

Self Parenting Beyond Narcissism and Codependency

Guest: Britt Frank

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[00:00:09] Meagen Gibson

Welcome to this interview. I'm Meagen Gibson, your conference co-host. Today I'm speaking with Britt Frank, a trauma specialist who is a somatic experiencing practitioner and is trained in Internal Family Systems. She's an award winning instructor at the University of Kansas and has taught classes on ethics, addiction and social work practice. Her first book, *The Science of Stuck*, is out now. Thank you so much for joining me, Britt.

Britt Frank

Hi, thanks so much for having me on.

Meagen Gibson

So in your book, you talk about getting unstuck, and that that involves learning how to stay right sized. And I think this is a great place to start when talking about how to change the dynamic in our toxic relationships with ourselves and other people. So what do you mean by staying right sized?

Britt Frank

Well, and the phrase toxic relationships has gotten so much heat in the Zeitgeist and on social media. I've seen people say there's no such thing as a toxic person. If the definition of toxic is that it is suboptimal for us, then yes, people can be toxic, behaviors can be toxic. So I'm just getting that out of the way. The thing about being right sized and this gets really complicated because it gets into, are you victim blaming and are you saying it's on us? But the fact is that, and Brené Brown talks about, I neither want to shrink down nor poof up, but stand my sacred ground.

And staying right sized in a relationship means I know who I am, I know what I want, I know where my lines are, I respect where yours are, and I can set appropriate boundaries. Anytime we're not right sized in a relationship, whether it's too big, taking up too much space, or too small and shrinking, we're going to be susceptible to toxicity. It's almost never the case that if you stay right sized that you're not going to be able to maintain health even if the person in front of you is sub optimized in their skill sets. Being right sized means you know which relationships you can stay in, which ones that you absolutely cannot stay in, and which ones need stronger fences.

[00:02:14] Meagen Gibson

It's really interesting too, because as you're talking, I'm thinking about the assumptions that we make about our adult relationships and people's emotional maturity. Because I'm thinking about like I have one child who it takes a lot of adult work for me not to match the way he gets big, often, more often than not, he's getting bigger than he needs to be in an interaction in order to take up space and be heard. And so in order to not match his size, not just also get big myself, that takes a lot of conscious nervous system regulation, but we forget to do that with adults because of the assumptions that we make about their chronological age and their emotional maturity.

Britt Frank

Exactly. And the tendency, the labels that we use, narcissism, codependency, love addiction, whatever, if you drill down far enough, all of those relationships are a distortion in size. And so you're either taking up the space or you're shrinking down. But we call adult relationships adult relationships when more often than not, there are little children running around in very grown up adult bodies. And that is the source of much of our relationship turbulence.

Meagen Gibson

Absolutely. Yeah. Now I've got this image of little people running around in adult bodies, like the kids with the blow up dinosaur costumes that make them look large. But yeah, let's piece apart a few of the things that you just named also, by the way. I think you mentioned narcissism and what were some of the other ones and kind of differentiate between them, what those might look like for people if those are the first time they're hearing those terms.

Britt Frank

Yeah, it was narcissism, codependency and love addiction, which are all on the spectrum of the same dilemma, which is we are no longer right sized in our relationships. So codependency, when people hear that word, they usually think of the enabling partner of someone with an addiction. So I don't want to lose my husband, therefore I give him money and I cover for him at work when he's hungover. Or we think of codependency as someone who is a people pleaser and says yes to everything at their detriment and continues to function and function until they are completely burnt out.

But what codependency, and I hate the word, because really we need each other, we're wired for connection, we need interdependency, but codependency is when our inner child is trying to rescue someone else's inner child. That is what codependency is. It's when I am no longer right sized in my own psyche, in my own body. And so my inner child is going, uh oh, there's nobody here to take care of me. I need to make sure that person in front of me is okay, because if they're not okay, I'm not okay. So codependency, at its core, is a dilemma of if they're not okay, I'm not okay.

We care about the people we love. It's not like, yay, be happy and be detached in a statue when someone you love is struggling. But this tendency to over function and over engage and caretaker at the expense of our own health and sanity, that's a problem. Narcissism is the word that gets so trendy, and it's weird because it's both overused and underused, suddenly, everything that people do that makes them not the nicest in the world, now they're a narcissist. Or anytime someone disagrees with us, now it's gaslighting, so it's overused.

