



Conscious Life presents
**HEALING TOXIC
RELATIONSHIPS**

Healing from Toxicity and Abuse

Guest: Zayna Brookhouse

Disclaimer: The contents of this interview are for informational purposes only and are not intended to be a substitute for professional medical or psychological advice, diagnosis, or treatment. This interview does not provide medical or psychological advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always seek the advice of your physician or other qualified health provider with any questions you may have regarding a medical or psychological condition.

[00:00:09] Jaï Bristow

Welcome to this conference. My name is Jaï Bristow, and I'm one of your hosts. Today I am very, very pleased to be welcoming Zayna Brookhouse. Welcome, Zayna.

Zayna Brookhouse

Hello. How are you doing?

Jaï Bristow

I'm great, I'm very happy to have you on board. Zayna, you're an intersection therapist and consultant. I'm really excited about today's conversation, because on this event we talk a lot about being in toxic relationships, about whether or not, when to leave a relationship or not, about recognizing red flags. There's some really great material.

But one thing we haven't covered so much is, what happens when we do leave a relationship? Because the toxicity, the trauma, all of that, can stay for quite a long time, and leaving the relationship doesn't naturally wipe all that away. So do you want to start by talking a bit about what happens in our emotional state once we actually get out of these relationships?

Zayna Brookhouse

If anything, for us, once we've made that decision to leave a toxic relationship, and I mean any type of relationship, not necessarily intimate and sexual, is we can find that we don't know who we are. Lots of our life was framed by that relationship that we were in, and potentially the toxic person we were in that relationship with.

What I call our psychological axis, if we think about the globe, it's thrown off for a while. We can feel uncertain, unsafe, in some situations. We are so used to centering other people's needs over our wants, that we actually forget what our wants were in the first place.

Whenever we leave any type of interaction, we are going to experience a period of grieving. We think, well, actually, we only grieve, or some people will think that grieving is part of the love that we had for that person, and it is.

[00:02:22]

If we're in a relationship with someone, something kept us there, something started it, something kept us there, and then some type of realization made us leave. All of that means you're still going to grieve. So it's really important that we begin to reformulate what our territories are, what our boundaries are.

We can see it as a failure, we're taught socioculturally that any relationship that fails, is a failure. Any marriage that ends is a failure. Whereas actually, there will be reasons for that. The shortcut that I sometimes have to remind people is, they're an ex for a reason.

You didn't just wake up one morning and go, actually, do you know what? Nah. You went through a process before you even went to leave, so once you've left, you have to go through a process again. You need to be able to forgive yourself, the amount of people that stay in toxic relationships longer than they should do...

A few years ago, it was about 17 times you had to be attacked before you left a violent relationship, and hospitalized, as well. It's really difficult to forgive ourselves when we come out of it. And I always use the metaphor that you can't see the universe from within it. So we come out of that universe, we turn around, and we look back, and we go, I should have left week one, I should have left week two. Why didn't I?

We mourn and grieve the time that we spent in that situation, but also we blame ourselves. I should have seen it, my friends said, red flag, red flag. And it's just as important to recognize your own red flags, as well as anybody else's. So it starts with forgiving self.

Quite often, you're conditioned to accept, maybe actively destructive communication models from the person that you were with. Maybe you were pathologized. Maybe you had negative shifts in your mental health, in your personality, in your routine, in what you wore, in how you ate, what you ate, and when you ate it. All of these things decrease your self-esteem, decrease your resilience, and keep you in situations that you can't do anything about.

We can't predict when somebody leaves, but we know that once somebody has left, you've got to rebuild from the ground up. Sometimes we'll turn around and we'll say, and this is a word we see all over social media, and will no doubt be mentioned numerous times over this conference is, narcissism.

Kind of rolls off the tongue, it's everywhere. Whereas narcissistic personality disorder is a diagnostic terminology, it's not a character trait, it's a person, it's a disorder, and can be treated. So when you hear, oh, no wonder that person was a narcissist, you have to wonder whether that's an overuse of a diagnostic terminology.

