

Therapy Chat Episode 253



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[00:00:00] **Laura Reagan:** Therapy Chat podcast episode 253.

[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:** Today's episode is sponsored by Therapy Notes. Between writing notes, filing insurance claims and scheduling with clients, it

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[00:01:02] Hi, welcome back to Therapy Chat. I'm your host, Laura Reagan and it's mid-November and in the U.S, we just shortly before I started recording this, we were told that all the ballots had been counted in our States that were still outstanding. And Joe Biden received the most votes. So unless something really unusual happens, it seems like we will have a President and I'm looking forward to that.

[00:01:31] I think the topic of today's episode is definitely interesting and very fitting for where we are right now in our country, and our country's history. As this episode comes out the week before the American holiday of Thanksgiving, which has cultural significance along with it's often seen as a family holiday.

[00:01:57] I feel a lot of mixed feelings about Thanksgiving [00:02:00] because, you know, we originally learned that it was this coming-together of the colonial settlers who had come to find this new world and the people who lived here before the Europeans came, and that it was this, you know, coming- together, beautiful, peaceful moment.

[00:02:19] And I don't know if it even really happened, but it's clear that the European settlers who came here were part of a genocide against the indigenous people who had lived on this land for tens of thousands of years before the Europeans arrived. So, we gather as a family and share a meal and we focus on our family connection, that's what the Thanksgiving Day means to me also, I was born on Thanksgiving, so it's always had a strong family meaning to me that was much more important than the historical myth that we had been taught before. Because when I was growing up, we always had [00:03:00] birthday cake on Thanksgiving and I really felt like a star that day.

[00:03:04] So that's my own personal experience of Thanksgiving. But as we go into that, it's kind of the beginning of the holiday season in the US. When we celebrate Thanksgiving this year, there will be many tables where we are not gathered with extended family because of Coronavirus and needing to isolate from one another to help everyone stay healthy.

[00:03:30] So there can be some sadness with that. And, there are a lot of families where politics has really created some serious estrangement. People

feel like they can't even talk with each other, which is very sad. So, I think this episode is timely because I talked with my guest, Tina Gilbertson about family estrangement, and she specializes in helping parents whose adult children are estranged from them.

[00:03:58] And this [00:04:00] is a situation that I see very commonly in my practice. I usually work with the younger members of the family who do not want to have contact with their parents. I mean, many of my clients have very positive relationships with their parents, but some because of childhood abuse may have limited to no contact with their parents.

[00:04:23] And I was really interested in talking with Tina about her work and her book. So, I hope that you will find this to be an interesting conversation. And if you have a strained relationship with your parents, this may provide you with some hope. And, if you are a parent who has a strained relationship or doesn't understand why there is such a disconnection in your relationship with your adult child, this may be helpful and hopefully informative, and provide some comfort and hope as well. So ,let's just dive right [00:05:00] into my conversation with Tina Gilbertson. Hi, welcome back to therapy chat. I'm your host, Laura Reagan. And today I'm really excited to be talking to Tina Gilbertson, the author of Reconnecting with your Estranged Adult Child.

[00:05:17] Tina, thank you so much for being my guest today.

[00:05:20] **Tina Gilbertson:** Oh, it's my pleasure, Laura. Thanks for having me on.

[00:05:22] **Laura Reagan:** You are very welcome. This is a topic that I am super interested in and it definitely comes up a ton in my practice, so I think that our audience is going to be really interested in what you have to say today.

[00:05:35] So before we dive into talking about your book and your podcast and your reconnection club, let's just start off by you letting our audience know a little bit about who you are and what you do

[00:05:47] **Tina Gilbertson:** I am therapist I'm currently based in Denver, Colorado, and I started out as just a general therapist in private practice, uh, somewhat over a decade ago, I guess.

[00:05:59] It's well, [00:06:00] anyway, it's been a while, but, um, what I, what I discovered in my practice was that I had a lot of clients who were not talking to their parents. And, uh, and I didn't really know at the time that this was

actually something that, that happens a lot. So I was kind of taken aback by, by how many clients I had and sometimes I would talk to them about, well, geez. You know, how. How well do your parents understand why you don't want to, to go home for the holidays or whatever it was. And, you know, they would say things like, well, I've tried to talk to them about the problems, but they don't get it, or they might say, um, I can't, you know, they wouldn't, they don't understand me.

