Self-Awareness Changes Everything in Your Life & Relationships! Dr. Christine Cocchiola | Ep. 131 Transcript

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Introduction to Abuse and Coercive Control

We all grew up with stranger danger, right? Right. 93% of offenders are known to the child. Someone they love, someone they trust, Someone their family member loves or trusts.

Less than 3% are ever arrested, convicted, and imprisoned. Wow. Did you experience any abuse whatsoever at all? No. I mean, unless you include that I met my future husband when I was 16 years old.

And that began a pattern of abuse, which we probably could talk about. Our expert, Dr. Christine Pochiola. Hey! How are you? Today, we're exposing the hidden layers of abuse, narcissism, and control with guest Dr.

Christine Kosciola. As the founder and CEO of the Coercive Control Consulting Institute, she is a world-renowned expert on psychological manipulation.

Let's dive in. You know, it's interesting talking about these things right now with this huge release of Epstein files. Sometimes I look at it, I'm like, this can't be believable.

and we are just hearing about it now. What is that about? That's about people in positions of power holding that power over others. It's quite remarkable, I think, like to think about the amount of the power perpetrators often have.

The neighbor next door who says, hey, let me watch your kids on Saturday because you have work. Oh my gosh, that's wonderful. He's such a great guy. Come to find out he's an abuser.

what are some of things that people can do to try to identify these things early rather than later on in life? Yeah, so those are. Welcome to another episode of a healthy point of view podcast.

I'm your host, Sam Tahata, and as usual, we're bringing experts from all over the world to talk about health, wellness, beauty and mindset. Today's guest flies all the way from that cold weather all away from etiquette.

You know what sucks? It's cold here in Florida right now, so she's not even able to enjoy the weather the way she should. So today's episode, we've heard a lot about abuse, narcissism, control.

Are you in one of these relationships? You might not know. We bring today our expert, Dr. Christine Cochchiola. Hey, how are you? Doc. Welcome to a healthy point of view podcast.

Thank you very much for having me. And I wish you had sent the warm weather along. It's somewhere. Everyone here in the nation is trying to find that warm water.

Actually, I think it's in Alaska. Alaska officially is warmer than Florida. So awesome. Listen, this is a topic that we haven't covered here on a healthy point of view podcast.

Your story, not just your education, but your story is very interesting because you didn't learn just from formal education going through school. You learned from your own experience of being in an abusive relationship, et cetera, which I'll let you get into that in a minute.

But before we start any of that, we want to get to know who Dr. Christine truly is. And I want go way back from when you were a kid, your upbringing. So the viewers and listeners can really understand who you are.

Absolutely, I would say what's kind of interesting is a lot of people who end up in abusive relationships, perhaps a lotta them come from abusive homes.

I had the most remarkable loving family system. Not perfect, let's be clear, but my mom and dad celebrated their 64th wedding anniversary in October. They had four of us.

We are all still very close and connected. And I would say that, you know, grew up in a large city and went to Catholic school. My parents sent us all to catholic schooling, old school traditional values.

And, it just was a small neighborhood, played kickball in the middle of the street on the weekends and whiffle ball in backyard. We had a pool, all the neighborhood kids come over to our pool.

It was pretty amazing and beautiful. Yeah, that's amazing. That's almost like my family. I'm the youngest out of four. You know, mom and dad are still together, you know.

Dr. Christineu2019s Background and Early Advocacy

Grew up in the Catholic Church Midwest. Same thing. Nice, beautiful neighborhood. So I get it. And I understand that. Let's talk a bit about how your work began in this industry that you're in right now, because you actually initially started as a social worker, correct?

Yes, I am a social worker still, but I became an advocate at the age of 19 for a local umbrella agency, a domestic abuse sexual assault agency. What made you do that at that age?

I mean, that's young. It's a great question. So actually at age 11 I found out that my mother had been abused as a child and I was so angry. I Was so floored that the world actually we lived in a world where adults could get away with harming children would not be arrested would Not actually have consequences And I just, I think my mom and dad expected me to say, okay, thank you for letting me know.

What they didn't expect is that it literally lit a fire in me that I was going to spend my life. And, and I knew that at age 11, that this was something really important to me, That I couldn't believe children could suffer abuse in a family system.

Yeah. That's something Now did you experience any abuse whatsoever at all in high school or any of the teenage years outside of home? No, I mean unless you include that I met my future husband when I was 16 years old and that began a pattern of abuse which we probably could talk about but yeah, no overall I I Thought I was living a, you know, a pretty good life.

My parents were super strict and I hated that they were superstrict and, but yeah, no, at 19 I said, I want to be a volunteer for this agency and actually spoke out against child pornography on the steps of Waterbury, Connecticut City Hall before the internet had opened up this world.

It was called the White Ribbon Campaign, and there I was at 19 or 20 standing on the steps talking about how child pornography, which we now call child sexual abuse images, was so horrifying.

And little did I know what the internet would unfold, as you know, Sam. Yeah. So, you know, it's interesting talking about these things right now, especially, with this huge release of the Epstein files.

