

## **Codependency to confidence**

**Guest: Tana Espino**

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### **Meagen Gibson - [00:00:10]**

Welcome to this interview. I'm Meagen Gibson, co-host of the Relationship Super Conference.

Today I'm speaking with Tana Espino, a licensed marriage and family therapist and relationship coach. She guides women to heal codependency and anxiety so they're not losing themselves in relationships.

Using a trauma informed approach, Tana focuses on somatic work as a foundation to help women deepen their connection with themselves and shift from codependency to confidence.

Tana, thank you so much for being with me today.

### **Tana Espino**

Thank you, Meagen, for having me on. I'm excited to talk about this topic.

### **Meagen Gibson**

Awesome.

Let's start with a wide view. Can you describe to me what codependency is and how it might look in a romantic relationship?

### **Tana Espino**

So codependency is pretty much a loss of self, it's like chronic self neglect. We tend to over give and over function, and we feel like we've learned, instead of learned behavior. So it's not like a diagnosis or personality disorder or anything like that. It's something that's been learned, most likely from childhood.

And that child grows up to think that they have to pretty much work for their worth in their relationships. And they take on roles, and these roles look like being a nice girl, and children maybe like Daddy's little girl or an adult could look like the caretaker, the fixer, the helper, all of that kind of combined together.

And so then you lose yourself in these roles. And you're not in your authenticity. You're in a role and the role is there for you to, pretty much on some level, expect that you're going to get the person to change or get the person to love you more or whatever that might be. But it's not from a place of authenticity.

Because growing up, you being who you were as a child probably wasn't safe, there probably wasn't space for you to be who you were. Your feelings probably weren't met with validation and acknowledgement that children need growing up, and that could be for many reasons.

We see that sometimes it's because maybe parents have substances or mental illness and aren't there to meet the child's needs and being seen, heard, feeling safe, validated, loved, and not all of that. It could be maybe the parent has postpartum depression or is very stressed or they have their own traumas.

I mean, there could be so many reasons. And then that child learns to take on a certain role in that family dynamic in order to feel a sense of safety and some sort of sense of control because everything seems a little bit out of control in their lives.

So that seems to be where it starts from. Or learned in the sense of maybe there wasn't any of that. And maybe they just saw their, I'm just going to use in this case the mother or the female caregiver, that they just maybe saw their mother always just self sacrificing. All their needs always come last, everyone else comes first. And so wow my mom is so over giving and all of that. And so maybe they learned it that way, too.

**Meagen Gibson - [00:03:35]**

I heard a lot lately. Sorry, I didn't mean to step over.

I've heard a lot of talk lately, a lot of talk lately about really holding up this female model of all the sacrifice and all the giving and all of the, as the model for which we've all been imitating and emulating our behaviors as women. And how maybe we need to step back a little bit from that and analyze if that's how we want to have the rules in our families and relationships.

**Tana Espino**

Exactly. Yes. Yeah.

**Meagen Gibson**

And I'm glad that you unpacked what it means to be unsafe, because obviously, from a trauma perspective, we think of unsafe as being, your life is in danger or you're threatened.

**Tana Espino**

Right.

**Meagen Gibson**

But there's so much more that can happen as far as how you develop your relationships with people, that doesn't necessarily mean that you were undernourished or in physical or emotional danger. It's more subtle the way that children can develop. And it's not conscious.

I mean these are things that your subconscious is doing and connections and patterns that it's making as a result of your environment, not because you've decided, oh, I'm going to be funny in order to make up for the tension in my house.

**Tana Espino**

Yes. Exactly.

It's usually something unconscious that happens. And it's not something conscious that are children thinking, oh, actually, I know that this has nothing to do with me, the fact that my parents are arguing.

And it's like no, children make it mean something about them and so then they just put the pieces together and create a narrative and that's where beliefs are formed and all of that. So yeah.

**Meagen Gibson - [00:05:27]**

I'm going to get good grades in school, and I'm never going to be a problem. And I'm going to be extremely responsible, not because that's a value to me and not because that's my self identity, but because that's how I keep myself safe in this family system so I don't create problems or add to people's stress, that kind of thing.

**Tana Espino**

Exactly. Yeah. That's exactly it. It could look something like that, absolutely.

And even that, that's a loss of self there, too. The authenticity is kind of, it's not there because that child believes, well yeah, I have to get good grades. This is a way that maybe by me getting good grades I could ease my mom's worries about my dad's drinking or who knows, whatever is going on in the dynamic. And yeah, the authenticity is lost there.

