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**HEALING TOXIC  
RELATIONSHIPS**

## **The Role of Grief in Toxic Relationships**

**Guest: David Kessler**

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**[00:00:09] - Alex Howard**

Welcome everyone to this interview where I'm super excited to be talking with David Kessler. We're going to be talking about how grief can show up within relationships. We're going to talk about grief in a broad definition of grief, so not just grief in terms of the loss of a loved one, but really the death or the loss of anything and how that can shape our dynamics in relationship.

To give a little bit of David's background, David Kessler is a well-known expert on healing and loss. He is co-author with Louise Hay of the best-selling book, *You Can Heal Your Heart: Finding Peace after a Breakup, Divorce or Death*, which has been the number one book on divorce and loss. He's also co-authored two other books with the legendary Elizabeth Kübler-Ross and he has been a contributing writer for eHarmony, Oprah.com and Anderson Cooper 360. He also lectures throughout the US, Australia, and the UK, teaching therapists how to help their clients after a breakup, betrayal, divorce and other losses. He had a limited podcast series on Spotify called *Healing with David Kessler* and you can find out more about David and his work in the bio and web link below this interview.

So, David, welcome back. I always enjoy our conversations together and this is going to be an interesting one to get into. Maybe a good starting point is why does a relationship become toxic? What are some of those signs?

**David Kessler**

Thank you, it's great to be back with everyone. One of the most interesting things that I don't think we understand is a relationship feels toxic when we begin to grow out of it. Many times we enter relationships and relationships seek their level and then all of a sudden we're like, wait a minute, this doesn't feel right to me and I'm not going to stay in this anymore. Interestingly enough, it's about us growing and a relationship feels toxic.

I just think one of the biggest barometers is when we don't feel good. We don't feel good about our interactions. A relationship ideally, both people should want the best for each other, but if someone's always trying to be right, every conversation makes us feel bad. We feel like we're getting gas lighting all the time. We get those apologies like, I'm really sorry you feel that way. We're just going, this doesn't feel good anymore.

Maybe the person that feels like they're harming us is telling us they're always the victim. They're comparing, we're feeling less than. All those things can be signs that wow, the relationship has shifted, we are growing, we don't want to do this anymore.

### **[00:03:38] - Alex Howard**

I was laughing a little bit in my mind. I was thinking the prize that we get for doing work on ourselves is often that our relationships that once felt harmonious no longer do.

### **David Kessler**

Exactly. Relationships, someone once told me they're a little like houses, you want to trade up. Each relationship you want it to be a little healthier than the last one. It's easy for us to focus on what's wrong with them. We want to absolutely get the awareness of, oh, I don't feel good in their presence and what am I going to do about it if they don't seem willing to change?

### **Alex Howard**

In a way, of course, those dynamics may have been that way all along and because we do that work on ourselves, we then start to recognize what we may have normalized to, may not have been healthy.

### **David Kessler**

Absolutely. Let me go back, if I can, to why these occur. First of all, it's easy to make ourselves wrong. Why do we choose these relationships? Why do we choose that person? Why am I always going after that, the narcissist, whatever it may be? Here's the thing we really want to understand. We were wounded. There was grief or trauma or both in our childhood. All grief does not have trauma, but all trauma has grief.

We needed to control the situation in our childhood. We needed to manage it. We had a parent who had an addiction, we had a parent who was a narcissist. We had all kinds of things, maybe we had horrible things we had to deal with, we had to manage them, we had to armor up to protect ourselves. Here's the thing. No one ever told us as we got older, it's safe to take the armor off. We're not even sure when it's safe to take the armor off.

I think one of the challenging things - for those who may not be familiar with my story, my mother died when I was 13. I grew up in a household, my parents, literally every argument, a suitcase came out. A suitcase came out, someone was leaving. There was never we're going to try to work this out, we're committed. Someone's leaving someone. So between my mother - and as my mother was dying, get this, my parents decided to have a monogamy discussion in front of me.

