

A toolkit for changes & transitions in relationships

Guest: Libby Sinback

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Jaia Bristow - [00:00:10]

Hello, and welcome back to the Relationship Super Conference. My name is Jaia Bristow, and I'm one of your hosts. And today I am delighted to be joined by Libby Sinback. Welcome, Libby.

Libby Sinback

Hi. Thanks for having me Jaia.

Jaia Bristow

So, Libby Sinback is a relationship coach, educator, and host of the podcast *Making Polyamory Work*. Libby believes love is why we are here and how we heal.

Today we're going to be talking a bit about changes in relationship and about how to cultivate resiliency through change. So, Libby, how did you get so passionate about resilience through change?

Libby Sinback

That's a great question. So I am a relationship coach, and I work mostly with people who are in some kind of polyamorous or non-monogamous dynamic. And it's really common for people to come to me when that's being really challenging in some kind of way. Either they're new to polyamory or non-monogamy, or there's a new partner that's in the relationship dynamic that's creating a lot of difficulty or struggle.

And what often is the case is that it's actually not the polyamory that's the problem or that's causing the difficulty, and it's not the new partner that's the thing that's causing the difficulty. Instead, what is clear is that the dynamic in the relationship that is before me needs to change. There's something that isn't working that was working before, or maybe it wasn't working before, but it was working well enough. Maybe people were functioning okay, but they weren't quite so happy.

And I think that this is a thing that happens a lot sometimes when a couple in particular is together for some time and then they decide to open up, usually they don't do that because everything's going exactly the way that they want it to. Either they want something more or they want to make something that's not working work. And there are a lot of people that say, oh, well, if you have a broken relationship you shouldn't try polyamory or it's just not going to make it better. And that's really true. But people do it, and sometimes they don't realize they're doing it when they're doing it, and they don't realize that when they seek out something totally new and different, that that means what they're doing is going to have to change pretty substantially.

So I'll have these couples come to me and they'll be like, hey, can you teach us how to do polyamory better? And I'll say, sure, but I think there are some things that if we don't change these things that this isn't going to keep working and this isn't going to work the way that you want it to. And that's usually pretty unsettling and pretty challenging for them.

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But I find that when we get to that place of really seeing what in the dynamic that's present needs to change, and then it does change, and then they grow some new skills, they grow a new way of relating to each other. It's not just a wonderful situation and that they can now accommodate more relationships in their lives, they also are just in a happier, more loving place with each other, and they're getting more of what they want, and they feel stronger and more resilient on the other side of that difficulty.

But in that moment when the change hasn't happened yet, but it needs to happen, they're in the thick of it or in the rumble stages, as Brené Brown might put it. She puts it perfectly, like you're faced down in the arena. You don't know which way is up, and everything is really hard. And that's where a lot of people peace out, or they give up or they go back to their old ways and get stuck.

And I find that every relationship, whether polyamorous or monogamous or whatever configuration is present, is probably at some point, if it's a long-term relationship, going to encounter some kind of major change of some kind. One of the partners is going to have a major change, the relationship is going to have a major change, there's going to be a major change to their other situation, their ecosystem, a job, whatever, and they're going to need to adapt to it. And it's that adaptation that's really the rubber meeting the road in the relationship.

And so that's why. I think at the end of the day, it is what makes relationships strong and resilient and great is being able to move through these difficult moments.

Jaia Bristow

I love that. And I think there's so many really important things in what you said. And one of the things I particularly love in your answer is, so often people think that polyamory is the issue, but it's more noticing that if one chooses polyamory to resolve other issues, then that's not a magical fix, for example. And that focus on change, and like you say, I think all relationships, whether monogamous or non-monogamous, go through major changes at some point.

So let's talk about some of the changes that can happen, because you mentioned maybe it's an individual going through some change, maybe it's the changes opening up a relationship, maybe it's having a new partner. There's all kinds of different things. So let's talk about some of the different changes that can occur in all kinds of different relationships, or when I say different relationships, I mean specifically both monogamous and non-monogamous.

Libby Sinback

Absolutely. It's interesting because a big one that I don't think people get a lot of support around at all is just moving in together. That's a huge change. A huge adjustment. I remember when I moved in with the first partner that I ever moved in with I was like, I thought our relationship was great. We'd been together a year. We had never had a fight. Then we moved in together and everything changed. Everything changed. It's one thing to love somebody, it's another thing to know what's at the bottom of their closet or whether they hang up their towel after they take a shower.

