

Fear Me Out Podcast

Episode 65

Hosted by Clinical Psychologist - Dana P. Saperstein PhD.

Guest Speaker

Dr. Dana and Susan Saperstein - Competent Therapists

Dr. Dana Saperstein 00:11

There are two basic motivating forces fear and love. When we're afraid, we pull back from life. When we're in love, we open up to all that life has to offer with passion, excitement, and acceptance.

Fear Me Out 00:30

Coming to you from our studio in Santa Barbara, California. This is the fear meow podcast. We're not your typical Self Help Program. Our show takes a deep dive into those psychological issues that affect us on a daily basis. We hope to shift your perspective and have you experiencing emotions differently. Now Dr. Dana Saffer Steen?

Dr. Dana Saperstein 00:50

Welcome to the fear male Podcast. Today I'm joined by my lovely wife, Susan Safford, Steen who will be interviewing me about the characteristics that I believe are necessary for a person to possess in order to be a good psychotherapist. So I'm going to turn the microphone over to Susan. So she can tell us a little bit about herself and why she decided to help me with this episode.

Susan Saperstein 01:13

Thank you. Well, first, I just want to remind you, Dana, that when we were thinking about getting married, you insisted that I have therapy, to just ensure that we were starting out on the right foot in our marriage. And at first, I wondered why I would need to do that. Because I felt like I had a really positive childhood, I had a good family, there was no trauma, there was no abuse, there was no neglect. And yet, when I started therapy, I discovered that there were a lot of familial traits that were being carried on by me, and that I would have brought into our marriage if I hadn't, you know, started to really look at some of those things that weren't going to be the most positive for our relationship. So you really encouraged me, and I'm really glad you did. I saw one therapist for quite a long time, before we got married and into the beginning of our marriage. And then I saw someone else. A few years later, when I was struggling with raising children and the stresses of of that experience,

Dr. Dana Saperstein 02:22

oh, forget about needing therapy to deal with your husband

Susan Saperstein 02:24

and also needing my husband....

Dr. Dana Saperstein 02:27

Of course, we can't dismiss that.

Susan Saperstein 02:31

Well, but in fact, because I had therapy, we learned how to argue and how to have disagreements and to resolve issues between us so that we, you know, we rarely hold on to arguments for long periods of time, and will usually resolve things pretty quickly. And with a give and take and a compromise. So I mean, those things, really, we, we both learned in therapy, how to be with another person successfully. The therapists that I had were both women. And I really, really appreciated and enjoyed the time that I had with each of them. And they came to me with a lot of passion and compassion and understanding. So one of the things I'd like to ask you, Dana, is, how do you choose a therapist? How do you find a therapist that might meet your needs?

Dr. Dana Saperstein 03:25

Well, I think it depends on what you are looking for, in the therapeutic experience in the first place. Some people, when they come to see me, they only come a couple times, and other people come and stay for years. So it really depends on whether you're just trying to resolve something relatively on the surface or whether you want to take a deep dive into who you are, and really do what it takes to resolve the deeper issues in your life.

Susan Saperstein 03:54

What kind of problems do people generally bring to you as a therapist?

Dr. Dana Saperstein 03:58

Well, that's a good question. I specialize in a couple of areas. One is post traumatic stress. So a lot of people come to see me who have had really traumatic childhoods, sexual abuse, physical abuse, emotional abuse, sometimes the combination of those three. And so that is usually longer term therapy. When I'm working with someone who has been traumatized. I also do a fair bit of relationship counseling that can be relatively short term, sometimes long term, depending on what the issues are that the people bring into my life. I think what I'd like to do is talk about what I believe the important characteristics are before I answer your question, which is a really good question. How do you find a therapist? I think that once I describe some of what I believe is really important, it becomes easier to figure out what kind of therapist that you want to have and then how you go about finding that person. I will start off by saying that I don't think that a person can be taught how to be a therapist, I think that it's something that you're born with the ability to do. And that, it doesn't really matter how much education you have, if you don't have what it takes, it really doesn't make any difference how much education you get, that's not going to really make a huge difference in terms of your ability to be present to people and to help people. So that's kind of a strong bias that I have is that you're kind of born with the ability, the reason I became a therapist, primarily, was because the person that I was seeing in therapy myself, said to me, you know, if you ever decide you want to be a therapist, I think you would be really good at it. And I'll do whatever I can to help you accomplish that goal for yourself. So he became a mentor, and helped me get into the graduate school I went to and was really instrumental in my career development. And I've done the same thing with probably five or six other people in the course of my practice. I've met some amazing people that actually a few of them I'm going to be interviewing in the next couple of

podcasts, people that I saw, initially as clients, and then I could just tell that if they decided to be become a professional with you'd be really, really good at it. And so far, I've been really lucky, because it has happened.

Susan Saperstein 06:18

So do you think that it's important for therapists to have had their own therapy?

Dr. Dana Saperstein 06:23

Well, that is, I think, probably one of the most important things that a person can do if they're going to be a therapist, because there's not a whole lot of therapy that's required in our training, there is a certain amount, but it's not. It's not really very much. And I don't think it's enough to really help a person get to get to a place where they can be of service on a deeper level, a therapist can take you any further than they've gotten themselves in their own healing process. And I learned that the hard way, actually, because when I first started practicing, I knew that I was helping people. But when it came to light, that I had actually been sexually abused as a kid. And then I had repressed that memory so deeply that I, it really didn't come back to me until I was in my 30s. And I'd already been practicing for a few years. And it was only after I came to understand that repressed memory was a real thing, because I didn't believe it was possible that you could repress something that deeply that was that significant and not remember it. But that's was my experience. And then I started looking back at some of the people I'd seen that were giving me clues that they had been sexually abused children, but because I wasn't able to kind of understand my own experience, I wasn't able to see the clues, unless a person directly told me that they had been abused. So I really felt badly afterwards, realizing that people were telling me without really realizing they were telling me what happened to them. And only because of my own recovery of the memories and healing, the trauma was able to sort of move forward and really be able to be present to pupil in the depths of their post traumatic stress.

