

Fear Me Out Podcast

Episode 23

Hosted by Clinical Psychologist - Dana P. Saperstein PhD.

23 Dr. Dana Saperstein - Fear of Not Being Happy

Dr. Dana 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 me out 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, here are your hosts, Kim Fauskee. And Dr. Dana Saperstein.

Kim Fauskee 00:51

All right, fear Me Out audience ready to get real today on this episode? DNA? Have you ever watched the show? Mythbusters?

Dr. Dana 00:58

No, I'm not familiar with that one.

Kim Fauskee 01:01

Well, we're going to destroy some myths today. Fact: The greatest myth that's ever been perpetuated upon mankind. And that is the fear of not being happy. I think we have Harvard professors that tell you that you should always be happy. We have books that tell you, you should always be happy. We have movies that tell you should always be happy. And I'm sure you have a friend or two that says you should always be happy. But are you happy all the time? Not me. Are your clients happy all the time?

Dr. Dana 01:36

You know, Kim, to tell you the truth, I would say maybe a quarter of the people that come to see me come to see me because they think there's something wrong with them that they're not happy.

Kim Fauskee 01:47

So why did this notion gets started, that we should be perpetually happy.

Dr. Dana 01:55

I'm not sure exactly why it got started. But I know why it's been reinforced by the culture that we live in. I think our economy would collapse if people weren't made to feel bad about not being happy all the

time. Because most of us either medicate ourselves or buy stuff we don't need in order to numb that feeling of not being happy all the time.

Kim Fauskee 02:18

If, if I read it correctly, I think the notion of happiness began in the Enlightenment era back in sometime in the 1800s. Were some scholars, some scientists thought that being happy was going to be the key to a life of fulfillment and, and grandiosity and so on and so forth, and chose to ignore the other emotions that that we all humans deal with on a day to day basis. So I'm sure, again, that we look at it as a bad pathology, not being happy not being happy. Yeah, yeah, definitely. And so like you said, your clients that come in to see you professionally, think there's something wrong with them, because they're not happy all the time?

Dr. Dana 03:13

Absolutely. You know, when someone comes to see me, and they say, you know, I really want to do therapy, because I'm not a happy person. My initial response is, I'm really sorry, but I can't help you. And they look at me with, you know, an incredible puzzle expression. Like, what do you mean, you can help me and my response is, well, there is no such thing as being happy. And I think that that's the point that you and I feel really strongly about is, uh, you cannot be a feeling. Happiness is a feeling and you cannot be a feeling. And I can't stress that strongly enough that you can't be hungry. You can't be any feeling you can feel those feelings. But somehow we have this very bizarre notion that you can be the feeling of happiness, and it sets people up to believe that there's something really wrong with their lives, and that they failed in some way. And that, you know, social media portrays people as being happy all the time. But, you know, those five minutes that you're posting that stuff on social media, what about the other 24 and a half or 23 and a half hours that you have to function as a normal person?

Kim Fauskee 04:25

And I don't even know if those five minutes if those people are actually really happy or not. Because who would put in the universe that you aren't happy? Right? I mean, I'm sure there's a few people that post you know, their miserable life and how depressed they are and and whether they're looking for some level of empathy or sympathy out there, but most of us aren't going to do that. Right. We're going to be out there portraying to everyone we know, our best acting job that day. We live our best life.

Dr. Dana 04:54

That's right. And again, the saddest thing that I see is people's feelings that they've failed, because they're not happy. And so my response is, Well, are you fall all the time? Or do you eat on occasion? And you know, again, people who committed that, you know, they're puzzled. And you know, you eat because you feel hungry, or you feel sad, and you're eating for comfort. But generally speaking, how long does food last inside your belly before you need to eat again?

Kim Fauskee 05:24

Just a few hours. That's right.

Dr. Dana 05:26

And you don't seem hugely upset and sad, because you get hungry after a while, and have to eat again. Because you don't have the expectation that you're going to be full. And just walk around as a full person. But we have this stupid idea that we should walk around as a happy person, despite whatever it is that's happening in our lives. And it's it's really ridiculous and extremely damaging to people. And that's why you and I are taking such a strong stand that what we encourage people to consider is that the thing to strive for is neutrality.

Kim Fauskee 06:04

You and I are familiar with a Harvard professor that has a fairly well known book out there that talks about being happy all the time, and he perpetuates. That is something that humans can actually do. Why do you think that somebody that's intellectual and highly educated, doesn't understand that we can't be in emotion?

Dr. Dana 06:29

Well, you know, I don't know that anybody's ever really sort of put the idea out there, that happiness doesn't really exist. Another is a false narrative about how you can live in the world. So if you can come up with a recipe, why are we somebody can be happy all the time, you're gonna sell a billion books, because everybody wants to be happy all the time. I mean, you know, who wouldn't want to walk around feeling great, 24 hours a day?

Kim Fauskee 07:00

That would be ideologically, that would be fantastic.

Dr. Dana 07:04

Yeah. What about experientially,

Kim Fauskee 07:09

that would be great, too, but I don't think it's very sustainable. No, because

Dr. Dana 07:12

you can't be full all the time. You know, we can't be awake all the time. We sleep half of our Well, maybe not half of our lives. But you know, at least a third of our lives. were asleep. Are you happy when you're sleeping? Are you worried that you're not happy when you're asleep? So depends

Kim Fauskee 07:26

on what kind of dreams are involved. That's true.

