



Conscious Life presents

ANXIETY SUPER CONFERENCE

In Therapy

People pleasing behaviour

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[00:00:00] Alex Howard

Hi, I'm Alex Howard and welcome to this week's episode of *In Therapy*, where we follow real life people on their therapeutic journeys.

In this week's episode, we're exploring the people pleasing pattern. This is where we get so used to accommodating everyone else, making everyone else happy around us that we also pay a price. We pay a price in our own body. We pay a price in our own nervous system. And when we're learning to really calm our body's danger signals, our body's way of trying to tell us that it feels that we're under threat, we have to learn to listen. Sometimes that means learning how to have boundaries with those around us and really honor our own needs.

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This week we catch up with 22 year old Sanaya, who has come to therapy to help with her anxiety. Last time we saw that Sanaya is making good progress, but there are still things we can add to her anxiety toolkit.

Together, we explored some of the key principles for calming the nervous system and ways to reset anxiety responses.

So Sanaya, it's lovely to see you. I think it's two weeks since I last saw you?

Sanaya

Yeah, it's been two weeks.

Alex Howard

How have those two weeks been?

Sanaya

Yeah, they've been, I think, good. If I'm honest, I haven't really got anxious that much.

Alex Howard

Wow. Is that normal, to not get anxious for a couple of weeks?

[00:01:57] Sanaya

No, that's not normal. But yeah, it's been weird. I've had anxious moments. I've done the STOP Process method a few times, and actually it has really helped a lot. I've seen a big difference when I've done that.

But as a whole, I can't really tell you that time where I got really anxious and I hated it or anything like that. And then in terms of sticking to my meditations and going to the gym and all of that, for the past week I just didn't do it. And I can't say that it made me anxious, but I did feel really guilty about it, but I tried not to think about it too much. And I was like, oh, it's okay. Life just gets in the way.

Alex Howard

And what was the reason you didn't go? Was it because you had too many other things happening? Because you've been really on it. Was there a bit of a lag in that, or what's the sense?

Sanaya

It begun just because I had a very temporary job for two, three days at the beginning of the week. And they were like really early mornings, like at 7:30. So I was like, realistically, I'm not going to get to the gym.

Alex Howard

It's not going to be open in time.

Sanaya

Yes, exactly. So that kind of happened and I was like, oh, it's fine because as soon as this is over I'll just get back into it. And I think my body was just like so tired.

Alex Howard

From the early starts.

Sanaya

On that Wednesday, my alarm went off and I was just like, I can't do it. And the job was quite demanding. I had to be on my feet all day. So I was just kind of like, it's not going to happen.

And then continued from there, it was like a mix of I could actually go, but I just didn't. I think it was the early morning, so I was just kept putting my alarm off straight away. And then it was quite nice for me just because I didn't actually get anxious about it, really. It wasn't like I was getting worried about it.

Alex Howard

Because in some ways it's quite, because I know that that routine of going to the gym and adding in the meditation has really helped, but also there was probably a sense of, I need to do this to be okay. And in some ways the fact that you didn't do it and you've still been okay, hopefully that also just calms things down. Like another step.

[00:04:35] Sanaya

Yeah, exactly. And then on Saturday, I was like, okay, I need to go back to the gym. And then so yesterday morning and today again, I went to the gym and got back into my routine. Applying for jobs and going to the gym and whatnot.

Alex Howard

And well done for getting back on track. It sounds like legitimate reason why you were off track, because all the stuff that's going on, but if we've got a strong habit, sometimes the challenge is you break the habit and then it's really hard to get started again.

So you've also shown yourself that even when you kind of were off track, not off track, but you weren't in the routine, that you also have the motivation to get yourself back in the routine.

Sanaya

Yeah, I had like a little blip when I went out, and then again, I think I drank too much. And then I came home and I just had this feeling that I was like, okay, I just don't want this in my body. So I did make myself throw up, which was I was, just afterwards I was like, I shouldn't have done that. But the next day I tried to forget about it.

Alex Howard

And you made yourself throw up because of how you felt with the hangover or you made yourself throw up more in that kind of bulimic way? What's your thoughts on it?

Sanaya

At the time it was this feeling of, I think because I was a bit drunk, I was just like, I don't really want the alcohol in my body. And I don't know if it was like a physical thing, like, oh, this is going to make me gain weight or whatever. I don't think it was. I think it was just from like a health point of view. I was like, oh, I shouldn't have drank that much.

Alex Howard

And it was the following day that you did it?