So I would say that's probably the biggest one, it's one that a lot of people go through. Not everyone chooses to cohabit, obviously, but many people do. And that's a huge change.

Another one that comes to mind is having a kid. It's a big one. And that's one where there's so much in that one situation. And it's interesting, I actually think having a kid has a lot in common with polyamory in the sense you're bringing a whole other human being into the mix here. And suddenly you're taking on different roles with each other and with this kid, and the kid is taking on a different role with you. And then with the kid comes multiple changes as the kid matures into a toddler, elementary school, middle schooler, teenager, etc. And then you go through another change later if/when the kid moves out, to not having a kid at home and being an empty nester. That's another big change.

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And these changes are all considered milestones. Like getting married, another change, potentially. You're legally bound to each other. Sharing a bank account when you didn't used to share a bank account. And those are all seen as milestones but in my mind they're also changes and they've changed the dynamic of the relationship. And those are changes we're often choosing.

But then here's another one. Let's say you got together and then one of you is grappling with mental illness and you need to suddenly change what you're doing with yourself so that you can get the treatment that you need, grow yourself so that you're not continuing to lean on the unhealthy coping mechanisms that aren't working for you.

And the thing is, it may be that if you're in a healing state you're not necessarily going to be all the time being able to operate the same way that you had been before. And it may be that your coping mechanisms were great for your partner in your relationship even if they weren't very good for you. And so if you need to shift those coping mechanisms your partner is going to have to shift too in how they relate to you and what they expect of you. And that can be really tough. And it can be a really tough transition for a lot of people. I can keep going.

Jaia Bristow

I just wanted to bring in, because you talked about mental health, but there's also physical health that can be another big change. And in vows, in a lot of wedding vows it's like, through sickness and health and all those kinds of things.

And I love what you were saying about milestones as change as well. And so even though they're chosen, they are moments of transition, moments of shifting in a relationship. And I love the comparison between having kids and non-monogamy or polyamory, and bringing a new human into the relationship and how that can change dynamics.

So, like you say, there's a lot of different ways relationships can change between two individuals. Multiple individuals bringing in new people, one individual having major changes to themselves, whether it's physical, mental health, job changes, other kinds of life stuff coming up that will impact a partner or partners. And so what are some things to focus on then that can create resiliency during these periods of change?

Libby Sinback

So I think one of the things that can be so important is to recognize when you're in a moment of change, because that can be the hardest part sometimes, is not even recognizing you're there. Not even knowing I can't just keep doing what I've been doing and have the same results happening and have this continue to work. I'm actually going to now have to shift gears and become a whole lot more conscious and a whole lot more present to what I'm doing and shift potentially because there's new things happening. Maybe my partner is doing something new. Maybe we're doing something new together. Maybe we're in a new environment or a new situation.

And sometimes we have the expectation of how it's going to go and we're operating on autopilot. This is funny. This is a lesson from improv. I don't know if you've ever done improv, improv acting and stuff. So have you ever shown up for an improv scene and you've already decided in your head how the scene is going to go?

Jaia Bristow

Yeah. And it never works.

Libby Sinback

Right. It doesn't work. Why doesn't it work?

Jaia Bristow - [00:11:11]

Because it's improv, and you can't predict how the other person's going to react or respond to you.

Libby Sinback

And if you try to maneuver them to do the scene the way that you want them to do, they generally don't like that very much.

So, I would say that the first thing is to just have a change mindset. Because if you don't have that, if you aren't aware that you're in a moment of what I would call a reckoning, really, sometimes it's not a reckoning, but sometimes it is. So what I mean by a reckoning is there are times in our lives where it's like, oh, this is really different. Something's happening, and it's going to rock our whole relationship.

And again, sometimes it's unexpected like illness or a gender transition or somebody coming out as polyamorous and the other partner isn't ready for that. There are all different kinds of things that can happen in those kinds of situations, or it can be something that you're choosing and that you're ready for, like having a kid or having a second kid, which is a whole nother ball of wax, or moving in together. But I think with those milestone things, those can often sometimes trip you up even more because you have in your head how you think it's supposed to go, and then it doesn't go that way. And then you end up fighting it, and you end up in a place of struggle, not just with your partner sometimes, but even with yourself when you're not showing up the way that you're expecting to.