You see all of this of what's really being unpackaged. And it sometimes I look at it and say, this can't be believable. Yeah. I would say that it relates back to why you brought me on to the podcast.

it's this concept of coercion and control. It's the concept that when I have power, when i have fame, or when have fortune, that I can coerce people into doing things that they really don't want to do.

And of course, power being the primary source of that. And then I think of these these young girls who were so

harmed and were hearing more and more. I mean, it's like literally it was a whole sex trafficking ring and so many powerful people.

were included in this sex trafficking ring and we are just hearing about it now and when we're just learning about what is that about? That's about people in positions of power holding that power over others.

It's quite remarkable, I think, to think about the amount of the power perpetrators often have. Right, and that's a level of power that is being utilized in a very abusive manner.

I mean, in an abusive matter that it's just not right at any type of level. So now you as a professional, specializing in this type particular issues and topics, What are you feeling?

What're you seeing? How are handling it? Because your mind works completely different than everybody else who's on the news, talking about it, everyone who is complaining, people that are protesting.

Your mind goes in different places and you're looking at certain behaviors and everything else. So I wanna tap into that. What is going on in your with this whole thing?

Yeah, so that's a great question. I think that we're missing a very important part of the puzzle. We do this thing in society where we wait for someone to perpetrate, and then perhaps we hold them accountable.

93% of offenders, child sexual abuse offenders are known to children. They're not a stranger.

Recognizing Grooming, Red Flags, and Control

And we all grew up, I know you're probably younger than me, but we grew with stranger danger, right? 93% of offenders are known to the child, someone they love, they trust, their family member loves or trusts.

Less than 3% are ever arrested, convicted, and imprisoned. Wow. Because we live in a world where we have always assumed that children lie about abuse, right?

They're making up a story. And what do perpetrators do? We call it DARVO. They typically deny, attack, and reverse the victim and the offender. We see this all the time.

Rape is a really great example, right? Like a woman is like what she was wearing, where she, was what, she drinking versus what did he do? Right. Right?

And so, and so one of the things about Epstein that a lot of people aren't familiar with, there was a case that his case was getting like exposed in Arizona and he knew the governor of Arizona.

And they were able to protract the case long enough so that the victims that were going to be on that trial would be older. So this is like the power, right, that ends up happening.

And so when I think about coercive control, I thing about it as the underpinning of all abuse. We have this really faulty ideology, this archaic way of looking at abuse and we assume that there's going to be evidence of the abuse, physical evidence.

Even when children used to disclose 20, 30 years ago, even maybe 10 years, ago they would go to the doctor and the Doctor would look for physical evidence.

But the bruises and something right, something along that line. And when we think about the parts of the body that are impacted by abuse, in particular, let's say child sexual abuse.

It's like the inside of your mouth. It heals within 24 hours. So if I disclose to you on Thursday and this happened to me on Sunday, there's not going to be evidence.

And so we used to think children lied about this and abusers had power to control the narrative. And then, of course, if anyone believed the child, the abuser would point the finger at the children and say they were a liar.

They were making it up. And this goes back to your original question. When I'm looking at this Epstein case, all of the cases, it's a grooming process.

abusers do not show up, I have a TEDx, it's gotten lots of views on Course of Control, and I say abusors don't show with signs saying I'm an abuser. The problem we have in society is that we are looking for a sign that someone is an abuser instead of looking at the grooming tactics they are using to abuse.

So I wanna dive deeper into that because I think that's what a lot of the listeners and viewers are gonna wanna really hear because that like the meat and potatoes here.

Now, I want you, before we get into the define what course of control truly is, right? Because when people hear, Anything about abuse, right? They always how you say that you just said that the physical signs, someone grabbing you hurting you, smacking you doing something physically, but there's a mental portion to it.

There's an emotional component to. It there are other things that. You don't see. So can you give us what that definition is of that course of control?

Sure, Dr. Evan Stark, he advanced the term. But to give a little clarity around it, I would just let your listeners know that Albert Biderman started researching coercion in the Korean War.

And he was looking at men who were imprisoned with prison guards and how they could slowly lose their autonomy, their agency, and actually admit to crimes they had never committed.

We're talking about grown military men, right? And so what we know that course of control is an eroding away, a stripping away of my agency, my autonomy, and my ability to really know what I should know.

And so I see, I take it a step further. I think coercive control is the underpinning of all abuse. You think about child abuse, you think of racism, sexism.

It's all about one person or one group of people exerting power and control over another person, or another group people. And we can look at, a Catholic priest scandal, It's about a person or groups of people exerting their position in society to harm and to silence others, right?

And so the interesting part about it is that you often, Dr. Stark used to say, it's like carpenter ants devouring the foundation of a house. You don't even know what's happening until it' too late.

It's like it happens around you. And you live in a world where you are gaslit, you're manipulated, You are intimidated. You're isolated. It also includes financial abuse.

Usually victims and survivors might be on a budget or they might get a reward for doing the act, whatever the acts are, right? Or they might lose their housing, or they may get housing if they do the thing that they're supposed to do.

