

Therapy Chat Episode 292

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[00:00:00] **Laura Reagan:** Therapy Chat Podcast Episode 292.

[00:00:04] **Announcer:** 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.

[00:00:34] **Laura Reagan:** Thank you to Sunset Lake CBD for sponsoring this week's episode. Use promo code: "CHAT" for 20% off your entire order at sunsetlakecbd.com. Sunset Lake CBD is a farmer owned, small business that shifts craft CBD products directly from their farm outside of Burlington, Vermont to your door. Sunset lake CBD has something for everyone.

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[00:01:00] stress and sore muscles. Sunset lake CBD customers support regenerative agriculture that preserves the health of the land and creates meaningful employment in the community. Farm workers are paid a living wage and employees own the majority of the company. Remember, use promo code: "CHAT" to get 20% off your entire order at sunsetlakecbd.com.

[00:01:23] Therapy Reimagined is more than a conference. It's an experience. Join the community of modern therapists for the fourth annual, second virtual, first hybrid therapy re-imagined conference from September 23rd to 25th, 2021. We will be in Los Angeles and online with our super fancy virtual conference app. We bring fresh diverse voices to our virtual and physical stages, talking about cutting edge topics that most other conferences avoid.

[00:01:50] Learn more at therapyreimaginedconference.com and grab your virtual or hybrid ticket, for 15% off with a special promo code for [00:02:00] Therapy Chat listeners: "THERAPYCHAT15." I will be there, and I will see you there, maybe even in person, I'm planning on going to LA depending on what happens, but that's my intention to at least stop into some of the events.

[00:02:14] So I'm excited about that.

[00:02:19] Hey everyone. It's me. Laura Reagan just wanted to make sure that you know about what I've got going on this summer. I don't think I've really talked about it much here, which is silly, but in case you didn't hear, I did start a second podcast called Trauma Chat, which is really for anyone who wants to understand what trauma is and how it shows up in our lives.

[00:02:45] As you've heard me say, if you've listened to this show, I've mentioned a million times that people tend to think that trauma is something that happens to someone else,

something horrific and [00:03:00] unthinkable, unspeakable. And that is true. Trauma is that, but it's also experiences that are very commonly shared among many of us. Most of us.

[00:03:10] On Trauma Chat, I break down what trauma is in hopefully understandable language that's not stigmatizing. I know I couldn't have possibly captured every thought there is about trauma and every aspect of trauma and how it shows up, but I hope that Trauma Chat will be helpful to people who really don't understand what trauma is and maybe wondering, do I have trauma, you know, or wanting to better understand what someone they care about is going through. And most importantly, how to get help if you have experienced trauma, what to look for, how to describe your experiences or how to find the words that name what you've been through so that you can, then connect with whatever type of resource support, whether it's therapy or a [00:04:00] podcast that you'd like to listen to, to learn more about it, or an article, another website. This is my hope in creating Trauma Chat. And the second part of that is the new Trauma Therapist Network community that I'm creating.

[00:04:15] It's unbelievable to say this because I've been laboring behind the scenes to bring this to you for a long time- starting in around 2018 is when I first had the idea. And then the process of getting from there to here has been slow and with many twists and turns, but I'm creating a community for people who have experienced trauma to find help, for trauma therapists to find other trauma therapists to network with and refer to, and gather and collaborate and share ideas and hopefully come together in person in, in gatherings that I don't know if they'll be able to happen in 2021, [00:05:00] but maybe by 2022, we can have in-person gatherings of trauma therapists to provide support to one another and combat the isolation of trauma work. Even if you work in a large agency or group practice, trauma work is so isolating. It's just part of the nature of it and connecting with other people who get it, is so valuable. The participants in my trauma therapist consult groups share how useful they find them to be because we're in our offices doing our work and then we go home, and it can be really hard to receive the same kind of support that you give to your clients.

[00:05:39] So I hope that Trauma Therapist Network will be a useful resource for you, whether you are someone who's trying to find more information about trauma, or if you are a trauma therapist yourself.

[00:05:51] To learn more, please go to traumatherapistnetwork.com. The website is not live yet as of June 28th when I'm [00:06:00] recording this, but it will be live by August 1st, if all goes well.

[00:06:05] And hopefully there may be even a soft launch before. A beta version. So please go to totraumatherapistnetwork.com where you can find a free download and sign up to be notified as soon as it officially goes live, whether you are a therapist or just someone who wants to learn more about trauma, there's a download there for you, different ones for each group.

[00:06:29] And I hope that this resource that I've really created from the heart will bring healing to more people. I really want people who have experienced trauma to be able to find the right kind of support. And that's why I created the Trauma Therapist Network. I

hope you will join me there. Like I said, you can get more information by going to www.traumatherapistnetwork.com where you can sign up to be notified as soon as the official website [00:07:00] goes live, which will be in August of 2021. If you're hearing this after August, 2021, go there and hopefully you will find the site and you'll see everything that it has to offer. I cannot wait. This is such a labor of love, something that I've really poured my heart into.

