

Ending unhealthy relationship cycles

Guest: Dr. Marni Feuerman

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Meagen Gibson - [00:00:09]

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

Today I'm speaking with Dr. Marni Feuerman, a licensed psychotherapist in private practice in South Florida.

She's a nationally recognized relationship and marriage expert with specialized training in couples therapy.

Dr. Marni's self help book for women who struggle with repeated unhealthy relationship patterns is titled *Ghosted and Breadcrumbed: Stop Falling for Unavailable Men and Get Smart about Healthy Relationships*.

Dr. Feuerman, thank you so much for being with us today.

Dr. Marni Feuerman

Hi. Thanks. It's great to be here, Meagen.

Meagen Gibson

So what are some of the reasons that you write about love and relationships?

Dr. Marni Feuerman

I'm sure it won't surprise you, but certainly I had some of my own struggles, and I would say just my drive to figure that out and to make sense of things from my history, my family of origin, different things that have happened to me, and how it impacted my own relationship struggles. That's certainly probably one of the biggest reasons.

And then I would be writing a lot, so I certainly work as a therapist, but I also would write a lot about these topics. And I found that there were certain articles that seemed to really be resonating with people, and some of them were on these sorts of things about unhealthy relationship patterns. And I thought I really have something here and that people are looking for this information. And so it just was in perfect alignment between my own experience and struggles. And then what I was detecting as to what people were looking for.

Meagen Gibson

Absolutely. And isn't it so funny that often our areas of focus are the things that we need the most help with ourselves? Exactly.

Dr. Marni Feuerman - [00:01:55]

Yes.

Meagen Gibson

So why do some people get stuck in unhealthy relationships?

Dr. Marni Feuerman

Well, it's not so uncommon. And I think one of the biggest reasons are what's called our feelings about things, and our feelings motivate us. And love is obviously one of the most powerful motivators.

And so, just because we feel a feeling of love, it's not always helpful. It's not always rational or logical. And so sometimes we can get really caught up in the attraction and the chemistry. And there's no real science, believe it or not, to explain the chemistry. So you could have somebody that you are a perfect match for on paper. But when you actually meet them, there's no attraction, there's no chemistry. It's just never going to take off.

And so, I was just very curious about that. And so from my understanding and what I've learned is that sometimes we get really caught up in those feelings.

And then the other piece of it comes from our attachment history and what we call attachment theory. And this is just how our early patterns of interaction with our caregivers can become a blueprint. And so sometimes we keep repeating what's familiar. And we will make those choices based on that feeling that we're having or the familiarity of it.

Yet it doesn't necessarily mean it's always healthy. And sometimes what we've experienced has been traumatic, or we've had some very negative types of interactions with people early in our life. And then we tend to repeat that over and over.

And so, that's one of the biggest reasons that I see. And certainly there's other variables to that. It's not hard and fast here, but I think that all of that tells us a lot about why we get stuck.

Meagen Gibson

And it's funny because so many people, I'm a huge promoter of therapy, admit it myself, and it's one of the things that people often joke about being resistant to going to therapy about, is that they don't want to talk about their mother or their father. It's the joke. So, tell me about your mother. And everyone is like, ah. But so often these are the relationships that inform the way that we relate. And often we're just trying to relate in the way that the opposite of what we might have had.

We might have been shown something, or we might have had relationships represented to us. So we do the opposite. So even then, it's informing the way that we go after these connections that we're driven to seek out.

Dr. Marni Feuerman

Absolutely. So what you're talking about is making what is unconscious, conscious so that we become aware. We need to know what's running the show from behind the scenes. And so nobody wants to just go over and over again into the family stuff. But I think if you can do it enough to connect the dots, that's really going to be helpful for you. That's really going to give you that self awareness so you know echoes of my past are harking back now in this situation, or in this interaction, or in my romantic life, and that can be really helpful. That's how we get some of those ah ha moments when we're connecting those things. So you're absolutely right.

Meagen Gibson - [00:05:09]

And some people are just better at recognizing those patterns than others. They might not have the background or the theory and the science behind it to understand how it all lays out, but they understand patterns.

