



THE

FATIGUE

SUPER

CONFERENCE

## **Recovery story: Cultivating healthy boundaries**

Guest: Marie Fleming

**Alex:** So welcome to the Fatigue Super Conference. And for this recovery story, I'm talking with Marie Fleming who is one of the psychology practitioners here at The Optimum Health Clinic. And with this series of recovery stories as part of the conference, what we're deliberately doing is pulling out certain kind of key themes and telling the story a bit from that perspective. So obviously each recovery story has lots of different facets and ingredients and pieces which are important to it. But with Marie's story we're going to particularly focus on the piece around, kind of core piece really is around being a mother on the recovery path and Marie's situation, that was being a single mother on the recovery path. But in fact, a single mother with a daughter who had some particular, special needs such as Asperger's and various bits that Marie may talk about.

It can be really challenging when we're working on our healing path to make time for ourselves, to make time to rest, to make time to use the various techniques, the various principles that we're learning about. And particularly when we have those dependent upon us that are quite severe in terms of their needs, it can almost feel impossible sometimes to prioritize yourself and recovery. And I think Marie's story is going to be particularly inspiring for those in that situation, but also for those that are not in that situation, to realize how it really is possible to prioritize and make time for one's self. So firstly, Marie, welcome and thank you for joining me.

**Marie:** Thank you for having me.

**Alex:** So this is actually a bit of a part two for us. We should say that we did your recovery story. It must have been ... do you remember when it was? It was three or four years ago?

**Marie:** It was like end of 2016.

**Alex:** Yeah. Okay.

**Marie:** I actually had just been on holiday, so October, 2016.

**Alex:** That's right. You'd just been on holiday and you just got engaged. And you had a horrible suntan which I felt deeply jealous of!

**Marie:** I was.

**Alex:** The pains of an English winter. So maybe let's jump back to the kind of starting point in terms of maybe just say a little bit about what was happening around the time that you first got symptoms.

**Marie:** Yeah. So it was back, I think it was around my 30th birthday and I was sort of just working, really just kind of on the treadmill. So like working full-time. I was a child protection lawyer, back then. So I was doing sort of long, kind of hard hours. Really intense work. And I also had my daughter. I was a single parent at the time. And I was just sort of juggling everything. So it was just like, there was no time, there was no kind of space to me. I was just kind of working on autopilot. Pushing, pushing through. And I started getting signs and symptoms, I wasn't ... I was fatigued. Sort of loads of different symptoms but I just put it down to the job. You notice everybody was tired there at work and it was a very stressful environment.

**Marie:** So after, I think about probably like a year's worth at least of just testing, like testing everything, ruling out everything, got the diagnosis. Like, oh, it must be ME, chronic fatigue. It was very kind of casual. And I still just sort of pushed through. So I didn't know very much about the illness back then but I just thought well, it's just a mind over matter thing. I'd always done that. I was very, very driven. Very sort of just into doing. I never really thought about it. And I was always complimented on how much I can handle. Well, it's like that, it was like a compliment because I was a single mother. How do you balance everything? It's amazing. No matter what happens, you still carry on. So I kind of wore it as a bit of a badge of honor.

**Alex:** And what were the main, at that kind of initial point of diagnosis, what were the main symptoms that you were experiencing?

**Marie:** So I was mainly ... it was massive fatigue where I was like, even if I'd slept all night, I just woke up like I've been hit by a truck. I had lots of pains in my body. Lots of dizziness. Feeling sick. Like really cracking headaches, like a vice kind of crushing my head. They were really, really bad. And just brain fog. Brain fog was like one of the worst things. Obviously as a lawyer I had to focus and I had to go to court and handle child protection cases, so it was a really ... it was a real big deal for me not to grasp my words or forget how to spell, or where I was while I was in the room. Which file I needed. All that stuff. So that started really, really stressing me out. And one

of the things I noticed was my stress tolerance which was always so high, again, I prided myself in the fact that I could deal with anything. Throw anything at me, and I will deal with it.

**Alex:** Isn't it?

**Marie:** Literally, and it was like I ... literally, there's nothing that could sink me. So I used to just keep going and again, it was just my mindset. So I just ... and I started noticing that things were really ... I wasn't handling things. Like mentally, I wasn't so strong. And my positivity, that was for me probably the worst thing. So very positive mindset, so I did the whole ... I've always been into the sort of self-help, positivity stuff, so I'd read all the books. I'd done all that. So, I used to kind of drive forwards with this mindset, as long as I think positively, I can overcome everything. Like everything. Like I took it so extreme. And it served me in some ways, obviously, because being positive is a good thing. But what it did was I just, I didn't kind of acknowledge how bad I really felt. So that's why ...

**Alex:** What was the lowest point you got to? Like what was the point where you realized that you couldn't just keep pushing? Like pushing wasn't the thing that was going to work.