**Meagen Gibson**

Yeah. Because I think a lot of what we're all seeking is connection and validation. And so as children we're testing out behaviors, we're testing out agendas, we're testing out patterns to see which one of those gets us the connection and the validation that we're looking for.

**Tana Espino**

Exactly.

**Meagen Gibson**

So what's at the core of codependency when you discover it as an adult?

**Tana Espino**

Yeah. At the core, what I see and experience is the unconscious belief of not feeling good enough and not feeling worthy. So kind of going back to the roles, like if we have that unconscious belief of, that core belief that's usually developed in childhood, I'm not good enough, so I have to do these things then to feel like I'm at least good enough and all of that.

When we have that belief then we know that unconscious beliefs are going to behave a certain way. I'm probably going to think a certain way around it. So feelings of not good enough or not feeling worthy of love and all of that.

And then from there, you're going to take on a role. You're going to perform. So the role, let's say, the good wife or the nice girl or the fixer, the helper, the caretaker, the peacemaker. And then from that role you're going to behave a certain way. And those behaviors can look like the people pleasing, the over functioning, the over giving, the self sacrificing. And then again with the unconscious belief of expecting something in return from the behaviors. Expecting your partner to change. Well, if I just do X, Y and Z, the self sacrificing, maybe he will see how lovable I am and he won't leave or whatever the thing is.

It's kind of like that's what I've seen, this at the root, this feeling of not feeling good enough. And then you're going to take on this role and you're going to behave a certain way based on this role. And then you're expecting something based on how you're behaving. And it's just, unfortunately, you obviously lose your sense of self. You're not in tune with the connection to yourself and your intuition and all of that.

But that would make sense because as a child if you didn't feel safe or there wasn't space for your own emotions or you were told maybe you shouldn't be sad, like why are you crying? So then you doubt your internal experience. And then, of course, that plays out then in relationships, then you just are not in touch with your intuition and you're more in touch with these rules because you feel like you have to perform for love and attention and all of that.

### **Meagen Gibson - [00:09:15]**

Do you find that when people come to you for advice, that they're at the beginning of this? Where they come to you and they say, I have the family I always wanted. I have the job I always wanted. And I'm so deeply unhappy and I don't understand why. And you've got to put that lens on, or since we're talking about relationships and dating, I've had the same pattern in relationships where people are taking advantage of me. And now I feel like this person I'm dating, I feel like their mother or I feel like I'm managing their life when they should be taking responsibility for it.

So they come to you confused by their discomfort and trying to look for the reason.

### **Tana Espino**

Yes, exactly, trying to look for the reason.

So I do feel that it is helpful to, we could say, go back and talk about, let's talk about childhood. What was going on there?

A lot of the times, too, what I've noticed sometimes, let's say there wasn't anything going on in childhood and they just happened to get with someone who, I don't know, maybe let's say, had a severe mental illness or substance abuse, and then the codependency starts there. And it begins there, because now I don't know, maybe there's manipulation going on or for whatever reason. And so then they find it hard to leave that relationship.

But yes, I think it is important to bring in the context to explore to go back because they do, the clients that I work with, do you want to have an understanding of, why do I keep attracting the same type of person? And then they blame themselves and then they might go into a shame spiral of, what is it about me that, let's say, I keep attracting men who cheat on me or whatever that might be?

And then the other layer to that then it's also exploring, with the codependency, it's also exploring, going back to exploring some of the childhood wounds. And what I have noticed, and I think this is really big out there, too, is that our unconscious mind likes what's familiar. And it feels, that's what feels safe, what's familiar.

And so then if, let's say, that child didn't get what they needed from one of their parents or there was just unresolved unfinished business, the unconscious mind wants to be clean of that in a present partner relationship.

So I say whatever happened in a past parental relationship, the unconscious mind wants to recreate in order to repair and make it better this time around in a present partner relationship.

And so that's another thing that I've noticed that we try to explore in going back into the dynamics of childhood. And what was happening with that, with the caregiver or parent or parents or whatever was going on there, because that's going to be the template or blueprint of their romantic relationships.