And so I think that's the first step. The first step is to know I'm in a place of change. I'm in a place of transition.

And then the next thing I would say is begin to be aware of your places where you have power or empowerment and the places where you don't, the places where you don't have any control. This is basically like the Serenity Prayer, really. And I'm not a religious person, but I love the Serenity Prayer. I love the Serenity Prayer. It's this opportunity to ask, what do I have the ability to affect here? What is outside my ability to affect? And being able to know the difference.

And most of the time what you can control in a situation when there's change happening is actually not a whole lot. You can usually control yourself. You can usually control what comes out of your mouth. You can control what you do, and you can control how you deal with your own internal life. You can have an influence on your partner, if you have a partner that has the space to listen to you. Because sometimes if they're going through their own stuff and they're really deep in something and that's the big change, you may not have a lot of influence on them. And in fact, trying to have too much influence on them might be detrimental. Again, that's like you trying to shape the scene.

So really being conscious of staying in your lane I think is really important. And there's a mindfulness aspect to that, too, of being aware of what you're putting into the situation. What are you bringing to the change that is happening? Are you fighting it? Are you rolling over and becoming a victim and being disempowered? Or are you sticking up for yourself, honoring your own boundaries, being clear about what's your responsibility and what's not your responsibility?

So I think that's really important. And I find that the people that really do well with change are the people who either have these skills, particularly around boundaries, being able to speak up for yourself, being able to own what's yours and not own what's not yours, and also just real respect for other people and their needs and their boundaries. So again, not pushing, not trying to control things. Those are the people that tend to do really well with change.

And sometimes change forces you to grow these skills. But I find that it can help give you some calm in the storm if you are really grounded in what you know you can do and then you let go of what you can't do.

Jaia Bristow - [00:15:18]

I love that.

Libby Sinback

The third thing that I think really helps deal with change is, and this is tied to the second thing, which is just really not leaning into victimhood. So letting go of this idea, because this happens a lot, because a lot of change that happens to us might not be change we're choosing. It might not be something we want. And it might be something that we're doing for our partner. We're making room, we're making adjustments because they need this.

I'm thinking about now, what if our partner needs to take a new job and it's going to involve moving cross country and we have to leave all our friends behind and leave everything that's familiar to us and we're moving to a whole other place, and that can be really painful. And if we're doing it for our partner because we want to be with them and because we want to support them and they're getting all the things they want out of it, and we're just sacrificing at that point, and that can feel really crummy.

But if you bring to that experience also this martyrdom complex within yourself, if you stay in this place of, I'm doing this for you, this is what you wanted, not what I wanted, and you put yourself in that victim place again, first of all, it's not very empowering to either of you. But second of all, what you're really telling yourself is, I am not an agent in this situation. Things are being done to me and putting things upon me, and I don't have any ownership or control of any of this.

And what that tends to lead to is the three really yucky things that I find that are toxic to relationships, which are blame. You blame the other person. Blame is like a way of offloading responsibility. It's a way of offloading pain. Resentment, which I think is also a toxin to relationships, just really building and holding on to all of this grief that you're feeling and seeping it out to your partner in the form of resentment.

And then the last one is just shut down. Just being completely shut down, being disconnected, disengaged, which is another thing that can happen if you feel like a victim. So I think that's a really important thing. And it can be really tough, especially, like I said, if it's a change that you're not embracing, you're not choosing it, but you're in it.

I've got two more. So the fourth thing is, allow for the heartbreak that you might be feeling around what the change is going to be. Because I do think that while any change can be an opportunity, every change you're losing something. Even when you get married you're losing the fact that you were single and you weren't married. You're losing the fact that you were more of an autonomous free agent before, and now really you're forming a family unit at that point.

Having a kid is a wonderful, beautiful, exciting thing. And now you're a parent, and sorry your evenings and weekends are radically changed forever and ever. And if you don't make room to feel sad about that on the regular sometimes too, give room for that grief, again, that just allows it to build up. It's not like the grief isn't there. It's not like it doesn't exist. So I think it's really important to feel it and let it move through you and honor it just in the way that when someone passes on we grieve them. That's part of a ritual that we have in most every culture. And I think it's important because we have to honor what was lost and appreciate it when it was there. So I think that's really important.

