



Conscious Life presents

How Past Trauma Impacts Relationships

Guest: Kelly Armatage

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[00:00:09] Meagen Gibson

Welcome to this interview. I'm Meagen Gibson, co-host of the Trauma Super Conference. Today, I'm delighted to be speaking with Kelly Armatage, a trained counselor, coach, and cognitive behavioral therapist. For nearly 20 years, Kelly has been assisting the healing of individuals and companies globally. An expert in coaching and behavioral change, Kelly has facilitated over 15,000 one-to-one sessions. Kelly, thank you so much for being with us today.

Kelly Armatage

Thank you for having me, Meagen. It's a pleasure to be here.

Meagen Gibson

I know you've got a long history of coaching and as a counselor to people, and you've served a ton of people in your time in practice. How did you get originally interested in trauma and trying to incorporate that into how you interact with clients?

Kelly Armatage

Because I'd had a lot of trauma myself in my life. I had two car accidents as a child. I had a difficult childhood, two nervous breakdowns by the age of 21, two divorces. I lost a baby. So a lot of trauma in my own life, which created me to be very interested in human behavior and psychology and why I was perhaps creating some of the scenarios in my life.

That started my path to become a therapist, coach, healer, and then over the last 20 years, I've done over 15,000 sessions, created my own therapy technique, which I teach other therapists to use in their clinics. Trauma is at the root of everything, really, with regards to therapy. Once we can identify the trauma and release it within an individual, we can change lives.

[00:01:45] Meagen Gibson

Absolutely. I'm always encouraged when, and I know several people like this in my own personal life that have careers and first adult lives and then go into the helping and healing fields, whether it be as a therapist or a trauma counselor. I just find the practice is so much deeper when you've had some adult practice and stumbles and can then come to it from not only the educated and informed point of view, but also the personally practiced point of view. So thank you for going into this field.

Kelly Armatage

Thank you so much.

Meagen Gibson

I have interviewed hundreds of people about trauma, and everyone always has a different answer. It's not because anybody with one answer is correct, but because everybody comes to the answer from their own lens. To you, what is trauma and what is past trauma?

Kelly Armatage

Well, trauma is pain, ultimately, and past trauma is past pain. It could be emotional or physical pain that an individual incurs on their life path. With trauma, we tend to not only experience the first initial emotional or physical hurt, we then create perceptions about the trauma or the event that adds on to the original trauma, and then we carry it. And then we almost reenact or recreate similar scenarios that build up on the trauma and we get in these self-fulfilling patterns.

Meagen Gibson

I've learned so much about trauma and why we - basically what I'm trying to get at is sometimes we can have these events of hurt in our past and pain in our past and they are out of sight, out of mind. And then something comes up and it will bring up that past pain and it's like we're right back in the moment. There are some things that are very predictable.

You're like, yeah, when I look under that rock, that's going to hurt a lot. There are other things where you minimize them in the moment and you're like, that wasn't that big of a deal. And then when you overturn that rock, it is a very large surprise. Why do you think that we do that? How do we deal with the emotional toll that trying to heal takes on us?

Kelly Armatage

I think that's a really good point that in the present we get triggered and when we are in the trigger or the stress response, all of this anxiety, anger, hurt, cortisol comes up and then we're like, why am I reacting like this? Why am I in this space?

It's a retrigger of an old wound that perhaps we have disassociated from or suppressed or put away and via identifying what the initial wound is and healing that we can then stop the current triggers in the present.

[00:04:46] Meagen Gibson

Absolutely. Or at the very least, if we're not able to stop them, have a lot more self-compassion toward ourselves, when we do ultimately get triggered.

Kelly Armatage

Absolutely. Because as we do get triggered, a lot of us just distract from the triggers or we go off and do our addictions or we go into conflict. It takes a long time to actually, A be aware of the trigger, B be aware of what wound is being triggered, and then C when we get triggered to hold space for ourself in the moment without going to addictions or to conflict.

Meagen Gibson

I like that the context there of just making enough space before you start engaging in either adaptive or maladaptive coping mechanism, because that's all we're trying to do is soothe. Some soothing mechanisms are going to be great and can work long-term and some aren't. And so creating that space where you have the awareness of the trigger, give space to the trigger before you choose how you're going to cope.

Kelly Armatage

I think that takes a lot of awareness and somebody that's quite deep on the self-development path to get to this space.

Meagen Gibson

Absolutely. I'm glad you named that because that's not going to happen immediately. We learn what triggers are and we start to become self-aware and we're not going to have the capability at first of creating that space, much less having the whole practiced menu of things that work for us when we're in that state.