Dr. Dana 07:31

Oh, man. So here's what I explained to people. It depends on how old they are, but you know, we used to drive cars that had manual transmission. Right. So the transmission, you remember those days, yeah, so the transmission was always in neutral when you started the car. Because if you started the car, with the transmission in reverse, or in Florida, it would just lurch ahead and die. So the cars were built with this notion that you just leave it in neutral. And then depending on what direction you want to go, you know, you engage the gear and push on the clutch and you can go forward or backwards. And

so that position of neutrality, if you think about it, from that perspective, is what I asked people to learn how to strive for on an emotional level. It's not that you feel bad or that it's not that you feel really happy, it's that you're feeling sort of neutral, and content. And that gives you the ability to deal with the difficult things in life from a neutral position and to create as much joy as possible, which will help you feel happy while you're experiencing whatever it is that you're doing that brings you joy.

Kim Fauskee 08:38

Yeah, I call that middle lane syndrome. You know, when I work with clients in business, the middle lane syndrome is not where you want to be. And I equate that to a three lane highway, where you have a slow lane, a middle lane and a fast lane. Right, the slow lane is too cautious a lane that I want to go probably five miles under the speed limit, because I don't want anything to happen to me. The middle lane is for those people who don't want to be seen as the people in the slow lane. And then the fat, the fast lane is that lane where you know, everybody's zooming by you trying to get somewhere in a hurry and get to that finish line, right. And so that's that fine line, you walk in business. But what we're talking about here in trying to achieve emotion neutrality is actually being in that middle lane. So some days, you got to slow it down a little bit for it to work for you live to work for it. And some days you want to speed it up. Right,

Dr. Dana 09:37

right. Yeah, I mean, I again, I think that if you can accept the idea that there's no such thing as happiness, it could come as a huge relief to you because then you don't have to try to be a feeling which is a contradiction just in itself. If you think about it from our perspective, then it gives you the opportunity to face life's difficulties and not feel bad that you're not happy. And it gives you the opportunity to create joyful experiences, which leaves you feeling happy.

Kim Fauskee 10:09

So from that, from that baseline is where we create joy from?

Dr. Dana 10:13

Yes, well, I think that joy and happiness are sort of interchangeable, but you can't feel joy all the time. It's impossible. There's too much in life that is difficult and frightening and, and overwhelming. And so of course, I try to encourage people to strive for creating joyful experiences for themselves. But sometimes it's just a huge relief to know there's nothing wrong with you, that you're not walking around feeling happy all the time.

Kim Fauskee 10:39

So how did you come to this conclusion that about emotional neutrality in your life?

Dr. Dana 10:46

You know, I'm not I wish I could tell you the answer that question did occur to me one day when I was, I think probably when I was watching TV, and I was noticing all the commercials on TV, and most of them have to do with taking drugs for whatever's wrong with you now, or drinking alcohol or finding some way of distracting yourself from how you feel. Because, you know, that's what sells. And then I started thinking about how the media works. And the media is always pumping people with as much

fear as possible, all the time. Because if you're at a certain level of fear, you're going to buy stuff you don't need in order to make yourself feel better, you're going to drink too much, you're going to eat too much, you're going to work too hard, you're going to do all the things that you can not to admit to yourself that you're not in quotes happy person. So it just occurred to me over time that we're being brainwashed into believing that, that there's such a thing as happiness when there isn't because it serves the economy. And it serves politicians and you know, serves the medical community, it serves my professional community. So again, I may dislike it, but it's certainly a huge part of our culture. Everybody

Kim Fauskee 11:59

was happy doing,

Dr. Dana 12:01

we need you. That's right. I could . they could retire happy, kind of a happy guy. Because I haven't, there's no need for me anymore, the waiting room would be empty, the waiting room would be empty.

Kim Fauskee 12:13

You know, we don't, we don't come out of the womb angry. Maybe we do come out of the womb angry because now we're in this cold lighted place where it's not comfortable. But we don't come out with these preconceived notions. So where do you think, in life? Do we get indoctrinated into this idea that we always have to be happy? I mean, does it start? Does it start early on? Is this something adults would begin to realize? Is that something that after we've been through a number of relationships, or we've had something bad happen to us? Where do you think this kind of starts? I only thinking back in my own life? In thinking, okay, so when did I stop thinking, I was happy, and I needed to be happy?

Dr. Dana 13:07

Oh, you know, I think it depends on the culture of the family that you come from. A lot of times, if you're a sensitive person, you come into the world being able to feel everything that's happening around you. And a lot of times, part of what you feel is the pain of the family that you're born into. And that can be threatening to parents, if the parents are not the kind of people that deal with the way that they feel, and are actively working on evolving as people themselves. So usually what happens once you start to become aware of what's happening around you is you get shamed into submission. That you're that either overtly or covertly, you're told that you're making a big deal about things that you shouldn't, and that you should just, you know, pick yourself up by your bootstraps and just, you know, perform, rather than really let yourself feel you feel. So you start to get conditioned to believing that your feelings don't matter. And that you're just supposed to go through life kind of cruising along and being okay, and trying really hard to be whatever it is that your family wants you to be. And again, the more sensitive you are, the more that's sort of in contradiction to how it is that the world feels to you. And it's quite confusing for people. We've talked in other podcasts about the idea that under these circumstances, children often start to create a false self based on what the family wants of them, because there's nothing that is more frightening to a kid than feeling abandoned by the family, especially emotionally. So you just bend yourself into the shape of a pretzel and start acting a certain way because you want to feel safe and included in the family. The problem is that you can't trust the love that's coming your way if it's based on false pretenses. So people pretend like they're happy, they pretend like everything's

okay and and that they don't notice you know, the problems that are happening around them and especially within their family and And oftentimes, you know, later on in life leads to depression and anxiety and feelings of an of being, you know, very much not at ease at all, because you've lost yourself in a certain way. And you just have to pretend like you're happy all the time. So it depends, it really does depend on your family and my family, the concept of happiness was not even on the, on the radar, in my family, my mom was the person that set the tone. And that tone was either super anxious, or in a panic. Because that was her connection to the world was either being really, really anxious or in a panic. So happiness was not part of that equation. But um, again, you know, coming from a Jewish family, that's not unusual that there's a lot of anxiety because, you know, historically, it's not, it's a culture that suffered a great deal of the hands of others. So, you know, happiness is important, but it's not as important as, you know, functioning and being safe.