Jaia Bristow

Absolutely. Just before you continue, I just want to say how glad I am that you did bring that piece in, because it was something I was thinking of myself when you're talking about the other pieces. And I think when people go through transitions, society puts this pressure of, you have to focus on the positives. You have to look at everything you're getting out of this. That's true.

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And I love again what you were saying about not identifying as a victim, because that can build resentment and blame and all kinds of negativity in a relationship, but that it's okay to create space for grief, for mourning what you've lost, as well that it's okay for us as humans to have almost conflicting emotions. That we can have grief at loss and excitement and joy at what's to come. And that's really okay to hold both those together. And so often we feel like we can't. We feel like it's one or the other.

Libby Sinback

Yeah, that is so true. And I'm going to add something to that, Jaia, based on what you just said, that I think also if you're the person who's not feeling a lot of grief because of the change, because sometimes we are in this place where one person is going for something they want, and that's bringing a whole lot of change to the other partner. A thing that can be really important for that partner who doesn't maybe feel a whole lot of grief, is to allow that to be held with their partner. Because it can be really hard to do that if you're going for something you want and you're super excited about it, hearing that your partner's grieving can maybe harsh your joy.

But I think it's so important for the relationship that, like you said, both things are acceptable. And it's so important for feeling safe, for feeling held, for feeling like whole people that you're allowed to be your whole self with all of your complexity. Like, yes, I'm happy for you. Also, please see what I'm losing here. Please just see that and hold that with me. You don't have to feel bad about it. You don't have to beat yourself up. Just allow this piece here, too.

Jaia Bristow

Absolutely.

Libby Sinback

I see that.

Jaia Bristow

And one more thing to add to that as well, is sometimes when in a relationship we feel like we have to share everything together and that if we're having slightly different emotions then we're not always on the same page. That's when either other partners, if people are non-monogamous, or close friends or family members or other people in one's life can be really helpful.

And I know, for example, I've had lots of chronic health conditions in my life, and I've spent long times totally bed bound and disabled, and that's had a huge impact on my relationships. And that's going to bring up stuff in my partners as well. But I may not be the right person to process their grief around my change in that moment.

And I've been on the other side of that as well, where my partner has been going through something, which of course impacts me in our relationship, but they're already going through so much that maybe they're not the right person for me to process within that moment. And that's when it's a great time to reach out to close friends, family, other partners, therapists, whoever it is that we need to, to process our emotions so that we can create space to hold the emotions and the grief of our partner.

And same, if we're really excited about something and our partner is grieving, then I think that's a similar situation where, it's not that we can't share our excitement with our partner, because of course that's really important, but this is why it's important that we don't have just one person which is our whole world and our whole universe, and why community is so important. And that's true, again, of monogamous and non-monogamous relationships.

Libby Sinback - [00:22:53]

I am so glad that you said that, because I've definitely had that experience before of, yes I understand you need me to hold the pain that you're in because of something that I'm doing that you don't want me to stop doing and that you think is good for me and good for us, maybe there are times when you need to talk about that with someone else. 100% absolutely.

I do think it's both but I think you're so right about we really do need our village. We all need our village, whatever that looks like to us. We need people who we can hold other parts of ourselves, because our partner may not be able to in that moment. And I think that's so true. I'm thinking about especially a gender transition. This is really common for relationships. And a lot of relationships don't survive a gender transition.

And I think it's because, one of the reasons is when you partner with somebody, you partner with them because of what you see and what you were drawn to. And then basically all of that is changing to something else. And that person really needs to be able to be that new version of themselves or be that true version of themselves. And they are really opening up into who they need to be and also fighting against stigma and fighting against prejudice and fighting against so many people who wouldn't accept them.

And so it would probably be extremely impossible, I know it was in my situation with my partner when they were transitioning. I couldn't talk to them about how I kind of miss us being two women together. That was kind of nice. That's not for them to hold at all. They need to be able to grow in the direction they need to grow and all they need from me is support. But I do need to be able to feel my grief. I just have to take that somewhere else. 1000% I think that's huge. And I think that putting pressure on yourself to not feel it at all, that's also not helpful. So I think it's so good that you brought that up about we need this whole community to support us.

