

In Therapy Day 4 - Self-care builds self-esteem

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[00:01:02] Katie

Hi, just checking in again. It's been a few days since I last saw Alex and I've been continuing with the REST program. I've been meditating and I did the self love meditation after my last session with Alex because I had a bit of a light bulb moment during the session.

I was talking about the vulnerable inner child within me. I've been aware for quite a while that I have to do some work on nurturing that inner child who I've spent my whole life protecting. Actually, I realize I've been kept imprisoned and not allowed to be free or to have a voice because of the fear. I think as a child, I wasn't allowed to be who I am or who I was emotionally. My needs were not met and for fear of being reprimanded for being me, I shut that little girl down and I became somebody who I thought society would accept more but actually, it's not the case. And I am as guilty as they are for abandoning and neglecting that little girl because I haven't allowed the little girl to come out and be who she is.

I'm definitely feeling like this work is working. I'm making more connection with that inner child, that terrified, anxious, desperate little girl and accessing those feelings is really frightening for me, but I am feeling like I'm very tentatively and very carefully being able to do that. And then I've got all my four kids home at the moment, and while I love it, and I really do love it, it's exhausting. I've got my ex-partner coming to stay over the Christmas period and that's on my mind.

But all in all, I feel stronger. I do feel stronger. So yeah, that's me.

Alex Howard

Really I just want to validate how you feel. I think in a sense, there is a level of betrayal that goes on in a situation like this, because either your ex-husband is not emotionally developed enough to understand that talking to your mother, who's supposed to be your support through a separation, talking to her behind your back and aligning with her is just emotionally really unkind. He's either unable to see that or he can see it and therefore he's gaslighting you in your experience, that he's making you question your own feelings and your own reality.

The things that we started to talk about, particularly the scaffolding around the practices to support yourself, I think becomes really important. We're just at the beginning of our journey together and there's much more that you'll be learning, which will, A, help deal with situations like this, but also there's certainly work we need to do about putting boundaries in place and resetting some of these relationships so people aren't treating you in this way either.

[00:04:24]

You are on a journey and this journey ultimately is going to lead to a very different life for you, but also a very different way of being related to on the other side.

Katie

Hi there, I'm struggling a little bit. As you know, I agreed to my estranged partner/husband coming for the Christmas period because the kids were really keen for that to happen and he wrote to me and asked me if I would agree to spend Christmas as a family. And I wrote back and said I didn't really want to do that. In the end, I agreed.

But I put in my plans to stay strong and I went for a walk every day, we spent Christmas together and it all went fine. There was a flash point on the first night when I found out that he'd been communicating with my mother about me. Prior to him coming I asked for specific dates as to when he would come and when he would leave, and he was a bit hazy on the dates that he would leave.

And so I asked and he said the 27th or the 28th. And then yesterday I asked him when he was leaving, either yesterday or today, and he said he wasn't sure and he thought he might leave it until the end of the week and I said I wasn't happy about that because I think that we managed to get through for 5 days, 5 or 6 days without any particular upset, nothing particularly major, and I would like us to stick to the plans that we made.

Anyway, it resulted in all the kids coming and begging me, "Please let him stay for another two days". I haven't found it easy with him here. I agreed to do it for the kids. Anyway, there's just been the most almighty attack on me downstairs by the girls. And I tried to stand my ground but the thought of it kills me. And then he has gone now. My daughter's taken him home and it upsets me so much because I tried so hard to be boundaried. I tried so hard to make it a nice few days for everyone. I worked my socks off doing Christmas. I cooked all the meals, I cooked Christmas lunch, I did all the presents as usual. I put my feelings aside so I could do that for the kids and this is how it's ended. I feel a bit broken today.

Alex Howard

Hello.

Katie

How are you?

Alex Howard

I'm good. Thank you. How are you doing?

Katie

Overall, I've been working really hard to try and keep an equilibrium and then we had that blip just before Christmas which kind of sent me skyrocketing but I managed to come back to some kind of balance quite quickly using everything that I've been doing with the RESET program. Straight after seeing you I did the meditation really religiously and I was really good at that. And then Christmas kind of, I went off piece a bit.