Kelly Armatage

Absolutely, yes. It's a journey. I think that the journey of healing trauma and healing triggers is a journey. It can be a long one, for sure.

Meagen Gibson

Yeah. How does unhealed past trauma manifest into relationship dysfunction?

Kelly Armatage

How does it?

Meagen Gibson

Yes.

[00:06:40] Kelly Armatage

Just in that, say, for example, you were abandoned or neglected as a child by your mother, then you would have an abandonment wound. So in the present, if perhaps your partner is being distant or unavailable or rejectionary in any way or you could even perceive that they are going to do that, you're setting it up.

When that abandonment wound gets triggered, you're going to feel that deep rejection, that hurt, that neglect, that abandonment. From that space, you might then go into other behaviors that will create more dysfunction in the relationship, such as chasing or trying to make that person be there for you, or getting into angry conflict. So that's an example. That's one example of past trauma such as abandonment and how that would play out in an intimate relationship or even with a friendship, perhaps.

Meagen Gibson

Absolutely. You made an interesting distinction there where you said perceive. Because especially people with trauma, we think if you have an abandonment wound from childhood that it would take a big abandonment in your current adult relationships to trigger those wounds. But we're being almost micro-triggered by the way that we're hyper-alert and trying to perceive danger all the time.

So if our partner is scrolling on their phone a lot and not paying attention to us or staying out with their friends instead of going on dates with us. These are not big, giant abandonments, but we feel on a micro level over and over and over again in these tiny ways, abandoned, which builds on this emotional trigger.

Kelly Armatage

I did a video on TikTok when you don't get a text back. It went viral because all these people are feeling abandoned because they haven't got a text back immediately, within half an hour or two hours, and they're in that triggered space. They're back to the age of being three, where mummy's not come back to the cot and you're stuck there feeling that neglected energy. I think we can really start to perceive and set up an expectation to be abandoned even before it happens.

Meagen Gibson

It makes sense. We develop these abilities to be hyper-aware and perceive to keep ourselves safe and to anticipate danger. And so it's not necessarily that the perception is lying. It's the scale of our perceived threat that is maybe the lie.

We can address our feelings and maybe misperceptions with the person as long as we're able to identify, like, hey, this is what happened. Here's how it made me feel and here's how we can avoid me feeling like that in the future. Does that sound like something that you can agree to and then we're over. Just like that, we're over it.

[00:09:44] Kelly Armatage

Yeah, but then sometimes your partner might not have the space to do that. Also, there's more accountability for you to heal that trigger in the moment so that you can ultimately be at peace with the fact that somebody isn't texting you back within the time frame that you require.

Meagen Gibson

Absolutely. People have lives. They're driving or they're at work and they're in a meeting. There's all kinds of things that cause people not to respond, because we have our own personal boundaries about how we correspond with people as well.

Kelly Armatage

That's it, exactly.

Meagen Gibson

Not every message is somebody else's emergency.

Kelly Armatage

That's it. Absolutely. I think the healing for abandonment wounds is A for some people that have abandonment wounds, they have this whole attachment of I have to be in a relationship, I have this fear of being alone. So I think people with abandonment wounds or anxious attachment styles, it's really good to have a period of time whereby they can really be alone, get comfortable with being alone, have that real space of self-love. That would be a good thing.

And then secondly, just being aware of who they choose in a relationship, like an avoidant attachment style or somebody with an addiction or somebody with abusive traits. These are not good choices for somebody with an abandonment wound because it's going to retrigger that. So being careful with choices. Thirdly, just when you're getting triggered, healing the trigger in the moment.

And then lastly, trying to create new beliefs of I am loved, I am supported, people are present for me. Getting a different neural pathway as opposed to people are going to reject me, hurt me, neglect me. The other end of the scenario, which is that people can show up for me, I am loved, I am supported, I am taken care of, I am lovable, et cetera. I would say that would be the route to healing an abandonment wound, for example.

Meagen Gibson

You bring up a good point. In fact, you said it in one of your videos that I was reviewing before we got on here about how we oftentimes get in this cycle where we have a trigger. Say it's the abandonment we've been talking about and we seek support through our safe people, and then they enable that rumination and talk us through it or talk us down or validate our feelings or whatever it is that we're seeking in our support.

[00:12:12]

And then we just go back to the same cycle where they soothe or whatever. Your partner is not abandoning you. They're probably just busy giving all the excuses and talking them down. You were encouraging people in that video to just not reach out to those people unless of course it's something legitimately urgent and an emergency, but just pause and be with yourself in that and question your own assumptions. So if you could talk just a little bit about that as well.