Sanaya

It was that night I came home and I did it. So I don't think I would have done it if I wasn't under the influence.

Alex Howard

Yeah. Okay.

Sanaya

The next day I did wake up feeling like I shouldn't have done that. And then I made sure that I ate a big meal and everything.

[00:06:36] Alex Howard

So it didn't feel like a return to old patterns?

Sanaya

No, I was just more annoyed at myself for doing it, but it was okay. After that, I was like, okay, just try and forget that. And then since then, I've been like, fine. And I haven't really had, I can't really tell you that I've had a really anxious moment or anything. So yeah, it's been good.

Alex Howard

So the you that sat here tell me about the last couple of weeks now, and if you imagine the you that came for the first session that you had, like a few sessions ago. I think this is the fourth session. Would you have believed that you'd be sat here saying that at this point?

Sanaya

No, not really.

Alex Howard

Because I think it felt to you at the start that the anxiety was something that, it had a lot of power and you were a bit powerless against it. And what I'm hearing you describe now is not that I never get anxious and not that I'm never going to have anxiety again, but it's just the anxiety about anxiety. Or the sense that this anxiety has this enormous power over you, that feels different. It feels like you're in a different relationship to it.

Sanaya

Yeah. It definitely doesn't feel like it has this intense power over me.

Alex Howard

Because it feeling like it has that power of you is part of what makes the anxiety so bad. Does that make sense? Because if it's like, oh, yeah, sometimes I get anxious like, I don't really like it, but so what? That's one thing. Another thing is, if it happens, I can't do anything, I'm not in control. And then there tends to be so much anticipatory anxiety, like anxiety about having anxiety.

And what I think I'm hearing you say is that anticipatory anxiety seems to have really calmed down. So your relationship to it feels to me, it just feels different.

Sanaya

Yeah, definitely. And I've been thinking, why do I get so anxious as well? And I think a lot of it is that I feel guilty. I don't know exactly why I feel guilty, but I think there's an element of letting people down. In the videos that I watched, I didn't really think I was a people pleaser at all but the more I thought about it....

[00:09:09] Alex Howard

When you found out what a people pleaser was.

Sanaya

I really worry like, oh, I don't want to let my mum down. I feel guilty about me being an awful child when I was in sixth form or whatever and being troublesome. And then I felt guilty for breaking up with my boyfriend. I feel guilty when I let my friends down when I don't see them because I'm feeling anxious or I don't want to see them or whatever. And then I also feel guilty because I should stay at home and be with my sister because I don't want her to be alone.

Alex Howard

How old is your sister?

Sanaya

She's 16.

Alex Howard

Why should you be at home with her?

Sanaya

No, it's just we always speak about, can you be at home on this day because I'm not doing anything. And I think it's just more so when I'm not there, she's usually, like a teenager, just sitting in her room on her phone. So I think she definitely prefers it when I am there because we'll watch the TV or do stuff together or go for a walk together. I think also, I never really had an older sister when I was growing up.

Alex Howard

You feel like kind of pressure to be that for her?

Sanaya

Yeah, I want to be her friend. It's like I don't want to let her down if I'm going out all the time. And then also my mom would prefer it if I didn't go out all the time anyway.

Alex Howard

It sounds really quite stressful. Because what I'm hearing you say, I just want to reflect it back, you don't want to let your friends down by not going out and be with them. But if you go out with them, you let your sister down because you're not there with her and you let your mom down.

And there's the sense of also wanting to be out there in terms of work and progressing things, which then means you let your friends down, your sister down and your mom down. So it's a bit like whatever you do, you're going to let someone down.

[00:11:06] Sanaya

That's why I thought I wasn't a people pleaser, because I was always letting someone down.

Alex Howard

Because you were failing at keeping everyone happy, you couldn't have been. What I think you now realize is the very fact that you feel like you're always letting someone down means that you have strong people pleasing traits.

Sanaya

Yeah, exactly. I was like watching that video and I was like, okay, maybe I am a people pleaser a bit. And then the more I thought about it and the more day to day and just like how I was with my family or my friends or trying to organize my life, I realized that I'm trying to make my friends happy and then make my family happy. And it's hard.

Alex Howard

Sounds exhausting.

Sanaya

Yes.

Alex Howard

And also, in a sense, it's also anxiety inducing because you're constantly having to think about, if I do this, how will it make that person feel? And if I do this, how will it make that person feel? And if I do this, I'm going to let those people down. So you're spending a lot of energy thinking about everyone else, which speeds up your whole system.