### **Meagen Gibson**

So instead of, necessarily this instance, if I'm hearing you right, it's not that you're playing out the exact role that you had in childhood. It's that you're in a relationship. It might be a healthy, stable relationship, and that is uncomfortable because it's not what you're accustomed to because of a

chaotic childhood or some instability or substance abuse, mental illness of a parent. The role that you had in childhood is not being reflected in this relationship. And so you're coming into it as the chaos agent. You can't identify why you're uncomfortable so you're going to stir the pot and create a little drama or create dynamics that aren't there in order to get the chaos comfort that you're accustomed to.

**Tana Espino - [00:13:03]**

Yes. Exactly.

So if it's in that context of someone who's readily available and secure and they're healthy and all of that, yes because that feels unfamiliar. Then sometimes there's a little bit of that self sabotage, which is really all about self protection because it's like, this doesn't feel familiar. This feels unfamiliar. I don't know how to maybe be in a relationship where I can actually receive that healthy love and attention and affection without me having to actually work for it.

Or I've had some clients also talk about when, let's say, they're used to a dynamic where the partners are always arguing, but they're always trying to compete with each other about who's right or who's wrong. And then when they get into another relationship, let's say, where that's not going on and the partner's actually listening and saying, oh, actually, yeah let me take accountability for that. You know what, I did do that thing. I apologize. They're almost like, I don't know how to do this. I don't know how to respond to this. I only know how to get back at you and have this dance, go back and forth.

So, yeah, there's a lot of, whoa, this is different. And they're not used to it. And then it feels unfamiliar or it feels like there's not enough chemistry or it feels boring or, you know. Yeah.

**Meagen Gibson**

Safety and security can feel boring if you haven't had that environment in your life often.

**Tana Espino**

Yeah. Exactly.

**Meagen Gibson**

Do you think you could take me through an example of somebody who's in a relationship and give me both the healthy response and the codependent response to a situation?

Let's say, for instance, somebody has got a partner, or somebody they're dating, that has some depression issues. They're out of the job market, and they're looking for a job. What might the codependent response to that look like? What might the healthier response to that look like?

**Tana Espino**

That's such a great question. That's good.

Okay. So partner's depressed, doesn't have a job. Codependency response would look like that person feeling responsible. And that's key where they're feeling responsible for pretty much taking their experience, meaning their feelings or behaviors or problems or situation, like taking their experience and like a Rubik's Cube, solving it and figuring it out for them. And it's like, okay, here, I solved it for you.

But there's a feeling of, like that sense of feeling like, I have to do this. I have to do this for my partner. I feel responsible for finding them the job, or I don't know, whatever that might be. I feel a sense of responsibility, which means as tired and maybe fatigued as I am, because I worked 10 hours a day or

whatever. I have to put that to the side and I have to make my partner feel better and fix them and all of that.

And then if I don't do that or if I try to set a limit or boundary, I experience high high anxiety. There's a difference between a sense of I want to help because I can, and I know that even if I don't, and even if there's other ways that I can support you, it's all going to be good and the world isn't going to fall apart.

There's a difference between that and when I feel like I'm taking a step back and I'm in this codependent pattern, and I'm like, okay, we're going to try to support you and I'm setting a limit. Then there's so much internal distress going on because it's like, I just have to jump in and save and fix you and all of that.

So that would be like a codependent behavior, codependent response to a situation like that where there's a lot of internal distress, and there's a sense of responsibility and almost like, do-ey to just take full control of that person's experience and fix it for them. And then enabling might come in somewhere in there at times.

### **Meagen Gibson - [00:17:22]**

And so it's that compulsive need to do, and then a really extreme discomfort if you don't do the thing that you know you could do.

### **Tana Espino**

Exactly. Exactly.

And then with that, of course, comes whatever codependent thinking might come from them for maybe even trying to set a boundary, because it's like, well then what if he leaves or I feel bad because I should be able to do this and all these thoughts that creep in. Because again, it goes back into, I don't feel good enough, and I have to do these things to feel like I am good enough to show you that I am worthy of all of that.

Yeah. So that would be like a codependent response and a healthier response. A healthy response looks like if you have the emotional bandwidth to help in any way, whether that could be maybe looking at mental health places for your partner to go to because they're depressed or if you have the emotional bandwidth, and you're not chronically in the self neglect mode and you have the bandwidth and you're like, you know what? I think I could support in this way. Then that sounds okay.