Monogamy discussions are challenging anytime, much less for a 13 year old. Here I grew up after all that horrible abandonment issues, doing relationships horribly, beating myself up that I'm doing relationships horribly. Why am I always attracting people who abandon me? All of that. Now, here's the thing we don't get. There was a blueprint we were given in our childhood and now we are doing that blueprint 100% correctly.

I always tell people, if I was going to give you a grade, I would give you an A in relationships. People always say to me, you don't understand, David, I'm so good at my career and then I get in relationships and I'm just horrible. I'm like, no, you're not. You're doing it exactly as you were taught. So here's the thing. Our soul, our psyche, wants to heal the grief. It wants to heal the trauma. So it's going to attract familiar people because we want to work it out.

Now, that means if you had a mother who was bipolar, you may be choosing people who are hot and cold, in and out. If you had a parent who had addiction, you may be choosing people who have addiction. If you had abandoning parents, you're going to choose those people. Now, one of the keys is we then beat ourselves up for our choices. I just remind people, you're not damaged, don't beat yourself up. Your psyche is trying to heal and that toxic relationship you're in is actually there for you to outgrow. It's designed to help you.

**[00:08:51] - Alex Howard**

What I also really like in what you're saying, David, is that in a way, as children, we are victims of the circumstance that we're in. What you're saying is that in a way, we become unconsciously the architect then of that in our lives. But that also means that as we do the work and as we change, we're also empowered to change those dynamics.

**David Kessler**

Absolutely. I can remember in a relationship, one huge argument I had about my needs are never met. Literally I got, well, what are your needs? I want to meet them. I'm like, I don't know what they are. I know how to fight for them.

**Alex Howard**

That's a really good answer in an argument, isn't it?

**David Kessler**

I don't know what they are. I just know how to fight that I'm not getting them because it's so old. It's so old. When things are really intense, it often means they're historical. The bigger our reactions are, it's like, oh, I might have some unattended grief, I might have some unattended trauma. It's really important that we bring all of that unattended grief, unattended trauma into our relationships.

I got to tell you, like I said, I had abandonment issues and oh, my gosh, if I went to a party and there was anyone there that said, yeah, not interested in a relationship. I'm like, do you want to go out? I mean, it's what we do. We don't realize it at first. The thing is, I think the hardest thing is to move our attention off of their toxicity to what are we going to do? Because the thing is, we all have the fantasy we're going to grow together. She, he, they're going to grow into their potential.

I got to tell you, there's a lot of relationships where people grow together and the toxicity becomes less and less and both people get healthy. There's relationships where all of a sudden you are growing, you're feeling better about yourself, you're not willing to tolerate the toxicity. You're not willing to have the boundaries stepped over all the time. You're just like, I can't do this.

**Alex Howard**

Yeah, I want to open up a bit more the grief piece here. For those not familiar with your work, this is one of the key pieces in your body of work. I know that people can think of grief sometimes in quite a narrow way. Part of what I really appreciate about your work is that much broader definition. So maybe you can share a little bit around how you define grief and then we can explore that within this wider context.

**David Kessler**

I think of grief as a somewhat one word for a lot of things, like you mentioned. I do think it's always a death, but here's how I think of it. Grief of course, is the death of a loved one, but a breakup is the death of a relationship. A divorce is the death of that marriage. A betrayal is the death of that trust. A job loss is the death of that paycheck with those people. Pet loss is the death of your furry friend, family member. They're all deaths. I use the word death because I want people to understand we need to grieve them all.

**[00:12:52]**

I think people sometimes go oh, I got to get over the divorce, I got to get past this. You have to learn to live with it, but you have to actually grieve it. You have to allow yourself to be sad, to be angry. Here's the thing that a lot of people find, when they let in the grief of that breakup, of that divorce, of that betrayal, an old grief that they had often from their childhood, a death, some trauma, it comes up. It becomes revealed in that moment and we have to deal with both. We have to deal with the current grief and we have to deal with the grief from our childhood or the trauma and or both.