But some people, honestly and I've come to find this, I'm somebody that recognizes patterns in my own behaviors and in the behaviors of others, unfortunately for them. But I've come to understand that not everyone is built like that. Not everybody's brain is working like that looking for patterns all of the time. And so for those people, I imagine come to you and say, I just don't understand why I keep ending up in the same relationships and these same things keep playing out. And that's where you enter in and say why.

Dr. Marni Feuerman

Right. Exactly.

So I usually will just say, well let's unpack it. Let's look at it. Let's explore it together. Let's figure out what's going on. Let's see what we come up with about why those patterns keep playing out. And if it is something you're not so aware of, we can start to really make sense of it and organize it and kind of know why it's impacting your behavior. And then you can begin to make those changes. Not that the changes will always be easy, but at least you won't just be on automatic pilot and you can stop yourself and go, well, why do I keep doing this? Why do I keep going after this thing or doing this behavior, yet it ends up destructive for me?

So it's what we call the process of it. And the process can be really exciting for people to learn and to challenge themselves. And the therapy can also hold people accountable for making some of these difficult changes.

Meagen Gibson

And that's what's so amazing about it for me, because there's so much science available and understanding available now that wasn't before, so it's not even just making what's unaware present, or how did you phrase it?

Dr. Marni Feuerman

Yes. Make what's unconscious, conscious. Yes.

Meagen Gibson

This is why I'm still in therapy.

But what's so hopeful about it is that once we are given the tools to recognize the patterns, you're completely capable of learning how to break out of that pattern. Seeing it, identifying it, naming it, and then being able to avoid that trap in the next time with support, especially.

Dr. Marni Feuerman

Well, that's really the good news in a lot of this because people sometimes think I can't just break this habit. But we know from again, the science, there's a concept called neuroplasticity, which I'm sure you're very familiar with, which is just about how the brain is pretty malleable. So we can begin to interconnect these different neurons, these different neural pathways. And so is it hard? Yes. Is it impossible? No. But I think you've got to think about it as I'm now forcing my brain to go down a totally different pathway that it's not used to.

And it's like learning anything, right? You didn't suddenly get on a bike and know how to ride the bike. So you may not be making the healthiest choices in your life or in your relationships, but there's also plenty of change that you can do even around that.

Meagen Gibson - [00:08:26]

Absolutely. So now that we've talked about unhealthy relationship patterns and traps and things, what do healthy relationships look like?

Dr. Marni Feuerman

Well, there's a lot of different factors. And again, the science also helps us with this, too. And I would say one of the biggest words I want people to take away from this discussion is that they feel emotionally safe in the relationship. And if you think about what that encompasses, usually you're not mistreated at all, there's no abuse, you're not over functioning for the person, things feel mutual, it feels like you have a sense of yourself and your boundaries and so do they, you're not walking on eggshells, those sorts of feelings.

And then, the other piece of it would be that there's a lot of trust. There's consistency, there's predictability, you can rely on the person, they show up for you. All of that is about feeling emotionally safe and seen and heard in the relationship.

And when two people can do that for each other, maybe not 100% of the time, but they're doing it a large percentage of the time, and they know how to repair and course correct if they fall off, that's what's key. And so we don't always put that word safe with the excitement and intensity of love and passion and excitement and attraction. So, we don't always click that together but we should. So if you have elements of both, that's great. That's wonderful. But as the relationship goes on, I think if you could deep down, you could say, I feel really emotionally safe with this person. Then I think that's golden.

Meagen Gibson

Absolutely. And you said so many things that I actually want to go back to and unpack, just even a little bit. But one of the ways that I sum it up, as technical as we're going to get in a minute, is that you can show up into a relationship with someone as your full self, as you're strong and ambitious self, as your goofy self, as your lazy self. All the aspects of you that make up you. You're safe to be with that person, and you won't be judged or shamed or ridiculed, right?

But going back to some of the specifics of what you said, I want to talk about different types of abuse, and we don't have to get too detailed. But there's several different kinds of abuse. And mainly people think about physical abuse, which is an obvious no go for relationships and an obvious reason why you should get out, or why that person is not compatible in a relationship with you. But what are some of the other types of abuse that people might not think about?

