

# What to Do When Work, Parenting, and Partnership Collide During Quarantine

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:00:01] the reality is that on a day to day basis, we are trying to figure out how to participate in roles that even in regular circumstances are pretty stressful. And, and now almost overnight, they become exponentially. More stressful.

**Diana Hill:** [00:00:13] What are some maybe some shifts you want to make as you are moving through this time, and what, what do you need just in this moment to get through this moment, survive the moment.

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:00:23] You are listening to psychologist off the clock.

**Diana Hill:** [00:00:36]

We are four clinical psychologists here to bring you cutting edge and science-based ideas from psychology to help you flourish in your relationships, work and health.

**Debbie Sorensen:** [00:00:43] I'm Dr. Debbie Sorensen, practicing in mile high Denver, Colorado.

**Diana Hill:** [00:00:47] I'm Dr. Diana Hill, practicing in seaside Santa Barbara, California.

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:00:51] From coast to coast, I'm Dr. Yael Schonbrun, a Boston-based clinical psychologist and assistant professor at Brown University.

**Jill Stoddard:** [00:00:57] And from sunny San Diego, I'm Dr. Jill Stoddard, director of the Center for Stress and Anxiety Management.

**Debbie Sorensen:** [00:01:03] We hope you take what you learn here to build a rich and meaningful life.

**Diana Hill:** [00:01:07] Thank you for listening to Psychologists Off The Clock.

**work-family-partnership-during-coronavirus\_recording-1\_2020-03-30--t02-08-50pm--diana:** [00:01:14] for mental health providers and nurses, people that are looking to continue their education in the area of acceptance and commitment therapy.

There is a lot of offerings through Praxis continuing education, Praxis, cet.com that are online right now. And they could be a tremendous resource for you if you're wanting to learn some of these skills that you can apply in your communities, um, and in, in your practice. So check them out at our sponsorship webpage on off the clock, psych.com and there is also a wonderful resource that both ya'll and I have. Been partaking in, which is Rick Hanson's online trainings as well. And those are for both mental health providers as well as lay people. His trainings and teachings are so relevant right now.

He offers a year long course on the foundations of wellbeing as well as a course on his upcoming book, neuro Dharma, which is an eight week course, and I've been turning to that quite a bit and found it incredibly, incredibly helpful. Right now.

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:02:16] Yeah. So check out both of those resources through our sponsorship page. There'll be some promo codes that you can use, and this is a great time to take advantage of being home and enhancing your skillset. diana, I'm so glad to get together with you today to talk about one particular challenge in this Corona virus pandemic, and that is figuring out what to do when

some of the most important roles we play in our lives collide as we're under quarantine.

So our work, our parenting, and our partnership, man, these are all crashing into one another.

**Diana Hill:** [00:02:50] I know this is such a personal topic, and then also something that I think many of our listeners could relate to. So I'm so glad you came up with this idea. Yell and we get to learn from you personally, but also your expertise in this area

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:03:00] and as we are recording this, I can actually hear my children, my children's loud footsteps above, so my parenting role may crash into this podcast.

but just to set a little context. All this chaos and tragedy that's happening all around us. Um, we all are trying to live our day to day lives and we're stuck at home often with small kids, with our partners, while trying to work.

We're. Having new responsibilities of homeschooling, we're having to figure out how to work in totally different ways or trying to figure out how to be kind to our partners, even though we're totally stressed out. And the temptation is to take it out on them. And so this is happening against this crazy backdrop, but like we still have to make our way through our complicated days.

**Diana Hill:** [00:03:45] And I think that it's been actually a conversation that we've had is how do we address this really kind of, uh, in the moment, individual struggle with, with work and parenting, while also acknowledging the bigger picture impact of this pandemic of. Fatalities and people losing their jobs and just really big suffering that's happening globally.