Just in the public lexicon, there's actually a part of narcissism that is really useful. We attribute narcissism as something that is all bad. If you meet a narcissist, you run into a narcissist, you were raised by a narcissist. What you are actually raised by were people with narcissistic tendencies. There is something called adaptive narcissism.

Now, adaptive narcissism is the good kind, is the positive kind of narcissism, and that means that you have self-confidence, that you have self-reliance, and the ability to celebrate yourself. So really, all of us want to be a little bit narcissistic if we really think about it, as opposed to what we

use narcissism as, and that's the maladaptive narcissism. That's about controlling, that's about relating negatively to others. That can be about DARVOs, so deny, attack, reverse victim, and offender. DARVO is an acronym.

[00:07:12]

It can be about the drama triangle. All of these things around human interaction are on the negative, or on the maladaptive side, but it is perfectly possible to break free from that, and create your own emotional territory.

Look at your ecosystem. Look at your self-compassion matrix. What do you need to build up now you've exited? There will be moments when you'll want to go back, I'll be completely honest. There'll be moments when you're on your own, and it's late at night, and maybe a memory pops up on a particular social media app, or you'll be looking through your camera roll, or you'll see a book that they purchased for you on the bookshelf. Those moments you'll go, oh, well, maybe it wasn't so bad.

And sometimes we have to forgive ourselves for thinking like that. Don't pathologize yourself. We have to think, is this the most obvious way of thinking about this? Well, it kind of is. It's somebody that you spent a great deal of time with, and it's somebody that is no longer in your life. It's called the principle of parsimony, or Occam's razor, some people will call it. It's the most straightforward way of thinking.

And feeling doesn't always mean that it is good, or beneficial, or constructive for your life going forward. Sit with that moment, go, okay, so I'm having this feeling, we'll talk a little bit later about metacognition exercises, and go, I'm going to forgive myself for thinking like this.

I'm going to be sad, I'm going to grieve, because what I'm grieving is the connection, not the person. Because we're humans, we all want to connect, we all want to bond. It's what limerence builds upon, we'll talk about that a bit later. They are an ex for a reason, sometimes we just need to be reminded of it.

Jai Bristow

There's so many great things in what you've just shared. Number one, this idea that, when you leave a relationship that suddenly you can forget who you are.

I really loved as well, that you're talking about relationships, including toxic relationships, aren't just necessarily with partners. And leaving a relationship isn't just necessarily with a partner. It's so important to remember that we can leave all types of toxic relationships, and that our identity can be very entwined in many different types of relationships, but especially when they're toxic, when they're overbearing, and we can lose ourselves in those relationships.

So when we get out, sometimes we don't feel free, we feel like, oh my God, what do I do now? Who am I now? How do I even behave now?

Then often when we're in that situation, and I've had this conversation with different people in this conference, then that's when the familiar can come in. This wanting to go back this, better the devil you know almost, because our brain chemistry, and people speak about this much better than I, but gets activated. And we want to go back to what we recognize.

[00:10:24]

And so sometimes, if we don't go back to that person, we'll end up in a very similar pattern and dynamic with someone new, because it feels familiar. Familiar, literally, family. Sometimes it can replicate the relationships we had with primary caregivers, with the people who raised us, et cetera.

There's a lot of really interesting things in what you said, that sense that toxic relationships can be with a lot of people. That when you get out, you can lose your identity. And that remembering the person is an ex for a reason, whether it's an ex-lover, an ex-partner, an ex-friend. And I don't know if you can have ex-parents, but some people might adopt that terminology.

And there's all this questioning, and this sense of sometimes wanting to go back, and that idea of having compassion and forgiving oneself for having that. But taking the time to remember they are an ex for a reason. And I really love the way you talked about, you don't just wake up one morning and decide, okay, I'm out. It's usually a process that's got you to there.

I was thinking about how you were talking about this idea of relationships failure. Maybe we need to start re-examining our definitions of relationships, because so often we're conditioned to believe, you meet someone, you fall in love, and you live happily ever after, in at least romantic relationships. But I think it can be true of different types as well.

