

Therapy Chat Episode 296



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[00:00:00] **Laura Reagan:** Therapy Chat Podcast Episode 296.

[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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[00:01:13] Remember, use promo code "CHAT," to get 20% off your entire order at sunsetlakecbd.com.

[00:01:23] 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.

[00:01:49] 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 [00:02:00] to someone else, something horrific and 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. 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, that name, what you've been through so that you can then connect with [00:03:00] whatever type of resource support, whether it's therapy or a 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.

[00:03:13] And the second part of that is the new Trauma Therapist Network community that I'm creating. 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.

[00:03:32] 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, [00:04:00] in gatherings that I don't know if there'll be able to happen in 2021, but maybe by 2022, we can have in-person gathering of trauma therapists to provide support to one another and combat the isolation of trauma work.

[00:04:15] 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 it's so valuable. The participants in my trauma therapists, 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.

[00:04:43] 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. To learn more, please go to traumatherapistnetwork.com. The [00:05:00] website is not live yet as of June 28th when I'm recording this, but it will be live by August 1st, if all goes well.

[00:05:09] And hopefully there may be even a soft launch before that, a beta version. So please go to traumatherapistnetwork.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.

[00:05:33] 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 [00:06:00] can sign up to be notified as soon as the official website 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. And I'm just so excited for you to see it. Thank you so much for your support.

[00:06:29] Hi, Welcome back to Therapy Chat. I'm your host, Laura Reagan. Today I feel like I am coming up for air after being sick for weeks, it seems. So there's been a lot going on recently. I went, well, you know, I've really talked about this, but on, in early August, beginning of August, I launched the new site traumatherapistnetwork.com that you've been hearing about.

[00:06:57] And I was so excited to get that out [00:07:00] there and have this resource to be available and right on the same day that we launched, a family member was injured in an accident, and they ended up being in the hospital for a month. And that took a lot of my focus. In the early part of the month, we went on vacation mid month of August, much needed vacation.

[00:07:24] And while on vacation, I was somehow exposed to COVID, and I had a breakthrough infection. So even though I'm vaccinated, I still got COVID very mild case, thankfully, because of the vaccination, but even a mild case is no fun, I can tell you, you know, the congestion was minor. The cough wasn't bothering me too much.

[00:07:48] I barely had a headache, but the fatigue and brain fog, not to mention the anxiety of getting this virus that has killed so many, so many people and has sickened so many [00:08:00] people. And even though I knew because of being vaccinated, I would be more likely to have a mild case. It's still, you know, there's a trauma reaction, like, oh my gosh, what if I die?

[00:08:11] Because you could, who knows? You don't know until you don't die that you're not going to die. So it's scary, but I'm glad to be recovering and hopefully maybe in another week or so, I should really be feeling like myself again. I'm very hopeful about that. Later this month, I'm going to be doing a presentation at Therapy Reimagined conference on trauma and keep your ears and eyes open and if you follow Therapy Chat on social media, I'll be doing a giveaway of a ticket to Therapy Reimagined. You heard my recent interview with Curt Wildhalm who is one of the co-founders of the Therapy Reimagined conference and The Modern Therapists Survival Guide Podcast. So definitely want to support them by [00:09:00] giving one lucky person a ticket to their conference, which is September 24th through 26th, 2021.

[00:09:07] So if you don't already follow me on Instagram, it's @therapychatpodcast and I'm on Facebook too as Therapy Chat Podcast with Laura Reagan. So enough about that stuff. Today's episode is very timely I think if you've listened to Therapy Chat much, you're really going to love this conversation today.

[00:09:29] I'm talking to Allyson Dinneen, who is the therapist behind the Notes From Your Therapist, Instagram page and book. And she speaks so beautifully, and so vulnerably about allowing ourselves to be vulnerable, and connect with other people and have healthy boundaries. When I read what she writes, it's like the way it feels to have attachment wounds.

[00:09:53] Some of the things that she writes, just capture it incredibly well and almost [00:10:00] poetically. So I'm often referring people to her book or her, her Instagram page, because you know, it's just, it's so poignant. And for me, the subject of self-compassion and self-kindness, which is pretty hard to do when you're not feeling worthy, and you're feeling shutdown with shame, her vulnerability, that she models through what she posts and, and in this conversation just reminds me about how important it is to be kind to ourselves and how we really are all connected. So I hope you enjoy this conversation as much as I did. Here is my interview with Allyson Dinneen.

[00:10:45] Hi welcome back to Therapy Chat. I'm your host, Laura Reagan. And today I'm so thrilled to be speaking with Allyson Dinneen, who is a marriage and family therapist in Massachusetts. Allyson, thank you so much for being my guests on Therapy Chat [00:11:00] today.