[00:06:38] They won't get it. So I can't talk to them. I just, I realized that there was a real disconnect and I, I knew there were parents on the other side who were probably really, really, uh, devastated by what had happened in their relationship and really maybe didn't have a clue as to why this disconnect had happened and why they weren't hearing from their kids.

[00:06:58] So, I started [00:07:00] writing articles online, you know, Hey, you know, here are some things that you might need to know. Cause I had all this information from the people in my practice, you know, they were telling me why they didn't want to talk to their parents, but they weren't talking to the parents. So I thought, Oh gosh, I, I need to help these folks connect and that that was, uh, you know, a few years back. And I just, there was such an outpouring of gratitude and questions, and I just heard from so many parents, I was blown away by how big this problem was. And so I decided to specialize in, in working with parents to, to try to repair some of these relationships that had gone kind of off, off the rails a bit, for reasons that were, you know, often mysterious to the parents.

[00:07:47] So that's where, that's where I, I landed. I ended up specializing in working with parents who are unwillingly rejected by their, or, or estranged from their adult children [00:08:00] and everything I've been doing for the past, I don't know, six years or so has really been to that and to try to help these folks reconnect

[00:08:09] **Laura Reagan:** Well, now that makes me curious do the parents who you work with often find that they're able to truly reconnect with their adult children.

[00:08:19] And when I say truly reconnect, I mean that, it's actually a relationship that's like satisfying for both.

[00:08:28] **Tina Gilbertson:** That is the idea, of course, that it be mutually satisfying and mutually beneficial. But when you've had, you know, estrangement and these kinds of problems don't happen overnight when you've

had decades of a relationship that has a certain tone, a certain set of dynamics to it, it takes time to turn the train around, but I do see parents working on doing that and having some success with their kids. And I hear stories pretty regularly of kids [00:09:00] being just so grateful that their parents were willing to stop and look at what was going on, which is incredibly hard, hard work for the parent who typically, you know, did the best they knew how thought they did a decent job, don't understand why this cutoff is necessary and everything for them to turn around and say, wow, there are clearly changes that need to be made. It takes a tremendous strength, I think, to withstand the shame and humiliation that often accompany these kinds of, uh, relationship rifts, you know? But, but I do see success and that's what keeps me going.

[00:09:43] I, I do get to hear about the success stories, but I'm not going to pretend that it's an overnight. Usually it's not an overnight process and it's definitely not easy. There's usually a ton of personal healing and [00:10:00] evolution that really wants to happen in the parent before they can show up in a different way in those relationships.

[00:10:05] **Laura Reagan:** What a beautiful gift you are bringing to these families by helping the parents find a way to resolve these rifts that feel very painful for both the adult, the parent, and the adult child. I mean, that's, I'm like super excited now that I'm thinking about it, that you're offering this.

[00:10:25] **Tina Gilbertson:** It is I'm excited to, it is what keeps me, I live and breathe this every day.

[00:10:29] It's such a privilege because the amount of healing that can take place through this crucible of parent-adult child, estrangement is, is breathtaking. There's so much healing often that needs to happen in the parent. And this is maybe the thing that brings them to the place where they realize something needs to. Something within themselves really needs to heal and, and change and do life and relationships differently. It's just, it's transformative. It [00:11:00] can be a transformative experience to go through this fire, this pain of this very, very deep, personal rejection.

[00:11:08] **Laura Reagan:** Wow. Yes. Those words are so evocative. Um, so Tina let's maybe for some who are listening, I mean, I think you've already kind of created a picture, but let's make sure that everyone who's listening really knows what we're talking about when we talk about parental estrangement, maybe you could give some examples of sort of like types of situations that

[00:11:29] **Tina Gilbertson:** Oh, sure. Yeah. Well, I mean, I'll start with my own grandmother. This isn't something I really thought about when I was getting into this work, but in my own family, my mom's mother estranged herself from her family of origin.

[00:11:43] My mom grew up without knowing her grandparents on that side of the family. I mean, she never met her maternal grandmother and grandfather, it was total lifelong cutoff, as far as we know. I think that kind of cutoff is rare these days, just because it's a lot [00:12:00] harder to do than it was in the 1930s. You know, it's just hard to, to be off the grid, to disappear, to be hard to find.

[00:12:10] So, and from what we know, I think of the research, most estrangements are temporary. They're not this lifelong disappearance kind of thing, but that is, that is one form of estrangement is just a blackout, you know, total cutoff and it's. And I think what parents fear, uh, they really fear it a lot when their child goes radio silent, that this is what they get.