So it's like a bribe in some ways, right? And that's the manipulation. Oftentimes when victims leave, in particular with intimate relationships, when a victim decides that she can see the abuser for who they are, as soon as the abuse knows that the've been exposed in the course of control often intensifies.

This is why we know victims and survivors suffer more abuse once they leave. Oh, wow. So we say leave, we tell, you know, will believe you. We say, why did you stay so long?

Me, right? Why did we stay? So long because I knew there would be retaliation so intense when I left. that the fear of leaving, and Dr. Stark talked about that, he opened one of the first shelters in the country, in New Haven,

Connecticut.

And he and his wife, Annie, opened it. They said that victims would come with bruises or whatever, they would say the worst part was the fears of what would next.

And that, when you think about that. Think about a child who's abused. Isn't the fear about what's gonna happen next, if they tell, isn't that fear that they're not gonna be believed or how the abuser is going to be so angry with them or maybe take away their mother's housing.

You know, the threats are always there. In the case of the clients, I work with a variety of clients but many of my clients are protective parents. They are people who have tried to escape an abusive relationship and that's when abusers will weaponize the children.

And they will use the legal system to keep someone engaged in the process so that they can actually retain the control So I mean, to finish up, I would just say the thing that people don't realize is that abuse starts off feeling good.

Abuse is certainly an experience of feeling like someone's your soulmate, feeling they're doing wonderful things for you. The neighbor next door who says, hey, let me watch your kids on Saturday because you have work.

Oh my gosh. Like, that's wonderful. Thank you so much. He's such a great guy. Come to find out he's an abuser. So abusers don't show up with signs telling us.

Right. Number one, it's a very scary thing, right? Because you kind of go into an abusive relationship regardless if it is an intimate relationship or that neighbor without knowing, you go into it blindly.

So what are some of the things that people can do to try to identify these things early rather than later on in life? Yeah, so those are red flags. And in a perfect world, we would be teaching every single child from early on what are boundaries?

What are things that adults shouldn't ask of you, right? Like an adult should never ask you to keep a secret. An adult never should say to you oh, just try it.

That's not appropriate. And an adults should not ask for your help.

Weaponizing Children and Family Court Abuse

A adult doesn't a child for help, and so giving children agency like a toolbox where they know what to say and do in these circumstances And as they develop, giving young people an understanding that when someone falls madly in love with you and then starts saying things even like, you sure you want to go out with your girlfriends on Friday?

Don't you miss me? Or wouldn't you rather just stay home and snuggle with me? And so when someone starts to take away the things in your life that matter to you or that mattered to before, that's a red flag.

When someone, maybe you look at their phone and you have a question about something that's on their, phone, and instead of them answering you what's in their phones, why that purchase or why the other person's phone number is in there phone.

Instead of answering, you they say, what are you doing looking at my phone? They say oh you're looking my my just like I looked at your phone you trying to get back at me.

They gaslight, they change the reality. They don't take responsibility. Yeah. Now, that's one of the things that you mentioned that, you know, I've seen a lot of recent content about like what guys should be doing, what girls should we do and how, women shouldn't really have guy friends because guys have a certain type of intention.

And one things you brought up is like the female, a guy telling the females like don' hang out with your girlfriend. And what I want to do is provide certain type of clarity.

Be some of the content that I've seen recently is like should should a married woman or someone in a serious relationship be going out with their girlfriends to a nightclub, staying out until three o'clock in the morning, partying, drinking and being in this environment that makes the other guy uncomfortable, you know, because that that could be a situation similar to that.

What would be your opinion on that? Yeah, I mean, here's the key. Is there reciprocity in our relationship where if I'm doing it, you can do it and it's fine.

If we have decided mutually that we're both gonna do these types of things and neither one of us is gonna have a problem with it. And it is our choice, no one's forcing me to do.

Right. then that's fine. I mean, that is the difference. What happens in these relationships is one person can do it and the other person cannot. Right?

That makes sense. Yeah. And so that hugely problematic and that always, like I say to people, is your relationship equal? Yeah Are you contributing just as much money financially as they are?

Maybe you don't make as money. Are contributing the percentage that you can in relationship to their percentage? Are each on the same budget? Each of you has X amount of dollars a week.

You each have the amount. Is someone dictating to you what you cannot and cannot purchase? You know, it's about reciprocity and mutuality and equality.

Yeah. I think that's the missing part with a lot of the stuff that I've been watching, is that equality, you know? Making sure. It's something that you both have to agree on.

Like if you agree, hey, we both shouldn't be in that environment, then you should both respect that. That's right. So I that is very important. You know you're talking about how the children and a lot of these type of relationships.

They get weaponized against the other partner. And I'll tell you, working at the fire department for 12 years I've been retired for almost seven or eight years now.

But firemen and police officers, for some reason here in Florida, teachers have the highest divorce rates. Right. So I saw a lot of these guys go through, I mean, some serious, a, lot, of trauma, right.

In these different divorces that they were going through. Not just guys, but even some of the women that were working with me. And one of the things that bothered me the most is when the other parent would weaponize these children against them because I feel like the kids really got to stay.

