

# Therapy Chat Episode 284

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[00:00:00] **Laura Reagan:** [00:00:00] Therapy Chat podcast, episode 284.

[00:00:04] **Announcer:** [00:00:04] This is the Therapy Chat podcast with Laura Reagan, LCSW-C. The information shared in this podcast is not a substitute for seeking help from a licensed mental health professional. And now here's your host, Laura Reagan LCSW-C.

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[00:01:11] **Laura Reagan:** [00:01:11] Hi, welcome back to Therapy Chat. I'm your host, Laura Reagan. And today I'm very excited to be speaking with Michelle Farris, LMFT who is a licensed psychotherapist and anger management specialist. Michelle, thank you so much for being my guests on Therapy Chat today.

[00:01:29] **Michelle Farris:** [00:01:29] Thanks so much for having me, Laura. I've really been looking forward to it. You have a great show.

[00:01:33] **Laura Reagan:** [00:01:33] Oh, thanks so much. And we've known each other a long time without really knowing each other, just through Facebook.

[00:01:39] **Michelle Farris:** [00:01:39] Isn't that funny?

[00:01:40] **Laura Reagan:** [00:01:40] I know, I think it's probably about 2014 that I met you seven years ago. So, we're finally connecting.

[00:01:48] **Michelle Farris:** [00:01:48] I know I'm so glad

[00:01:49] **Laura Reagan:** [00:01:49] In this way.

[00:01:51] So, um, let's start off before we get into our conversation about the topic of codependency. Let's just start off by you telling our audience [00:02:00] a little bit about who you are and what you do.

[00:02:02] **Michelle Farris:** [00:02:02] Sure. So I'm a therapist and I work primarily with codependency and anger management. I love it. One of my first internships was the 52-week anger management program that batterers went to. And, you know, my friends were, or like, why are you doing that? And, you know, I loved it because they were all typically abused as kids. And it was so wonderful to see the light bulb come on for them and for them

to be able to make those changes. And I don't know, I just loved anger work. And then I went into codependency because of my own codependency recovery. I think I started that when I was in my twenties, and I don't know. I think that's what I really love about therapy is just the process of growth and wanting to give other people hope that they really can make changes because, you know, I mean, that's why we do what we do. Right? We want to have people get better.

[00:02:57] And, for me, it was a huge part of why I [00:03:00] became a therapist because I saw that I finally had hope because I left, I don't know for college, like most people thinking, oh, now that I'm away from my family, everything's going to be great. And it was like, I had no skills to live and it was kind of a rude awakening.

[00:03:15] So that process made me realize, oh, I really do want to do this because this is really fun and this is really, you know, just it's rewarding.

[00:03:23] **Laura Reagan:** [00:03:23] Yeah. It's really rewarding. Cause we both said it at the same time. Well, I, you know, you brought up something that I think would be helpful even though it's not specifically what we're focusing on today, but just to make a distinction because I know a lot of times people say that when there's domestic violence in a relationship, like if the, let's say, for example, the male partner is the abuser, they'll say, you know, he needs anger management, but what the court will put them into is an abuser intervention program or a batterer's intervention program. Like you were talking about where you did your internship, which is [00:04:00] very helpful, but it's not necessarily the same as what people think of when they say anger management.

[00:04:06] Am I right about that? Or I don't know how that is there...

[00:04:08] **Michelle Farris:** [00:04:08] Um, your partially right. Yeah, well, it was a 52-week program. Now I think they've put it down to 16 weeks, which I think is a shame because they really need that full year. But the differences is that they talk more about the power and control aspects, but there was a lot of anger management strategies and communication strategies we taught them. So by the end of the year, I mean they really got some good skills. It was just a matter of whether or not they were motivated to use them. But yeah, that's the only difference. Whereas a normal anger management class, like say the four week one, I do. I don't go into power and control. I just focus on the tools and that's for anybody. So yeah, it is a little bit different.

[00:04:47] **Laura Reagan:** [00:04:47] Yeah. I think that's important because you know, people, if there is a power and control dynamic in the relationship of, uh, an abusive relationship, you know, if that's not addressed, then the anger management wouldn't [00:05:00] really be, you know, fully addressing the problem that caused the person to do that.

[00:05:05] **Michelle Farris:** [00:05:05] Exactly. And that's why they need a full year. You know, they're not going to get this in four weeks, you know, they're going to, they need a lot more time. So, but it's really rewarding to see people be able to change like that.