[00:08:18] Alex Howard

How was that period when you were doing it?

Katie

Amazing, I love it. And I've been doing it again laterally. I think Christmas you go into this black hole, don't you? You don't know what day it is or what's going on, and there's so much going on. That's the time when I should be doing it but the time just seemed to... And then I find if I'm out of a routine, I find it very difficult to get into a routine, I suppose, is what I'm trying to say.

But the last week or so I've got back to work and I've been back in more of a routine. As I say, I don't find it easy to be in any routine, but I've been feeling all right. And I have got an anxiety bubbling under the surface with everything that's going on with COVID. I've heard a couple of really horrible stories, but the meditations really helped. I did the self love meditation, I've been doing that, and I found that incredibly powerful.

I've tried doing the compassion one a few times and it makes me angry because I try and see people who I still feel angry with through a compassionate lens and I find that difficult.

When I was doing the self love meditation I found myself crying my eyes out, real tears rolling down my face.

Alex Howard

I think at the moment the self love is more important than the compassion for others. I think so much of your life has been about making other people's needs more important than your own, and there's probably a place in you which feels a bit sensitive and almost reactive to giving others compassion, but actually what it sounds like is really landing and really resonating is giving yourself that self love.

Katie

Overall, I know that I am connecting with that little girl inside me much, much more, and I'm nurturing her and honoring her. I'm really giving myself permission to look after myself and to give myself a bit of time and not to be too harsh on myself.

Alex Howard

Does it also feel more empowering to realize that much of this is about your relationship with you? Because that's something that we can change. I think part of the helplessness and the overwhelm of how things have been seen in the past is that the suffering is a result of how other people have related to you and you can't change those people. But when you realize that the way that you're relating to yourself is at the core of this, that is something you can change.

And in fact, part of the reason for the homework that I set you last time was just the act of showing up to yourself and meditating regularly, going for a walk when you need to, going through the program, like that commitment to yourself is an act of self love.

[00:11:35] Katie

Yeah. And I have been, on the whole, I'm not going to say I've done it perfectly because I haven't, but on the whole, the walking I've done a lot of. The meditation I did at the beginning and I have, it's like a sandwich, I didn't do much in between, over the Christmas period. But I do also find that when the house is full of people, I find that quite difficult. And before my ex-husband came to spend that 5 days with us, we had come to an arrangement that he'd come for 5 days, and it was fine apart from that one blip.

Alex Howard

Apart from that, were you able to navigate the time you had?

Katie

Yeah. Until the day that he was due to leave.

Alex Howard

Yes.

Katie

And then I said to him, because he wouldn't give me an exact day that he was going to leave, he said on the 27th or the 28th. And I said, well, I'd like to know just so that we have arrangements in place, and he wouldn't. So I kind of let that one go. And then on the 27th I said, have you decided when you're leaving today or tomorrow? And he said, I think I'll stay till the 30th. And I said, well, I'd prefer it if we could stick to the arrangements that we made before you came.

So he got the kids to come and petition me and say, please can he stay for another few days? And that was kind of progress for me because I felt strongly that we should stick to what we've made and what we've said.

Alex Howard

Which was a big stretch for you outside of what was your ideal.

Katie

Yes. Exactly. And I did come in for quite a lot of abuse as a result of that.

Alex Howard

I guess my question is, with all that's going on right now, what do you need from you? Like, how do you best support yourself with all that's going on? Both practically in terms of tools, in terms of how you are with yourself. What are you finding that is helping you support you? Obviously, meditation is one of those things.

Katie

Well, I suppose when I think about... I'm still looking for that purpose in my life. I still don't really know what my purpose is. I've been feeling very drawn to moving out of London into the countryside and

getting dogs and chickens. That's something I've always dreamt of all my life. But I don't know if that's just me. Again that's not trusting myself, because I don't know if that's just me, that's escapism or whether that's really what I would love.