Susan Saperstein 08:05

So in other areas, do you think it's important that the therapist have experienced, for example, if somebody was to see you for addiction or marital problems? For example? Do you think that the therapist should have certain qualities to help me with that? If that was my problem?

Dr. Dana Saperstein 08:20

Well, I would say absolutely. When it comes to addiction, I'm a terrible failure as a therapist, because it's a really tough thing to deal with, if you're addicted to alcohol, or other drugs. And because I've never been addicted to anything, I don't understand it, as well as people I know that work in the field of addiction that have recovered themselves. So oftentimes, I will refer someone out, if that's their primary issue that they're bringing into my office. Now, that's not to say I haven't been able to help certain people overcome their addictions. But, boy, it's not an area of my expertise, which is really important that whoever you see, as a therapist, they better be very well versed in whatever it is that you bring whatever you bring to the table. When it comes to relationship counseling. I'm always stunned when someone comes to see me and they don't ask me whether I'm capable of being in a relationship myself. I know that you're not really supposed to ask therapists personal questions. But if I was in trouble in my relationship, and I was going to seek help, I sure want to know whether the therapists that we're seeing is capable of having their own relationship. And if that person is either not capable or unwilling to

answer the question, I know I'm not in the right place because being a therapist doesn't mean that you have mental health and that doesn't mean that you're capable of being in a relationship. Because I know plenty of professionals that are a disaster when it comes to their own mental health and their own relationships. Now, it's very self serving. Question. When I say to people, how come you didn't ask me whether I've been in relationship because you and I've been married for a million years, and we've not been married to anybody else. And so I can, you know, say with a certain amount of confidence and pride that I know what it takes to be in a very long term relationship. But I think that if you're going to put your relationship in the hands of a professional, they better have the ability to conduct their own relationship. If that's the issue that you're looking for, otherwise, it's not going to turn out well,

Susan Saperstein 10:25

it sounds like you have to be very, very empathetic to be a good therapist.

Dr. Dana Saperstein 10:30

Well, why I said that I think it's kind of generic is that the most capable therapists that I've met are ones that are really highly sensitive. From a genetic standpoint, I would call most of the people that I respect empaths, and that their sensitivity leads them toward the ability to read people on a very deep level, which I think is extremely important. I've talked before in the podcast about the idea that I think that pathologizing people, diagnosing people and coming up with a treatment plan based on that, there being something wrong with a person is actually quite disrespectful, and can actually even be harmful. Because most people that come to see me, they believe that there's something wrong with them. And so if, if I agree with them, then all it does is make the person feel more ashamed of themselves. And, and like there's something dreadfully wrong with them. I don't look at people's symptoms as what the in quotes. Problem is, I think symptoms are a form of communication. And that if you're willing to look at symptoms as a form of communication, it really helps you understand what's going on, underneath the surface in a person's life that really needs attention. Because most therapy that focuses on symptoms, they can help people resolve their symptoms. But generally speaking, if they don't deal with the underlying cause, a new symptom is going to take the place of the old one, because you're not really dealing with what the problem is.

Susan Saperstein 11:56

Well, I know you and I know that you use your intuition a lot. So is that something that is a necessity for a good therapist?

Dr. Dana Saperstein 12:03

Well, again, in my biased view, and I'll be the first one to admit that I have a strong bias, I don't see how a therapist could possibly be of any use if they're not really deeply connected to themselves, and can come from a place of being very intuitive. Again, I know I've mentioned this in the podcast, but I believe that your intuition is sacred. And it's the part of you that's connected to the Divine and that divine energy is there to help people heal. And if you're not connected to it as a therapist, then you're generally speaking going to be approaching things from kind of a cookbook perspective, which is what we're taught in school is that, you know, you apply this technique to this symptom. And I think it separates the therapist out from their clients and creates a bit of a division that as a therapist, I'm better

than you are, or somehow healthier than you are. And I just don't think it helps a person feel very good about themselves. If they're pathologized. In the process of getting help,

Susan Saperstein 13:05

do you think that a certain amount of creativity is involved as well, in establishing your care for someone then?

Dr. Dana Saperstein 13:13

Well, I do believe that part of being really sensitive is also having heightened ability to be creative. It kind of goes along with being a sense of a person see having a novel approach to problem solving. Usually, when someone comes to see me, I try to just get a feeling of what that person needs rather than, you know, again, trying to figure out what's wrong with them. Because I think underneath whatever symptoms a person has, there's deep loneliness and despair and feelings of not being loved, and, and that most people walk through life feeling lonely and not properly cared for. And that shows up in the different symptoms that we develop an order to kind of mask the loneliness and the feelings of low self esteem that go along with not being properly cared for as a child.

Susan Saperstein 14:03

I imagine you can tell a lot just by looking at someone in their body language and how they speak and things like that. I know that was really important in my career as a nurse that really observing how somebody responds to you or physically, from a body perspective, is really helpful.