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:04:08] I think that there's so many levels to the way that this conversation can happen. ,

we're, we're trying to sort of maintain like the larger context of, of all this terrifying, tragic, uncertain. Events that are happening all around us. , but also, you know, to focus on what's happening day to day on how we carry ourselves through our lives. And then there's sort of the balance of the positive and the negative and trying to figure out how we can validate some of the really challenging things that we're all experiencing and that some people are really encountering in, in very terrifying ways, while also making space for opportunities for, for goodness and joy and, and even, you know, surprising gifts amidst this chaos.

**Diana Hill:** [00:04:47] Absolutely.

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:04:48] So the reality is that on a day to day basis, we are trying to figure out how to participate in roles that even in regular circumstances are pretty stressful. And, and now almost overnight, they become exponentially. More stressful. So now we aren't just parenting. We're parenting full time and we're responsible for educating our kids.

We're not just working. We're learning an entirely new system of working, how to communicate with colleagues. We're doing it under intense financial anxiety or fear of losing our jobs if we're lucky enough to still have them. Now. We aren't just partners. We're dependent often exclusively on our partners for connection, for parenting, support, for work support and emotional support.

And so that's the specific day to day reality that we're going to be talking about

today. How we get through. The days that have this new kind of pressure, these new kinds of demands.

**Diana Hill:** [00:05:35] And I don't know if you've experienced the Yael, but as I've been talking to friends and clients and colleagues, there's this roller coaster experience of feeling like the floor is dropping out from under you. Hopelessness. I don't know if I can do this, how long you have to do this for. We have no end date.

And then maybe these moments of sweetness and hope and, and peaceful moments with our children, or just appreciation and gratitude. That experience, uh, probably is also mapping onto our physiology. And when we're in the state of stress and overwhelm, there's really good reason for that. Right now, as Rick Hanson talks about, we have three basic needs.

We have a need for safety. We have a need for human connection, and we have a need for satisfaction to feel like we're growing as humans. That we're feeling joy and happiness in our life. And all three of those knees were sort of pulled out from under us pretty quickly, pretty dramatically. And that's why we feel at times. So, dysregulated. So the first, the first tool that we wanna, talk about as. Working parents is how to help you with your own nervous system so that you can feel grounded with two feet on the ground and in a core that you can draw from when working with your kids or being with your partner.

And some of the basics are around that are, are actually quite simple. One of them is just the power of human connection and finding moments for human connection with your family that actually soothes your nervous system. So that may be through touch. Um, just yesterday my son made a Fort in, in his lower bunk of his bunk bed and we both climbed inside.

I remember doing that as a kid, making forts in the bunk bed. We climbed inside and we played cards and there was this moment where it was sort of dark in there and we were in there with our little itzy bitsy, but like playing, playing cards together and I felt so safe. And I felt so calm and it was just a little, just a little snippet of a day where there was other moments where I felt completely unsafe and not calm.

So finding what is, what is, what is it for you that makes you feel connected and safe? Who are the people that when you call it, you can feel your nervous system settling down. Another related component is just the physiology of your body, and we can calm our bodies and and make our bodies feel a little bit more grounded by slowing our breathing down, by relaxing the tension in our muscles by getting something warm.

There's actually something, um, some research around holding a warm cup of tea or warm soup or warm blanket that brings comfort. And Debbie talked about that early first response to trauma is just, can I get you something warm? How can I make you feel safe? and then knowing that we co-regulate each other. So the prosody of our voice, the, the, the slowness or the ups and downs, the sweetness of our voice when talking with our kids, our facial expressions that we're expressing to our kids, that co really regulates our kids, but also co-regulate us in art and our nervous system.

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:08:31] I love all the suggestions. Just kind of finding opportunities to co-regulate to connect in and to find, you know, a sense of safety

in and warm. I love that sort of simple idea of like just getting a warm cup. The, when you're feeling a little dysregulated because it is so simple. and I think we need simple right now.