Instead, relationships more as the opportunity to learn about yourself, to grow with someone, and that you can have completed, rather than failed, relationships. I was wondering if you had anything to say about that?

And then maybe... You mentioned this limerence, and I'm wondering if you could talk a bit about what that is? And how that comes into play.

Zayna Brookhouse

We actually get prizes for staying in relationships, if you get married, then your prize goes up every year, and sometimes it's not worth staying for a platinum award. It really isn't. Because what you're losing is much bigger than what you're gaining from that actual relationship. Society teaches us that longevity is a measure for a relational success, and it isn't, it's the opposite.

Every time when I'm seeing people and I go, every time you are in conflict with your partner, you learn something about them, and you learn something about yourself. Everything we can make into a learning experience. And when we have moments where we think, oh, my goodness, this has all gone south, I'm going to have to get out of this relationship, what are other people going to think?

Other people are going to think whatever they want to think. You're not in their head, you're not controlling their brain chemistry. Everybody will have an opinion, whoever they are, from wherever they're from. You might have people, and we're primed usually through the media, actually, to think about conspiracy theories.

After lockdown, well, everybody's left their spouse, divorce rates are through the roof. Well, it was because people recognized they weren't compatible, it wasn't actually because they were together all the time. It was what they learned from that conflict.

[00:13:55]

It's really important to do, and to trust yourself. And that's where people slip under the radar and become what we call limerent objects. Which is slightly objectifying in one sense, on the other sense, it's nice and easy to say. So limerence, there's a couple of really good books, there's one called *Living with Limerence* by Dr L, and there's *Love and Limerence* by Dorothy Tannov, that are widely available, to think about what is limerence.

Because sometimes it can feel like love. If somebody says to you, what's a loving relationship? What does a loving relationship feel like? It's about support, it's about healthy boundaries. If you have no boundaries, that's not love, by the way. It's not about barriers. Boundaries and barriers, different things. Barriers are things that are inflexible, unadaptable, usually caused by fear. Boundaries are about knowing yourself, knowing the relationship, knowing how you want to experience the relationship.

You need to be open to learning, individually and together. Open to challenge, if you have somebody who walks off every time you raise something challenging, you need to be thinking, this is about them, however, this is not helping our relationship.

It's about respect. It's about trust and honesty. Committing to each other. Societally we commit in legal ways. I like to call it legal entanglement just because it sounds funny, but because that's what it is. But you are trying at the same time to have an emotional entanglement, a physical entanglement, a familial entanglement. All of those things come into making a relationship, and they all go into making love.

I guess the one that I would also add is kindness. The most crucial time, and simultaneously the hardest time, to show kindness to the other person, and yourself, is when you're in conflict. So it's the hardest thing to do, but actually it's the best thing you can do.

So that's love, along with that, obviously, the change of chemicals in the brain, and the beating of the heart, and the anticipation of seeing someone. Where it changes, and can change, is when somebody is a limerent object. There are some people who invite limerence, and what that is, is a conditioning of a nervous system, of your nervous system, by someone else in a way that serves them.

It's neurochemical. We can go up all in the brain and go, it's all up here, but it's also down here, head and heart. We forget and go on one or the other. However, this is both. This makes this explosive for some people, we have a neurochemical basis of an intermittent reward, followed by uncertainty.

Somebody will go, I really like you. You'll go, I really like you too. I'm doing this like I'm on an app look. They'll go, let's meet up. You'll go, Great. So you'll go along. Maybe some of us will shave bits of us that we don't usually shave because we're going on a date. So we go on this date, and this person pulls us in, this is how I want you to act. I like you, let's see each other three weeks next Wednesday. Three weeks next Wednesday comes around, and they go, I can't make it. That leaves you in uncertainty.

You're having the reward, I get to see my limerent object, and then you're having the uncertainty of, do they really like me? Is this going to go anywhere? Are they going to see me again, or am I

going to get ghosted? I think ghosted is something that if you can avoid it, don't do it. You don't owe anybody an explanation, but at least just say, look, I'm not interested, I'm honest, I'm upfront.