You got keep the kid out of it. Like they shouldn't be exposed to all of this trauma. I mean, this really can really hurt a child. Long term, I mean the childhood trauma will stick with you for years after years, and you have to then you'd have the work on it have breakthroughs and, you know, really work in the Childhood Trauma in your 40s, 50s sometimes, so I want to dabble into that because.

You've experienced this, right? You actually were in one of these relationships for 27 years and 11 months. And then you had X amount of years before that because you were with them since you're 16. So I want to talk about your story and about how that was when your own children were being weaponized against you.

Yeah. I have to say, I don't think there's anything more heartbreaking than losing a child when you never actually did anything to lose the child, right?

Losing a relationship. But the other side to that, and I'm a clinical social worker and studied this in my doctoral

degree, is the others side of that is that secure attachment is vital to healthy development.

And when a child is made to hate one parent over another, it is a significant psychological trauma. It changes their life, as you just mentioned, forever.

When a parent is an abuser and there's evidence of an abuse, and this is where it gets a little dicey, right? Let's just say that you're divorcing and you don't get along and kind of hate each other because maybe one person had an affair and whatever, but no one is an abuser, right?

No one purposefully gaslighting, manipulating, intimidating, taking you to court 500 times. We have Jennifer Dulos in our state, that infamous case where he was taking her back to So, the court system itself, by the way, is unfortunately often colluding, because there's money to be made in these divorces.

There's so much money. The attorneys, all of them. Yes, we call it the divorce industrial complex, actually. Come on, winning. They win. If you stay in court, then they win, right?

And so what happens in these situations, again, if we don't get along, than at least we want the children to have a healthy, secure attachment to each of us.

Unless one person is an abuser. Then game over, in my opinion. And that's when it's a little bit tricky, because it is hard for the childen to actually recognize that one parent might be an abusive, So in my particular case, I thought I was married to a great dad and relatively decent husband, wasn't perfect.

But then when I began to recognize what was going on and the multiple affairs, et cetera, and I started to pull away, that's when the coercive control of the children intensified.

So abusers will actually coerce the child into a false narrative about the safe parent So, you know, I was framed and that's one of my books is called framed woman in the family court underworld I Was framed as unstable that I?

Was off my meds the one the there was one incident where I caught him having an affair I took the kids to my parents for the weekend and he knew where was I picked up the kid I said we're going to mom my mom and dad's and then he started calling and saying he's gonna call the police for me kidnapping my children and He got on the phone with my father and started screaming at my dad.

This is someone he had known our entire life. He couldn't control me, you understand, right? And so then eventually he figured out that if he played nice, which is what abusers do, it's called, I think you had Dr.

Nadine Macaluso on your show. It's trauma bonding, he threw in some intermittent reinforcement. And this is happened with Albert Biderman in the coercion chart he created in 1957. The prisoners of war would be given, after starving for five days, a piece of bread.

Well, now the prison guard's your friend. Instead of the enemy, they become your friends, right? Or you're cold on a concrete floor and they throw you a pillow.

All of a sudden, you make nice with the person who actually has been harming you over and over again. You know, we call it entrapment. Feminist psychologists in the early 1970s called it psychological warfare because it literally, like, F's with your brain.

Like, you can't figure out what's real and what not real anymore. And my abuser started saying, just come home. We'll go to therapy. we'll get better, et cetera.

Now, he was the one who had the affair with a good friend of ours. So I go home and when I teach college full-time, when i went to teach my course that afternoon, I brought them home, brought the children home.

Went off to teacher my courses. He's going to call a therapist. We're going get better. Fast forward eight years

when there was an incident between him and my daughter and I said to her, it was a very toxic incident, and i said, When did this start?

And she said when she was nine. She remembers the day and the hour, and it was that day where he started saying, your mother's the cheater, she's off her meds, you can't trust her, come to me for everything.

Yeah, so imagine telling a nine year old who had a really secure attachment. An attachment is really hard to break, but it can be fractured. And so you take a 9 and a 10 year-old, my son was 10, over and over again for eight or nine years, those children start to have contempt.

They don't trust you. We call it betrayal trauma. The are betrayed by the abuser because they know the abuse has so much power. And if they go against the abusers, they're afraid.

So they don. Then they are told that you're a betrayer. You can't be trusted. Your off your meds. you yell all the time. Like they create a false narrative.

I mean it sounds like that psychological warfare. I'm just sitting here listening to you and I feel like I am going crazy thinking about it. It's really incredible and it's happening a lot.

And I think, you know I will go back to an earlier question you have, who are these people? Like who these abusers? And the problem is, is that if I show up in a suit and tie, If I'm the guy down the road, I don't know, the fireman, plumber, school counselor, and everybody thinks I am a decent person.

No one would believe that I covertly trying to take away the attachment, malicious fracturing of attachment. Take away attachment my child has with their safe parent.

And you know what that's a remedy for. It's a remedy to either be involved in an abusive relationship, it's recipe for a recipe to be in abusive relationships or to sadly be on the trajectory towards becoming a narcissistic abuser.

Becoming a coercive controller, becoming someone who needs to control their environment so much that they will do it covertly in a way that no one in the world would ever suspect.