One of the things that I'll just mention that I have always found to be really helpful for soothing my nervous system is just to get a break rolls that I find really demanding. And that is something that's been really, really hard to find ways to access during this time where I'm stuck at home with my three kids and with the demands of my work and trying to support my partner who has to work and trying to get support from him.

And it kind of reminds me. Of some of the ways that psychological detachment gets talked about and how useful it is to engage psychological detachment. So this refers to the opportunity to really fully step away from a role to get a break from it. And there's this really cool research study that I love, which followed Israeli army reservists who were full time workers.

And when they got called away. Got called into active duty to go to war. What they found is that work burnout decreased. So going away decrease these participants work burnout, and to me that really just drives home. The point that we regain. Our energy, our enthusiasm, our creativity, our willingness to do hard work when we have regular breaks from it.

And that's really hard to gain access to during a quarantine. And so I think there are a couple of things that we can think about doing to manage this challenge. One is start with self-compassion. I mean, this is really hard and we can. Gain perspective and see the silver lining, but it's also worthwhile to just make space for how hard it is.

And so we can be aware of what's happening in our bodies. We can send ourselves some self-kindness, and then we can engage that sense of common humanity that we're all going through this. We're all stuck at home. We're all failing to have breaks from all of our most demanding roles. We can also work on being really flexible, right?

So if something isn't working, we can pivot and do something else. And I think staying flexible in this sort of unprecedented and extremely challenging time is, is really useful. , for me, that can happen on a moment to moment basis, cause I have a three year old. So what worked, you know, two minutes ago may no longer work.

And, and. Being willing to kind of pivot away from trying to do a puzzle that he's no longer interested in, serves me pretty well, rather than rigidly pushing forward.

**Diana Hill:** [00:11:06] I feel like this whole experience is one big flexibility training. we're being asked to do something that's unprecedented that we'd never done. Before of how to navigate this. , we're getting flexible, what to do with our pantries and limited food that's in there and to have like one precious pepper and what am I going to do with my, with my one pepper today?

And then we're being asked to be flexible with our work. We're seeing people's workspaces with their homes behind them we've never seen, you know, their living room before. So there's lots of different opportunities for flexibility. And that's strengthening us as I think as, as a species, and then even strengthen, strengthening our families.

We're teaching our kids how to be flexible, cognitive flexibility is in psychological

flips. Flexibility's a huge predictor for psychological wellness and mental health in general.

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:11:55] I think that that's such an important point that what we know is that psychological flexibility underlies. All of mental health and that kids are naturally a little bit inflexible. And so as we're changing their routines, as we're changing our routines, to see this as an opportunity to build some more of that flexibility, to be patient and compassionate, because it is a hard thing to be building, but to know that the effort in building it will actually serve us all in the longterm in some really important ways.

Which doesn't mean that it's not hard, but it does mean mean that there is really important value there. I love, I love that idea.

**Diana Hill:** [00:12:31] So we've gotta be flexible in how we find opportunities for detachment.

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:12:34] Absolutely. we're not going to get the kind of detachment that we would in normal circumstances, but what we can do is look for small opportunities where and when we can to get some psychological detachment. So, Create rituals, to transition from one role to another to sort of let your mind know in your body.

No, now I'm stepping away from parenting and into work. So that could be something like a morning meeting to start learning time and enter into parenting mode or at kiss of your kids before you go to work in your bedroom. Or a specific TV show during leave me alone time. and, and find time to get away from each role and savor those moments.

And psychologists talk about savoring, um, using the five senses. So taste, touch, smell, sight, and hearing. So really engage your senses in any small opportunities. As Diana was talking about that hot cup of tea. I mean, that can be an opportunity to really savor a quiet moment, and it might be a short moment, but the more you can save, right, the more you amplify that opportunity to get that small break.

**Diana Hill:** [00:13:31] It reminds me of when I had, a little baby and I put the baby in , the car seat on the bathroom floor and I'd get into the shower and that would be like my moment , and it feels like that right now. Sometimes it may just be in the confines of your shower that that's where you get your detachment or cooking dinner and you say, everyone out of the kitchen.