[00:12:31] They basically lost their child. But I think that. Uh, much, much more common is a kind of on again, off again, relationship between the parent and child. Sometimes the child is in the parent's life and sometimes they're gone again. So it's kind of a cyclical, or periodic estrangement. That's how it's referred to in the literature, cyclical or periodic.

[00:12:54] Um, and I think the reason that's the most common is that there's so much pressure, uh, both internal and [00:13:00] societal for people to, you know, forgive, to get back together and stuff like that. And so there's a tension that builds up. Like it's just hard, it's hard to be estranged from your, uh, primary family members.

[00:13:14] And so, you know, people time goes by, maybe people try again. But the same problems that were harmful to the relationship in the first place, you know, are still there unless there's been some, some effort made. And so over time, a new kind of, uh, pressure builds up the pressure to get away. Again, and I think that's why you get this, this on again, off again.

[00:13:39] So that's a, that's a second kind of estrangement, besides the, you know, total blackout, lifelong cutoff. And a third one that I do see is what I call emotional estrangement. So the relationship, it's not like they never talk. It's not like they even don't see each other. You know, these are parents and children who may go to lunch.

[00:13:57] They may send texts and everything, [00:14:00] but at least on the parents side. There is a sense that they're strangers, you know, that they're not as close as they used to be, or as close as a parent would like them to be on an emotional level. You know, often there's this sense that we used to be able to talk about anything.

[00:14:18] And now it feels like I kind of walk on eggshells. So the estrangement, the distance is not physical. It's not logistical. It's more of an emotional, distance. And that's very painful to feel that someone who is so important to you is like a stranger. So that's the third kind of estrangement that I recognize and see in some of the people that I work with.

[00:14:39] **Laura Reagan:** Okay, these, these are just getting me thinking so much. Obviously since I'm a person, I'm a child, I'm a child of parents. And I am also a parent of children who are adults. And, um, you know, I'm just, I'm thinking about clients and I'm thinking about friends and extended family [00:15:00] members.

[00:15:00] Um, my, in my family and my partner's family, I guess I'll just ask you and you can, you can teach me, the situations that I often see are I encounter, I'd say there's two, two common situations that come in to my office. One is, people who had a father who at some point separated from the mother and the child, didn't see them again.

[00:15:27] And then the father tries to re re-engage with the child when the child's an adult. And they have these like continuous missed connections where the, the child wants a relationship with the parent, but they're also angry. And, you know, so it's hard for the parent to break through and the parent keeps trying to connect, but it's like, they really don't know the child, so there they keep missing and it just feels like these repeated abandonments and betrayals.

[00:15:59] **Tina Gilbertson:** [00:16:00] Yeah.

[00:16:00] **Laura Reagan:** And then the other side that I often see, which is like almost the complete opposite is I often see people, especially women who feel when I meet them, they described being so close with their moms, like they talk to them every day or they see them every day or their mom is constantly calling them. But, they feel the mom is like, too enmeshed or too intrusive.

[00:16:27] So they'll describe a closed, they'll call it a close relationship, but they'll describe a feeling very violated by the way, the mother is pushing like intrusively on their boundaries and, and then, you know, as they are working

through that, they start to make connections to ways that they don't feel that their mom really met their emotional needs and then they want to put more distance. And the mom like really, you know, reacts negatively to that with this, like either like really controlling behavior or [00:17:00] just really hurt and like rejecting. Where would you put those in the examples of what you gave?

[00:17:08] **Tina Gilbertson:** Oh, wow. Yeah. Um, well you're right. I mean, I see these two. Describe them very well. These situations, these are just two in a panoply of, uh, different, uh, situations and dynamics, mother, father, daughter, son, all of these things, but, uh, you know, where are these emotional estrangements are? These cyclical estrangements? I mean, um,

[00:17:30] **Laura Reagan:** I'd say they're both probably emotional, really.

[00:17:32] **Tina Gilbertson:** Yeah. Yeah, definitely. I mean, in the case of the father, there was an actual physical, uh, estrangement there maybe after a divorce or something like that. And of course there's the complicating factor if the mom alienated the child from the father. And of course that can happen in either direction.

