

Fear Me Out Podcast

Episode 33

Hosted by Clinical Psychologist - Dana P. Saperstein PhD.

Dr. Dana Saperstein – Emotion & Healthy Dependency

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 00:52

So Dana, I think he's you know, dependency has scared the shit out of me my entire life. Think of the people that have listened to this podcast probably fully understand that I probably have lived my life not counting on other people. And it's kind of been later on in life that I've had to fully embrace receiving, and fully embrace that if I'm going to be in a healthy relationship, I'm going to have to understand what healthy dependency is. So I think, to start this podcast is for you to give us an interpretation on dependency, and probably the healthy side of it and the unhealthy side of dependency.

Dr. Dana 01:40

Yeah, you know, Kim, I think that the concept of dependency is looked at very much like the concept of fear that we think that fear is the problem. And you and I have talked about the idea that fear is not the problem, it's how you deal with it. Same thing is true with dependency. dependency is not the issue, it's how we choose to deal with our needs, determines the outcome. And like most things, we throw the baby out with the bathwater, that if being dependent means being hurt, and will just not be dependent, and that'll solve all of our problems. There is an inherent fallacy and looking at things that way, because as human beings, in my opinion, we are the most dependent species on the face of the earth. If you look at our birth as an example, how long do we rely on our mothers, fathers or whoever takes care of us before we're actually capable of taking care of ourselves? At least a decade, probably longer than that,

Kim Fauskee 02:36

I was gonna say some of us are much longer than others exactly, are shorter than others.

Dr. Dana 02:39

But I mean, if you look at human beings, they do not function as human beings if they are left without caretakers. Prior to maybe 1213 years old. If you look at orphans, in places like Brazil, as an example, where there is no government support for kids that are abandoned, those kids stay alive by forming groups, and they rove like animals. And they do whatever they need to do to survive, but they don't develop a conscience. And they live pretty much like animals for their whole lives. That doesn't mean that they're not dependent. They depend on each other for their survival, but they don't ever grow up to be relatively healthy people, because they've never been able to feel a sense of security, and never been able to feel dependent on someone to take care of them. So they have to take care of themselves. I think that all of us have to struggle in some ways with our needs to feel connected to other people, and to find a way to do that safely. If you think about the fact that you're born helpless, then pretty much your parents determine how you come to terms with the concept of dependency. If your parents are capable of taking proper care of you, and they love you, and they provide you with a sense of security, and they don't require you to be anything other than who and what you are, then pretty much you're going to be comfortable being dependent on the people that you feel a connection to. The problem is that that rarely happens. And so we naturally develop this notion that if I just don't depend on anybody, then I'll be safe and nobody will hurt me.

Kim Fauskee 04:24

So why does that not naturally happen in humans? Because if you look at other mammals and other species out there, they're definitely connected to their mothers, their fathers, whoever the primary caregiver is for that mammal, and they survive really well. They evolve and get turned on to their own on their own. But we as humans, that's not the typical case.

Dr. Dana 04:51

Well, I think it has to do with how developed your cortex is. Animals rely mostly on instinct in their relationship to the world. And I think that the parents of baby animals rely on their instincts to take care of their young and help them survive. And there's no shaming process that comes into the picture, there's no requirements for their babies to be anything other than what they are. And so they get to develop in a much more natural way. Now, I will say that most animals don't live as long as human beings do, maybe that has something to do with it. But also, the fact that you are that you have a direct, fully developed cortex means that you can put yourself in another person's shoes. And it can, you know, revolve around the concept of empathy, and all kinds of other feelings, so they don't really believe that animals have. So it's a bit more complicated with us human beings, in that we're helpless for a really long period of time, we're usually I was gonna say, We think too much. Yes, we think too much. We're usually shamed and made to feel bad about our needs, for love, and, and connection, unless we are absolutely willing to be our parents, mini me. I'm not trying to say the parents do this on purpose, some do most don't. Because all families have values and ideas of what their kids should be like, and so on and so forth. And in cultures, like the United States, where independence in quote is valued, then we're made to feel really ashamed of needing our parents right from very early age. We've talked before about this idea that you should train your little babies to, to put themselves to sleep and be independent as quickly as possible. Now, I've had lots of heated discussions with people about that concept, because I think it's a criminal thing to do. I think that babies are not capable of taking care of themselves, for at least the first couple of years of their lives, and that they really need their parents and need to feel connected to them, especially at vulnerable times, like going to sleep. But that's

inconvenient for us, because it means we've got to share our beds with our babies and, and allow them to feel that sense of comfort. But if you think about it, if you had the choice between sleeping with somebody that you love, or sleeping by yourself, what will you do?

Kim Fauskee 07:17

Or you want me to answer that question, what

Dr. Dana 07:18

would you do?

Kim Fauskee 07:20

Well, I probably want to sleep with somebody you love. Yeah, of course,

Dr. Dana 07:23

it's the most natural thing. So why would your little children not want to sleep with you, they are their source of security and comfort. I know it's inconvenient. I can't tell how many times I got kicked in the nuts by my little kids when they were in my bed. I didn't enjoy that part of it. But it sure was sweet to snuggle with them and to help them feel a sense of comfort for the first number of years of their life. And I don't think there's anything wrong with people that love each other being really dependent on each other. But I know I'm an outlier as far as that goes. Because

Kim Fauskee 07:54

it was gonna say I think it's still a polarizing issue even in 2022. I'm not sure about co-sleeping with your children. Oh, absolutely.

Dr. Dana 08:00

If you know, Most pediatricians would shame you if you said I want to have a bad family, because, again, it's not the American way, we're supposed to be independent and take care of ourselves. Thank you very much. Now, the problem is that if you spend your life in quotes being independent, your behavior is actually more dependent than people that accept dependency because your behavior is strictly based on being independent. It makes you increasingly dependent on fighting the natural part of who you are. I hope that makes sense. The way I described it, no, it

Kim Fauskee 08:33

did. I was thinking about that, as you were saying it and felt appropriate.