### **Alex Howard**

As you touched on earlier, of course, the blueprint of how we're going to approach that grief in adult life is set up by what we learn and what we experience in childhood. What often happens is people go through these painful losses, but they don't necessarily meet them from a place of feeling those emotions. They try and avoid the emotions or rationalize it or try and make sense in their head and not in their hearts. So maybe say a little bit about how those responses then of themselves become part of these toxic dynamics in relationship.

### **David Kessler**

One of the things I often ask people is how was grief modeled in your home when you were growing up? I can tell you for me there was one time my mother answered the phone. I heard her scream. Her mother had died. My dad walked over, he hung up the phone, he picked my mom up and it was never mentioned again. That was grief. Then I saw an episode of Gilligan's Island and there was a funeral. Mr. Howell was on the other side of the island, but they thought he had died. That was my blueprint. That's how I learned about grief.

When grief came to me, the only advice I got from anyone was be strong, which often means ignore your feelings and take care of everyone. So many people, when they had a grief in their childhood, they, as the child, had to take care of everyone. So let me just play out how some of these things happen in our childhood. I think about a woman who was going through just a horrible divorce, such a bad relationship, she was finally willing to get out of it and there was no making it work. She had tried and tried and tried.

She told me one of the things, the memories that was coming up for her was when she was five years old, her parents were divorcing. Her parents were divorcing. Her dad was packing up and leaving the house and she was just heartbroken. She was following him from room to room and then they get to the car when he's about to drive away. The five year old's standing there looking. She told me, she said, David, do you know how in any movie or story, in that moment, the dad looks back at the little girl and says, don't you worry, honey, daddy's coming back for you. Daddy's never going to forget you. Daddy loves you. She said, dad got in the car and drove away. She said, I got no look back. I got no last words. He just drove away.

That's the event that happened. So what's the story that little girl made up in her mind because there were no adults to help her? The story she made up is, I'm not worth a look back. No one's there for me. Everyone leaves. I'm not lovable. As she grew up, that became her belief system. So we have an event, then the stories we make up around it, and then it becomes our belief system. As an adult dealing with a divorce, what does she say to me? She doesn't go, I finally got healthy enough to leave. She goes, everyone's going to leave me. Everyone eventually does. I'm not worth staying with. So those early events impact all our relationships.

### **Alex Howard**

And then, of course, as we've been saying, we normalize to those dynamics. The challenge, of course, is that when we start to see what's happening and we perhaps watch or listen to an

interview like this or someone comes across your work or so on, that to then change those dynamics, it can be difficult.

**[00:17:54]**

Because as we start to take those steps of change, as you mentioned earlier, the other person, if we're lucky, they come on that journey with us, but often they try to pull us back. Not because they don't love us, because they do and they can feel us pulling away. I'm curious as to what you find helps people navigate that change and that transformation?

**David Kessler**

Well, here's one of the things to just start with awareness. This isn't always comfortable and it's not always true, but a lot of times we attract someone who's like the parent who we believe loved us the least. So to really think about, oh, my father had anger issues, my mother was neglectful. Oh, my gosh, I'm in a relationship with someone with anger issues. Oh, my gosh, I'm in a relationship with someone who's neglectful. I'm in relationship with someone who's cheating.

That's just like my childhood. To first recognize is there a pattern there, because that's really important to recognize that. I think the next thing is we lose our power in relationships. We give the other person all our power. We think the only way out is for them to change, and we have to bring the power back to us. There was a scared child in you. There was an abandoned child in you. There was a victimized child in you. That child is probably still in there and there's an adult in you now who is your own source, to remember your power. They're not your source. You've got to remember your power.

When you're faced with bad behavior, toxic behavior, irrational thinking, gaslighting, narcissism, they're loving you, they're hating you, whatever it may be, you got to remember, all right, I can take care of me here. I don't have to be a victim of this. Perhaps when I was a child, I actually was a victim, but I don't have to be a victim anymore.

