Opening on people-pleasing and safety

People pleasing is not about being kind, it's actually about safety. We are so scared of rupture in relationship. And we'd rather abandon ourselves than feel abandoned by somebody else.

I feel like a doormat, I fell run down, and I'm exhausted, burned out. My entire life I spent making decisions to please other people. The emotion that arises when there's a ruptured relationship literally feels like death in our body.

and we cannot sit with that. I knew something had to change. You can't solve this emotional behavior with a logical solution. We're trying to make actual change occur.

This will be the hardest thing you have ever done, but it will so worth it when you come out on the other end. Hello, and welcome to the Dr. Jess Unfiltered podcast.

Today, I have a friend and colleague with me, Elise Shunkowitz, who is a licensed clinical social worker. She is trained holistic and functional psychotherapist and neurosomatic coach specializing in nervous system regulation, anxiety reduction, focus and performance optimization, as well as changing our daily lives for the better.

Guest introduction and background

She has her own amazing riveting story of really arising Phoenix from the dust, from being on psychiatric medications, working in the psychiatric hospital to now a very talented therapist in The State of New York who really changes people's lives.

So Elise, thanks for being here. Thank you for having me. You crushed that bio. I'm very impressed. So thanks for being here, but I already teed that right up for everybody.

So I have to have you start with your own story because I haven't heard it in detail myself. I think you'll really inspire a lot of people by telling us you had PTSD, you have anxiety, and what was the turning point for you in your life?

Yes. I struggled a lot as a young teen with really debilitating depression, anxiety, OCD, eating disorders, all really in the context of complex PTSD.

And it got to the point where at the end of eighth grade, beginning of ninth grade I actually stopped going to school. It was so debiliating that I just couldn't function and couldn' t engage in And what happens with the conventional Western medical model when a kid is school refusal, right, they're not really functioning, is you go to therapy, you got to psychiatry, and the best option they have is to put you on meds.

So I was started on SSRIs and at the time was really sold on that, I'm told. And you were 14. I Was 14, yes. Yeah. and it was, yeah, was told that this is the magic pill.

This is what's going to help you feel better. Hmm. As the years went on, I was on all these medications and it would continue to have awful, awful side effects, so much so that the side-effects were worse than the depression, right?

They were so unbearable. So went from doctor to doctor, kept changing the medications, then added more medications. Then came in the benzodiazepines, the Xanax and Clonopin, and then the sleep medications for insomnia, The Ambien, Lunesta, because after a little bit of time, you build up dependency.

So they stop working, so you try a new drug or you increase the dose. Fast forward, eventually get put on a stimulant too. I go to graduate school to become a social worker because there was a part of me that really deep

down believed that if I am going to help people, I'm going do it in such a different way than I experienced myself.

Yeah. So great, because that's all we all have this story. That's how we got into this holistic functional world of our own traumas and our really struggles with the Western medical model.

Right. I go to social work school, I get a job. My first job at Bellevue Hospital, which is the flagship New York City public hospital system in the psych ER and inpatient psych unit in a mobile crisis team.

And I was on four psychiatric medications myself. while working there. Plus, on top of that, a daily allergy pill and birth control.

Eliseu2019s mental health struggles and medication journey

So who knows what was going on with my hormones. And I am barely functioning. I'm suicidal, severely depressed, anxious, and just a complete mess while I work in the hospital with these incredibly mentally ill and in many cases very, very dangerous patients.

Yeah. So I was really, really fortunate at the time. I, you know, sometimes you're in the right place at right time, I became personal trainer at my local gym where I already was a member and I got connected with all these trainers who were actually studying at a functional neuroscience institute and at The Czech Institute with Paul Czech.

Oh, wow. Yeah, so these are trainers who are really smart because they're not just doing your basic personal training. They're actually understanding neurology and the mind-body connection.

So I started learning from all of them as a trainer while I'm at Bellevue. And I kept thinking to myself, Wow, this is amazing. Like this functional neuroscience work that I am studying right now, it is either the hokeyiest, pokeyest BS I've ever heard or it is going to completely change my life.

And it did. It actually changed my live. I started changing my breathing patterns, I starting eating all organic food, got rid of my microwave. You know, like I stopped wearing a bra after I learned about the impacts of how they impact your lymphatic system and slowly but surely I really started getting healthier and working with my own coaches and health practitioners to help me start to get off these medications.

This is what I need to do. There are so many people out there who, like me, thought that they were stuck, trapped in the system, on these medications for life, feeling awful, having these awful side effects, and that there was no hope.

And really, my work is about giving people hope and realizing they can feel better. They don't need stay on the meds forever if they don' want to. So that's how I got into this work.

It's amazing. I mean, I'm sure at Bellevue, which if you guys don't know, there's a lot of movies done about Belleville Hospital. It is pretty iconic.

Yeah. And I am sure you saw a lots of ways people practice and did things in your experience there. Was there something that you say that made you do things differently?

Yes, I mean, so many things. So I was at Bellevue for half a decade. And when I started, i was so deep in my own journey in the Western medical model being on all these meds.

Yeah. As the years went on, that's when i started really changing my lifestyle and getting off the medication. I saw, oh my gosh, these patients come in and their stay is only covered by insurance if they're given medication, Oh yeah, I know, because we would have all the insurance reviews all of the time, right?

And the insurances only covers if you're titrating up on medication. If you are not on medications and you aren't titraining, there's no reason for insurance to cover your stank.

Wow, okay, that's so messed up. It blew my mind. So messed. We would even… There's mental hygiene court. So if a patient was admitted against their will into a hospital and they refused to take medication, the doctor could take the patient to court, The court was in the hospitals.

On our 19th floor, we also have a prison unit affiliated with Rikers. We had a whole court with a judge and everything. And the judge would determine whether the patients was an imminent risk to themselves or others and needed medication.

Then they would be medicated against our will in hospital. And I will say some of these people, they were very dangerous. I'm not going to say they weren't.

But to be restrained and tied down against your will and forced injected with medication, I mean, that in itself is such a traumatic experience for a patient.