Kelly Armatage

It's such a great point because when I give these assignments to my clients, they're like, oh my God, Kelly, I was out of my depression within two weeks. I had a couple come into my clinic. His name was Michael and he had depression and he was on antidepressants, et cetera. Because I know the dynamics with depression and anxiety, A from my own experience and B from being a therapist, I'm like, okay, how often are you speaking to your wife about your depression?

He's like, oh, about three hours every night over dinner. I'm like, three hours? So I say to my receptionist, bring in the wife for a session. Mary comes in and I say to Mary, how often are you speaking to Michael about his depression? She says, oh yeah, every night. I said, well, here's an assignment. Next time he speaks to you about his depression, you're to say, I love you, but let's speak about something positive. Immediately, because she was a bit co-dependent, it went into, but who is he going to need?

I said, well, he's going to need himself for his own emotional support. Are you willing to do the assignment? And so she went off and did the assignment, and the same with Michael. I said, Michael, here's your assignment. Stop speaking about your depression with others because you're just having it enabled. He's like, who's going to deal with my emotions? I said, well, you are.

They both followed the assignment and he was out of depression within two weeks. You can use this for depression, anxiety, relationship stuff, just look where you're going to get rewards, reassurance, comfort. You're actually keeping that condition, whatever it may be, depression, anxiety, financial debt, whatever it may be, you're keeping that condition in place.

Meagen Gibson

It's the same as anything else. It's the same as breaking the other cycles of how we're going to soothe that are maladaptive. I think we put value judgments a lot on some coping mechanisms over others. We look at addiction and alcohol use and things like that critically, but the action of seeking support from someone who can listen to you, in a different way doing the same thing, which is seeking an outlet and off-gassing, someone that can hold the pain for you or be with you in the pain.

By not doing it yourself, you're just creating another dependency that you've got to rely on. You can only get through it and really have that self-ownership when you take that dependency away. If I hear you right.

Absolutely. Look, when they say about mental health, especially if you're in a suicidal place, for example, they say, do reach out. So I do encourage that. I do encourage that. Absolutely. When we're in those types of despairing states and we do need people, we can initially reach out for

support. What I'm talking about when I mentioned the fake client names before is that when we get into a cycle and a dynamic of going to somebody for reassurance, for comfort, it sets up an addiction, a further addiction on top of the other addiction.

[00:15:46]

We go to that person and we get the subconscious payoff of reassurance, of comfort, and that becomes addictive in its own dynamic. And then it's very hard for both people to break off that dynamic because the person that's being needed, they like that, they get a payoff for feeling needed, and fixing someone else's life. There's a bit of a superiority within the ego there in that they're fixing someone else's life and they don't have to look at their own stuff.

Just in specific conditions within your life that are dissatisfactory, make an intention to not keep speaking to your friends and family about it in a negative way. You can speak to them about it in a solution based way, that's fine. And you'll see massive changes. You will see, I've seen it myself over the last 20 years. Depression gone, anxiety gone, addictions change. It's a really powerful technique and I do encourage it.

That's a powerful distinction that you made there because it's not, "Don't speak of it". Because I was thinking that so often we mistake this type of sharing for intimacy. "This is the thing that is the hardest for me right now, and I'm going to share it with you because it's the hardest thing for me. And to know this about me is to know me. And to know this about me makes me feel close to you. And we're sharing intimacy".

We mistake this type of sharing for intimacy when instead our intimacy should be far beyond that. And instead it's, "I'm struggling with this. Here's where I've come to with it, and here's what I'm going to do about it. And that's what I want you to know, is that this is also going on". Instead of "We're going to just kind of ruminate about this together for 3 hours and you help me feel safe".

Kelly Armatage

Absolutely. This is why I created a therapy technique. I created a three-step accredited therapy technique for therapists to use on their clients because I figured out that talk therapy doesn't work, it's just regurgitating the trauma. We need to shift out the trauma. This is why I created ASK.

Even people say on my videos, "Kelly, I've watched two of your videos and it's done more for me than ten years of intensive therapy". We need to shift trauma. We need to create solutions. We need to create transition and change within our societal traumatic issues. Regurgitating the same old stuff over and over just creates an addiction to being reassured for our pain.

Meagen Gibson

Absolutely. I definitely want you to outline for us what the ASK technique is. I know it's an acronym, ASK?

[00:18:28] Kelly Armatage

It means A Serenity Kit. I created it in 2013 and I initially created it for the public to use on themselves. I created these, A Serenity Kits. I would sell them, it's like a therapist and a kit, that is what it was initially. I sent one kit off to the Sunday Express in the UK and they're like, "This is a really clever kit, I healed my insomnia".