[00:07:17] And I'm just so excited for you to see it. Thank you so much for your support.

[00:07:25] Hi, welcome back to Therapy Chat. I'm your host, Laura Regan. This week, I am excited to bring you a discussion that I recently had with a friend and colleague Risa Ganel, LCMFT. Risa is a marriage and family therapist in Maryland, the owner of a group practice, and she is also an expert on relationships who does public speaking as well.

[00:07:52] And today Risa came on to talk about how conflict is a part of relationships [00:08:00] that makes them healthy, when it's done in a healthy manner. She talks about the six elements of healthy conflict, and she talks about why our families of origin can make us think that conflict is not safe due to attachment experiences.

[00:08:21] So I thought this was a really interesting conversation. It's pretty much relevant to all of us. And even therapeutic relationships. So I hope you'll enjoy my conversation with Risa. She's so knowledgeable and I just love talking with her. Before we dive into my conversation with Risa, I just wanted to express gratitude to all of you who have checked out the Trauma Therapist Network website, and also want to mention Mary Sue McCarthy LCPC, who has her practice in Hunt Valley, Maryland. She's the newest member of the Trauma [00:09:00] Therapist Network family, and Mary Sue is someone who I've had years of relationship with, through some of the consultation groups I offer.

[00:09:09] She has training in Sensorimotor Psychotherapy. She's certified in EMDR, and she also uses one of my favorite methods, which is Equine therapy. She has that available in her practice too. So I also wanted to thank Melvin Varghese of Selling the Couch Podcast who had me on his show recently and that's going to be airing in September.

[00:09:34] So I hope you'll listen to that. I talked a little bit more about my own story and how I decided to create the Trauma Therapist Network. And in addition to that, I also recently was honored to be interviewed by Katie Vernoy and Curt Widhalm. Curt was last week's podcast guest on Therapy Chat, and they together [00:10:00] co-host The Modern Therapist Survival Guide Podcast.

[00:10:04] And they had me on. And we talked about my thoughts about trauma therapy and the difficulty in finding a trauma therapist. So you've also heard that they are sponsoring this show in the month of August to help people learn about their conference, which is in September, the Therapy Reimagined conference.

[00:10:24] So even if you're hearing this after 2021, this is an annual conference that brings together a lot of innovative ideas and fabulous people, including me I'm speaking this year, with so many wonderful other colleagues. So hope you'll check that out.

[00:10:43] Last but not least I want to congratulate my other podcast, Trauma Chat on achieving 5,000 downloads. Trauma Chat has only been out for a couple months, so that's a really nice amount of engagement that it's [00:11:00] receiving. And I'm so grateful for that. Certainly much better than the initial download numbers that Therapy Chat had, because I had no idea how to market it. And I think I was afraid to let people know that I made a podcast. So I was almost hiding.

[00:11:15] I'm out there telling everybody about Trauma Chat and people are finding it, and so I'm very grateful for that. And people are saying that it's helpful, which is really cool because, you know, traumatherapistnetwork, Trauma Chat, Therapy Chat, what they're all about is my contribution to trying to basically make a difference in child trauma and trauma in general. As more people begin to identify how they've been impacted by traumatic experiences, we can really break the cycles. Where, you know, children are raised in families, by parents who were traumatized and don't know it. And so the children don't get everything they [00:12:00] need. And then they grow up and they have struggles and unhealthy relationships, and they don't know how to give their children what they need. And it just goes on and on and on, and we can change it. So I believe that knowledge is power. And I really want people to be able to understand that trauma is so prevalent.

[00:12:19] It affects almost everyone. And if we can understand how we're impacted by trauma, then we can work to heal from what we've been through. So thank you all for being a part of it. Whether you tell people about Therapy Chat, or Trauma Chat, or both. Whether you tell people about Trauma Therapist Network, you are helping make a difference in this way, and I'm really grateful for you. So enough about that. Let's just dig right into my conversation with Risa Ganel. I hope you'll enjoy it.

[00:12:53] Hi, welcome back to Therapy Chat. I'm your host, Laura Reagan. And today I'm so happy to [00:13:00] be talking with my friend and colleague Risa Ganel, LCMFT. Risa, thank you so much for being my guest on Therapy Chat today.

[00:13:07] **Risa Ganel:** Thank you, Laura. It's awesome to be here.

[00:13:10] **Laura Reagan:** Yes, I'm so happy. And we're going to talk about a subject that I think comes up in every therapist office and is a difficult thing for so many people, which is conflict and how conflict shows up in relationships. So before we dive into that fascinating and important subject, let's just start off by you telling our audience a little bit about who you are and what you do.