[00:05:17] **Laura Reagan:** [00:05:17] That's awesome. When I was an undergrad, I, uh, sat in on a couple of those abuser intervention programs, what they call it over here.

[00:05:25] And just a couple of sessions I was allowed to watch with my professor facilitating and it definitely changed my perception about, you know, the dynamics of abusive relationships. You know, what the intention is on the part of the abuser, you know, where it seems like this, you know, person who's just like this out of control, like monster when it's really just this very hurt person who has no understanding of how to express it.

[00:05:52] **Michelle Farris:** [00:05:52] Or no skills to be able to do that.

[00:05:55] **Laura Reagan:** [00:05:55] Yes. And to manage it exactly.

[00:05:56] **Michelle Farris:** [00:05:56] Right.

[00:05:57] **Laura Reagan:** [00:05:57] All right. So that's a slight [00:06:00] aside, but not really. Cause I mean, you know, all of that factor into what we're talking about today, but you do specialize in codependency and I was wondering if you could just kind of start off with talking about what that means, because you know, I used to find that as an extremely confusing concept.

[00:06:16] **Michelle Farris:** [00:06:16] Yeah. You're not alone. Um, I think a lot of people miss the fact that they're codependent because there's so many different kinds of symptoms. They may not relate to the primary ones. So they think, oh, I'm not codependent. But to me, I relate codependency as a pattern of behavior where you're focusing on other people at your own expense.

[00:06:36] So you get all your validation, your approval from others. Because you don't know how to give it to yourself. So there's really a, it creates one of those one-sided relationships where you're doing all the heavy lifting you're trying to rescue, possibly control, possibly, you know, get into their business because that's how you find yourself versus [00:07:00] being able to have a healthy relationship when you have a sense of self, you know, so it's really hard, but you know, I think to your point of it being confusing, I noticed that there's kind of two types that I've seen. One is the people pleaser type and that's the type I am, I relate to where we don't want conflict, we'll do whatever you want us to do. Uh, we're super good caretakers. Uh, so we look nice, yeah, but the problem is, is that we don't see that we're actually hurting ourselves. Now the other part is I'm going to not use a name, but a person I used to know, and they were very aggressive in their verbal approach. They were much more of a controlling type of person.

[00:07:40] So they were codependent too, but a totally different style- more in your face, not afraid to get into conflict, not afraid to speak up for themselves, but they didn't have good boundaries and an awareness of how they were coming across. But you know, those are kind of different sides of the same coin. Uh, I think it's helpful [00:08:00] sometimes for people to realize there's not just one type. You can have a constellation of the symptoms that's unique to you.

[00:08:06] **Laura Reagan:** [00:08:06] That is really helpful. I've more heard of it in terms of the people- pleaser, conflict -avoidant, and somewhat like martyr, martyr- like way of being, which is pretty relatable I think, you know, because I raised my hand when you were saying that.

[00:08:25] Because, you know, it's like an, all of you who are listening, who may be therapists, does this sound familiar at all? Because, you know, we know that we don't rescue as therapists, but our relationship is one sided. You know, it's meant to be focused on the other person, right. You know, I think there's a natural way that we fall into this work because we're comfortable doing that.

[00:08:46] We know how to do it. Well, not everyone, you know, but yeah, it's...

[00:08:51] **Michelle Farris:** [00:08:51] Right. And if we can balance that with really good self-care and boundaries, like possibly, you know, working with the clients, we know we can [00:09:00] help versus being with clients that we know in our heart, you know what, this isn't a good fit, but I'm going to do it anyway because I should, you know, and that's, that's, that's kind of a way codependency could play out in our professional lives.

[00:09:12] And, and now I'm really careful because if I don't feel a good, strong connection with someone. I'm not going to be as likely to be able to help them, you know. And again, it's human nature, right? I mean, it is a relationship. So some people are going to be more compatible than others, even in the therapeutic relationship.

[00:09:29] **Laura Reagan:** [00:09:29] Yeah. I think you're making a important point for therapists to think about how you decide who you want to focus your work with because you know, you're working 10 times harder if the connection is really hard to build based on your attachment style and their attachment style.

[00:09:47] **Michelle Farris:** [00:09:47] And, and you know what, there's always another therapist that's going to say no, that's my ideal client, send them my way.

[00:09:56] **Laura Reagan:** [00:09:56] Right.

[00:09:56] **Michelle Farris:** [00:09:56] So it's like, it's not like we're the only therapist in the world.