And if you remember what we said, I think on our second session about the biology of anxiety, that when you pump those stress hormones, the cortisol, the adrenaline, your system gets used to being wired, and then almost it will latch onto anything to worry about because it's already overstimulated.

Anything that we can do that helps calm your system, like it's almost your baseline of anxiety and stress. If before it was up there and it's already calmed down a bit, anything we can do to calm it down even further just means that if a panic attack or anxiety is up here, the further your baseline is, the longer the journey is to get to that point. It feels overwhelming.

So this feeling like you've got to put everyone else's needs before your own is just that, apart from the fact that it gets in the way of you doing what you want to do in your life, it stresses your system.

Sanaya

Yeah.

[00:13:08] Alex Howard

Also, one of the things, one of my quotes I probably overuse, but is that to say yes to ourselves, we have to say no to other people. It's learning how to go, do you know what? I know I want to be there for my sister, but actually right now this is what I need to do.

Do you have a sense of how that pattern plays out? You've given me some examples of some of the people. What are some of the things that you say to yourself inside of your mind? Like if you're imagining, for example, going out with your friends and not being there with your sister and it's a day that she's going to be home, how would you play that in your mind? What would be the things you'd say to yourself?

Sanaya

I think the main thing is like a worry. Like what's she going to do without me? And I just worry about her. And then I also think personally maybe I shouldn't go out. I might end up drinking too much or being embarrassing. Or I'm not going to make a difference if I'm there anyway, so I may as well make a difference whilst I'm at home.

Alex Howard

And when you worry about her, do you project your anxiety onto her? You worry that she'll be anxious if you go out and you're not around?

Sanaya

I wouldn't say it's anxiety. I just worry that she was like a bit depressed.

Alex Howard

So you feel a slightly maternal thing of wanting to be there to help her?

Sanaya

Yeah, I think so. And I think because we have a really good relationship and she trusts me a lot as well. I don't know. I want to be there for her.

Alex Howard

So there's a part of that which I think is a very sweet sisterly care. So I don't want to wrap everything in psychological issues. It's also like you care about your sister and you want to be supportive of her. But there's also another piece that comes in which is then that almost gets turned against you and turned into like, you're being selfish or not being there.

So there's the genuine care, but then it almost gets weaponized by your inner critic and used as a way to make you feel bad if you're not always there with your sister. Does that make sense?

Sanaya

Yeah, it definitely does.

[00:15:41] Alex Howard

How does it play out with friends? So let's say it's got some friends that are going out on a Friday night to pub or bar. And you said you might go, then you decide not to go for whatever reason, it might be your sister, it might be you're working, whatever. How does that then play out in your mind?

Sanaya

They make jokes that I'm flaky on plans and yeah, I think I just get worried that I'm not fun anymore. I think in sixth form I went out literally all the time. If any of them wanted to do something, I would always be like, yeah, I'm on it.

Alex Howard

Was that also because you didn't want to let people down? So it was almost like if someone wanted to go out.. Or was it because you were just like you were into going out?

Sanaya

That was just me. I just didn't really care about anything and I just wanted to go out at that age. Because that whole entire time I was definitely letting my mum down. I wouldn't say that in sixth form I was anxious or tried to people please at all. It was genuinely just me.

And then I think just because I've changed quite a bit since then, I do worry sometimes with my group of friends that I'm definitely not the same.

Alex Howard

Yeah. So you don't want to let them down and you don't want to be seen as flaky?

Sanaya

I don't want to be seen as someone who's boring and no one sees anymore.

Alex Howard

And then how does it play out with your mom? Think about the different places where this pattern plays out. With your mom you decide to go out with your friends, what's the guilt pattern that plays out thinking about your mum?

Sanaya

I think I just feel like I owe her something. I think one of her main worries is also me, where I'm going, how I'm getting back. Because even though I say, don't wait up for me, she still does. So I still worry about that. I feel like I definitely owe her and I should be at home helping her because she's stressed or whatever.

Alex Howard

Sounds like a lot of responsibility. It sounds like you're responsible for how your mum feels, responsible for your sister, you're responsible for your friends. It seems like hard work to me.

[00:18:21] Sanaya

I guess so. But I guess it's not really... I know it's just how I want them to perceive me as well.

Alex Howard

There's also to be seen as being kind and being considerate and being respectful and thoughtful of others.

Sanaya

Yeah.

Alex Howard

When it comes to deciding what to do on a day off or a weekend or an evening, how much do you decide that based upon what you really want to do versus your sister, your mum, your friends? What drives those decisions?