Dr. Dana 08:38

It means going against the natural part of the feelings that you have of wanting to be safe. Because everybody wants to feel safe. And everybody wants to feel connected and loved. And dependency is a pathway toward those feelings now that the hard part is that if dependencies are okay, then why does it turn out so badly? A lot of the time? That's the major question that people ask me when I say to them, well, maybe dependencies is not your problem, maybe. Maybe it's something else. And you know, then they say, well, what could that be? And my response is always Well, who do you choose to depend on? Wouldn't that matter more than, than anything, that if you choose somebody who is of integrity, and not

somebody that's going to take advantage of or exploit you, then your needs are going to be met, and you're going to feel really safe and loved. So it's a matter of choosing who to give your heart to, and who to allow yourself to depend on more than anything else. Because you're never going to get over the need to be dependent on someone. If you decide you want to live a life connected to other people.

Kim Fauskee 09:42

In theory, that sounds really good. In practicality, that almost sounds impossible.

Dr. Dana 09:48

I think it takes a lot of work. It certainly has taken a lot of work on my part, because I was brought up as an empath, taking care of the people that I came into the world with and that I believe that my responsibility was to manage their pain. And then my connection to them was to care for them in ways that they didn't realize, and I didn't have the time, but it sure was burdensome, to feel all the pain and have the people in my life that were responsible for my welfare not really take responsibility for their pain. So it was up to me. So I grew up like everybody else thinking that needing other people was the problem. And that I could be in a relationship with someone but not need them. And that would solve the issue of, of dependency. But I was grossly in error with that, because every time I felt connected to somebody, I didn't want to live without them. And what is more dependent than that?

Kim Fauskee 10:39

So can you give an example of a healthy, dependent relationship?

Dr. Dana 10:47

I can, but I've get a lot of flack for what I say because, well, I can talk about my own relationship with my wife,

Kim Fauskee 10:53

that's good, because your name is on the podcast. Yes. You can say whatever you want.

Dr. Dana 10:58

I am hopelessly dependent on my wife, I don't want to live without her. I rely on her in all kinds of ways. I adore her and I don't want to live without her. I know that I could survive if she died. But I certainly wouldn't want to, I feel that connected to her. And I feel like she's that much a part of my life.

Kim Fauskee 11:16

So that's a bad. I mean, you're, you're saying like, that's a bad thing?

Dr. Dana 11:20

No, I've been told that it's a sign of weakness. But to me, it doesn't feel bad at all, that actually gives me strength to know that, that I've chosen well, because so far, she's not betrayed me in any way that has compromised my connection to her, I feel the same way about my kids, I don't want to live without them. I love being close to them. And I wouldn't want them to live in my house. But I'd be really happy if they live next door or across the street. And we could see each other as often as we want to. Or we obviously want them to have their own private lives. But you have one kid who loves to travel. And

every time he's away for extended periods of time, I feel like one of my limbs is missing. Because I really depend on him to feel a sense of well being and connection in my life. That puts me in a very vulnerable position. And I understand that being dependent is a secure recipe for vulnerability. If that makes sense. You can't, you cannot be connected to somebody and really love them deeply. Without being extremely vulnerable to what would happen if you lose them.

Kim Fauskee 12:24

It's like being all in right? It's not one foot in one foot out. Right? Right? You don't have the shield up protecting yourself, you're

Dr. Dana 12:31

no and I choose really carefully who I give my heart to. Because I know that when I become attached to somebody, it's, it's for me, it's pretty much all or nothing. So I choose my friends wisely. I choose the people, you know, that I connect with. And I make sure that I vet them to a place where I really know that they're trustworthy, and they're loyal. And that, you know, it's not that we're not going to hurt each other, my wife and I've hurt each other many times, but not purposefully. And I know that I can depend on her. Like she can depend on me to try to resolve whatever comes up. And that provides a sense of security.

Kim Fauskee 13:09

So you talked about the positive or healthy side of dependency. What is the unhealthy side of dependency look like?

Dr. Dana 13:18

Well, you know, I can use my life as an example again, my parents lived a very miserable marriage with each other. My father was unfaithful for the beginning of their marriage even before I was born. My mother was desperate to be connected to him. So she was willing to compromise her integrity in order to stay with him because she didn't feel like she could live in the world without him. My dad was a very obese person, guess who was in charge of buying the food? Your mom Exactly. And guess what? She bought lots of food. Well, everything that he couldn't he couldn't resist carbohydrates and sugar. Yes, everything that my father was unable to resist. My mother made sure the clauses were full of it. And that was her insurance policy that my dad would continue to hate himself and then wouldn't leave her. And, you know, she spent her time shaming him. And he spent his time telling her how stupid she was. But they figured out a way to stay married for 25 years before my father finally got tired of all that and found another person and started another family.

Kim Fauskee 14:23

So you and I talked before we started recording about the actual term codependency because I think a lot of people were listening to that thinking they were codependent right upon each other. You have a little bit of a different take on whether that term codependency is actually relevant or not.

Dr. Dana 14:41

Well, I think it's been number one overused, and it's a term that's made to pathologize people and make them feel ashamed of themselves for needing other people. Now, I'm not going to say that some

relationships don't have an aspect of dependency that's really unhealthy. If you think about somebody who's an alcoholic who's You know, spouse buys the alcohol and makes sure that it's always there. That was my situation. Yeah, I would say that that's a fairly unhealthy relationship. I wouldn't call a codependent in a certain way, I would say that those people made an unholy alliance with each other to stay together. And they both knew what their roles were, I guess if you want to call it codependent you can, but it gives voice to dependency as being the problem. And we are as prey animals completely dependent upon each other for our survival. So even though we have become predators based on our intellect, and the weapons we build, and the ways we treat other people, we don't have big fangs, and we don't have big claws. So by biology, we are very much prey animals. And if you look at how he was able to hold monkeys live with each other, they don't own separate condos, that they go and visit each other. Right, they all live in the same place, and they're all over each other, and they sleep on top of each other. And, and the only monkeys that are segregated are the sick ones that end up consuming, maybe they want to get rid of the sick ones, because you know, they no longer have any value sort of to keeping the Society of monkeys going. And the adolescent nails, which everybody knows are a pain in the ass in any species. So they keep the animal, the the male adolescents out of the picture, because they don't want them spreading their gene pool into the population until they're old enough to fight for their share of the female monkeys. But otherwise, they're all over each other. Because you know, the more insulated you are with your fellow monkeys, the less likely it is you're going to be consumed by a predator.