On top of already being in this space that's dirty, the food is awful. They barely get outside. There's no movement happening. And I would do things like call in for social work group on the overhead.

I'd say, okay, social group. And everyone would go into the room and I said, actually, we're doing movement today. Because I was studying personal training.

Now I'm a movement professional. This is what they needed. They needed movement. So that was part of the journey. By the time those five years were up, I call it almost a soul disconnect.

I struggled so much to go in on a day-to-day basis and see what I was seeing. And it's very hard to do work where you don't feel aligned. You know? I've been there.

Yeah. For sure. Yeah, it's very difficult to feel aligned and feel like you're doing your best work in an environment like that, right? Especially because your hands are tied in the hospital, a lot.

I mean, I'm surprised they let you do movement with them. That's why I had to. It was a secret. Oh my gosh, but now you incorporate these things into your own practices, Nutrition and things like this are a big deal in at least therapy world, right?

Yes, they're a huge deal, in the least-therapy world. I do partially virtual, partially in person, but when people come to my office, I have a vibration plate.

We have vagus nerve stimulators, we have colored glasses. Oh my gosh. Yeah, We do movie, with you Tai Chi, all different types of breath work. And I feel like that is a great way to start off therapy, because you're getting the patient grounded in their body.

finding a sense of safety, calming down. And then from there, we figure out what they need that day and what are we working on short term, long term. Sometimes there's conventional talk therapy, but a lot of the time there is really so much more neuro work and somatic work, and movement to really help the patient start to feel a sensor safety and regulation.

Honestly, look, We do a lotta work. We have a wanna fun. That's the thing, right? I want therapy to be engaging. I wanted it to something that patients are looking forward to, even when they have to do some of the hardest work in their entire life.

Yeah, absolutely, because it's really coming face to face with yourself, big time. And some the work we do, especially the nervous system regulation, somatic work, I tell my patients, this will be the hottest thing you have ever done, but it will so worth it when you come out on the other end.

Yeah, that's amazing. And then you give them probably homework to do at home, I'm assuming, with some of the nervous system regulation things. Yeah. For sure.

Absolutely. We do what people can. Everyone has a different tolerance of what they can take on outside of a therapy room. But absolutely, because you want to integrate as much as possible in your day-to-day life.

That's the thing that never made sense to me about therapy.

Bellevue Hospital and the limits of the medical model

A, why was it void of movement? And all the other things, the nutrition, breathing patterns, sunlight, right? I take my patients outside. We go grounding in the grass.

we go to Whole Foods and go grocery shopping. There's all of that. And also, I want what happens in a therapy room to translate into their day-to-day life.

Oh, wow, yes. It shouldn't be an isolated, here's a 50-minute session, and we talk about what happened in your life, but then you just go out and live your own.

No, we're trying to make actual change occur. So the things that we do, I want them to apply to your day-to-day life. The homework assignments are just interacting in every day.

When I talk getting in touch with your intuition and understanding, what is it that I, especially when I work with people pleasing, right? We need people to figure out what it is that I say, when you pick out your clothes, listen to your body.

What is it that you're drawn to wearing? You know, what you go out to eat, so I try to integrate it into their everyday life so they can build up on those things and it becomes, they slowly start to change over time.

That's the habit and performance optimization that your specialty is, you actually have them go out into the wild and live how they would love to live optimally and ideally.

Okay, that's really beautiful. Exactly. A lot of phobia, exposure therapy, and that way too. Interesting. Yeah, okay. So I want to go back to something you said.

You know, you're off Most of the medication now that they put you on as a teenager, and you were a little girl when all of this happened, what are some of techniques that you use to do that?

Do you incorporate those with the people you see now? Absolutely. Absolutely, so I always say let's start with a basics, right? How are you breathing?

how are moving? Are you eating? are sleeping? getting outside? So we start that talking about Let's figure, make sure you're eating in a way that feels right for your body.

Let make you sure your breathing well. Lets make that you are actually, you know, doing things that bring pleasure into your life. Because we need joy, we play, and we fun.

And then from there I might refer out to people like you, to other doctors and practitioners to help with hormonal balance and managing pain and all these other things.

To make sure we have a nice team of really solid clinicians who are going to help to make that everything going on your body is running smoothly. Because we don't realize that our bodies are constantly working for us.

Like, our body are so inherently intelligent. They want to heal. And we just need to give them what they need. To heal, and if they're operating with a lot of toxicity around us, including toxic thoughts, because those are the worst.

we're not allowing the body to flourish. So if we can give it what it needs, it will do the work it need to do, and people will feel better. I bet people really honestly just feel less depressed with just that recipe, you know, getting

outside more, more sunshine, better food, water.

Absolutely. Some of your patients probably don't even need medications after that point, I would assume. It's true. Really? It is true, yes. I'm going to come off pretty easily depending on the person.

Yeah, yeah. The biggest thing I find also is are people living in alignment with what they actually want, with their values, what their goals, the things that bring them joy.

Because a lot of the time, especially someone who lives in New York City, people, I see this all the times, are living a life that they've been told is the life they should live, right?

They go get the fancy job at the law firm, they go buy the house with the white picket fence and have the kids. I'm not saying that there aren't people who don't want that.

But a lotta times people find themselves 10, 20 years in doing things that actually don' want to do and then we think, oh, here's the SSRI, the antidepressant and it's gonna fix it.

That can't fix the issue. Who? If you're not in alignment with your soul. Wow. I know. Yeah. And it's a hard pill. A hard truth pill for a lot of people to swallow.

The hardest. Because they're in their comfort zone, right? Absolutely. You got it. Oh, yeah. Ask them to step out of their comfortable zone. That's the difficult one.

It's very difficult. There are a lotta patients even I can heal because they are in toxic relationships. Yes. That they're spouse or whoever else. And you can tell their nervous system or whatever else is going on, their autoimmune condition isn't healing because of that relationship.

I'm sure you've seen that a lot too. Absolutely. Because the body is trying to protect. We see this all the time with physical ailments. One of my favorite books is Metaphysical Anatomy book.