[00:18:23]

We will find ourselves conditioned with social and cultural factors. We have to find a mate, we have to bond, we want romance. Years ago, it would have been a Mills and Boon novel, now it's a rom-com. We all want to be in this, we all want that, we all want to be swept off our feet. And what happens is a limerent object provides us a breadcrumb of it, but not all of it.

It's somebody holding a hand out with, I don't know, whatever favorite pastry is of yours, and they bring it closer to you, and then they pull it away, and you know that that pastry is in their hand. You know you want this. However, they have the control over it.

Some of us will be drawn because of a rescue fantasy, which comes from Freud. It's a response to certain archetypes. We're trying to save someone, we're trying to rescue. We're trying to chase a feeling of bliss.

Maybe something else is going on in our lives. And somebody comes along, and you're like, wow, wide-eyed, bushy-tailed, heart-beating. And they come along, and they go, "do you want this pastry?" And you're like, "yeah, I need the pastry." And then they pull it away.

The neurochemical changes compared between love and limerence are different. The chemicals in love are about giving affection. So it depends on what your love language is here, because you'll give love in different ways.

Limerence is about obtaining the affection of that pastry, of that wonderful, shiny object that you want. Limerence produces testosterone, because we're chasing something. Dopamine, which is what we get from social media, those really short videos, on a particular social media is like, oh, mini dopamine hit. So we're craving that, and adrenaline, we're ready for the chase. We're gearing up.

Whereas love is those happy, lovely, feel good, oxytocin, calming chemicals of ones that we crave, and sometimes we'll get them confused, dopamine hits, and oxytocin, we get them mixed up. When we have a limerent object, we'll see them as perfect.

Somebody else will come along and go, "you did know..." And you're like, "no, that's totally not, they've told me all about it." And you make excuses for them, they're not reasons, you'll make excuses for them. You'll find yourself in a period of stress and frustration, because you don't have the commitment, not only do you want, but the commitment that you need, and the commitment that you deserve.

They're going to play mind games, they're good at that. Pastry, taking it away, pastry, taking it away. Have you ever played with a kitten? With a toy mouse on a string, that's limerence. That's the furry equivalent of limerence. You see it, you want it, I'm not going to let you have it again. And you become consumed.

So the phases of limerence are infatuation. Wow, this person's the best person in the world ever.

[00:22:01]

Addiction. I'm addicted to thinking about them, sending them messages, stalking their social media feeds, because we're longing for the reciprocation. We're longing for it to come back to us.

And then we can go into recovery. If we recognize that somebody is a limerent object to us, a shiny, shiny, that never quite pulls through. Then we can think about reinforcing that, our behavior is causing that, we're keeping ourselves there.

How can I change my behavior? How can I think about the illusion that is idolization? No one is as brilliant as you think they are, because everybody's got flaws, everybody's got foibles, everybody's got insecurities. We don't always see them with a limerent object.

"Breaking the habit" fantastic Linkin Park song, for those of a certain age. Eliminate the uncertainty, be realistic, is this person really going to end up with you? What does this relationship look like? What outcomes would you like to have? And how would you like to experience it? And are any of those likely to ever happen?

Because if it doesn't, love is out there. Because when we're in love, we see somebody's flaws, and we accept them for them. We don't make excuses, we don't write them off, we don't disbelieve others advice. We accept them, this is part of you, we can be calm instead of stressed and frustrated, we can be calm and relax into a solid relationship.

We have clear communication, if I'm not coming out Friday night, I'm not coming out Friday night, I'm not going to say I might, maybe. That's the mind games, that's the uncertainty. And we can stop thinking about them because we know they're there, we know we're secure in that relationship. So we're not terrified of constantly losing them, because we know we've got them. Whereas in limerence, you never really had them in the first place.

Jai Bristow

Oh, my God, I'm hooked. There is so much in what you're sharing that I can relate to. I wish this was made explicit in the romcoms. I feel like we live in a society which romanticizes this limerence that you're talking about.