Kim Fauskee 16:41

Do you think dependencies changed over time, you and I come from a generation where our mothers were from the Betty Crocker mold, right that the woman had a role being a good wife, keeping the house up taking care of the kids making sure her husband was fed. And there was that I don't want to call it traditional role as a traditional role back in the 50s and 60s, to now where there is a stance, so out there from women saying I don't need a man. And maybe that's a projection of the times, but maybe dependency has changed, or the perception of dependency has changed?

Dr. Dana 17:24

Well, I think people are encouraged to convince themselves that they don't need other people. And made to feel ashamed of the fact that they do. And so naturally, a part of our culture is going to say, well, I don't need you, I don't need anybody, I can do it on my own. I think that's a very unhealthy stance to take, because it ensures loneliness and isolation. But again, if you're made to feel really ashamed of the fact that you're lonely, and that you wish you had a partner, you know, you can always say, Well, I don't need anybody. And I don't, you know, I don't rely on anybody. And I'm just fine. And I just have a hard time really, I mean, I know there's some people maybe that are capable of that but I think most of us really need a connection with each other. I had a sister who died from cancer, maybe 15 years ago. And that was probably the most painful experience I ever had in the name of dependency, because I loved my sister dearly and was really connected to her. And we really depended a lot on each other for most of our lives. And especially as adults, we're really, really close. And when she died, it absolutely broke my heart. And I had to think really long and hard about whether I was ever going to let anybody into my heart as deeply as I let her because it hurts so much to lose her. And I thought about it for a long time. And then finally I realized if I'm going to encourage people to love each other, and to be connected to each other, I can't be a hypocrite and fold up my tent and, you

know, go hide somewhere because I lost somebody that I really loved. So like a weird person I am I went to the extreme. And I took a poll of all my friends. In my mind, I thought I wonder who I can ask to become my siblings in the place of losing my sister. So there was one woman and three men who I dearly loved. And I called each former up and said, hey, you know, I lost my sister, would you consider being my brother or sister? Like formally? And then can we make that commitment to each other for the rest of our lives? Because I really miss having a sister.

Kim Fauskee 19:35

That was a very psychological forward take on, by the way. Well, it was tough many people would think of, and I'm not saying replacing your sister, but thinking of in a sense, how can somebody take that role?

Dr. Dana 19:50

Well, nobody could ever replace my sister but that doesn't mean I can't have other sisters that fill the need that I have to have a sister and some additional brothers. Luckily, the woman that I call this somebody I've known for 40 years, and she was a person who I knew that we really cared for each other. Luckily, she was not a threat to my wife because she was good friends with her. And so it was easy for me to invite her. And she actually started crying when I asked her and said, that was the most lovely thing she'd ever heard in her entire life. And now we call each other brother and sister and we really look at each other as being siblings, even though biologically we're not. And the guys that I asked to be my brothers kindly agreed, even though they probably thought it was nuts. And not that we weren't close before. But now we're even closer than we were before. Because I tried to include them as part of my family. And, you know, very much like yourself, come to celebrations and be connected to, you know, to my family, and know them, and then they get to know you. And we develop a really strong, hopefully connection with each other. Absolutely. And, and become dependent on each other. I mean, I don't know if you ever think about our relationship, but you and I are very dependent on each

Kim Fauskee 21:06

other. We just kind of sent a shiver down my spine. But when I hear that word still,

Dr. Dana 21:11

yes, I realized that and I'm sorry, I never used that word before. But no, I

Kim Fauskee 21:15

think I think I need to hear it right when I was talking about trying to embrace receiving in dependencies is the same thing. Is this that that familiar? You know, pathologizing in my mind what dependency actually means and was right raised not to be depend on anybody because I couldn't trust anybody in my life. And, and I'm finally at a stage now where I can not only conceptually understand it, but want that in my life. It's just that familiar patterning of that uncomfortable feeling. But I still have to overcome and be cognizant of Ashley, how you eloquently talked about healthy dependency, realize that that is actually the concept that it can be healthy, that it isn't strictly unhealthy.

Dr. Dana 22:05

Well, and when I decided to write a book and do the podcast, or the book, especially, I told you that I thought about everybody that I knew, and your image came into my mind. And part of what I needed to think about was that, how much can I trust him? How much can I rely on him? How much really can I depend on him to be my partner in this endeavor, you probably trust me more than I trust myself. Well, and I didn't have any hesitation, because I know what kind of person you are. And I know that you take your relationships really seriously. And you're a very committed person and that your feelings are very deep. And the more I figured that we connected with each other, the more that we would come to depend on each other. And that feels very safe to me. I don't I don't feel any discomfort saying that I depend on you. Oh,

Kim Fauskee 22:49

no. And I think you're right, through this evolution of the last couple of years of the book. And now the podcast is coming up on a year. Pretty soon. I totally feel that Yeah. Now. I mean, I do and it's been a good thing, right? It hasn't been this, this negative thing or this nebulous thing, or this thing that I have to keep one foot in one foot out? Because I'm not sure, right? I mean, when you asked me when you asked me to do it, and and I guess I'll pat myself a little on the back here is that when I said no, two or three times, when I finally realized that it was the right thing to do, I did go in with both feet and write, write. And knowing that pretty much I was going to count on that it was going to be a very good experience, which I do, it's been actually better than then pretty good. Right? And not think, oh, you know, it's probably gonna end badly, you know, like a lot of things have in my life that I've set up in that way in my mind, and just confirmed where I had to get rid of that thinking.