**Alex Howard**

I think what can also be difficult is when we've got used to looking outside of us to meet those needs and then we start to turn our attention inwards. The first thing that people often experience is not a sense of ease and contacting those needs. It's all the difficult feelings that they've been trying to get away from, in a sense. When we start to turn inwards, often what people can experience is that sense of deficiency. They go, well, no wonder I've been trying to get away from this. I'm curious as to what you find helps people stay with that place. Of course, in time we can move through that, but particularly in that point where that difficult stuff arises, what helps?

**David Kessler**

I think one of the first things to realize is so many of us, I would say most of us, were raised to be other-oriented. We were raised to check everyone's temperature, to see how everyone's doing, to come home and check in with folks and if they're okay, we're okay. If they're upset, we're upset. It's exactly true when we, number one, pull back to ourselves, people aren't happy. I always say when people pleasers quit pleasing, people are rarely pleased.

**Alex Howard**

That's a good phrase.

### **[00:21:45] - David Kessler**

When you begin to take care of you, the outside world may not applaud, they may go, how selfish of you. What they're saying is, you're supposed to be here for me. We got to learn to be here for ourselves. I got to tell you, you're exactly right. When we turn our attention inward, we're going to often go, well, there's nothing there. No wonder I'm so unhappy. No wonder I need other people's barometers. It becomes like a new gym you have to walk into that it's like a gym for your muscles.

You really have to figure out what makes me happy. What do I want? What are my needs? I can tell you. I work with people all the time. I say, tell me your children's favorite foods. Tell me your children's favorite places. Tell me your husband, your wife's favorite things. Tell me what your parents - you can give micro details about other people and then I go, how about you? Where's your dream trip? Not sure. We haven't turned our attention inward. So when we get to that uncomfortable inward, be gentle with yourself. Start slowly.

Sometimes I tell people, just figure out the things you don't want first. I know it's hard to figure out everything you want. Oh, I don't want to be with people who are unkind to me. Oh, I don't like mushrooms. Whatever it is, just start small and begin to learn you, because the more you learn you and take care of you, that is the attracting the healthier relationship that is going to happen.

### **Alex Howard**

When one turns inwards and part of what they discover is, for example, the unprocessed grief. You mentioned that, for example, what can happen in life as an adult is we have the death of something, but actually what it activates is the history that's not being processed. Walk us through some of the practices and some of the things that in your substantial body of work help people to move through that.

### **David Kessler**

Yeah, it's interesting. I have a large online group, it's hundreds of people in grief. We have specific groups that people break into. I'll tell you, we added an older loss group because we have so many people who are going, oh, I never processed my dad dying at five. I never processed my mom dying at 13. I never processed when my sibling died. I had to be the healthy, perfect one. All of those things that happen to us, our grief doesn't go away. It sits patiently for us to process it.

The thing is, we can't heal what we don't feel. So we do have to go back and we have to look at it through the adult's eyes with permission to feel it, to go back. I'll tell you, it's almost a bit of time traveling that you're surprised how much you can go back and heal those moments. When you heal those moments, there's something dramatic that happens to the 24-year-old you and the 36-year-old you and the 44-year-old you, the 55-year-old you that like, oh, I see now making I'm decisions from that.

Here's one of the things we know that I think is challenging. We often feel that, oh, God, I'm so screwed up. I'm so damaged. Let me go work on this alone. You literally, study after study shows this, can't heal grief and trauma alone. People think, oh, let me isolate and work on this. The worst, cruelest thing we do to anyone is we put them in isolation. We need others to help us in the healing. That grief, even if it's from five years old and ten years old, needs to be witnessed by another human being.

You got to find groups, you got to find a therapist, you got to find a grief counselor, you got to talk to your friends about it. I got to tell you, if you begin talking to your friends or your partner, your spouse or your boyfriend, girlfriend, whoever it is, and they go, it's years ago, just get over it. Not the right person to talk to. They're never going to witness your grief. Don't even try to get them to witness your grief. A lot of people are grief illiterate, and they're not going to be good at it. You just got to choose another person.

