

In Therapy Day 3 - What does your inner child feel?

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[00:00:56] Katie

Just checking in. I had my second session with Alex yesterday. I was just sitting here thinking that I just feel empty. I feel like I've spent 50 years trying to build a life and try to become a better person and to create happiness and joy, and it feels like it's all just being snatched away from me.

So I wrote the letter. I listened to the first module of the RESET program and I wrote the letter why I want to do it. And it said I'm grieving. I recognize that my emotional reactions have been really damaging and I don't like the person I've become, but I'm scared to let go of that person because that's the person I've invested my whole life in. I don't really know where to go from here.

I want to do the program because it's important that I recognize that those emotional reactions are serving me no purpose. And I have to change if I want to be happy, because I sat here tonight thinking it's almost just like I want to start again.

But I wrote that I know I have to change. I'm living very defensively. I've got a whole load of core beliefs. I've been thinking about these get into jail free cards that Alex was talking about, and I'm not feeling very positive and I'm determined to be real because that's genuinely how I'm feeling. There must be a better way. There must be. I just don't know what it is.

Hi there. Just checking in. It's nearly the end of the second week since I last saw Alex, and I'm feeling okay. I've been doing the homework, not as much as I should have been, I have to admit. And I've been doing the meditation and it makes me feel amazing. I love that 10/15 minutes of just doing nothing. And I don't know why I'm reluctant to do it more often. There's a certain resistance within me, and I have been aware that I need to take more care of myself. And I've been trying to eat healthy soups and I've been making myself go on a walk every day, and I've been trying to do these meditations.

So, yeah, there's definitely some progress, definitely some progress. And yet there's that little voice in my head, already now I can hear it saying, but it won't last. This peace or this serenity that you feel won't last. You'll be miserable soon again, before long.

Alex Howard

So, Katie, welcome back.

[00:04:24] Katie

Thank you.

Alex Howard

How have you been doing since last time?

Katie

I've done the three modules, but I haven't completed module three, I've just watched the video. Because I was working up until Friday just gone so fitting it in was a bit tricky, but all the children have come home this week, and so I've been pulled in four different directions. "Can you pick me up from here?".

Alex Howard

Talk about a life of contrast right now. Husband and children, busy life, everyone goes, you're alone, and then four children descend.

Katie

Yeah, well, gradually they came back and there's constant, "I'm hungry". "Can you take me here?"

Alex Howard

Give me some hope that gets easier as they get older.

Katie

No, it gets worse. If you've got boys, it gets way worse. And I bought a piano, like a keyboard for them for Christmas. And it's just been constant.

Alex Howard

My 7 year old just started learning the piano a few months ago. I'm so there with you.

Katie

So it has gone from being quite quiet to just very busy but I thrive with the busyness. So although I'm struggling to adjust a little bit, I'm not working, so I finished work on Friday, so I have been for a walk every day and then I've probably done three, I've meditated three times out of seven, though.

Alex Howard

Yeah, but that's three times out of seven you wouldn't have done previously.

Katie

Yeah. And each time I've done it, I thought, oh my God, this is amazing. And actually, I was thinking on the way over here, I was thinking, I can't tell Alex I feel too good because then they'll think I don't need any more therapy and then I'll just...

[00:06:08] Alex Howard

Funnily enough I've been around the block enough times to realize these things are not quite that simple. If you came in and said, "it's all great and wonderful", I'd be like, "Katie, I sort of feel like you're bullshitting me".

Katie

This has been a pattern where I've felt better, and I thought, I'm fine again, and then I just go off.

Alex Howard

But that's also part of the sabotage.

Katie

Yeah.

Alex Howard

So just to break that down a little bit more, if we're only motivated by having less pain, when the pain is really intense we're really motivated. But as soon as the pain reduces a little bit, the motivation is now gone. So we have to have a motivation which is more than just not wanting the pain to be terrible. Because that's where you have these sort of things get a bit better, and then you stop doing all the things that help, then they get worse again, then you start...

But we want to break out of that cycle to actually go from being reactive in your life, to actually designing your life to be the way that you ultimately want it to be. And that's part of the gift of the chapter you're at, that suddenly your life is somewhat of a blank canvas in a way that it hasn't been for the last 20 something years because you've got a different set of priorities at this point.