Regular checking in with yourself like, do I have this bandwidth for this? And also, can my partner actually, does he actually have the energy to actually go on Google and maybe type up a few things where he can get some support for his depression? And maybe from there also find a job that he can. Does he have that energy to do that? Like, oh, he does. Okay. So I'm going to be here to support him in whatever way that looks like where I do have that emotional bandwidth to support, but also where I'm not taking his experience that is composed of his behaviors and feelings and situations and all of that. I'm not taking it from him and figuring it out for him and then giving it back to him.

I'm with his experience. I'm holding space. I'm with his experience, and I can support in a way that might look like finding some mental health resources for him. But he's also making an effort to then call those places or whatever that might look like.

And if I am feeling grounded and centered and secure in this relationship, and it's not anything with a codependent patterns or behaviors, then I know that if, for whatever reason, the only support in this moment that I could give him is just listening to what he's experiencing, then I'm not going to have that anxiety internally of, like, oh, my gosh. I have to do more than just listen to what he's expressing. No, if I feel really grounded and secure in myself and I'm aligned with my authenticity and all of that, then I know that even just me being here with him in his experience is more than enough.

**Meagen Gibson - [00:20:31]**

And even in that, being able to really evaluate, I hear that you want to talk. It's important to me that we speak. Now's not a great time. I will come back to you at this time or on this date.

**Tana Espino**

Yes.

**Meagen Gibson**

We will talk about it. It's important to me. You're important to me. But I can't do that right now.

**Tana Espino**

Exactly. Yeah.

**Meagen Gibson**

Great.

**Tana Espino**

That's exactly it.

**Meagen Gibson**

And then I know we're focused on women because that's the majority of your clientele, but quickly, can you say anything about what codependency might look like in men? Does it look different or is it identical? How might it show up differently in men?

**Tana Espino**

Yeah. You know what, I have worked with a small handful of men that have experienced codependent patterns. And I find, in my experience with these clients, it's similar. It's that need, I don't feel like I'm doing enough. I feel like I have to show them that I'm a good person or I am a good, whatever that means.

So they also do the performing for that love and affection. And in combination, they also experience anxiety around that as well. The anxiety around being alone or not having someone there either or the anxiety around fear of losing their relationship or the connection with a person, which is similar to what I see with the women that I work with.

So I want to say that there are definitely similarities from my experience working with male clients who also have codependency.

**Meagen Gibson**

I can hear that a really important part, if you recognize that you have codependent patterns in relationships, is probably setting boundaries.

So we talked a little bit about that just now, about evaluating and I've heard you say several times evaluating your bandwidth or how much space you have, how much you have to give. So I'd love it if you said a little bit more about that.

## **Tana Espino - [00:22:33]**

Yeah. So with boundaries, definitely if you've never set them before or kind of went back on your word when you're setting them, like one foot in, one foot out. It's definitely challenging and it's definitely a practice. But the thing with boundaries is that if you haven't really started to connect back with yourself, just basics of what are my basic needs right now? Like, oh, I'm tired, I should probably sleep instead of maybe doing all these things for other people or whatever the thing is.

It's a little bit challenging to set boundaries because boundaries are about, let me just check in. Am I okay with this? Or how do I feel about that? It's about checking in with what's going on. What's true for you internally, and if we're disconnected from ourselves then it's a little bit hard to figure out what are our boundaries, how do I even set them? Well, am I really tired or can I really help them with that?

That's what I've seen with, and this is all my experience, everything that I teach and support my clients with is because I've experienced this myself. What I've noticed, it's that sense of, well, I mean, I could really do that thing that I want to set a boundary on, so how do I know if it's really something that I do want to do or not? And it can get a little bit fuzzy when you have been disconnected from yourself for so long, which is what codependency is, a disconnect from self, your internal experience.

So I want to see that with boundaries, the pre-work for boundaries is starting to get connected with yourself on a basic level. Like I said, I'm thirsty, I should probably drink the water instead of ignoring that. Or I'm tired, or just super basic, and then moving it up to the more emotional things, such as, oh, I'm really stressed today. What do I need for myself?

Getting that in place, then working with boundaries. Because then with boundaries, you're able to check in and see what is it that I'm okay with? And what is it that I'm not okay with? And with boundaries and people pleasing, it's like you're always saying yes to everyone else and you're always saying no to yourself, and then you continue that then it's like continuing more of a disconnect from yourself because you're just externally looking at, what is it that everyone else wants or needs? And so I'm going to attend to that. And so then my boundaries just get really blurry.