**Marie:** Yeah. It was literally when my body just stopped being able to get up, out of bed. I drove myself to the point of, like I had all the signals, I had all the symptoms. I took a day off, but I kept going back in. I thought the world would end if I didn't go in, do my job. So it was only when I started getting up out of bed and I couldn't ... I used to will myself with positive again. You can do it. You can do it. I'd listen to music. And it was when that stuff didn't work, and I was lying in bed and I was like, my body isn't moving. It's not actually doing what it's told anymore.

**Alex:** And what was that like? When you kind of ... your whole identity was kind of build around being this kind of invincible machine and you get to the point that even with your most intense willpower, you can't get yourself to function?

**Marie:** Well, that was where it was really, really terrifying because I was like all the mechanisms, all the strategies I'd used, all the tips and tricks I'd used my whole life, didn't work. And every time I tried to research things, they would say most things I'd been doing and I was like, well, these things aren't working. So everything sort of fell apart, really. And it was then, I had stop. It was when I stopped working, was the hardest thing in the world, I think to this date, actually. Yeah, it was like the hardest thing to just not. Not work anymore.

**Alex:**I supposed in some ways that working was also a way of keeping yourself busy enough, not feel all the emotions and all the feelings that were probably there, as well, right?

**Marie:** Oh, definitely. Yeah. Because I had a lot of things that happened in life. So life hadn't been plain sailing and I had a lot of kind of things from very early from about 13. And I'd never had any space to deal with those. I thought I had. I hadn't, even remotely. But I just fill the space up. So I was always so busy distracting and doing and running around. There was never any time to just breath. Or just be with myself. I was just busy. And I got away with it for awhile.

**Alex:**Not ultimately, I guess.

**Marie:** Not ultimately. Yeah.

**Alex:**And so, at that point, you've been diagnosed with ME/chronic fatigue. You've got these severe symptoms. You're not able to work. You're also a single mom, and you're responsible for taking care of and support your daughter. How was that piece of that? Kind of being faced by the fact that you couldn't just ignore and push through?

**Marie:** Well that was challenging because at the beginning, well first it was just like, I felt guilty anyway. So even before the diagnosis, I knew I had limits. So at the weekend, I knew I was just about resting to drag myself back to work on Monday. But then of course my daughter, she was here with me and it was the two of us. So even just me taking her out and where I couldn't do it. I had to ... I used to push through and just take her out, for an afternoon out or something. And then it got to the point where I couldn't do that. So I had to actually say no, or make an excuse or try and explain in a way that didn't panic her. But it was so hard. So even when I managed to say no, and actually stay in and not do anything, I felt so guilty. I felt like the world's worst person.

**Marie:** The worst, really bad mother. So hard.

**Alex:**And did your daughter have her Asperger's diagnosis at this point? Or was this something that came later?

**Marie:** Yeah. She had it. But she'd only had it probably, hold on ... It was probably only a couple of years. Fairly recent. It was about within one or two years. So I'd always been sort of caring for her, knowing that things weren't quite as they would have typically been. But, and I always knew there was something, and the diagnosis was so hard. So I had this pattern of always having to push for her. And that was almost like my blueprint because of the struggles, I always had to go in for school meetings. I had e-mails. I had calls.

I had to kind of coax her into school. Deal with her outside of school. Take calls from her during school. So there was so much kind of my whole world was very much tied into her and her needs. So it was just how I lived. So to suddenly go from that, like high level of care, to well, I can't kind of take you out to the park now, was just crushing, actually.

**Marie:** It really, really upset me. Yeah.

**Alex:** And how did the story unfold from there? So, did you ... and I should note because I'm part of your practitioners, but I tried to remember the sequence in terms of what happened between them and finding Optimum Health Clinic. Was that something that happened quickly or something that took a bit more time?

**Marie:** What you mean, sort of how I dealt with my daughter or ...

**Alex:** No, in terms of actually finding kind of a path forward for yourself in terms of discovering kind of yeah, kind of interventions and such thing.

**Marie:** Well, it was a real process because at first, I think when I started the clinic, I worked on calming the nervous system down, and really getting myself into more of a sort of healing state, coming out of this stress response. So I did that for awhile, but there was still this piece where I wasn't quite dropping into that. So it was like there was a sticking point and the sticking point was because I kept on pushing beyond my level. So it was only when I ... it was a real process of actually almost like looking at that square in the face, and oh, this is actually a piece that's not just ... I can't ignore it anymore. I tried to. I tried to say I'll do all the clinic stuff, and all the protocols and everything. And I get it. But I still got to do. There's nothing you could say or tell me that I can't be a mom and I have to do those mom things. And I don't care what the clinic says, I still have to, so I can be a mom. So it was a real sticking point.

**Marie:** And I also have this thing because of her special needs, there was more vulnerability with her. So it was more of a story for me because I was like, well she has so much anxiety. She had sort of depressive episodes. It was really intense with her. I was like, "Well, there's absolutely no way I can just say no, and I can't do those things." What I learned in the process, though, was the importance of sort of building up that self-care piece. That was probably one of the most life changing things even to this day, that actually did something for me, because I just got the memo. It was like until I look after myself, I can't ... it's this whole cliché thing, but it's true. You can't give from an empty cup. You cannot look after other people, it doesn't matter who

it is, if you are running on empty, and you're dragging yourself through the day. Something's got to give.