And I think something else that wasn't named is love bombing, which feels like very much a symptom, or condition of this limerence you're talking about. I've been in a very toxic, abusive relationship, where it was that, it started off with the person giving me everything I thought I'd ever wanted, everything I'd ever fantasized about and wanted. And really it was more than the breadcrumbs, it was, here's a whole buffet of pastries. And then slowly there were less, and less. And then suddenly it was like, you can have pastries today, now they're taken away, you're hungry, you're going to eat when I tell you to eat. To not take this metaphor so far.

It's such an important distinction, and there's so much in what you've said that I can relate to. Really important distinctions to recognize, is it love or limerence from your own nervous system? Do you feel like you can feel calm and relaxed in this relationship? Or do you constantly feel like you're in a state of stress, frustration, unsureness? That's a really big red flag, or green flag, depending on which one it is.

[00:25:45]

This idea that if you have no boundaries, that is not love. I was like, wow, so obvious on some levels and yet super important to make explicit. And there's a whole day on this conference all about boundaries, there's some great talks, I've done some fantastic interviews, so I recommend people check those out as well.

And this idea, you said at the beginning, I've made notes because it was so great, like what you're losing is much greater than what you're gaining, and again, we forget that sometimes there's this fear... You talked about the infatuation, addiction, recovery, and it's addictive like a drug, like other substances. This addiction makes it really hard to see how much you're losing.

And the idea that actually by leaving you might have more to gain, that there is real love out there, especially if you've never had experiences of real authentic love. Because this limerence, this state of stress in your nervous system... I realized recently that I've associated intensity with love. I've had times in my life, or relationships, which have been very calm, and I'm like, oh, this is boring. This isn't what love is all about. I need to feel like I'm about to have...

Zayna Brookhouse

Where's the drama?

Jai Bristow

Exactly! I need to feel like I'm about to have a panic attack every 10 seconds, if not, it's not real love. It's such an important distinction that you're talking about, and recognizing both.

And that sense of open to challenge. You talked about the drama triangle, which is the victim, hero, or perpetrator/aggressor triangle. And you can go between roles, and you talked about maladaptive responses versus the healthy.

Like with Narcissism, you can have maladaptive disorder, or you can have healthy self-interest, looking after your needs, and interests, and wants, and desires. It's not so much like, right or wrong, black and white, but more like the scales.

And there's very maladaptive extreme tendencies and characteristics, whether it's manipulation, narcissism, codependency, love bombing, limerence. And then, on the other extreme, there's maybe very healthy versions, or maybe opposite versions. But you can have what's actual love, you can have self-care, you can have... I can't remember what some of the others I mentioned, like healthy communication, all that kind of thing. But most people, I think, aren't all one or the other. Sometimes we're somewhere along, and we're all on different journeys.

And so my question is, what happens when you're in a relationship, and you're someone, you want to have the communication, you want to talk about it. You feel that there's love there, rather than limerence perhaps, or at least mostly, again, I don't know if it's all one, or the other, sometimes I think maybe it's somewhere in between.

But the other person, or persons, are very conflict avoidant, for example, and won't stay with you, aren't open to challenge. Don't have that... I love what you said about kindness in conflict, as being crucial and the most important, even though the hardest time. It can be really difficult.

Relationships are about more than one person a lot of the time. So you can do all the work yourself, but if the person opposite you is unwilling to engage, and is not doing the work, what do you do then?

[00:29:34] Zayna Brookhouse

I guess I would say to people, actually look at what "activist burnout" is, just go and have a look, and have a little bit of a read of it. Because what you can be doing is, you can effectively be going, I've done my work, I'm here ready to work with you, we're all going to work together as a group. And that person then disengages, you can't make somebody engage, you cannot force somebody to come to the table to start talking. And you then have to think, and I call it, emotional inflation, emotional currency, we only have so much of it, and sometimes we spend it in the wrong place.