[00:11:00] **Allyson Dinneen:** Hi, Laura. I'm so happy to be here finally with you.

[00:11:03] **Laura Reagan:** Me too. We've been trying for a while to get this interview to happen. And now it's finally here. So you are the author of the book Notes From Your Therapist, which comes from what originally started as your Instagram account. Um, and that's how I found you, and I just love your work. So I can't wait to get into talking about that, but before we do, can we just start off by you telling our audience a little bit about who you are and what you do?

[00:11:32] **Allyson Dinneen:** Sure. Laura, well, I'm a marriage and family therapist and I specialize in emotions and emotional neglect, trauma, and relationships.

[00:11:43] **Laura Reagan:** So your Instagram account is what I first noticed. And you know, the first thing I saw was just that you, I mean, I noticed that your little handwritten notes kind of caught my attention, but I was like, wow, the way you write about feelings [00:12:00] and just your sort of writing from your own perspective, like, you'll say, I didn't know that blah, blah, blah, but what you're also doing is for people who see it. And I know for me reading the notes, it's like, yeah, I didn't know that too. You know, and or, oh, so if I feel that way, that, you know, when nobody listened to me, when I was a child, that did something that hurt me then my feeling that way is, is right. That's not, that there's something wrong with me to have that reaction.

[00:12:35] So you have a way that you can both modeling your own emotional expression and sort of teaching about, I would say what you're doing, whether it's intended or not you're kind of teaching the reader, what attachment needs are.

[00:12:51] **Allyson Dinneen:** Oh, that's so great to hear that perspective, Laura, from someone like you, it's been a really interesting and like it started as an experiment [00:13:00] and with like all of life, I think we're all kind of like experimenting.

[00:13:03] And if you've been a child that, you know, suffered from emotional neglect in your, you know, in your family. One of the things you weren't allowed to do was experiment. So, uh, I find that just being a creative person and being able to have my voice out there and try some things and, you know, have a little bit of trial and error itself is part of my recovering from emotional neglect.

[00:13:30] Just because of that. Like, I didn't get to make mistakes. I had to be aiming for being perfect all the time. And so. I would say like the whole project of my Instagram, it didn't start out to be what it is now. It's definitely been an evolution into me being more myself and me sort of knowing myself better and using my voice in a way that I wasn't able to.

[00:13:54] And it did, when I say it didn't start out that way. It was very [00:14:00] much like I was trying, I, all I had to go on when I started it was that I wanted to talk about things that people don't talk about that I suffered growing up from not being able to talk about. And that was primarily emotions. I just wanted to be able to talk about feelings.

[00:14:18] And so I just started with that, and I quickly learned, because the thing about Instagram is there's feedback from people who are reading you. It's not like just writing in a journal. I would get feedback in the form of like, oh, you know, I could talk about anything to do with emotions and relationships.

[00:14:41] It's my favorite subject. But when I talk about, say like this thing, holy Molly people really like it. And I would get this feedback on there's like a handful of things. There's really, I noticed very early on. There are a few things that when I talk about them specifically, people [00:15:00] overwhelmingly like that note.

[00:15:03] And, um, I was like, great. I can talk more about that specific thing. So it's been a really interesting experiment in feedback from like what the world needs and what I have to give, like what I do best.

[00:15:17] **Laura Reagan:** That's beautiful. And you know, honestly, I'm not sure your age and you don't have to say, but I feel you and I are probably close in age.

[00:15:27] **Allyson Dinneen:** I'm in my 50's.

[00:15:29] **Laura Reagan:** Okay. Well, I'm 49. It's like we in our generation sort of, and the way we talk about social media from a distance is sort of, that is a negative thing, you know, just in general. And that it's, you know, that it has little value, but it does do a lot of harm kind of is the way I think the people our age, who didn't grow up with it, look at it, not each individual, but that's sort of just like a cultural way of talking about it.

[00:15:56] But what's becoming, it's like an inkling of [00:16:00] something that I'm noticing. And you, and I sort of began to talk about this before we started recording that there is something happening right now where some people, and it's not just social media, because I

would say this podcast is some of that too. Some people are beginning to try being more their authentic selves in a way that is for public consumption and in hopes that it will help other people feel more comfortable being able to do the same thing.

[00:16:30] But it's, it's a twist on certainly how therapists are expected to show up or how we have been told we should be showing up in public ways. So, you know, you sort of mentioned how, when you and I were talking before, how there are a lot of things going around on Instagram is in some ways, Instagram is doing a lot to educate people about mental health and de-stigmatize mental health.

[00:16:57] And it's not just Instagram, it's through all forms of [00:17:00] social media and even tick-tock, but the messages that are out there are coming from all different sources and some are more based in like research or more based in, you know, a depth of knowledge and others are more sort of like pop culture, you know, positive vibes only type stuff.