## **[00:26:54] - Alex Howard**

As you were talking, David, I was thinking that one of the blocks that people have to going to those more difficult places emotionally is the narrative of, well, I can't change what happened. What's the point in going there and feeling it? You said a little bit earlier that you can't heal what you don't feel. I think often there's a significant resistance to that feeling, to feeling that feeling, because of the narrative, well, why would I want to go there? What I wanted to ask you was, in going there, in allowing oneself to really feel that, what's actually happening, how is that changing or transforming that experience? In that moment of healing and resolution, from your experience, what actually is that?

## **David Kessler**

It is really interesting. One of the keys, I think, is what we run from pursues us, and what we face transforms us. It's really amazing, the transformation that can happen. I got to tell you, you would think if I'm this adult who feels abandoned in every relationship. I'm just a black hole. This is like me I'm talking about. No one could love me enough. No, I can't tell you how many people stood in front of me trying to love me, and I couldn't believe it. I couldn't let it in.

I had to go back and work. I had to go back and feel. I had to go back and talk. I had to have that witnessed. I really had to understand there was a horrible thing in my childhood. There was a number of horrible things, but there was some horrible things that happened in those moments, in those years. I didn't care or have the wherewithal to know how to care for that five and six year old. So you almost have to try to do repair work with them.

We talk about it in a million ways. Our inner child work, whatever it is, reparenting. But you have to go back and talk about what that child was feeling to someone who's going to witness it and be helpful and caring so that you can begin to model it. Now, when we do that, we begin to have this awareness. Because I can tell you, when I was standing in front of so many people who really loved me, not taking the love in, I didn't think that came from that childhood. I believed, in that projection from that, that abandonment went on to everything, I was convinced they didn't love me.

That's the work you have to go back and do. It's amazing how it changes everything and how you see it differently. Now, some of those voices don't go away, but there's a couple of things I learned with the grief being witnessed, with the trauma being heard, with connecting to others. There's a volume that I can turn those voices down and there's a healthy voice that I can turn up. That's really been a lot of the power. Does abandonment not ever come up? No, it still comes up from time to time.

I can pause and I can go, okay, I'm feeling it. Where is it coming from? Oh, yeah, it's my little guy. I remember, I can see why this is triggering me or activating me. All right, no one can abandon me because I'm always going to be with me. I'm going to regulate myself. No one can step over my boundaries because I'm going to have boundaries that I take care of.

If they don't respect boundaries, I'm the one that walks away. I take care of me. It radically changes your whole life. It's really amazing. I often joke about how in *Back to the Future*, the movie now a show, literally, he goes back and changes things, and the next thing is his whole adult life has changed. It really is like that. When you do grief and trauma work, your whole life changes.

## **Alex Howard**

It makes me want to rewatch the films. I quite like that analogy. I appreciate you describing it in the way you did, because I think when people are on the edge of touching into those emotional places and I know that people said this to you before. It's like people think they're just going to fall into an abyss and they're going to become annihilated or swallowed by it.

**[00:32:14]**

I think what's helpful in what you're describing is that there's something very tangible that they're actually doing in that place. And though it may feel like they're falling into the abyss, that actually they're meeting that place in themselves. I guess that's the message of hope here, that as children, we are dependent upon someone else to do that, but we can learn to be that source of holding and regulation for ourselves.

### **David Kessler**

It's so easy as the adult. I think the unhealthy toxic model we have with ourselves is when these things come up, we're like, oh, I'm so damaged. I'm so screwed up. No one's ever going to love me. And to go, oh, my gosh, this isn't being done to me. It's being done for me. It's being done for my healing.

If I cannot make this thing that's coming up that makes me feel so damaged, my enemy, think of it like an old friend knocking at your door saying, I want to be healed finally. I want to be healed so you can have healthy relationships. It's really powerful. My friend, Dr. Edith Eger, talks about taking that traumatic wound and it becoming your cherished wound.