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But the problem is, it's a lot more common than people realize, and it's also tragically underused. And I've been in these relationships, and when you're in a relationship with someone high level narcissist, having everyone have the same label, it's really difficult to figure out what's what. So narcissism is a spectrum. It's a character trait. We all have it to a degree. And you can fall anywhere on the scale of narcissism with an M. Narcissistic with a C is sort of like a behavior, hey, that person's acting in a narcissistic way. So *ism* is a characteristic. Narcissistic is the behavior.

Narcissist with a T, there are people who fall into that category, but that is the highest level. That's when we're getting into sociopathic, illegal, going to prison kind of behaviors. If they get caught.

Meagen Gibson

Yeah. Thank you. And very good, *ist*, *ism*, *ic*. I like that we ended with that. *Ist*, *ism*, *ic*. Because it is, it's a very clear differentiation of behaviors, typology, diagnosis versus, yeah and we can all... And we were talking before we started recording about how narcissistic tendencies or behaviors might come out if you are, let's say, chronically ill or under a tremendous amount of stress because of some life circumstances or things, right? None of us behave from our best characteristics under duress.

And so that doesn't mean that you are a narcissist or that the person that you're dealing with that's going through a particular difficulty right now is a narcissist. But understanding these types of behaviors allow you then if you're interacting with them or if you're behaving like that to take accountability and say, like, oh, okay, I can see I maybe need to pump the brakes and have a little intervention with myself.

Britt Frank

Which goes back to being right sized, now there is some merit in validating, hey, the person you're with is actually a high level narcissist, but we get so bogged down in how to label the people with whom we're in relationship that we forget that we have choices in reaction in response to their behaviors. So whether or not that person is a narcissist with a T or narcissistic with a C, does it really matter? How is this behavior impacting you? What are you tolerating? What are your limits, and are you in harmony with what's in your own best interests? And if the answer is no, it actually matters not what you label that other person. It's more about the impact on us than the label where we place them.

Meagen Gibson

And most of the people that will be watching this interview and are interacting with this conference are not on the narcissistic spectrum. They're on the codependency spectrum, if I could be so bold as to say. But both of these behaviors get established in childhood where we're either dealing with somebody with narcissistic tendencies or coping and putting somebody else's needs and behaviors above our own in our own kind of codependent behaviors, right? And then we just carry this into adulthood and don't even realize who we're matching.

[00:09:03] Britt Frank

Which is, you know, I think it was John Leech, he wrote *Growing Yourself Back Up*, and I think he wrote this, and if I'm wrong, I will fix this on social media somewhere. But adults cannot be abandoned, they can be left. And so when we get into this and I have fear of abandonment too, because I have a traumatic childhood, but as adults, this terror of abandonment is an instant tell that you are no longer right sized. Because in an adult state, when relationships end, yes, pain, yes, grief, yes, sadness, all of those things, yes, anger, but terror does not match an adult state because to be left as an adult sucks.

But you also know, I am an adult, I can continue to care for myself. As a child, to be abandoned is to be left for dead. And so that's a really easy little tell where you are on your age regression spectrum. Are you matching your chronological age right now or not? By the level of terror at the thought of having to leave or having been left by a partner.

Meagen Gibson

That's interesting too. And there's different things like you're talking about abandonment, but there's also like, if you feel silenced, maybe you weren't heard or you were overly criticized as a child, there's kind of the feeling and then there's the injury that caused that feeling or injury in the first place and where they match up. And your ability to stay right sized is going to signal to you, oh, wait, maybe this is historical and not... Because I am a fully capable adult, no one can silence me, no one can abandon me. I have an adult self.

Britt Frank

And the big caveat, and this is so important to me to name, none of this amazing information, none of the tools, none of the techniques, none of the therapy will, quote, work if you're not in a safe relationship. So I've personally been in a domestic violence situation and my question to my therapist, why can't I set boundaries? Why can't I stand in my autonomous... Because I'm being abused. So if you are actively being abused by a partner, none of this, I mean, the first order of business is establish safety, which often means leaving, not always, but often or at the very least, separate. Go to your corners.