[00:17:48] You know, fathers can alienate their, try to alienate their children against the mom as well after a divorce, or even when there isn't a divorce, there can be parental alienation. So that is a complicating factor. And [00:18:00] one thing I do want to say, because parental alienation is a, is a subject that is, um, discussed in, in the literature and among therapists that there is a lot more attempted alienation than successful alienation. So, I mean, it's a real thing. It absolutely happens. We all know that it does that. Unfortunately, some parents, you know, try to turn their children against the other parent. It's very harmful of course, to the child, as well as to the other parent. It's very unfortunate, but there are lots of attempts at this and some are successful, especially when the kids are young and they have no contact with the other person. But, um, I think that's probably a little bit outside the scope of just kind of regular estrangement, because most estrangements are motivated by the adult child himself or herself. So, so just getting back to the father who was separated and wants to reconnect, this is just an inherently difficult situation for both the father [00:19:00] and the child. There's no guidebook, you know, who are we to each other? If I haven't seen you in 15 years, I mean, how do you be a dad? If you haven't been a dad and this is no longer a child, they're an adult.

[00:19:12] So it's just a tricky thing to navigate. And I think just the one thing, a bit of advice that I would give to parents is you've got to develop the skill of validating the difficulty for yourself and for your child of forging that

relationship. After this huge hiatus, you're not supposed to be able to just pull this out of a hat.

[00:19:36] It's difficult, but you also need to, to be able to sit with that anger. If your child is angry and feels abandoned, you have to be able as hard as it is to, to understand, you know, why that anger might be there, there to understand how your child could feel abandoned. Even if you, you know, your experience was that you tried and tried [00:20:00] to see your child and weren't able to, or that you, you know, wrote to your child six times a year or whatever, you there's gotta be room to just acknowledge and understand if the child is angry and, you know, you have to be able to hear that.

[00:20:14] And to, to accept it and, uh, empathize and just have, uh, remorse and sadness for that child's experience. So, you know, that's what I would say to the father is don't be in a hurry to, okay, let's get on with this. Let's have our new relationship. Now that's all in the past because that's not going to address the need that is still there.

[00:20:34] So that's, that's what I say about that is when there's emotional distance, you've, you know, how do you create emotional closeness? And one way to do that is really by listening, empathizing, trying to understand and be, just be with whatever that person is experiencing.

[00:20:49] **Laura Reagan:** Well, that's where you said let's see the shame and humiliation that the parents feel at being estranged from their children. It seems like that can get in the way.

[00:20:58] **Tina Gilbertson:** Yeah, [00:21:00] definitely. I mean, that is actually the biggest obstacle to repairing these relationships. There is something very human that gets invoked when your own child is, you know, their pain is basically an indictment of your parenting. That's what it feels like. Right?

[00:21:18] If I didn't do it right, I hurt my child. I didn't try to, I didn't mean to, and yet my child was injured, damaged, hurt, angry, disappointed. It's just incredibly, it's a, it's a lot to take on as a human being. And by the way, as someone's adult child, yourself. Exactly. Right. Yes. So parents are not these super people. They're just people with emotional needs of their own, a need to be also validated, although your child is not the person to do that, but you know, we all have a need for validation, visibility, appreciation. We need to know that somebody sees how hard we've tried to do the right thing. And if it's [00:22:00] not your child, um, it needs to be you, it needs to be someone else.

[00:22:03] But I think, um, when the child is estranged, or angry, moving away, the parent may have a, a very strong need for that child to recognize, Hey, I didn't mean to hurt you. You know, I did the best I could. Can you forgive me? In much the same way, by the way that I forgave my parents for not being there for me.

[00:22:23] Uh, so there's an, also a justice problem there. If I put up with a lot.

[00:22:27] **Laura Reagan:** Yeah.

[00:22:27] **Tina Gilbertson:** You had to put up with something and why don't you forgive me the way I did, but, you know, speaking of these emotional needs that parents have, cause we all have them, uh, that reminds me of the second situation that you talked about with women and their moms.

[00:22:41] And, uh, and it can also be moms and their sons.

[00:22:44] **Laura Reagan:** Sure.

[00:22:45] **Tina Gilbertson:** It's not just moms and daughters, but with moms and daughters in particular, I do see this a lot. Is that really, really close relationship often, but not always with the women. The mom was a single mom and it was [00:23:00] us against the world, you know, the two Musketeers or the three Musketeers, you know, mom and her children.