[00:13:35] **Risa Ganel:** Sure. So, I am a marriage and family therapist with a private practice here in Maryland, in Columbia, specifically. And I work primarily with couples, my practice is called Together Couples Counseling, and I've been in practice for 30 years I can't believe I'm actually saying that number. It's really hard to believe.

[00:14:00] **Laura Reagan:** [00:14:00] I can't believe that either.

[00:14:03] **Risa Ganel:** And you know, a lot of times people ask me, well, how did you get into becoming a therapist? And I have to say that my story is kind of the typical story of therapists, which often is, well, all my friends when I was growing up would come to me for

advice. And that certainly was true for me all through middle school and high school. And one of the things that I recall really standing out when I was a kid was I went to sleep away camp and out of a bunk of 12 girls, my parents were the only ones who are still married. And I remember writing home to my parents an impassioned letter about this fact, because I was just so shocked by it. And I think that stuck with me, that experience, as I went on to study psychology and while studying psychology, I [00:15:00] felt like, wait a minute, something's missing here.

[00:15:02] Why are we only talking about individuals, and abnormal psych, and all the things that are wrong with people? There was a huge element missing for me. And at some point I don't even remember how I was introduced to the field of Marriage and Family Therapy. And I said, that's it. We live in families, we don't grow up on our own.

[00:15:28] We live in family units and it was that that really had me moved towards wanting to work within family systems and become a marriage and family therapist, as opposed to all the other disciplines available, at the time of, you know, social work, psychology and so on.

[00:15:47] **Laura Reagan:** Yeah. I wanted to be a marriage and family therapist when I started out, but there wasn't a program in my state, so I ended up, well, I moved here to Maryland and did social work. There was a program in Maryland, but I didn't know that at the time. So. [00:16:00]

[00:16:00] It was small.

[00:16:00] And I already had a plan for social work and that was what I was going to do.

[00:16:03] **Risa Ganel:** Yeah. Yeah. So I got my degree here in Maryland, as you mentioned in College Park in marriage and family therapy, and I've been practicing ever since in a variety of settings and then eventually specialized in working with couples.

[00:16:18] And that's really, my passion is to, to help couples. And as you said, conflict is walking into my office every day. Well, now they're logging on to zoom. You know, it's, it's what I help people with every day.

[00:16:32] **Laura Reagan:** It's, you know, when you said that, the first thing I thought of was like couples fighting over zoom while they're in their sessions with you. And, you know, I know, I've never been in couples counseling myself, but I have a lot of clients who I refer to couples counseling. So they talk about their sessions. And I know that it's not all just fighting, but it's funny that that's what came to mind. But, you know, I think that probably that even illuminates, how many of us feel [00:17:00] afraid of conflict.

[00:17:01] And for me, I was extremely conflict avoidant for a long time. And finally, when I was in social work school, went to therapy and I remember asking the therapist, is it possible to be comfortable with conflict? And she was like, yes, it really is. And I'm like, all right, really though, are you sure? You know, even me?

[00:17:24] And she was like, yeah. And you know, now I do see that it, of course, I mean, it's a very necessary thing, but it's still hard. And, uh, like for me, when I was growing up, my

parents got divorced when I was six, but them getting divorced was completely shocking because I couldn't then, and I still can't remember ever hearing them raise their voices to each other, even disagree, debate argue, never.

[00:17:52] So, you know, it was like far as I knew as a kid, it's like, these people seem happy and in love, you know?

[00:17:57] **Risa Ganel:** Yeah. You didn't have a model for how to [00:18:00] do it.

[00:18:00] **Laura Reagan:** Exactly.

[00:18:01] **Risa Ganel:** So first if it's okay, I'll go back to the first thing that came to your mind, which was couples therapy and couples arguing in their sessions, right?

[00:18:12] **Laura Reagan:** Not to make couples therapy sound bad or anything.

[00:18:14] **Risa Ganel:** Well, I will say that if that's what's going on in their therapy sessions, there's a problem. I don't allow that to happen in my therapy sessions. So people listening out there, if you're playing out and I don't mean for like a minute or so, but if your sessions are playing out conflict, the way it happens at home over and over again, that's not good. That's not good couples therapy. I say to my clients, sometimes I don't want you to do in here, meaning in my office, in my session and our sessions, what you do at home, you don't need me for that. You don't need to pay me for that. This needs to go differently.

[00:18:54] **Laura Reagan:** You can do that by yourself.

[00:18:55] **Risa Ganel:** Yeah. It needs to be different in here. And so I do, I have some rules [00:19:00] in my sessions, right? Talk to me, not to each other, that helps. Sometimes I might direct them to talk to each other, but that's later on, down the road. And, but moving away from that with regards to conflict in general, all relationships have conflict. It's not just that it's inevitable for relationships to have conflict. It's essential. It's necessary and it's necessary for growth and it actually builds intimacy if it's done right. And I think the done right is where we all get tripped up myself included, right? Like I have my own models for conflict that I grew up with. The silent treatment was something that happened in my house.