Oh, I don't know this one. Yeah, it's great because you could look up all of the physical health issues and it tells you the emotional component of them.

So things like that, you want to explore and see what's actually underlying here. I mean, how many times have you had a patient where the illness or the disease or health issue is benefiting the patient even on an unconscious level?

Right, they can't get better because they actually benefit from the caregiving. Oh, I see. Yeah, there's a benefit to being sick. They don't even realize it, though.

It's subconscious. Yeah, like, I'm not believing that. I am not sitting here saying, oh, if you struggle with a chronic illness, you dont want to get better.

Most people genuinely want get to better, but sometimes there's an underlying benefit to being sick. Like money or attention, possibly. Exactly. Okay.

And those people aren't conscious of that, it's something that's running in the background, right? Exactly Okay, so say I come to you and they say, I really want You know, what's the first thing you would say to me?

And what are you, like, assessing me and seeing if I'm ready? How are doing that? That's a great question. So I always preface this with, I am not a medical doctor, so I can't tell you what to do with the medication.

But what we're gonna do is we are going to assess to see how ready are, how healthy are and when we work with your prescriber, make it that the titration is a lot easier.

Yeah, so usually I look to see how healthy are they? Does their lifestyle actually support getting off medication? Because when people are getting of the medication, they're going through withdrawal.

Holistic therapy, movement, and nervous system work

And a lot of times a psychiatrist will say, well, you're actually, right, your withdrawing and you experience depression because you withdraw, because your brain is, I mean, withdrawal feels awful.

Yeah. You talk feels, awful and they'll say oh, You're depressed. So we actually have to put you back on that medication. They say that. They go backwards.

Oh, no, you can't go down on this. You're actually not doing well. But their brain is going through withdrawal. Right. It's hard to tell. Is it depression, is it withdrawal?

Right? We don't really know. Does that make sense? No, that makes really a lot of sense. I actually never thought about it that way. So it's confusing.

Yeah. The doctor is, the psychiatrists are very well-trained when people are on the medication, not so well trained at getting that moth. That's against the business model.

Yes. And so I'm looking to see how healthy are they? Can their nervous system really support this detox process? Can we help them do things like sauna and coffee enemas to help support that detox?

Yes. Are they eating well? Like I said, are they breathing well, or are getting outside? How high are their stress levels right now? can their body tolerate this additional stress of getting off if they're already so overwhelmed and in a toxic relationship, having trouble at work, right?

Having financial stress. And then I even consider things like being in New York and a lot of my patients are in new York, not all of them. What season is it?

Because they come to me and it's October and they go, I want to start getting off my meds. And I go seasonal affective disorder comes around the corner.

I don't think this is a great time to do it. Let's spend the winter preparing your body. Then when spring hits, we'll start this titration process. Yeah.

That makes a lot of sense. As soon as November hits in New York City, everyone becomes depressed. So I have to take that into consideration. Yeah, it is pretty gloomy in the York.

It is gloomily in York, yeah. it's gloomey, so that is very true for you. Let's see here. so let's get into the people pleasing. You know, I hear a lotta people online nowadays call it a trauma response.

Yes, right. Yes. I think a lot of people out there would say, well, I'm just nice. Just being nice, is this actually a trauma? So where does this come from, from people?

Because I have this. Yes. And the reason I got so deep into teaching people pleasing workshops is because of me too. Like we're all, and I still struggle with, I've made a lot of progress, but I so very much struggle it.

Yeah. People pleasing is not about being kind, it's actually about safety. Oh, wow. Okay. Yeah. It's about what happens in our bodies when we are so scared of rupture in relationship with somebody else.

So doing something that's going to disappoint someone or cause them to reject us or create any sort of conflict, we'd rather abandon ourselves than feel abandoned by somebody Okay.

Well, yeah, that makes sense. I guess, you know, we can deal with ourselves, but we cannot deal rejection from

other people, same times. Is this something from childhood for most people?

Typically, it is. So typically, is a trauma response because at some point, potentially, love felt very conditional. As long as I maintained connection with maybe my primary caregiver, my mother, and my father, and made them happy, then I was safe.

Because back then, we depend on our parents. We can't live without them. They house us, they bathe us. they feed us and it's actually what's so, like I said earlier, our bodies are so inherently intelligent.

Our nervous systems created this survival response to keep us safe, to protect us to always tell my patients and myself, I have to remind you of this, is that when we're engaging in people pleasing, Remember to thank your nervous system for actually back then doing what it needed to do to keep you alive.

To keep in connection with your parent who was supposed to take care of you. But now we get into adulthood and these tactics are no longer serving us, right?

Like we're adults, we could take of ourselves. Yeah. So we want to work on. How can I actually sit with the immense discomfort that arises when I do something that might create rupture in a relationship?

Right. Set a boundary. Yes. I mean, that's why when we tell people, just say no. Just have better boundaries. People can't do it because it's not a logical issue, right?

You can see this emotional behavior with a logic solution. You have to address the emotions that are arising when we engage in any sort of relationship rupture.

I think a lot of people subconsciously, people, please, they don't even really realize when they're doing it's like ingrained in them so hard from childhood even.

So much so. How do you make people aware that that's what even what they are doing? I mean, I also struggle. I can tell you I had no idea what I even wanted for myself up until maybe in the last I don't know, five to eight years.

I think my entire life I spent making decisions to please other people. My family, my friends, even my major in college was like, oh, this isn't good enough.

You know? My parents wanted something else. So a lot of it is recognizing, how do I feel when I say yes to something I actually want to say no to? Like, do I feel pressure?

Do I want to cry? I wanna go hide in a box and cover up and never talk to anyone? There is something that happens in us emotionally that is building up over time when we're not listening to ourselves.

And it creates resentment. It creates burnout. Makes us feel like a doormat. Yeah. And a lot of the time, so many of us don't even know what we want because we've done this for so long that we're just always making decisions to accommodate other people.