Which is why couples therapy is completely contraindicated. Couples therapy is not recommended if there's abuse in the relationship because of the power dynamic. Abuse is not a relationship problem. Abuse is not a communication problem. Abuse is not your trauma led you to this problem. Abuse is an abuser problem, period. But when I was in these violent relationships, a raised voice was a prelude to what was about to happen, which was very violent and very bad. So assume that you're in a safe relationship before you try to implement things like boundaries or speaking your truth or setting limits, because if someone is crossing lines and being abusive, this stuff doesn't work and that's not your fault.

Meagen Gibson

Absolutely. I'm so glad that you just explicitly named it because especially if you're on the codependent spectrum, I recently came to this realization that I had conducted a lot of my life feeling like I was Neo in *The Matrix*, forgive the movie reference, but that I could just plug in and learn everything and then do all of the emotional labor to make all of my relationships satisfying and safe. It's embarrassing how recently this revelation just came to me. And then it finally

dawned. I was like, no, actually, I can't do that. Actually, that's incredibly impossible. And relationship takes two people, and the people that love you should care how they make you feel.

[00:12:42] Britt Frank

It's really terrible, and especially because so many people nowadays have access to therapeutic language. And there are lots of things in the media about people weaponizing therapeutic language, which makes it even dicier. I really love AI-Anon, for partners of people who struggle with alcoholism, they have this thing called the three C's when it comes to trying to fix or caretaker your partner, you did not cause this. You cannot control it, and you can't cure it. You can't control it. You didn't cause it. You can't cure it, but you can contribute to it. And so it's really important when we're trying to fix the toxic people, to ask ourselves, what am I trying to control? What do I believe is mine to fix? Because we can control our reactions, but unfortunately, we cannot control other people's choices.

Meagen Gibson

Again, thank you for bringing it up. I am an AI-Anon Attendee. I know it's anonymous, but just in case anybody needs to hear it, those meetings are fantastic and where my codependency tendencies started to unravel. Shout out to AI-Anon. So I want to pivot just a little bit and talk about, we've talked about the tools and the language of learning all of this stuff, but then what are the actual tools of remaining right size? What are the things that you need to practice in yourself to understand that you aren't? And then how do we restore ourselves back to right size?

Britt Frank

And this is where I love the Internal Family Systems model. And I'm trained in multiple models of therapy, and I have never seen anything work as fast, as effectively, as the parts model, Dr Richard Schwartz's model. Because to recognize that you're right sized requires you to identify, I am not my parts, all of the parts of me, my inner child, my inner teenager, my inner adolescent, my inner 25 year old who's all wide eyed and I can take on the world. We're made up of all of these parts and subparts. And so in order to get right sized, we need to, what they call in IFS, we need to unblend.

It's not just the singular I, the singular me, it's, oh, wow, there's a part of me right now who's making choices that are causing harm to my system. So I am not the part. The part is not me. Oh, I'm the adult here. It's my job to help this part get the needs met. So this part is not... It's sort of like parenting a toddler. The toddler shouldn't be running around walking around downtown trying to get fed, because bad things will happen.

So it's our job to recognize, oh, wait, I am not my parts. If I feel like that, it's because I'm all blended. So, task one, if you feel overwhelmed, if you feel flooded, on a scale of one to ten, if you're higher than a five, it usually means that we've forgotten who's in charge. And so, separating, okay, and that's where inner dialog is a really good tool versus inner monologue. I know I shouldn't go on that date with that person. I know I shouldn't answer the phone. I know that this is not good for me, but here I go. I'm getting in my car at midnight.

Versus okay, Britt, the part of me that wants to do this, I know that this feels really important, and I know this feels like you have to have it. But let's try to figure out a better way, because I love you too much to let you do something that will harm you. And that's a very compassionate but firm way

of approaching our choices and our behavior. You don't need to shame yourself. Shame on you. You shouldn't do that. What's wrong with you that you're going back to this toxic relationship? Listen, everybody is susceptible to getting ensnared by toxic relationships, whether with romantic partners, friends, coworkers, bosses, or family.