Sanaya

I think it depends. It literally just depends on the day, I reckon. And how often I have seen my friends. If I feel like I've seen them a bit too often and I haven't seen my sister for a while, then it just all depends on how often I've seen them.

Alex Howard

So it depends on who you owe some of your time to.

Sanaya

Yeah.

Alex Howard

It's quite interesting that, isn't it?

Sanaya

Yeah.

Alex Howard

Because what you're not saying to me is what you want to do. Like, do you want to hang out with your sister? Do you want to hang out with your mum or do you want to hang out with your friends, or do you want to hang out by yourself? Obviously, these aren't the only options.

What I'm hearing you doing is almost weighing up the different like, well, I spent time with them, I haven't spent time here or I owe this person some time. Which to me is quite a strong helper pattern. It's like placing everyone else's needs as being more important than your own.

[00:20:08]

And I wonder, I don't think this is the only thing, I don't want to take something which is a bit of a jigsaw and inflate it too much but I wonder if part of what your anxiety has been about has been a part of you going, how about me? What do I want? As opposed to I've got to be there for this person, think about this person, don't let this person down. That's all quite activating and quite stressful to your system. And it's like a part of you just going, I don't know what to do.

And I wonder if the more that you're making decisions from what you want to do, which, of course, is sometimes going to mean you want to have your sister, sometimes you want to spend time with your mum, sometimes you want to see your friends. It's not that you're suddenly going to go screw the lot of them and never spend time with them. But it's like a different place from which you're then operating.

Sanaya

Yeah. I agree with that.

Alex Howard

What's your sense of where that helper pattern comes from? Like not wanting to let them down, not wanting to be seen as being selfish or being uncaring. Do you remember where that started? Or some of the times when you were younger that perhaps got a bit carried away?

Sanaya

I'm not sure entirely. I know with my mum especially, it is just because I feel bad just from how I was in sixth form and I put her and my dad through quite a hard time.

Alex Howard

Have you ever sat down and sincerely apologized?

Sanaya

Yeah.

Alex Howard

And did they hear that apology?

Sanaya

Yeah, they have. My mum will still bring up petty comments, kind of as a joke, about a party that I threw when I was 18 or something.

Alex Howard

In the house?

[00:22:05] Sanaya

In the house. Well, they went to the cinema, and for some reason I thought it would be okay.

Alex Howard

It's sort of right of passage then.

Because if you were saying to me you've never really had a conversation about I'd be like, actually, probably the adult thing to do would be to sit down and say, you know what, I was a teenager and I was having fun, and I recognized that I crossed the line at times and I recognize I wasn't respectful. And I want you to know that I am sorry about that. But it sounds like you've done that.

Sanaya

Yeah, I definitely have.

Alex Howard

I believe you. You're like trust me, Alex, I've really done this. So I know you done that and I'm not going to push that any further. But it's interesting that despite the fact that you've done that piece, you've not let go of it somehow. There's still a place where you're holding onto that and feeling guilty for that.

Sanaya

Yeah. I think it's because both my parents were going through such a hard time themselves.

Alex Howard

At the moment or at the time?

Sanaya

At the time.

So especially seeing how stressed they are now, and I think they're in an okay place right now, it's just like, gosh, I added to that. So I definitely do feel guilty a lot for that.

Alex Howard

But you see, it's interesting because I think that it's an appropriate right of passage to go a bit wild at points. And as long as no one gets seriously injured as a result and you're not doing things which are just like fundamentally violating people's boundaries. Like throwing a party in the house when your parents go out is not the most grown up thing to do, but it's also what happens when you're a teenager and you're just like, I want to have fun. That is part of growing up.

And it's interesting that, because in a sense, by the way, not going through that stage is also problematic. If you imagine someone that goes through their teenage years and always is a really goody two shoes and does everything right and doesn't want to let anyone down. There's a part of them that hasn't been allowed to be free that actually then they're more likely to sabotage their life later in life.

[00:24:17]

It's a little bit like someone that marries the first person they're in love with and doesn't have any sexual freedom and expression, is much more likely to have an affair at some point later in life because part of them is like, I've never had that experience, I don't know what that's like.

And that's not permission for someone just go completely crazy, but it's appropriate to have different experiences. But what's interesting is that what sounds like relatively normal teenage behavior that perhaps got a little bit enthusiastic on a few occasions, has been taken by your inner critic and almost weaponized against you of, you're now not allowed to go out and have fun because you're going to hurt your mum, you're going to not be there for your sister. And it sounds like that just isn't helpful for you.