Let me ask you this, those abusers, do you think they know that they're an abuser? You know, this is a great question. I think that initially my perspective is that what I have seen is if I'm a child who has lived in a family system, probably born with the traits, let's be honest, people are born a little bit more, lets say, fragile.

and more susceptible to behaving this way. But then you put them in a family system where they don't actually securely attach. And secure attachment is based on one major thing.

What's that? The ability to authentically be myself. Mm. That comes with unconditional love. So it's like authenticity can only occur if I'm loved without conditions.

You can do whatever you want, I still love you. I may be upset that you broke the glass or the vase, but I love no matter what. Yeah, that's amazing. Yes, exactly.

And so when I grow up in a home where I can't be myself, I have to be careful of what I say to dad or mom. Maybe I'm shamed if I cry. I am a little boy and I was shaming if cried.

A boy who is not allowed to have emotion. Or I a girl who's not to allowed be angry. And so all of those things are occurring to me in childhood and then the behaviors that are concerning become fortified because I learned I had to hide myself.

I can't be me. And the more I hide myself, I call it the fortress of shame.

Dark Tetrad Traits and Why Abuse Escalates

I'm ashamed of who I am. My parents don't like me, they don' love me unconditionally. So I have to hide. The older I get, the better I'll get at hiding myself.

As I age, I no longer actually see it as hiding myself, I'm no long in a position of I am doing something wrong to answer your question. I kind of in delusional state where I not doing anything wrong.

This is me and if you don't like it, too bad. And so that fortress of shame becomes so thick and then you marry that person. and they're the lawyer in town that everybody loves.

They're even a prosecuting attorney. And they are doing really great work. Then you try to divorce them. You're trying to penetrate that fortress of shame.

How dare you? Oh, don't you dare. I am gonna now retaliate. And we're seeing this more and more. That's why I'm good friends. One of my dear friends and colleagues is Dr.

Ramani Diversola. She's a narcissistic abuse expert in the world. We talk about how there's trajectory of these problem behaviors. The person who actually has these traits of coercive control is not only narcissists, but Machiavellian.

What does that mean? Yeah. Highly manipulative. Manipulative of systems. It's go to court and performative. The judge loves you, right? The police come and you're like, yeah, she was really angry and, you know, She just lost her mind.

So that's what happened here. Oh, wow. Right. And so it's that Darvo. it is the deny, attack, reverse, victim and offender. Poor me. I'm the victim, that's the perpetrator when actually that person is the perpeter and they're so good at it because they are not losing their mind because their children aren't talking to them.

They're not loosing their minds because of losing the house. they actually are retaining the control. Victims are losing there mind, because there losing house, there children, all their friends, the false narrative is going on.

And so it's narcissism, Machiavellianism. The fourth is psychopathy. It's a dark tetrad. We haven't connected it to abuse in this way, but all of us working in the field see this with all the worst abusers.

Its psychophathy, I'm willing to break the law. I am willing. And this is the thing that victims don't realize is that if they think they're being stalked, they are being You know, it's not hard, as you know to, right?

I mean, in this world, you can tag somebody's phone easily. You can take someone's car easily, no one would ever know. So stalking is illegal in all 50 states, but if it your intimate partner, the police don't respond.

Why is that? because it's a civil issue. It's the civil, you guys just aren't getting along. And so the third one is psychopathy where I'm willing to break the law or probably already am breaking the laws.

The fourth one, and I see this with all of my clients, is sadism. I actually like to see you suffer. I want you to suffer. You're gonna suffer because you exposed me.

And I'm not gonna be exposed. I am gonna do whatever I can to turn this around. So many victims of abuse are suffering these types of harm. This is very prevalent.

Yeah, and we're seeing a lot more of that. And I think because of the digital world that we live in, a lots more exposure is coming out. You know, you're seen a lotta celebrities, lot of politicians, lotta people in these powerful positions, as you mentioned earlier.

But everything that you just mentioned, those four things, You're seein' it in this individuals. Connecting the dots with it. Yeah. Absolutely. If you don't pull back on this charge you're trying to charge me with, then I'm going to do this to you.

I mean, there's always this imminent threat and it might be a quiet threat. It doesn't have to be an aggressive threat, right? It can be very covert, but there is always knowing.

We hear stories, right? Like the mafia or whatever. I mean, this is the kind of behavior that is going on, sadly, in these circumstances where victims know they will suffer considerably.

My ex used to say to me, the kids will never love you. You'll never have custody. Go ahead and leave. It doesn't matter. Would you label that as a neurological and psychological impact when you lose that autonomy?

You lose an autonomy very gradually, right? It's not something that's like overnight. It is a slow erosion. We call it a multifaceted strategic intentional plan.

I will slowly erode your autonomy. If I took it away right away, you'd be like, what are you doing? If I take it away slowly and I make you think there's something wrong with you It's like that movie Gaslight from the 1938 film where he Ingrid Bergman's in it and and the abuser starts turning down the lights in the house and tells her she's crazy when she sees the Lights getting turned down and it's all because he's trying to get her jewelry Yeah, so so You know, one thing that I've heard you talk about is that family courts are becoming dangerous, you know?