[00:16:21]

No one, I don't care how smart you are, is impervious to this dilemma. It happens to everyone. It happens to the best of us. So just start by validating, okay, this is a thing. It's not just me. Then, remember that you're the adult, and your job is to parent the younger parts. It's not an I, me, my. It's a us and a we. And so inner dialog is a good tool to practice that,

Meagen Gibson

And it's a fantastic, I'm a huge fan of IFS, as you know, and one of the things that's made such a difference and such a shift for me is that often at the beginning of a therapeutic journey or a healing journey, it's the cliched, like, what was your family like? And tell me about your relationship with your mother. It's always the mother's fault. I'm joking. But in that, without IFS, sometimes it can be kind of an excuse field, right, where we're like, oh, I didn't get what I needed, and that explains my actions and behaviors.

And then there's this validation of, like, of course I can't, insert problem here, it's because of this, and then that's where the journey ends, or that's where the exploration of the responsibility ends. And IFS gives you a way to get that kind of clarity with responsibility within an adult framework that also takes care of those damaged parts that still have a really valid need that they're trying to get filled, right?

Britt Frank

I love that you named that. And the whole justifying our own behavior is a problem. But when it comes to explanations, it's also easy to say, well, my partner was abused as a child, and I understand, because I'm such a compassionate, empathic person, that they don't want to be like this, but the trauma made them. The whole trauma made me do it is the new the devil made me do it. And again, it's important to separate, to uncouple, an explanation. And I will rant about this every time I get a microphone. An explanation is not a synonym for an excuse.

All behavior can be explained. If you look at the most high level heinous crimes and you look at the case file, it makes sense. Like, okay, it's not not understandable how we got from point A to point Z, but that doesn't make it okay. Your partner's trauma may explain the toxic behaviors. That doesn't mean you have to tolerate them, and it doesn't mean that it's okay. So explaining a behavior can be useful, but it doesn't in any way excuse us from our work or excuse our partner in the relationship from their work. So it's really important not to overlap this idea of there's an explanation, therefore it's a valid choice. No. No. No.

Meagen Gibson

Yeah, absolutely. And that can be, we're talking about partnerships, but in family dynamics and family relationships, it can also be really difficult. I mean, I know for sure that that's been some of the tough stuff of the season that I'm in now is really understanding with tremendous compassion the stories and experiences that informed the actions of my parents in my childhood and yet also

having my own independent feelings and making independent choices about my relationships not because of them, but because I am informed by them.

[00:19:42] Britt Frank

And that comes down to the three C's, right? Our parents contribute to our template. They contribute to the development of our psyche. They contribute to the way we frame the world and our place in it, but they don't actually cause us to make choices. And so taking the causation thing, well, my mom made me do it because she neglected me. It's like, no, your mom contributed to your pain. Your mom created a lot of trauma, perhaps, like, your mom contributed and created conditions but the choice is ultimately ours.

And that's incredibly good news and really bad news. I remember when I started my journey healing family of origin stuff, I was so mad because I'm like, no, this isn't my fault. I didn't ask to be born. I didn't ask for this set of genetics. I didn't ask for this set of circumstances. And then I got into victim mode, which was a very comfortable place for me. Someone owes me. Someone should take care of me. Someone should do it for me.

And then my therapist was like, yeah, actually, you're grown now to the degree that you have choices for people that have no choices. If you don't have any, you don't have any. I had choices that were available to me that I was not making because I wanted to stay in the, well, they made me do it. So the good news is no one can make you. The bad news is no one can make you, unless you're being subject to abuse or oppression.

Meagen Gibson

Exactly. Right. There are circumstances that do make it incredibly difficult, and the deck is stacked against you to break intergenerational trauma or change your situation or take responsibility. I mean, even I moved from Los Angeles to the middle of nowhere, North Carolina, where there wasn't a store for 30 minutes, and there definitely wasn't a therapist for hours around. So there can be geographical difficulties, economic difficulties, to getting the kind of support and help that you need in order to really create change. So we definitely don't want to overlook that.

Britt Frank

And with relation... I'm so glad you named that because often with toxic relationships, we put the first order of business is fix them. When that doesn't work, it's, well, I just need to fix myself so I can tolerate abuse, and that doesn't work. But then it's we don't have any other options. You can't heal from a toxic relationship without the presence of a healthy one. Now, the whole you need to love yourself before you... that's crap, but you do not heal from toxic relationships in the absence of healthy ones.