[00:19:46] Right. And so oftentimes people evaluate their relationships, particularly their marriage or their romantic partnerships based on how little conflict [00:20:00] there is.

[00:20:00] **Laura Reagan:** We get along really well, we don't fight. We never fight!

[00:20:04] **Risa Ganel:** Yeah. and all the literature shows, all the research shows, those who don't fight, have a higher predictability of divorce. So, that's not a good measurement for the quality, the stability, the connection, the intimacy of a relationship. You know, I was saying before that conflict is essential and necessary. Um, we all have to move through stages of mismatch. So think about other systems. Think about the animal kingdom. Think about nature, right?

[00:20:38] Storms have to happen for things to change, look at for the landscape to change, a tornado comes through and it changes the landscape. Yeah. A tornado is devastating. We

don't want tornadoes happening in your relationship, but I frame it in that way because that's a system, an ecological system, and [00:21:00] so are our relationships, if we think of it that way, it's not individuals, it's an ecosystem. And what one does affects the other. Conflict allows there to be messiness, growth, evolution, to occur. Okay. Am I making sense here?

[00:21:17] **Laura Reagan:** Mhm. Though the messiness part makes me curious, but you can keep going.

[00:21:23] **Risa Ganel:** So there's a really great, you can actually see it on YouTube there's a really interesting video of an infant interacting with her mother. Uh it's by Ed Tronick and it's called The Still Face Experiment. I see. You've seen it before.

[00:21:41] **Laura Reagan:** Oh yeah. I hate that thing, but it's important.

[00:21:44] **Risa Ganel:** It's important. It upsets a lot of people. It's funny, I don't find it upsetting. I find it actually just fascinating.

[00:21:51] **Laura Reagan:** I think it has to do with early, early attachment experiences.

[00:21:55] **Risa Ganel:** Yeah, exactly. So it's a little hard to describe, [00:22:00] but it shows a mother-daughter interaction. The child in this video, I think is maybe a year old and it shows how they fall out of sync. The mom holds her face still instead of smiling and laughing and giggling, she just holds her face still.

[00:22:13] And what we see is the baby's reaction to mom doing this. They're out of sync, there's disconnection there. The baby's trying to engage her. Mom's not responding. And it really shows how, even from infancy, even younger than one years old, every relationship goes through periods of harmony, where they're laughing and giggling and playing, and the baby's able to get mom to do what she wants her to do to disharmony. Where now mom's not responding. Baby gets distressed, arches her back, starts to cry, starts to point. And then mom comes back into engage with the baby and that repairs things for the baby. And they're back in harmony. Baby gets her needs met, right? Baby needed mom to engage. Well, think about how [00:23:00] many times for anyone out there who has children.

[00:23:03] Or remembering when you were a child, yourself, there's many moments where we fall into those moments of being out of sync with whoever we're with. And this is kind of an, a really amazing thing, which hopefully will be a relief to hear, which is on average, 70% of our interactions, in relationships are out of sync. And I say that should be a relief to hear because when that level of mismatch or conflict is occurring, it's normal.

[00:23:38] **Laura Reagan:** Yeah, that's good to know.

[00:23:41] **Risa Ganel:** What's abnormal is if it's far lower, or far higher. Look, we do have to take into account too much conflict. As well as too little, too much conflict and how that conflict plays out is unproductive and unhealthy. Too little conflict, the avoidance [00:24:00] of conflict, is also unhealthy. So what we want to be able to do is manage successfully those periods of harmony, disharmony, repair, and then back to harmony. But people get stuck relationships really get stuck in falling into disharmony. And then moving into this like

pseudo fake repair it's it seems like harmony again, but it's not really, nothing's been addressed.

[00:24:27] Nothing's been negotiated. Nothing's been resolved. I mean, a lot of conflict doesn't get resolved. It gets managed instead, which is a healthy thing for it to be managed. It's going to come up again. It's okay. That it comes up again. We're going to manage it over time. What we put in place might work for a while. A solution, uh, a compromise might work for a while until it doesn't and then we have to renegotiate.

[00:24:50] **Laura Reagan:** So I think that pseudo repair thing really resonated because it's like being angry at each other and then saying, I don't want to be angry [00:25:00] anymore. I forgive you. I'm sorry. You're sorry. You forgive me.

[00:25:04] You know, and then it's never really been addressed. It's not like we talk about, I was hurt when you said this and ect. I mean, I don't know. I'll, I'll wait to hear what your recommendations are about the best ways I know. I can. I'm sure I have a lot. I can learn here. That will be helpful for me too, but, but that pseudo repair, I it's like, oh, I thought everything was fine. That was a couple of days ago. Yeah. We talked about it and talked about it is like saying, sorry and saying you forgive each other, but not, yeah. It's not really

[00:25:33] **Risa Ganel:** addressing.