Kim Fauskee 16:03

How does fear play a role in not being happy?

Dr. Dana 16:07

Well, what I see is that, you know, people feel scared that there's something wrong with them, because they're not walking around feeling happy all the time. Because, either because they're being shamed by the people around them, or they are being shamed by the culture around them, or the media, or whatever it might be. And then if you go to the Self Help section, in any bookstore, you're gonna find 100 books on how to be happy, and what's wrong with you that you're not happy and that you know that everyone's got a secret formula that they put out that

Kim Fauskee 16:36

five key ways to be happy in your life. That's right.

Dr. Dana 16:39

You know, whatever, whatever they are. I haven't read any of them. Because I don't appreciate that notion. But but you know, who of all of us don't engage in magical thinking?

Kim Fauskee 16:53

We do. You're right. I mean, we definitely have this curated opinion in our head of how life is supposed to be how we're supposed to be. And you know, we're looking for that simple fix, right? I think, again, like he talked about, there's 100 books, or more out there on how to be happy and the keys to being happy there. There is no magical solution, and there is no key to doing it. Right?

Dr. Dana 17:20

Well, that fellow that you're mentioning previously, who wrote the latest bestseller unhappiness,

Kim Fauskee 17:26

Arthur Brooks, by the way, well, I

Dr. Dana 17:28

sent him a note, he did not respond. And I sent him the note saying, you know, this has it ever occurred to you that you're supporting a false notion, and that you could really help people if you help them understand that. That's, you know, creating experiences that give you joy. That's really, really important. But being happy is a complete false belief system that just creates misery. And if world experts tell you that there's something wrong with you that you're not happy, it's quite confusing, and very demoralizing. And it leaves most of us who are not happy all the time wondering what's wrong with us.

Kim Fauskee 18:05

We're talking about, you know, emotional neutrality and happiness and other emotions. Those are feelings, right. So people may be listening, that are thinking, wow, emotional neutrality. I never thought of it that way. What's that feel? Like? What's emotional neutrality feel like?

Dr. Dana 18:24

Well, what it feels like to me is that I'm okay. People ask me all the time. How are you today? And I say, okay, and I really am feeling okay, a lot of the time because I'm ready for whatever the moment is going to bring to me and I don't feel scared that I'm just okay. Because to me, it's not negative to be okay. I will tell you that sometimes people look at me, like they're puzzled. Because when they ask me how I'm doing, they say, Well, I'm great, everything's wonderful. You know, I just say I'm okay. I don't say it. With a tone of misery, I just say it like it is, which is I'm in neutral right now waiting to see what's going to happen at any moment. So I can rise to that occasion of finding some joy because I love feeling joyful. I think it's wonderful. And I also appreciate the fact that if you have a life without pain, you're either dead, or in complete denial, because nobody has a life without pain. I've never been a single person who hasn't had struggles and difficulties and losses and all kinds of all kinds. And what I've noticed more than anything, Kim is that how you feel about yourself deep down inside determines how much joy you're going to let yourself have, anyway. And what I mean by that is, I can't tell you how many people that I've, as an example, I used to go to Mexico surfing all the time with a group of about 1516 people. And what I noticed is that, you know, we're all friends and we had some of the most ecstatic, joyful experiences I've ever had. Because the place that we stayed at was beyond description. In terms of how wonderful it was, a perfect house with a cook that, you know, makes gourmet meals and an infinity pool looking out over a surf break, that is to die for. And because it's in Mexico, they own the surf breaks. So you can't even surf there unless you're staying at the house. So, you know, for anybody who's a surfer out there, being able to surf with your friends, and some of the best waves in the world is an incredibly joyful experience. And what I noticed more than more than ever, was that at the end of a surf session, could be as long as five hours, my body's completely filled with endorphins. And I feel like I'm on another planet because it feels so good. And then get out of the water sit in the infinity pool, looking out over the surf break. And I would say that almost everyone, the first thing they did when they got on the water was have a beer. And it was stunning to me. Because alcohol is a way that people celebrate, and they were celebrating a good surfer out there. But on the physiological level, what alcohol does, it's a depressant. Even though you might feel a little bit of elation, it really depresses your central nervous system, when I would think to myself, What are you guys doing? If I drank right now, these chemicals that I just spent five hours creating, that's fine, my body would just diminish and go away. Why would you want to tamper with this, it feels so wonderful. But I think that more often than not, it scared people to feel that good.

Kim Fauskee 21:26

Or they want to sabotage the joy.

Dr. Dana 21:29

Yeah, and it wasn't a conscious thing. By the way, none of these people you know, have alcohol problems. It's not like, you know, like they were alcoholics and they had to drink. It's just that most people have a tendency to want to keep things neutral, even though they don't even know that that's what they're doing. So they were diminishing their joy and their feelings of what we will call happiness. To get back to neutrality, get back to neutrality, even though you're not supposed to be neutral, you're supposed to be happy all the time. And it was very confusing to me. I never said anything to anybody, because I just, you know, it wasn't, that's not the place for it. But I have watched people all the time and I noticed that, um, you know, you win a sporting event or you have some amazingly wonderful experience. And the first thing you want to do is diminish the joy and diminish the excitement by having something to drink or eating too much, or whatever it might be, to bring yourself back to a state of numbness and kind of you know, and robbing yourself of joy.