[00:10:00] [00:10:00] **Laura Reagan:** [00:10:00] We don't have to be.

[00:10:01] **Michelle Farris:** [00:10:01] That's right. We don't have to be, but personally it really creates a lot of havoc in our relationships because, you know, if you don't have a strong sense of self, it's really hard to create a healthy relationship because you're going to be chasing that other person to make you feel complete.

[00:10:17] You know, that whole, you complete me from Jerry Maguire, you know, I mean, that is the essence of a codependent, you know, they need somebody to complete them.

[00:10:27] **Laura Reagan:** [00:10:27] Yes. Oh my gosh. That's so funny that you said that, but when you said it, I thought of Dr. Evil from what is it? Austin Powers. Like he's like got his

mini me and he's like you complete me and it's like that, you know, it's just that drawing attention to the irony of how, you know, that's so unhealthy.

[00:10:47] **Michelle Farris:** [00:10:47] Yeah. And it's hard because, you know, codependents, don't often realize they need recovery because they're in relationships with alcoholics, or with people who are self-centered, or narcissistic, or people with [00:11:00] lots of problems so they think, "I'm not the one with the problem, they need to get sober. They need to go to therapy."

[00:11:06] Versus, but our behaviors are actually hurting us because we're literally giving up all of our time and energy towards that other person, rather than having a balanced life.

[00:11:17] **Laura Reagan:** [00:11:17] That's really true. And I mean, I mentioned it as how the therapy relationship can be similar to that, but I think, you know, we who have this type of dynamic, we play it out in all areas of our lives, you know?

[00:11:30] **Michelle Farris:** [00:11:30] Yeah. Well, that's another thing that I think people miss is they think it's only about the alcoholic and the codependent, right? That's the traditional form that we know, but you, can do this with your kids, you can do this with your adult kids by taking responsibility and caretaking them far beyond what they need. You can do this in a friendship. You can do this with your parent. I mean, you know, The codependent goes across all types of relationships. It's not just the romantic ones.

[00:11:59] **Laura Reagan:** [00:11:59] Do you think you [00:12:00] could take just a second and kind of give an example just of what it would be like for someone who does this with their kids, who does it with their adult kids who does it with their parents, just for people to hear like, oh, I do kind of have that.

[00:12:13] **Michelle Farris:** [00:12:13] So a parent with small kids might be so overly worried about them that they don't practice self-care, they're so focused on their kids' accomplishments because that's how they feel good as parents. If my kid is the star, then I feel okay. If my kid fails, I fail. So their self-esteem comes from their kids. With an adult kid it might be maybe they're still living at home and they're 30 years old and you haven't helped them become independent, they're actually still emotionally and financially dependent on you because you like that. You like that love and attention and connection, but you don't know how to kick them out of the nest.

[00:12:57] You know, that's hard. And especially now [00:13:00] with, you know, kids nowadays, it is harder to launch, for sure. You know, it's a lot more money to get out there in the world and pay rent and all that. In a romantic relationship, that's going to be, you know, you may want your partner to be your everything. And, you know, I see a lot of men do this where they don't have any other emotional support, but their partner. And that's really dangerous because what happens if you get into an argument, what happens if they go out of town, then your support walks right out. And that's not a good place emotionally to be. So I always recommend people, you know, really making sure they have outside support and a relationship. I'm trying to think what other kind of relationship there is. You said the child, the adult child...

[00:13:43] **Laura Reagan:** [00:13:43] What about friendships?

[00:13:45] **Michelle Farris:** [00:13:45] Oh yes. Well, I have a personal story about that.

[00:13:48] I actually had a codependent friendship a couple of years back and didn't realize it. Cause I've been in recovery a long time and I thought, hey, you know, I got myself care going. I got a lot of other [00:14:00] relationships, but when the relationship ended suddenly, I was totally blindsided. And even though it's natural to go into grief, I plummeted into grief like holy cow, what just happened. And I realized that without knowing it, I had become too attached. So even though I've had my recovery, I had my other friendships, I was still relying on her to be my main support. And that was a huge wake up call for me because sometimes we don't realize we're doing it until the relationship ends.

[00:14:33] And then we're left, picking up the pieces and realize, oh my God, this isn't just sadness. I'm falling apart. Or I'm totally heartbroken. And that's, you know, if that was a healthier relationship, I would've been sad, but it wouldn't have plummeted me as far down as I went. But ironically, it was one of the best things that ever happened to me because it woke me up.