It's such a powerful three-step technique and it just helped you to identify your picked up habit, your psychological payoff, the reason you're doing the habit, and how to shift that out of the subconscious and create a whole new neural pathway of change. And actually you can do it in 20 minutes. I can do the technique on a client within 20 minutes, it will shift it out. It's so powerful and I love the results of ASK. You can see the Ted Talk on that.

Meagen Gibson

Okay, great.

Kelly Armatage

It's free for the public to use on themselves, if they want to. They can check out my TikToks.

Meagen Gibson

I think you're right, so many of the therapy techniques, and I highly believe in therapy, don't stop going to therapy y'all. But just discussing, we never get to accountability, we never get to self awareness if we're just rehashing the stories we have about ourselves and our past and our histories. We never get to the "now what?" part. I have a lot of compassion for that because I think a lot of us have lived a very long time with no one validating those stories, those feelings, those things that have hurt us in the past.

Once we get that hit, the connectivity of somebody looking us in the eye and saying "I believe you, that shouldn't have happened, you didn't deserve that", then we just want to stay there. We want to stay in that place where we're receiving validation and somebody's telling us that we deserved better. It makes sense that you get stuck there sometimes.

Kelly Armatage

That space that you're talking about is also quite valid because I think we do when we're doing trauma healing, we do need to validate the anger, the sadness, the guilt, the rage. In the validation and awareness and presence of that pain, we set up the healing. For sure, because our pain is absolutely valid.

Meagen Gibson

Absolutely.

Kelly Armatage

And then it's from that space, it's shifting it out.

[00:20:54] Meagen Gibson

You can't shift until you feel that fundamental sense of safety, that embodied sense of safety. I know that you talk about healing past trauma cellularly, so if you could tell me a little bit about what that means to you and how people do it.

Kelly Armatage

Say, for example, somebody was abused as a child, emotionally or physically and they're holding, within their cells, the pain of that event. If we have been abused or bullied, for example, then we would have felt initial hurt, pain, upset, sadness and then this would go into the cells of the body and then we start to set up perceptions that we create about A) the person and B) ourselves. So "I hate that I was bullied, that's such a horrible person. I did something wrong, maybe I shouldn't have been in that place, maybe I should have tried to stop it". You're setting up the resentment and the hate and then you're setting up some guilt and shame and then you're carrying it.

In the present, the way we would look to shift out that trauma, cellularly, is A) go in and validate the pain, validate the initial anger, sadness, bringing a presence to that emotional space within the mind-body. You can often feel that like often I will feel within my clients there's like trapped shame in their solar plexus or I can feel where their trauma, that's my gift, I can feel where their trauma is trapped.

By just bringing an awareness and a presence to that old trauma, getting the client to bring an awareness to that cellular space that start to set up a somatic healing for it to start to shift out. Plus you can then start to change the perceptions of A) yourself and B) the other person from judgment, criticism, resistance, into compassion, understanding, acceptance, surrender.

So A) validating the pain and creating like a somatic release from the cells and then B) creating a perception shift which will change cellular attachments.

Meagen Gibson

That's so interesting. As you were speaking, I was thinking about how sometimes when we experience hurt and if we don't share it with the right types of people, people who are capable of supporting us in it, when we are hurt, we get into a protective mode. But it's not just of us, it's of the other person that's hurting us, if that makes sense. We prioritize safety, but as protection of ourself and the person who's actually causing us harm.

Let's say it's a parent, we don't want to report neglect or abuse or things like that because we don't want to be separated from that parent. And so we will protect them even though they're the one that's hurting us. Or if you're an adult and you're being hurt by someone, you're going to protect yourself and the other person perhaps because you don't want to be questioned, you don't want to deal with the shame or the judgment. There's so many ways in which we further traumatize people who are being hurt, not intentionally.

When we then experience these triggers, as you said, and we try to go back into it, if we haven't felt any of the shame or judgment yet, because we were in that protective mode, that's when it all

comes out. All of a sudden we're surprised with all of the shame, even though we weren't necessarily responsible for what happened to us.

[00:24:41]

All the guilt and the shame is around because we prioritized our own protection and the protection of the other, maybe. I'm spitballing here, but releasing that and just what you said about being able to sense where that protection has happened and how to release the shame and the judgment, that must be a pretty powerful experience in the room.

Kelly Armatage

I've had a few clients this year, actually, whereby they had a lot of shame held in their solar plexus from childhood trauma, which tends to be sexual, physical or emotional abuse. The shame is, "I am flawed, I am bad, I am not good enough", which is, again, that self judgment and criticism towards self for something we were utterly powerless over and a vulnerable child. It's held in that space and it completely and utterly impacts the person in their present life, in their relationships with their self esteem.