[00:25:34] **Laura Reagan:** Yeah.

[00:25:35] **Risa Ganel:** What was the hurt? Where did it go wrong? How can we address this going forward to do it differently in the future?

[00:25:44] **Laura Reagan:** Yeah.

[00:25:45] **Risa Ganel:** What do we need to put in place? What can I commit to? What can you commit to?

[00:25:49] **Laura Reagan:** Yeah, that's a lot different.

[00:25:50] **Risa Ganel:** It's very different and it's takes skill. It takes skill. Most of us are not taught these skills. We download [00:26:00] the template for how to be from the families we grew up in. And how to be, includes: how to manage upsets, how to respond when we're upset, how to deal with anger. And oftentimes those are not the healthiest templates for strengthening relationships or having the intimacy in our relationships that we want.

[00:26:22] And what is intimacy? I define it as the intersection between truth and love.

[00:26:28] **Laura Reagan:** Truth and love.

[00:26:29] **Risa Ganel:** Yeah, that in an intimate relationship, you can really love somebody and speak the truth. This hurt. That's not okay with me. So on and so forth. And, still remain connected. You can protect yourself. And remain connected. That's intimacy where the boundaries are appropriate, where you can, as I said, be protected and connected. Protecting yourself doesn't have to mean disconnect.

[00:26:56] **Laura Reagan:** Yeah. Trust is coming to mind here for me.

[00:26:59] **Risa Ganel:** Which is [00:27:00] why repair, as part of the process of dealing with conflict, is so important because it builds trust. When there is no repair, it degrades trust.

[00:27:09] **Laura Reagan:** Yeah, that makes sense. And, you know, I keep thinking about how for most people I work with, they have childhood trauma and how trust can be so difficult when you have trauma.

[00:27:21] So, you know, and the wounds of attachment disruption that were never repaired are all there. You know? And so when a conflict comes up, it's easy to, you know, just follow that template and say, oh, this, this means this is happening. They don't love me. I can't trust them. They're they're going to leave me whatever it is.

[00:27:42] **Risa Ganel:** Yeah. Yeah. Which is why everything I talk about with regards to conflict and what I call the intimacy circuit applies to our relationship, not just with others, not just with our partner or our spouse, but with ourselves. Part of [00:28:00] healing trauma, which you know far better than I, is about the relationship with yourself, developing the boundaries for yourself to protect yourself and discerning when it's safe and when it's not safe and trusting yourself to discern that.

[00:28:16] **Laura Reagan:** Yeah. Well, that's very true that trauma really makes you not know, like you really can get disoriented with what is real. So yeah, that trusting yourself, that's big work.

[00:28:27] **Risa Ganel:** Yeah, again it's skills that needs support proper support for learning and strengthening those muscles. And so I referred to the intimacy circuit before and I'll describe what I mean by that.

[00:28:41] So I call it the intimacy circuit, because if we think about it as similar to an electrical circuit. Along the pathway of this circuit, there are elements where, when we're disconnected from one of those elements, the circuit is [00:29:00] broken, right? The energy doesn't continue through it. If we're talking about electricity.

[00:29:03] And so it stops working. So we disconnect from intimacy when we disconnect from one of these six elements.

[00:29:09] **Laura Reagan:** Okay.

[00:29:10] **Risa Ganel:** And conflict is a part of the circuit. Okay. I remember right at the top of this, I said, it's essential. It's not just okay that conflict happens. It's necessary. Okay. So I'll briefly mention each of the six items in the circuit.

[00:29:28] And the first is self-worth. The first is our own connection to our self-esteem, that connection to the unwavering truth that is, we are all worthy of love and belonging and the ability to hold ourselves, with warm regard, flaws and all. So our self-worth is such that we're born with it. Everybody is born with it.

[00:29:51] You don't earn it. You don't ever have to earn it. Not by getting good grades, not by getting that job. Not by [00:30:00] looking a certain way. We all inherently have that self-worth but we get disconnected from it for many, many different reasons than because of many, many different things that happen to us, trauma in particular.

[00:30:12] **Laura Reagan:** Yes. Agreed.

[00:30:13] **Risa Ganel:** So that's element one of the circuit, right?

[00:30:17] **Laura Reagan:** A big one.

[00:30:17] **Risa Ganel:** A big one. And the second is boundaries, emotional boundaries, certainly physical boundaries. I don't skip over that lightly. It's just a more obvious one, our physical boundaries between us and others. But I mean this more about our emotional boundary of who we let in and who we let in how much, as well as, how much of ourselves do we let out into the world emotionally that it's like a dimmer switch, our boundaries, that we can turn up or turn down based on who we're interacting with.