**Marie:** So even if it feels very difficult or painful, I knew that the short-term was me not maybe taking her out, or not staying up late, watching a movie with her or staying awake for a movie. In the long-term, I have to do these things to get to where I needed to be which was a better parent and able to care for her even more. So it was a real toss up between what do I want here. It was quite a hard lesson.

**Alex:**What do you think, when you say you kind of got the memo, what made you get the memo? Was there a particular moment or was it ... because I think you did the 90 day program, right? When you first came to Optimum.

**Marie:** I did like the Individual Psychology Programme ... yeah. A version of it. It was the on the phone.

**Alex:**Telephone, yeah.

**Marie:** It was later. Yeah. It really did take me awhile. I'm trying to think what actually got that through to me. I think it was just a process of feeling exhausted and feeling so fed up with feeling exhausted constantly, and I'd given up the job. I let go ... I'd even come out of a relationship. I made all these massive changes. I'd done all the daily things and I put the work in but there was still this piece that was there and I think when we had sessions, it was actually our sessions where that came out and it was like, I think you asked me the question, something like well where can you take the pressure off, because it was like she was going through all these kind of emotional things and she needed a lot of help and support. But I was the one doing it consonantly and it was like I was taking it all on my shoulders, as if it was 100% my responsibility and as a mother or a parent, we feel that, don't we?

**Marie:** We feel like, it's like our children are our entire responsibility, but actually, you got to take a step back and they're on their own journeys as well and they have their own stuff going on, so that was a massive eye opener. And I think we discussed about well, does she need support from outside of me. That was tough.

**Alex:**Yeah.

**Marie:** Because I was like coaxing her through everything. I was like talking her through things. I was counseling her as well as being the mom. I was doing all that. And think it was this realization that actually that might be somebody else's job.

**Alex:** Well I think part of the achiever pattern and part of the kind of massive kind of self-responsibility pattern is that I am the mother, or I'm the father, or whatever it is and only I can do this as well as it needs to be done, and I have to be ... and it's like, we start to then feel like we have to be that child ... I think your daughter was in her kind of early to mid-teens at this point.

**Marie:** Yeah. She was like 11, 12, 13, around that. Yeah.

**Alex:** Yeah. So it's this kind of sense of well, as you said, I have to be everything. I have to be the teacher. I have to be the therapist. I have to be the doctor. I have to be the crisis care. I have to be all of these things. And even for someone that doesn't have fatigue issues, that is still an enormous stress and responsibility, but actually, it's not just the stress, responsibility. Actually, one it's not necessarily either the most skilled or the best positioned person to play those roles. But it's really hard asking for help, particularly when you've got that kind of self-identity around I have to be ... I'm invincible. I have to be there for everyone. And I kind of wonder what helped you kind of be willing to share some of that responsibility and to ask for help from others.

**Marie:** I think it was desperation in the end. I was like something's got to give. It's like, I just reached a point where I can't keep pushing. It's almost like I can't keep pushing. But then I can't expect to get a different outcome and I was really committed to recovery. I think that's the thing. It was like, it was actually somewhere along the lines, I don't even know where that happened. It was like I'm so committed to my own recovery, I have to put myself first, which was like, it's like a bad phrase, isn't it as a parent? Got to put myself first. I didn't even want to say it. But I thought actually if I do that, well a few things happened. I started doing that, but from love. I didn't take my love away from her. I was still doing all the things. I needed to do the basics. But actually it was like, modeling that for her.

**Marie:** Which then it started to make sense. I just kind of flipped it in my head, actually, if I'm showing her like I can't do this, I need to rest or I can't do this for this long, because I'm really not feeling well, and I need to do this, she started modeling that which really, really changed things. And then the penny dropped.

**Alex:** I think there's something that's really important in that. That in a sense, particularly when you've got a child which has Asperger's or has some kind of special educational needs where they are kind of quite highly dependent upon the structures and supports that are out there, that you also the more they can own their situation the best way that they can, then they can be the one to ask for help when they need it. That takes pressure off everyone, and it means they're more likely to get the most effective help they need. But so as

you say, in a sense, you might have thought previously, I've been really selfish by taking care of my own needs and not just being a complete servant to my daughter's needs. But it's fascinating that actually as you were going, I need to take care of me, it wasn't that you took care of you therefore you were able to improve and help your daughter. It's actually had a direct impact on her changing her way of functioning in a way that helps everything.