Dr. Dana Saperstein 14:21

Well, I do agree with that idea that the first meeting I have with someone I do, I do what I call taking the person's emotional temperature, which is I just kind of sit with the person and try to read what it is that their body is trying to tell me about the level of pain the person is suffering from, and, and also to kind of get a feeling about whether the person is has been damaged by their life experience or whether they're broken. Because there are certain people that have personality disorders that in my experience, they can't be helped because they're broken beyond repair. And it's a really sad thing. When that happens. But it's also important to recognize that not every problem has a solution. And that people with personality disorders, generally speaking, cannot take responsibility for themselves. So how do you help somebody that blames the world and everybody else for their problems and can take any responsibility for anything that is, you know, part of who they are as a person. So, if we exclude the people with personality disorders, generally speaking, I do try to read people as much as I can, I mean, the look in a person's eyes, their facial musculature, breathing patterns, all kinds of stuff tells me a lot about a person's experience in life and and how much trauma they're carrying in their body. I've had experiences where people have actually gone into a spontaneous trance in my office as a way of trying to cope with some of the questions I asked them, there was a mom who brought her daughter's in a number of years ago. And their symptom, both of them being twins was that the Lakers were having a terrible season. Now, it's really hard to imagine that two young 16 year old twins would be that bereft about a basketball team and the fact that the basketball team was not doing well requiring therapy, because they were really struggling. And so I started to talk to the mom about, you know, is there anything in their background that might be significant in, you know, contributing to the way that they kind of live in the world. And the mom described that when, when the girls were, I think eight years old,

their father was bipolar, and was not living at the house at the time, and he came into the house, broken the house with an axe and tried to kill the mom. And the police came in and killed the father in front of one of the daughters. a fair degree of trauma, if you can well imagine, the solution that the mom came up with in order to help them at that time was to move them away from where they lived, and come to live in Santa Barbara. And they weren't, they just sort of went on with their lives, and did the best they could. But eventually, I think the trauma started to catch up with the two young women. And when they we started talking about all this, all of a sudden, they went into a trance, and they sort of conked out on their mom. Each one of them was sitting on either side of them, the mom and they just sort of fell into their mom's lap, and went into a trance. And that was their body's way of telling me that they'd suffered really, really significant trauma. And they were just barely coping with what it is that happened to them as when they were younger. So once we set about healing the trauma, they did really, really well. And I'm still in touch with one of the young women, she's a mom with kids and living a good life. So that's a rather dramatic experience. But it's amazing to me to watch people go into a trance spontaneously, and they don't even know they're doing it most of the time, because they've gotten so used to disconnecting when they start to get uncomfortable, that it just becomes a way of life. And it's amazing to see how many people hold their breath as an example, when they start to talk about things that matter. And most of the time, people don't even realize they're holding their breath. And that's, that's their body's way of telling me that whatever it is that we're talking about is really traumatic for them and needs gentleness and care in that moment.

Susan Saperstein 18:27

It sounds like really observing people's body then is super important.

Dr. Dana Saperstein 18:33

Well, I mean, I think that there's so much that if you're willing to pay attention that you can read about people, you and I had a really strange experience a few weeks ago, we were walking, where we usually walk in the afternoon, we walked by these four men that were standing together, and we walked by them. And I said to you, did you just feel that weird energy that those guys had? And you looked at me? You said, Yeah, it's really yucky. And the picture that came into my mind when we walked by these guys was that one of them was really severely abusing his wife or girlfriend physically. And I got such a clear picture of the violence that he was carrying out on his partner it was literally disgusting. When you pay attention, you can feel that sort of thing. If you're a sensor person, and you're willing to take your perception seriously, I have no proof that that's what the guy was doing. But his energy was really horrible. And when I have experiences in the world, whether it's good energy or bad, I trust them implicitly, and I don't doubt what it is I'm feeling or see in my mind, because why would I get that information if it wasn't necessary?

Susan Saperstein 19:41

Well, it is kind of strange being with you, sometimes.

Dr. Dana Saperstein 19:44

I do things. Yeah, you know, we joke all the time that I can empty out a room as quick as anybody. Because all I gotta do is tell people what I do for a living and they can't get away from me fast enough. Sometimes.

Susan Saperstein 19:55

That's true. So you mentioned working with these young Women and I know you have seen a lot of young people. So is that different working with young people than working with adults?

Dr. Dana Saperstein 20:07

Well, the biggest difference is that the younger you are, the less set your patterns are inside of you. I mean, I'm always amazed when somebody who's like 1617, or 18 year old tells me, I sure wish I would have resolved this stuff earlier. myself What, like yesterday, because you're so young, you know, compared to somebody who's been dealing with the same stuff for 3020 3040 years.

Susan Saperstein 20:32

That's what I was trying to say about my own therapy in our relationship, it was good to resolve some of those things early so that we could then move forward, rather than being stuck in places.

Dr. Dana Saperstein 20:43

Well, I know that occasionally you and I've had some intense arguments. And I always think to myself, Why do I encourage you to do therapy? She got so good at fighting? I don't even stand a chance anytime. But then I smile and realize it's all for the best.

Susan Saperstein 21:00

And how a young, is it appropriate to bring a child in for therapy?

Dr. Dana Saperstein 21:05

There are lots of professionals who work with children, but I'm not one of them. I really don't like to see people under teenage years, because oh, boy, it's usually the parents who are the problem. Not the kid, it's so much easier to see your kid as a problem than to take a look at your own. Whatever it is that you're doing or not doing that's causing problems for your kid. Yeah, therapy is different for children. And that is for adults, because a lot of times children are not as verbal and not as able to describe how they feel. So I prefer to work with teenagers and up, the only teenagers that I will work with are ones who come on their own free will. Because occasionally I say to a parent, you know, they want me to see their teenager and I say, well, there's your teenager who wants to come? Oh, yeah, yeah, there's no problem. And the kid walks in the door and looks at me like I have, you know, Ebola. And it's really an unpleasant experience. Because I say to them, Do you want to be or? And they say no. And my response is, Well, I'm really sorry. But I can't really work with you unless you're interested in what I have to offer, because it's hard enough to deal with a grumpy teenager, when they want to be her, let alone if they're against their will?