[00:30:53] You're my friend. I'm going to tell you a lot more of what's going on in my life than I'm going to tell this wonderful person that I just [00:31:00] met at a dinner party, who I think I'd probably be really good friends with over time. I'm not going to tell her right away things that are going on in my life, just as if she said something to me that I thought was hurtful.

[00:31:14] I'm not going to let it in through my boundary as much as I would, if you had said the same thing. Because you're closer to me, so what you say matters more to me. This is the kind of thing. I mean, when I say boundary. Yeah. And I can't help, but think of the timely thing that's happening right now.

[00:31:34] As we're recording this when, uh, Simone Biles has chosen to step back from the Olympics from competing, what a fabulous display of boundaries for herself. She had the weight of the world on her shoulders. And she, as I see it, in many other ways has said, I'm going to pull back, even though it's going to upset people, this isn't about who it upsets. I'm going to do what I need to, for [00:32:00] me. What an amazing display of boundaries. How many times have I, I know I have said to myself, well, I have to go to that because they'll be upset if I don't go. And this isn't the Olympics, this is like some party or something.

[00:32:19] **Laura Reagan:** Hey everybody. I wanted to take quick minute to tell you about my experience with Sunset Lake CBD. I first tried CBD when my integrative doctor recommended it for chronic neck pain and tension that tends to wake me up at night. I really like Sunset Lake CBD's products. The full spectrum CBD tincture is mild tasting compared to others I've tried and I find it works quickly. It doesn't feel sedating, but it does have a pleasant calming effect. And I also liked the CBD gummies. They taste good and they work well. So if you're looking for a craft CBD product that comes directly from a farm outside of Burlington, Vermont, that's a producer for Ben and Jerry's ice cream, you're going to want to check out Sunset Lake CBD. And [00:33:00] remember, Therapy Chat listeners get 20% off using the promo code: "CHAT." So go to [sunsetlakecbd.com](https://www.sunsetlakecbd.com) and use the promo code, "CHAT."

[00:33:12] Yeah, I know. And she's the only one who has to deal with the consequences of, of doing what everyone else wants her to do. And she's, she's the only one who benefits when she does what she needs, but that's the only thing that matters. It's her life.

[00:33:30] **Risa Ganel:** That's right.

[00:33:31] **Laura Reagan:** Yeah.

[00:33:31] **Risa Ganel:** It's a beautiful way of protecting herself and she is a survivor of sexual abuse. So I, I just really applaud her and I, I mention it because I think we all need to think about that for ourselves. I actually said to my daughter the other day, as she was trying to make a decision about whether she was going to attend something or not, I said, sweetheart, this is a Simone Biles decision for you, like it's okay to take care of yourself. You make the decision that you need. It had, [00:34:00] it was nowhere near as big as pulling out of the Olympics. But I think we all have those Simone Biles moments in our lives.

[00:34:07] **Laura Reagan:** Yeah anything that involves our capacity, our, you know, mental health and wellbeing, our physical health and wellbeing.

[00:34:15] **Risa Ganel:** Yeah.

[00:34:15] **Laura Reagan:** We deal with that every single day, you know?

[00:34:18] **Risa Ganel:** And they're connected.

[00:34:19] **Laura Reagan:** Yes. Yes.

[00:34:20] **Risa Ganel:** So that was element number two. So I said self-worth, boundaries, personal accountability is number three, in the circuit. Okay, in the intimacy circuit. And what I mean by that is when we mess up, which we all do is taking ownership of it, holding ourselves accountable to not only ourselves and how we show up in the world, but to our relationships and our impact on them. I said, before relationships are an ecosystem. If you behave in a certain way, it's going to invite a particular response from your partner. So if you scream and yell and you wonder why your spouse is screaming and yelling at you, right?

[00:34:59] We're going to [00:35:00] invite that kind of response. And the only thing we have control of is ourselves. Nobody else. So that's where personal accountability comes in to the intimacy circuit. If I can hold myself accountable for my behaviors, it will keep me in connection with the other person just as self-worth and boundaries will.

[00:35:18] **Laura Reagan:** I feel very, it's very clear to me that if my partner is accepting their own responsibility or holding themselves accountable for their part, I'm first of all, I'm much more comfortable doing that for myself, but also I just feel more trust in them because they're not deflecting blame, you know.

[00:35:36] **Risa Ganel:** It makes it safe.

[00:35:38] **Laura Reagan:** Yeah.

[00:35:38] **Risa Ganel:** Safer. Right. It makes it safer. And that's an essential part of a healthy, intimate relationship is safety. So the next part in the intimacy circuit is vulnerability. The willingness to put yourself out there, which could look like something as simple as saying, I'm really sorry. I did mess up. I said I [00:36:00] was going to be home at five o'clock and I didn't show up until seven and I didn't call you putting yourself out there.