Dr. Marni Feuerman

Yeah. Well, I think the hardest ones to recognize certainly are more the psychological or the emotional abuse because it could be so subtle. I think this is where people need to go with their gut. You feel like something's off, something's not right. You feel like you can't be yourself. You're questioning your reality, maybe somebody's gas lighting you or making you feel like you're always the problem, or you're always doing something wrong, or you feel threatened somehow that if you behave in a certain way or do something or you do something wrong, that the relationship is going to blow up. If you're always waiting for that other shoe to drop in the relationship.

So those things are pretty subtle. They can definitely feel like abuse. And sometimes you need to reality check it with people, you have your friends, family, other people that you really trust. Sometimes it's good just to check it out with them, because I think when we get so absorbed in a

relationship, we can have this tunnel vision towards it, and we don't let these outside people help us. So I think that's an important piece of it.

But the emotional abuse it's very underhanded and sometimes people aren't even sure they can label it abuse. But your gut and your feelings, I think, are what you want to pay attention to, to question that.

Meagen Gibson - [00:12:46]

Absolutely. And you're absolutely right. It's the kind of thing where it can be so subversive and so subtle sometimes that over time you come to get this feeling of like, wait a minute. And oftentimes those kinds of relationships are very easily hidden from friends and family, and they don't see that kind of aspect, so it's also harder to discern. But that gut feeling has never done me wrong and it's something you should listen to if it feels... It's like the kind of intuition if you're walking alone and you feel unsafe, it's like listen to that, call a friend or get somewhere where you're more lit or something. It's like that gut intuition is there for a reason and listen to it.

Dr. Marni Feuerman

You're right.

Meagen Gibson

Go ahead.

Dr. Marni Feuerman

I was going to say if you're afraid to talk to a friend about it because you want to keep it personal or private that's also when a therapist is like, that's the perfect thing for you to go talk to a therapist about.

Meagen Gibson

Absolutely. And then I also, just to name it, there's also financial abuse, somebody's keeping somebody financially hostage and not giving them any agency or freedom in their own lives.

Dr. Marni Feuerman

I also want to talk about over functioning because I just saw an Instagram post from someone a few weeks ago about over functioning and felt totally attacked. And I was like, oh, and had to unpack that for a little bit, especially in the context of relationships. I was like, oh, there's some work to do there.

Meagen Gibson

So I would love to just define what over-functioning looks like in romantic relationships and how you can identify if that's what you're doing.

Dr. Marni Feuerman

Yeah. I think dependency and over function sometimes it gets a bad rep. So I believe that people should feel as if things are in balance. Whether it's one person depending on the other or one person going to the other person a lot to meet each other's needs, things like that. I think that's all good. I think that makes a relationship very intimate and very special.

And certainly there's going to be times where people over function because somebody is going through some events where they're really knocked down or a health issue or they're going through some problem or stressor, which I think that doesn't count really, because that's going to happen.

Meagen Gibson - [00:15:14]

That's situational

Dr. Marni Feuerman

That's situational, exactly.

But I think if one person feels like they're always the one to take the pulse of the relationship. They're always the one to bring up problems, issues and concerns. They're always the one to problem solve. They're working 200 hours a week because the partner can't work more than 10 hours because they're laying on the couch all day. You are drained because the relationship is so out of balance. So I would look at over-functioning in that way. And if it's happening, how you're going to address it, how you're going to bring it up.

Because usually the sustainability of the relationship, it's just not going to happen if one person is doing that, they're going to burn out.

Meagen Gibson

Absolutely. It's a lot of responsibility on one person.

Dr. Marni Feuerman

Yeah, share the load, right?

Meagen Gibson

Yeah. Absolutely. Right.

Okay. So what can people do if they're not making great choices in partners? What's step one? If somebody's coming to the conference and they're saying this is why I'm here, I want to figure out what to do.

Dr. Marni Feuerman

Yeah. Well, self awareness is key. So you certainly want some insight, but you also want to know some practical behavioral changes to make. And also knowing that despite how you feel, so you could very well feel love for that person, but it's not right for you. It's not right for your life or it's not healthy.

And so sometimes I even want people to put pen to paper. Put down, write down every single significant relationship you've had, or maybe you haven't had any. And that's interesting. Maybe all your relationships were one month long, and then you got married and had a long term marriage with somebody who you think is abusive or something like that.