[00:17:20] So I think for therapists to be talking about their own experiences, even I know, you know, as a therapist, I know I'm not supposed to go into depth about my own self-disclosure for my own reasons. But if I share that I can relate to the experience of feeling misunderstood as a child that can be beneficial to my client who feels misunderstood as a child, because when they're, we're talking together, they might think that I don't know what it's like to feel those kinds of things. And the fact that they know I do can help them feel more comfortable. You know what I'm saying?

[00:17:56] **Allyson Dinneen:** I, I, I have so much to say about that. First of all, [00:18:00] Instagram and what's happening and what's possible. And what people think about Instagram is something I'm obsessed with. Of course, the, you know, the sort of common knowledge, common wisdom, I mean about, uh, social media is that it's like a bad thing overall.

[00:18:14] It's like a net bad thing and I really disagree, but that comes from the awareness. So what I've learned from doing my own Instagram is a little bit sort of therapeutic for myself because what it means to be on Instagram is working on your boundaries. And to me, boundaries are a key skill that needs to be built when recovering from emotional neglect, something that you weren't allowed to have as a child, you were basically supposed to put up with anything, everything adults said or did, you had no autonomy as a child. So here we are in the world of social media and there's so much out there. And [00:19:00] I have found that I absolutely have to use my boundaries about what I look at and expose myself to, to protect my emotional life, to protect my wellbeing.

[00:19:15] And that's something that I'm practicing on social media. Another thing that I feel like is very common is that you see, as you said, social media used to like educate people and I find it to be very like we're all a wash in so many means and information about, you know, things that have to do with psychology and emotional and mental health, which is great.

[00:19:43] But what I find is that a lot of that is sort of, it reminds me of being instructed as a child. It's all people instructing others, like, do this, here's how boundaries work, try this, stop doing that. And that to me is just exactly what I [00:20:00] heard as a kid, growing up, adults telling me what to do when, what I actually needed and what human children need is to watch how things work.

[00:20:09] The way that we develop our emotional skills and our maturity is by, not so much being lectured and told what to do, but by watching how it works in other human beings. And I kind of realized that gradually, that is like, I don't in the beginning I probably said more like it's okay to focus on your self care and spoke more in a you voice. But the times that I began to say that, you know, I'm struggling with my self care right now because of this, you know, the stress that has been happening lately, people, I just realized people respond more to it because I'm not telling someone else what to do. I'm giving people the respect [00:21:00] to know what they need.

[00:21:02] I will stay. I realized that I can just stay in my own lane. I can't go wrong by talking about my own healing and recovery because other people get to decide for themselves what's useful to them or not from watching. And they may say like this, like this, none of this works for me or this I love. And it's just, it kind of is indirectly taken up by people.

[00:21:30] I think, as you said in the beginning that when you read something that someone says, like I struggle with versus stop struggling with. I take that in very differently. When someone says like, Allyson stop doing this, or try doing this versus a person who says, oh boy, when I'm struggling with this, I try to do this.

[00:21:53] Or I've tried this, it didn't work. And I figure out which part of that works for me or what I [00:22:00] need for myself. I don't know if that makes sense. But, so that was another thing that I learned is just to stay more talking about my own experience, because I think it's a respect for other people's autonomy, basically.

[00:22:15] **Laura Reagan:** Yes. It's a, the one down thing, you know, the one down thing where we're like, listen, what you need to do is this, instead of.

[00:22:26] **Allyson Dinneen:** Again. Yes. Again, and I feel like the sort of unspoken topic that I'm probably covering is codependency. And I think that basically, I think our whole culture has normalized codependency- like that's what we think relationships are, is just this sort of normalized codependency, where we control other people's feelings. We think it's normal to control our partner's feelings. We think it's normal to control our children's feelings, when that's just really a [00:23:00] boundary problem. Right. So that's probably the thing that I'm demonstrating, I guess.

[00:23:05] It's, I'll just stick to talking about my own feelings. Other people's feelings are not my territory. Right? Like other people's process and even like their emotions and their recovery is not even my, I don't have any ownership over that. It's not really my role to tell other people what to do and what they need, what they need, you know?

[00:23:26] So I feel like that's what I've found myself doing on Instagram is just demonstrating what it looks like to stay in my own lane emotionally and let other people see if that's something they need. Because that's what I needed growing up with someone, not to tell me how to do life, but to let, to give me the respect of figuring out, like I will figure it out. I will stumble. I'll be two steps forward, three steps back, but it's safe for me to figure it out for myself.

[00:23:58] **Laura Reagan:** And [00:24:00] as you aren't telling people what to do at the same time what, for me, what it has done- one you're normalizing the feelings that you're expressing by saying, these are my feelings. And I read that and I say, I have these feelings to wow.