Jaia Bristow

Absolutely. And I'm really glad as well that you talked about gender transition as an example of change, because again, I think that's something that doesn't get talked about so much. And again, the two sides, the person can have grief and mourning at their partner changing, and also that it's harder for the partner going through that right now.

And I think in the examples you were talking about as well, you were talking about where we have power, what we can and can't control. But there's also looking at power dynamics in relationships as well when one person is going through so much on a personal and societal and cultural level, and having everyone around them impacted by their change, but it also impacts them more strongly than anyone else, then of course it brings up stuff for everyone.

I think those two pieces are really important. It's okay to have your feelings. It's okay to feel grief about any kind of change and to be sensitive about the way that we process that and who we process that with and who we put it on and who holds that space for us. So thank you for bringing that in.

What was number five? You still had another one.

Libby Sinback

Oh, number five. So number five is what makes all of this possible to move through, I think, is we need gas in our engine. And in my view, the gas in your engine to get through change is pleasure and joy.

And it can be really easy when we're coping with change, and especially for some of us who I think maybe we are a little more perfectionistic and we're like, well, I'm going to nail this change. We're going to get it. I'm going to do all my work. I'm going to take all the classes, I'm going to read all the articles, and I'm going to figure it all out. And when I'm having a hard time, I'm going to really just dive deep into myself. And it's a lot of work, and it can be very tiring.

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And I know this as a parent, being a parent is a lot of work and figuring out how to take care of your kiddo is a lot of work. And it can sometimes be hard to remember. We're in this because we're human beings designed for pleasure, for connection, for play, for adventure. And to forget to put that gas in our tank when it's hard is going to make it... We're going to be running on empty.

And so I think it's just so important in those moments to cultivate even little slivers of joy here and there, little slivers of pleasure here and there, and to find it wherever you can. And then find it and call it out. This is a beautiful moment. I'm really celebrating with you right now. This just feels really good.

And I think for me, it's important to take breaks, too, to just say to myself, okay, today I'm not going to work at this. I'm just going to allow myself to be and I'm going to create a little bubble for myself. And maybe I'll take myself out to a nice meal or I'll make a cozy corner for myself in my room or I'll take a really long bath or something. And this sounds like self care, but I really want to emphasize that pleasure is the measure, not doing a good job. It's just about feeling good. And if you're able to find ways to feel good together, that's wonderful. If you're able to find ways to feel good apart, sometimes that's what you need. You need to restore yourself in order to come back into the difficult things that you might be needing to work through or grow into.

And I realize I have one more, but this is the last one. Because I think that sometimes change can be traumatic. There are times when it can be traumatic. There are times when it's not traumatic. I think one of the things that really makes the difference, well all of these things I think that we've talked about so far make the difference of change not being traumatic, but I think one of the big things that can make change not traumatic is to find meaning in it.

I'm not saying everything happens for a reason, because I don't believe that and I think that's spiritually bypassing to say to people. And again, you and I are on the same page, like toxic positivity, let's not do that. But at the same time, for me at least, and I think this is true for almost all of my clients that I work with, what helps you get through something that feels hard is to understand what about your values are you expressing through staying in this?

When I think about a partner going through a gender transition for example, that's just one example, it's in my value system to support people for who they are exactly as they are and love them for that. And that's so deeply rooted in who I am as a person. But I can't imagine not sticking by somebody when they're going through that, and working with them and celebrating with them and cheering them on and wanting them to be the best version of themselves and finding out who that is and then digging deep into myself to love that. In the times when we have a little tiff over something because they were just very emotional and having a hard time with some of their own feelings around it, I would be able to dip into my values and say to myself, this is worth it to me. This is a part of who I am and who we are.

And I think that's another thing, I actually give my couples an exercise to do a lot of times, which is not just to figure out what your individual values are, but to figure out what your relational values are. What do you share with each other? What are you both committed to with each other? Which is why you're sticking through something that's hard, disruptive, painful, or just requiring you to grow.

And I think if you don't have that values piece, if you're not able to tie some meaning to it for yourself, sometimes it can feel like you're just unnecessarily doing all this hard work and giving yourself all this pain, but it's really important to ask yourself what for. And I think that if you can't find something there that might be a sign that it might not be worth it... And that's the other thing that I guess that we should talk about perhaps.