[00:23:05] And then yeah, there is a, there is a certain. Uh, enmeshed quality perhaps to the relationship that develops and the needs of the mom, uh, for love and belonging and stuff are met through that relationship with the child. And the child at some level, either consciously or semi, consciously, or unconsciously becomes aware of the, the burden of having to be there. Be there for that, their mom, you know. Cause mom doesn't have a lot of other close relationships. Mom relies on me too for companionship, for, uh, you know, just to listen, to be, to be close and together. And. I'm the most important person in my mom's life. And that, that can be, um, a big responsibility, you know, for, especially for a young person who is, you know, 20 to 25, trying to [00:24:00] add a place in, in, in their lives where they're trying to make a life of their own as, as an adult,

[00:24:05] **Laura Reagan:** Very much especially I see when they have children, like now they're managing their own family, their little nuclear family and their mom is demanding a lot of them they feel. Suddenly, it feels like it's way more than they can do.

[00:24:19] **Tina Gilbertson:** Yeah, definitely. And having children is a flashpoint. There's a mother daughter relationship coach called Rosjke Hasseldine. She is a, um, a counselor who specializes in mother daughter relationships.

[00:24:34] She talks about these flashpoints in a young woman's life where she may kind of pull away from her mother. And that is, you know, having children of her own is one of them. Where the relationship with her mother becomes a totally full of tension. And mom can't understand that cause it's like, Hey, I've got grandchildren. You've got kids I can babysit. This is great. This is wonderful. We're, we're a big happy family. Uh, [00:25:00] so there's a real ripping away of this sense of, of everything being okay and close and wonderful. It's, it's really devastating. What can happen. And of course the daughter can feel. Just painfully aware of how much her mom is hurt by being shut out, perhaps while the daughter just makes room for, for the, her chosen family, her new family, it's just, it's a powder keg, or it can be.

[00:25:25] Um, because mom has these emotional needs that really can't be met elsewhere. And so it's not really optional for the daughter to be there for her mom. So I'm not surprised that you've seen that too in your practice, because I think that's a pretty common dynamic and it's certainly not that they don't love each other.

[00:25:43] That's what's so tragic about this. You know, they both the pain of this weight of something in their relationship. Rosjke Hasseldine thinks of it in terms of women's needs and how, you know, societal women's needs are not [00:26:00] typically considered important needs that need to be met. So it falls on daughters.

[00:26:06] It falls on daughters to meet mom's needs because mom isn't really supposed to have needs, but, but women are supposed to meet everybody's needs, so it's this complicated. It becomes a you know, whose needs are going to get met mine or my daughters mine or my mother's

[00:26:20] **Laura Reagan:** Someone's needs have to be abandoned here. Who's it it going to be?

[00:26:24] **Tina Gilbertson:** Yeah, exactly.

[00:26:25] **Laura Reagan:** Oh man. Let's just pause for a moment so I can give you a little bit more information about why I love Therapy Notes. I switched to Therapy Notes a few years ago. I'd say it's about three years now. I believe. And

I have never regretted it. I was very happy with the EHR I used before, but Therapy Notes is more intuitive. I love the interface. The customer service is fantastic, [00:27:00] and I love how I can get my notes done quickly because I can customize the template that I use for my notes. And there are opportunities to put check marks rather than having to write out the intervention used. So I have cut my time, spent writing notes way down, which is wonderful because I like to focus on seeing clients.

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[00:27:49] Now let's get back to our interview. And then I think about how I hear from the parents. You know, that [00:28:00] they're saying, they're sort of saying implicitly, okay, you don't want to be around me. Fine, but you're keeping me from my grandchildren and that's just not okay. You know, and, and sort of that becomes like this power struggle, like the parent is saying, Oh, you're rejecting me well I reject you.

[00:28:17] But those children, I want them.

[00:28:20] **Tina Gilbertson:** Yes. Yes that I do see that too. And that's tragic as well. You know, obviously, ideally you have a multi-generational family and the kids see everybody getting along and the kids feel loved by everyone and the kids get to love everyone equally and all of that. But, what the grandparent who tries to bypass the parent quickly finds out is that they don't have a, in most places, as far as I know any legal, right. They may feel a moral, right. But they don't have any legal right to be in their grandchildren's lives. And that is, that's obviously really tough for someone to take if they've been waiting for grandchildren for [00:29:00] eons. But the point is that they, they focus on these grandchildren. Without realizing that the relationship that needs to be tended is their relationship with their grandchildren's parents.

[00:29:14] That is the primary relationship. And yeah, it's easy to resent if your child is keeping you away from your grandchildren, but you know, everybody gets their turn to determine what happens with their children and who their children see and everything. So everybody gets a turn to be parents and have absolute say over their kids.