Yep. That makes so much sense. I see this every single day. People never even ask themselves what they would like to do for that day, and they just kind of are on autopilot doing things for other.

Do you think that causes disease? I think so, because of the trapped emotions. You know, what is that pressure doing to us? That resentment, that feeling actually so disconnected from ourselves.

And then it builds up, it build up and builds, and I've seen experiences of people with throat cancer who never actually stood up. Who never spoke out and said what they wanted.

who were not smokers. Wow. I don't think that's a coincidence. No. Because the body will find a way to make you change your behavior.

Treating the whole person beyond talk therapy

Yes, completely. I can actually think of a person right now who's had a couple different neck surgeries, had the thyroid removed, still has chronic neck pain, and they refuse to speak their truth.

Their only goal is to think everyone else around them happy or the life of the party. Exactly. And I believe it led to sickness here, just like you talked about.

I couldn't agree more. I think so, too. And it's a tough pill to swallow, to think about that. But like I said earlier, our body's always trying to protect us.

Our body is so inherently intelligent. We're always fighting our bodies. The biggest thing that I had to learn and I try to get my patients to learning is, and struggle with it very much though, is having compassion for yourself.

Hmm, that's such a hard one. You're always so compassionate for everyone else. I know, and then we beat ourselves up. And I do it, I definitely do and I've gotten better, but I did it.

We beat our bodies up, right? We become chronically ill and we are so angry at our body. But that anger destroys us. You know, there's this excerpt from Joe Dispenza's book, You Are the Placebo.

And I know you've been to his retreat. Yeah, I'm a fan. I am too. There's an excerp I always read from the book and it says something about how in wound healing studies, where participants were, they gave them a paper cut or something like that.

although I could be messing this up a little bit, they were monitoring the healing of the wound in one group that had more neutral emotions and one that very angry emotions.

And the group had the angry emotion, which you can replace with anger, sadness, discomfort, whatever it is. They healed so much slower than the other group.

So I always tell my patients who are struggling with physical health ailments, I say, listen, I don't want to be spiritual bypassy. I'm not sitting here being like, oh, let's just be happy and be so grateful.

Yeah, have to feel your emotions. That is the bulk of the work I do with people is sitting with and metabolizing uncomfortable emotions, that's really, really important work.

It's almost like, do you have to get them there? Yeah. In the session, you've to give them to that point, right? Oh, my gosh. It is rough. But when I share that study with them, it shows them why it's important to metabolize their emotions and not emotionally beat themselves up, but actually be with it, feel it.

Let it resolve in the body. Don't push it away and don't suppress it. Don"t push in away. And also don"'t let these uncomfortable emotions drive your behavior and be totally crazy and wild and neglectful.

You know, there are two different types of people. There are the people that will suppress their emotions and say they're fine. They don' feel anything.

Then there're people who act a little crazier, who can't emotionally regulate. Yes. Do you think one causes more dysfunction than the other? They're just both terrible.

I think they're both pretty terrific. There's this analogy I always tell my patients that I wish I could take credit for this because it's so good. Uncomfortable, difficult emotions are like obnoxious, annoying children in the backseat of a car.

Have you heard this one? No, but I resonate. Yeah. So they are those children, you're driving the car and there are the children the backs of the cars and they were screaming and kicking and crying.

Okay, would you hand them the steering wheel? Right. Yeah, they're going to crash the car. But you also wouldn't suffocate them in the truck. So that's the two things that you're talking about, is the people who are stuffing down the emotions.

and the people who are letting the emotion impulsively drive their behavior. Yes, correct. So what is the answer? What do you do with that? All my patients, well, what do I do then, Elise?

We would gently attune to the children. We'd acknowledge that they're having a difficult time. I know you're really upset. wanted to get ice cream, but we can't get iced cream today, right?

We have to go do something else. And I know you're upset, and I'm here for you. I'll be here while you are upset. It's okay to be upset but I will let you feel it and process it.

So actually talk to yourself that way. Oh yeah. Really? Yeah. But then you have actually go in and be with it, so this is the hardest work because everyone says, what do I do now?

Is actually learning to sit with and feel what is arising in the body. And this is, I swear, this what I tell my patients, This is the hardest work you will ever do.

Because no one wants to feel it. No one trained us on how to do this in elementary school. This should have been a course. I think I got taught the opposite.

Exactly. Right away from it, don't act on it don' acknowledge it When you do that, when you suppress it, whether it be through avoidance, through drugs, alcohol, sex, shopping addictions, people-pleasing tendencies, whatever it is, that energy, emotion, it's not going anywhere.

It's building up. Building up tension. So, okay, now you're getting more of what's gonna happen. You're gonna explode, you gonna develop chronic illness, You gonna get to a place where you just cry hysterically and can't function for days on end.

Something is gonna to happen to that energy. So we do need to be able to actually sit with it and be with, let it metabolize, not act on it impulsively, and then be about to figure out what to do from there.

How do you know when it's metabolized? So you, that's a really good question. I really am asking for my own personal. So this work that is so fair. This work, I tell people repetition after repetition.

We will have to do this session after session for a very long time. But what happens is eventually when you are sitting with it, when your being with that, When you're just going to it from compassion and curiosity, not from judgment, literally feeling it directly.

I tell my patients, where do you feel this? Is it in your throat? is it your chest? If you were to remove it out of your body, describe it for me. Is it hard?

Is is soft? Does it have a color?

Assessing medication tapering and lifestyle readiness

I have I've a mentee of mine who's an art therapist, and she did a great post about drawing it, which I love to like just draw the emotion, right? And I know it sounds so silly.

But when you can actually be with it and not run away from it. You start to realize, OK, I can't actually sit with this and I'm not going to die. Because these emotions feel like we're going to die.

Yeah. Going back to people pleasing, why do we people please instead of taking care of ourselves and doing the thing we need to do is because the emotion that arises when there's a rupture in relationship literally feels like

death in our body.

and we cannot sit with that. Do you know what I'm thinking about? Yeah, it always goes back to unsafety, actually. And you women, they're always scanning the room for safety, and they are always the caretakers.