**Marie:** Mm-hmm (affirmative). Definitely. But actually, it's worth saying. It wasn't like a smooth sailing thing. Some people might be watching this and it sounds almost like, oh, I just made that decision and she just was fine about it and it was like really challenging. The reality is, it was like when I started saying I can't do things or I had to step away from maybe where I would have stepped in. There was feedback from that. It didn't go down so well. So there was a bit of, I had to sort of stand my ground and that, I think I had some sessions there with you then around that because I needed that support around, god, I'm saying no and I'm sort of just not available for certain things. But actually, it empowered her in the end. It sort of got her to sort of dig a little deeper for her and of course, yeah, she's a bit older, but I think that applies with any age because whatever age they're at, a child still needs to be able to figure stuff out. And not for us to step in all the time.

**Marie:** And one of the things I found with her as well is that I was ... when I was not well, when I saw her struggling, this is like a helpful thing as well, where it was almost like I was trying to meet her in her illness or her difficulties, and it was just bringing myself down. It was like I was being so full of empathy, I wasn't sort of focusing on my own needs. So it's actually one of the best things you can do, I think, when you're caring for somebody is to really be in your own shoes. Like more than ever.

**Alex:** Well, I think one of the things that happens is also the more depleted somebody becomes, often the less boundaried they become because it's almost like, we're less able to see where the edges are, where the boundaries are needed. And even if we can see it, we're less kind of resourceful in terms of holding up those boundaries and defending them. And so it's kind of a vicious circle. People get more fatigued. They get less boundary. They get more and they get more fatigue and they get less boundaries.

**Alex:** So it's almost like you're able to turn around that direction and actually taking care of this is going to be the thing that's going to help everything start to move in a different direction. But that takes courage as well. Like I wonder where that courage or that kind of willingness to act came from. Maybe it was just a desperation that was the fuel of that.



**Marie:** Well, it's desperation. It's partly trust, as well. That I have to do something differently and I knew the patterns I had just weren't working, but I also recognized that there were no boundaries, since boundaries was huge for me, because I had no boundaries like anywhere. And once you start seeing them in one area, you start noticing that they are kind of in many areas, right? So that me, it was like I was kind of just sort of, I don't know, just drawing a line in the sand or something where I was just saying, "Right, I need some boundaries and I need to do what I need to do." And then that started rippling out in other areas, actually. So it was very much beyond even parenting. It was everything.

**Alex:** Yes, and we'll come back to that in a second. But I think also we should say that obviously there were multiple facets. It wasn't just you were working on your boundaries and taking care of yourself. You're also working on your nutrition. You're also working on calming down the maladaptive stress response. These other pieces were all important. Obviously we're focusing on this piece for the purpose of the interview. But yes, let's come back to what you were saying that in a sense it wasn't just your relationship with your daughter, it was almost the way you were interfacing with various other people in your life was also having to change.

**Alex:** And I know that can be its own source of stress in a sense. So just say a bit about, you don't have to go into detail, but just say a bit about some of the ways you've navigated that and some of the ways that that was challenging.

**Marie:** Yeah. It was just drawing boundaries around like when I was available. So going back to my mindset was like being supercharged all the time. I was taking calls all the time. There was never any sort of thought behind do I feel like taking this phone call? Do I feel like kind of meeting this person? It was all very autopilot. So I used to be available for kind of anyone that wanted to ring up and just kind of dump their stuff on me or go on about whatever it is they wanted and there was no sort of exchange. So it's like dynamics with people. It was like what I allowed in my life, probably for most of my life. A lot of people pleasing. Saying yes to everything. And suddenly I started chipping away at some of these and by changing how I was with my daughter, it sort of empowered me to make some changes in other areas.

**Marie:** So it started off with little things. It was like, I'm not going to answer my phone just because it's ringing. It was like a simple thing, but a lot of people do this with the phone ringing, you run across the room to grab it. And now it's like, well if it rings and I'm not available, I'm not available. I'll call them back. But it was like being there for everybody. So yeah, it was such an important piece and carving out time for me because by doing that, I could have my own thoughts. I could work out what my own emotions were. What

my own needs were. And then what I needed. What did my body need, what are my self-care needs, and it was impossible to do all that when I was like overloaded with the world and everybody in it and all their stuff.

**Marie:** So it was too much. It was too much to deal with. So it was really just breaking out of that.

**Alex:** And how was this impacting upon your physical recovery? As you were starting to put more boundaries in, take a bit more rest, be less triggered by all these environment kind of pressures, how did your body respond to that?

**Marie:** It responded well. Like I've been telling you this all along. So it really did. It responded well because it felt, again it wasn't an overnight thing but it was in the context of all the other work. The clinic, and calming the body down and all of these practices. It started to feel, it's like life went from kind of being really heavy and like a burden to actually there was more lightness and then I could start to think about well what do I enjoy? And what am I interested in? And all of the kind of fun, and I think I actually ended up having a session with you about fun. Because there was zero going on and you said, "What do you like for fun?" I was like, "I don't know. I have no idea. I don't know what it is." And I had to actually work on that. Like what is fun to me. Because there was nothing going on.

**Marie:** So that was a really big ... it sounds quite sort of simple doesn't it? And almost like fluffy, but it was a really powerful part of the puzzle for me, because of those other things going on.