[00:29:34] And then you, then you advocate to the next generation and they get to have kids. And, you know, that's kind of how it works. And the lucky people just get included in the next generations' activities and it's not problematic. But, when there are problems in relationships, these things do break down. And when you say, well, that's cruel to the grandchildren to keep [00:30:00] our, you know, the grandparents away.

[00:30:01] But complication is that yes, it's very unfortunate when grandchildren have to watch their grandparents being held at bay. But in order to have empathy for the grandparents, the parents have to make a sacrifice and, and there is no empathy for them. So it's kind of a zero sum situation here. Somebody's needs have to be trampled in order for someone else's to be honored.

[00:30:24] And that. You know, that's a situation that, where you just need to change the playing field, the rule book something's got to change so that there isn't a zero sum quality to who gets their needs.

[00:30:35] **Laura Reagan:** Yeah. It's like, instead of looking at it as a black and white, who's the bad one. Who's the good one here. It's like opening up more of an expansive view of what is really going on, that everyone here has needs and how can we lovingly meet each other's needs, you know?

[00:30:52] **Tina Gilbertson:** How do we get along appropriately? Yeah. Along instead of, uh, being angry at, you know, you, because you won't let me get [00:31:00] along. It's how do I get along here?

[00:31:02] If somebody is mad at me, how do I manage a situation where someone is so mad at me or so hurt by me that they're holding out these things that are important to me? And it's easy to get lost in resentment and, uh, and uh, self criticism and other criticism. It's just easy to go down a black hole with this.

[00:31:22] It can be extremely depressing and it can be hard to turn things around, but that is the answer. Really? The answer is. That there needs to be compassion in this situation for everybody, for the grandchildren who might benefit substantially by having this intergenerational family involvement, uh, compassion for the parents who obviously have some reason, you know, we want our parents and our children. To be, uh, it's pretty normal to, to want that to, to want harmony in our families. Right? So if the, if the parent of the grandchildren [00:32:00] is not wanting that, for some reason, we've got to look and say why, you know, what needs to happen to bring this natural state back where, where we want harmony. And of course, passion, uh, compassion for the

grandparent who really feels a, just, uh, a terrible, piercing loss, which may of course relate back to earlier losses that may or may not have been addressed. That's another thing that comes up with estrangement is acknowledged, unaddressed, trauma, grief. Uh, these things can be triggered when we're rejected by the people we love.

[00:32:37] **Laura Reagan:** Well, as a trauma therapist, it's like, there it is. It always comes back to trauma because yeah. It's like why the parent originally couldn't meet their children's needs the way the children needed them to is probably because of the parents unresolved trauma that they had no idea was affecting them because they just tried to push through. And then the child is reacting because [00:33:00] they feel traumatized by the way that the relationship was, or, you know, the attachment wounds that came from from that. That makes sense to me.

[00:33:10] **Tina Gilbertson:** Yeah. And in order to address your children's trauma, of course you have to face your own, and that's not something that everybody is okay ready to do, well enough supported to do, equipped to do so.

[00:33:22] Yeah. It's a tricky, tricky problem and a very important thing to try to, to try to help with. I think people really need help with this.

[00:33:30] **Laura Reagan:** Yeah. And that's ,what, you know, cause what my clients express is that they just want their parents to listen to them about how they feel, validate their feelings, like you said, Apologize if needed for wherever they fell short without, you know, making it all about them, just like, you know, I'm so sorry. I didn't, I couldn't be what you needed me to be or something like that, you know?

[00:33:57] **Tina Gilbertson:** Yeah. And this is an important thing for therapists [00:34:00] to understand. It's sometimes pretty easy for us to see that what's really needed is for the parent to listen and just hear their children's pain. But when you are that parent with untreated trauma or terrible deep grief or loss or feelings of deep insecurity or, or low self-esteem, it is not trivial to listen to someone say you hurt me.

[00:34:25] I mean, that, that goes to the absolute core of your being. And it is, yeah. Set asking everything to, to listen and hear and hold that kind of information. So it is, you know, that's just a note for therapists. We, we can see what, what needs to happen here, but we've got to appreciate the, the price that it feels like needs to be paid from the, from the client's point of view.

[00:34:51] So we've got to be exceedingly, gentle, understanding, empathetic with the person we feel is you know, the key [00:35:00] to, to solving this whole thing. You know, it may be like, come on, come on. You know, here's what needs to happen. You need to get with this program, you need to do this. You need to do that. But we know that pushing people, uh, does not help people change.