[00:36:05] It's you know, being vulnerable means finding the path to remaining connected to the other person while also protecting yourself. The two go hand in hand. Being vulnerable doesn't mean laying yourself bare so that you can be hurt. There's reasonable self protection as well, but self protection doesn't mean going behind a wall, becoming silent, walking away.

[00:36:32] It means remaining engaged, holding yourself firm let's say, in your beliefs about something while hearing what the other person has to say and taking their perspective into account, protected and connected. I haven't met one couple in my office where they see the situation or the interaction in the same way, makes sense.

[00:36:55] They have different perspectives, different histories, different backgrounds, [00:37:00] different families they grew up in, and this is true from my relationship to my husband. And I see things differently all the time, but I need to be able to put my perspective out there, even though it's going to differ from his.

[00:37:14] And protect myself, while remaining connected to him by knowing that his different perspective is not a threat to me, I can still engage with him. He can have a different belief about something, how we behave around that is what matters.

[00:37:28] **Laura Reagan:** Okay. So the part about protection is the sort of not losing yourself, in their perspective.

[00:37:36] **Risa Ganel:** Not losing yourself in their perspective. Right? That's what, that would be one. If we look at boundaries as a continuum, losing yourself in their perspective would be boundary-less, right? It's swings to the side of, well, I have to see it their way. I don't maintain my opinion, my beliefs, my thoughts. I have to morph myself into how the other sees things. [00:38:00]

[00:38:00] And if we swing to the other end of the pendulum of boundaries along the continuum, we're walled off. I don't take in anyone else's perspective. My way of seeing things is the only way of seeing things. If I even let you know how I think, because I may be walled in where I don't let out, what I think, those two ends of the spectrum are not healthy places to be, we want to be in the middle. And that's how we stay protected, emotionally.

[00:38:27] **Laura Reagan:** Okay. I wanted to be sure I knew really what you meant when you were saying protected, protected and connected.

[00:38:33] **Risa Ganel:** Yeah. So self-worth boundaries, personal accountability, vulnerability, and the next, the fifth would be empathy as part of the circuit, which is, as we all tend to know it, the ability to put yourself in someone else's shoes to understand their perspective, understand what they're feeling, even when you experience it differently. There's other

elements of empathy. I'm not going to go into all the details, but there are different forms of empathy [00:39:00] and it's actually a skill that can be learned, empathy is.

[00:39:04] **Laura Reagan:** It feels like it's like, um, partly, you know, when you're in conflict with your partner, like giving them the benefit of the doubt or assuming, you know them to be like not a bad person, I don't know. That might not really fall into the way you're using empathy here, but it's like, I can see their perspective, even if it's not the same as mine, so I can listen to what they're saying and not just be like, what are you talking about? How could you possibly think that or things like that, is that what you're talking about?

[00:39:32] **Risa Ganel:** It's certainly an element of it, for sure, for there to be room in our minds of how the other person is different from us. And empathy allows you the space to be able to do that.

[00:39:46] **Laura Reagan:** Okay.

[00:39:47] **Risa Ganel:** And then the sixth element of the intimacy circuit is connection. And when I speak of connection under the guise of conflict as well, right. It's the ability to learn [00:40:00] to make repairs, to actually get back into genuine harmony and not just gloss over, not just say I'm sorry, but to actually repair the break in connection that has happened. And that inevitably happens and is part of being in a close, intimate relationship. And all of these elements are essential for having an intimate relationship and often need support and help to learn how to do, how to do it well, and it's a lifelong kind of endeavor.

[00:40:36] It's like, it's a practice much like meditation. That it's not like you just get good at it and you're done with it. You practice every day in a different way, right, with whatever comes up.

[00:40:49] **Laura Reagan:** Right. So like tomorrow for my practice, if I wanted to criticize my husband and see if we could get something stirred up, [00:41:00] well, how, how do people practice it? It's not like that I'm sure.

[00:41:07] **Risa Ganel:** So the next time you find yourself in a situation where there's clearly disharmony. Right? One of the things I encourage people to ask themselves is what part of me is speaking right now? Is it, is it the wise connector, part of me, the one that wants to be connected? Or, is it the adaptive, reactive, part of me, sort of the primitive reactive part of me, where you feel that what we call whoosh, all of a sudden that sort of comes over you.

[00:41:42] And the next thing you know, you're saying all these ugly things, or you're storming off, or you're, you know, giving the silent treatment. Or you're slamming doors. That's the reactive part of us. We all have it. It's normal. It's it's supposed to be there. It serves a purpose and we [00:42:00] need to practice shifting from that reactive part of ourselves into the wise, connected, flexible, calmer, part of our brains.

[00:42:11] That's one way of practicing. What part of me is speaking to my partner right now? And the personal accountability piece of that is looking at yourself, not looking at him and saying he's being reactive, it's his fault. No, no. What are you doing, right now? That's personal accountability.

