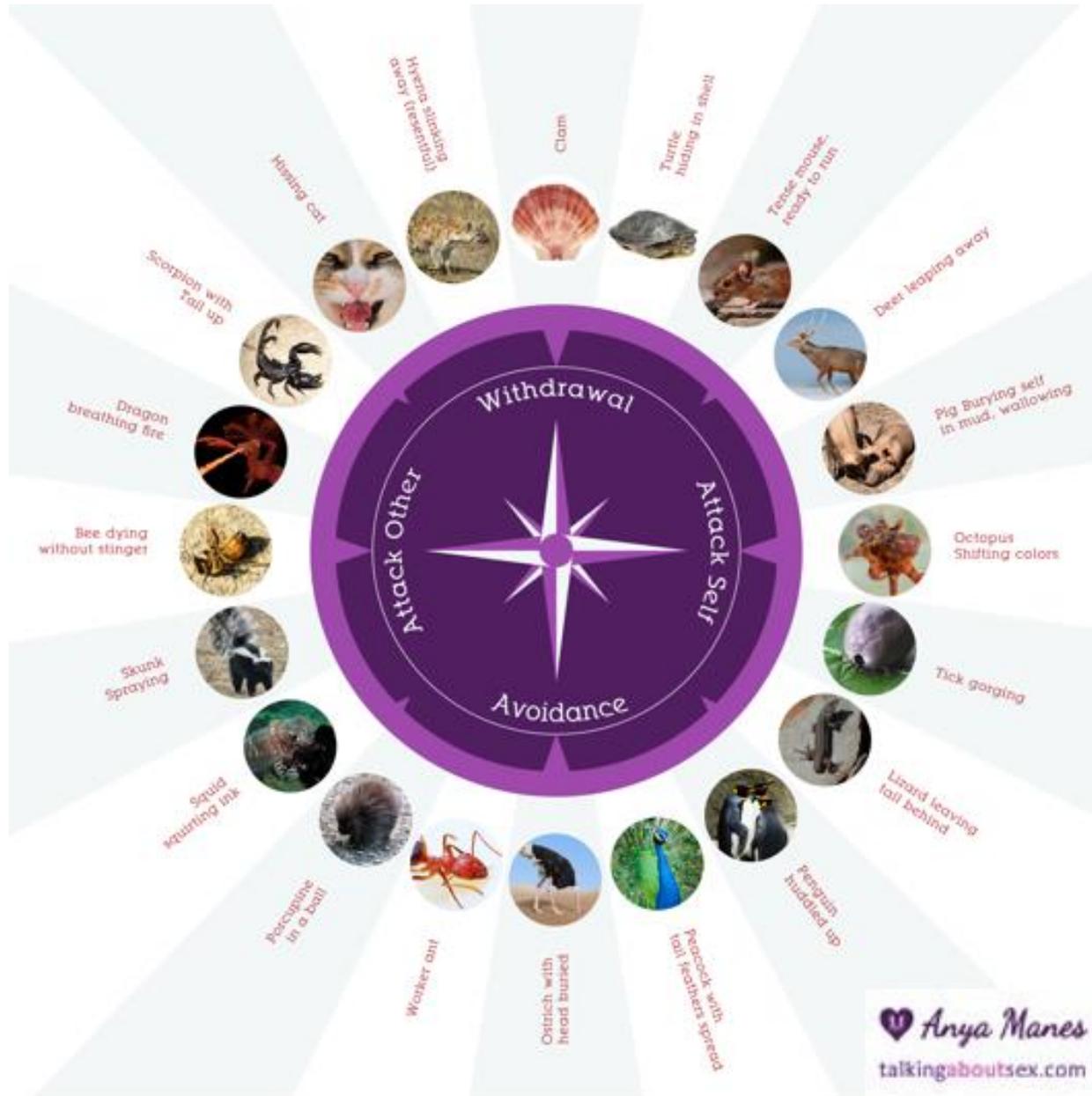
- Ostrich with head in the sand: refuses to acknowledge or see, denial
- Peacock: distracts others with flashy tail
- Worker Ant: focuses only on chosen activity (workaholics, gamblers, video game addicts)

Animal Spirits for *Attack Other*:

- Porcupine balled up: prickly, defensive, fearful
- Squid squirting ink: blinding, lashing out, distracting, defensive, fearful
- Skunk spraying: snooty, confident, generally unpleasant, spreading discontent
- Bee dying without stinger: attack that wounds the attacker as well, aggressive martyr
- Dragon: powerful, wrathful, scorching
- Scorpion: aggressive, seeking to sting
- Cat hissing: angry, defensive, fearful, tense, lashes out

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The reactive patterns we have usually aren't helpful, and understanding those patterns is key to changing them. For me, I identify with the hyena, pig, and lizard. I can be resentful, I can wallow, and when anxious, I'm hard on my fingernails and cuticles. I can stay in my resentment and my hurtful thoughts, brushing off the damage done to my fingertips, thinking this is just "the way I am" ... or I can think of these as unhelpful ways I react to my boundaries being crossed. If I recognize that I'm under the Lizard Spirit's influence, I can choose to shake off that spirit and reflect instead on what boundary was crossed and how to be proactive in defending that boundary.

Reflect:

1. Which Animal Spirit(s) do you identify with? Which of the four strategies (*Withdrawal*, *Avoidance*, *Attack Self*, or *Attack Other*) is yours?

2. Think back to a recent example. Which Spirit overtook you? What boundary was being crossed?

3. List the people close to you that you sometimes clash with. Which of the four strategies do they use, and which Animal Spirit do you associate with their behavior?