Kim Fauskee 22:30

There's a statement or a meme out there. It says it's, it's okay to be okay. And I want to go back to something you said earlier of, of the acknowledgement of being okay. Because when somebody asks how you're doing, and you say, okay, to me, that's an automatic cop out. That's not you're you're not being vulnerable. You're not being transparent. It's like that's the standard answer, right? It's like when my kids say, Sure. Well, that's half Yes. And half now. Right? And so, being okay, seems that to me to be the same answer, right. So, you know, nobody wants to hear I'm shitty, or I feel horrible, right? Because they're like, Ooh, okay, that ends the conversation right away, right? And then if you say, I'm fantastic, or I'm phenomenal, they think bullshit. Right? Right. But so you can't win. You can't win by saying I'm a phenom. You can't win by saying I'm okay. And you can't win by saying I feel like shit. Right? So because we're so conditioned, we're so conditioned. in these answers. We don't even know where we stand in life. Or we're supposed to stand in life anymore.

Dr. Dana 23:36

So am I supposed to change it from okay, that I'm neutral? Well, I

Kim Fauskee 23:40

don't even know. I don't know. I don't know what the I don't know what the answer is to be. I mean, be. Again, I hate to sound judgey here, but it's like, you know, you hear people? You know, I have a friend that says, Every time you ask, it's so good. It's like, well, now you can't be so good. 100% of the time, right? Yeah, you know, but you, you know, we were conditioned to be positive or positive about ourselves and feeling good about ourselves. And, and we just don't want to give a standard answer. We certainly don't want to give the answer that we're not feeling okay about ourselves. And I just think that people need to be a little bit more transparent. And actually, you know, say how you feel,

Dr. Dana 24:25

what would you feel? I mean, how would you react if somebody that you cared about and you said, Hey, how are you doing? Really shitty? I mean,

Kim Fauskee 24:32

I actually Well, I would be fine. I'm fine with that. Because I want my friends and acquaintances to actually be truthful with me. And if there's something bothering them, they should say that, not that I'm going to jump in and get all up in their business about it, but I would say, God, I'm sorry to hear that. there's anything I can do for you let me know. Right? But I'd rather have somebody tell me that. Then a 1000s of I'm so good. I'm phenomenal. I'm fantastic, right? Because we just we're living. And again, going back to social media, right? I mean, you could sit there right now and thumb through for the people that are listening. I'm sure the majority of you have social media and you can thumb through all the social media. And it's everybody living their best life. It's not realistic. You know, social media is a fantasy, right? And yeah, granted, you can put pictures of your vacation and sure you're seeking joy and stuff like that, but you know, it's not happening every day of your life there. And, again, like we started this podcast, and like you've eloquently explained, we got to stop living this lie, that happiness is something that is the zenith that we need to achieve. Right? You know, being okay is okay.

Dr. Dana 26:01

Well, I could say I'm cruising in neutral.

Kim Fauskee 26:04

You are one of the things that I want you to talk about a little bit, because I've always considered you to be a hedonist. And don't take that from a sexual standpoint, but a hedonistic lifestyle, right? That you've been somebody that in the 25 plus years that I've known, you has always seek that joy in your life and have done a really good job of achieving that. So can you talk a little bit about leading a hedonistic life?

Dr. Dana 26:34

Well, I call myself a responsible hedonist, because I take I take care of business first sounds

Kim Fauskee 26:39

like a responsible nudist or something like that. I'm not doing it out in public.

Dr. Dana 26:43

That's right. When I'm naked, I always put sunscreen on so I don't do it myself. That's what it sounds like. Well, you know, this, I came up with this notion when I was in my 20s. And I was working in a psychiatric ward and the Medical Director of the ward was a really, really, really uptight, really sort of tight ass person. And, and she was not an advocate of joking around and having fun. And when I'm around people, I really like to joke around with people.

Kim Fauskee 27:14

Work, works work, okay. workboat,

Dr. Dana 27:17

I would see I would do my job. I did everything that was required of me. I was being facetious. But I was also a smartass, and would make jokes a lot because I like making people laugh. And it was fun. Plus, when you're working in a really super serious environment, sometimes it takes a bit of a tension away when you joke around. So we were sitting in a staff meeting. And, you know, I was putzing around having a good time making people laugh. And all of a sudden, the Medical Director looked at me with scorn and disdain. And you said to me, Oh, my God, you're such a hedonist. And I thought to myself, Wow, I didn't think she ever noticed.

Kim Fauskee 27:53

I got called sophomore at work once, right? Which is by worse than me.

Dr. Dana 27:57

So I started laughing. And I said to her, Oh, my God, it's like one of the nicest things anybody's ever said to me. And, you know, after watching sphincter locked down, she didn't really say anything, but steam was pouring out of her ears. And I thought to myself, you know, she's actually really she's right. I try as hard as I can to have fun, but also be super responsible at the same time. So in the course of my career, I always set aside time for surfing, because that was my main source of joy, besides, you know, being with my family and hanging out. So, you know, I used to take every Wednesday morning often, and meet with my friends. Luckily, they had Wednesday morning off all the way from high school through, you know, our 50s and I will say that those are some of the most joyful experiences in my life.