So it's like I see people policing so much more prevalently in women. I hate to say that, but Well, it's also common in autoimmune diseases and other health issues.

Yeah. And that's mostly women as well. Yes. Autoimmunity. You don't want to do causation equals correlation. Right. Exactly. But there seems to be a link, some sort of causations, perhaps, or association.

That's what I see in practice too. Besides, would you say to to define people, pleasing for people. Would you say it's always saying yes when you want to say the opposite?

Or is there some more to it than that? Is it just that simple of a concept? It pretty much is. It does boil down to that. it can come out in different ways, though.

Right? Right. I can't come in saying, yes, when do you wanna say no. And it really any sort of accommodating the other person, changing yourself. to accommodate somebody else and manage their feelings.

So it can look like not speaking up in the conference room at work when you disagree with everybody. It can like saying yes to going to a friend's birthday party when go.

Yeah, that's a good one. It can be what they call fawning, right? I think they came up with a fourth of the sympathetic fight, flight, freezer, fawn. That's right.

I always forget about faun. Because it's the newer one, I forget it too. Right, exactly, so it's being kind when your body is telling you otherwise. It's kind, quote unquote kind.

Doing the thing to accommodate somebody else when inside everything is saying you don't do it. Now I always tell people, everyone's always afraid that overcoming their people pleasing is going to make them selfish.

Do you get what I'm saying? Yeah. Like, I don't want to be selfish. I am only ever going to choose myself if I overcome this. That's not what this is about.

This is recognizing that relationships are given a take, and it is not always about choosing yourself in every situation. It's also about recognizing, OK, what is it that I want in this scenario?

Maybe I really don' t want go to that friend's birthday party because I m not feeling so great, but I' m OK. I'm just like not feeling so great. It's rainy, it's dark, I don't feel like going.

So I recognize what do I not want in this situation and what DO I want. But then I have to ask myself, what action here aligns with my values and who I wanna show up as?

So it's really just making sure you're in alignment with all parts of yourself. So, it almost like you really have to get to know yourself pretty well.

You do. If you don't know your self really well, that's the bulk of it. Oh my gosh. I know. That's a whole step before even like working on the people-pleasing boundaries.

Got to figure out who you are and what you want. Yeah. And some people might be thinking, you know, well, what's the point? Like, I'm happy as long as everyone else is happy.

I hear that a lot. Right. A lot, but are you happy? Right? Is that actually what makes you happen? Yeah, all the time because we're all human. We're human, yeah.

And we have our own unique desires and needs and wants. So figuring out getting in touch with that, What brings you joy? And that's sometimes really hard for people to answer.

So are the peacemakers of the family, are they the people placers? Usually. Really? Yeah. That's how my mom was, for sure. They're the ones who are just, they just want to keep the peace.

they want everyone to feel happy and calm and safe. But you'll usually find that those people deep down are so, They feel so disconnected from themselves and what they because they're really concerned about making everyone else happy.

And because of that, they later on, many years later, will be like, I feel like a doormat. I never choose myself. You know, if I'll run down, and I'm exhausted, or burned out.

But I can see this in my family members, actually. Yes, sir. For sure. Can you? Yeah. A thousand percent. Of course, it's always easy to see everybody else, except yourself.

It's true. Sometimes what happens is when there's a people pleaser in the family, it results in a lot of other family members arguing and fighting. Because if that person is always trying to please everybody else, they're always like, yes, sirring all everybody, but then each yes is a yes to something different.

Family members being told yes something else and it's actually not, it is not in alignment. So they just cause chaos in the family. Oh, wow. So it's really, they seem to want to be the people who keep everyone happy and they end up making everyone unhappy in the end, which is not their goal at all.

That's exactly, exactly. Now everyone's at war with each other because they simply wanted to make everyone hap- they thought they were gonna make everybody happy.

It's dysfunctional in the end, you can see, and sadly. But man, I thought I was being a good girl. I started to be a girl growing up.

What people-pleasing really is

We all were. Not causing any issues. Don't ruffle feathers. No, speak up, look cute. Yeah. Be good. Right. And that's really, really detrimental to women, actually.

So, you know, obviously you've talked about leaning into the discomfort to feel these painful feelings sometimes for real growth, actually. But what has someone learned early on in their family that is staying small kept them safe?

Then what do you do with them? Talk to these people. Yeah, I mean, that's the work. That is starting to dive into what is it that I want and where am I living out of alignment with my dreams, with me goals.

And that's where we really, what we want, if something is a yes or something isn't no, it doesn't come from our mind, It comes from your body. Oh, you feel it.

I love that. Okay. When you're drawn, like these amazing pants you are wearing, when you pick them out. You're drawing to them, right? I was like hot pink today.

Yeah. Yes. you were like, I loved that, that feels good. Right? Like when When you're at a restaurant and you are looking at the menu and deciding what to eat, we could go into our head and be like, oh, I need to this, you know, this is lowering calories and this 30 grams of protein.

Exactly. But what if you actually tuned in and listen, what sounds good? Like what feels good if I imagining chicken, how does that feel today? If I imagine eating vegetables, has that field today about some loaded mac and cheese, some load of mac n cheese?

How does I know? I'm not into her side for just the food and mac. And she's anyway, Being clear, we also have very clean diets overall, but tapping into what do you want?

What do feel drawn to? I'll send patients to a plant store. I'd be like, go to the plant Just notice what plants you find really pretty. Or a gymson sore, like a crystal sore.

Yes, that's a great idea. I never thought about that. These are low risk decisions. You don't even have to buy anything. Interesting. Go to a museum. Yeah, this is fun.

This is where we have a lot of fun and therapy. It's just play. like no major risk involved, no severe consequences, just notice what am I drawn to and what do I kind of not like?

What's repulsive to me? I don't really like that. Maybe it's a painting in a museum, maybe it is a certain plant the way it looks. and just start to tune in.

What excites you? This is so ridiculous and I hate that I'm saying this. Sometimes I tell my younger patients, I say to them, what shows up most on your TikTok?