So getting to know yourself, at least starting to get to know yourself so that you could check in, because boundaries are all about checking in. And it's not about building up a wall or blocking yourself from anyone else. Actually, it brings you closer together to the other person. Actually, it makes you connect more with the other person because you're speaking from an authentic place. You're being real about what you're saying. You're saying, actually, yeah, I can't do that thing that I really want to do with you, and we're going to have to reschedule. Or whatever the boundary is.

And sometimes what happens, and I've had some clients share this with me, and they might say, let's say, they say yes to something, and at the end they're like, I know I shouldn't have said yes. And now I feel like I have to say yes because I want to be in integrity with what I said. And I'm like, but actually, you're not in integrity in general, because that's not really what you, internally you don't want to do this. So you're already not being in integrity.

So it's okay then to say no. If you're talking about integrity then it's okay to say no because you're saying yes to something that actually you don't want to do. But then you're saying that you should follow through with it because you want to live with integrity and in your word, but in reality, you're not, because internally it's a no. Your body is like, no, we don't have the bandwidth for this. And you're saying yes. So we're already not in integrity.

## **Meagen Gibson**

Yeah. Because it's such a familiar place when you're a codependent pattern to abandon and not even consider your own needs, wants or desires. That's like your operating system. It's external to everyone else's commitments first. Instead of pause first and say, what did I like before this happened? What did I enjoy doing? What is meaningful to me? And then start adding pieces back in.



And I know you spoke about having personal experience, and this is where your work comes from and why you like doing it. I also have personal experience with this. And I know my particular situation, and I know a lot of people can relate to this. One of my relationships had substance abuse problems, and one of them had high, high medical need problems. So in both of those situations it can be very easy to abandon yourself because it feels like life and death all the time.

**Tana Espino - [00:27:28]**

Yeah.

**Meagen Gibson**

And so once I started unpacking some codependent relationships and became aware of my methodology of coping and functioning and placing value on the way I functioned and showed up for other people, and making meaning in my life that way, instead of about what I wanted, it was really interesting and difficult to set those boundaries and to see a call coming from someone and to just take a moment literally out loud, I would say out loud and my children would laugh at me, I would out loud, do I have space for this right now? Do I have the energy for this right now?

And once, I had to say it out loud because if I thought it I would obviously like, all the other voices would be like, girl pick up the phone. But once I started doing that, I started, it was like baby steps. It was like, I'm not going to take that phone call. I will text and say, I don't have space for this right now. I will talk to you at this time.

**Tana Espino**

Right.

**Meagen Gibson**

I'm sure people watching this have encountered those kinds of situations before where it really feels like life and death. And I just want to say that's also a possible situation in which you can have your own thoughts, feelings, boundaries, needs. Those are more than ever important.

**Tana Espino**

Yes. Absolutely.

And also with the example that you're giving and your experience also know that, oh, I don't have to do all of this alone. If you're having a partner that has, let's say, a severe medical illness or something where it's like, where else can I reach out for support, too, so I don't feel like I have to just take it all on and just be the only one to do this?

Because sometimes that, something like that can happen too, where that person feels they want to be in control and they want to be the one to like, because I could do it better or, no, I'll take it on. And because also there's some elements of control where it's hard for them to receive the support or ask for the support from others together to help with something like that.

**Meagen Gibson**

Absolutely. When you're doing it all, receiving help or asking for help feels like a threat. You're like how can I possibly hand you one of these balls when I've already got them juggling?

**Tana Espino**

Right.

## **Meagen Gibson - [00:29:52]**

They're all in the air. How do you expect me to give you one?

## **Tana Espino**

And I think something that you mentioned, too, with baby steps that is so important with boundaries. It is about baby steps, because when you slowly start setting it, you're going to feel, it's like there's, I like to show a visual of two ends. Like someone who has just blurry boundaries and someone who has very rigid boundaries. And in the middle, I like to say the middle is that healthy, embodied boundaries because it is about checking in.

And so someone on this end where the boundaries are so blurry as they're working towards getting more to the embodied boundaries healthy center, they feel like, oh, I feel like I'm being mean. They start getting anxious about what are other people going to think? Because they were maybe so used to this person not having boundaries and maybe only saying yes to everything.

So once they start setting it, there is this discomfort of, I did it. And like, oh, my gosh, that was a lot. And I feel like I'm being very rude and mean because I'm starting to set this limit.