Susan Saperstein 22:20

Well, it does seem like whoever you're working with the client must be willing to work with you and to be open and look at themselves.

Dr. Dana Saperstein 22:28

Well, I'm really, really fortunate, because I will say that 98%, maybe of the people I see are referred by satisfied customers, either friends or family. And I won't work with somebody unless I take great delight in seeing them. So one of the first assessments I do in my head, and I usually don't tell the person I'm sitting with that I'm doing this is that if I met that person in a different context, what I want to be their friend. And if the answer is not yes, then I as politely as I can tell the person that I'm not really sure I'm the right person for them to see. And refer them away because I have the great luxury of being as busy as I want to be. And so I only want to work with people that I really enjoy seeing. And so it makes my day really wonderful because I look forward to everyone that walks in the door. I don't know if other therapists measure their clients in that way. But I can't imagine why you would want to work with somebody that you don't really like,

Susan Saperstein 23:30

Oh, I feel sorry for that person who is not likable.

Dr. Dana Saperstein 23:35

Well, but that's only my perception doesn't mean they're not likable, it just means that we don't have a connection that I think is vital. In order for me to help them because again, I see

Susan Saperstein 23:45

you have to have a positive working relationship. Yeah. Because,

Dr. Dana Saperstein 23:49

you know, conceivably, therapy is a scientifically based process. And I don't believe that I think it's an art. And I think that part of what helps people the most in coming to therapy is a feeling that the person actually matters for real. And if I don't care for the person, how can I help them feel like they matter for real? Because my experience with people is that I'm trying to help them see what is lovable about them that they don't see in themselves. So I'm and I can't even tell you how many times I've said to somebody, Boy, I sure wish you could see yourself through my eyes. Because you would be a lot nicer to yourself and a lot kinder if you know if you weren't so prejudiced against yourself, even though I understand why that happens. So I think that for the first time people experience being cared for, being listened to and feeling like they actually matter. And once you have that experience, and you recognize that that's what it feels like it makes it easier to start to have those experiences in the bigger world around you. That makes sense. I don't think that that's the way most therapy therapists work. The job is you're trying to figure out what's wrong with the person and look at them like their medical problem, some sort

Susan Saperstein 25:00

Do people from really different cultural backgrounds than yours? Come and see you sometimes?

Dr. Dana Saperstein 25:07

I would say yes, definitely, I think that if you're going to work with somebody, you better understand their culture really well, because there are some cultures where therapy is only taken advantage of for the seriously mentally ill. And that for anybody else who's just struggling in life, it's a source of shame. So that's sometimes something a person has to get over. Because I was raised Jewish, even though I

don't practice being a Jewish person, I know the culture really well. And my last name is kind of a dead giveaway that I'm Jewish, for people that are Jewish. So I get a fair number of people that have come to see me that are Jewish, and they just sort of, there's a kind of a connection there that is automatic, because they feel like I understand their culture without having to explain it to me. Santa Barbara is kind of a weird place in that there are lots of white people and lots of Hispanic people and a few Asians and hardly any African Americans. So it's kind of a weird community in that regard.

Susan Saperstein 26:05

It sounds like if you are from a specific culture, that it would be a good idea to seek a therapist who understand your culture?

Dr. Dana Saperstein 26:13

Oh, absolutely. I you know, there's lots of questions that, that you can ask, when you're going to see a therapist, and a lot of people don't feel comfortable asking the questions like,

Susan Saperstein 26:23

What would you ask, What should I ask him?

Dr. Dana Saperstein 26:25

How much experience do you have with what it is I'm struggling with? And that's, you know, if you want to see a doctor, then we're going to do surgery on you. You don't want to be the first one. You don't want to be the practice patient, that would be terrible. Sure. And so why wouldn't you want to know if the person is skilled at whatever it is that you're suffering with? And how much experience do they have with it? And if they understand the culture that you come from, because every culture is really different? You know, again, that the question like Why would you not ask somebody that's doing marriage counseling, if they're capable, that sort of thing? There's all kinds of questions. Again, therapists are not really supposed to divulge much personal information. But I think that you can still get enough information to know whether you're in the right place. And if for any reason you don't feel comfortable, then you're definitely not in the right place. Right. And a lot of times, people have a hard time trusting their own perceptions about that, because they've made to feel ashamed of themselves or that something's wrong with their perceptions. But I think we pretty much know whether we feel comfortable with somebody or not. So again, after the, I'm sorry, if we pay attention, yeah, again, after the first visit, I always ask people, you know, number one, you have to re evaluate my sanity, because just because the state of California gives me a license does not guarantee my sanity in any way, shape, or form. Because I think a lot of therapists are very troubled people. And that's why they get into the field. And so if you don't feel comfortable, there's a reason for it. Not that you're not going to feel a little bit nervous, you know, divulging personal information to a stranger. But that's really different than feeling uncomfortable with a person him or herself.

Susan Saperstein 28:12

What about continuing education? Because it seems like psychology has changed over the years that there there are always new ideas about how to do things or how to resolve different problems. How do you feel about having continuing education units?

Dr. Dana Saperstein 28:30

I do as required by the state of California, but I have to admit that most of the continuing education courses I've taken have been worthless to torturous.

