

How to find secure bases?

What are secure bases?

In their book *Care to Dare*, authors George Kohlrieser, Susan Goldsworthy and Duncan Coombe describe the need for *secure bases*.

They define a *secure base* as a person, place, goal or object that provides a sense of protection, safety, and caring *and* offers a source of inspiration and energy for exploration, risk-taking, and challenges. The more secure and supported a person feels, the easier it is for them to look at tension.

To understand why we all need secure bases, consider how the human brain works. When an actual or perceived threat to survival emerges, the primal brain will prompt the individual to resist change or avoid risk as a means of protection. However, when the individual has a secure base, the focus changes from pain, anger, fear, and loss, to reward, opportunity, and benefit. In other words, the individual can make the transition from a lower vibe (negative or neutral) to a higher vibe (positive or inspiring).

The authors also add that while the strongest secure bases often take the form of people, secure bases can also be anything that shuts down the early warning system in the brain and provides the energy and inspiration to seek a challenge. Places, goals, and objects can be secure bases, as can a country, a religion, an event, a group or a pet. A secure base can be any entity that, through a relationship, enhances a person's inner sense of safety and inspires exploration. The stronger the secure base, the more resilient the person becomes in the face of adverse or stressful circumstances. Because the need for a secure base is rooted deep within the brain, the secure base concept applies universally across all cultures and generations.

If leaders want to support their teams to grow to a higher vibe, it's important to be a secure base for them and to help them find other secure bases as well.

Many leaders fear that to be a secure base they need to be available at all times. It turns out that physical proximity and frequency of interaction are less important than the *perceived* availability when support is needed.

However, it's not always that easy to be a secure base for others. That's why leaders need to create more inner safety and security first. This is done by looking at their shadow sides and transforming them (see chapter 4 in the book *The Compassionate Leader*). It is also important to have secure bases for themselves. In order to perform well, everybody needs support. Leaders are no exception.

Being a secure base is part of Compassionate Leadership. You will find tips and techniques to create more inner safety and security throughout the book *The Compassionate Leader*.

How to detect secure bases?

This is a simple exercise to find them.

People as secure bases

Answer these questions:

- Who were my secure bases when I grew up?
- Who took care of me and challenged me to try things that seemed very difficult or even impossible?
- Which experiences had a deep impact regarding the kind of leader I am now? In other words, what are the “roots” of my leadership?

A person who is a secure base offers both a kind of protection and inspiration to explore and grow. A secure base offers both aspects, otherwise they are a good friend or colleague, but not a secure base.

People who have passed away, still can serve as a secure base. Just thinking of them or asking: “What would X have suggested me to do” can be enough.

Now, answer these questions:

- Do I have enough people in my life as secure bases?
- Do I have people in my life that are both in a personal and professional way secure bases?

Goals as secure bases

When a goal is a secure base, it gives you a source of energy and inspiration to pursue challenges in the present and the future. Plus, when you reflect back on an achieved goal, you can draw energy from that past accomplishment. Goals provide a sense of safety for you in your daily life because they give a sense of meaning amidst the mundane and routine. They also provide what researcher Daniel Pink described as the “three factors for motivation”: a sense of purpose, mastery and autonomy.

Answer these questions:

- Do I have enough goals as secure bases in my life?
- Do I stretch myself enough to achieve or accomplish my goals?
- Do I break down my goals into small steps and enjoy the progress I make?

Other types of secure bases

In addition to people and goals, events (such as a wedding, graduation or sporting event), experiences (such as university life, a promotion or a holiday), places, beliefs and symbols can all be secure bases for people. For those who travel or live in different countries, their motherland can be a secure base. If you have grown up in the mountains, at the ocean, in the jungle or in farmland, your native topography will most likely be a secure base for you. Religion is a secure base for many people in the world.

Objects can transform into secure bases. Children have special blankets or stuffed animals; tennis players may have a special racquet and many people have pieces of jewelry that give a sense of protection as well as a confidence that encourages exploration. In many cases, these items were given to people by their secure bases.

An activity that you repeat regularly can also become a secure base. If every day you go for a run, write in a journal or meditate, then any of these processes can you give you both a sense of comfort and a feeling of energy and inspiration to face the world.

Here are some examples to inspire you:

- People: mother, father, sibling, spouse, teacher, coach, boss, authority figure, peer, subordinate, friend, ancestors, ...
- Places: country, home, nature, city, village, town, park, sea, mountains, jungle, beach, office, ...
- Events: wedding, funeral, sports, disaster, accident, crisis, graduation, birth of child, engagement, promotion, ...
- Experiences: childhood, adolescence, being a student, boarding school, university life, being a parent, marriage, having a family, employment, career, ...
- Goals: achieve a business target, get a promotion, become a parent, buy a house, gain a qualification, run a marathon, change a relationship, recover from an illness, ...
- Other: pets, beliefs, religion, ideology, special objects, symbols, memories, rituals, prayers, work, hobbies, money, music, poetry, books, ...

List your secure bases

Now it is up to you. Write down as many secure bases you can come up with now in each category. Use the examples above as inspiration, but don't let them limit you.

- People

- Goals

- Events

- Beliefs

Finding new secure bases

By identifying your secure bases, you develop a good idea of the traits of people who would be effective secure bases for you. That knowledge can help you find new secure bases in your life, be they friends, colleagues or partners. Remember, you cannot be an effective secure base if you do not have secure bases for yourself.

Here are some tips for developing new secure bases:

- Pick a secure base who furthers your dream. If you want to be a CEO, pick someone who understands what it takes to achieve that dream.
- When you have identified someone you would like to be a secure base, describe your situation and how they may be able to support you. Ask them to challenge you to achieve the goals you have set for yourself.
- Transform a desire into a goal that can be a secure base. If, in a transition, you have lost sight of your dream, devote time to reflection so that you can develop a new one. Dreams, in terms of things we want to achieve in the future, are powerful sources of motivation, joy and hope.