And that it's really changed in the past 20 years that you've been seeing this stuff with your profession. Can we talk that? What is it that's happening in this family court system?

So we used to have something called the tender years doctrine, which back in a day when men worked full time and women were stay at home, they would divorce, and the expectation was that the mother would stay with the children, right?

I mean, we didn't have a lot of divorces, but when we did, it was up to the woman to take care of the kids, all right. But then with women's lib and women working more, there was an understanding that if I divorce someone, I'm going to have to pay child support and or alimony, so I want 50-50.

Now, many dads deserve 50-50, right? Many deaths are good deaths, no question about it. But the problem is that now that initiative has taken over when safety is a concern.

That's the problems. I always use the example of, let's just say that I worked, and this is like something that we're so far away from, but in a perfect world for me, from a psychological perspective relating to children, if I work 80% of the time, in the city and my partner was home 80% of the time and we divorced.

My partner should get 80 percent of custody because the attachment is with my partners. But what we do is we just assume it's 50-50. So we take children who were spending most of their time maybe with mom or dad and just take it all away And we go week on week off.

Could you imagine going a week not seeing your mother when you were five years old or eight years? That would be crazy. Right. Yeah. But we're doing it because family court does not understand the developing brain.

All right. And they don't take into consideration the trauma of pulling a child away from something that is a secure attachment, whether it's the father or the mother.

Yes. Listen, I've even seen some fathers that end up getting that 50 50. and they don't know what to do with themselves because they've never actually spent 50% of the time with the kids.

Their whole life has to get adjusted. And I've seen fathers where they really don' even want it 50-50, but they get stuck with it. So I hear with what you're saying.

Sometimes taking the 50 50 means that I don have to pay child support, so there's a monetary gain, right? And that's problematic because kids are not objects to be exchanged like an exchange, So what can you tell me about high spectrum abusers?

What is that? High spectrum of users. So I'm thinking, um, that you're talking about, are you talking to autism spectrum? Like, yeah, something of that nature, you know, Yeah, okay.

Well, I think that, well, let's start with this. One of the things that happens a lot is that abusers will get misdiagnosed or self-diagnoes. They will say, Well the reason why I told you that happened when this happened or the reasons why didn't come home on time and I thought I'd told but I actually didn' tell you was because I have ADHD.

or I'm a high functioning person on the spectrum and therefore I get a little obsessed about things and that's why I keep asking you where you're going and who you are going out with.

This is what the pattern of behavior is. A lot of abusers will get diagnosed with bipolar, which is like highs and lows. What I would just say is that There is no excuse for abuse.

There's no diagnosis that should supersede a person's behavior when they're being abusive. And a lot of times what victims do is they stay and they want to help the person.

She's on the spectrum so I'm going to stay and help her or she's got ADD and that's why she does these things instead of actually looking at the pattern of behavior that is diminishing you in this relationship.

Right. Yeah. Doc, let me ask you, when it comes to male and female, what's the percentage look like with female abusers versus male abusors in these relationships?

That's a great question. So I just did a training last week in Arizona to court professionals, and there's always this conversation about there is a lot of female abuser, my clientele they'll say is males and females.

And I run a men's support group. There are men who suffer abuse, there's no doubt about it. But 35% of women suffer violence in their lifetime. Those are the physically, the sexually or physically violent cases.

My question is, how many of them are suffering non-physical forms of abuse? It's all coercive control, and we don't even know it, probably 70%. and how many children are growing up in these homes.

I'll give you another stat. 90% of violent crimes occur by men, okay? So we are not saying that men… I don't say that man are victims, but I just think that the scale is a little bit this way.

And I would say going back to your family core in the systems, when we think about all of the system in world, you know, we just had Roe v. Wade overturned, right?

We live in a society that is based on norms created by white men. Right. The courts are set up by White men, the criminal justice system is set by a White man, right?

I mean, churches set-up by the White Men. We can go on and on, and so those patriarchal systems are in place and are oppressive to everyone else, including women.

And so men are victims. However, I will also say that, you know, my ex is an abuser, but one time when the police came and I had called them, he told them I was an abused.

And I hadn't abused him. Thank God there were cameras. But the point is, is that lots of times abusers will claim victimhood even when they're not. So it's, I think just in general, there has to be an understanding that the systems are not set up equitably, going back to equity.

They're not setup equitebly. Women are treated differently than men, and boys are treat differently then girls. That's good and bad, meaning little boys aren't treated with the dignity that they deserve in our society.

Their actually groomed to behave a certain way that society expects of them, and little girls are too. It's problematic. Why are we creating a space where children can't be their authentic selves?

Whatever that is, cry when they want to, get angry when the want too, why are not allowing for that? And so the problems start very early on that creates the misogyny that we continue to see.

So if someone catches themselves in one of these relationships, can that relationship be fixed with therapy?

Leaving Safely and Beginning Recovery

I say no. No? No. No, it's really problematic. A lot of couples will go to therapy and try to work on the relationship when someone has, I call it their character logically disordered, right?