Dr. Dana 23:51

Yes, so Well, again, I will say probably the thing in my life that has solidified the issue of dependency is the physical problems that I had had to endure. As I've said, another podcast, I've come close to die many times, maybe three or four times now. And a few of those times, I was so completely sort of physically disabled temporarily, that I could not really take care of myself without my wife, and my children being there for me. And I resisted hugely at first and both on all three of them came to me and said, you know, what the fuck is your problem? You too, have taken such good care of us. Why don't you let us take care of you, and just stop being, you know, such a butt about it. And I thought to myself, well, you know, maybe it's time that I learned how to really surrender. Because certainly in my spiritual life, I feel like I have surrendered to my version of God. And I feel completely dependent on that relationship and how it's done nothing but served me really well. In many ways. And so why not allow myself to be taken care of, in my moments of, of deep need and vulnerability? I'm lucky so far, it's turned out well, so I can't look back and think I kind of made a stupid mistake. Why didn't I just keep myself you know, disconnected?

Kim Fauskee 25:18

I think probably in in we do the post mortem on those things about you know, we've we've purposely kept people of our life or we've not done certain things, or we haven't gone in with both feet. Generally, I think, when we think about it afterwards, we held ourselves back. Right? From something actually really good. Yes. And that. So we're, we're talking about relationships and and in dependency. I think all of us know somebody that always needs to be in a relationship, right? Whether that is a single person

or, or person that gets divorced and gets remarried and gets divorced and gets remarried. What's that all about?

Dr. Dana 26:09

I don't know if that's really a question of dependency as it is, that the person is looking to the outside to fill them up. And it's not that you don't get filled up in your relationships with other people. But you also have to be willing to, to be connected to yourself on a deep level internally. I think that people that go from relationship to relationship, it's almost like it's a drug and that they're medicating themselves with that feeling of being in love for a week at a time,

Kim Fauskee 26:42

or however long it lasts. Instead of morphine, it's this dopamine, dopamine hit, right.

Dr. Dana 26:46

I certainly know that there are people who use sex as a drug, just like food and many other things. And I think for some people, relationships are a drug. And, you know, I remember once I had this friend who she was in a different relationship, maybe every two weeks. And then when she first met the person, he was the absolute love of her life, and she just was walking on the moon, with excitement. And then you know, he would do something that would somehow dampen the fantasy. And then two weeks later, all I hate is that guy, he's stupid, or whatever. And I was thinking to myself, Wow,

Kim Fauskee 27:19

when the chemical level dropped a bit, yes. And I

Dr. Dana 27:23

think that really what she was doing was juicing herself up with dopamine, basically. And that feeling of elation that comes when, you know, we meet somebody that appears to be the answer to our dreams. And I'm not saying that there are people that we can meet that are the answer to our dreams, but usually, it's not a two week relationship.

Kim Fauskee 27:42

How about the fear of being alone? Well, and

Dr. Dana 27:46

I think that propels a lot of people toward relationships that are maybe not as healthy as they could be. Because a lot of times people make excuses when they know that it's not the right relationship for them. But they're so afraid of being alone, and have been so defeated by other people that they met that they just sort of hope their partner is going to change, or they figured they can change their partner or somehow come up with magic that was going to make everything work out. Okay. Because being alone is difficult for a lot of people.

Kim Fauskee 28:15

The magical thinking theory, again, yes,

Dr. Dana 28:18

it gets back to that notion of solving your problems by discounting what you feel and using magical thought in order to solve a problem.

Kim Fauskee 28:29

So you see, in your practice, I'm sure a fair amount of couples that are having relationship problems that are probably on the borders of divorce or separation. Assuming that dependency in some way plays a role in that,

Dr. Dana 28:49

you know, Kim, I really actually think it does because women have an easier time acknowledging dependency, because they're not as made not made to feel as ashamed of their need for a relationship as men. You know, most men approach relationships feeling like it's their job to fix whatever a problem might be, or fix whatever situation might be. And I think that's a way of avoiding intimacy and dependency in a certain way, because you're living a role rather than really being connected to the person. So I often talk to people about the concept of depending on each other, and what there is about their partner that they can depend on. And what it is that's getting in the way from them being able to depend on feeling safe with their partner. Because if you can get to a place where you can solve those kinds of issues, then sometimes you can actually heal the relationship because it really scares people to be close to each other. I think the hardest thing for most of us is to be in a deep, intimate emotional relationship with someone.

Kim Fauskee 29:54

I heard from a friend of mine the other day when he was having time Talking about difficulties he was having with his partner. And the first question I asked him was, have you talked about it with her? And he goes, I can't do that.

Dr. Dana 30:11

How's you expect to solve the problem?

Kim Fauskee 30:13

That was that was my, you know, response to him as well. He goes, No, I can't, I can't go there. I can't go there with her. Because he felt that it was just going to open up Pandora's Box. She would take offense to it. And I think he's completely fearful, she's going to leave if he speaks his truth.

Dr. Dana 30:36

Well, and he may be onto something, she actually may do that, or he may be using it as an excuse, so he doesn't have to show up.

Kim Fauskee 30:42

So isn't that isn't that a level of dependency, when you can't, when you're walking on eggshells around your partner, you can't speak your truth, and that you're fearful of them leaving.

Dr. Dana 30:55

I think that's the opposite of dependency, I think it's an attempt to remain removed from somebody that you need, so that you can feel safe, I think that it's an excuse for him to tell himself well, I can't depend on this person, because she'll lead me if I tell her the truth. So it's a way of being safe, but pretty much guarantees you a life of loneliness, and it's more likely to leave him if he doesn't try to solve the problems. And if he does, because, you know, oftentimes, if you don't approach things, people think you don't care about him. And so he may think he's avoiding problems. And his partner may feel like he just doesn't care about me, because he never talks about anything, he never brings anything up. So his notion that he's saving the marriage, by not bringing things up, is going to be interpreted by her, as he doesn't care about me, and he doesn't care enough about me to try to solve any of the issues we have, creates a big misunderstanding.