And my point is not that you should go out and go crazy the whole time. It's that you shouldn't feel guilty for wanting to go out and have fun. Like what I hear you say of the other night where you drank too much and you ended up making yourself sick, no one needs to make you feel guilty about that. It just didn't feel nice. Like you're going to be less likely to do that next time because you didn't like the way that it felt. A layer of guilt and you're a terrible person, you're this, and that, is not a necessary thing to come in.

Sanaya

Yeah.

Alex Howard

What do you think would happen if you had a bit more space from this judgmental, critical voice? Like you didn't have to make yourself feel guilty for doing the things that you want to do.

Sanaya

I think I would do a lot more of what I wanted to do.

Alex Howard

Right. What might some of those things be?

Sanaya

I think it's literally just looking after myself a bit more and knowing if I wanted to be on my own on this night or if I wanted to spend time with whoever on this night, I think it would be a nice balance, I guess. And I think I had that uni quite a bit. But that whole moving back home and I can't just accommodate to what I want to do and when I want to do it because I'm living with other people.

Alex Howard

I think it's an important point you're making. There's definitely an appropriate respect of living in your parents house and living by the rules of the house. So it's not that I'm saying you should go out until 05:00 in the morning every night. There's an appropriate thing. As a parent I do get it. Your mum struggles to go to sleep knowing that you're out. I don't think there's ever easy resolutions because it's like I just completely get that parental thing.

[00:27:10]

If my wife goes out, my wife goes out and goes crazy, my wife goes out just if she's traveling across London late at night, I don't really go to sleep till she's home, and rarely does she go out beyond midnight anyway. So there's a place where I get that. And you need to be free to have your life as well.

And that's one of the reasons why at the age that you're at, it's generally healthier dynamic in families for kids to move on and have their own space, then you're not... But of course, you're living in London, and the reality is London is that's not an easy thing to do. And I think for a lot of people, they end up being home longer than they would have done because that's just the reality of London life.

So I think it is a tricky dynamic, but I think the piece that particularly is important here is you feeling more free to listen to what you want to do. Because I'm not hearing you say, you want to go out partying every night anyway. You want to go out some of the time and enjoy doing that. What are some of the other things that you would do if you weren't thinking about the impacts on everyone else and being there for your sister and your friends? If your time was completely yours to design your life the way that you want to, what might that look like?

Sanaya

I'm not entirely sure. If I had money, I would go away on my own, and that was something that I knew, I thought I would never, ever go away alone because what would I do with myself? But recently I'm like, maybe I would need it and it would actually be the best thing for me if I had money.

Alex Howard

Where'd you go?

Sanaya

Abroad, like France or Spain or something.

Alex Howard

Backpacking or traveling or spend some time somewhere and work there?

Sanaya

I've not really thought about it too much, but I think just organizing something to do on my own would be really nice. And I feel like after I'd done it, I'd be like, okay, I've just done that all alone with no input from anyone else.

Alex Howard

There's also something about building your sense of self-confidence that I think often comes from putting ourselves in, it's not a difficult situation because there's not a difficult thing, but putting yourself in unfamiliar situations and thriving as a result that just gives one a sense of personal power. Like, I can go and travel on my own, or I can go and live in a different country by myself. It's part of growing your character. I think that sounds like a great thing to aspire towards.

[00:30:03] Sanaya

Yeah. I don't know. It's something that recently I've been thinking about, and I feel like it's that whole thing of growing your self-confidence. I think once I've done that, I'd be like, I literally got through it all on my own, and I don't really need to rely on anyone else, which is comforting.

Alex Howard

Yes. And also particularly the career path that you're looking at. The more you can grow your sense of self-confidence, the better as well.

What stops you? We're talking about a potential goal in the coming months, let's say. It doesn't have a timeline on it, but of going traveling, perhaps being in a different country. It might be traveling, it might be staying in a location for a bit of time.

So there's a financial piece there's, obviously COVID . Whatever happens with that. Is there anything else that's in the way of doing that?

Sanaya

Yeah. I just feel like, well, I'll be leaving.

Alex Howard

How about your mum? How about your sister? How about your friends?

Sanaya

Yeah, exactly. I'd be less worried about my friends, but more so about my family.

Alex Howard

I think when we just talk about something and put a spotlight on something, often that alone helps us see it a bit differently. I wonder just verbalizing to me that you're possibly not pursuing what you want to do in your life through fear of letting down and not being there for your family. When you think about it like that, how does that sit with you?