[00:14:24] Alex Howard

Well, I guess one of the opportunities/challenges of what's happening is that you've needed to be where you are to support the kids and for everything else that's been going on, and suddenly all of these things have the potential to be questions and to be reconsidered. And what do you want for this next decade, this next chapter of your life?

Katie

My dream is I'll be sitting in my wonderful country house/cottage, whatever with a big garden and dogs and goats and chickens. And I'll be researching and writing. That's kind of my dream. But then I don't think about the lack of access to Sainsburys up the road. I don't know. I can't do anything at the moment.

Alex Howard

Well you can. What you can do is you can allow yourself to dream and you can take the time and space to just listen to what your heart and listen to what your body is wanting. And being in touch with that doesn't mean you have to impulsively suddenly act on that straightaway. These kind of decisions need your head, your heart, your gut instinct. They need all of those centers lined up. But just for now, just recognizing that when you think about that life in a certain way, it gives you a sense of optimism and a sense of hope and a sense of looking forward to the future, which is different to that mindset of focusing on all the things you feel you've lost and all the things that have gone wrong in the past.

What I'm hearing is as things are becoming a bit calmer and you're being more supportive and caring towards yourself, that part of what is then happening is you're allowing yourself to look to the future in a more optimistic and positive way. And I think that's great.

Katie

Yeah.

Alex Howard

We were talking a couple of sessions ago about this idea of get into jail free cards, like certain ways of thinking about yourself and your life that cause you to get stuck. And I'm wondering, if we just put a bit of a spotlight on that for a minute, what you notice in the last weeks, how that has been. Have there been some of those stuck places coming in?

Katie

I very quickly go to, "I am guilty". So when I wasn't doing the meditation every day or if I didn't do a walk, I set myself, I always have very high expectations and if I don't meet them then I feel guilty that I'm bad for not. So I do feel I have this fundamental core belief, and I have already kind of uncovered that, that I'm guilty.

[00:17:18] Alex Howard

Can you say a bit more about that? I'm guilty means what?

Katie

Well, in some of the work that I've done previously I worked out that was one of my core beliefs.

Alex Howard

Is it a close relation of, "it's all my fault" sort of thing?

Katie

Yeah. And it's inherently that I'm to blame. And I think that's a result of being scapegoated, like I have been in my life as a child and in my marriage. And also, I don't want to just portion the blame completely, it's this idea of this independence and taking control and doing everything, being very fiercely independent and self-sufficient, and if I don't get it right, I dropped the ball or a ball, then I'm bad. I'm guilty. I haven't done it right. So one begets the other I think.

I had to be self-sufficient, I had to be independent because I didn't feel supported. All my life I've sought external validation. I have from a very young age. And I'm not doing that as much, working with you I know that I'm not doing that as much.

In one of your meditations you said, the knowledge, I can't unknow this now. I can go into myself and find that peace and that calmness. I don't always find it very easy, but I can do that. And that's very reassuring for me.

Alex Howard

I think we need to spend some time, in the coming weeks, connecting to and reminding yourself of your goodness. I think so much of the patterns in relationships have been spotlighting and attacking you for either true or not true limitations or issues, that you've normalized to a place of believing those things to be true. And to counteract that, I think it would be helpful to spend some time actively looking at the things you do well. Looking at your strengths, looking at the places that you've been kind.

And almost like you were doing with the thought diary, at the end of each day taking some time to write down things that you feel proud of, writing down things that you think you've done well, things that... They could be things that day, they could be things historically, but actively starting to put some attention on things that make you feel good about yourself.

Katie

It's interesting because when I spoke to my cousin who was hospitalized with COVID, and I felt, because I've got this terrible anxiety about it as well, but I just felt so sad for her and what she had been through. And she's out of hospital and she's recovered, but she's still not well. And it ravished the whole family but she was the one who was hospitalized.