Kim Fauskee 28:47

So how did you get there, though? I mean, it's, it's probably not something that you had an epiphany one day and said that I'm going to acquiesce from living this kind of life to living this kind of life now of being a responsible hedonist. I mean, this must be something that you kind of grew up with and went with in your adult life. I imagine

Dr. Dana 29:08

as uptight as my father was about making a living and all that stuff. He had a really good sense of humor. So he taught me to joke around because in his idea about life, it's okay to joke with people and tease people and have a laugh with them. And that just came really easily to me because I'm a smartass by nature. So I always looked at adults when I was a kid and thought to myself, Why would anybody want to be one of those? Why would anybody want to be an adult? It just seems so serious and you know, you got to give up the fun of being a kid. Not that being a kid is always a ton of fun, but still, I just thought adulthood is totally overrated. So I chose a career where I could be in business for myself and make my own hours and again, I never missed a mortgage payment. I always made sure my family had a roof over their head and all the food they need. did, I actually started a second business in order to generate extra income, so I could buy surfboards and take my family on nice vacations and go out to really nice dinners. So it's not as though I didn't, you know, take care of business. But I also spent as much time surfing and playing as I possibly could, because I just thought, you know, why would you want to live a life without having fun? It just seems so silly. Like, what's the point of working your ass off, if you don't really enjoy yourself. Plus, I'm really lucky that I've always really enjoyed my career. So I'm not somebody who walked up the stairs to my office thinking, Oh, fuck, I can't I hate going to work. And, you know, being miserable, I always look forward to it, because the

people that I see, and the only people that I will see are people who I really like. So I would look forward to seeing the people that came to see me. And if it was somebody that, you know, I didn't really like very much in the first meeting, I would say, you know, I'm not really the right person to work with you. I don't want to hurt the person's feelings. But, you know, if you can't feel joy in what you're doing, even though being a therapist is a really serious business, especially because, you know, I specialize in trauma. And when the amount of pain that comes in my life is more than anybody possibly could ever imagine. I still can approach it with a feeling of joy, because I look at it as a compliment that people feel safe enough to expose the depth of their vulnerability with me. So you know, try to put a positive spin on it. Even though it's very serious business, and I do occasionally joke around with people that come to see me because, you know, it cuts down a bit on the tension. Plus, I'm just that kind of a person.

Kim Fauskee 31:46

If they have comedy, traffic school, or they have comedy therapy as well.

Dr. Dana 31:50

You know, there used to be a therapist, actually, in Santa Barbara that did laugh therapy.

Kim Fauskee 31:55

I didn't mean to demean therapy at that point, but it just seemed kind of appropriate. And, you know, I saw the only reason I brought it up. I saw as a city bus was going by today, there was somebody advertising for eco therapy, if you if you're not getting through, or you've had enough of talk therapy, try eco therapy, what's that? I have no idea. Okay, but I need to, I need to look it up. So obviously, there are multiple kinds of therapy out there. But why if we're all a combination of a mixed bag of emotions on a daily basis, why don't most of us, and I'm probably being truthful and saying most of us, including myself, at various periods of my life. I'm fearful of seeking out joy.

Dr. Dana 32:51

Well, I think it's not necessarily that we're fearful of seeking out, I think it's so we don't feel like we deserve it. Deep down inside, when you're made to feel ashamed of yourself and bad about yourself, and people take advantage of you and in your situation abuse you. How does a little kid believe they deserve anything good under those circumstances, because as children, we always blame ourselves for whatever is happening to us and not happening for us. So I think that again, what right do you have to feel joyful when you've been so mistreated and made to feel so ashamed of yourself?

Kim Fauskee 33:28

Yeah, I mean, it. I agree that that voice and that feeling was definitely inside of me. I think there became a demarcation point at some point in my life, I'm thinking Why Why am I doing this? Why am I holding myself back, it's not doing me any favors. It's just compounding things making it worse. And so I probably did that. And instead of going to the middle, I probably went all the way to the other side and started you know, living life flying by the seat of my pants and doing whatever I wanted whenever I wanted with whoever I wanted at that time and and figured out eventually and kind of moved the dial back to the middle there and probably like you had said about responsible hedonism and I don't look at my life is as hedonism but, you know, I didn't I grew up responsible and integrity and honesty and all those things are a big part of me and a big part of how I live my life and how I expect my friends to live

their life and so on and so forth. So but, you know, I didn't want to block myself from seeking joy ever again in my life. And so, you know, I set my life up to where my schedule allows me a little bit of that of what I love to do every day. Right? And that doesn't mean, that doesn't mean I don't do it while I'm angry, or while I'm sad or feeling some grief. But I do stuff every day that that makes me happy.

Dr. Dana 35:12

You know, can the other thing that occurs to me while you're talking to this, we have also been conditioned to believe that if you're sad, or you know, not, you're not feeling 100% positive, that there's something wrong with that, like, they're like, sadness is a negative emotion in most, in most circles. And I don't feel like sadness is a negative emotion, some of the most amazing experiences I've ever had, is crying uncontrollably. And feeling that intense grief, and allow my body to release just the sadness of some of the things that I've been through and how to, you know, to deal with I remember, a couple of years ago, I had a stroke. And it really, really scared me, it was a very, it was such an awful experience, I thought for sure I was going to die. And eventually after being in the emergency room, and, you know, given the medicine they gave me that saved my life and kind of brought me back, I was in ICU, and I was laying in my bed by myself, and I just started sobbing uncontrollably. And it felt so relieving to get that sort of terror out of my body. And that feeling like, you know, I could have never seen my family again, or any of that stuff. And it didn't, it didn't scare me that I was crying, it actually felt really good to get that out of my system, so that I could let my body start to heal, because, um, it was a really traumatic experience. And yeah, who wants to ever have a stroke, and I'm not saying I'm happy about any of it, but just to be able to feel the relief of expressing the sadness was not a negative thing was actually quite positive for me.

Kim Fauskee 36:54

We've talked about this before on the podcast, but I think catharsis is an important point. Absolutely. You know, sitting down and actually feeling those emotions of sadness, that intense sadness, the grief, the anger. If we've all bottle it up, I don't think I have to tell our audience what happens to you know, when either you compartmentalize or you stick it away in your subconscious or whatever, it's not going to leave.