So it is baby steps. And the only way to do this is to actually start practicing the boundary setting and to start working at it in increments. But also checking it internally. Like, okay, I said the thing that I was supposed to say, or I'm about to send this email that I'm so anxious about, but I have to set the limit. And so it's working through the anxiety.

Because part of it also is like, I don't want to feel the anxiety so I'm just going to say yes. I don't want to feel the internal distress so I'm just going to agree, I'm going to say yes. I'm just going to do the thing because I'm trying to avoid my internal experience.

So then the boundary piece here is like, little by little as I sent that email out or as I did the thing. Like, okay. I'm going to work through some of the anxiety that I'm feeling pre or post setting the boundary.

## **Meagen Gibson**

And I know for me personally, there's also an aspect of you set the boundary and one of two things usually happens. Someone completely respects it and it surprises you with their reaction. But then later, whether they know they're doing it or not, tests the boundary. They, not forget it, but they just, or sometimes I think they just do.

You built yourself up. You did all this. You practiced your speech, you set the line, you drew the boundary, you did all this work around it, and then they were like, yeah, absolutely. Sure. And then two weeks later, they do the exact same thing that they were doing before. And you're like, we just talked about this.

So there's always testing, I find. Or the other reaction is that you set the boundary and immediately the person has a super aggressive negative reaction because your boundary is a threat to them because they've depended on you so much and in that relationship.

## **Tana Espino**

Yes. Absolutely. Absolutely. Yeah.

And then it just starts to change the dynamic because if there is a dynamic around one person, which is the person that has the blurry boundaries, always saying yes and the people pleaser. And if this person was used to that because they have another role in this friendship or whatever dynamic is here. Then, yeah, when this person starts getting to more embodied boundaries, and this is like, how do I respond to that? And then sometimes the relationship or friendship starts to shift.

Other times it becomes healthier. Other times, it's like, I don't know how to navigate this. And then, it just kind of shifts.

**Meagen Gibson - [00:33:23]**

And we all have to be more comfortable with our relationships shifting and changing. It's not worth us abandoning ourselves to preserve something that isn't working.

**Tana Espino**

Yeah. That's exactly it.

**Meagen Gibson**

And I know you've mentioned feelings, which I can think my way through things all day long. I'm an expert at it. But let's talk about your body. And you talked about anxiety a little bit and that feeling. But let's really dig into what these patterns of behavior to establish value and worth in yourself might feel like in your body. How you might feel cues that something is off and that you need to pay more attention to what your patterns of behavior are. What these roles you're playing are. Are there body cues that you can feel that will help you tune into that?

**Tana Espino**

Yeah. So helping you tune into more of what's happening in these codependent patterns?

**Meagen Gibson**

Absolutely. Or when you're out of integrity with what your needs and desires are and have kind of abandoned yourself as well.

**Tana Espino**

That's a good question, because from what I've seen, and this is also my own experience, it looks like a full spectrum of different things.

So definitely there's, with anxiety it can manifest differently for everyone. And so sometimes that might look like constantly just feeling like there's this impending doom, or something bad is going to happen, or constantly just maybe distracting themselves. So that could be with social media or something. So there's something internally and so then the behavior piece looks like a distraction. Whether that's getting on the phone, scrolling and then putting that down but then switching to TV.

It could look something like that. It could look like if there's been, let's say, an argument with a partner, they don't hear from their partner for several hours, which maybe for that person might feel like it's an eternity not hearing from them for several hours. Maybe during that time they notice, oh my gosh, I can't eat. I haven't eaten for, I haven't eaten all day, I haven't had an appetite. So that's a clue right there. Or my stomach feels like it's in knots. I'm starting to get really nauseous. Or I feel like it's getting hot, or I can't take a full breath.

These little clues there in your body that are letting you know that your system is activated because your system perceives that something or whatever is going on is a threat of some sort. And so then it starts getting into this activation.

And usually what I see has been, with codependency, has been more so anxiety. Of course, there's depression, too, anxiety or depression. But mainly it's been a lot of anxiety that I work with, with clients and what I've seen mainly with the codependent behaviors, codependent patterns.

## **Meagen Gibson - [00:36:29]**

That tracks.