And my first thought was, I want to send her some flowers to kind of lift her spirits, but then when I was sending them, and I did send her flowers, but then I was thinking, I know that I want to send her

flowers for her, trying to unravel all these beliefs, and I was thinking, because I've been so used to people saying, "you're this, you're that", I was thinking, am I just doing this so I feel good? And I wasn't. I knew my gut feeling was that I wasn't but I almost felt guilty.

[00:21:02]

And then I had another friend who's been very, very ill, and I kept saying, I must make her some soup and I never got around to it and I have that guilt of, she must become an awful person because I didn't drop a food parcel around. That's the kind of thing. But I know deep down that I want to do that for people. I want to make people happier and lift their spirits and the empathy.

Alex Howard

Yeah. You want to spread kindness in the world rather than spreading unkindness, which you've been on the receiving end of a lot.

Katie

Yeah.

Alex Howard

But I think what often happens is our inner critic hijacks, you do something for the right reasons, and then your inner critic sort of hijacks that and uses it then as ammunition against you. Just seeing that saying, hang on a second, my motivations are good and the rest is just bullshit. Not letting that hijack it and then use it as a weapon against you.

So I think having some time each day where you write down things, either that day or things historically, about yourself that you feel good about, that you feel proud of and making that an active spotlight of placing your attention on seeing that.

Katie

Yeah. And I am finding myself. I've enjoyed cooking a lot because my ex-husband used to do all the cooking a lot because he loves cooking. And I've really enjoyed, and I've enjoyed doing it in a clean and tidy kitchen. I've really enjoyed doing that and the creative stuff and making masks. And I really enjoyed, I know I don't want to sit at a computer from 9 till 5 every day. I know that. I've known that for a long time, and yet that's where I always got my validation because I know I can do that, and I know I can do a good job of work, but I don't want to do it anymore. I want to breed dogs and sell chicken's eggs. I genuinely have this yearning to do that and have a B&B and make nice food for people, give people a nice experience and not live in a 9 to 5 city life anymore. I don't want it.

Alex Howard

And as I say, that might be the rest of your life, or that might be a chapter in your life. You don't need to know the answer to that right now. But I think letting yourself hang out in that place of wanting and wishing and curiosity, I think is healthy, and I think is good.

How far have you got in the RESET program? I think I said to you last time you could go as far as module four.

[00:23:53] Katie

Yeah. Well, you said do module four just before we meet, and then I'd forgotten that you said that until about 5 minutes before we met.

Alex Howard

That's fine. Between now and next time I'd like you to do modules four and five. And I think they can also give you a more practical tool to use to work with some of this. So a way of saying stop to, and challenging these various patterns of beating yourself up and judging yourself.

So it's a sort of two pronged piece of homework that I'm asking you to do. Part one is focusing on these positives about yourself and looking for them and cultivating your attention on them. And then the second is what you'll learn with the stop process. And then the present process is how to stop the ways that you focus on the negative, and you go into the get in jail free cards and you beat up on yourself. And I want you to keep going with the meditation, because that's part of what is really important to calm and settle things. Then these become our next two tracks moving forwards.

Katie

Okay. So that's four and five?

Alex Howard

Four and five. Exactly. What questions have you got, if any, questions for me?

Katie

Well, it's more kind of a question on a statement. So I found the gap between seeing you, and I know Christmas and everything came in between so that was unusual, I found that quite a long gap.

Alex Howard

It has been a long gap.

Katie

Yeah. So I was hoping that it wouldn't be so long next time.

Alex Howard

No, it won't be. I will look at something in a few weeks time.

Katie

Okay. Yeah. Thank you. I feel calmer now. It's quite good timing in a way.

Alex Howard

Yeah. And I think also it's understanding that you're dealing with difficult stuff, like going for a divorce is difficult. And it's exposing the very issues that you want to work on and need to work on but you're

having to work on those whilst dealing with it, which is also difficult. So just giving yourself some kindness and gentleness for that I think is important.

[00:25:53] Katie

Yeah. Thank you.

Alex Howard

Good. All right, Katie, I'll talk to you in a couple of weeks. Good luck with your homework and go gently in the meantime.

Katie

Thank you.

Alex Howard

Take care. Bye.