[00:42:29] He's responsible for his side of the street. You're responsible for yours. And if you bring your wise connector to the conversation, it's going to go a lot better. Even if he's not in that same space. I'm saying he, because I'm thinking of my husband and your husband, but obviously could be she, or they, or them.

[00:42:51] **Laura Reagan:** I love that. Just that what part of me is speaking right now is so good.

[00:42:57] **Risa Ganel:** So I share this [00:43:00] with you to say that I hope it is helpful to know that conflict is essential. Learn to do it better, and we can all have more intimate, connected, relationships.

[00:43:13] **Laura Reagan:** That's beautiful, and And do you, do you feel that this is really work that people can do only in couples therapy? Or what do you think?

[00:43:24] **Risa Ganel:** No, I think it's something that we can all do on an individual basis as well with, uh, you know, with an individual therapist, if, if that's the route that you take. It is helpful for that person to have a systemic view right, of relationships. And to know that when, even when there's one person in the room that they're working with, that they're actually working with a part of a system.

[00:43:50] Yeah. And you know, therapy is not the only way to, to work on this, but just to learn more about it, I, I send out an [00:44:00] audio email for those who are interested in more information or remaining connected to me in some way. It's just information. I'm not selling anything. I'm not. It's really just to put good information out there that hopefully will be helpful to people.

[00:44:14] And I do it by audio because well, I learned to write in graduate school. And everything I write just turns out to be like a paper for school. And so I don't write as much, it's formal. And so I'm so used to having conversations because I'm a therapist. So I decided, I'm just going to do an audio each week and talk because that's what I'm used to.

[00:44:40] So put on a headset, go for a walk and listen to the audio is what I encourage.

[00:44:45] **Laura Reagan:** If people go to your website that you have a free download too.

[00:44:49] **Risa Ganel:** Yeah. The best way to get that download is actually to go to this link, which is a Bitly link. So B as in boy, I, T as in Tom . L [00:45:00] Y slash power of conflict, and that's the best way to get it.

[00:45:06] There is a website you can go to, which would be relationshipintelligencecoaching.com, that can also get you to the link for the power of conflict.

[00:45:17] **Laura Reagan:** Relationshipintelligencecoaching.com.

[00:45:20] **Risa Ganel:** It's just hard to remember.

[00:45:22] **Laura Reagan:** All right, well, good. I'll put both links in the show notes for the episode so people can easily find it and Risa, thank you so much for being my guest today. I loved our conversation and definitely learned a few things. Probably talk to you about these things next time we go on a walk or something.

[00:45:40] **Risa Ganel:** That would be great. I'd look forward to our next walk down the trail.

[00:45:44] **Laura Reagan:** Yeah, me too. Well, I just really thank you again for being my guest today.

[00:45:50] **Risa Ganel:** Thank you so much for having me.

[00:45:55] **Laura Reagan:** Thank you to Sunset Lake CBD for sponsoring this week's episode, use promo [00:46:00] code, "CHAT" for 20% off your entire order at sunsetlakecbd.com. Sunset lake CBD is a farmer owned, small business that shifts craft CBD products directly from their farm outside of Burlington, Vermont to your door. Sunset lake CBD has something for everyone.

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[00:46:34] Remember use promo code: "CHAT," to get 20% off your entire order at sunsetlakecbd.com.

[00:46:45] The therapy re-imagined conference is going hybrid this year, meaning you can join us virtually or in person in Los Angeles for three days of learning and connection. With headliners like Dr. Bandy X Lee, and Dr. Jamie Marich, you know, that we're [00:47:00] exploring topics that don't find their way onto typical conference stages.

[00:47:04] Grab a virtual conference ticket or join our small, but mighty group of modern therapists in Los Angeles, September 23rd through 25th at the Sheraton Universal. We're keeping the live audience small, so don't wait if you want to be in the room. Learn more about what we plan for this year at therapyreimaginedconference.com and make sure to use "THERAPYCHAT15" at checkout for 15% off your virtual or hybrid conference ticket.

[00:47:27] No matter how you participate in Therapy Reimagined it's going to be an event to remember. And I hope to see you there. Like I said, either, I'll definitely be there virtually, cause I have a presentation to give and I intend to be there in LA at least for some of the events. So make sure to use that discount code.

[00:47:51] And for more information and resources on trauma and healing from trauma, go to [00:48:00] www.traumatherapistnetwork.com. Trauma Therapist Network is a community for therapists, and a place for anyone to go to learn more about trauma and find resources and connect with help. www.traumatherapistnetwork.com

[00:48:14] **Announcer:** Thank you for listening to Therapy Chat with your host, Laura Reagan, LCSW-C. For more information, please visit therapychatpodcast.com.