One thing I also wanted to explore a bit more was, we talked at the end of last time about these get into jail free cards, these ways of getting yourself stuck and not moving forward by the way you're thinking. And I'd love to hear in a minute about what you discovered, but I also wanted to point something out, which is that one of the get into jail free cards was, "I don't believe things can change. I don't believe that anything's going to work. I think I'm always going to be this way".

And I just wanted to speak to that because you've had three experiences so far of doing the meditation. And in no way do I think doing a few meditations is going to transform everything that's happening in your life. Of course, it's a much more complex tapestry of different pieces that we need to approach in different ways. But if you can notice a significant shift in how you feel by sitting and doing a meditation for 15 minutes or something, what I hope is that that's a piece of evidence that shows that there are things that can have an impact on how you feel.

And if we think about it, like the way I talk about it in module one of the RESET program, that the belief is like the top of the table and the evidence is the legs of the table. You've got three pieces of evidence. You've got three legs for this new belief that maybe it is possible for things to change. And I was just curious if that's that you recognize?

[00:08:47] Katie

I know that one can change. I know that people can change, it's just for me it's this, and I suppose this is what happened this week, is that I know the tools are there but it's why I have this resistance to doing it for me. I can't waste that time on me because there's too much to do. And when you say it, "If you see it, you don't have to be it.", I've seen that for the first time almost. I know that it's there for me. I know that I can do it. I know that there are tools there but why is it so hard for me to do it? Why do I have to drag myself up the stairs and do it? And then when I do it, it feels so amazing.

Alex Howard

Yeah. Well, I think firstly, it's really honest of you and great that you see that that's part of what's happening. And you've got some evidence that it is possibly possible, let's say, for things to change, and lots of people struggle with motivation. A lot of people struggle with self sabotage. And I think at the core of this, it goes back to what we talked about in our first session, which is it's your relationship with yourself. It's the loving yourself enough, valuing yourself enough to actually invest that time and energy in doing that.

We'll come back to that in a minute. But I think also related to that is these get into jail free cards, so tell me what you discovered.

Katie

One of the biggest ones was, "I don't deserve nice things", "I don't deserve to devote time to myself". That was a really big one for me. "I'm not on the same wavelength as the rest of the world". "I'm not a good mother". That's a really huge one for me.

And I said in the vlog, it's not so much a belief, it's a fear. It's a huge fear that drives my whole life. "I'm not a good enough mother". "I'm not a good enough mother". This is what I can feel, the emotion coming up now because all I want, all I ever wanted was for my kids to feel safe and secure and loved. I die for them. I know that.

And I've just noticed as well I think this week, just with me just putting a few boundaries down, even just like with the boys, "What's for lunch?". "Soup". "I don't want soup. I hate soup". "Well, that's all there is so if you don't want it, then go hungry. You have to wait for dinner". In the past, I'd be like, "What else would you like me to make you?". "I've got this. I've got that". And today I just said, and yesterday, "There's soup".

Alex Howard

You know what you could also do is have a conversation and say, "There's been a few complaints about the service at the hotel so what I'd like to recommend is that why don't we do shifts?". And you can take it in turns. Cook a lunch each. "We'll do a 5 day roster, and you can cook whatever you want".

Katie

Well, then we'd have super noodles every day.

Alex Howard

Yeah well there we are.

[00:12:12] Katie

Again, I'm very tentatively positive, because I have noticed myself just thinking, no, actually. Because the narrative for at least a couple of years has been about me in the family, I'm mad. I'm crazy. I'm the troublemaker.

Alex Howard

You're scapegoated, like you are in your family of origin.

Katie

Totally.

And yesterday my youngest...I was cooking, I was heating up the soup actually and he just came up and he put his arms around me. And I mean, that is just unheard of. And I was like, "what do you want?". And we just had a big hug and he was like, "You alright, mom?". Things are just shifting because he has been, I have fought his corner, I've fought battles for him, and I think I've shared this as well in one of my vlogs, I've fought battles that maybe weren't battles to be fought on behalf of my kids, because I can't allow them...

Alex Howard

You want them to know that you would fight for them.

Katie

I would do anything for them. But actually, I recognize again this week that some of those battles that I fought are on behalf of this little girl inside who's so frightened and desperate for support and love.

Alex Howard

How does it feel to recognize that? What do you feel?

Katie

I just feel real sadness.

Alex Howard

Whereabouts in your body do you feel the contact with that?