Susan Saperstein 28:41

But you but that doesn't mean that you haven't learned a lot of things over the years, because you know, you you'll have, but most

Dr. Dana Saperstein 28:49

What I've learned has not come from therapy books, or self help books. I'm not a big believer in most self help books. I think that they're designed, you know, to give you a little bit of information that might be useful, but they're mostly useful to the people that write them, so that they can make money. Because again, it's a recipe to change the way you think. And I really don't believe that changing the way you think, has a huge effect on changing the way you feel. It can help. But it's not the key ingredient. And I can't even tell you how many people that I've met have seen other therapists and they've gotten some good information and then had benefited some, but a lot of people become extremely knowledgeable about themselves and nothing changes. And it's because the feelings associated with whatever it is that happened to you and didn't happen for you, in the course of your life, don't get addressed on a deep enough level so that you really feel different in the way that you live in the world.

Susan Saperstein 29:52

So how do you help people to feel things rather than just think about them?

Dr. Dana Saperstein 29:57

Well, one of the main things I do is hypnotherapy with people especially. They have people that have suffered with trauma because it takes you out of your head and into your body in a very deep way. When you're being traumatized, or neglected, you go into a trance in order to cope. It's a naturally occurring phenomenon that is designed to keep you alive in the face of things that a person should never have to experience. So doing hypnosis is just a deliberate recreation of that state of mind that you go into, but not just for coping, it's also used for healing, from my perspective. So over the course of time, I've developed a bunch of different ways to help people connect with the deeper feelings associated with their trauma and to release those feelings so that they feel lighter and freer in the way that they live in the world.

Susan Saperstein 30:47

I remember with one of the therapists that I saw, I did this of my own accord, actually, she didn't recommend it. But I found that if I closed my eyes when I was talking to her, I just, it just helped so much, I was able to see things differently. And so I was like putting myself into a trance of some sort.

Dr. Dana Saperstein 31:06

It's just making it easier for you to block off the stimuli around you and just focus more internally on what it is that you were talking about and feeling at the time. So yeah, I would say yes, in a certain way,

maybe not as deep as doing a formal hypnotic induction. But it doesn't really matter how deep you go. What matters is your willingness to let yourself feel what you need to feel. Yeah, I

Susan Saperstein 31:29

think it it just kind of shut off my brain a little bit so that I could get deeper into my feelings. So that was helpful for me

Dr. Dana Saperstein 31:37

extremely important. That's for sure.

Susan Saperstein 31:39

What about medication? When does somebody need medication?

Dr. Dana Saperstein 31:45

Well, I think that if you're looking for a therapist, again, part of what's really important to talk to the person about is their degree of medical knowledge, generally speaking, and specifically about psychotropic medication, because all the therapy in the world is not going to help you if your dopamine receptors are out of balance, and your neurotransmitters are not sufficient enough to help you feel a sense of well being. So part of what I've done over the course of time is do a lot of reading about medicine and, and trying to understand as much about different medications that are available to help with depression and anxiety. Because, you know, to think that therapy is going to make a difference, when somebody's suffering from a medical problem that has psychological symptoms, to me seems very short sighted. And so I want to make sure I can, when I'm with somebody, try to feel the difference between what might be coming from their brain chemistry versus their life experiences and their psychology. I've had an experience a while back, where this man came to see me who had fallen and banged his head really hard, and had a terrible concussion. And for the next two years, he was super depressed and anxious and, and really uncomfortable. And even though he had proper medical care, the physician that was treating him never told him that when you have brain injury, that oftentimes it disrupts your neurotransmitters and that it that part of your, your healing process needs to be addressed with with medication that will help boost your levels of serotonin or norepinephrine or both. And it never even occurred to him that that could be part of what he was struggling with. And I could feel it the first 10 minutes of sitting with him. And I said to him, you know, I don't think everything that you're suffering from is, you know, based on the trauma that you suffered, I think a huge part of it is medical. And he got some medicine within a very short period of time, a huge proportion of his symptoms disappeared with proper medical treatment. And he was really upset that nobody had ever considered that this was part of what was contributing to his despair. I had my own experience after I've had a couple of strokes. And after the second one, I was a mess. I couldn't stop crying. I was just awful when sure you remember, I remember was terrible. And I thought to myself, you know, I got to do something because my brain has not come back to normal. Even though I lost function on the right side of my body and couldn't speak, all of that came back fairly quickly. But I don't think that the injury suffered and my brain came back with the same vigor as the rest of my body. So I decided to take some medicine. I take a really tiny dose of a drug called Effexor. It's not a therapeutic dose. It's not supposed to help. The doctor said it's not doing anything. But within a couple of weeks, I felt so different, that it was really truly miraculous.

Susan Saperstein 34:43

I imagined when some people get some of their symptoms under control, for example, if they're really anxious, if they can get their anxiety under control with medication, it'd be easier to do talk therapy with them. Well,

Dr. Dana Saperstein 34:55

that's true because if you're so overcome by your camera History, you're going to feel like a failure. And like, there's something really wrong with you that you can't use willpower to overcome. Whatever you're suffering from, I can't even tell you how many people have come to see me that were suffering from depression that came from a biological imbalance, and so much shame and feelings of just being a failure because they were not able to control their symptoms using willpower. And willpower is not an ingredient in resolving depression. So sometimes it can be enormously helpful for somebody to realize that they've not failed in any way, other than to understand that their psychological symptoms, in part are due to a medical problem. But somehow, we're really prejudiced against our brain chemistry. If you had diabetes, and you needed insulin, I don't think that you would feel ashamed of that chemical in order to balance your body properly. But when it comes to our, our mental health, we're taught to feel like we were mentally ill if we need some assistance in that regard.