### **Alex Howard**

That's beautiful. I'm also interested to touch on a little bit how we navigate this in relationship. We've just been talking about how we get to be there for ourselves. It was sitting in my mind what you said earlier when you're in a relationship, you were saying you never meet my needs and then your partner says, well, tell me what your needs are. I don't know what my needs are. But in a way, it's like there's that place of finding what we need for ourselves. But also then as we're reshaping these dynamics, or maybe we're finding ourselves in a new healthier relationship that can meet us in that place, that this can all be very delicate. It can require a lot of care and sensitivity of how we allow ourselves to be held and also how we hold each other in these places.

### **David Kessler**

I think the tricky part is we're all not so - oh, I'm single, I'm going to work on me, or oh, I'm leaving the relationship. We're trying to also work it out in the relationship. So I want to give a technique that I think is really helpful. I don't know if this is toxic. Can I get out? Can I make this work? Here's the thing that I'll tell you, it was life-changing for me. I hope life-changing for others. It's an old archetype. The archetype is we've all heard, stay on your side of the tennis court, drive on your lane, tend your own garden.

They're all different ways of saying the same thing. My favorite one is dance in your own hula hoop because it's such a good visual. You know you can't dance in someone else's hula hoop. It doesn't work. So to think about, there's my lane, my side of the tennis court, whatever it may be. There's three lanes I think of. My lane, your lane, God's lane. If it's not God, the universe's lane. My lane, your lane, God's lane.

Here's the thing. My lane is how I show up. Am I kind? Am I respectful? Am I nice? Am I honoring boundaries? Am I hearing the other person when they talk? It's all me. Your lane is how you show up, what you say, what you do, how you respond. The third lane, God's lane, is it going to rain next week? Is there going to be an earthquake? Is there going to be whatever happens? Who's going to die next? All that's God's lane.

I find our power is all in our lane. We are happiest in our lane. We are always unhappy in the other person's lane or in God's lane. I'll just give you an example. Any argument you're in, I promise you just stop and go, all right, what's going on for me? Whose lane am I in? They shouldn't be saying that. Oh, they shouldn't be saying that. He shouldn't be saying that. She shouldn't be saying that.



Oh, what they say is their lane. I'm not in charge of their lane. I'm only in charge of mine. So I can recognize what they say. I can observe it. I can decide how I want to respond, but I've got no control over their things.

**[00:37:23]**

I'll tell you, going back to what we said before, if you were raised in a childhood that you were other-oriented, you think what the other person says or does is your responsibility. You got to remember, you're only in charge of you and they're responsible for them. So we have to begin. If we feel it's a toxic relationship, if we feel we're both toxic, we can say to them, hey, honey, let's work on our relationship. Let's try to become healthier.

Great, honey, I'm in. Okay, good. That's their response. If they're like, we're fine, you're the problem. Okay, that's them. That's their lane. Let me work on me. I can only improve me. Let me focus here and then you'll begin to see the more you stay in your lane, they're going to rise to the occasion with you or they're going to stay behind, and then you'll have a choice to make.

**Alex Howard**

I love the clarity you bring to that because I think so often what happens, as you say, is we get so frustrated at the other person not changing. I really like the point that you make, at the end of the day, if they're not coming on that journey with us, that is absolutely their choice not to come on the journey. We do have a choice whether we're going to stay, or we're going to leave at some point.

**David Kessler**

Alex, I can't tell you how many people I talk to that I'm like, Alex, what's going on? I get a paragraph about my wife and what's my wife doing and all this. I go, okay, well, we've got some time together, Alex, can we talk about you? Well, you know what my wife says about me. I'm like, oh my gosh, it's hard to find the person. We got to get into our lane and talk about us, because we love talking about the other person and we have no power there. Our power is here.

**Alex Howard**

Well, it's like people go to - I think I might have been guilty of this once as well. We go to couples therapy so the therapist can help the other person.

**David Kessler**

Fix the other person. Fix them. I'll tell you, professionals know couples who sit down and they both go, we want to work on ourselves to become the best relationship, do so much better than the couples who walk in and go, they're the problem. No, they're the problem. That's going to take a while just to untangle that because we can't work on each other.