Start to discern. What are the commonalities? What are you noticing? I like people to poke around about their own life history, their early history, the family stuff. Are you picking partners who remind you of, let's say, the most negative trait in one of your parents or something like that. Or how you felt in your family? Are you repeating that something where it's recreating the same thing over and over or recreating the feeling you had about yourself or about other people? What are you starting to notice with that?

And hopefully things will start to pop out for you where you'll say, okay, I tend to do this a lot. I tend to pick partners like that. Or I tend to be a piece of this dynamic where I'm the 50% of the relationship I'm creating over and over and I need to figure out what I need to change in myself to make different decisions.

And then, of course, as we first started talking about therapy is perfect for this kind of process, too. And I would say, you're going to want a therapist who understands some of the science and neurobiology, attachment. They're also what we call process or experiential. So sometimes they're working at a certain level of depth with you to get you really deeper into your emotions and into what might be happening underneath the surface so that you can really connect these things. And then a therapist can also hold you accountable for making the changes and gently nudge you towards taking more risk so that your behavior changes.

The other thing. Sorry. One other thing I almost forgot, because I know not everybody can afford therapy. So I also want to let people know there's a lot of resources out there, just like what you're doing now. There's self help books, there's podcasts. Luckily, there's a lot of free resources as well, which I think can be really helpful.

Meagen Gibson - [00:19:25]

It's absolutely true. The accessibility part is absolutely key. I tell therapy all the time, but I didn't start until very late in life. And there's a lot of circumstances of accessibility, both in financial, geographical, lots of circumstances against people when it comes to accessing therapy. So thank you for naming that.

And then because so many things that you said resonated. The attachment lens and how we're looking at our relationships, and that self analysis of really starting with your relationship with yourself. What are my core ideas about myself? And then where did those come from? And how am I recreating those patterns? Because it feels familiar. And because it feels like my family attachments.

If you don't mind, I would love it if we just spit ball some examples. So, for instance, if I had a super hypercritical parent about my appearance, then that might not be a red flag to me at all when my partner criticizes my appearance, because that's a very familiar thing for someone who deeply loves me and that I'm securely attached to, or whatever kind of attachment, that a primary caretaker in my life also did that. So it feels familiar. It feels like a family relationship should feel, right?

Dr. Marni Feuerman

It's almost like people conflate that with love, because a parent who's supposed to love you, and we naturally were born to attach and connect with that person, even if they're not reliable and responsive to us, we still attach. And then, yeah, the feeling usually about how we see ourselves and what we expect from other people it's going to line up. And so we then say, oh, this must be what love feels like because my mom always criticized me and so my partner does, just like you said. And so we don't think that that's unusual or that shouldn't happen. So it's exactly like you just described.

Meagen Gibson

And by the way, all of these are not direct examples for my life.

If you had, let's say you grew up with a financial abundance, but somebody used that financial abundance to control you or to influence your choices and decisions. And then you get into a relationship where your romantic partner does the same thing. They have wealth or stature, and they're going to use that as a means to control how you get to live your life and what your options are and how you get to spend that, right?

Dr. Marni Feuerman

Precisely. Yes. You'll mirror that what happened to you often or sometimes the polar opposite but not necessarily in a good way. You could pick someone who, let's say is, so the opposite where they're extremely stingy and greedy and cheap. And you're the person who's always trying to get them to pay for things and give you gifts. And money just becomes symbolic of okay, if this person loved me they would be doing this for me when it really has nothing...

Meagen Gibson - [00:22:39]

Because that's what love meant to me.

Dr. Marni Feuerman

That's what I was taught and that's what I learned, that when someone loves you, they throw money at you and that's it. So yeah, that can absolutely happen a lot as well.

Meagen Gibson

I'm really glad that you named that because, I think I brought it up at the beginning too, is that it's either you're going towards what you know or you're going away from the opposite of what you know, towards the opposite of what you know.