Kim Fauskee 31:52

So we talked about this at the beginning of this conversation, when does the dependency issue really start manifesting itself in your life?

Dr. Dana 32:04

Oh, from the moment that you're born, and you need to depend on your mom, or whoever your caretakers are to feed you and comfort you and, you know, keep you warm and safe. And all of that you're helpless, completely helplessly dependent on somebody for your survival for a very long period of time.

Kim Fauskee 32:23

So So that's it. So that's true. Yeah, right. Where do the lines start getting blurred, where we start entering into adult relationships in our life. And we got one foot in one foot out, we can't be completely vulnerable with our partner, we don't want to speak our truth. We don't want to show our emotion. And then we start creating that familiar pattern that goes from relationship to relationship, or we stay in a unhealthy I don't want to say D evolving, but not evolving relationship that just kind of just sits there, like a ship out in the middle of the ocean not going anywhere.

Dr. Dana 33:03

You know, Kim, I think it starts really early in your life. I can give you an example. Again, a lot of people are gonna get mad at me, but sleep training, you're training your year old or your 18 month old asleep by him or herself, thinking that you're doing that child a big favor by teaching him how to self soothe, which is a common psychological term. You're asking a year old kid to do something that he or she is completely humanly incapable of doing. Because you don't have a fully developed self at 80 year old. So the only thing that you're capable of doing under those circumstances is detaching from your needs in order to fall asleep. So what you learn how to do is numb yourself and disconnect from yourself and fall asleep. And if your parents are really happy that you're becoming independent, at such a young age, imagine growing up and realizing that you can't depend on anybody to properly take care of you. Because your needs are too much, that you're too much. Or you're too hungry or too tired or too in need of comfort. And so you go to war against your needs, because you're taught from a very early age that your needs are a problem. Because kids always think in very black and white terms. So if I just stopped being hungry, if I stopped being needy, if I stopped needing comfort, then nobody's going to hurt me by rejecting me. So I'll just become a really good girl or a really good boy. Or I'll become

incredibly dahlias and fight against everybody because my needs scare me so much. And it starts right from the beginning. And it goes from there. You know, you become a toddler and your parents occasionally shame you into submission and so on and so forth. And again, all a child is a ball of impulse and a lack of sort of control until they're taught how to mediate their behavior. And you can either do it by shaming the kid, and making him or her feel bad about himself. Or you can help them understand that their behavior is not acceptable.

Kim Fauskee 35:10

So we fall into these familiar patterns. And so are our picker in terms of mates and friends in our life and so on and so forth. tend to follow that familiar pattern, then, yes. Where we're picking somebody that that probably isn't the best for us. But Ashley has that that comfortable feeling? Right? It's

Dr. Dana 35:37

something that we recognize, right? Yes. It's a funny, I

Kim Fauskee 35:39

guess, comfortable is not the word familiar as the word

Dr. Dana 35:42

Yeah. Yes. Well, if you think about what it's like to be brought up as a man, and then you start becoming involved in romantic relationships, and again, very general statement that most men are only able to relate to women, on a sexual level in any intimate sort of way. Because we're allowed to be intimate with women sexually. We're allowed to surrender to that connection, on a sexual level, but you're certainly not going to talk to the person about how you feel, or trying to work out any of the

Kim Fauskee 36:15

rest, surely, that's really going to dampen the mood, right? Well, because

Dr. Dana 36:19

because that makes you weak. But being a sexual person gives you prowess and, and a sense of manliness, so all your eggs are in one basket. And I've actually seen this happen with certain men, when they get to an age where, you know, as an example, they get prostate cancer or whatever, and they can't perform sexually anymore. And it has a hugely detrimental effect on them, not just sexually, but emotionally because it was the only way that they could be close to the women in their lives. And once that's taken away, what else do you have to offer? There's no commodity there, there's no connection to the person. Because that's how you are taught to feel connected to a woman.

Kim Fauskee 37:02

So we're going to use you as an example. Because you and Susan have been married for some 40 years, I believe.

Dr. Dana 37:06

Yeah.

Kim Fauskee 37:10

So how does your relationship continue to evolve? Because you were you were taught, you know, we're talking about, I mean, there's a big difference between being 25. Right, and being married to somebody for 40 years, and in your late 60s now. And that's the relationship is has morphed over over that period of time. And what was important to you, then isn't so important to you now, and sex changes, conversations change kids, grandkids, and so on, so forth. So how do you keep I think that's always the rub, right? How do you keep a relationship growing? Right. And again, you talked about your dependency on Susan. Right, and in a healthy way. But for somebody that was only married for 11 years, and hasn't had a long term relationship since then, theoretically, I kind of know how to grow a relationship and her relationship should grow. But practically, I haven't done it. Okay, so you're a great example that kind of tell us how you and Susan keep evolving your relationship through all these? Well, I,