Sanaya

It's definitely something that I want to work on and I think I'm not also entirely sure what exactly I want to do just because I haven't really thought about it. Because in a day I don't think about what I want to do.

Alex Howard

You think about what everyone else wants to do.

It's probably also the case that whilst your anxiety was feeling strong in the way that it was, it probably also felt like you didn't want to be away from the familiarity of environment.

[00:32:15]

I think that, I use this word, recognizing it's too strong a way to put it, but what you're describing is an element of codependency. That you don't want to leave home because it's safe and familiar. And when the anxiety was feeling quite overwhelming, at least it was a place that you felt safe.

But also not wanting to leave because you don't want to leave your family and they feel that they're left without you and what the impact might be. I think that's not a good place from which to make important life choices. And you're at an age where each chapter in life as one gets older, has its gifts and has its challenges. So one of the challenges you have in the chapter you're at is you don't have money and you don't have confidence in the way that you will as you get older. One of the gifts is you have freedom and you have time.

And then one gets older and older and one, hopefully if life works out, gets a bit more money and gets perhaps a bit more self-confidence, one has less time and less freedom. So there are pros and cons.

And I always think that one of the secrets to life is to try and live each stage as fully as you can at that stage. So the person in their early 20s goes traveling, has great experiences, follows their passions, does the things they want to do. When they get to their 30s or 40s and they might be married, have kids, have a mortgage and can't just go, I want to go traveling, I want to do this, doesn't resent the fact they can't do it because they look back fondly and go oh, wow that was a really exciting time of my life and I really liked the fact at this point in my life I've got these things.

So it's allowing yourself to be free to live this stage of your life, which to be blunt, is about being selfish and about doing, not that I think what you're talking about is selfish, but it's about doing what you want to do. I think it's really important.

Sanaya

Yeah.

Alex Howard

When I put it like that, does that feel a bit different in terms of how you think about it? Does that give you more permission?

Sanaya

Yeah, it does. And I think next time when I'm wondering what I'm going to do, I think I'll try and think about what I want a bit more and figure that out. But it definitely makes sense.

Alex Howard

I might be wrong, but I feel like the, I can't do it because I don't have money, feels like a bit of an excuse. Because you can go and get money by doing what you're doing. You're starting to earn a bit more and you're doing a bit more work. And even if you're only putting away £100 a week or something, or £200 a week, you can put away the money and you don't need much to travel in the way that you're talking about.

[00:35:06]

Again, that's the thing, different stages of life. You get to my age and you want to stay in five star hotels. There's a different cost and a different need that's involved as well.

Sanaya

Yeah. It's definitely something that I think about because I think I really would benefit from it.

Alex Howard

Yeah, I think so. There's an interesting thing that people talk about self-esteem and self-worth like it's something that should just be a given. And there's a truth in a sense that we're all intrinsically inherently valuable and worthy. But I also think self-esteem and self-confidence is something that we earn. And we earn it by doing things that are challenging and difficult and learning to respect ourselves for the fact that we do them.

Not that we always succeed and not that it always go the way we want it to go, but it's like we go, yeah, I respect myself for the fact that I go for what I want. I respect myself for the fact that I find myself, that was difficult and I was scared and I did it anyway. Just the very nature of the fact that you've come here and done this, I hope that's giving you a sense of, yes, that was kind of scary, but you did it. You earn that self-esteem and that self-worth by the actions that you make.

And I think this idea of going traveling is a great way of developing and growing that.

Sanaya

Yeah.

Alex Howard

So coming back to this inner critic, this critical judgmental voice, I really want to build more awareness of that because what's happening, I think at the moment is it's there quite a lot of the time saying, oh, you're being selfish, you're letting this person down or whatever. But because you're not so aware of it, it's just happening and it's getting quite a lot of influence over you by the fact that it's just being allowed to do what it's doing.

The more that we put a spotlight on it, the more that you start to see it. The very fact of seeing it often takes some of your power back from it. Going actually, is that actually true?

Part of how I'd like to work with this is A) to do some homework around building awareness around it, and B) to start to really challenge the things that it's saying.

Sanaya

Okay.

Alex Howard

So on the awareness piece, we've talked about how it plays out with your sister, how it plays out with your mum, how it plays out, perhaps to a lesser degree, with your friends. Can you think of any other

places that you find yourself feeling guilty or you find yourself questioning, feeling an obligation to do something that may not be actually what you want to do?