I tossed this theory at Tina Payne Bryson, when I spoke to her as well, who does a lot of attachment work, and just a theory that we, and we were talking about in the context of parenting, but also obviously a very deep relationship, but that you just parent the opposite of the way that you were parented if you didn't appreciate the way that you were parented. And when you come at it and in this context, in romantic relationships, when you come at it from the understanding with that attachment lens and the understanding of the attachment science and research, then you can see those tendencies and instead just do either the equal or the opposite so create your own definition of what secure attachment is going to look like in a relationship for you.

Dr. Marni Feuerman

Yeah. And I think through a lot of relationships you can have that attachment revision. I think it just depends on the partner and how severe the circumstances. But if two people kind of say, oh, we're so stuck, we have this awful dynamic between us or we fight all the time or we don't know what's going on. Sometimes you get two people who are recreating that same dynamic with each other, and that's what the heart of couples therapy is a lot. Can we go in here to create more of a secure attachment or what we call earned security?

So you both figure this out. You both learn how to meet each other's needs in a healthy way. And you both talk about this stuff and you know what's happening. You realize and maybe can say, I feel like this sometimes when this happens to me it brings up this negative view I have of myself. But you're expressing it to your partner, and you're seeing if you can both inch towards each other to correct this and get back on track.

And it's really beautiful when it happens. I definitely see couples doing it. Sometimes they can't ever get there because they're just really driving each other crazy with that. But sometimes two people can completely revise that insecure attachment history together with each other.

And then sometimes I'll have single people who realize, I have to pick a really different type of person. I have to pick somebody that may not be typical, may not be like what I keep choosing, and that I have to get out of what I keep doing over and over again. So both can happen.

Meagen Gibson

I love that you spoke to committed long-term relationships as well as people who are dating and trying to get out of their relationship cycle.

I know that I've experienced firsthand, and I was trying to recall exactly what happened, but I've experienced this where I've gotten into an argument with my spouse. He said something that triggered something in me and had the experience where I recognized that it was not about what was currently happening between us.

And I was trying to think of what happened so that I could actually give the concrete example. But this is so typical of arguments, but I have no idea what he said or what I was so angry about, but I do remember that it wasn't actually about him. That I was able to calm down my nervous system and say, I know what this is actually about, and this is about when in my family relationships when this would happen, I would feel familiar in this way.

And as ugly as that whole morning was, I remember what it felt like on the other side of that as well, when I could get the clarity about what it was really about and name it and the way that it diffused it between us so that we could move and re-center ourselves and we're on the same team here. We love each other. We're both after the same goals. Let's try to communicate more carefully and be responsible for what we're both bringing. He definitely had responsibility in the way that he was communicating, and I also had responsibility in the way that I was receiving and interpreting his communication.

I wish I could have thought of the more concrete example. I wish I could tell you exactly what had happened just for the benefit of our viewer, but I can tell you the other side of that feels really, really good, it's freeing.

Dr. Marni Feuerman - [00:27:16]

Yes. What you're talking about is the exact definition of a trigger. And usually if you're triggered, almost every single time it often has to do with, it's like ticking off one of those things that you just said, like something from your past. It's become, like a raw spot. And a lot of people don't realize that. So I think it's fantastic that you were able to slow it down like that and say, okay, what's really happening with me? Why is it bothering me so much? Why is this making me so upset and angry?

Meagen Gibson

And sometimes people can get to that place and talk about it. Which is also great too. Where you can just say, oh, gosh, when you said this, it always reminds me of this thing my dad said or the way I felt. Sometimes it's not even parents. I certainly don't mean to bash parents, because it could be a lot of things. You could have been a victim of something. I hear this a lot with someone who's bullied in school a lot. So their parents maybe were okay, but they had this horrible bullying experience where they always feel small, insignificant, helpless. And sometimes it flares up in these moments in their adult relationships and interactions.

Dr. Marni Feuerman

And so just figuring that out and connecting those things can be so beneficial, because then you're also feeling much more self assured about you, what's happening to you, why it's happening, what you need. What will help you in that moment? Might help you just to be able to let your partner know what's going on with you.

Sometimes it may be helpful to say, hey, when I get like this, it would help me if you did this and such. Right. If you just talk to me softly and came and gave me a hug or whatever it is. I mean, everybody has different, deeper emotional needs that they can express around this, but you won't really get there if you don't figure that part out first. Almost like that has to come first to know what you need.