Katie

Just here.

Alex Howard

How does it feel to put your hands on that?

See that little girl that you feel in there, which feels, well how does she feel? If you were to describe the feelings that she has right now, what would they be?

[00:14:29] Katie

Just like I always say, just so unheard and so misunderstood. So full of love to give.

Alex Howard

But wanting to receive.

How does it feel for the little girl when you just right now acknowledge her? When we give her some space and she's invited into this room. What does that feel like?

Katie

I'm a troublemaker. I'm a difficult person. I'm causing trouble.

Alex Howard

Is that how she feels or is that what you tell yourself?

Katie

That's what she feels.

Alex Howard

So she feels that when she shows herself and when she expresses herself that she's being a troublemaker and she's causing trouble.

Katie

Yeah.

Alex Howard

Do you think that's true? I know that's how she maybe feels but do you think that's true?

Katie

No.

Alex Howard

Okay. So tell her. Just feel, you can do it with your eyes open or closed, whatever feels comfortable, just feel that place in you where she's longing and she's wanting. And she feels like she's being a troublemaker.

Katie

I can't do this. It's too painful.

[00:15:49] Alex Howard

So just feel your feet. Feel the sofa. You don't have to go anywhere that doesn't feel okay. Just give yourself some space just to be where you are.

Katie

Okay.

Alex Howard

So what comes up when you just give yourself some space?

Katie

I just can't do it.

Alex Howard

Okay. What do you feel would happen if you did?

Katie

I just get told again to stop causing trouble. Stop.

Alex Howard

It sounds to me, Katie, that what's happening...

Katie

You've got nothing to be concerned about. You've got nothing to be unhappy about. You've got nothing to be anxious about.

Alex Howard

So whose voice is that?

Katie

My mom.

Alex Howard

Take a few breaths and I want to describe to you what I think is happening. So you've got this little girl in you and she's longing and she's wanting. She's wanting to be seen, she wants to be heard, she wants to be loved. And then you've got this inner critic voice, which is your mom, which is attacking her, judging her, criticizing her. And there's a growing voice, which is you, which is actually able to see this in a way you've not seen it before. That's the piece that's different. This dynamic has been going on for years. The dynamic's not new. What's new is the way that you're seeing it.

[00:17:29]

How does it feel to see it, to actually recognize it? Because this dynamic has governed much of your life. What's happened is you've gone from being in the very needy place, which was a lot of the anxiety, to then trying to appease the critic, to then going through periods of really pushing yourself and driving yourself and trying to be the best in your career to try and satisfy the critic voice.

So many of the things in your life which have caused you to suffer have been trying to deal with this dynamic. This dynamic can change. This dynamic is not who you are in your core. This is something that you learn. This is a trauma from your childhood that's become a part of who you are because it's become a habit. But it can also change.

The first step to it changing is that you penetrated with your awareness with such clarity. That you just go, "Fuck it. I don't want to do this anymore". How does it feel to see it in that way?

Katie

I'm just conscious of my mind just saying, just thinking about the kids. And when you just said talk, the pain is so excruciating and it's scary because if I start I just feel like I just wail.

Alex Howard

So the fear is that the pain will destroy you or you will disintegrate. And what I'm here to tell you is, one step at a time. It doesn't all have to happen today. This is something that's been set up for decades, a certain way. You've survived decades. You can survive longer. It doesn't all have to change right now.

Katie

But that's what I've done, I've survived. I haven't lived. I've just survived. And I feel that very strongly. I've just survived.

And it's been almost like just keeping my head above water, keeping my head above water constantly. And sometimes I can, I don't know, sometimes I just feel like it's a bit easier. Sometimes I just sink and I have to just really struggle to get just to there.

Alex Howard

But you see, your tendency has been to focus on your moments of weakness or the times that you feel you've not been strong. What I'm seeing is how much strength it's taken to survive with this dynamic for so many years.

Katie

Yeah.

Alex Howard

And seeing it doesn't suddenly miraculously change it, but there are certain things that once you've seen them, you can't unsee them. It's like when you see this in the way that you're seeing it and the way you're making sense of it right now, that alone has a transformational effect on your life.

[00:20:43] Katie

I mean, I have been aware of this little girl inside fighting. I've got a book in my head that I want to write about this double personality that I've left. It's almost like this little girl inside has been trapped and I've developed this character that... Just everything I've done is to protect that little girl.