Dr. Dana 37:23

It's a recipe for depression and anxiety, and physical problems.

Kim Fauskee 37:28

So why so? Why aren't we taught? I guess we are because it's a natural body Lee functions with these emotions, and to actually be cathartic and get that energy out of us. So where do we get taught not to do that?

Dr. Dana 37:46

I you know, nowadays, it starts in infancy. You know, if you look at how babies live in the world, newborn infants, especially, have no inhibition at all. Most of the time, whatever their instinctual feelings are, they express in the form, usually of crying or screaming or, you know, or showing who's ever taken care of them. Usually the mom and the dad, that they're hungry, or they're tired, or they're, you know, they smile, and they drool and, and you know, they express themselves very, very freely. But now

there's this new notion of teaching your infants how to be independent. And you there's this notion that you got to, I think it's called sleep training, or some I'm really sorry to whoever invented the term, but

Kim Fauskee 38:37

it's, oh, that that's the one that they let the child cried out at night.

Dr. Dana 38:41

Yes. I can't even tell you how disturbing that concept is to me, because when you're an infant, you are not capable of soothing yourself, it is physiologically impossible. First of all, you aren't even fully developed until about 18 months to two years. So this idea that you should be able to comfort yourself when you don't have one is really crazy. So all it does is teach babies how to disconnect from themselves in order to fall asleep. I don't know about you, but that idea of disconnection from how you feel, in order to go to sleep, is so frightening to me. And awful, but you know, tell that to a pediatrician who wants to help parents that are tired and, and you know, cranky and again, if you tell people that it's healthy to need each other, you're just encouraging in our culture weakness, and you know, and making people weak and I just have a lot of trouble with that

Kim Fauskee 39:41

these people need to watch National Geographic and watch the evolution of other mammals. Well, that's because that doesn't that doesn't happen with other mammals. Well, because

Dr. Dana 39:50

By definition, we are prey animals. We have very short fingernails and don't have any things and so it The only way to survive as a prey animal is in concert with other animals. There is no such thing as a, as a prey animal that lives all by him or herself. They live in groups, you know, when there's monkeys asleep, or sleeping all over each other. And they don't think that it's shameful that they need each other. And the only ones that are excluded from the group are the ones that are really sick and on the way to dying. And the adolescent males, which everybody knows are a pain in the ass, or whatever culture they might, or whatever kind of animal they might be. So you know, the adolescent males get shunned, because the big guys don't want them, you know, making more baby monkeys until they're big and strong enough to dominate. But generally speaking, they all live all over each other, because it's not likely that you're gonna get consumed or for you're in a group. So, um, you know, I make a chart for this, but I think the healthiest way for babies to live is in family bed. Right? I mean, your young kids see you sleeping with your partner, if you have one. And you don't have any shame about sleeping with your wife or your husband, and your kid wants in on the action. And you tell them that it makes them weak because they know they should be strong enough to take care of themselves. If you had a choice between sleeping with somebody that you love or sleeping alone, what choice would you make?

Kim Fauskee 41:16

Oh, well, that's obvious. To somebody you love, right? And, of course,

Dr. Dana 41:20

now I get that it's not always comfortable, you know, sleeping with your little kids, I can't tell you how many times I got kicked in the nuts when my kids were

Kim Fauskee 41:28

only my 15 year old Ashley was sleeping next to me last night.

Dr. Dana 41:32

Well, there you go. Because it's natural and normal. If you're feeling vulnerable to want to feel the connection to the people that you love. It's just completely healthy and normal. And we shame people for for that. And then we tell them they should just be happy for no reason. Well, I

Kim Fauskee 41:47

I remember my youngest child is now 15. But I still remember even when my oldest child, I think the co sleeping or letting them cry it out on their own was a big topic back there. Yes, you know, 30 years ago and up to 15 years ago. And now I believe, again, I haven't had a kid in 15 years. But I believe the pendulum has kind of gone the other way to where there's more promotion of co-sleeping arrangements. And then there's the huge naysayers about that as well.

Dr. Dana 42:20

You know, this young high school aged kid came to see me about 10 years ago. And for whatever reason, he was throwing up on the way to school every day. And his parents were quite worried about him because you know, he's losing weight, and he was anxious and uncomfortable. And I sat down with his kid and was talking to him a bit about his life. And he told me that when he was a little kid, like three, four years old, he couldn't sleep easily by himself, he would wake up really scared. And he would come into his parents bedroom and sort of stand at the foot of their bed hoping to get invited into the bed. Because he was so scared feeling alone. And his father was really angry with him for not being a man. And so you know, he would yell and scream at his kid and take them back to bed and you know, tell him not to leave the room. So eventually, what the kid figured out is that his sister who was a couple years older than him, would welcome them. And so they, you know, they they slept together in a really sweet way. And he was comforted for a long time till the dad found out what he was doing. And the dad came into the room and you know, in the middle of the night and picked them up and threw him in his bedroom and took off his belt and beat the shit out of them. And said to him, if you ever do it again, this you know, this beating is going to be minor compared to what you know, lies ahead. So the dad took off his belt, hung it on an end, hung it on a nail on the inside of the door and shut the door, so that the kid would stare at the belt every night, knowing what would happen to him if he left his bed. And so eventually, he learned as time went by, to just disconnect from himself and fall asleep. But by the time he became a teenager, he was so traumatized by those experiences as a kid, that he actually became a heroin addict. And the reason that he was throwing up every day is because heroin makes you throw up. And finally, you know, we were able to figure out what the real problem was that you know, he had post traumatic stress leftover from being beat up for needing comfort,

Kim Fauskee 44:17

isn't isn't isn't Bedwetting, kind of in that same category.