Meagen Gibson

Yeah, absolutely. And it's so funny because when you're in the heat of the moment that's not the time to figure that out, I found. It's something you have to figure out after that's happened and you retroactively think, okay, what would have suited me in that moment? How could my partner have reached through my disproportionate reaction to reach me and ground me and re-establish trust in a way that I would have known? Oh this is my signal.

Even just between my son and I, we've made an agreement that when we're both speaking in a voice or we have a face that we're not aware of. So if I'm speaking to him in frustrated mom voice, or if he's

speaking to me and I just want to play, I don't want to do chores, he gets this face. We're identical in that way. We both just say the word tornado. We look at each other and we say tornado voice, and then we know that we've got to relax our face. We've got to put, genuinely it brings a smile to both of our faces. And then we know that we're speaking from the voice of I love you the most in the world. You're one of the most important people to me. I'm going to change my voice when I say the same thing to you.

Because it could be something as simple as, come to dinner. But if I smile and I say, come to dinner, that's great. But if I say, come to dinner! He's like, what. I don't deserve that. What's that tornado voice? So that's just an example with my son.

But it's just the little things. But we established that after we had had a really, really rough morning, one morning and later in that afternoon we said, you know this morning when we were just not communicating, we kept missing each other. And could we come up with a code word for when we're both speaking in a way that the other one doesn't like, so we don't just keep doing it? And I went like this, and he said, what about tornado?

Dr. Marni Feuerman - [00:31:15]

Funny. Yeah. We get hijacked in these moments, and that's what you're talking about. And the hijack also serves a purpose. I mean, our brains do that automatically. We pick up, we're scanning for danger. So that's a good thing our brains do. But if something becomes dangerous because of our own history, right? Like if we hear the criticism, whereas for a lot of people, it may not be that big a deal. But if we were, like you said, criticized mercilessly or something growing up, now it's dangerous. And so you hear little criticism and you blow up or you shut down, freeze, fight or flight kind of thing. If you're doing that, that is just your brain saying danger, danger, shut down or go crazy or whatever.

But like you said, you're not going to be super rational right then. But you can reflect later. You can look back and say, oh, gosh, why did I react that strongly? What was happening? And do just like what you did. And then you go back, and then you have this repair. You just had that repair with your son.

Okay. When this happens, we are getting this understanding now. We have a code word. The code word will perhaps short circuit that trigger, and maybe we can slow it down because emotion happens rapidly.

And that's a lot of what I end up doing when I'm working with clients, I slow down the process. I freeze frame a little bit so we can go real slow, and then we can look at it together and say, what happened here? What's going on? What did you say to yourself in that moment when you heard your husband say that critical remark? What are you telling yourself? What's the story you're telling yourself? What's the feeling that comes up? I'm just going super slow. And then people start to make sense of it.

Meagen Gibson

It's really interesting, too, because the fight response is so much easier to identify. When someone's being defensive, they got triggered and they're defensive, and they're counterattacking, right? That's easy to identify. It's more intense.

Dr. Marni Feuerman

There's energy and an intensity to height or escalation for people, what we call amplify or sometimes we pursue, like the hot pursuit. I think I know where you're going with this. And then there's people who withdraw and shut down.

Meagen Gibson

The withdraw people, right?

And I have found that that is so much harder because what your brain does is it wants to fill in the blanks. It wants to create a narrative around what's happening for that person.

And I had this in one of my relationships where that was happening. And so what it made me feel like is that I wasn't valued, I wasn't being seen, that I was being dismissed, that what I said wasn't important, valuable or smart. Whatever I just shared just laid there on the floor while this person either disappeared energetically, disappeared emotionally, disappeared intellectually, just gone. Even though they're sitting right in front of me.

And so your brain makes up all these stories about what that means about yourself for what you just shared or your relationship. And so I would love it if you had some suggestions around that and how to reconnect with somebody that's gone into that response.

Dr. Marni Feuerman - [00:34:46]

Yeah. So it doesn't mean they're any less upset or pained or hurt. They have feelings, too. But they've learned to down regulate the feelings. That often comes from having a survival strategy, too.