Oh my gosh, so funny. Because it probably tells you what you love. Oh, that's actually really observant of you. Yeah, if it's all travel, you're probably so excited to travel.

For me, it is people dancing and DJing. Well, yes. I forgot to tell you guys in the bio that Elise is also a DJ that is booked out every weekend in a story in New York.

So I'm just saying, she's got multi-talents here. Honestly, that's interesting. For me to think that, I don't know, people can just… literally sit with this and hopefully understand and have breakthroughs with their emotions with you as the guide for this.

And they can have fun doing it. So it's partly about really what I'm hearing you say with the people policing. It's really about getting in touch with that like contraction versus expansion almost.

That's beautifully put. Yeah, that's exactly it Okay, so it's like instead of being up here in the monkey minds, which is what I tell all my patients they're sick for too.

They have one thing in common. It's they are all up there. Yes. And when I'm like, can you feel into your body and see how it feels in your heart? And they were like what are you talking about, right?

What? No one knows how to do it. Okay. I am like does this hurt? They are like how? Yeah. And so it's like everyone I see that's healthy has their brain and their heart connected.

And then people who are up here constantly like a dog with a bone trying to figure out their illness. Figure it out. It really keeps them ill. It's so true.

And constantly in that yang masculine energy, which doesn't allow the body to do its thing and heal. The yin is when we recover, it's when you heal, so we're up here, the monkey mind, yang, whatever you want to call it, that's the state of You're thinking, you're doing.

This is about being. Yes. It's about feeling. We need both. But we're humans that are, we need the yin and the yang, the masculine and feminine, but we are so up here.

And I spent all of my life up there. I still do, this is still a work in progress to get into here, that's why I go to the beach all the time. The beach is like, yeah.

Right? Yeah. My natural yin of my body just melts, my breathing regulates, you know? I joke that a trip to Florida for me is worth 10 therapy sessions, because it's so healing.

It's… I recognize not everyone can do that, but that's the thing. When you can tap into that… do less and just be. That's when the body will work its magic.

When it has the right nutrients, the love, it will heal. I agree with that completely. So I'm just thinking about my TikTok I really like. Yeah, I want to know what comes up for you.

Dogs. There you go, dogs make you happy. Yeah. Yeah, and that definitely like traveling and conspiracy theories. Yes. So this is what makes me happy. This is the world I live in.

Thank you. Exactly. But that's a really good point for everyone listening is, what's on your TikTok? What's in your feed? what is algorithm bringing up for you?

Not that I endorse using TikTok regularly by any means. At least we can use it to like give insight about. But you know, if you're going to doomsday, scroll, and dissociate, what is the fun thing for you to look at, right?

And that's really where you should be spending your time and your day instead of in the digital playing out. Yeah, doing the things you love. Let's say you loved dogs, but I have a patient who, she's not old enough to have dogs.

She can't really take care of a dog. But I encourage her to some dog sitting, do some puppy yoga. Go play with a neighbor's dog. So how can you actually do the things that you love, even if they're not fully accessible to you?

What kind of music are you drawn to? Listen to that type of using on your own. Dance with yourself. Have a dance party. I have a party with myself every day.

It gets me in a good mood. She really does. You're very good at that, actually. That's one of the reasons I became a DJ. I just want people to dance. I want them to move and be in their bodies and have fun and sing.

Get their vagus nerve activated. Absolutely, absolutely. So okay, question for you then.

Emotions, suppression, and learning to sit with discomfort

You want to have people have to sit with themselves and get silent and know themselves in stillness. Is there a point where people can sit and re-traumatize themselves?

That's a really good question. I love this question and it's the reason I think that it can actually be detrimental that we prescribe meditation to everybody.

Yeah. Really? Because I that not everyone is ready for meditation. When you are excessively in your monkey mind, and then you tell the person to just sit, it is so unbearable.

It is, so torturous. Do you know what I'm talking about? I do know. I know exactly what this is like. My mom used to make me listen to Jon Kabat-Zinn audio recording.

He's the god, the grandfather of mindfulness or something like that. Yeah. If I hear his voice, this was when I was a teenager, I would listen it. Okay.

Okay, but so, and then if you are already someone who's in a lot of trauma and you're in free state, which I spent most of my life in, I think that reiterating that freeze in still space is actually more harmful than beneficial.

So for all the people out there listening, being like, oh, no, gotta sit with my emotions. I can't do it. Or I'm not spiritual. You don't have to. What I do with people and I'm creating more programs so it's accessible online to do this is stair step people down into feeling safer in stillness.

But we might start off with hopping on the vibration plate. We might started off doing more intensive breath work or more intense movement. And then, you know, maybe from there we slow it down, we do some calmer breath work,

some Tai Chi, things that are going to get you into your body but are not complete stillness.

But they actually feel good. I love this. Yeah. Because I think it's too much to ask someone to just sit there and meditate when they have no idea how to.

It doesn't feel safe, it feels overwhelming, and they're constantly in their head thinking, I'm doing this wrong, doing that wrong. Or, you know, they start on tangents thinking about how their boss yelled at them yesterday or what they have to do at work the next day.

It's like you kind of catch yourself in these, like, I don't know mental spirals. Absolutely. Yeah. And then what's the point? You're just driving yourself nuts sitting there.

So it's re-traumatizing. Yes. Interesting. So that's why whenever I'm doing this work with people, I am always checking in with them and how's it going, you know, if we get them to a place where they are able to actually do that more conventional meditation somatic work.

Checking in, okay, how is it doing? Some days they're more in their head. I say, OK, let's come out of that. Let's do some movement instead. And then we'll try it again, maybe, or we will do something different.

In my office, I might do a little cranial steak roll or reiki, because touch is so powerful for calming. If it's not traumatizing to somebody, touch can be so power to just help melt the person's nervous system.

So if they like that and they want that, we might a do little of. But it is really working with each individual person because everyone is different, So true.

That's the art. The art of it. It's very hard to teach. I guess for everyone out there listening, how can they tell if they're in a free state or a flight or fight?