This is my half hour to cook. But yeah, we've got to get flexible around it and understand that our temperaments in the household are different in terms of closeness and needs for closeness versus attachment. You may have some introverts that. Need a little bit more quiet time without sound, without people around.

And then we may have people that are more extroverted or really, really crave that social connection. And they're feeling a lot of loss right now kids with not seeing their friends as much, uh, not engaging in sports. So acknowledging everyone's needs around that and how we can be flexible in meeting the needs of, of the individuals that are different within your family.

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:14:24] And again, engaging that compassion because if you have one family stuck under one roof. Different people have different needs. It can be really challenging to meet all the various needs at the same time. So,

you know, we're going to be imperfect here, but it's all about, um, you know, just being mindful, aware.

And it's also about values. values has been something that's come up regularly on this podcast because it's a core feature of acceptance and commitment therapy. But Diana, I wonder if you could talk a little bit about how we can use values to guide ourselves through this time period.

**Diana Hill:** [00:14:56] . I think that it's an important part of psychological flexibility. It's like, why are we being flexible so that we can continue to point towards what matters to us? And it may look very different at different times of, uh, what pivoting towards our values is. And if we can identify what are some of the underlying core values that we want to pursue right now and really keep it simple.

It can be helpful as a compass or a guiding post of where we want to direct our attention and time. I think that a lot of times we feel like we have like these conflicting values of like, I really value work or I really value my kids, but actually those are different domains and under, in those domains there, there may be a value that you can pursue.

There's this concept of, of stacking, stacking your life that Katy Bowman has talked about. She wanted to move more, but she wanted to be with her kids. She wanted to move, but she also wanted to write a book. And so she figured out ways in which she could move while doing those activities and sort of stack them together.

And I think we can think about stacking our values right now. If we value kindness, if we value connection, if we value, Something like giving back to the community. How could we do that in a way that is also stacked with, with what's happening in our homeschooling? So, for example, you could create a homeschooling, uh, exercise that is also involved in getting back to your community and stack them together.

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:16:18] I love that. I love that idea of stacking because it is, really difficult to think about like separating out our time. Like how do I get enough time to do a good job at my job and how do I get enough time and energy to parent in the way that I want to parent and how do I sort of reserve something for my partner?

sort of like killing many birds with one stone, which I never liked that metaphor, but it's, you know, it's sort of more efficient in what we're doing and recognizing that the, why, the sort of who we want to be. Lives in lots of different domains. And right now, all of those domains exist under, in one house and the more that we can sort of be efficient in acting on our values, the easier it is on us. Basically.

**Diana Hill:** [00:17:02] I think we're seeing that with people in terms of like something with like grandparents being involved with kids in, in a way that you're helping the grandparent and you're helping the kid and you're helping yourself in terms of getting some work done while your grandparent is teaching your kids Spanish or something creative like that.

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:17:18] Yeah, that brings to mind a recent experience that



my husband and I had. We were both needed to attend work meetings online and we weren't sure what were going to do with our kids for the two hour span of time. And so we engaged my mother in law for a zoom babysitting session. She lives across the country and it was this great opportunity.

For her to connect with my kids and for my husband and I to be engaged in our work. And it was, it was a really good example of stacking lots of different values and lots of different domains and it worked beautifully. I'm not sure that it will ever work again, but we really appreciated that opportunity.

I want to sort of turn to another issue that I think is really confronting us as all of our roles collide, which is that. The stakes just feel really, really high, right? We're now responsible for our kids' education. We want to stay good parents now that we're full time parents, and there's a lot of pressure on many people to do a good job in their job because the fear of job loss and the economic crisis that's happening.