Dr. Dana 38:22

you know, I have to say that some of it is luck. I mean, I didn't know as a 20 year old, almost 21 year old that I was meeting my future lifelong partner, all I knew is when I first laid eyes on her, I fell madly in love at first sight and couldn't get enough of her. And she just felt so fundamentally different than any other woman that I had ever been with, not that I had, you know, hundreds of experiences before them. But certainly enough to know that this person, there was something different about her. I just felt sort of a visceral connection to her in a way that I had never experienced before. I was in a lot of therapy at the time. And once we committed to each other in a serious way, I asked her if she would go to therapy and start to do some self exploration so that things on the level of self understanding was more balanced. I was really lucky that she said yes. And that the therapy experience she had was quite useful to her and those experiences taught us how to communicate and how to be present to each other, and how to work our issues and how to be respectful. We also made an agreement very early on that if anybody ever entered our relationship, that before that we were attracted to, and could, you know, create a problem that before we did anything stupid, we were talk to each other? Because I watched my dad be unfaithful to my mom during their whole marriage. And I watched my mom be unfaithful to herself during their whole marriage, and it did nothing but create hostility and disrespect and so Luckily, she was willing to agree to the idea that we neither one was whatever know what the future brings. But at least we would have an agreement that before anything stupid happens, we talk to each other. And I believe she's kept that agreement, I know that I have. And so with that kind of security built in place, that we're there for the long term, and that no matter what happens, we're committed to each other, it sort of cements this notion that no matter what comes up, we're going to work it out. You know, the other thing that I think is really important, is to try and not blame the other person, for whatever problems come up. Because when I realized what a pain in the ass I am to live with, and that, that I'm not an easy person to live with, even though I really feel like I'm a good person. And that I, you know, and all that stuff was I don't feel bad about myself. But I also recognize that, that I, that I haven't much easier than she does. She's got to put up with me, I have to put up with her. But she's so much easier to put up with than I am. Because she's a more graceful, kind, patient, maybe gentle person than I am. Right. But also she's told me what I brought to the relationship that wasn't a part of the way that she came into the world in terms of, you know, being an unusual person being a bit of a risk taker being somebody who is not externally focused. I am really fortunate in that I, if I like you, and you're connected to me, I care a great deal about how you see me and how you feel about me. But generally

speaking, I don't really care that much about how people look at me and how they feel about me. And so that gives me the freedom to just kind of be who I am, which is sometimes a pain in the ass. Because, you know, if you don't like me, I don't care, unless there's somebody that I really want to like me or whatever. But generally speaking, I am not a person that is dependent on other people to reassure me of my value. And my wife is somebody who's different than that, in that she was brought up to be completely dependent on other people's opinions and feelings about her. And so we struggle a bit with that, because I see how hard it is for her sometimes.

Kim Fauskee 42:11

Well, I think you bring up a good point not to interrupt your train of thought, yes, go ahead. But because I think our society today, especially with a lot of the millennial population, and now the Gen Z population, their value is predicated on who likes you?

Dr. Dana 42:27

That's right. Well, that's where influencers are so popular, right? So now so

Kim Fauskee 42:31

dependency has a whole new meaning to it now, yes, in with these generations, they're going to have to overcome in a healthy way, because, you know, I see it in my own kids right now, in terms of the social media influence, and how it really is unhealthy. Yes. And that way in learning how to live life through Tik Tok, it's probably not going to do yourself any favors. Now I've denigrated your your evolution of your romance and in partnership with your wife, so but I wanted to bring that point up, though, that dependencies is having a whole different look now, especially people listening that maybe millennials, Gen Z years, and or have those as children right now, because I am a little cautious that healthy relationships, not only with themselves, but healthy relationships with others may not happen.

Dr. Dana 43:36

Yeah, and I don't disagree with you. It's something that frightens me a great deal. But if I can get back to just answering your question, I apologize for interrupting that when I talk about being a difficult person, it gives me a perspective, if we're in an argument with each other to take a step back and go, How important is this, that I get my, that I'm right. And that to get my point across? Or doesn't it really matter that much? And should I just be grateful that most of the time she's willing to put up with me? Not because I'm an unloving, you know, terrible person, but because it's, it's, you know, I think sometimes it's hard to be in a relationship with me. So with that kind of compassion for others, it makes it easier for me not to be such a hard ass when it comes to her. And you know, proving a point and having to be right and all that stuff, because that does nothing but create resentment and difficulty amongst people.

Kim Fauskee 44:34

So you've learned to live with each other over time, you've learned to have difficult conversations with each other that probably aren't malicious, but they don't make you feel good about yourself when you have to have those conversations, but they have to be had. Well, I

Dr. Dana 44:52

mean, the biggest problem I have right now is that I'm physically pretty much disabled in a lot of ways. And I've never been this way before in my life. I've always been an incredibly adventurous, really fun loving physical person. And now the only activity that I can remotely do with some degree of safety as a walk. I hate people say, Well, what do you do now, and I say my extreme sport is stepping up a curb and not falling,

Kim Fauskee 45:17

actually going up to 3% get great, exactly.

Dr. Dana 45:19

And so I have said to my wife, many times, you know, I am really sorry, I never expected that I would become this person in our marriage, and you're still so healthy and are so able to travel and do everything that you want to do. So what I've encouraged her to do, actually, is to travel with friends and family, so that she doesn't feel resentful, and not to worry about leaving me behind, because I can't do what, what I believe is my responsibility in a marriage to do and so I'm happy that she has other people that will do those things with her. And I do the best I can for us to have fun together and, and, you know, be with each other. But it has been a problem. And I've said to her many times, are you sure that you don't want to send me off in an iceberg somewhere and find a replacement. And she just rolls her eyes and looks at me like I'm an idiot because she still loves me and, and wants to be with me, despite the fact that I'm not the same person in a lot of ways that you married.

Kim Fauskee 46:15

So I think you brought up an interesting point there too, because you have, I don't want to call it a disability. But you can't do the same things you could do five years ago, 10 years ago, 20 years ago, for sure. Yeah. But your wife still has to live her life and get fulfillment, satisfaction, see places, see people? And again, I think if she were feeling completely dependent upon you, she probably wouldn't do that. Right? She wouldn't be traveling with her friends. And will she be worried about you? He's going to be mad at me if I do this? Right? And again, she's not here to answer that question. But as her husband, you probably know the answer to Well, we've talked a lot about it, because I because I do see, I do see, it's not just wife. But I've seen men do the same thing, right? That they hold the other spouse back. Whether it's jealousy, or whether it's dependent on them, they just don't want to see them do something without