**Alex:** Well, I think people can often think that well, fun is just something that you do to have fun. Like fun is, it's kind of like ... it doesn't have any value to recovery. There's no value to the world. It's a kind of frivolous, kind of pointless self-indulgent kind of activity. When actually, one of the most common things that someone could do to their nervous system is to be in joy and have fun. Because when we're having fun and we're doing something that brings us joy, everything relaxes and everything settles in a response to that. And you can spend endless hours trying to meditate your way to a calm healing state, or use various kind of techniques to get to a healing state or doing heavy work on boundaries or achiever pattern or help pattern, all of which can be very important.

**Alex:** But sometimes, the most healing thing you can do is just go and do something that you like to do, that makes you feel happy. It's the least frivolous and the most practical thing that we can.

**Marie:** One of the things that comes in, I give kind of like Netflix homework sometimes to some people that I know, because I recognize it, that sometimes

when they're not having any fun or they're doing all the healing stuff and all of the serious stuff to get their body into a healing state, but then they're watching maybe a bit of TV or something, but then they're actually watching like really super serious things, or quite intense things. I was having this conversation quite a lot recently and I was saying, "Make a list on Netflix of all this kind of silly, lighthearted, funny things you can find." And often people hadn't thought to do it. And it's actually a healing state can come from just laughing and just thinking something's funny or entertaining. It's just as important, I think. I've learned that now because it was a massive lack in my life.

**Alex:** So you're not prescribing the Walking Dead and Game of Thrones here, I see.

**Marie:** No, because I think it's so ... and we do it without realizing. We can be quite intense and serious. I know I was very achievery about my recovery for awhile so I'd meditate like six times a day and I'd have it on timers and I'd be like really serious and then that became a source of achieving and a source of stress in itself so I had to really shift. I had to be a bit more fluid and spontaneous with it, which is very hard for me. It didn't work that way.

**Alex:** What was the point that you realized that this ... you were doing, again, I know we both made the point but I want to really reemphasize it. There was a lot of other pieces in terms of functional medicine and just kind of testing and supplements and food and everything else. But what was the point that you realized that this was working? Like beyond just the fact you could go and actually, this clearly is something that I need to be doing. Clearly my life is going to be better for making these changes. What was the point that you were like, "Wow, I can actually see the way this is impacting my recovery." Was there a particular moment or a particular time where you saw the uplift in your energy?

**Marie:** Couple of times but more in hindsight because in the moment, and I never was really good at spotting it. So it was like a couple things, like once where I think I started to just be able to sleep better because I went through a period of being very wired and waking through the night, having vivid dreams and waking up horrible. And then I actually started to sleep for longer periods. That was, I was like that's obviously my nervous system is responding which is brilliant. And then the other thing it was like suddenly, you drag yourself out to get some groceries or something and then I'd go and do that and I'd come back in and then I could make a cup of tea. And I was like, "Oh, there's like a tiny bit of energy left over from me coming in."

**Marie:** And it was like so subtle but it wasn't until I did that for awhile, and then I realized, oh I've been doing this for a while. When did this happen? So it was a very kind of, I'd love to say I woke up one day and I discovered something but it never happened like that for me. It was more like a gradual process and I think once I went out for Christmas shopping, that was it. And I was still really sort of having to monitor how long I was out for and all of that and then I realized, oh my god, a year ago I couldn't have even gone out for longer than 20 minutes. Wow. So it was like looking back. So it was for me, it was always looking back going, "Oh my god. This kind of crept up on me." And I can feel the difference in my body.

**Alex:** And how, just going back a bit, something you touched on a bit earlier in terms of the impact upon other people. As you know, we often use an analogy like change being like a dance, and we're dancing a particular dance of somebody and then we try to change the dance and that other person has one of three choices. They either try and pull us back into the old dance. Not because they don't love us but because they do love us. They don't want things to change because they want it to stay the way it was. Or, they come with us in the new dance, or we go and dance a separate dance. And in terms of relationships, that basically means they suck us back or we take them on the journey, or the relationship has to fundamentally end or change.

**Alex:** That could be quite difficult, particularly when it's not just acquaintances. It's people that are our family, and how was that with people around you, when you were having to kind of adapt the way that people were using to you interfacing with them?

**Marie:** Really challenging, because of course people often people don't like us to change and not because of any ... it's just how it is, isn't it? Like they get uncomfortable. But really, really difficult. So I had to, again, I had to kind of stand firm with them. So I left a relationship during my sort of recovery program because I knew we were going separate ways and it just wasn't aligned anymore for many reasons, but also family members, yeah. It's like, or loved ones. You can ... if you didn't have boundaries and suddenly you have them, people are going to respond. They are. If you said yes all the time and suddenly you say no, you're going to get that kind of feedback of people and that can be challenging. Really challenging. So I had to ... it was hard. I'm not going to lie. It was a real challenge. A real challenge. But it was something that had to be done because the choice ... it's the choice between that and actually just staying stuck.

**Marie:** Well, I wasn't going to stay stuck. And I knew I needed to make changes. But actually, when I made changes, it felt better in the body.