And so what I wanted to talk about here is that it's really easy to get caught up in the anxiety and the pressure, but a shifting perspective in beginning to look for possibility in making. Mistakes in encountering challenges can really lighten the load, which doesn't mean that it's not hard, but a shift in perspective can really help us confront the challenges with, um, an attitude that's more helpful and with an energy that's gonna carry us further.

And the idea that I draw on, . Is from Tik, not Han's book, of the title. No mud, no Lotus. I just love that title because it's the idea that from the stickiest, dirtiest mud arises the most beautiful of creations, and if we can apply that to this circumstance, wow. That's, that's just powerful.

And what we know from research is that this really bears out in the experience. So in parenting, when we make mistakes, when we can't be there to provide all the things that our kids need, whether that's hugs, intellectual stimulation, a snack, our kids actually become more resilient, so they may not be happy in the moment, and we might feel some guilt.

But actually they learn to solve their own problems. They recognize that they're not the center of the world. They build an ability to tolerate discomfort, and that actually serves them well. And it actually helps us to be better parents. So the more that we can kind of see the possibility in what doesn't go well, the less arduous it feels.

**Diana Hill:** [00:19:47] You know, it reminds me back of talking to Dr. Sticksrud Who wrote The Self-Driven Child when he talks about how , if you do 95% of the work for your kids, your kids will do 5% if you do 50% then the kids will learn how to do 50% and there's so many opportunities here, not for neglecting your kids, but for asking your kids to step up.

You know, step up and learn how to wear it, how to unload the dishwasher, , not just take the plate to the sink, but take the plate, scrape it into the compost, and then put it in the dishwasher. Please,

carrot, carry through on things, take the trash out. Change your own sheets and wash and wash your own sheets.

These are all things that would be really helpful when they're, um, college

roommates that they know how to do. And so I think that there could be opportunities within the household for us to step back a little bit and then let our kids step in and, and there's opportunities for growth there. Absolutely.

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:20:42] Yeah. I actually, I got really into, um, the writing of this one anthropologist by the name of David Lancy and he writes about this concept of benign neglect that I just love. And he writes about how useful it is for parents to benign neglect their children. . Terrible ways, but to sort of have a lighter hand and let your kids make mistakes, it's sorta like the blessed, Wendy mogul has this great book called the blessings of the skin, knee.

And I think that the more, again, that we can sort of say, we don't need to be there. We can actually, um, lighten the pressure that we're experiencing as parents, even in the educating environment. And, and just. Look for other ways that our kids can grow rather than us needing to do it all. And what's so cool too is that this actually applies to the work domain too.

That when we lighten the load, when we sort of see mistakes as an opportunity for growth, that when we see our humanity coming through and what can feel like unprofessional ways, it actually allows for more connection with colleagues. Because that is, you know, when we're more human and authentic, that's how we connect to people.

And that there's real opportunity there too.

**Diana Hill:** [00:21:46] and in the parenting partnership realm as well. I've been hearing about how one partner who didn't usually do this thing is, is stepping in and doing more of it I was actually just talking to somebody last night who was saying that, um. Her husband was doing all of the grocery shopping and she was remaining home, and that's total role reversal for their family and how nice it's been to see him step up in this way.

So there's, there's these opportunities to learn some new skills within the household because we just have to, where we don't have enough resources to do it all on our own.

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:22:19] Right.

**Diana Hill:** [00:22:20] on each other. Yeah.

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:22:21] reminds me back to when I spoke with Sue Wentz on parenting multiples and how she talked about the intense stress of having multiple infants. Can actually bring partners together because they haven't, there's no alternative. You have to sort of bind together to get through it. And so there can be role reversal, there can be people stepping up.

And again, it's just this opportunity to, to see that really intense challenges provide opportunities for growth, for resilience, for creativity, for new problem solving, for connection. And, and that can really help us endure it a little bit more easily.

**Diana Hill:** [00:22:56] So this concept of perspective is another act skill actually of how to shift your perspective, shift your attention to see. CN from a different view. And we can use that concept of shifting our perspective as well around our expectations with ourselves. we all had expectations around how clean our house should be and how much work we should get done and how much our children should be learning in a day, and how much exercise everyone should be



doing.