[00:35:12] And certainly shaming people does not help people change. And it's very easy to unwittingly, accidentally shame someone who is in this position where their children are not talking to them.

[00:35:26] **Laura Reagan:** I can understand because as a parent, you know, I want to be open to, I feel it's inevitable at some point, my children should probably come to me and say, when you did this, I felt you didn't want to see me or you, you didn't care, or you weren't, you know, whatever it was, I'll just have to wait and see what it's going to be, but whatever it's going to be, I know it's, it should be coming because that would mean that we actually have had, you know, an open enough relationship and open communication enough that they trust [00:36:00] me to be able to come to me like that.

[00:36:01] But right. But I also dread it. Because I don't want to feel that I ever let them down because you know, it hurts so bad. And that's, you know, that's me with years of therapy, about the way I've been hurt before it's being able to know that that's still going to be coming or should be coming in and stealing myself to tolerate it.

[00:36:24] Like not, not just bracing against it, but like be open to it. Yeah. That'll probably be my work in therapy for the rest of my life until, until they're ready to come and confront me about what ever it was. But What, tell us how you doing reconnection club helps parents with this because you know, the shaming piece, and the the pain and stigma is so deep and yeah. Horrible for people.

[00:36:53] **Tina Gilbertson:** Yeah. So the reconnection club at reconnectionclub.com is I see it as an online school [00:37:00] where parents can get the information that they need to start trying to make these repairs. And of course there's a support element to it because as we've just been talking about making repairs is not simply a matter of, you know, going step by step through the numbers.

[00:37:14] It's very, very much an emotional process, a process that involves probably a lot of tears, a lot of, um, efforts to heal and personal growth and so

on. There's a lot of information there in the club and the textbook for it is a book that I've written called Reconnecting with your Estranged Adult Child. So that's, I consider that the textbook for the online school and that puts forth this approach. Uh, what I hope is a very compassionate approach that takes into account parents' needs for, for healing and, and being understood and being visible and also adult children's needs, which we know are the, the reason why people disconnect from families [00:38:00] because their needs are not met or they're, they're, um, quite, uh, badly trampled through usually unwitting behavior from, from families.

[00:38:10] So, um, yeah, the, the whole idea, there's the book, you know, Reconnecting with your Estranged Adult Child. There's the reconnection club where people take those principles and they work together. You know, it's, it's just for parents, the reconnection club. It's an online home for them basically to, to work with these ideas and these principles in a, what I hope is a very supportive, kind, atmosphere.

[00:38:33] One thing that's different about it is, you know, if you go online and you look at forums where estranged, parents hang out or estranged adult children, there is so much anger. There's so much vitriol. There's so much blame. There's so much diagnosing of each other. I mean, for every adult child who diagnosis their child, their parent does a narcissist.

[00:38:54] There's a parent on the other side, diagnosing the child with narcissism, BPD. Yep. [00:39:00]

[00:39:00] **Laura Reagan:** You know, bipolar.

[00:39:01] **Tina Gilbertson:** Yep. Absolutely. Those are so there's just so much us and them. So that's what I wanted to get away from with our online space. Um, and we, we looked very carefully at, uh, at how people are talking about themselves and their children.

[00:39:17] And we, we really, it's very important for us to keep a kind respectful tone. And we, we don't often need to remind our members because I think, you know, somehow we have managed to, uh, to set that tone for the most part. So I think of it as a very healing space. So ideally people read the book, they joined the club and they take their time in working through these uh, things. And we always encourage people to have an individual therapist. I can't count the number of times that I have recommended individual therapy to people who are posting in the reconnection club. And they're talking about what sounds to me

like undiagnosed trauma specialists. In particular are [00:40:00] very, very much needed for the people I work with.

[00:40:03] Just so many have undiagnosed unaddressed trauma. That's completely affecting all of their relationships, but in particular, uh, with their children, as you can imagine, you know, this incredibly intense relationship. That's not like any other.

[00:40:18] **Laura Reagan:** That's the thing is like, normally for people who have trouble relating with others, you can alienate all of your friends and all of the, your coworkers, but you, and you can be like, it's, they're jerks and I hate them. But then. Your children, you want, you may feel angry at them, but you want them to, so it's this conflict. Yeah.

[00:40:39] **Tina Gilbertson:** Yes. And, and, you know, parents express that, you know, honestly, deep down, they thought, well, geez, at least my children are supposed to love me. And you know, some of us, when we hear that, we're like, well, you know, that's pretty selfish or, you know, it's easy to label that as well.