[00:24:15] Or, oh yeah. That's that feels right. You know, so it's. I don't, you know, it's not therapy and it's not necessarily, maybe it's somewhat educational, but it's like, it's something different.

[00:24:29] **Allyson Dinneen:** I think it's more like storytelling. To me I've sort of realized it's more like reading books. I was a bookworm as a kid, I kind of survived by hiding out and reading constantly. And I think that was my way of, um, of seeing like how other people coped with life. Like I watched and read basically how other people coped with life. And so I kind of feel like that's all I'm doing on Instagram is I'm doing two things. I'm saying that it's [00:25:00] okay to talk about things that people don't normally talk about, which I grew up, like nobody talked about, in fact, you were forbidden and shamed for talking about painful feelings of any kind.

[00:25:11] So you had to act, okay, you had to act good, strong, resilient, all those things. It wasn't so much feeling bad. It was, not acting like you were, you were not allowed to, um, show or act or reveal how you felt. So that's one thing is like normalizing that what it is to be a human being and have feelings because we all do.

[00:25:35] I think, and I guess the second thing would be like, letting people just expand their awareness that that's normal. Like that's a, I hesitate to use the word normal, but like, that that is an okay thing to be doing. Like that person is talking about how they feel. Maybe I am allowed to do that too.

[00:25:55] **Laura Reagan:** Yes, I don't know why for me, it's, it's very soothing. And I [00:26:00] actually recommend for people who are hard on themselves, my clients who are like, well, I don't understand why I'm so anxious. Why do I feel so I shouldn't be feeling like this. And you know, I'm trying to help them develop more of an inner, an ability to nurture themselves from within, which is hard when you, when that's not familiar.

[00:26:21] **Allyson Dinneen:** When you don't even know if that's okay.

[00:26:24] **Laura Reagan:** Right. Or even what that means, maybe.

[00:26:26] **Allyson Dinneen:** Yes, exactly. It's so helpful to think about the child inside all of us, because I think so much about how children, you know, A lot of us, and this still happens to me. I'm not making it sound. I don't mean to make it ever sound like I've got this all figured out. And once you're figured out, you're done, because this is part of what it is to be a human being it's like continually, you know, healing bits and pieces of yourself.

[00:26:50] I, I noticed just how much a part of me goes to a very black and white childlike thinking of like, which are the things I heard all the time as a [00:27:00] child, like be a good girl, that's being a bad, you know, that kid's being a bad boy, that kids being a bad girl, you be a good girl. Don't be a bad girl. So the child in all of us is thinking in just strictly in terms of what's good and bad, like it's bad to be anxious. It's bad to be overwhelmed. I'm being good when I am resilient, and I am high functioning. Instead of like, we got to get rid of these, you know, extremes of categorizing, parts of ourselves and the way that we feel as good or bad.

[00:27:34] Yeah. Yeah.

[00:27:35] And is that just like the old child, the old, wounded child inside of us that still thinks in those terms, understandably.

[00:27:42] **Laura Reagan:** Exactly. I, I do use that all the time with clients saying. And it's helpful for me myself. Once I figured it out for myself, I started telling clients when you find yourself thinking good, bad, black, white, you know, safe, unsafe the extremes, and you're not looking at the more [00:28:00] nuanced picture, then that's a clue that it's, that younger part or that traumatized place, that that reaction is coming from.

[00:28:07] **Allyson Dinneen:** Right. People seem to really resonate- when I said in the beginning that I have like a few themes that people really were just like really overwhelming like it when I talk about that. And one of them is the idea of not being also responsible for other people's feelings.

[00:28:23] But there's a nuance there that I feel like gets missed. And I'm still trying to like work on ways, I often write about this because I'm trying to find new ways of saying this. It's not just that you're not responsible for other people's feelings. It's that people are actually allowed to feel bad. And it's us who has to recover from the idea that it's bad if people feel bad, it's that same good, bad thing. Like I have to take away their sad feelings or they're upset feelings when it's actually more like learning [00:29:00] to feel that there's nothing wrong in a situation when someone's sad. There's nothing wrong about that. And it's just, it's not them who has to be fixed.

[00:29:11] It's us who has to start to recognize that child's thinking, you know, that child who had to fix adult feelings to feel safe is still trying to do that as an adult when that's not what we have to do anymore. It's actually, no one tells us like when you're 18 and you leave home that you don't have to do that anymore.

[00:29:33] But we, if we don't know that we just keep doing it for the rest of our lives to feel safe when the truth is that people need to be able to feel sad and upset. And for example, if I'm very sad about something, it's like, say the anniversary of some grief in my life. If someone comes at me with like, oh, well just don't think about it.