[00:14:53] **Laura Reagan:** [00:14:53] And I would say if it were a healthy relationship, healthier relationship you wouldn't have been blindsided too, right? Like there would have been [00:15:00] communication that there would have been an awareness that this is, you know, coming to its natural end. Yeah.

[00:15:07] **Michelle Farris:** [00:15:07] Yeah.

[00:15:07] **Laura Reagan:** [00:15:07] So what about, um, people who are, have co-dependent relationships with their parents? I think like as adults, maybe.

[00:15:15] **Michelle Farris:** [00:15:15] Yeah. That's hard. I see that where they might still feel like their parent needs to give them permission or validation versus realizing that, you know what, they're my parent, and the natural course of development is as they age, we will start to take care of them. And if we never got what we needed growing up as, as co-dependents, then we may resist that and we may still expect our parents to take care of us emotionally, even though they're like in their sixties, seventies, eighties. So it doesn't, you know, the purse strings are never cut, we still call our mom every day. Now that doesn't necessarily mean it's unhealthy. People call their mom every day cause they're close. I think that's lovely, um, if you have that, but if [00:16:00] it's so much that you depend on them that it's unhealthy, or it's hurting you in any way, or it's preventing you from, uh, having friendships, then it's probably an issue to look at.

[00:16:12] **Laura Reagan:** [00:16:12] Well, I definitely hear from a lot of people who say my mom is my best friend and we talk every day, but when they go into more detail, it's like the conversations are one-sided, where the mom does all the talking about herself and they get off the phone feeling like, \*uneasy sound\*. You know?

[00:16:30] **Michelle Farris:** [00:16:30] Well, that's so classic codependent. We listen, listen, listen, and then we get off the phone and realize where's mine. Like I didn't, I didn't get seen

at all. But the problem is, is that the codependent doesn't realize that they don't actually offer that information, they expect the other person to say, Hey, well, how are you? But if we've trained them not to ask us that, because we're asking them constantly how they are, then we actually have to untrain people and that's, what's really hard in recovery is that the [00:17:00] codependent has to actually practice volunteering information about themselves, not just focusing on the other person's wellbeing. And that, you know, that takes some time.

[00:17:09] **Laura Reagan:** [00:17:09] Yeah, it's more vulnerable, right to share how you feel, then to be feeling that good feeling of your friend or the person you care about leaning on you for advice and suggestions.

[00:17:20] **Michelle Farris:** [00:17:20] Yeah. That's like the co-dependence high, is I'm helping you. I feel amazing because I just did you this huge favor and then what ends up happening is they end up crashing a couple of days later because they didn't get anything back. And then now they're in resentment and hurt, but they can't say that. So it's a vicious cycle of I'm going to keep giving, giving, giving, hoping you're going to notice me, but when you don't, I'm going to be really upset. But I'm not going to tell you about it.

[00:17:47] **Laura Reagan:** [00:17:47] Yeah. That's, uh, that feels familiar in many, many, ways, but, um, you know, I think that the one that you talked about with the controlling approach doesn't feel as clear to me.

[00:17:59] Can [00:18:00] you give some examples of how that might show up in relationships, if you can think of any?

[00:18:04] **Michelle Farris:** [00:18:04] Yeah so it's more the person who might be telling you what they think you should do. They might be more judgmental. They might appear that they have all the answers, but inside their self-esteem is just as low as yours. It's just, they have a better, you know, they learned to get their value by being the wealth of information or being the smart one. So they use that because of course, you know, that's a positive trait, but in relationship it sets the other person to feel like they're wrong, because there's this cloud of judgment that doesn't feel good, but they don't know how to say anything.

[00:18:44] So that's where the codependent, you know, has to pull back and go, wow, maybe I am a little judgy and I need to look at my own humility that maybe I don't have all the answers and maybe that's not the way I need to lead in relationship. Maybe I don't [00:19:00] have to do that. Maybe I can just practice being myself because that's what the codependent doesn't do.

[00:19:05] They take on these traits to connect. So if I think I have all your answers, I'm trying to connect with you, but I'm kind of pushing you away in my judgment at the same time. So, you know, that's why it gets so dysfunctional.

[00:19:20] **Laura Reagan:** [00:19:20] Yeah. I think parents can do that too. You know, like as a way to try to, I see this a lot with like, in this parent who sees their child as not launching. But the parent is kind of telling them what they should be doing and trying to control their path, but not letting them just go out there and possibly flake a bit. Yeah, because that is, you know, you can't do someone's life for them.