[00:37:58] Sanaya

I would say exercise, but this week it's been like a revelation that I don't actually have to exercise. And I definitely did feel quite guilty about it, but I just kind of shrugged it off and said well I was working, my body needs to rest and just accepted that. But I think I did have that excuse that I was working like a really long shift on my feet.

Alex Howard

Because you go, I've done all of this, as opposed to having a day where you're like, I actually just don't want to go.

Sanaya

Yeah. Even when I've not bothered to go to the gym, I'm worried about it throughout the day, not worried about it, but I just feel really guilty about it. Like, oh, if I miss this day, then something will happen. And then I've gone, even if I haven't made it to the gym, I've gone for a run or done something at home which has made me feel a bit better about it. But I still feel that guilt like, oh, I didn't actually make it to the gym.

Alex Howard

So it's almost like you're trying to placate your inner critic by saying, oh, well, I did do this or I went yesterday, I'm going to go tomorrow. As opposed to just like, fuck off, I'm not going, and that to be ok.

Sanaya

And I do notice that on the days that I don't go, I watch what I eat a lot more. I do less cooking and I usually have just a salad for dinner or something. And I tried not to do that, but I still do it and I do just tend to eat less if I've not done my exercise, I'm just a bit more wary of it. So, I kind of feel like that it evens out. I'll just have a salad for dinner so then I won't feel that guilt.

Alex Howard

What I'm actually hearing you say, is there's a place that you have to earn the right to have a full meal, like to have a proper calories.

Sanaya

Yeah.

Alex Howard

You see that?

Sanaya

Yeah.

[00:40:17] Alex Howard

Because whether you have the full meal, that dinner or tomorrow doesn't actually matter in the scheme. Of course, if you're massively increasing your calories and you're dropping any exercise, you're going to gradually gain weight. That's the mechanics of what happens. But feeling like I can only have a proper dinner if I've been to the gym is quite a controlling way to be around nourishing your body and having food.

Sanaya

Yeah.

Alex Howard

Because it strikes me also that quite a lot of what you're talking about, and you said it yourself explicitly as well, is how you're perceived. There's the helper pattern, like wanting to look after everyone else. But there's also a bit of, I call it an achiever pattern, in a sense of wanting to be seen to be helpful, wanting to be seen to have the body image that you think you need. There's quite a lot of that that I think also influences your actions.

Sanaya

Yeah, definitely.

Alex Howard

So I really want to get more awareness around the helper pattern and the achiever pattern, particularly. Going back to module three, that thought diary that you do, I talk about in the end of each day, like journaling, I think would be a really helpful thing just to see it play out more.

Like at the end of the day, where today did my helper pattern or my achiever pattern... And you look back and you go, oh, actually I was going to go and do X and I didn't because I wanted to be there for my sister and do this. Okay, you write that down. And then you notice that you were hungry after lunch and you were going to have pudding. And then it was like, oh, I didn't go to the gym this morning, so I'm not.

So you just start to write those things down because just the more awareness alone is often really helpful in taking some of the power out of the pattern.

The second piece is then, particularly with the helper pattern, the question to ask yourself, is this really true? Or is this really how I want to set it up?

So to take the example of, you were going to go out and it's like, oh, but I don't want to let my mum down. And then it's like, is it really true that me going out is really going to hurt her in that way? And if the answer is yes, it's like, is that really the way that I want to live the rest of my life, that I can't be free to live the life that I want to because of my concern of the impact that it's going to have on my mum, for example.

Sanaya

Yeah.

[00:42:53] Alex Howard

How do you feel about doing that?

Sanaya

I think it's going to be weird to actually be aware of it as it happens, but yeah, it's just trying not to feel guilty about it.

Alex Howard

And if you do that's, okay, but write that down.

Sanaya

Okay.

Alex Howard

Because it's not that doing this means that it's going to banish the guilt overnight, but I really want to grow your awareness, and my understanding as well, because we'll talk about it next time. Really grow your awareness around how these patterns play out and manifest.

Because the more that we can see them, the more... So there's a few different layers to the awareness. The first is just to recognize you do these patterns, which you do because we're talking about it in an eloquent, clear way.

The second is to be able to see specific examples and you've given me some and I want you to get some more. The next is to see the pattern as it's actually happening. So, you're in that moment where you're about to go out and then you think I shouldn't because your mum and your like, hang on, this is the very thing that Alex and I talked about.