Dr. Dana 47:21

them, right. And I recognize that as being an incredibly unhealthy way to live. When my wife and I first got together, she lived in another city, and was contemplating moving to Santa Barbara. And she said to me, you know, if I move, what do you want from me? And I said to her, not a lot. But there is one thing that's really, really important to me. And she was very puzzled by that statement. I said when she sort of what is and I said, if you've moved to Santa Barbara, you have to promise me that you'll make friends as quickly as possible. And she thought, Well, why is that your requirement?" And my response was because of you're just relying on me, first of all, you're going to be bored to death in a really short period of time, because I am a barbarian compared to the way you live your life. Right? I'm not going to the opera, I'm not going to the ballet, and I'm not going to any big city to celebrate whatever it is that big cities have to offer, am I actually quite limited in terms of the things that I really love, you're gonna have

to get used to going on vacation to tropical places where I can go surfing and, or to the mountains, which I really love. But there's a lot that I don't like that you really like. And I don't want you to be resentful. So you've got to make some friends really quickly. So that you can do the stuff that you want to do. And I can do the stuff I want to do and it won't cause a problem in our marriage. So, right from the beginning, we've made agreements that it's okay to get your needs met in those particular ways with other people. Because otherwise, what I see when people you know, don't have balanced lives in those ways, and they're just relying on each other, it causes so much strain in the relationship, because who's going to be everything for everyone. Plus, as a man, you will know this the way you talk to other men, if you ever talk to any woman in your life, the way you talk to other men, they never speak to you again. They look at you like you're the biggest, you know, 12 year old 13 year old and oil, and you're disgusting. It wouldn't be true, right? And it is true. So my wife knows this and she knows why I love to hang out with my friends because we're disgusting when we're hanging out with each other, but we don't discuss it with each other. We actually love having those kinds of conversations, and I know that the kind of conversation she has with her female friends are not the kind of conversations that I would have very often anyway, with my male friends. And so that balance is really necessary.

Kim Fauskee 49:50

There's a common denominator in not only everything that we've talked about in the podcast, but certainly And these relationship episodes that we're doing right now. And I think you'll agree with me, it's knowing yourself first, and doing the work doing the conscious introspection, because that's where it starts if you don't know yourself, and you don't know who you are, or why you're here, or what you're doing in this relationship, then nothing's going to work.

Dr. Dana 50:25

Oh, I couldn't agree with you more. And you know that about being connected to your intuition, that if you're willing to be dependent on your intuition, without question, to me, that says, That is the secret to a life not without pain, but certainly a life where you're pretty clear about how you want to be and what you want to be and where you want to go and how you want to do it. So again, I am helplessly in a certain way dependent on my intuition, I don't ever question it, I don't mess with it in any way. I treat it with the kind of respect that it deserves. And I believe that it's a spiritual connection to my version of God or whatever you want to call it. And again, that makes me extremely dependent on it. Because it's a central part of my life.

Kim Fauskee 51:13

So I'm thinking that a lot of people listening to this episode are thinking well, so what happened so I, I've been peeling off the layers, and trying to get to the core to kind of know myself better and understand why I make the decisions I make but my partner's I'm willing to do that. And you is when we talk about relationships, you know, that can that can start bringing down the house, when that happens?

Dr. Dana 51:42

Well, as a therapist, that's probably one of the saddest parts of my professional life, that I feel a really strong obligation when someone comes to see me to help them to the best of my ability. And if their partner is not along for the ride, and doesn't decide to do their own work, it does create an imbalance.

And sometimes it actually ends a relationship because I'm, the more you get to know yourself, the more true you're going to beat yourself, the less like your friend, you're going to avoid having conversations that really need to happen. And those conversations are not comfortable. And some people don't want to have those conversations. That's not what they signed up for. They just signed up for a relatively superficial connection with their partner because it feels safe to them. So yeah, you're right, it does create a serious problem. I will say, a lot of times when people start to see their partner changing in a way that seems healthy, initially, they get frightened by it. But oftentimes, they feel compelled to sort of see if they can feel better about themselves in the same way that it seems their partner is feeling better. So it doesn't always turn out poorly. But it can. And you're right about that, because I always feel sad when you know, somebody makes a choice to leave a relationship, because their partner absolutely has stayed the same. And they've evolved to a place where they're much kinder to themselves and more connected to themselves.

Kim Fauskee 53:11

You and I talked about the concept of of counseling, prior to getting into a relationship, or maybe something that should happen in your teenage years, in turn, in terms of what we talked about the conscious introspection and really knowing who you are, what makes him tick, and then being able to pick the right partner. Now I get it that the divorce attorney lobby, and probably the psychology lobby would be totally against that. Because I'm sure that that two thirds divorce rate would be cut down to about a quarter or less if that was the case. So I'm only speaking by experience because I am a single guy that does date. It only through trial and error and experience have I finally figured out who I want to draw into my life. It surely wasn't as a teenager surely wasn't, you know, in my 20s I did fall in love with somebody that I was married to for 11 years. That had a lot of good to it and some not so good to it. And in hindsight, would I you know, if I wouldn't know now what I knew then when I married that person, more than likely not. Yeah. And she probably say the same thing. So I'm not, you know, calling her out. But I guess what I'm trying to say is that it's just so important that you do the work on yourself because I would still be making that familiar choice and attracting that type of person into my life. And when I meet that person now I know because there's a red stop sign in front of them immediately now that that instead of that familiar feeling. Now, what's that odd feeling like this, like you said, it's not the good visceral feeling. It's the bad visceral feeling, right? And I, again, I had to do it through trial and error to finally get to that place. And again, I have to be cognizant of that and listen to my intuition now. That, oh, they're really attractive. But man, I'm not getting that visceral feeling. And they're talking about stuff that's really familiar that I've been trying to get away from. So, again, going back to the concept of having relationship counseling early on in your life would probably be very helpful, or, or at least the aspect of, let me help you get to know yourself better.

Dr. Dana 55:56

I mean, you're preaching to the choir.