If you are in a situation where you have self-regulation, which is the ability to emotionally regulate yourself, you gotta have that first. And this is primary caregivers in childhood, we can look at teaching co-regulation. Which is where one person is self-regulated enough to help the other person to regulate. Both really healthy, both thumbs up, exactly what we want.

Codependency, and this might happen along with a couple of other things, when we're talking about somebody not engaging in challenge, is when one person over relies on the other person's thoughts and feelings, to frame their own. This person is acting in this way, so I'm going to act in the same way.

You have to be self-regulated enough to be able to do co-regulation, and if you're not, then you'll go into codependency. When we're talking about teaching co-regulation as primary caregivers of small people, we encourage people to be open with their emotions.

The amount of times I have heard phrases like, "Oh no, we never spoke about that. Oh no, we never had questions like that. Oh no, we were never allowed to ask questions." Not being able to ask questions and challenge is one of the symptoms of a psychologically unsafe topography.

When we're thinking about working in corporations, when we're thinking about working in businesses, we want places to be psychologically safe, and we need our relationships to be psychologically safe as well. Otherwise somebody is just going to keep going, "can you engage? Can you engage? Can you engage?" And you're going to end up with activist burnout, and compassion fatigue.

Compassion fatigue is the cost for caring too much. We are being obstructive, and destructive, to ourselves. We're the owners of our emotional banks, we get to choose where we spend it. If somebody wasn't engaged, then actually maybe they could do with going off and talking to somebody else outside of the relationship.

This is about what they are not bringing to the table, not what you're not bringing to the table. Because you're trying the three words for any motivation for doing, or not doing anything. Is this constructive to me? Is this obstructive to me? Or is this destructive to me? If continually chasing somebody who won't engage is destructive to you, you have to think about where we're spending that emotional currency.

[00:33:25] Jaï Bristow

100%. I love that idea of emotional currency, that it's a limited resource that we have, and we get to choose where we spend it, and we can put some in. But if all our currency, all our energy, is going into one relationship, then that doesn't leave us with any to invest in our other relationships.

And this whole conversation we've been talking about relationship in a very broad sense, relationships with family, with friends, with coworkers, with neighbors, with lovers, with partners, with spouses, with whoever it is. And we are social beings, who have a lot of different types of relationships. We tend to have community around us, and if one person, whether it's our partner or not, is taking so much of our time and mental energy then that leaves us with no currency left for other people.

We often talk about love as infinite, like there's enough love to give to everyone, but our time and energy isn't, and our capacity to help regulate, and be there for someone isn't. So I think that that's a really useful framework. And at the same time, it's not always that easy.

I love what you were saying about whether it is destructive, constructive, or obstructive. So basically, is it helpful, harmful, or does it get in the way?

And that's helped... I forget, I've interviewed so many people recently, but I had a great chat with someone about, I think it was Jimanekia, where we talked about, is it harmful, or is it helpful? I'm really thinking about that.

At the same time, sometimes it's not that easy, sometimes we are very invested. We know that when we can get the person to the table, then it's helpful, and we really love the person, and it doesn't feel like it's a toxic enough relationship to leave.

At the same time, it feels, maybe it's more obstructive, rather than destructive. So it's guessing whether they're stonewalling, or ghosting. I've had relationships where the person is so conflict avoidant that they'll literally, if we're in the same space, they will literally, run away to not have a conversation. Or if we're not in the same space, they will literally just throw their phone away to not have to deal with it, because they are terrified of having an uncomfortable conversation. So what do we do then?

Zayna Brookhouse

We aren't taught how to fight, we're taught to run away, yes, we go into fear response, and we are going to have conflict in any, what we call the interpersonal theory, in any relationship that you're in, there is going to be some conflict. In fact, if you look at any good novel, there is conflict, or even kids film, there is going to be conflict present because it exists in life.

We can look at equipping ourselves with things like the metacognition exercise. So we're thinking, oh, well, what do we do now? Observing those thoughts, evaluating them. Does this thought serve me or not? Explore the origin. Because all of these things come from somewhere. We don't create stuff. We absorb stuff like osmosis from the world around us, from every single stage.