[00:19:46] **Michelle Farris:** [00:19:46] No. And yet it's, uh, it's such a humbling experience. I mean, my son's 22 and he's still living with us and I'm okay with that. But he's, it's like, it's been a process of letting go more and more. Letting him get his job and do his [00:20:00] thing. And you know, me trying to teach him how to be more and more independent, but it's, it is it's challenging as a codependent because as a codependent, I naturally want to take care of him because that's my skillset, even in recovery, I'll still want to fall back on that. But I also know that if I do that too much, then I'm really not serving him or me.

[00:20:20] **Laura Reagan:** [00:20:20] Yeah. You're, you're really making me think about a question that I've considered a lot myself as a parent of two young adults, 22 and 24. How do you know when, how do you know where the line is to be? I mean, I feel like what I'm trying to do is just, you know, when they need more help, give more help when they need less help, let them do it. You know? So like sort of just trying to gauge if they're in a crisis situation, they do need help.

[00:20:49] **Michelle Farris:** [00:20:49] Right.

[00:20:50] **Laura Reagan:** [00:20:50] If it's something where they maybe didn't budget, well, you know, is there a way to help them like figure out how to solve the problem, but not solve it for them [00:21:00] and things like that. But, but how did, how do parents figure out the difference between being caring, supportive, loving, and being codependent?

[00:21:10] **Michelle Farris:** [00:21:10] Well, I think just what you did is you're trying to be supportive without jumping in and fixing it, and everybody has a different starting point, you know, depending on the kid, depending on their capabilities. So it's going to look different for different families. And I think that's where we get into comparison of, oh, my son, isn't doing what their son's doing.

[00:21:30] And this is so unique, every skillset. And if a parent has been really codependent for a long time, Then it's going to be baby steps at first to start to reverse that it may be having them start to do their own laundry or, you know, don't offer them money all the time, literally. And like, literally

[00:21:47] **Laura Reagan:** [00:21:47] Okay we're doing better than that.

[00:21:49] **Michelle Farris:** [00:21:49] There you go. Yeah. See, I still,

[00:21:50] **Laura Reagan:** [00:21:50] They do their laundry.

[00:21:52] **Michelle Farris:** [00:21:52] That's good. See, I'm kinda on the fence about that, I sometimes do it, I sometimes don't. But I know that that's one of the things I can [00:22:00] concretely do, but it's really about stepping back and letting them figure it out. So sometimes the codependent wants to rush in, or we see an issue before they do and maybe that's the first sign of defense is, you know what I see it, that doesn't mean I have to act. Maybe I wait for a while. Before offering, maybe that's the growth, you know, or I get with some other parents and talk to them and get support around other parents who are also struggling, because I think you have to get that support in order not to feel bad about what you're doing, you know? Cause all of this is human and after the year we've had with COVID,

it's like, of course there's going to be more issues and that's understandable. We, we kind of have to give ourselves a break, you know.

[00:22:43] **Laura Reagan:** [00:22:43] That's a good point. I mean, everything's different with COVID with kids who would have gone to college and been away and gone through all these experiences and learn from them are kind of, many of them were back home and, you know, sort of falling into the comfort of [00:23:00] just, you know, everyone being so scared and just needing to kind of pull together.

[00:23:05] **Michelle Farris:** [00:23:05] Yeah, for sure.

[00:23:06] **Laura Reagan:** [00:23:06] So can you talk about how this starts? Where does codependency come from?

[00:23:13] **Michelle Farris:** [00:23:13] So it basically starts in families where the parents are either emotionally or physically unavailable, or inconsistent. Um, so this is very common in families with addiction, mental health issues like rage, maybe the parent's depressed or anxious to the point where it's impacting their functioning.

[00:23:32] It can be any issue where the parents are totally consumed or it's taking so much of their energy. Like it could be having a special needs kid, that's taking so much of their energy that they really don't have a lot left to parent the other kids. So, you know, in healthy parenting, the attention goes from the parent to the child. It doesn't go from the child to the parent. But in codependent families, it goes from the child to the parent because the parent [00:24:00] doesn't have the skills to really be present all the time and to do the hard work of parenting because they might be, you know, with an addict, or they might have depression, or they might have anxiety, or they might have an illness, or rage problems so that really impacts their ability to parent. So then the child learns not to have needs. Okay, I'm going to be in the background or I'm going to be a straight A student so that I matter, or I'm going to be a caretaker. I'm going to caretake my siblings or caretake a parent so that I feel like I can have some value because they don't get taught that they have value simply because they are who they are. So that kind of sets up that dynamic of looking outside of themselves for that approval and that self-esteem.