Dr. Dana 44:21

Sometimes it's an indication that somebody's pretty anxious. As another example, I met a woman who was probably in her 40s. At the time I met her and she was having trouble in her relationship with her husband. He was a Vietnam veteran who probably experienced, you know, some of the worst that a person could ever experience. And he came home with the philosophy that you don't talk about anything that's negative, and you smile all the time. And all you do, all you're supposed to do is be happy and focus on the goodness that life has to offer. So you know, he was a nice fellow and they had a okay marriage For a while, but you know, people have stuff in life that they need to deal with. And anytime that this woman brought up anything negative, you know, he would tell her that she was there, there was something wrong with her and that she should just focus on the, happy things in life and not focus on the negative and everything would be fine. And it got to the point where she just couldn't take it anymore. And that the relationship wasn't viable after a certain point in time, because she, no matter how hard she tried, couldn't be okay all the time. You couldn't be happy all the time. Because there's stuff in life you got to deal with. And the sad thing is that, you know, they didn't, they eventually got a divorce because he absolutely refused to budge from his position of Mr. Happy. And, you know, it was it was okay for her because she was able to kind of reconnect with herself. But it was a really sad thing for both of them because they loved each other, but he would not budge from that position.

Kim Fauskee 45:57

So this is 2022. And at some point in the last handful of years, the world has tilt its axis. And it seems like we live in these unparalleled times where negativity is really put out in the forefront, whether that's in war, whether that's in politics, whether that's in the economy. So people were probably sitting there thinking, Okay, I understand this whole emotional neutrality thing. I understand social media is what it is. I'm looking for more joy and fulfillment in my life. And the question is, do I have to block out all the external forces to be able to get that? Or how do I filter? If I can control what I can control internally? How do I filter out those external forces that that may block me from achieving that neutral? emotional state? If that makes sense?

Dr. Dana 47:04

It makes great sense. I think that to be a bit more discriminating would really help. Because if you are watching something on TV as an example, on the news, and you notice that all it is is one negative, frightening story after another, yeah, they want you buy something. Yeah, that's it doesn't matter what your politics are. Because whether you're watching Fox News, or CNN, it's all the same negativity, negativity, negativity, either way, right? It's all designed to make you feel afraid. And then you're gonna go buy the stuff you don't need and indulge in all kinds of other behaviors that are unhealthy for you, because you got to deal with the fear in one way or the other. And if you don't deal with it directly, you're going to deal with it by medicating yourself in some fashion. So what I ask people to consider is that, you know, it's important to know what's happening in the world. But you don't have to be the net. You don't have to spend hours on the end of it all consuming, right. And to recognize that there's actually a lot of really good stuff that's happening in the world at the same time, but good stuff doesn't sell. I've,

Kim Fauskee 48:18

which is interesting, because we're just having this conversation on, everybody has to be happy, the fear of not being happy, and you just sell it, he doesn't sell well, he doesn't sell on the media, right, but it sells books.

Dr. Dana 48:28

Well, he may sell books. But it sells books only because people are not happy. And they think there's something wrong with them, because they should be happy.

Kim Fauskee 48:37

It's a contradiction in 30. So again,

Dr. Dana 48:42

I you know, I'm not saying put your head in the sand and don't pay attention to what's happening around you. But don't overdo it and make sure that whatever sources of information that you're getting, are not being juiced up, in order to create a feeling that is really unhealthy for you, because it doesn't do anything, to watch all this stuff. And make yourself feel really bad. I spent a lot of time during the day listening to stand up comedy, because I really liked to laugh. And even though some of it's not as respectful as it could be, it makes me laugh really hard. Post, there are a couple of websites that only produce the good things that are happening in the world. So I subscribe to these sites. And they send me all this amazing scientific and other types of information that nobody hears about, because it's not on the news. And it's certainly not in the paper or any you know, or on social media all about the amazing things that people do for each other, and in the name of science in order to try to solve a lot of the really serious problems that we have. And I think if people were willing to spend way more time looking at the inspirational things that their fellow humans are doing, in addition maybe to the tragic things that we do to each other, that balance would sure take a lot of the anxiety out of our lives.

Kim Fauskee 50:02

Yeah, it surely seems like you know, the negative in the contradiction in the bad pathologist is certainly being put out in the forefront now, in that living life is becoming on a day to day basis becoming more difficult. If you pay attention to the external world and not keep your eyes on your own paper and do what makes you happy, yeah, there. Is there. Is there any, maybe we've broached this over the last 50 minutes. But is there a commonality that you see? Because, again, most of the clients that you see, this is a problem for them? Is there a commonality that you see that kind of, they can get over that hump, and start getting some joy into their life on a consistent basis? Or is it more of an individual? So,

Dr. Dana 51:00

I mean, I have a global philosophy that I sort of bring to my professional practice, which is I try not to pathologize people. And most people come to see me expecting me to agree with him, as we've talked about before, that there's something wrong with them. And that I'm supposed to give you a diagnosis, and I'm supposed to come up with a treatment plan. And then I'm supposed to implement that treatment plan to cure what ails you,

Kim Fauskee 51:25

which is interesting, because that for most people, that's like a sigh of relief, I finally finally got the diagnosis I was looking for. Right, right. There is something wrong me thank God.