And those can be paid. It can be a therapist or a counselor. It can be a group. It could be a friendship. It could be a mentor. It can be anything. But most people, not most, many people, are in this isolation state where the toxic relationship isn't going anywhere until we beef up your supportive resources. So this do I stay? Do I go? Do I quit the job? Do I leave the marriage? What do I do? We can't answer that question because you don't have the resources in your environment to support that decision. So the first order of business with toxic relationships is in any way, in any place, that it's available to you, we need to start building a support system so you have the

infrastructure to tolerate what happens when you leave toxic relationships because it's incredibly unpleasant.

[00:22:50] Meagen Gibson

Absolutely. And you said something I want to come back to because it was important and sometimes the two of us talk very fast, so I want to make sure people hear, but you said something about resiliency, and it reminded me that sometimes we misunderstand resiliency as meaning to just take anything. And that's not resiliency at all, right?

Britt Frank

Not a bit. And again, it gets misunderstood. And this idea of resiliency, this idea of forgiveness or empathy or compassion, none of that stuff means you are supposed to tolerate abuse. That's not what that stuff means. When we're talking about resiliency, it's about, again, our ability to get back to right size when we've shrunk down or when we've poofed up, how fast you can get back to your actual chronological age. That's the measure of resiliency. It's not how much abuse you can tolerate. There are no merit badges for that.

Meagen Gibson

Absolutely. We will not be handing those out. So when we're talking about family dynamics, you do a great job in your book of outlining the different signs of an emotionally unskilled family, which I think is a really great way of phrasing that. And so I think this is important because if you didn't have outright abuse, trauma or neglect as a child, you can still have experienced severe misattunement and unintentional harm that impacts your adult relationships negatively. So could you describe the ten signs of emotionally unskilled families?

Britt Frank

So I really wanted to call that chapter toxic family run, but, again, most people don't identify as being part of a toxic, abusive family. And many people don't need to develop the level of no contact or estrangement that maybe me personally or other people may have had to do. And so emotionally unskilled is sort of... That's the right phrase for many of these family dynamics where they didn't mean to cause harm. I understand they loved you and they were doing what they knew and all of that.

But, again, it's not about their intention. It's about, what's the impact of their choice? And when people are like, oh, my God, I just can't call this trauma, fine. Don't call it trauma. Just call it emotionally unskilled. Your parents or caregivers were emotionally unskilled. And those dynamics, again, occur on a spectrum. So if we're talking, parentification is one of them, and that's when the parent looks to the child to parent them. That can be something as simple as a mother making sure that her daughter thinks she looks pretty every night before she goes out.

But the extreme end of that is when we get into things like emotional incest and higher level emotional abuse or triangulation. And that's when two family members are talking about a third without the third being present. So I'm mad at someone, so I'm going to talk to this person over there. Triangulation is a very common family dynamic. On the extreme end, it's incredibly abusive. So there are a lot of these things that, again, like narcissism fall on a spectrum.

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And just because you didn't have an abusive family doesn't mean that they were emotionally skillful in every area, every second of your life. Like even the best parents in the world, and I know many of them, are still human. All humans are imperfect, which means all parents are imperfect. So looking for where things may have been less than optimized is a great place to start. And there are more dynamics in there. But those are two of them.

Meagen Gibson

Yeah, it's interesting, right? So all these little things that our parents were doing their best, and I'm thinking of parentification and how culture changes as well. I don't think there's a single oldest daughter of the 80s who wasn't parentified a little bit. Right?

Britt Frank

Hi. My name is Britt. I belong to this club.

Meagen Gibson

As do I. Speaking of patches we didn't want to collect. And so was anybody trying to harm us? No, of course not. It was the 80s. Triangulation and perfectionism and the ways that we project harmonious, well adapted family images in public and in social circles and then things are really difficult at home, and nobody's talking about it, nobody's naming it, and we're gaslighting each other into, like, everything's fine. Everything's fine. It's these emotionally unskilled behaviors that end up in our adult relationships, and then we're so confused and can't really put a finger on why we'd feel insecure.

Britt Frank

And the guilt. And I see this all the time. People feel so guilty for identifying family of origin levels of skillfulness. And the impulse to defend our caregivers is really strong and is a very big barrier to our own integration, our own sense of wholeness, happiness and well being. So I tell people, self parenting, becoming right sized, recognizing your wounds, isn't about blaming your parents. It's about becoming a parent to your parts in all of the ways that they needed that maybe got missed along the way.