Jaia Bristow

Let's come back to that piece in a second because let's rewind a little bit because I think first of all, that emphasis on joy and pleasure, that's so beautiful. And I think when we go through change we can get so caught up in the change. So caught up in the grief, so caught up in focusing ahead, so

caught up in, sometimes in logistics as well. Depending what the change is, often it comes with a lot of logistics, that we sometimes forget how important it is to focus on finding moments of joy and pleasure or just noticing right now I feel really good. I feel really happy. And just honing in on that and enjoying that and allowing that. So I really want to re-emphasize that point as well.

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And then when you were talking about finding meaning and values in relationships, another piece I wanted to add to that is, for me, I noticed how I always learn a lot from every single relationship I've had, whether good or bad or however it wants to be summarized, I always learn a lot. And so as well as finding meaning in what are my values and how am I living out these values? I think there is a piece around what am I learning? What am I getting out of this? How is this nourishing me? And as you say, if it's not my value, then if it's not nourishing, then maybe let's talk about when it's worth cultivating and sticking with it and the change, and when it's also okay to have a different kind of change and either end the relationship or transition into a different form of relationship. So let's talk a bit about that.

Libby Sinback

I think the first thing I want to say is that I always want that to be an option. And whenever it's not an option I always get a little worried because if you don't feel like you can opt out, if you don't feel like you can step away from something, then you're not going to have an easy time meeting whatever challenges before you with a feeling of empowerment, and then you can slip into that victim state.

So when I think about how do you know is this a change I can cope with? Is this worth sticking through the relationship to move to the other side of it, or is it time to move on or make, like you said, a more substantial change to the relationship, maybe transition it to something else? I ask myself the question... There's two questions that I ask. The first one is, am I still getting enough from this relationship to grieve what I'm losing?

And it sounds really simple, but it's actually a tough question to ask. But I think it's so important to really take a look because a lot of us don't think about being able to really let go of what we're losing, because at the end of the day you're going to have to do that. That's part of what grief gives you, is it gives you an ability to also let go. You feel the grief, but then you have to let go. If you can't let go because it's too important to you, maybe it is a deal breaker, you need that in order to stay in the relationship. And it's okay to say this is a need for me. This is a deal breaker. And I don't think I can be happy if I have to let this go.

And I see that with my polyamorous, monogamous, my poly mono couples sometimes. One person's polyamorous, and that is who they are and that's who they need to be, and they're with a mono person because they didn't know that when they first got together. And the mono person is just like, look, I love you, but I'm monogamous, and that's what I wanted. That's what I wanted in my relationship. That's what I need. And I don't feel like I can stay with you and give up monogamy for you.

And that's so valid. There's nothing wrong with saying that this is a need that I have. It's heartbreaking, I know, to say, well, then we have an incompatibility and we can't stay in a relationship. But sometimes that's what needs to happen in order for both people to fully be the truest version of themselves.

Jaia Bristow

And I think there's something in what you're saying around, we were talking about values before, about not compromising, not just one's values but oneself, to be in a relationship. When we were talking earlier about, for example, moving across country or doing things where it's for the other person, that's great to some degree, and it's one thing to move across country, but to give up your identity, to give up your values, to give up who you are. And like you say, sometimes we don't realize that sometimes it's a discovery we have when we're already committed to a relationship. And then it

can be really hard to recognize a crucial incompatibility. Or sometimes it is entering a relationship, we know it but we think it will change.

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The number of couples I know where one's monogamous and one's not, and they think, oh, but the other person will eventually change their mind. And it's like, no. And then there's also, I recently coined the term flexiamorous for those who can adapt between monogamous and non-monogamous depending on who they're dating. I know lots of people who are inherently non-monogamous or polyamorous, lots of people who are inherently monogamous and quite a few people who are, what I call flexiamorous, where they can adapt. And that's wonderful, but not everyone is like that.

And I think people forget that monogamy isn't necessarily a choice or a lifestyle choice. It can often be for people really a big part of who they are. And, like you say, it's a need, it's a desire and a need, but it's also like an identity for many people.

Libby Sinback

So the second question that I always ask when trying to evaluate whether this is a relationship that's sustainable or whether it needs to transition or de escalate or whatever, is just capacity. And this is so important because sometimes we think, well, I'm committed and it's in my values, and I want to be able to do it but sometimes there's just too much going on. There's too many things piled on your plate, and you just don't have the ability to add the heaps of stress and layers and layers and layers that are going to require you to meet this change head on.