Susan Saperstein 36:03

Well, we sure have a lot of biases against mental illness or any kind of emotional problems,

Dr. Dana Saperstein 36:09

right? Well, and I will say the insurance companies make it worse. I'm not an insurance provider for any insurance companies, because they want me to pathologize people to the degree that I have to make it sound like everybody that I'm seeing is going to jump off the roof, if they don't get help, and it's so it's so damaging to that person's health record, to make it seem like they're on the verge of death. And plus, there's no such thing as privacy and medicine anyway. I mean, I, you know, I tell people all the time, I've had a lot of surgeries at local hospital. And I've also gotten three letters from them saying that my records have been compromised. So if you think your medical information is protected, you better think twice about that. And if you're a young person, I don't think it's a good idea to use health insurance to cover any kind of mental health issue, because anybody that's going to hire you moving forward has access to your health records, even though it's not legal. And they will discriminate against you if they find out that you've suffered from depression or anxiety. Wow. So it's really a sad thing. But so the insurance companies are extremely prejudiced against mental health treatment.

Susan Saperstein 37:20

Well, hopefully, we'll make some progress in our country. In that regard. Yeah, good luck with that one. You know, there are a lot of different kinds of therapy, you know, you hear about cognitive behavioral therapy, EMDR talk therapy, what is it called when you lie on the sofa? And just

Dr. Dana Saperstein 37:38

talk? Oh, psychoanalysis?

Susan Saperstein 37:39

Psychoanalysis? Yeah, what a what a? How do you differentiate between all those things? And should you ask your therapist, what kind of therapy they perform?

Dr. Dana Saperstein 37:48

You know, that's a really good question. Because there are some techniques in cognitive behavioral therapy that can be useful. But not if that's all that you do. Because it's an intellectual form of therapy, that's designed to help you change the way you think, with the idea that if you change the way you think you're going to change the way you feel. And maybe that can help a little bit. And again, there are some techniques that I've asked people to try, you know, in terms of, you know, negative thoughts, and so on, and so forth. But if that's all you're gonna get, it's really not going to help you very much, because it's all symptom based. And, yeah, you can resolve your symptoms, but I can guarantee you another one's going to come take its place, if you don't deal with the underlying cause. Psychoanalysis is really popular still in like New York City, and maybe a little bit in Los Angeles. And for some bizarre reason, in Argentina, it's a huge type of mental health treatment in Argentina, but most people I know look at it as kind of a waste of time and money. Because really, what you do is lay down on the couch, and you have to see a therapist four or five times a week, and it's super expensive. And, and you just talk and the therapist doesn't even look at you. They're sitting behind you, and kind of making a comment every once in a while. So I guess if you if you'd like to talk a lot, and you want somebody just to listen to you and not engage with you in any way, maybe that will help you if you're

Susan Saperstein 39:17

so you're just talking to yourself. You're basically Yeah.

Dr. Dana Saperstein 39:22

And, you know, I hate to be so cynical, but so much of it was based on, you know, sexual weirdness. Back in the day, there were some things that Freud and his contemporaries came up with that were useful, but it's fairly antiquated. I just happen to believe that going on, focusing on a deep level, and really looking at yourself as deeply as you can, regardless of whatever the issue is, is necessary in order for proper healing to take place.

Susan Saperstein 39:49

Well, I do know that your particular style is very eclectic, that you haven't you don't follow a union approach or a particular approach that has been written about, I know that you've taken ideas from a lot of different philosophies and have come up with your own Dana Saperstein method of working with people, and I know you're successful, because you have, you know, wonderful letters from people every year that thank you for helping saving their lives in some cases, you know, really, really helping them. So I know you're and also you have a full practice, you've never, never not had a full practice. So I know that whatever it is that you've figured out for yourself, and your method of doing therapy has been successful.

Dr. Dana Saperstein 40:33

Well, I want to speak to that, because I think it's really important. I don't experience fear much, if ever in my office, and when I'm working with someone. So no matter how pain the person is, no matter how

much trauma they carry, no matter how hopeless they feel, I don't feel scared about whether I can help the person or not. And the reason I don't feel scared is because I feel a very deep spiritual connection to my version of God or whatever you want to call it. And I feel like that helps me help the people that I see. So rather than relying on a theory or something in a cookbook, in order for me not to be afraid, because I think that that's really what most psychology books are about. It's not to help the people you see, it's to help you feel less frightened in the face of whatever the person is bringing into your office. Because if I have a recipe book, and the recipe doesn't work, I can blame the person that I'm seeing as the problem, not me for not being able to help them properly because they didn't follow the recipe. Now I know that's a bit of a cynical way of looking at it. But I really do believe that's Yeah, but you are cynical. Yes, that's true. Well, and plus, I mean, I see so many people that I've seen a lot of therapists before. And they say to me over and over again, how come nobody has ever asked me these questions. And the question seems so simple to me. And yet, they're apparently they're not. So I think that sitting and feeling and being connected to the person on as deep a level as you can, is really the best approach to helping the person feel safe, and listened to and cared for, and so on and so forth. That I don't think it's a hugely complicated recipe, in that regard, or at least approach. And so could you know, putting people in a box isn't necessary under those circumstances, I don't need to think about things from this perspective or that perspective, I just need to get a feeling about why this person doesn't like themselves, and why they feel so ashamed of themselves. And I understand that a lot of people are brought up in families where who they are is not acceptable, even if they're not being traumatized. Every family has rules and regulations that they want their children to abide by. And if their children are different inherently than what's required of them. In order to feel safe, you just stop being who you are, and start being somebody else. And that creates a feeling of not being loved on a deep level. And also a feeling like, if somebody does love you, it's not real, because it's based on your performance rather than who you really are. Because I don't think most people are accepted for who they are, especially if they're sensitive,

Susan Saperstein 43:25

that's a big struggle for people, just allowing themselves to be who they are, to figure out who they are, first, and then to allow it to be okay to be that person and to not be worried about being judged by other people will