**Alex:** That's a really interesting compass, right? That there's a kind of like even when it's challenging and difficult in the change, there's that sense of this feels right. Like this is what I need to be doing. There's something I think is very, kind of affirming in terms of our own self, love and self-worth when we're standing up for ourself. When we're kind of advocating for our needs even when it's inconvenient or challenging to do so.

**Marie:** Definitely. Yeah. I think it's really powerful.

**Alex:** So how did your recovery story develop from this point? So you were starting to make physical progress. You noticed you could do things. Gradually, over time, you noticed you could do things that hadn't been able to do. How did the physical piece evolve from that point?

**Marie:** So I started to do ... Yeah, so I was doing more. And then of course, because I had a bit more energy, I wanted to do everything and catch up on with my life and just get it all done. So the next challenge of course it is, is always kind of like slowing down and learning to slow down which again, it's so difficult for me because I was the most impatient person. But obviously this teaches you a lot of patience. So it was just building really, really slowly but actually for me it was really just reassessing everything. So initially, I was trying to just get back. I wanted to recover to get back to my job, my profession. Just wanted to be a lawyer again. That's all I wanted to do. But somewhere along the line, because I'd learned more about myself, because I'd got in touch on a really deep level, the things I cared about started to come in and then that's when I started exploring kind of what am I really passionate about. What I'm really interested in. And what matters.

**Marie:** And I had some really significant times when I had those kind of insights of like actually I'm really here to do certain things now and I can feel that more. It wasn't coming from an achiever, five year plan thing. Because that was me. Five year plan. Written out. It was more of a much deeper thing. It's like, what am I about and what do I want to stand for and what do I care about? It's all these kind of bigger questions came up. So it really ... Yeah. It just really helped. It was all part of my recovery, I think. My purpose. Your purpose and what you are here for and what feels good.

**Alex:** And then that part of what that led to was training as a practitioner, doing the therapeutic coaching, as it's now called practitioner training. How was that kind of going on a kind of this new path and kind of going much deeper into these kind of ideas? And yeah, how did that impact upon this kind of wider kind of piece?

**Marie:** Brilliant. Yeah, obviously, because I'm here. I love it. And it was ... it just deepened because I didn't really start it with a view of like, oh, I want to join the clinic, I wanted to just be a lawyer. I was still holding onto that. But I just, I did it purely for the enjoyment. I was like, I'm so ... this material, and I knew it changed my life. I could feel it. I could feel it happening. It was like I want to learn more. I just had an appetite for it. So the thing came up. The e-mail came in and I was really interested in exploring it. And then one thing led to another and I ended up joining the training, but really again, it was just in my own recovery. I had the the plan in the back. Remember, five year plan.

**Alex:** Five year plan change instead of five year plan.

**Marie:** It was, yeah, kind of silly actually. But yeah. Now I always having that planning. And at the back of my mind, I was like maybe, who knows what's going to happen. It was more of a curiosity. I was like, who knows where I'm going to end up? It was like that. But I'm just going to do it now and really focus on my own recovery and understand myself more, and go much deeper with all of that and that's the honest reason why I started to train and I absolutely fell in love with it, the more I did it. It more and more made sense to me. Yeah. I just had this whole love affair with the whole thing.

**Marie:** Yeah. I just carried on with it.

**Alex:** And also, what was happening for your daughter? So you're down to the point where your energy is coming back and your healing path is really happening. But how was it for you and as you were getting energy back, because sometimes one of the challenges can also be that we're kind of forced to put boundaries in place where we have no choice but to put boundaries in place. But then as energy comes back as we move from example, stage two to stage three, on the three stages of recovery, that that could be ... it can be it's own new challenge, right? But actually we now have got the energy to say yes to things. So there's less of a kind of immediate urgency to put in place boundaries, but they're still really important. So how was that?

**Marie:** Yeah. Well part of it was practice, because obviously the more you do it, you just become a bit more familiar with it. It feels more comfortable. But initially, like the other patterns, when I had more energy, I wanted to ... I went through a bit of a phase of overdoing it again. Bouncing the boundaries. And I went through a phase of like saying yes and sort of being there again for my daughter. But then what happened was I could notice the impact it had on me. So there was more like this self-awareness piece which is really, really important.

**Marie:** So when I did it, I could then recognize, oh yeah, and I do not feel good. This does not feel good. My body's telling me so. I feel really heavy and kind of stressed again. Now what do I need to do? So I could kind of self-correct. So I could then do the things. And then I recognized, ah, yeah, and I'm going into those old patterns. These old, familiar patterns. Here they come. And it was just being aware, and then being able to make a choice and going, "Right, I'm going to do it differently." It was a very conscious thing. But like anything, you can practice it, and it does start. It starts to become more familiar. And then it became part of me.