And this is a little spicy I think for me to say this, but I do think there are times when you can say, hey, that's actually too much work for me. It's not that I don't love you. It's not that I don't celebrate the choices that you're making. It's not that I don't want to make this work. It's just that I actually can't. I actually don't have the mental space or the physical stamina or the nervous system regulation skills yet to be able to move through this, and forcing myself to, beating myself, could again, it could cause me great self harm to push myself too hard.

And the only person who can know that is you. You're the only one that can know what your capacity is and what it isn't. And of course, I think it's great to push yourself. I think it's great to bring yourself outside your comfort zone just a little bit. But if you're so far out that you feel out of control, overwhelmed all the time, falling apart, not able to do your job or care for your children or whatever it is, if it's really impacting your basic functioning, it might be too much. And that's okay. We all have limits as people. We only have so much energy. We only have so much time. We only have so much work in us. And our value is not rooted in how much we're able to do, sometimes we need to honor our value by doing less.

Jaia Bristow

Absolutely. And people talk about burnout in careers or in work life, but you can also, it's not even having burnout specifically in relationship, but we're not suddenly a different person when we're in a relationship that we totally recharge. We're holistic people who are impacted by work, by our friendships, by our family members, by our romantic relationships. And so if we've got a lot going on in other areas, that's also going to impact our relationships.

But I think in terms of capacity, we need to factor in everything. And again, sometimes it's really important that we do prioritize ourselves and that we say, hey, this is too much for me right now. I need a timeout. I need some time for myself. I need time to recharge. If you're here to hold space for me, then wonderful. But if you need something from me, I can't give you that right now. And that's really okay to have those moments.

Libby Sinback - [00:40:48]

And I love that you say that sometimes it's not needing to transition. Sometimes it's just needing to take a break and back off. And that can be hugely helpful, too, in moving through change is not backing off from the change because the change is going to keep happening, but just giving yourself a chance to not work so hard at it sometimes so that you can recharge.

And at the end of the day, these relationships that we get into with other humans, they're meant to sustain us and nourish us. They're meant to be safe places for us. And I do think there's a certain point where if a relationship is so much change, so much chaos, so much messiness, and it's just not what we can cope with, it's okay to say, you know what? The world is chaotic enough. I need to be able to have a place where I feel safe and settled. And if I don't feel like we can get there because there's so much to overcome to get there, then this may not be going to work.

Jaia Bristow

I'm aware of time, but there's still so much I want to talk to you about. So I also just want to recap some of what we've spoken about. And then before we end, we've talked about maybe when is a good time to end a relationship but I also want to talk about how to end a relationship because that's a change that a lot of people might need support in.

But before we do that, let's just quickly recap because there's been so many gems in this conversation, and I don't want to lose them. So obviously, we talked about the many different forms change can take in relationship, whether that's chosen changes, like milestones, like marriage, kids, moving in together, and also changes that we don't choose, like changes in health, mental or physical, changes in jobs, moving across countries, gender changes and transitions, all these kinds of things.

Then we talked about ways that we can create resiliency through those changes. So you talked about not identifying as a victim. First was recognizing that we're going through a change, and that's really important. And I remember the comparison with improv. So recognizing and acknowledging that we're going through a change and that that's okay. Life is full of changes. So recognizing we're going through a change, not identifying as a victim and blaming the other person or building resentment because we all have choices.

And then creating space for grief. I think that was another really good one. Focusing on pleasure and joy. And what else did you say? I'm trying to remember them. They were so great.

Libby Sinback

Meaning and value.

Jaia Bristow

Yes, exactly. So meaning and value.

And then we were talking about when all of that is not possible, then sometimes it's time to end the relationship and the times where we recognize that, when you said whether it's too messy and doesn't feel safe anymore or whether our needs aren't being met in a relationship due to change, and that that's okay as well, and all of that.

So now let's talk about how to create those changes and those relationship endings.

Libby Sinback

Well, so I have a whole workshop on this, honestly. I have a two hour workshop that I teach on peacefully transitioning relationships. Because again, I'm polyamorous and I exist in a polyamorous community, and so even when a relationship that I'm in ends, oftentimes I'm going to still be seeing that person around, they might even be dating one of my friends or they might even be dating one of

my partners, who knows. So it's really important that as best we can, we end those relationships peacefully.