[00:29:55] Let's go, let's go shopping or let's do this. I feel [00:30:00] unsafe with that person because I feel like they are trying to take away the feeling from me. And it feels like, it just feels like they're inside metaling around in my emotional life, which feels more and more as I get older, like the boundary transgression that it kind of is, just as it would feel if someone said to me like, oh, you can't be hungry, you just ate, you can't be cold.

[00:30:27] **Laura Reagan:** Although we do say that to kids.

[00:30:28] **Allyson Dinneen:** We do. And that's an example of being out of our boundaries again, and just teaching children to tolerate having their feelings controlled by other people.

[00:30:41] **Laura Reagan:** I would say even teaching them to disconnect from their feelings because they, they look at the adults, biologically their wired to look at the adults as they're the ones who know how to take care of me. So they tell me that I'm not hungry. Even though my body tells me I am hungry, then I guess my body's wrong and I'm wrong. And I must not be [00:31:00] hungry, so, but why do I feel like this?

[00:31:02] **Allyson Dinneen:** Exactly. I think it's really unfortunate because it's just generation after generation handing down what basically amounts to desensitizing. We're sort of desensitizing children who are born fully equipped with feelings about their physical state, you know, I'm hungry, I'm cold, their emotional state. I'm sad. I'm alone, I'm upset and we're just trying to desensitize them to those feelings. And then of course, you go to school where it's all about 24, 7, 5 days a week, desensitizing anything that you feel like you're overwhelmed, you're hungry, or, you know, you don't want to sit here anymore. And it's just a whole sort of process of, you know, conditioning us to be out of touch with anything we feel. And then unsurprising, when we're adults that are confused about, you know, what we want to [00:32:00] do, what we enjoy, what we need, what do we need? Like physically or emotionally, the number of people that I see that I ask that question, they like literally have no idea. Kind of like become tearful when I'll say like, what do you want?

[00:32:13] Or what do you need? Like, I don't know, like. It's a painful question for a lot of people because they lost that attunement a long time ago. The fact that someone actually wants to know is also a really painful experience for people. Like, can I trust, like a lot of people have trouble, like this must be, I can't trust this.

[00:32:34] Like, you're going to trick me somehow. You're going to hurt me. If you ask me what I need.

[00:32:39] **Laura Reagan:** Oh, seems like a trick question. If you know that you have needs.

[00:32:43] **Allyson Dinneen:** Yeah, exactly. As a child, I don't know about, you know, your audience, but for me, there was a lot of like this sort of bait and switch, like tell me what, you know, tell me the truth, tell me what you're really what's really going on. What's upset with you. But the minute I did, I would be [00:33:00] severely punished for admitting that I felt sad or this was unfair or unhappy about something. So on the one hand I was being told to always tell the truth, but on the other hand, I was punished basically being taught to lie for adults.

[00:33:16] They wanted me to lie and pretend and perform what they wanted in this horrible catch 22. So basically, I just could not trust these adults that I loved.

[00:33:32] **Laura Reagan:** Hey everybody. I wanted to take a 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 like the CBD gummies. They taste good and they [00:34:00] work well. So, if you're looking for a craft CBD product that comes directly from a farm outside, 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 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."

[00:34:25] Well, and that's I'm so I'm so sorry you had that experience. And I know that you're not alone in that it's relatable for me with the part about, you know, well, just for me, just like suppressing how it felt and I, going to something you said earlier, it reminded me, probably said this on the podcast before, but it reminded me of how when I was little, I was always told I was too emotional, so, and too sensitive. And, you know, I got the message explicitly from people and implicitly where, you know, you could just tell people didn't like that, or people would be [00:35:00] uncomfortable and they would kind of give me messages that I shouldn't be that way, even though I didn't know, I was just being me and I had real feelings about real things that were happening that weren't, you know, that were valid. But I remember when I learned how to disconnect from my feelings, somehow, I learned how to hide my feelings and, and not cry when I was upset or not, it was mainly that. Anxious or sad were the two things that I learned to not show.

[00:35:28] And I remember just like this feeling of like, yes, I did it. Like finally, I, I mastered it, you know? So it was like an actual way of trying to get control over something that felt out of control for me. And I was so proud of myself and it was like, finally, I've got, I figured out the meaning of life. Hide your feelings, which is so absurd when I talk about it.

[00:35:51] **Allyson Dinneen:** Because it wasn't safe to be vulnerable. They didn't have, it wasn't safe to be vulnerable. So you had finally cracked the [00:36:00] code, right, which was to like numb out your feelings.

[00:36:05] **Laura Reagan:** This is how to be good.