**Alex:** Yes. How did that also support you in being more ... kind of ironically somehow, being almost more resilient to deal with situations? Because with things like Asperger's for example, it's not generally a case of, it's like ... it just kind of gets sorted and goes away. It's something that one is still kind of managing and kind of living with. And so that wasn't like your recovery started to come together, and then everything around you got fixed. In some ways, you still had to deal with all of the stuff that was happening. So, yeah, how did you find yourself more kind of capable and more skillful in your handling of things?

**Marie:** Yeah. It was definitely the resilience, because actually, things did get a lot worse with my daughter. She went through some incredible challenges and even just in the last few years. So they never stopped. And some of them got really quite big and serious. But the fact that, because I've learned what I've learned, I was able to handle it better and I believe I was a much better parent. I really say that now and actually, I really mean that because I feel like the way I handled it, some of the tools and things I could give her but as in here they are, now you need to do this. This will help you rather than me trying to step in and fix it.

**Marie:** So I was like trying to fix it and make it better and take away the pain and the suffering from her but I realized, no, it's for her to do certain things and I'm just going to love her. I'm going to support her. I'm going to care for her 24/7. I'm going to be loving her, but it doesn't mean that 24/7 I've got to be doing. So it was a real difference.

**Marie:** But actually, when it happened, I went through some incredibly tough challenges with her, even in the last few years, where I could deal with them, because I had my health. I had resilience. And I was never going to burn myself out, even if the biggest stresses happen, what I am actually good at now in life, because life is stressful, right? We're never going to get to a point where everything is perfect. We have times when it is. But my goodness, it's stressful. So even now, I'm just more resilient because of those tools and because of the things I'd learned along the way. So I get ... it's like you bank ...

I always say you bank that. It's even post-recovery. You get to use this stuff for everything, because there's always going to be a challenge somewhere.

**Alex:**What was ... Firstly, yes. Absolutely. What was the ... coming back to the kind of recovery piece, and then I want to talk a bit more about kind of life, but as you ... what was the point where you really started to know, you thought about kind of being able to go Christmas shopping. Kind of go further down the line and everything else that you were doing kind of nutrition, function medicine piece is calming your system, what kind of boundaries. All of these kind of pieces. What was the point that you really started to know, wow, I am coming through the other side of this. It's been a journey of kind of years, not months. But, what was the point where you really started to go physically, wow my body is healthy again?

**Marie:** I think it was when I started getting creative and I started to think about my future, and then I started to see ... Again, it was in hindsight. I was like, "Oh my god, I haven't had a nap like for months." In the day. And I hadn't even realized that until I sort of looked back and it was like almost I missed it. So it's like I actually realized ... it wasn't even a specific day. It was just dawning on me that god, I'm not really having symptoms anymore. And I'd gone beyond that checking symptoms, because there's a point where checking symptoms and being very aware of your body is very helpful, if you're coming from a place where you never did that. But then there's a point where you got to let that go. Which is hard, because then you're still checking because I was like scanning myself all the time, going what's going on, when I didn't need to.

**Marie:** So it was when I started to just kind of into my life a bit more. Like relax into it and then there were days and then weeks where I didn't really check my symptoms. And then I was a bit like not sure about whether I should, do I call myself recovered? I think I can. I was really, really reluctant to because I wasn't sure how that was going to go. And then I had ... there was one time I had a real few months of no symptoms and then I had a crash for three days. And then I had a panic thinking, oh my god. This is it. It's come back. And then I realized, no, no, no, you know why this has happened. And I could see the build up. I was like, I'd overdone it. This piece had come in, and then I've been dealing with this.

**Marie:** And my energy wasn't quite there to sustain it and I'd just overdone it. And then I realized that and I calmed down and then I carried on. And that was my last crash. I didn't know that was my last crash till months went by because you don't know, do you? Until like months have gone by.

**Alex:**And I think I remember us having the you no longer meet diagnostic criteria conversation where it's like, you're kind of, am I fully recovered? And



it's like, well, if you went to your doctor right now, you wouldn't get a diagnosis. So yes. But it's also more than just the absence of symptoms. It's also the point where you really start to have energy and vitality for life and that obviously came back in abundance.

**Marie:** Yeah.

**Alex:** Maybe let's also talk about then meeting your soon to be husband. In terms of the inner changes that you made in terms of boundaries and relationships and kind of self-love and self-worth, how that impacted upon your then journey in your own intimate relationship?

**Marie:** Well, it's funny, is I think my ... I remember my very last session that I had with you actually, where we were sort of just solidifying it all and it was like, I don't think ... carry on. I was like, really? I was still not sure. And it seemed like it wasn't. And I remember saying to you, my next bit is in a relationship. I have a bit of a worry about, okay I've got this all in place now and I feel in my own power, and I feel it in my body and all that. I'm recovered. But what if I lose that? And I had this thing of like, I don't know how that's going to be in relationships so I kind of held that at bay for a bit, because I'm like, I'm not sure.

**Marie:** But interestingly, when I met my soon to be husband now, it was like, he was somebody that because I had my own boundaries in place, we clicked in that way. If I had met him before, I don't know, I just don't think it would have even been that way because I wouldn't have been able to handle a relationship. Like a normal, functional, like happy relationship. Because I just wasn't in that place. So for me, it was about kind of tentatively sort of going into that and exploring, well how does it feel to, okay, learnings but then integrate that in a relationship? Because that was the next phase.