Kim Fauskee 56:00

Well, you know, we're, again, you're, some of the stuff that you do in your profession is proactive, but a lot of it's reactive, right? Because people don't just come here, because they feel great. And I need to go see a psychologist or my relationships are going great, but I need to see a psychologist. Either I feel something's wrong with me. Somebody's told me something's wrong with me. My husband, my wife has

told me that there's something wrong with a relationship. And that's why we end up here. Right? Right. So I'm trying to tell everybody to be proactive, not reactive, right? Because being reactive doesn't have the same resolution as being proactive does, yeah.

Dr. Dana 56:38

Well, I mean, I know it's a long time ago, but the first young woman that I ever fell madly in love with. When I first got together with her, I was so stunned that somebody that looked like her and it was kind and sweet as her would have anything to do with me. And I was just so enamored with her that I didn't really pay attention, you know, to what you brought to the table, I just dove in headfirst and fell madly in love with this girl. And the belief that she was the woman of my dreams. And oh, probably within a year. So my friend started to tell me that she was actually sleeping with every guy in the neighborhood. And I didn't know it. And then when I found out that it was actually true, I was devastated. It just absolutely shattered me and broke my heart. And I realized that while I started to go to therapy at that time to figure out, you know, what the hell was going on. And part of what I came to understand is that I was not being loyal to myself, I was not being faithful to myself. And so the natural person that I would attract would be somebody who treated me the way that I have felt about myself. And I think that that's something that's really important for people to understand that it's so much easier to blame her for being a whore, than it is for me to take responsibility for the fact that I overlooked so much because of the way I felt about myself as a person.

Kim Fauskee 58:07

I was gonna say there's always a common denominator and all your problems. Yes,

Dr. Dana 58:10

it's you. That's right. But most people have a hard time accepting that because it's so much easier to be and see yourself as a victim. Right?

Kim Fauskee 58:20

I know that. Absolutely.

Dr. Dana 58:22

We're talking about relationships now. But this happens on a micro level and on the macro level. And I know I'm kind of switching the subject. But I am always fascinated that 47 million people voted for Donald Trump in the last election. Because it is so far beyond my comprehension, that anybody could be in my mind. And I know this is not a nice thing to say, could be that stupid. Right? But it can't be stupidity. And so I've spent a lot of time thinking about okay, so what did he bring to the table that's so attractive to people. And what I came to realize is that there are lots of people who feel helpless and feel victimized in our country. And that he knows how to appeal to people that feel victimized and helpless, and feel like they've tried everything that there is to try to redeem themselves and where they live. And most of the people in the country live in places where the economy is not that great. And that the reason that the downtown areas of those places are empty is not because there's rich people in those buildings. They don't care if their rent or not. It's mostly because economically the places are a disaster. And then, you know, he'd go to the steel places, and he'd go to all the industrial places that have been destroyed by technology and all that stuff. And he tell those people, sit back. Don't worry, I'll

take care of it for you. I'm going to make America great again, like it was before. And people are so desperate that they're willing to look at him like he's Jesus incarnate, and he's going to save them from their despair. And he was really good at playing upon people's desperation, and needing to be saved. And you know, if you think about it, the Republican Party has been the party of being a victim now. And, and it works really well. Because, you know, when Clinton was running for president, she said, we're gonna have to all work together, we're going to work together. And everybody's thinking, I already fucking tried that, that didn't work. We can't work together, because there's nothing to work on. And then there's the other person that says, I'll sit back, I'll take care of it for you, well, who you're gonna vote for if you're desperate and, and feel victimized under those circumstances, the one that's you want you to try again, or the one that's going to take care of it for you.

Kim Fauskee 1:00:39

Since we're not Joe Rogan, I'm gonna get off the political bandwagon for just a second,

Dr. Dana 1:00:44

we can get off of it forever. But I'm just saying that this concept applies of dependency and applies on a micro level.

Kim Fauskee 1:00:50

No, I agree with the world we live in. We do live in a victim, society, Republicans, democrats or independents aside, we live in a victim society. And we're very quick to point fingers, right? Right, that it is somebody else's problem, because we don't want to keep our eyes on our own paper, right? Because we want to place blame on somebody else for our problems, right. And it's just, I mean, unfortunately, that's where we ended up. That's why a lot of people end up in your office, this is why we're writing a book and doing a podcast. And again, it's the same T shirt that I wear, it's not about you, you know, it's like, you know, figure it out, keep your eyes on your own paper and deal with your shit people. Right, you know, and in life, I'm gonna tire life is gonna get a lot better. But I don't want to end on on that note, so I want to bring it back to how we started this conversation on dependency. And I think you made some really good points about embracing healthy dependency. So I want to end this podcast by you kind of reiterating what healthy dependency looks like and feels like,

Dr. Dana 1:02:02

you know, Kim, the image that always comes into my mind are the strands of DNA. And when life has created those strands wrapped around each other, and make something that's bigger than they would be separate, right, they create a life. And then there's some kind of, in my mind, divine spark that sets off that. That aliveness. And I think that, that that's what a healthy relationship should look like is to separate people that wrap themselves around each other, and create something bigger than they would have separately. And it's not that you don't retain your identity, and that you don't have a really strong sense of self. It's just that what you create feels really good and secure, and relatively comfortable. It's going to have problems, of course, and I'm hoping that, you know, most people will realize that when you get into a relationship, that's not the end, that's just the beginning. And that, you know, a lot of people think, well, if I have problems with my relationship, that must mean the relationship is a problem. And that's not the case, who gets a life without problem and pain. It's just part of it. It just depends on, I

guess, how solvable those problems are, and how much responsibility each person is willing to take in order to try and find a way to keep that connection to the dependency going in a healthy way.

Kim Fauskee 1:03:24

I think that was really well said. And so I hope people will follow me as I seek healthy dependency. Thanks, Anna. We'll talk more about relationships in coming episodes there.

Dr. Dana 1:03:35

Thank you, Kim.

Fear Me Out 1:03:39

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