[00:36:06] **Allyson Dinneen:** Right. And that's the, you know, you, I don't need to tell you this. I know, you know, but it reminds so much of how those were adults who couldn't stand to see your sadness and your vulnerability, because in some level, some part of them, it reminded them of their own, but they've spent, you know, they're, they've shaped their whole personality around numbing themselves. The last thing they want to see. And the thing they're most convinced that you need is to shut down your feelings like they did. And the ultimate thing is like, so that you don't remind them of their own pain.

[00:36:40] **Laura Reagan:** Exactly. And that's what we, as adults now can do to our kids where we shut down their feelings, because it makes us uncomfortable. You know?

[00:36:49] And I don't know. I mean, when, even when my kids were little, because I wasn't a therapist, then. And I didn't know. I thought saying don't cry when they were crying was the way of being [00:37:00] kind. Like don't cry. It's okay. It's like, wait, why am I telling them not to express their feelings?

[00:37:06] **Allyson Dinneen:** Right. My poor first child.

[00:37:08] Right? I mean, you can only do what I've recently realized is the, uh, the skills that you have from your family growing up are literally the only tools you've got when you go into adulthood, if that's what you've learned, like that's the only tool I had was to tell people to snap out of it, go be by yourself. If you're crying, if you're angry, you have no right to feel that way. Just, I'm going to overwhelm you with, you know, my own requirement, demand that you shut down and oh gosh I have so many feelings of regret and guilt around that. And that's just, I've had to deal with that with that oldest child now. And it's actually been a very sort of healing processes to now, like, let her tell me and not be defended against it.

[00:37:55] And just like, let her tell me the things that I did that were painful for her [00:38:00] or the things that I didn't see that she was going through. It's made us closer now because I don't have to do anything. It's finally the living expression of my work, which is like, I don't have to do anything. I can just accept how she feels right now.

[00:38:17] And it's amazing how it almost it's like, uh, Jonice Webb has written something, or I think in one of her books that about, I think it was an experience whether it was her or someone she was writing about had that experience much later in life with an elderly father where they just had this moment of, she was able to say how she felt and the elderly parent heard it.

[00:38:46] And it was almost like it, it brought so much healing about, you know it doesn't take away those memories, but it's amazing that you can, it's amazing to know that we can still reconnect with people that we love by [00:39:00] simply like it's, it's amazing how simple it is to just let people have feelings that we don't have to defend against.

[00:39:09] It doesn't have to mean I was right or wrong. I mean, inside myself and I talk about this with friends, you know, like parents or close friends, like, or you, for example,

right now it's so painful to know how limited I was in my twenties when it came to parenting, but that helps me. I have a, I have a place to talk about my own pain around that with friends who can also hold it.

[00:39:36] And say me too, or I know what you mean and not fix it either. Like they don't, I don't need them to say oh, but doesn't she understand you did the best you could, like you were, you were a great mom. I don't actually need to hear that. I just need to hear this still hurts. This hurts still. And just have it be accepted.

[00:39:57] **Laura Reagan:** That's the same thing your, your daughter's asking for. Right?
[00:40:00] She wants you to hear it and then you want your friend to hear it. And that's what the repair is so it is so simple just to, but it's, so it's not easy, but it's simple. It's not easy to let your guard down and open your heart to their disappointment or their pain and your own disappointment in yourself. But that's my biggest...

[00:40:23] **Allyson Dinneen:** It's so true. It's how did you say it? It's so simple, but it's not easy, but you know, what's kind of interesting. I've been thinking about this idea lately more like we have this idea that it's work to learn this particular skill, you know, of like letting other people feel things, which I want to say that what we're doing is actually, it's easier to be less defended when you say there's a truth to her emotional reality, I will just accept the truth of her emotional reality. And I don't have to say it out loud, but I can also [00:41:00] have my own emotional reality about what that was like for me back then.

[00:41:04] **Laura Reagan:** Yeah, exactly.

[00:41:05] **Allyson Dinneen:** So like everyone's emotional reality can be true and real, but in terms of like, I've just been thinking about this idea lately that often I use the metaphor a lot about like skills it's like developing skills that I never had as a kid that I never learned from the adults growing up about being able to tolerate uncomfortable emotions about being able to talk through hard things.

[00:41:31] Well, how to stay connected with people we love even though we're talking about painful things and not to abandon them emotionally or that kind of thing. But what I kind of like, I use this metaphor a lot about skills and practicing, but it's not the exact, and I'm having a hard time putting this exactly to words, but what I've realized, it's not like going to the gym and like you have to perpetually work this muscle.

[00:41:59] [00:42:00] Otherwise it will totally atrophy, and you'll be like 90-pound weakling again, it's not like that. You know what, it's more like, it's more like riding a bike, you tried and you tried and you tipped over and it seemed hard. Like you would never get it, but once you got how it felt to be riding the bike and it just stayed up and you were coasting and you felt in your body, like you had an embodied experience of like, Oh, this is how it works to be on the bike, you don't ever forget.