## **Tana Espino**

And then, of course, the other sign, actually, that I think you touched on it a little bit, but if it's not the body parts where it's the heaviness or rapid heart rate, or feeling nauseous, or you haven't eaten, or knots in your stomach, then it's going to be the obsessive thinking, or the rumination. That's how you know also that something here is happening because the state that we're in is going to send the message to the brain, and the brain is going to start creating stories around our internal state.

So the obsessive thinking or whatever is happening, the rumination of constantly just worried about that thing. It's almost like taking a pause and saying, okay, well, I'm noticing this is going on. Let me just check in on what's happening internally here. Oh, wow. I actually started. I'm feeling, I don't know maybe I'm feeling numb, and I can't really feel anything. Or oh, wow, I notice my stomach does feel like it's in knots, or my chest feels like there's a pressure or something sitting on my chest.

So there are going to be these cues from your body. And sometimes if we're so used to it, we kind of think like, oh, yeah, it just happens. I always get nauseous when, I don't know, I haven't talked to my partner. It's just a thing. But it's like, no, this is your body's response telling you that it feels like there's a threat, like there's a threat somewhere and so your system is just activated.

## **Meagen Gibson**

I know that for people that are in the codependent part where they're abandoning their own needs and doing for others, just abandoning the way that your body feels completely tracks. I'm going to not only ignore my own wants and desires and needs, but also the way I actually feel. That can all be pushed away in service of other people.

## **Tana Espino**

Absolutely.

And even with emotions, too, because we know emotions are also in the body and we feel them differently. If we're sad or we feel like crying sometimes we feel like that knot in our throat. Or maybe when we're angry, we feel really hot or our heart starts to race. So sometimes even the emotions we might suppress in some of these relationships because we feel that it's not safe to have these emotions or because we've just never been in tune with them because maybe in childhood we hadn't. Then we also suppress that. And we don't listen to those cues from our emotions.

And so then sometimes doing this work and starting to get connected back with our bodies and starting to connect back with our emotions, or certain emotions that we've given up for the purpose of the dynamic of the family system or our relationships. It can feel really scary in the body to start feeling some of these emotions.

So it's almost like you're dipping your toe in, feeling it a little bit and then reeling it back in and doing whatever coping that you normally do or whatever else. But it's almost like little, it is baby steps with all of this work.

## **Meagen Gibson**

Yeah. I think that people want a prescription for breaking codependency, and obviously there is no won and done solution, it is a series of many, many baby steps, as you've already described, right?

## **Tana Espino - [00:39:59]**

Yeah. Absolutely.

## **Meagen Gibson**

So if you have a partnership and you realize that you're in codependent patterns, how do you recommend a person approach that conversation? Like when, how?

## **Tana Espino**

Yeah. I mean, definitely. I think the one would be when both partners are just in a place where no one's activated. It's not during some type of argument, but just more so like, wow, I've read this book and I feel like, as an example, I feel like I do have some codependent patterns. I'm going to bring this up to my partner in a casual conversation, but not when we're both activated or feeling stressed or anxious.

And just really bringing it up to saying, hey, you know what? Maybe, I don't know, maybe if it's through a book or a blog they read, and just being really honest, having that open conversation. Hey, I read something and it kind of resonated with me, and I think we might be in this pattern. And I don't know if it's a blog or a book, then I'd like for you to look at a few things that I've seen, and I want to hear your thoughts on what you think about this because it seems to be accurate or it seems to be matching up.

And then from there, assuming the partner is open to hearing that person out. And from there, it could look like, so we're about our growth, so let's talk about ways that we can actually maybe seek some support. We're both in this. It's helpful to get some type of support to help us maybe navigate through this and try to see how we could change our patterns.

So it's kind of just straight up having that conversation with them, assuming that the partner is going to be open and reciprocate that as well.

## **Meagen Gibson**

And it's interesting because I found that the person on, and I'm going to say the beneficial side of the codependency, but that's not the right term, but often the one person is high functioning and doing a lot and over serving and abandoning themselves and other people are benefiting from that in the relationship. And I found that it helps me personally to say, I'm getting into these behavior patterns, and I found that I'm stressed and I'm tired and I'm not very much fun, and I'm responding unfairly when things come up that should not throw me out of whack.

So because of that, I need to set some boundaries about the way that I'm showing up. I need to change some things because I want to be more available for fun and play and flexibility. And that's how we're going to get there.

And normally, the response I get when I say something like that is completely like, oh, I totally understand that. It doesn't sound like as much of a threat because I'm trying to get here where I'm not just doing less for you. I'm going to be more fun, too.