Meagen Gibson

And I want to talk about estrangement a little bit, because I think estrangement feels a lot like family divorce in that if you tell somebody, I'm divorced, everybody, the first thing everybody always says is, like, what happened? It's this kind of voyeuristic sort of what happened? Because I think my theory is everybody's always like, if I figure out what happened, I can avoid that. And so I have often felt like estrangement kind of gets the same rap where it's this shameful thing that nobody wants to talk about.

And people secretly judge other people that have experienced estrangement in their families, whether that be you're a parent that doesn't talk to your child or a child that doesn't talk to your parent, siblings, grandparents, whatever it is. If there's estrangement, how can we handle that

judgment and what kind of myths or things that we can dispel about estrangement and what it takes for somebody to get there?

[00:28:57] Britt Frank

That one I have a personal beef with because it's just like, oh, my God, what a terrible person. How could you cut off insert family member?

Meagen Gibson

But they're your... We get that. But they're your... Insert.

Britt Frank

Which, again, that goes back to, yeah, they're my insert family member but that doesn't mean it's okay, nor does it mean that I need to tolerate levels of toxicity despite their role, despite their trauma, despite why their brain made them do... It doesn't matter. You don't have to tolerate abuse. The myth of estrangement is that people come to that decision lightly. This is just like, oh, I'm just mad and, we chatted about this before, estrangement is not a grudge. Estrangement is not I'm in a fight with someone, and I'm not talking to them.

Estrangement, like divorce, comes only after you have exhausted every possible option. Estrangement is never for people who truly have to or choose to end up in that place. It's never something taken lightly. It's so fundamentally oppositional to our evolutionary biology to distance ourselves from a family member. We're pack animals. We need our pack in order to survive. If someone is estranged from a family member, that immediately tells me, wow, the injury and the lack of being willing for the perpetrator or the person to validate or name or in any way come on board with let's fix this, has to be so extreme because estrangement is awful, it's tragic, and it's not contagious.

That's the other thing. It's like people think, oh, my God, if I validate your estrangement, suddenly I need to do this. It's not contagious. If you don't want to be estranged, then don't be. But if someone is, then it's really tough. How to handle, your question, how do we handle the judgment from our decisions? That comes back to being right sized, which is knowing which people to disclose that level of estrangement. Like, I don't walk around being like, hey, hi, my name is Britt, and I really like coffee, and I'm estranged from family of origin member. So it's being able to discern who's a safe person to share and how much. And in healthy nontoxic relationships, that line is clear.

Meagen Gibson

Absolutely. And I think it's one of those things, too, that when you choose wisely and you disclose that to somebody, you'll find out that you're in the same boat as a lot of people that you didn't realize that you were. It's a lot more common than we think it is. And when you find the compassionate people in your life that understand, it's almost like you both see with the same glasses on. You're like, oh, yeah, I've also walked down that path.

[00:31:40] Britt Frank

Yes. And this is the same thing with grief. If you're not estranged and someone that you care about discloses to you that they are, don't say I'm sorry. And again, if you have, no shame, we all say I'm sorry because... Oh, I heard you got divorced. I'm sorry. I heard someone died. I'm sorry. You're estranged from your father. I'm sorry. Don't say I'm sorry, because that creates this weird, like, now they need to take care of you, and you're sorry. But you didn't actually... Just say, wow, God, that sucks, or oof, that must have been hard. Or just shake your head and be like, damn. There are no words. You don't have to fix it. You don't have to take care of the person, but be with them in that moment. I'm estranged from my family member. Wow, that must have been really hard. That's all you have to say.

Meagen Gibson

Yeah, absolutely. I think that's validating and also, I just want to name that sometimes that estrangement is also because... It's not a one way victimization. Sometimes it's not this person hurts me so much. It's we cannot be good to one another.

Britt Frank

Yeah. I mean, there are so many reasons for estrangement, and it's not just overt physical, sexual, or whatever type of abuse. There are lots of reasons that people choose estrangement. And again, you can beg and plead and ask and bargain with your family member or with whomever, but they're going to do what they're going to do. You didn't cause it, you can't control it, and you can't cure it. So at some point, estrangement becomes the only healthy option for you to stay right sized.