[00:40:58] You're a narcissistic [00:41:00] parent, if you expect your children to whatever, whatever, but you've got to understand where that's coming from. Here's a person who may have had no sense of, of belonging, being cherished or, or anything that's really that, that feeds them as humans. And it's you, you know, if you can really get that, you can understand why they would at least hope that the children they bring into their lives might be that unconditional love that, that, um, they never got before.

[00:41:33] I'm not saying that is. Yeah, that that's what should happen. Children should unconditionally love their parents. That's not, that's not what I'm saying. What I'm saying is I can understand why someone who has never, ever experienced that would look to their children for that. So rather than condemning parents who do that, it's very important to understand the history of someone who reaches out to their child.

[00:41:56] To get their needs met and who is absolutely devastated when the [00:42:00] child does want to do that,

[00:42:01] **Laura Reagan:** You've described it beautifully and really it evokes compassion for the parent, you know, and that's the thing I think for me, like clients who are coming to work on how their attachment needs were unmet during childhood, their emotional needs or you know, they were abused

physically, sexually or verbally that, you know, it's like, I don't want to, like, I don't want to vilify my parents that they're not bad. They loved me. I know they did the best they could and I'm angry at them and I'm hurt by them. And I want to set boundaries with them, but it doesn't mean, you know, that the parents, I think the only way to do this healing work, whether it's working with the adult child or a child or the parent is with compassion for everyone, because everyone wants to have these loving, harmonious family relationships, like you said. So, you know, something got in the way that they [00:43:00] couldn't. And that's why I think what you're doing is absolutely beautiful and needed. And so healing. I just feel like even in this time, in particular, in our like world history. There's so much violence and so much anger and so much us and them, the fear, but things like what you're doing are repairing relationships and creating more connection. And that is what we need. So thank you so much for what you're doing.

[00:43:28] **Tina Gilbertson:** Yeah. So I do want to say that I would never want or expect or ask anyone to enter a relationship that feels harmful to them.

[00:43:39] That that is absolutely not the goal of, of reuniting parents and children. You know, healing must happen before reconnection can happen because the idea is a mutually satisfying, uh, nurturing relationship that doesn't harm anybody. But that is, you know, that adds [00:44:00] to the lives of everyone involved.

[00:44:02] **Laura Reagan:** Wow. I am very grateful that you're doing this and I think your your way of describing it is so helpful. So just to wrap up for people who are listening, maybe people who are parents who are estranged from their children, I was thinking your podcasts might be like a good entry point for people.

[00:44:24] **Tina Gilbertson:** I hope so. Yeah. The podcast is the Reconnection Club Podcast.

[00:44:28] Sometimes it's easier to find it under my name, Tina Gilbertson, then Reconnection Club. I'm not sure why, but anyway, in that podcast I do try to give just kind of tidbits and bits and pieces for parents to, to think about, to reflect on sometimes practical tips, you know, there are logistical things that come up when you're a estranged from a child.

[00:44:49] Should I send them a birthday card? Should I invite them home for the holidays? You know, that kind of stuff. So, yeah, I do. I do hope that, uh, uh, you know, the feedback is that, that. The people, [00:45:00] you know,

some people find it really helpful. So yeah. Check out the Reconnection Club podcast. If you are a parent, who's got even troubled relationship with an adult child, you know, headed off at the past.

[00:45:11] If you're still in touch and you're not a stranger, but you're worried about the quality of your relationship. I, I like to think that there are some tips and information there for you as well.

[00:45:20] **Laura Reagan:** Fabulous. You've got it all. You got the book for those who prefer to start that way. You get the podcast for those who start that way. Blog posts, your club. So, um, Tina, I'm just thank you so much for being my guests on Therapy Chat today.

[00:45:34] **Tina Gilbertson:** It's been an honor to talk with you, Laura. I and congratulations on five years, plus thank you. Uh, have therapy chat, you provide, uh, an incredibly uh, important service for therapists and just for the general community. So thank you for doing this and very much for having me.

[00:45:53] **Laura Reagan:** The pleasure was mine. Today's episode is sponsored by Therapy Notes. [00:46:00] There are many ways to keep your practice organized, but Therapy Notes is the best. They're easy to use, secure platform, lets you not only do your billing, scheduling and progress notes, but also create a client portal to share documents and request signatures.

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[00:46:34] **Announcer:** Thank you for listening to Therapy Chat with your host, Laura Reagan LCSW-C. For more information, please visit therapychatpodcast.com.