**Marie:** You can be in your own bubble at home, perfectly, but get your stuff together with someone else's stuff, and then you got a whole other recipe. So, it was really interesting. So it was sort of like, it just felt like more of a natural progression. But of course, it was because he was somebody ... he was also very self-aware. So, if I'd have tried to me trying to connect with somebody who hadn't ... I'm not saying people are better than people because they've been self-aware, but it's like this thing of if you worked on yourself in that way, you're going to need that. You're going to need, in a relationship, someone of similar. I believe that, someone similar.

**Marie:** If you've gone through a massive change, and you're meeting new people. So it was a real new thing for me on learning how to be in a relationship with very healthy boundaries, and not lose myself because that

was one of my patterns I just gave of myself so much. I lost myself in that. And I was really protective of that actually.

**Alex:** Yes.

**Marie:** Very protective. Yeah.

**Alex:** Marie, I'm mindful of time, but just kind of a final question, what would you say to you kind of at the point where you were really starting to crash in terms of work and symptoms and that would have said, "Well, I can't put boundaries in place. My daughter needs me. I've got to ... I got all these responsibilities in terms of my work and my career, and I can't ... my friends and family. I need to be ..." What would you say to someone that's really struggling with this idea of boundaries and taking care of one's self?

**Marie:** Yeah. I'd really say just from experience, it's like a non-negotiable. You have to draw a line and put yourself first. It's not even putting yourself first ahead of everyone. You just have to make the decision that you matter. That's the first step. Make a decision that you matter enough to even contemplate this. Because it's maybe not a great thing to say, but if you were like taken out into hospital and you were like taken off, I don't know, three months and you couldn't move, what job would get on with whatever they need to do? The role that you do, that you feel that you're responsible for, because I was like that. I felt like cases would just fall apart if I wasn't there. They will continue. They will find a way. And even our loved ones. Everybody will find a way around that and it's only the pressure that you put on yourself. It's all the kind of internal noise. It doesn't mean it's true.

**Marie:** But if you don't put yourself first, nobody's going to come in and do it for you and that you've got to just make the decision, do you care enough about yourself? Does your health matter? And actually, do your loved ones matter enough for you to do this? Because you're also ... you're going to be better partner, friend, sister, daughter, whatever, the more healthy you are. So it's just like a non-negotiable. I'm pretty firm about that now when that comes in and we talk about it because I know the importance of it. That's the piece we've got to start with, right? Making that decision.

**Alex:** That's right. And as you just kind of said there, I think one of the really crucial things that allows us to cultivate healthy boundaries is self-love and self-worth. And in a sense, as obviously you know, I love the work that you and I were doing together. It was around cultivating self-worth and self-love to feel like then I'm worthy of and it's okay for me to have these boundaries in place.

**Marie:** Definitely. Yeah. And it is, it's that self-love piece and if I had spoken about that years ago, I'd have gone, "Oh god, she's... I don't know." Because it was absent. Like I had a self-hate relationship with myself for like 20 odd years. So I had to learn. Because a lot of our work as well of like learning to ... It was like I remember sitting in a session with you, I felt like such a cliché because I was like I'm with a therapist and who am I? I'm that person, because I didn't have an identity beyond the criticism and the doing and the achieving and all the harshness. So I had to learn like who I was beyond all of that and then I had to learn to love what was there.

**Marie:** And I really do now. And I can say that I genuinely love myself and I care about myself, so I'm always going to come back to that place. So whatever happens in life, whoever I come across or interact with, it's that self-love piece that comes above everything, and you just kind of follow that and it leads you to the most amazing places. It really does. The most important ... if there was ingredient, it would be that. I think. Definitely.

**Alex:** It sounds so simply. It isn't always easy. And it's a practice, right? As you experienced, you have to work at it, and it's that work at it over time that cultivates that new way of relating to one's self.

**Marie:** But it's doable. It's like practice with anything. If you do it enough, you will start to feel familiar. So it's available to everybody. I really believe that.

**Alex:** Marie, thank you so much. I appreciate you being so honest about such a personal kind of story and yeah, thank you so much for your time and also for the amazing work that you do now, working as a practitioner. Kind of having come from kind of patient to student to practitioner. It's obviously quite a journey.

**Marie:** Yeah. No, I loved it, and I really appreciate being here and sharing this because yeah, I know that it makes a difference. It isn't just textbook. I think that's the difference. It's not just ... we're not talking textbook stuff here. We're talking real experiences that we've all had, right, at the clinic and actually our professional knowledge as well as our personal experience. I actually think that makes the difference is what I found so amazing about the clinic, when I was patient. Because of that understanding. So I think that that makes the world of difference. Thank you for having me here.

**Alex:** My pleasure. Thanks, Marie, so much.

**Marie:** Thank you.