[00:24:45] **Laura Reagan:** [00:24:45] That was a very succinct and clear explanation. Thank you. Yeah. That's that makes so much sense.

[00:24:52] **Michelle Farris:** [00:24:52] Oh, good.

[00:24:53] **Laura Reagan:** [00:24:53] Is there a different, is there a, like a pattern or trend on who tends to have more [00:25:00] of the people pleaser type and who has more of the controlling approach? Just curious. It's okay if not.

[00:25:05] **Michelle Farris:** [00:25:05] You know, I've seen men and women have both. And I think there's a growing number of men that are identifying with being codependent, whereby the time they're in adult relationships, they are really trying to be the White Knight and rescuing all these damsels in distress versus actually being able to have a healthy relationship.

[00:25:26] So I think it's probably relatively equal. But the styles can be different. You know, like the roles in the family, you might have the hero, you might have the lost child, things like that. But the codependency, you know, the other thing is, is that you can either grow up on the codependent side or you can go grow up on the addict side. And the addict is more you know, they're going to get into addictions, probably in their early teens. They're going to be more of a self-centered personality type. Whereas the codependent kid is going to be much more about other people and lacking a sense of self, [00:26:00] which is why ironically, they grow up and marry each other because they ended up being that dysfunctional match. So, yeah, so I think, I think that both of them end up sprouting from these kinds of families.

[00:26:13] **Laura Reagan:** [00:26:13] That's, that's so interesting. And you know, I think the addict side, of course, like you said, that traditional idea was alcoholic, you know, partner with a partner whos enabling them. That's what I originally heard of as codependency and understood, but addict can really be more than just substance abuse, right?

[00:26:33] **Michelle Farris:** [00:26:33] Oh yeah it can be food addiction. It can be, uh, compulsive behaviors, sex addiction, video addiction. I mean, there's lots of ways to numb out and a lot of co-dependents do have addiction issues because that also helped them cope as kids.

[00:26:49] You know, a lot of them have food issues because you know, the easiest substance to get when you're five is food, you know, you're not going to get offered a drink, but you're going to get offered sugar. And that can [00:27:00] start really early that food is love thing.

[00:27:03] **Laura Reagan:** [00:27:03] And, uh, you know, I'm also thinking about like workaholics.

[00:27:06] **Michelle Farris:** [00:27:06] Oh, yeah. Yeah. Oh yeah, there, I mean, codependents are the ones that you want on your team because these are the ones that are going to give you their heart and soul. And that's, what's really precious about them, right is because they really do contribute a lot. The problem is, is they don't have any sense of their stopping gap, so they just keep going, even though they're running themselves into the ground. So in recovery, it's really about how do I give a lot, because that's who I am, but know where my stop point is, where I have to go you know what, I'm going to say no to that, because I just don't have the time versus Oh no I have to keep saying yes or else you know, I'm going to be thought of as lazy or selfish. Those are really common beliefs codependents have when they think of self care.

[00:27:51] **Laura Reagan:** [00:27:51] Yeah. Yeah. I'll add, or people will be mad at me.

[00:27:55] **Michelle Farris:** [00:27:55] Yup, yup that's a huge one.

[00:27:57] **Laura Reagan:** [00:27:57] Yeah. And it's so, you know, it's so [00:28:00] sanctioned in our culture to be. I mean, I'll say particularly for women, but it's, it's, there's this whole like cultural ideal where the, the fairy tale is what everybody's aspiring to the women think that there's going to be a, you know, Knight in shining armor who's going to come along and help them live happily ever and the men think they're going to be a Knight

in shining armor and come along and help someone be, you know, just in those old gender roles, stereotypes from. But if these are the fairytale, this is what I grew up reading these fairytales.

[00:28:32] **Michelle Farris:** [00:28:32] Yeah, I did too. And I thought getting married was going to be the answer to everything.

[00:28:38] **Laura Reagan:** [00:28:38] Yeah. Or becoming a parent and having a family and then you'll live happily ever after.

[00:28:44] **Michelle Farris:** [00:28:44] Right. Right.

[00:28:45] **Laura Reagan:** [00:28:45] I'm just going to redo and do it better.