For someone who escalates or amplifies it they got their needs met by being the squeaky wheel. Whereas someone who withdraws or shuts down, usually they had to lay below, they had to go below the radar. Their philosophies don't rock the boat, maybe don't have needs because nobody comes to meet them.

So they're usually very overwhelmed from what I hear from people who do that. They have to just down regulate and shut down that system. It doesn't mean that they don't care. So you want to remind yourself okay, they're shutting down.

Meagen Gibson

It's what it looks like but it's not what it means, right?

Dr. Marni Feuerman

Yeah. And so that person probably does need a little time to be left alone because their hearts are probably racing. So they need, their system needs to calm down a bit. And then I would say you can re-approach. But if you come back in to try to get them to talk, you've got to be much softer, much more neutral, caring. Hey, you shut down there, you got really quiet. I know I blew up. Can we try to talk now?

And see, sometimes people will stone wall is what we call it, which means it's a severe shut down and they refuse to talk to that's something that they might need their own help for or you need some couples therapy for if it's that severe. But if somebody turns back in towards you and tries to talk and tries to explain their feelings and what's happening for them, then great. So I would say go towards that person in a much more calm, neutral, reassuring way, and you can probably get them to open up.

Meagen Gibson

Yeah. One of the things that worked for me is to say when we were talking earlier about X Y Z, I felt you get really quiet. I felt kind of alone, and that's okay. I just want to understand what was happening for you because I had a bunch of stories about what that meant, about what I said. And I don't want to unfairly decide what you were thinking and feeling. I'd rather you tell me if you want to do that right now.

And normally, in the past, that has worked to my benefit. Not every time. Sometimes they're like, I was thinking I was hungry. I was thinking it was lunch so I wanted you to stop talking, so I stopped talking, and I'm like, oh, okay. Simple enough.

Dr. Marni Feuerman - [00:37:38]

Funny. Yeah. Sometimes we get it totally wrong. Sometimes we don't have a good read or that good attunement with the person. So yeah, absolutely.

Meagen Gibson

Sometimes I've had it revealed to me that they were saying, when you said that I felt a lot of shame around the fact that I had made you feel what you were disclosing to me, I felt a lot of shame. And I was like, shame. Whoa, I had no idea that was happening for you. That's not at all what I got from your complete and total quiet and not moving.

Dr. Marni Feuerman

Shame is a big one that can happen too with some people. And so that just makes them want to hide and disappear and go really quiet.

Meagen Gibson

Yes. Absolutely. Well, we're almost wrapped up but it would be a missed opportunity if I didn't talk to you about the dating scene and ghosting and breadcrumbing people. And if you didn't give us a little tippet of advice around that phenomenon.

Dr. Marni Feuerman

Yeah. I would say if it doesn't happen that frequently, then it's probably just a situational thing, and it probably has absolutely nothing to do with you. Because I don't want people to read into it too much. But if you find it happens over and over. That again, those patterns where you keep picking the same type, you keep having the same experience. You get ghosted by 10 people. That might be the time to just do some of the things that we talked about, which is just really getting curious with yourself and trying to detect. Is there more going on? Do I have some personal issues that I need to work through? Do I have some family stuff that is unprocessed that I need to look at?

So just try to dig a little bit deeper around that. But look, finding love, finding a match just know that it's hard and that when you do find that one person and it clicks, then everything's, a lot's really beautiful around that.

But I would say have the right approach and the right attitude and know that you're probably going to have some difficult, not some great experiences with dating. But just know that when you find that person and you feel that emotional safety, they're predictable, they're consistent, they're reliable, they call when they say they're going to call, they show up for you. That's really what you want to aim for. And I would say, don't put up with any less than that.

And people out there you're deserving. You deserve love. You deserve the happiness. And don't stop until you find that.

Meagen Gibson

I love that. It's a fantastic note to end on.

Dr. Feuerman, where can people find out more about you and your work?

Dr. Marni Feuerman

Sure, they can find me on drmarnionline.com

There's a lot of good information there and free resources. So, yeah, I would love for you to check it out.

Meagen Gibson - [00:40:41]

Fantastic. Thanks so much for being with us today.

Dr. Marni Feuerman

Sure. You got it. Great to be here.