How would they know? If they're in a fight or flight, they probably feel a sense of panic a lot of the time. The free state is a harder one. I think it's harder to tell.

Some patients of mine come in and they know that they are in free-state because they just say, I can't get out of bed. They can go do the things I need to do.

Or I could do their bare minimum, but I struggle to anything else. But they may notice, actually, in moments that they just can't physically move. I didn't realize I was in a freeze state for a very long time, and I actually loved running sprints.

And I learned it was because the sprinting got me into a flight state. Oh my gosh. Because people will tell me I don't think I'm in freeze because I do this HIIT exercises or CrossFit or sprints or whatever it is.

Get them out of the freeze. Oh, my God. Yeah. So I would start all, I had insane energy. I was pumping on cortisol. When I as a Bellevue and all those meds, running on Cortisol.

And I could do crazy workouts and never get tired. See, people need to hear this. Cause they just think that there's nothing wrong. Oh, absolutely. They think nothing's wrong.

I thought nothing was wrong, and then it's really rough because your ego, everyone tells you, oh my gosh, you have so much energy. You're so strong. Do all these crazy things and keep going.

And when I started doing all this somatic nervous system work, I actually started getting tired at the gym. Oh wow. It totally impacted my self image.

So I felt, Oh my God, so I'm not as strong as I used to be. Can't do crazy stuff at gym anymore. If I do a workout 45 minutes in, then I'd be exhausted.

This is wild because I have heard people say when they start doing the work with a nervous system, they'll fall asleep for like hours or something to re-regulate almost.

But people do not like it. They fight this. I didn't like, I did not because my body needed that rest and repair. It needs that yin. Wow. So I was getting so tired all the time and my somatic therapist at the times said this is part of it, this part the process.

So with these people, this is the reason you're having these slow movements with them. To help them start to kind of feel the body. Yes. Because I feel like when people are in a HIIT exercise or a CrossFit, they can't, it's really hard to, you know, because you are working out, but it is like you You're not as much.

It's a slow movement. Sometimes I will have them do more intensive exercise because it does force a bit of a rebound. Right? It forces your sympathetic to go up and then it has to come down.

Yeah. So there's benefit in that. But from there, I want them to actually get into the body after that So I'm doing it as a way in to get into the body and calm their system down.

But yeah, when you're constantly go, go go and high intensity and never getting tired, probably not the best sign. No, it's not. And people need to hear that.

They really do. I think women especially. OK, so with the people pleasing, what tips would you have for people if they can't find a therapist like you?

How would how would have them kind of start? Is there a book they could read or resources they couldn't look at for? People pleasing. Yes. So I actually just launched like a very short mini course.

I think it's under 25 minutes. It might be even shorter on how to start to tap in and just really feel, first of all, notice what's a yes, what a no. How do I start sit with discomfort in my body at the thought of creating rupture in relationship?

So that's one resource out there. And really just, I don't have any books in particular off the top of my head. A lot of this work has been through my own, the systems I've put together have been like so much disjointed therapy and training and things like that and pulling from different practices, yes.

Freeze, fight-or-flight, and somatic regulation

But the biggest thing I would suggest is start to identify A, what is a yes and what a no in my body. Okay. What do I feel drawn to? What I do not feel draw to, what do we feel repelled by?

And a yes can feel like excitement, it can be like curiosity, It can like peace and a no might feel anxious, avoidant, fear. You might feel it in certain places.

Yes, you're going to feel that tension build up in your throat when you actually want to say something and don't say it. You're gonna feel nervousness in you stomach when are worried about letting someone down.

So start there. And then from there, notice, just observe when your kind of giving into these tendencies. When are you saying yes when actually you want say no?

Because the way to start changing the behavior is to just start to notice when it's happening. Not beating yourself up for it, just noticing it. Because now you're gonna start pattern recognition of, okay, I actually am doing that more than I realized, or I'm doing it in this situation more that another situation.

And then from there, learn to be with the discomfort in your body. And that's going to take time. That's gonna take the reps of feeling discomfort. We're not saying to act on anything yet.

Don't say yes when you, you know, don't really know what you actually want to say no yet, might be too much, but just feel what it would feel like in your body if you did say, no.

Run through that situation. Exactly. Right? Exactly run through the situation and be with what comes up. Go into the body and notice where the sensations, the immense discomfort, and the fear of the panic is coming up in your body.

Be with it, breathe with, it move with. And just start to actually build up a tolerance of sitting with that. Because if you can sit with discomfort. If you consider with scary emotions.

You're superhuman. You can do anything, you know? Because that's the thing. It's like we stop ourselves from doing so much that we want to do because we're so afraid of feeling what might come with that.

The fear that there's a fear of feelings anxiety or dread or panic in doing the action. So we don't actually fear doing action most of the time. We fear the feeling that comes up when we engage in that action Yeah, we will do everything to not feel discomfort about.

Big time. It's so true. Big Time. So, you know, self-esteem is tossed about a lot within this conversation with people. But if someone really has been making themselves small, maybe they've been putting other people first their entire lives, how long should they look at rebuilding the self esteem?

And you what things or tips do you have for them? I guess for building self Esteem, I love doing selfesteem work. DJing has been, it has just been the biggest, I feel so corny when I use the term inner child, but it's been such an inner-child repair thing for me and a self-esteem builder.

Because I'll tell you why. We build self esteem by realizing that we can tolerate failure. Oh, so it's not through success. It's, not as much through, success as, much as being able to sit with the failures that might come if we don't succeed at what we wanted.

So I spent all my life only ever choosing path that I was really good at. Right. Only three. We all do that. But yeah, right. Well, but like, no, like I couldn't fail.

I always chose the courses I could fail at, the sports that, I, was, really, good, at and I understood myself as I'm really good at these things and I can't do anything else that I am bad at because my ego will shatter.

I cannot tolerate the thought of failing. And I was the straight A student and the great athlete and all those things. But when I got into my late 20s, I could not tolerate messing up.