I think Dr. Nate calls it the pathological lover. I called these people once they're in the family system, predatory parents. And so that person needs to retain control.

They might show up to the therapy acting like they want to get healthy. But I'm going to return to, is the relationship equal? I am going return, to has there been a pattern of behavior to diminish you?

A pattern is one more than one. If you sit there and we're having an argument one day and you call me a stupid whatever, and I say, please don't call that anymore.

I don' appreciate it. And you continue to call to me that. That's a patterns of verbal assaults. Right, right. What happens is people hold on to the good.

The dinners out a family vacation. I don't know the bills getting paid you know food on the table, I mean some of I used to work for child welfare some victims are just desperate to be able to keep their lights on and they stay in abusive relationships so.

For me, there are very few, and we know this from research, plenty of research. Abusers are drawn towards conflict. So when a victim tries to leave, it's going to get worse.

Yet we tell them to live all the time. But also, that there're very situations, its called situational violence, where someone has one episode of being bad.

Whether its physical, sexual violence or its verbal assaults, whatever it is, the gamut. They have one incident and then they're really sorry. And they go and get help and they actually get better.

Those cases are literally less than 1%, if at all. Wow. Every time we say to a victim, maybe he'll get The reality is we're giving a victim hope when there is no hope.

And that intensifies the trauma bond. When the world says, oh, come on, she's a great provider or he's great. Provider. Oh, Come on. He's. A great dad.

Why would you leave him? You're going to lose everything if you. Leave him. Society supports the negative narrative. How does the. Your spiritual belief get into this.

Not you in particular, but other people, right? Because I'm a believer, I am a Christian, and the Bible says differently, all right. So my mom used to say, God doesn't make junk.

She used say that, then she realized who I was married to. And she realize that after multiple times of trying to forgive and going back, that actually she was the one who said to me, i'm disappointed in you that you haven't left him yet.

Oh wow. And so she was a church going woman, Christian, she died several last month with her rosary beads on her chest. She was the person who was God loving and I believe that evil exists.

And the evil exists in people that are walking around us every day and we don't even know that they are bad

people. And so there's some people who will never heal.

It's because of the traits that were born with. Like I said, they were a little more fragile. Then they were born into a family system where they couldn't actually receive all of this unconditional love and the ability to be authentically themselves.

They create this wall around themselves and they have to protect that wall. And so, sadly, when children grow up in abusive homes, they're growing up and that same inability to This is an intergenerational trauma that is could be cured if we kept children safe.

So what's the solution for someone who catches himself in that relationship? What do they do? Yeah, well, first of all, you don't tell the abuser you're leaving.

Never. You get everything in place first. You plan on losing a lot financially. you just plan. On it, you plan, on giving up some of what you really hoped to have, whether it's the house.

I mean, most of my clients, none of them ever keep the. Because the abuser often has, um, cameras in the House anyway. Like there's just so many hidden ways to stalk someone nowadays.

The house isn't safe anymore. Right. So you plan on what you're going to give up, and then you consider what your going gain. And frankly, Dr. Stark, he passed away last year, but he called course of control a liberty crime.

and you don't even know that your liberty is being taken away. And so one of the things you gain when you leave, when your escape, because escape is elusive, you're never done because post-separation abuse is the intensifying of coercion and control post separation.

But one the thing you gained is your freedom in some capacity, not entirely because the abuser won't allow that, but in capacity. The second thing that you've gained if you have children is you gain giving them the gift of perspective.

The gift they get to know you for the first time in their life, who you really are, because as a victim, you were walking on eggshells all the time, in that home.

They were working on egg shells. So all of a sudden, they got to be who they truly are. with you. And sometimes that doesn't feel good, by the way, these kids are angry.

I wrote a children's book every moment of every day to help protective parents when their children are coming home from an abuser's house or are needing to go and they don't want to.

These kids. Are so dysregulated. Anxiety is the number one factor that's going on in their life because because they haven't been able to relax. Right.

They haven.t been. Able to be themselves. Wow. And so the gift of perspective is an amazing thing. It's not easy, it takes time, but it is a gift. With all of your experience, obviously having your doctorates in this course of field here, when someone gets out of that abusive relationship, that controlling relationship there's a healing process that they have to go through.

This is a healthy point of view. Give me the top three things that people should focus on to be able to heal within and get their parasympathetic system back to where it needs to, right?

Where they're not so anxious and have the anxiety and now they are free. What are some of the things maybe you did, to able heal yourself and be to live that healthy, very fruitful life full of vigor?

Yeah. And we have so much research now that's showing that this complex trauma that occurs lives in the body, and it causes long-term autoimmune illnesses for people.

Sadly, the research is just starting to come out and we're starting recognize it, but I think the more and more that we realize that, then we are going to be able to say, wait a minute, this is also impacting people physically, right?

And so some people decide that the most important thing for them to do to get healthy is to advocate, is become a social justice warrior. And I was doing that before.

I teach on this subject every semester, did not know I'm a victim of abuse. So I was doing this work already, but obviously I propelled it a little bit more, right?