[00:28:48] **Michelle Farris:** [00:28:48] Right. Well, and it's outside of us, you know, that thing, that relationship, when I get that something outside of me, then I'm going to be okay versus what [00:29:00] if I'm okay inside of me first, you know that, and that's really, the heart of starting recovery is kind of switching that focus from other people to themselves. And that's, that's a hard, even though it sounds simple, that's really hard for co-dependents to do in recovery because they really think the relationship is going to solve everything.

[00:29:18] **Laura Reagan:** [00:29:18] Yeah. So it's like if I just get out of this relationship and get into the right one.

[00:29:22] **Michelle Farris:** [00:29:22] Yep. Yep or I get that better job.

[00:29:25] **Laura Reagan:** [00:29:25] Yeah. move to that neighborhood or that better house.

[00:29:29] **Michelle Farris:** [00:29:29] Yep.

[00:29:29] **Laura Reagan:** [00:29:29] Yeah, I'll be happy when...

[00:29:31] **Michelle Farris:** [00:29:31] Exactly, instead of what, if you could be happy now?

[00:29:35] **Laura Reagan:** [00:29:35] Yeah, so how do people heal from codependency? Do you have any like suggestions, resources?

[00:29:45] **Michelle Farris:** [00:29:45] So I kind of call it relationship recovery, where you go from relationships that don't serve you, to learning how to trust yourself and create relationships that work. Because that, to me, you know, in my recovery, I did the relationship [00:30:00] piece first, and I didn't make as much progress because I totally bypassed well, I mean, to have a relationship with myself and then, but until I did that piece, I didn't get as much serenity or as much peace within myself.

[00:30:16] So that to me is huge. So the self-care, the self-trust has to be built first. And of course that's a long-term goal. So it's not something you're going to get in a week or a month, but, but it is something that that's going to create the foundation, so when you trust yourself, you're going to be able to learn relationship skills, set boundaries, communicate from a better place, and pick healthier people. And there's lots of resources now. I mean, there's, Alanon, I always recommend people checking out, Alanon or Coda. Alanon is more

established than Coda, but some people like Coda, they're both 12 step programs, free on Zoom. Even after this pandemics over I wouldn't be surprised if a fair number of meetings stay on zoom because [00:31:00] it's so convenient for people.

[00:31:02] **Laura Reagan:** [00:31:02] Let me ask you real quick, I'm sorry just about those two, are they both um, like higher power focus?

[00:31:10] **Michelle Farris:** [00:31:10] You know, that's a really good question. So yes they are, but you can be an atheist and go to these programs. They are not going to make you believe in a higher power. It is something eventually that most people even, uh, agnostics and atheists end up finding some form that works for them, but you don't have to.

[00:31:29] That's one of the biggest myths is people think, oh, it's a religious program and it's actually not. But it is helpful to have a power greater than yourself. That can be nature. That can be the group because the group has, you know, a certain energy that can be, uh, very powerful for us in terms of healing.

[00:31:48] So it's really important, but I'm really glad you asked that because alot of people get stuck with that assumption that it's a religious program.

[00:31:55] **Laura Reagan:** [00:31:55] Yeah. And that's why I was because I, I know, I really don't know anything about [00:32:00] Coda, so I really wasn't sure if, but that's, sometimes people are asking like, how can I find a codependency group that's not, you know, higher power focused, but I don't know if there are others, either.

[00:32:11] **Michelle Farris:** [00:32:11] There's smart recovery, but that's more the addiction side. So I don't know if they or celebrate, celebrate recovery is definitely religious so, yeah. I don't know if they have smart recovery for co-dependence.

[00:32:24] **Laura Reagan:** [00:32:24] Okay. I think there's like adult children of alcoholic's groups, some places. And of course, not everyone who has codependency is an adult child of an alcoholic

[00:32:34] **Michelle Farris:** [00:32:34] Right. But that is another, I'm glad you brought that up because that's another really powerful program for sure.

[00:32:38] **Laura Reagan:** [00:32:38] Okay. Are they, do they require higher power, is that part of genome?

[00:32:43] **Michelle Farris:** [00:32:43] Um they don't require anything, but they will talk about it because it is part of the steps.

[00:32:48] Yeah, but again, you can go in and say, you know what? I don't believe in a higher power. I've no interest in that. And most people are gonna say, totally cool. We're, we're happy you're here. If they don't say that, go to the next meeting [00:33:00] because it's totally your business on whether or not you want a higher power or not. It's totally okay not to have one.