Meagen Gibson

Absolutely. I likened it to, I'm just going to quit punching that ride ticket. I choose not, speaking of being right sized, it's like, you must be this tall to ride this ride. I'm like, I don't want to ride the ride anymore. Guess what? Right.

Britt Frank

Yeah.

Meagen Gibson

Yes. I want to just check over one more thing. Oh, yes. So when we're talking about now we're right sized, we know what kind of tools to use to assess our size and then once we have that, how do we differentiate between responding to something and reacting to something?

Britt Frank

I love that question. And again, the right sized thing does not mean that every relationship that you're in, it doesn't mean that they also need to be right sized. And this is where adult friendships are really, it's important to differentiate, you don't need just inner circle, high level besties. If someone is really not right sized, but they're really awesome as a coworker, then you can locate them in your friendship ecosystem in a place where you don't have to be confronted with their less than skillful behaviors.

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So taking an inventory of all of our relationships and going, do I keep it, do I toss it, or do I relocate it to somewhere else, is really important. And I lost your original question, but I really wanted to name that we don't have to only have super healthy friends. It's totally fine to be in relationships with people as long as we're aware of what we're willing to tolerate. Oh, your thing was responding versus reacting. A good way to tell whether you're reacting versus responding is just to ask yourself, have I made a choice? Does this feel like a choice, or does it feel like a default setting?

Right? I'm very aware when I'm just doing the thing, and I'm like, oh, God, I'm doing the thing again. Why am I doing the thing again? Versus I see what's happening. I can see my choice points. I can pick one, and then I can execute. If you're not doing that, assume you're in reactivity and not in response, and response is that right sizeness. Reactivity is too big or too small. Alice in Wonderland syndrome.

Meagen Gibson

Thank you for that, and I would also say that it's really contagious for people in a great way when you catch yourself reacting and then name it and then change the way that you're responding. People catch on to it in the best way, especially children, if you have any children in your life, it doesn't mean that you have to be perfect as a parent or mentor, aunt or uncle or whatever. So many times I've just caught myself literally mid freak out and been like, wow, that was a choice to react that way, that was bigger than necessary, huh? And they'd just look at me like...

Britt Frank

That's so great because you can laugh about it and then you deshame. This happened with my husband just a few days ago. I was whatever and I said something and I caught myself and I'm like, oh, my God, that was so aggressive. And he's like, yeah, that was really aggressive. And then we started laughing and it doesn't have to be such a heavy burden. And a lot of times this work is so off putting. Oh, my God, I have to stay right sized and I have to parent my parts and I have to be mindful of boundaries. Sometimes laughter is actually the best way to move through a human moment because we all have them. And I'd much rather call myself out for having a moment than being called out on it by my partner.

Meagen Gibson

And sometimes, you know, it's not all psychological. Sometimes it's physiological. I live in Florida where it is so hot and I will admit I am not myself when I'm overheated. And so the whole month of August is just me apologizing for things I said when I was hot.

Britt Frank

That needs to be a meme. Yes.

Meagen Gibson

So we're all just doing our best and trying to stay accountable and all my little codependent brothers and sisters out there, we're doing great. Keep it up.

[00:37:21] Britt Frank

And really the solution to all of this is, I shouldn't say that, that's a very broad blanket statement, the solution often for much of this is self parenting because you're not going to tangle with other people's parts. You're not going to be in reactivity. You're not going to let yourself get so overheated that you can't recognize that now is not a good time to have a high level conversation about something difficult when we're paying attention to and you don't have to pinpoint exactly how old you are and what are you. It's just, do I feel right now adult enough to handle what's in front of me? And if the answer is yes, proceed. And if the answer is no, hit the brakes, pump the brakes, take a step back and do whatever it is that you do to make yourself feel like yourself again.

Meagen Gibson

Absolutely. I love that. Frank, thank you for being with us. How can people find out more about you and your work?

Britt Frank

Thank you so much. I love our chats. So my book is *The Science of Stuck* and you can buy it wherever you buy books. My website is scienceofstuck.com. Or find me on Instagram [@brittfrank](https://www.instagram.com/brittfrank).

Meagen Gibson

Thanks again, Britt.

Britt Frank

Thank you.