**Alex Howard**

I guess in a way, part of the challenge here is that, going back to a bit of a theme here, when we were children, things were happening to us. In a way, because we weren't developed as an adult, it was all happening out there. I guess that's part of the maturation that we go through in life is that we start to take real responsibility for ourselves.

**David Kessler**

And to really inhabit our own story, to really be the author of our own book, the author of our own life, to really make it about us. Grief and trauma robs us of that. That's why it's so important to understand if you're feeling all those things, damage, hurt, boundaryless, an unhealthy empathy,

because there's healthy empath and there's unhealthy empath. That it's about feeling everyone else's feelings. I always tell people when maybe they're going, oh, I can't join a group, I can't be with other people, I'm too much of an empath.

**[00:41:08]**

If you're feeling everyone's feelings, you're abandoning your own. We have to go back and heal that wound because having empathy is great in a healthy way. Feeling other feelings that don't belong just makes us a feeling stealer, not healthy. It's because we were raised to be experts at that. Don't blame yourself if you are like an unhealthy empath. You were raised, those talents were fine-tuned in you and now you want to bring that amazing power you have back to you.

**Alex Howard**

It's an interesting point. I was just thinking that in a way, I think a bit of the narrative around empaths has become, well, I was born this way, therefore I can't change. But we wouldn't accept that necessary from someone saying, well, I was born angry, or I was born anxious or I was born this and I can't change. It's like one may have tendencies they've come in with, but they can also learn to find those boundaries and find those places to take care of themselves, even if that's not an easy journey.

**David Kessler**

Absolutely. Look, I'm not in a place to say that our DNA is not a factor. I think it is, but I also think we have so much ability to undo some of the beliefs that don't serve us. I think about Henry Ford, the guy who invented cars had a famous saying. He said, whether you think you can or you think you can't and you're right. I'll tell you one of the saddest things, like literally on my Facebook and Instagram, I'll try to post something that's witnessing or reflective or inspiring and I will get all kinds of comments.

You don't understand my situation. I can't heal. I go, whether you think you can or you think you can't, you're right. Yes, you can't. If you would open your mind, healing is possible. I got to tell you, if anyone researches my life, the things I've been through, happiness is possible for all of us. Possible for all of us. I've had horrific losses. I've had physical abuse, sexual abuse. Believe me, happiness and joy are still possible. Your wounds may convince you they're not, and I'm here to tell you they are.

**Alex Howard**

That feels like a beautiful place to end. David, for people that want to find out more about you and your work, we'll obviously have your website on screen underneath, but tell people where they can go, but also some of what they can find. You mentioned your online group, for example, so speak a little bit to some of your offerings.

**David Kessler**

We're always trying to offer different classes. So we have trauma classes sometimes, how to use writing through trauma. We have all those kind of classes that come up. Our main things we do is we have what's called Tender Hearts group and that's our grief group around the death of a loved one. Like I said, it can be a death that happened last week, it can be a death that happened 40 years ago. We can always still do that work on ourself and we need to be in conversations about it. There's something powerful in a group and it's a large group. You can be on Zoom and never be seen.

**[00:44:41] - Alex Howard**

For some people, that's quite reassuring, I know.

**David Kessler**

Or be up front asking questions. It's up to you. But I'll tell you the thing I love about group work is we find ourself in each other's stories, and we find our healing in each other's stories. The other thing we have is our Grief Educator Certificate program. There's a lot of therapists, coaches, people who have been through horrendous things, all kinds of losses and want to turn their pain into purpose.

We can certify them as a grief educator so they can run groups, they can help others, they can expand what they're doing. So those are two powerful things. They can find them at [grief.com](https://grief.com). Tender Hearts is at [tenderheartssupport.com](https://tenderheartssupport.com). Hearts plural. Tenderheartssupport.com. The grief educator program is [griefeducator.com](https://griefeducator.com). They're really powerful tools for healing and finding the life we deserve to have.

**Alex Howard**

Fantastic. David, thank you so much. I encourage people to check those out, and I appreciate your time, as always.

**David Kessler**

Thank you, Alex.