It's a wonderful experience to be with my client as they shift that out. It might take, I don't know, 15-20 minutes as we release that shame, that guilt, that pain, and often there's nausea that happens. The person will feel, because it's quite deep shame, it's quite a deep, low level frequency. As it's being released, I can feel myself even, feeling nauseous as it's coming out. But as long as you just keep sitting with it, with the person and guiding them through, you can release it fully out.

And then those clients will text me a week later and say, "Kelly, thank you so much, you've changed my life". I love doing this work.

Meagen Gibson

Absolutely. It brings up an interesting question that I've been contemplating lately. I saw someone speak, and I already interviewed her for the trauma conference, but about the difference between feeling and sensation.

There's the whole, we talk about somatics, of course, all-in trauma work, but sensations and feelings can be disparate sometimes. They can make a lot of sense, if I'm angry and I get hot, that makes sense sometimes. But if I feel shame and I get nauseous, it's like a feeling is like your brain's communication and your sensations are your body's communication.

Sometimes we have bypassed our body's communication methods for so long that then when they come up, we're almost more shocked about how our sensations are showing up around the issue than our thoughts and our feelings about it.

Kelly Armatage

Absolutely. I think it's the original sensation you felt at the time. I think for that client, she felt nauseous when she was being abused in that manner and that was trapped behind the judgment and the shame. It's amazing what we hold and store within the pain body, as Eckhart Tolle would

say. It's amazing what we store there. It's just wonderful, as you keep clearing that out for people and within yourself, you just keep ascending into great emotional states and you just change your life, really.

[00:27:54] Meagen Gibson

I want to talk about that a minute because we've been talking about a lot of hard stuff, but I know I've experienced this and I think it's safe to say that you have as well. Is that on the other side of the hard stuff and on the other side of that release, talk about the higher stages, because it sounds cliché, but when you put down the boulder you've been carrying around, it's more than a metaphorical weight, it feels like an actual weight.

Kelly Armatage

Absolutely. I think it's even in the bible, the burden is lifted. I remember reading a book by Shirley MacLaine, the actress, one time and she's quite spiritual, Shirley MacLaine, and she said, "The self development path or the self love path is a wonderful journey. It's the only journey". I just thought it was so powerful because I truly believe that it is the only journey.

If you really want happiness, abundance, love, peace, if you want those higher frequencies of bliss, joy, you have to release the trauma. You have to do the work. When you do start to release out old stuff, when you do start to really learn about how you think, feel, behave in your life, and you're willing to take accountability and change it, when you really start to get that inner validation, that self love.

On the other side of the pain is this light space. You can experience the most amazing, blissful, joyful, wonderful spaces without anything around you creating that because your mind has now got to such a wonderful space of freedom.

Meagen Gibson

Absolutely. I think so many people reach middle age and have all the things they want or all the things they thought they wanted, and can't get access to creativity, joy, and spontaneity, and all of these things and don't know why. This, to me anyway, is the solution to the why. That you get access to the joy and the creativity and the spontaneity and the freedom once you do the work and heal and then the circumstances in your life matter less to a certain degree.

Kelly Armatage

Absolutely. I work with millionaires, billionaires, entrepreneurs, celebrities. It doesn't matter if you have the yacht, and the billions, and the hot partner. If you've got a lot of stored trauma, you are not going to experience true and consistent happy spaces.

Meagen Gibson

Absolutely. I can say with 100% certainty that most of the millionaires I've met have been unhappy.

[00:30:38] Kelly Armatage

Well, yeah, because they're on the success path, which is, "I must get that to get the wealth to validate myself", it's like a self esteem issue.

Meagen Gibson

Yeah. Other people are like, "I must solve my trauma in order to feel happy". And we just didn't get distracted by all the shiny objects along the way.

Kelly Armatage

Yeah, they're nice. Abundance is great, but I think when we truly tap into that inner source, that inner abundance, that inner well-being, everything comes from that space, including all the shiny objects, but you're not attached to them.

Meagen Gibson

Exactly. Thank you for tying it together, because you're right, I like shiny objects too.

Kelly Armatage

They're nice.

Meagen Gibson

They're wonderful. I just don't get too attached to them. How can people find out more about you and your work, Kelly?

Kelly Armatage

Well, I'm on www.KellyArmatage.com, I have a big platform on TikTok. I have a Ted Talk. Google me, I've been in a lot of the media, and I create content consistently to help people.

Meagen Gibson

Yes, you do, that's where I found her. Check it out, everybody.

Thank you, Kelly, so much for being with us today.

Kelly Armatage

Thank you, Meagan, for having me. It's been wonderful.