I always say we have three different selves. So we have an inherited-self, which is usually genetically based. We then have a conditioned-self, which is when society gets in there, gives us all these really helpful/unhelpful messages. And then you have an evolved-self and that you, is the

one where you've gone, I don't need this in my life, I'm not keeping it in my life, I want this in my life, so I'm going to go and get that in my life.

[00:37:33]

Every which way adapt. Adapt or keep your thought. Brene Brown talks about the gap between stimulus and response. And when you say to somebody, there's a gap between stimulus response, they'll go, is there? Something happened? I responded.

Actually no, there is a huge gap between stimulus and response. And I think about it, because that's what I do, I like to think and come up with stuff. And some of the bits that I've created to go in the middle of that gap are instinct. Instinct are those base things that keep us going, they're the primitive brain.

Consent, so obviously consent is the ability to affirmatively, and knowingly, engage in something. And intuition, intuition is something that you need to know yourself to be able to do. So we'll talk about people that have been doing their roles for years. A carpenter will know exactly how long a piece of wood is before you measured it, because they have that, it's based on prior experience, I know how long that is, how tall that is.

So if we know ourselves, if we are self-intuitive, then we can look at, is this instinct, gut feeling, which is usually flight or fight. I'm going to consent to go further. And this is where the people are running out of the door, and all you're hearing is the door closed behind them, is they're not necessarily consenting. They've gone to instinct, oh, no, I'm not doing that, I'm not going there, it's too difficult.

So I'm consenting to affirmatively engage, and then I'm being intuitive about my response. It's coming from me really knowing myself, and that's in every single area. So whether there is work around some sensate focus techniques, for physical embodied recovery after trauma. Whether that is coming up with your self-compassion matrix, which is what I say to people, spider diagram, we're all back to GCSE time, get a bit of paper, write down what you need in your life. What do I need to self-soothe? It's a make your own Maslow's, because nobody gets to the top of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. It would be nice, but nobody gets there.

It's about all of the things that you need, to keep you, you. Damaging relationships, toxic relationships, obstructive, constructive, destructive... Thinking about where is my, and this is a great word, eudemonia.

Eudemonia comes from stoicism, comes from Xeno. And people will think, why on earth is somebody who deals with the heart, and is very heart-focused in their work, why are you going on about Stoicism? Isn't stoicism all logic? I'm like, actually, no, because I've thought about that too. Stoicism can be emotional.

Yes, we need the logistical, we need the logic part of our brain, but also we need our hearts, because we want to be holistic, we want to be one. And the virtues of Stoicism are four things. Wisdom. I always say wisdom to know yourself. Wisdom, when to know better. Courage, to put all of that into play. So courage to walk away, courage to forgive yourself, courage to love yourself again.

[00:41:16]

Temperance, which I think is a fantastic word in itself, moderation. Don't always listen to your head, don't always listen to your heart, listen to both, get them communicating. Never do too much, you were saying earlier about everybody is all this, or all that. Temperance. Moderation. Just because somebody in the media says you got to do this... Years ago it was live on cabbage soup, I'm showing me age, so we all then go and live on cabbage soup. Actually, it doesn't change your underlying relationship with food, it just makes your kitchen smell.

Don't be all or nothing, temperance. And justice. Justice for yourself. You don't need any other closure than your own. You don't need anybody else's forgiveness other than your own. It's justice for self. If somebody is repeatedly not engaging, and is sending you to a place of reactivity and defensiveness, that's for them, that's not for you.

That's their interpretation. That's their gap between stimulus and response, not your gap between stimulus and response. So knowing your own, having the wisdom to know yourself, and the courage to carry it through, are stoic virtues, yet actually, can be used when you are in heart space.

Jaï Bristow

Absolutely. I love everything you've shared, because I love how different interviews I've done on this conference for different parts of the puzzle, for the overall healing, toxic relationships.

I was thinking about how I spoke to Dr Betty Martin about boundaries, and about how our internal landscape is our right, but also our responsibility. And then everything you've just shared feels like really useful tools for how to take on that responsibility, how to understand oneself, and manage one's own needs.