I think that's where my huge sense of injustice comes from. When I fight it's not for me, it's for the world. I think that's where my huge sensitivity to people who were less fortunate than myself comes. I've been criticized for all my life by my family, where my political... I get very heated politically.

Alex Howard

Anytime that you think someone's been treated unfairly you become the champion.

Katie

And I get into trouble for it.

Alex Howard

Well, probably because you... Well, with respect, you probably take on fights that are not yours to take on.

Katie

I do. I have lots of times and I will continue to do so. I still now sit here and say I would continue to do that.

Alex Howard

The problem is that has a price for you. And ultimately, what you're doing is you're trying to resolve an inner dynamic with your behavior on the outside. And you can't heal and you can't resolve a wound like this with what you do on the outside. In fact, the more you do that, in some ways the more painful it becomes because you're putting all of this effort and energy into trying to change it and you're not succeeding.

Katie

Yeah. It's true.

Alex Howard

What she needs from you is to be important enough that you commit to her. And yes, part of that is the metabolizing and the digesting of the pain, but that doesn't have to happen today. And that can happen over time. It doesn't have to be one big, right I've got to deal with this pain. It's a process and it's a journey. But the stepping stone towards that is your practice. It's your committing to your meditations, it's your keeping going with your daily walks, it's your putting the boundaries in place with the kids and holding those boundaries. Each of those acts is an act of self love. It's an act of care of her.

[00:23:26] Katie

And it just struck me as you spoke there, that I'm neglecting that inner child as much as everybody else has.

Alex Howard

Well, here's the thing. The way that we relate to ourselves emotionally is normally a mirror of how we were related to emotionally. So your upbringing was neglectful of the emotional needs of you. You then learnt that as a normal. So you have been neglectful of the emotional needs of you.

Often one of the mistakes of a lot of therapeutic work is we think that we heal the past by talking about the past. There's a place of talking about the past, and there's a place of metabolizing and processing the emotions of the past. But the real trauma of the past is not the past. The real trauma of the past is how we reenact the past in the present. So the way that you are relating to yourself emotionally now, yes, the origin is in the past but the suffering is now because you're recreating it moment to moment, day to day.

Katie

And I haven't even realized it.

Alex Howard

When you change you, those around you have to find a way to change within that. And that is the most powerful way of influencing them.

Katie

Yeah.

Alex Howard

So coming back to your practices and how you're supporting you, my question for you is, what do you think is realistic in terms of a commitment to yourself in terms of time, each day or whatever it may be, of putting in place some pieces that can support you?

Katie

I've thought about it and I'd like to do an hour's walk a day and then this 20 minutes/half an hour meditation.

Alex Howard

Does that feel doable most days?

Katie

Well, at the moment with not working, it does.

[00:25:37] Alex Howard

And how long are you off work?

Katie

Until the 4th January.

So that's why I've committed while I'm off. But actually, because I'm working from home, it's doable. It is doable. And it's just about doing it. That's the thing for me.

Alex Howard

So doing a daily walk, doing a daily meditation practice, and I would like you to set the goal of 5 times a week. So you aim for 7 days but you know you've got a couple of days break because there's going to be days where, for whatever reason.

Alex Howard

Continue doing the exercises in module three as well. The thought diary and the rating of your nervous system. I'd like you to add in an additional piece in there, which is in addition to rating your nervous system, I'd like to rate your mood as well. That will also then help us if we've got some tracking of that. As we come into more of the practical tools and strategies that will also help us get a sense of how things are progressing and how things are unfolding.

The other thing that I think will inevitably happen, and I think would also be helpful, is this, and we're jumping ahead a little bit with things I want to look at, but this inner critic piece is also a big part of it. In a sense, you're stuck in the middle of an abusive relationship between that and the little girl in you. And historically, as we talked about, you've either tried to ignore her needs by being busy and trying to keep them happy, or self medicating her needs using alcohol or food or whatever it may be, that we want to really take care of her needs. And the first step to that is listening. Because, as you say, she wants to be seen, she wants to be heard. Just by seeing and hearing how she feels, that alone is very powerful and transformational.

Katie

Yeah.

Alex Howard

Any other questions for today?

Katie

No.

Alex Howard

Brilliant. Okay. Thanks, Katie.

[00:27:39] Katie

Thank you.