Dr. Dana Saperstein 43:39

because it's never been okay, in their experience, most of their family members, if you're sensitive, you're looked at as being really weird by your family members, on a conscious level. And on an unconscious level, a lot of times, amazingly enough, your parents can be afraid of you because you're seeing them and their secrets. And they would prefer to keep their secrets a secret, and their and their lack of self esteem and all that hidden. And if you've got a little kid that's looking at you and can read you, you're going to shut that kid down as quick as you can, in order to save yourself from the embarrassment of your own shame and whatever your issues might be. And that's not even somebody who's been overtly traumatized, not loved properly. So it's kind of sad that we don't really stand much of a chance in the society we live in. Because we're also made to feel really ashamed of needing people. And that's so heartbreaking because we aren't, we're not predators by nature, even though we act like it. We're actually prey animals. We don't have sharp claws or big teeth. And so the only way to be safe as by being around other people, and it seems like animals have a pretty easy time accepting. You

know, you see monkeys, they don't live in condos, you know, they live all over each other, and the only ones that are excluded from The group are the ones that are sick and, and are consuming resources that maybe jeopardize the troop, or the adolescent males, which we all know are the biggest pain in the ass in the world, right? Who wants to hang around adolescent male, no offense. But you know, they get rid of the adolescent males, because they don't want any competition with the females for, you know, for making babies, but they know they're safe in numbers. And we've been made to feel so ashamed of our need for other people. And I don't see how we can live without connection to other people. I remember when our kids were little, our sweet little daughter, we tried to get her to sleep in her own bed. Oh, man, what a disaster that was, you know, I just saw her like, I don't know, I think she was what, two, two and a half or three, standing by the door just crying, you know, let me in, let me in. Because, you know, if you have the choice, it's to sleep with other people or sleep by yourself. What would you do? What would you do, and we exclude our children and separate them out thinking we're gonna teach them how to be independent. And all we do is teach them how to be afraid. It doesn't teach them independence at all, because they're not old enough to be independent. And, you know, I, again, people get mad because I, I shame them into, you know, having family bad, because I think it's the healthiest way for kids to, for young young children to start in the world is to feel safe, and not to be forced into fit false independence, because all it's going to do is teach a kid how to disconnect from him or herself, in order to fall asleep. I don't think that's a great way to store your life. But I also know it's a pain in the ass to be tired all the time. And I mean, I remember how many times I got kicked in my testicles by my little kids sleeping in the bed with me. It was not that comfortable. But you know, I think it was worth it in the end. Yeah, a little bit off topic. But once again, you know, it has to do with being shamed of the need for other people.

Susan Saperstein 46:59

Say, I come into your office. And I say, Dana, I am just miserable. I, I wish I was a happy person, like the people I see around me. But I'm just miserable. I never feel like I can do a good enough job at anything. I always feel like people are judging me. I feel like I'm letting people down. I feel anxious all the time. Are these things that you would hear from a potential client?

Dr. Dana Saperstein 47:28

Only every day?

Susan Saperstein 47:31

So where do you start? Well, the way that

Dr. Dana Saperstein 47:33

I, the first thing I usually tell people is that if they want me to help them become a happy person, that I can't help them. Because I don't believe that there is such a thing as a happy person. And again, I've talked about this before on the podcast, but I think we've done such a huge disservice in being brainwashed into believing that you can just be happy. First of all, you cannot be a feeling. You can feel your feelings, but you can't. So being happy, by definition, is completely humanly impossible. And I think that if you can strive for neutrality to a place where you can just be okay, then you can cope with the difficulties that life will bring you because nobody gets a life without pain. And you can also try to create as many joyful experiences as you can, coming from sort of level ground. And I can't even tell

you how relieving that is for some people to realize that they've been chasing something that's humanly impossible.

Susan Saperstein 48:35

Well, of course, we see it on social media all the time, the happy families that are portrayed and their family pictures and yeah,

Dr. Dana Saperstein 48:42

but I've gotten enough of the backstory about how people really live to understand that it's just an illusion, right? Because really, truly, most people are lonely. And most people are suffering, feeling like they don't have enough love. And that they're so craving more of it, but they feel so ashamed of themselves for not being okay, when they're really not. Okay,

Susan Saperstein 49:06

so what about self worth? Why do so many of us feel like we don't match up to our expectations of ourselves?

Dr. Dana Saperstein 49:16

Well, because there's an unrealistic notion that the things that happened to or shouldn't affect you that much that you should just be a happy person, no matter what your experiences, and that's absurd. I mean, if you grew up in a family where you're being criticized all the time, and made to feel less than and held to a standard of perfection, you're gonna be miserable, and there's no happiness in that, because nothing you do is ever good enough. And that's not even a situation where you're experiencing trauma, right overtly. But I think that most of us are brought up to feel inferior and like we're never good enough. And there's so much stress on performance. I mean, when I first started my practice, I would see teenagers who are getting into trouble by drinking too much or cutting school or whatever. And now all I see is anxious teenagers who are taught to be circus monkeys that have to perform to some level to get into the best college available. And they don't get to live in the present, everything's about some magic thing that's going to happen in the future, which never happens. And that they don't get to enjoy their lives when they're young and vital. Because they have to chase some magic dream that goes along with the culture that we live in, especially in a wealthy community. So they rebel. Well, not just rebelled, they get anxious, because no matter how hard they perform, there's still no guarantee they're gonna get into the school that they want to go to. And the teachers are complicit in all of this, that, you know, they get measured by standardized testing, and how their students do. And so it's never good enough, it's always always you got to do more, you got to do more. never good enough, you always have to, you know, and then eventually some dream is going to come true, which is so absurd. Because, again, statistically, only 40% of people that start college finish. And that's a dismal statistic. And of those 40%, only about 60% of them get jobs. So there is no magic that can go into college. And I'm not against College. I'm a really highly educated person. But I did it with a specific goal in mind. Because I had a career choice I was trying to make, I wasn't just kind of wandering through life, because I was told that you got to get a good education, because there's lots and lots of people that would do much better if they were taught to trade or not made feel ashamed themselves for not pursuing some kind of higher education when really they're not interested in the first place. But they've been scared into it.