Dr. Dana 51:34

Yeah. So again, my idea is not all your symptoms, but a lot of the symptoms that people have, psychologically, are a way of expressing a deeper wound inside of the person. So you know, ask people to recognize it, yeah, it doesn't feel good to be anxious, I get that it certainly doesn't feel good to be depressed or, you know, have compulsive behaviors or whatever, whatever it is that that you have sort of gravitated toward, because there was nothing else available to help you feel better. Once a person comes to understand that most of our suffering has been at the hands of the people that brought us into the world or other people in the world. And that it's really what happens to you and what didn't happen for you and sometimes equal measure that's created your suffering. And it's not that I'm encouraging people to see themselves as being victims, but to recognize that victimization is something that leads toward post traumatic stress and other forms of suffering. And that if you can recognize that, that it's not really you, that's the problem. It's dealing with what happened to you. And again, what didn't happen for you, being you know, deprived is as equally damaging as being abused. And you start to heal that stuff. There's a natural feeling of relief and, and a greater capacity to experience joy once you go through that process. Now, as you know, from your experience, and I know from mine, it's not the easiest thing in the world to do takes a lot of courage, you have to be willing to cry, you got to be willing to deal with the anger and the fear and all the different emotions that got bottled up inside of you from the time you're a little kid. But once you release that stuff, it really frees you up to create way more joy in your life.

Kim Fauskee 53:22

Yeah, you're right, we've talked about it, you know, numerous times in different subjects on the podcast about, you know, peeling off multiple layers of the onion. And it's not easy, it is painful. But again, going back to the catharsis theory, it's necessary to get to the point of this emotional neutrality, to be able to be able to seek joy and to live a more fulfilled life. I don't know how to break it down in more simple terms to our audience, or to people that are interested in listening, but, but again, it's going to sound like I'm beating a dead horse here. But I know a lot of people that think they're very evolved, and that they're, you know, in the psychological forefront of their lives. And I have a different opinion about that. Right? Because I think that they've done just the tip of the work, right? And they think that that's enough for them. And again, maybe it's enough for them to be able to get to the next place in life that they want to get. But it's just it's not that easy. But I don't also want to scare people away from doing the exercise because everything that we talked about on this podcast, and all the guests that we've talked about, or have taught on this podcast, you have to do the work.

Dr. Dana 54:51

I mean, yeah, you're preaching to the choir now. So

Kim Fauskee 54:54

yeah, and again, you know, I don't want to scare the waves of people in my pocket. as to say, you know, I'm sorry that willpower doesn't work. And I'm sorry that unicorns in the universe don't work. And if I had magic fairy dust, I give it to you all, but I don't. I mean, I've had that, you know, that ideology in

my head. And at one point in my life, because we're all looking for the quick cure, we're all looking for the skipping some steps to get to the top, right, because for whatever reason that that we owe, think there's a finish line to whatever we're doing in our life that we don't look at life is a journey. Right? That, again, some of the chapters are going to be shorter, some of the chapters are going to be longer, some of the chapters are going to be happy, some of the chapters are going to be incredibly sad, but we're all on this journey. We're all writing our own book here. And, you know, again, if you know I can sum up whatever episode this is going to be 24 Is it you have to do the work and you have to be willing to do the work, and you got to have an accountability partner in your life, I'm telling you, I'm promising you is going to look a lot different going forward.

Dr. Dana 56:17

You know, Kim, you're absolutely right about that. And the other thing I just wanted to reinforce and I know we've already said it 800 times here today, if you can leave the notion that there's such a thing as happiness, it can bring you an enormous amount of relief. Because then you're not going to feel like there's something wrong with you

Kim Fauskee 56:34

don't believe in happiness. You'll be okay.

Dr. Dana 56:37

Yeah, I don't believe in that. Well don't believe in happiness as a state of being look at it as a feeling that you can create for yourself isn't Lance gonna disagree? Right? Well, you know, the Magic Kingdom has a base for the happiest place on earth. Well, I don't know if you've ever looked at the videos of what's underneath Disneyland. It's not the happiest place on earth. It's like any other place. Right? There's sewers, and

Kim Fauskee 56:59

all kinds of I didn't mean to digress. Sorry, go ahead.

Dr. Dana 57:02

So, you know, again, if you can recognize that there's nothing wrong with you, either, you're not walking around happy all the time. And then, that neutrality gives you the strength to face the difficult parts of life, and the ability to create joy much more easily.

Kim Fauskee 57:21

So I want to apologize to our listeners, that people that tuned in that, that I just busted the myth of, or I shouldn't say I did, we did busted the myth that happiness was an achievable thing thing in your life. Before we end this hour's discussion, I do want to talk about, you know, again, trusting your faith and intuition. Right. And I want you to talk about a little bit about that, in terms of achieving the emotional neutrality, because again, you know, not only our book, but the podcast and everything that we talk about, on this podcast really comes back to Faith and intuition and and how that's the best navigator in your life.

Dr. Dana 58:05

You know, Kim, I will tell you that when I discovered neutrality as a space to be in from an intuitive perspective, it just felt really, really good. To me, it took so much. It brought me so much relief, that there wasn't something wrong with me that I didn't walk around, you know, as Mr. Happy and that it gave me permission, you know, to experience both the ups and downs of life, and not feel like there was something wrong with me that, that I wasn't happy all the time. So you're right. It was a very strong intuitive feeling.

Kim Fauskee 58:39

Wasn't there something back in the 70s? Wasn't there actually a Mr. Happy or Mr. Happy? Yes, yes. And then there were the keychains with a happy face and all those on that. I mean, I'm sure they didn't take it into this context. But you know, again, going back to simpler times, where we didn't overthink everything.

Dr. Dana 58:58

Well, they invented pet rocks at that time.

Kim Fauskee 59:02

All right, folks, we're going to end this, this scintillating discussion on the fear of not achieving happiness. And trust me, there's more myths in psychology that we're going to talk about and we're going to have a different opinion on so stay tuned. Thanks, Dana.

Fear Me Out 59:20

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