[00:44:51]

And I mean, honestly, these same steps that we talked about I think are important to go through even when you're transitioning a relationship to a not relationship, when you're exiting a relationship or fundamentally changing. And it's just focusing on what you can control and accept what you can't. Do your best to communicate clearly where your boundaries are and where the changes are going to be happening on your end, because when you're deciding to opt out, then that's ultimately a unilateral decision. You don't actually have to get someone else's agreement with that. You do have to get agreement to stay together, but you don't have to get agreement to separate.

And so it's really important to be clear within yourself, hey, this is a decision that I'm making. I don't have to justify it. I don't have to get the person to agree with me. I can give them an explanation if I want to. And I recommend when you're giving an explanation to stick with things that aren't starting a fight, but instead just sticking with what you know is true for you and what your experience is and what you need, because those aren't things anybody can argue with.

And then I really recommend having a full on process of grieving together, if you can. And if you can get on the same page about a story that you'll tell to the people that you share acquaintances with so that you're on the same page. Because the aftermath of a breakup is usually the worst part, where people in your community feel like they have to take sides, where you encounter each other in the wild and you're not sure how to respond to each other, where you hear about something or you see something on social media that they're doing, and it really just rocks you and makes you heartbroken all over again. And so having that stuff worked out and navigated with your partner that you're breaking up with as part of the process to care for each other can be a really valuable piece in the process.

And then, like I said, grieving together, really appreciating what was great about this relationship. To your point, what did I learn? What do I value? And what is going to stick with me for the rest of my life because of having known you and being in this partnership together? And then setting some clear expectations about what happens next.

I recommend having a time where you have a lot of space from each other. That's not always possible because some people have entanglements, like they have kids together and so they can't just go no contact for a period of time. They have to continue to communicate about the kids, about childcare, etc. Or they have a shared asset that they have to communicate about or what have you. But as best you can, try to give a lot of room for that grieving, because at this point, you really aren't going to be asking each other to hold space for the grief and for the rough feelings, but they do need to be allowed to be there.

And so I would say insulate yourself, protect yourself, block on social media, all that stuff I think is good to do, just temporarily. And then if you ultimately want to try for a friendship later, you can. But I don't recommend forcing something. I recommend allowing the transition to take its shape and grow into what it's going to grow into. Because again, here you are in another change. You're changing from being broken up to being friends. That's another change. Go through all those steps again. It really is very translatable across all of these different kinds of change.

Jaia Bristow

I love that. And I love that you've provided a toolkit for people to go through any kind of change and transition, including within the relationship, including ending the relationship. And then again, if people go into a new type of relationship with each other, like a friendship or something.

And I was just reflecting as well when you were talking about the learning piece, yes, learning all the positives that we've got out of the relationship, but also recognizing what we've learnt what we don't

want in a future relationship. If the relationship has ended, there's probably a reason and that's also part of the learning process, and I think that's really important as well.

[00:48:58]

Libby, thank you so much for your time today. How can people find out more about you and your work, and find this two hour workshop on how to peacefully end a relationship?

Libby Sinback

You can find me on my website libbysinback.com. You can also find me on any podcasting network that exists. You can find me at *Making Polyamory Work*, that's the name of my podcast and I've been doing episodes since 2019, so if you're just finding me now, there's a lot to catch up on. So I recommend starting at the beginning. But I also have a website for my podcast, makingpolyamorywork.com. And I have some of my top episodes, if you're interested in finding out about those.

And then on my website I have my courses. So I am running a prerecorded *Breakup Better* course that I think is really, there's not a lot out there like it. And so I'm really proud of that course.

I'm also going to be running a 16 week relationship skills course. And it's a small group. There's a lot of small group practice together. And there's group coaching with me and it's a really intensive but wonderful experience. And like I said, it's a small group, it's capped at 20 people. And so if you're interested in that, you can also find that on my website.

And then I'm also just doing this little mini workshop next week, but I think that probably this will be aired after it has already gone live, but the recording will be available too. It's just how to make your communication more efficient and effective so that you can have more pleasure and joy when you're going through a difficult time instead of talking about it non stop.

Jaia Bristow

Thank you so much, Libby. Take care and thanks again.

Libby Sinback

Well, thank you again for having me Jaia.