Like I was incapable. Because if I messed up, the entire world felt like it shattered all over me. I wanted to run under my bed and cry and hide for days.

And I realized that if I keep showing up, I learned this actually through becoming a personal trainer. I would train clients early on and have no idea what I was doing.

And i'd want to run home and cry because I'd be like, i messed them up and I like hurt them and i didn't want To keep going back. But the thing that built my self-esteem was I kept going Back.

i kept showing Up and it kept learning from the mistakes and realizing that I wasn't going to die. He didn't die. I didn' die, yeah. Now with DJing, my DJ teacher gives me permission to mess up.

He says, you're gonna mess at every gig you have. And you know, I'll be mixing music, and I make a mistake, And it's like, no one cares, but I care, But no-one cares.

It's actually not that big of a deal. and… I learned, okay, that I survived this. You know, no one hates me, right? Like, I'm okay right now. Yeah. And even if I am not okay, have the skills and tools to go back and connect with myself

and soothe myself, and realize I will be okay.

But you learn by doing something that you're kind of bad at. I tell patients, let's go find something you are not really good at and do it. They're like, oh, they hate it?

I have my stomach all turned when you said that even. Oh, you know. But I would take dance classes in New York City, and by the way, when you take dancing classes, these are not beginner dance courses.

These are advanced people taking beginner classes. The first dance class I took in NYC, beginner hip hop, I thought I had a concussion or I was stupid.

Building self-esteem through failure and discomfort

Everyone else in the class knew exactly what was going on except for me. And then they do this thing where the, you know, they'll break the group into half and one half sits and watches the other half grip, burn them out.

Oh my God, the first time I didn't do it. I said, no way now, I'm going to perform in front of all these people. Yeah. But then I decided, it was after a breakup and I kind of part of my quote unquote globe.

I looked like a fool, I really looked a like fool in so many of these classes. I'm a decent dancer but I can't follow choreography because my mind, it's like learning another language I've realized.

Dancing is a whole different language. Yes. And I just kept showing up and looking like full and having fun and realizing I am okay. Like I totally okay and that's what builds up self-esteem.

I'm okay if I stumble and fall. I love this because everyone thinks self-esteem is built in the successes and the wins and, you know, where you're glowing and that's where it comes from where, like, crafted your experience, the expert here, and it's not what you are saying.

It's actually, there's gifts in failure. And that's where it gets confusing, totally. That's the confidence. Confidence is like, I can show up and I could crush it.

And I've done all these things. You gain confidence by being competent, which is exactly what you're saying. But how many of those people can tolerate if something doesn't go well or if they do have a failure or they crash and burn?

That is the self-esteem. The self esteem is, can I sit with and tolerate that massive failure and be okay? And is it fair to the inner child to stop something that sounds so fun to you because you're afraid of how you'll look?

No, it's not fair. It's fair not to her at all. The innerchild. Yeah. Wow. She needs to learn that it is okay to mess up. I mean, I don't know about you, but I was told it was awful to messed up I'm the oldest girl, so yes.

Same. That's my problem. Right. We were told no mistakes. And then we create this really fragile ego and sense of self and anything that It feels like a little, you know, just flicking it feels, like, the whole ego shattered.

Yeah. But it's not. It's just a flick. And the stronger it is, it can handle it. You know? So that's building up the self-esteem. Okay. I can do that by saying, okay, here's my comfort zone.

What is just outside my comfort zone? What can I do to push myself just a little bit that is not going to cause injury or trauma? Because you don't want to go too far out of the comfort.

It's like dosing meds. I was thinking the same thing. Yeah, it's exactly that. If you prescribe someone too little of a dose, not gonna do anything. But if you prescribe them too big of a dose, it could be lethal.

I always say to people, when we're detoxing you, 20% you can handle worse. But no more than 20%. I like that.

Detoxing. And if it gets worse, then we pull back on the protocol.

Yeah. So, you know, same thing there, I guess. You know 20%, outside your comfort zone, possibly. Yes. It's all about the dosing. Whether it's in comfort zone, whether it is in medicine.

Absolutely. Yeah, because what happens in detox, you can die in a detox if it isn't done appropriately. Or you could get the person to the point where they go, I'm not doing this anymore.

Put me back on those meds, put me on whatever I needed because I am not feeling this. Right. So, absolutely, it all is about dosings. Like going to a gym.

Similar analogy. If you pick up those, two-pound weights and start bicep curling, they are like, oh, so easy. I go forever. Sure, you might build a little muscle over time and you get some resistance training, but you're not going to grow the same amount of muscle if you pick up a weight that actually is challenging.

But now, if go try to pick a 50-pound dumbbell and muscle curl with it, It's not going to work. And what happens to make the muscle grow? You have to rip the muscles fibers.

So it's also like you have kind of enter a little bit of discomfort. Yeah. It is interesting. Exactly. Perfect. Well, Elise, thank you so much for all your wisdom here.

I really appreciate you coming today. Oh my gosh. Thank you for having me. This was a great conversation. So, for people who want to have more of you, where can they find you?

Where can I get more beliefs? Yes, absolutely. So if people are interested in learning more, I have all the social media stuff, the Instagram, TikTok, YouTube.

People can reach out to me on my website if they're interested. What's your handle? Oh, my handle, yes. at nerdy, N-E-U-R-D-Y, like neurology, underscore therapist.

Where to find Elise and closing remarks

So that's my handle on Instagram and TikTok. You can go to my website, feel free to reach out to me on, you know, on the contact form or email me. Like I said, I have that people pleasing program that has newly been released as well as I had one that is nervous system regulation, my four favorite nervous regulation exercises that are not meditating.

Actually, the program is called I Hate Meditate Day. No, it's for anyone who hates identity. But I love connecting with people. So please don't hesitate to reach out over DM or email or however you want.

I'd love it. Well, thank you for providing all of us your amazing wisdom here. There's people going to get a lot of benefit out of this, myself included.

And I appreciate it! Thank you so much for having me. If this episode spoke to you, subscribe and share it with someone who can't find the answers to what ails them.

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