And then the final step is to be able to see it enough that you can actually make a different choice. So in that moment, rather than going, I'm not going to go out, you go, I can see the impulse to not go out because of the thing of my mum, but actually I really do want to go out, therefore I'm going to go out. So we're gradually getting a deeper understanding and a deeper awareness of how it plays out.

Sanaya

Yeah.

Alex Howard

I also want you to really continue with your STOP Process. Be mindful, and we can talk more about this if it's helpful at any point, but you're making really good progress, which I'm also really pleased to see and well done for putting in the work to do that. And it's not a perfect straight line from where we are to where we're going to.

So inevitably there's going to be the odd bump on the road. One of the things that's important is making sure we do all we can to protect the progress that you're making.

[00:45:04]

One of the things that sometimes happens, and I don't think this is what happened here because I was exploring it and I think it's not, sometimes our motivation to go to the gym, to do meditation, do the STOP Process is we feel so shit that if we're terrified if we don't, we're going to feel worse. So it's like we're motivated by not feeling that way.

And when we start to feel a bit better, that motivation drops away because we're feeling better and then we stop doing all the things that are helping us, and then we slip back, then we get motivated again and we start doing those things. So we want to avoid the primary motivation just by getting away from it, because you'll find this erratic follow through.

What we really want to have, and I think there is a good amount of this here, is you're also just motivated because you feel good and you want to keep feeling good. So it's not avoiding feeling terrible. It's like you notice that if I go to the gym most days and if I meditate most days, and as we're adding in this next piece around listening to what you want and honoring what you want, you notice that actually your life is growing and progressing in the way that you want to, and you're motivated by the moving forwards, not just the motivated by not falling backwards.

Sanaya

Yeah.

Alex Howard

It might sound like semantics, but it's kind of an important difference.

Sanaya

No, that's why literally on Sunday I was getting a bit like, oh, I don't want to hinder the progress that I've made so Monday I need to get back into doing the meditations.

Alex Howard

And you did, which is really great. You're where you are making progress because of the effort you're putting in. You don't have to put this effort in for the rest of your life. The outcome of this is not that you have to go to the gym and meditate and use the STOP Process, all these things for the rest of your life otherwise you're going to have anxiety. We want to get enough momentum that gradually you need less of that.

And yes, you want to live your life in a way that takes care of you and takes care of your mind and takes care of your body. It's just having a balanced relationship with that, but right now we've got momentum and we really want to build on that momentum.

Sanaya

Yeah.

Alex Howard

Any questions?

[00:47:19] Sanaya

I don't think so. Are there any new videos that I need to watch?

Alex Howard

Yes. So you got to the end of module four?

Sanaya

Yeah.

Alex Howard

So if you keep going and do module five, I'm then going to suggest you jump to module nine.

So just so you know what you're looking for, module five is a continuation of the STOP Process with some other bits added in. Module nine is on the inner critic, and we've been talking a bit about the inner critic today. I think watching the module on that would be helpful.

So those two modules, five and nine. Six, seven and eight, we might come back to a different point. It's more about working with emotions, which totally has a place, but it's not quite where you need to be I think at this point. So do five and then jump to nine, I think be really helpful.

And if you want to do more, you might find ten quite interesting, which is a model of nine different personality types. It might be quite an interesting way of understanding your mum, your sister, and some of those dynamics. If you want to do that you can.

Sanaya

Okay. Thank you.

Alex Howard

You're welcome. Lovely to see you, Sanaya. Keep going. You're doing great.

Sanaya

Thank you.

Alex Howard

I hope you found this week's episode helpful. I'm also curious, is this a pattern that you recognize? Is this something that you find yourself doing being at the kind of beck and call of everyone around you, their needs and their wishes?

And I'd love to hear in the comments, is that something you do? But also, what are your signs that you're not listening to your own needs? Is it that you get an increase in anxiety? Is it that you become physically drained? Is it that you start to get physical symptoms? How does your emotional body communicate to you that you're not listening to your emotional needs? If you can see it, you don't

have to be at. The more awareness we have of those responses, the better we can get at breaking that pattern.

[00:49:13]

Also, to let you know, that my 12-week online coaching program, The RESET Program, is opening for registration again this Thursday. We open The RESET Program up a few times a year. Really, what happens in *In Therapy* is you get to be a spectator observing other people's therapeutic journeys. But all of the participants in *In Therapy* go through the RESET Program.

If you want to find out more, there's a free 3-part video series and there's a link in the description below the video where you can watch those free videos to find out more.

Next week we're going to be catching up with Beverly. So if you're curious as to how she's been doing, please do join us next week.