[00:33:06] **Laura Reagan:** [00:33:06] Okay. Thanks for saying that. That's just something a lot of people ask about.

[00:33:11] **Michelle Farris:** [00:33:11] Yeah. Yeah.

[00:33:11] **Laura Reagan:** [00:33:11] So groups seem to be a good way to kind of address this.

[00:33:16] **Michelle Farris:** [00:33:16] Yeah, get support, they offer mentors. Uh, uh, in the way of sponsorship and then they walk you through the 12 steps. So you start with admitting your powerlessness, which most people don't want to do, but it actually is freeing because when you admit that you're powerless, you realize you're not, you're not in control of things and you don't have to take responsibility for everything.

[00:33:38] So, you know, most people do the steps with a sponsor that, you know, we don't typically recommend doing them by yourself because you need somebody to guide you through it. But it's a very powerful process. And you can take what you like and leave the rest. Some people come into the program and they don't want to do the steps at all.

[00:33:54] That's totally fine. You know, it really is. You can dip your toe in and out. You can leave [00:34:00] early, you know, it really is a place to go for support, but there's no rules. There's no, uh, guidelines that you have to do, which I think is helpful for people when they start.

[00:34:10] **Laura Reagan:** [00:34:10] Yeah. And I'm glad you're saying this, because I think, you know, for people who are listening, it can be, it just intimidating like, oh, I don't know. I mean, I don't even know what would happen at this group.

[00:34:18] **Michelle Farris:** [00:34:18] Right, right.

[00:34:19] **Laura Reagan:** [00:34:19] So I know I sort of interrupted you giving resources there. Is there anything else that aside from what your wonderful work is, which I definitely will give you a chance to talk about, but is there anything else that you would suggest for people to look into, if they want to do that healing process?

[00:34:35] **Michelle Farris:** [00:34:35] You know, Alanon is the number one. A lot of people with the family of origin work therapy is really good because when you have a lot of trauma and abuse, it really is best to do that work in therapy. Sometimes they have ACA groups led by a therapist. So if you're not ready for 12 step, but you want something safe and small, that can be an economical way to have therapy.

[00:34:59] And a [00:35:00] very safe group, because it's usually only like six or eight people, you see them every week. It can be, you know, like several month commitment. So those are some options that can help.

[00:35:11] **Laura Reagan:** [00:35:11] Awesome. And what, what do you have to offer for people who want to hear more about what you're doing and how your programs and products can help.

[00:35:22] **Michelle Farris:** [00:35:22] So, uh, my website is [counselingrecovery.com](https://counselingrecovery.com) and I created a codependency workbook that is kind of fun. It's electronic, so you don't have to print it, but it goes through seven modules of self-care, self-trust, boundaries, being able to identify our relationship behavior, because I was thinking when I created it, what did I want that I didn't get?

[00:35:46] Because you know, when I started my recovery, like 25, 30 years ago, there wasn't stuff like this. So I kind of was going around in the dark. So I really put a lot of thought into what did I [00:36:00] need. And honestly, I needed to learn how to trust myself and identify those patterns that weren't working. So that's what my workbook is about.

[00:36:07] And then I have a video with each module just because I like to connect. And sometimes people need that verbal and just visual of, okay, that's what I'm doing to make sure I'm on the right path. So that's been really fun to create that.

[00:36:20] **Laura Reagan:** [00:36:20] That's awesome. I can't wait to, I'm going to definitely go check that out. Not because I need to, but just in case I want to share it with anyone.

[00:36:29] **Michelle Farris:** [00:36:29] That's right. That's right. I love it.

[00:36:33] **Laura Reagan:** [00:36:33] Well, I'll definitely link to your website in the show notes and your workbook. And Michelle, just thank you so much for being my guest on Therapy Chat today. I loved this conversation.

[00:36:44] **Michelle Farris:** [00:36:44] Oh me too this was really fun thank you so much Laura.

[00:36:50] **Laura Reagan:** [00:36:50] Hey therapists, do you feel stuck working with clients who can't access their emotions or name their inner experience? Do you find it difficult [00:37:00] to work with people who are disconnected from their own emotions, and they may be disconnected within the therapeutic relationship as well? Learn a comprehensive approach to conceptualize your client's concerns.

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[00:38:21] **Announcer:** [00:38:21] Thank you for listening to Therapy Chat with your host, Laura Reagan LCSW-C. For more information, please visit [therapychatpodcast.com](http://therapychatpodcast.com).