[00:42:32] And I think what I'm trying to say is that once I've had an embodied sort of experiential, this is what I feel like is happening in therapy, is that when you've had an experiential moment of, this is what it feels like to fall apart with someone else. And be okay. And they don't abandon me. That's in your body and you don't forget that.

[00:42:56] So just like with my daughter, when I finally reached the [00:43:00] point where I could just like, sit and like take in and feel my own sadness and feel her sadness, I don't have to learn that from scratch again. I don't have to- like I continually practice it, but it's it's so it gets easier instead of being like the muscle, the gym workout memory, where it's like always going to be hard to let other people have their feelings.

[00:43:25] It actually is getting easier and easier. It's not that I never forget because I do often, you know, one of my younger kids can come to me like come in the door crying and I could be like, oh my gosh, what's wrong? What can I do? And so that's often my default because that was my entire childhood that will never disappear.

[00:43:46] But overlaying that now is the ability to quickly shift into right. It's okay. It's safe to just listen. It's safe to just let her be sad. It's safe to not solve this problem, if she's not asking for that. And [00:44:00] this, I hope that makes sense. I want people to feel like it's not hard forever. It actually becomes a skill that gets easier.

[00:44:08] Just like you can pick up that bike and hop on and you remember, oh, I know how to ride this bike, even if it's been a while.

[00:44:14] **Laura Reagan:** Yeah. I love that. And I think, you know when I'm saying like it's simple, but it's not easy. I think what I'm thinking of there is like, it's not easy because the defenses are so automatic.

[00:44:27] **Allyson Dinneen:** Yeah.

[00:44:27] **Laura Reagan:** But it's simple because once you do it, because what I've seen in the years that I've been working with people individually who have pain from childhood, no matter how angry they might feel at their parents and how hurt they are rightfully by abuse, you know, benign things to deliberate abuse, you know, the whole spectrum of the ways that we can be wounded during childhood, through our family relationships

[00:44:55] **Allyson Dinneen:** Sure. It's so easy. That's realizing it's so easy for people [00:45:00] nobody's even doing anything wrong all the time. It's just, we're very sensitive and it's very easy to be wounded.

[00:45:06] **Laura Reagan:** Exactly. And children have so little power. So, you know, they are so vulnerable that when hurts come, they feel so big, and they don't know how to deal with them and they need help.

[00:45:18] But I think what's, what's simple is the fact that that child always, almost always, I'll say there, I'm not gonna tell any, I certainly don't want anyone who's listening to think that I'm saying that if you were abused that you should go and try to repair things with your parents. That's not at all what I mean, but every person I work with who has had their parents didn't meet their needs, or they were abused in some ways, often, all they want is for their parents to hear how they feel about what happened. And, and the parents usually are so ashamed of the disconnect in their relationship that there, this is where it's the hard part. The defenses are I [00:46:00] can't hear this. I can't hear this. I can't take this in. I don't want to hear this.

[00:46:02] I can't accept that's the way it was for them. And what's simple is that all you have to do is just open your heart, let your guard down, let your defenses down, and assume that this child of yours loves you and wants connection with you, like you do with them, and that that's it. That's why it's simple because all you have to do is just say this, this is their truth.

[00:46:25] I may have done something that hurt them, and I can still love myself, even though I made a mistake, you know, so I think that why I said it's not easy is because I think we expend an immense amount of energy, not wanting to accept the way that we've harmed someone else, because we didn't want to harm them. And we feel ashamed about it.

[00:46:46] So as soon as, you know, we, they want to confront us about it. We don't want to let them confront us about it, you know, and that goes across to other things too. Right.

[00:46:55] **Allyson Dinneen:** That's so true. And it's more of that kind of black and white thinking. Like [00:47:00] if she's right, then I must be wrong. The black and white, the good, bad, the right wrong.

[00:47:08] Instead of like, the more we grow, you know, and we sort of develop our emotional maturity as we start to be able to recognize like multiple things can be true. It can be true that I'm thinking I had no resources or support at that point as a mom and I was so afraid and, you know, like at wit's end too much for me, for one person to handle.

[00:47:34] That is so true. And it's true that my neglecting to notice what she was going through was also true. And the more that we can build that holding multiple truths into our relationships, the more connected we can feel, because it doesn't require one person's reality to be erased for the other person's reality to stay, [00:48:00] you know at the party line.

[00:48:02] **Laura Reagan:** I love it. Well, Alison, I have just really enjoyed this conversation. You're such a kindred spirit and I'm really glad that we got to connect today, thank you for being my guest.