Susan Saperstein 51:41

Well, really, it's a miracle that any of us function.

Dr. Dana Saperstein 51:44

I know, it sounds pretty negative. Yes, but that's what keeps me gainfully employed. If I can be, you know, smart, ask for a moment. But on

Susan Saperstein 51:52

the other hand, it also brings to mind that everybody can use the guidance of a third party or another party who can listen to them and just help them and guide them. That I mean, I'm not sure why anybody would not want to have therapy.

Dr. Dana Saperstein 52:10

Well, most people believe that it's not for you, unless there's something in quotes really wrong with you, instead of looking at it the way you did, which is going to make my life better. And it's not because we're all mentally ill

Susan Saperstein 52:22

something that will help me to grow. Yeah. But it's expensive for somebody who just wants to enhance their life. Well, but

Dr. Dana Saperstein 52:29

all therapists start out in training. And when I started out, I saw a facility I worked in, I saw people for \$5 a visit. I didn't get paid anything. But you know, there are low cost places where you can get help if you have no money. Now are all therapists capable, no, but neither are ones that charge \$250 an hour. So just because somebody's licensed doesn't mean that they're capable in any way. I've, you know, the people that I've encouraged to become therapists, they all started out at the bottom. And the people that were lucky enough to see them benefited hugely, despite the fact that they weren't that experienced and they weren't licensed. So you can always find help, if you're looking for it. And whatever place you go to, you're not trapped with the person that you're assigned to. If it doesn't feel like a good match, you can always respectfully ask to see somebody different. And there are training clinics everywhere. If you're looking for a therapist, the best source of where to find somebody that might be able to help you is by talking with friends, family, or people that have had a successful experience. So referrals, yes, referrals. And if that is not an option for you. Then amazing enough Psychology Today is a really good resource because they're a clearinghouse for anybody that joins their platform. And what's published is the person's educational experience and, and ways they're different types of expertise. So you can always start there. Every community has a psychological association that is amazing enough, despite my cynicism, I'm part of the Santa Barbara Psychological Association. And they have a list of all the therapists that are part of the community and all their skills and the thing and the people and the populations they like to work with.

Susan Saperstein 54:28

So then you you just interview somebody, and see how you feel about them.

Dr. Dana Saperstein 54:34

And just because somebody is licensed doesn't mean they're any better or smarter or more capable than you are. And I think that's really important for people to understand that we sort of attach some sort of expertise to someone because of their licensure and all that. And I'm really sorry to say that, just like any other profession, there are a handful of people that are really good. Another handful of people that are or good? And then have you stayed away from? Yeah. And I again, I don't think that's any different than any other profession?

Susan Saperstein 55:09

Well, that kind of brings us to the first question I asked you, which is how do

Dr. Dana Saperstein 55:12

you choose a therapist? Although I was sort of trying to answer that question,

Susan Saperstein 55:15

maybe we've kind of come full circle. Yeah.

Dr. Dana Saperstein 55:18

Because again, there are so many important things that I think a really good therapist should be capable of. And again, if anybody is looking for a therapist in the interviewing somebody, and they won't answer your questions, you're not in the right place. And, you know, I understand that some of those questions might be personal. But don't come and see me if you, you know, if you don't want to ask me about what my experience is, is whatever your as yourself, right? Like, have you worked with people before that have people ask me many times, is what I bring to the table? Something you're familiar with? Right? Can you handle the fact that I've been sexually abused terribly? Is that something that you're comfortable with? And that you've worked with before? Right? And you know, I can answer the question. Yeah. And it's not something that puts me off. It's sad. But I can present your pain, I'm not going to take any of your pain into my body, it's not what I do to help you. And that makes it so much easier for me to be able to help you. Right? Oh, I have no doubt that there are people that have come to see me that didn't like me, and, and, you know, you can't win a popularity award with everybody. And on occasion, when somebody with a personality disorder has come into my office, my manner is very off putting for somebody like that, because I insist that they take responsibility. And you know, I've had people stand up and scream at me, like, you know, don't you understand that my wife is the problem, or whatever it might be, and I just looked at, I'm like, Okay, there's the door, don't let it hit you in the butt on the way out, because I'm not the right person for you. I want to work with people that are sincerely interested in healing and doing whatever it takes to get to a place where they feel like their life is worth living. And not that they can be happy, but they can experience happiness, and cope with a with a despair that is part of everybody's life, because nobody gets a life without pain. And this notion that we should just be walking around happy all the time is absurd.

Susan Saperstein 57:18

That keeps you in business, Dana?

Dr. Dana Saperstein 57:20

Yes, it does.

Susan Saperstein 57:22

Is there anything else you'd like to say before we wrap it up?

Dr. Dana Saperstein 57:24

No, I really appreciate you asking the questions, because it certainly makes it much easier for me to talk about what matters to me. I know you get impatient with me sometimes because I get on my high horse. But I guess that's the nature of all relationships, right?

Susan Saperstein 57:40

We understand each other. Yeah.

Dr. Dana Saperstein 57:43

Well, thank you once again, thank you.

Fear Me Out 57:46

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