## **Tana Espino**

Yeah. I love that. Yes.

## **Meagen Gibson**

I know you mentioned it a little bit earlier, but we were talking specifically about romantic relationships, but if you've found yourself and it has occurred to you that you're in a codependent

relationship romantically chances are that you're in several maybe outside of that romantic relationship. They can look different depending on what the nature of the relationship is.

Like, one might be a physical caretaking, if you've got somebody that's medically fragile. One might be a mental and emotional codependency. One might be just a real boundary issue at work where your boss is abusing your evenings and weekends. How do you encourage people to do that self evaluation? When might they want to look at their other relationships? And what would you recommend as an approach to that?

### **Tana Espino - [00:43:57]**

Yeah, that's a good question.

In any of those situations you're most likely feeling some dissatisfaction.

So what I mean is that, you're either, like, I'm so tired today, it's just been such a long day at work. Or I've been working 6 days straight because my boss has asked me to. You're going to feel some, you're not going to be this joyous, grounded, feeling really secure and just relaxed person. There's going to be, you're always going to be, either you might be complaining about something. Whether that's because your physical body is feeling so drained or emotionally. There's always going to be something. And it's in that dissatisfaction that you're looking at, you're doing a reassessment.

Wow. I've been tired all this week. Let me see what's been going on. Oh, that's right. My boss has asked me to do seven projects and I know that I could have passed it on to Sally, but I didn't, and so I took it on because I feel like I need to show that I'm the best worker so that I could get that promotion, or I don't know, whatever.

It's like reevaluating, like, oh, yeah, I'm so tired. Or whether that's in a friendship where maybe it feels one sided. Maybe you're the glue to the friend group or whatever. You're constantly trying to set up dates to go out to eat or all of these things, and then you feel resentful. Maybe you're going to feel resentful. That's kind of like a little clue. They're like, oh, I'm starting to feel resentful. Let me see what's going on. Oh, that's right. I'm always constantly reaching out to my friends, etc etc.

So you're going to feel something. Resentment, drained, dissatisfaction, something that lets you know. And when you feel that, then you're almost assessing what took place this week? Or what has been happening recently that I'm feeling this way? I don't feel the joy or I don't feel the relaxation or commiseration. I just don't feel good about myself or, you know, something.

That's one starting place. And then you're looking at whether it's work or a friendship or a family situation.

### **Meagen Gibson**

It's like something that brings you joy, whether it be the relationship or the work that you do. Normally, this is a great part of my life. It's very fulfilling, but I'm not feeling fulfilled. I'm not feeling validated in this. So I've got to look at what's changed? What's shifted? What's different that I can adjust in order to get back to that feeling?

### **Tana Espino**

Exactly. Exactly. What can I adjust? Can I ask for more support? I guess, we're talking about family situations. Can I ask for more support? Or if we're talking about work, the thing here with, even I'm thinking about working and people pleasing and boundaries, even if you said yes, you can always go back and say no. It doesn't have to be like, I've already said yes. It's like you can reassess. If we're talking about work and you're feeling so tired and you're like, whoa, wait a second. I know why I'm so moody and tired. It's because I've taken on seven projects. I said yes to this when maybe I couldn't take it on.

Okay. So that's an opportunity. You could go back to your boss and know that you can say no. You can have these conversations and say, actually, I know I said yes, but now that I'm looking at things I can't take this much on. Can we pass this on to someone else? Let's brainstorm another way that we could do this.

It is about checking in and noticing, I don't feel good. Or I'm starting to feel really irritated and resentful about this thing. Where is this coming from? Let me see, reassessing and then seeing like, okay, what then can I have control over? And what can I change about this situation? What can I, myself, do to change something here that I have to maybe readjust or reassess?

**Meagen Gibson - [00:48:04]**

That resentment clue is key.

**Tana Espino**

Absolutely.

**Meagen Gibson**

Well, this has been amazing. Thank you very much Tana.

**Tana Espino**

Yeah. Thank you, Meagen.

**Meagen Gibson**

How can people find out more about you and your work?

**Tana Espino**

Yeah, I'm on Instagram. My handle is [@loves.hustle](#)

And my website, [www.loveshustle.com](http://www.loveshustle.com)

**Meagen Gibson**

Thank you so much for joining me today.

**Tana Espino**

Of course. Thank you so much.