[00:48:12] **Allyson Dinneen:** Oh, me too. Laura. It's been wonderful to talk with you. I could talk with you all day.

[00:48:17] **Laura Reagan:** I feel the same. So where I think I know the answer to this, but where can our audience find you and everything you have going on?

[00:48:24] **Allyson Dinneen:** Oh, probably the best place is my Instagram my account @notesfromyourtherapist. It has my website there too, but that's, that's the main place I'm hanging out these days.

[00:48:35] **Laura Reagan:** Wonderful. And I'll link to that in the show notes. And I have your book sitting right here, right here in front of me, see, and I love it.

[00:48:48] And I, you know, like I said, I use it when I'm doing my video sessions with clients, I might turn to a certain page and, you know, ask them like, have you seen this? I'll show it to them and be like, yes, exactly [00:49:00] so, and I also recommend people to go, just check out your Instagram very often too, but I love the book because some of my clients, and I can relate to this deeply are like, I can't do it with social media.

[00:49:12] I just need to be away from social media and I'm like, that's okay, she's gotta book. Um, yeah. So I recommend that for anybody who just, you know, I think it's a nice thing to keep on your nightstand for a little like soothing, comforting inspiration for, for me, it definitely is. So I'm very grateful that you took the time to be my guest today.

[00:49:34] So as we're wrapping up, can you tell us maybe like the top two things that are the themes that you find people resonate with the most on your Instagram?

[00:49:44] **Allyson Dinneen:** Oh, sure. Yes. What I was talking about earlier. Okay. So people, I think the top one is that we're supposed to need each other. The top one is when I write on you hate feeling needy or [00:50:00] you think you're not supposed to need other people for support, emotional support. And that seems to be the most powerful one that has gotten, you know, shared the most by people because we grow up in a culture that is a wash in the whole point is being independent from all other human beings and being able to do everything, including meet all of your own needs by yourself, never needing support, you know, just being resilient and strong and capable of everything. That's why you were supposed to be perfect as a child so that you'd never need any help.

[00:50:37] **Laura Reagan:** So many negative messages about being "needy."

[00:50:41] **Allyson Dinneen:** And it's, it's unhealthy to need other human beings. When that's like how we're born and come into the world and you, and I know that human beings are highly social mammals.

[00:50:53] That's what we are. That's what we have completely evolved for is emotional safety with other human [00:51:00] beings. People often wonder about like, oh, but then

you're not, you're codependent and that's people get caught up because what a healthy relationship of meeting other people looks like is it's a balance of needing others to depend on and countering, and also your own personal autonomy in the world.

[00:51:21] Both of those things are what we need in our relationships to be ourselves and to have the autonomy of our feelings and our dreams and desires. But also to feel like we don't sacrifice relationship because of that, it's not an either or thing to need others and to desire to be a separate person. So that's probably the top things people have been recognizing like they've been trying to shove down their needy feelings for so long.

[00:51:49] They can't believe it. Like other people are saying, wait, it's okay to need others so much? So much shame, like that is the mechanism for keeping that [00:52:00] particular myth going, it's like shaming people for needing help. And if there was a second one, I guess I would say that it was you mean I'm not supposed to fix or take away other people's painful feelings?

[00:52:14] You mean, I'm allowed to feel painful feelings? Other people are allowed to feel pain and painful feelings. So those are probably the top two that I like, just try to find. I'm often trying to find different ways of saying it because, you know, I still think about that myself all the time.

[00:52:35] **Laura Reagan:** That's, thank you. That's so beautiful. And I mean, I think that's a hundred percent hits the nail on the head for me what drew me the most to what you write is that, I mean, I'm looking, I'm going to read one now from the book. Is that okay? I think this is a good way to close. It says you might not want to feel needy, but your nervous system is extremely evolved to drive you, to seek safe, emotional connection with [00:53:00] others. And it has millions of years of a headstart on your wish to be above that. BOOM.

[00:53:05] **Allyson Dinneen:** I forgot, I said that like that sometimes says it more concisely than I currently could like right now.

[00:53:14] **Laura Reagan:** Well, you, you really have a gift for being able to capture with language, this emotional experience. And I'm really glad you decided to take on that experiment of the Instagram, which you said in your book, I didn't even know if I was really allowed to do that, but I just tried it anyway. And what it's become has obviously resonated with literally hundreds of thousands of people.

[00:53:39] **Allyson Dinneen:** Thank you so much Laura. And if nothing else, if I can just say that discovering the things that I'm actually allowed to do has been so much a part of my recovery from my own childhood.

[00:53:52] Thank you. I'm so grateful that you have enjoyed my book and shared my book and my account so much.

[00:53:58] **Laura Reagan:** You're welcome! [00:54:00]

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