And that became to be able to help other people heal, to to change legislation. We've codified course of control now in nine or 10 states now, in the United States.

It's now a form of domestic abuse. I don't have to have a bruise to get a restraining order. Right. Right? So these are huge movements. Some people, it's knowing that we have to, like we know yoga works, right?

We know that tapping works. We that meditation works mindfulness, mindfulness. Removing ourselves from the abusive situation as much as possible is really very healing.

I would say for me the most healing thing was when my children were turned against me as a therapist, I realized that I had to parent them differently.

And that meant looking through the lens of their own aversion and control. And my healing came when I began to see my children heal. When I begin to actually fortify and reignite the attachment they had with me all along, that there's nothing, as you could imagine, better than seeing your child doing better and healing.

And it's my particular niche is to help protective parents learn the skill set to parent these children differently, even if they're going to the abuser's home.

Even if they love the abuser, how do you parent differently so your child can heal? And in that, of course, we heal. Right, right. Amazing. Doug, I'm gonna have a little fun here to get to know you even a bit better.

So one of my favorite podcasters out there is Steven Barlett with The Diary of a CEO. He came out with these conversation cards. I wanna have you grab that.

And you'll pull that sleeve up, and then you're gonna randomly pick a card from the middle somewhere. You'll read the question and answer. What would you do if you absolutely weren't afraid?

Um, what would I do? If I absolutely wasn't. I'd say write a book, but. You've written a few of those. Yes. That would probably would have been the first thing that I would say.

Healing, Parenting, and Final Takeaways

Probably the, I think probably also add health to my work, physical health and wellbeing, expand my business to help people get physically healthy as they're dealing with the CPTSD.

I love that. It's so important. Pick another one. What have you done recently for someone else? I just sent out my Valentine's Day cards to all of my loved ones.

Oh wow, early. Yeah, yeah. All right, I love that, amazing. I like to do that for Valentine day, bake some cookies and heart shapes. Want me to another one?

Yeah one more, one I'll say one. One more. Do uncomfortable situations bring the best or worst out of you? Hmm. Oh, that's a good one. It is. I'm trying to think of a really uncomfortable situation I had recently.

And I would say that it probably, um, yeah, I. Would say. That I think I handled it good. I think this is an interesting

conversation, and I won't go too much on the tangent here, but I would say that what happens when you've been, one of the reasons, I have a podcast called Perfect Prey, because I thing abusers choose their victims.

And what we know about victims' character traits is that they're typically highly agreeable, people pleasing, kind-hearted, loyal to a fault, conscientious.

They like to fix things, they like things to work. But what that also is related to from a clinical perspective is this idea of subjugation, where in society, in general, women are subjugated at a high rate.

Like you're supposed to be a good girl. The Catholic church religion makes you follow the rules, right? Sometimes your family system. And in, general women, are born to caretakers.

It's just biologically innate, So, and then what happens is when you give so much in life over and over again, you gave to your partner who's taking instead of giving back, right?

You give to children, your family, et cetera, that there's a space between giving and resentment. And that resentment can percolate. And we see this with a lot of victims where they don't behave well under duress because they are so tired of being subjugated.

They're so of taking advantage of, that it's like a little perculating coffee pot and they explode. Wow. That's when people say, aha, look at you. You are the problem.

when actually you weren't the problem, you just, after a period of time, were so worn down that you behaved in an uncharacteristic way. Victims will always say to me, how do I know I'm not the abuser?

And I say, who would you be if you were in a relationship with yourself outside of this relationship? Who would you be? Typically they're like, I'd be happy, be good, it'd compromise, collaboration, we'd work together.

I wouldn't be angry all the time. It wouldn' be frustrated. And so oftentimes victims will behave pretty poorly in situations that are challenging. That's the true definition of how they say, Not everyone's made to be with each other.

Yeah. Sure. And no one's been made with an abuser. Absolutely not. You know, and that's something that people really have to open up their eyes, their ears, all of their senses and realize when it's going that direction.

So Dr. Christine, as we wrap up here, if one person is listening or viewing this podcast and really resonates with today's message, what is that one last thing you can leave them open?

that if you are a person living in this situation and you're a parent, I promise you, you have so much influence. Your attachment to your child can never be entirely broken.

And do what you can to fortify it and to reignite it. That's so imperative to healthy child development, secure attachment, to you. Amazing. If people want to find you where can they find?

Coercive control consulting. I'm on Instagram. Dr. Coach Yola course of control typically if you put in course Of control you'll find me. So yeah, amazing.

That's a Christine. Oh, she Allah. It was a pleasure having you on a healthy point of view podcast I think this was extremely informative and if we can just change one person and make your life better That' what it's all about.

Thank you. You thank you so much for having me Sam Guys, you heard the doc speak You gotta be aware of these red flags. Especially if you have kids, we gotta put our kids first.

We gotta make sure that they don't grow up in this type of trauma. we have to protect them. Guys, make that you take this podcast, you share it with friends and family, because it just takes one person to watch this Podcast

where we could truly change the trajectory of their overall life.

Make sure you like, share, comment, do all that fun stuff, and we'll see you for the next one.