I almost want to call it healthy narcissism to go back to what we were talking to earlier, and that different scale. And so like that question I was asking, about if someone's being really avoidant, and really not engaging, how do you do it? And with everything you've just shared, it's just one example, everyone has to take on board what you've shared, for what's useful for them. But something that comes to me is that willingness to say, okay, this is what I need, and taking responsibility. And this is not, you have to do it or else. Or not, oh, I don't want to trigger you, so I'm not going to, or upset you.

But just being very clear of, hey, I need conversation. How and when can we have that conversation? For example, let me know, but this is something I need, and I need to have this chat before the end of the week. That's a very clear request based on everything you've just said, based on taking into account, conditioning, and intuition, and instinct, and consent, and all of that.

Sander T. Jones and I had a great chat about boundaries, and consent, and the importance of consent in communication, which we don't think about very often. We think about consent as sex, or as touch, but basically anything that takes, that requires, more than two people, two or more people. Any interaction with two or more people, whether it's physical or verbal, needs consent. And you can't force someone to have a conversation in the same way, you can't force someone to have sex. I mean, you shouldn't, rather than can't. But that's another story.

[00:44:55] Zayna Brookhouse

Yeah, that's a whole other story. I guess, absolutely, you can also consent to yourself. If you think about, when I said about those three psyches, those three selves that I work in. You have to consent amongst each of them. Consent, when we say the word consent, loads of people are going, it's about sex. And it's not about sex. It's about the ability to give permission, also to withdraw permission from yourself, or anybody around you.

Jaï Bristow

Yeah.

Zayna Brookhouse

When we hear phrases like, no one can make you feel anything, mistruth, of course people can make you feel things. They give us the belief that we've done something wrong if we do feel something, if something's going on for you, have some emotional vulnerability about it.

There's two things, emotional transparency, and emotional vulnerability. One requires knowing what you're feeling and saying it, I'm feeling this today. Emotional vulnerability is feeling safe enough to invite somebody into your experience. And that also includes your emotional origin story, of how you feel, why you feel.

Jaï Bristow

Yeah.

Zayna Brookhouse

If you're chasing somebody for engagement, and they're saying, I can't do this today, and they're leaving, they're exiting stage left. Then you need to think about, okay, so how can we get to emotional vulnerability? You can't make that person consent to get to emotional vulnerability.

You can encourage by things like "RADAR" from the "Multiamory" podcast. I use that a lot, it's a nice, straightforward, quite a gendered way of having relationship check-ins. So R-A-D-A-R all capitals from the "Multiamory" podcast. You can find it if you Google it. And what it is, is an agenda for relationship check-ins.

So what's going on for you? How's this week been? Is there something that I can do that makes life nicer, kinder? Because we're looking at love, for you and for myself. Is there a way that you can communicate to me? And this is a phrase that I use, spiky. I'm spiky today. Come anywhere near me, you're going to get a bristle. How can we build that in? We shouldn't be going into situations, and that uncertainty, how does that other person feel? We should be able to have shorthands in relationships to communicate, and receive what's going on for somebody else.

Because we're not in their mind, we're not mind readers. We can't anticipate somebody's response, because they've got all those bits going on in between the gap between stimulus and response. So we should never assume. My number one thing, never ever assume how somebody else is feeling.

[00:48:09] Jaï Bristow

I think that's brilliant, I think that's so important. I'd love to go into this further, because I feel like there's a million things we could still cover, but unfortunately, we're out of time. Zayna, how can people find out more about you and your work?

Zayna Brookhouse

I do, actually, I practice what I preach, I stay off of social media as much as I can. But I have a website, it's just zayna.net. I have a speaker's profile with some agents. And recently, over the last year or so, you'll have seen me maybe in various different publications. I have a magazine column, and I also write for other publications as well. You can google me, Zayna Psychotherapist Oxford. You can Google Intersectional therapist, I'm on the first page of that.

Jaï Bristow

Fantastic. Thank you so much for your time today.