All of that it needs to shift. A lot of times people tell you, you just need to lower your expectations, and I feel like telling someone, especially a high achiever, that they need to lower their expectations, can feel a little bit in validating.

It can feel like telling an anxious person, just calm down or telling a depressed person. Just think positive thoughts. There may be some truth in that that. We do need to lower expectations, but actually what may be a more flexible way of responding would be thinking about shifting your expectations to what really matters to you and really distilling down

placing your attention on what is most important in this moment. Is it most important right now that I get this work project done and I have my focus on this and my kids are going to be in front of a TV show or is it more important right now that I let the work go and I just take the kids outside and engage with them for a little bit and all of that can come from a perspective around, uh, what's where our values lie and, and being a little bit more flexible

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:24:20] so again, coming back to like values, having clarity on values and putting them at the forefront and being really flexible. Absolutely.

**Diana Hill:** [00:24:28] and that relates to two mistakes and do overs that we can again, have mistakes and actually see them as an opportunity to do something again and try again.

I love the example of a, a music teacher that told me once that this is the sound of learning, because people would complain as they'd walk by her classroom where she was teaching band, and it was always so, loud and this cacophony of sound.

And, and she would say, this is, this is what learning sounds like. It's not always. A, um, a pretty thing. And so we can think about that in our own household, that we're all learning new things and we're trying to figure out how to do this. And this is the sound of learning, in our home right now.

It can be a bit messy.

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:25:07] So that perspective shift of appearing, things that don't sound good or seeing things that don't look very pretty as as what learning looks like or what growth looks like or what you know, um. The beginning of something beautiful looks like is a real perspective shift that can make some of those less comfortable experiences feel a lot more useful. Um, one other area of perspective shift that I think is really useful is, is when things feel really dark as they do during a, tragic time is we're experiencing. We can feel shame when we try to feel joy. While others are suffering. And so I think this is something that felt really important as we're planning for this episode, that if we're talking about how can we experience more opportunities for satisfaction and connection, and even just pure pleasure, that there's this anxiety around, well, is it wrong to have a great day or enjoy some of the surprising perks of this time when others are suffering so much?

And so one of the perspective shifts that. I really want to advocate is not shaming ourselves or others for looking for joy and positive experience, but making space for both, right? That we can have compassion and, reserve a space for all the suffering and the tragedy that's happening and also make space for gratitude, connection, and fun.

**Diana Hill:** [00:26:25] we're complex and we're going to feel a whole gamut of emotions, even in the worst of times. There's moments of joy. And so I think that not shaming each other and not shaming ourselves is really important. That make enough room for all of the complex emotions we experience.

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:26:43] And there really are opportunities to have joyful experience in, in this sad and scary time. For example, under normal circumstances, so many families that have parents that are working full time outside of the home, plus kids and activities and other demands, social demands that. Just are all canceled right now.

We now have opportunities to slow down, to have quality family time, to play board games, to go on walks, to have dance parties in our house, to bake with our kids, to play card games, to do art projects. And these are things that, I mean, it's so interesting because in a lot of the work that I do with parents and couples, people are often talking about this wish to just have more time and now we have it.

But sort of, it's forced upon us, but it's a really cool opportunity.

**Diana Hill:** [00:27:35] I'm really curious to see as we slowly emerge out of this, which we will, how people shift, uh, the way that they live as a result of this experience. This is gonna change us. As a culture and communities and really profound ways around what matters to us and what we want to keep that we've actually learned here.

And it may be some simple things like just slowing down and, and, and trying to have more family time at home together. It may also be even just appreciating some things that we didn't appreciate before. Just the abundance of food that our, country has, or the abundance of paper goods, you know, just taking some more time around things that, um, that we took for granted before. And I think our children will, will learn, learn from that as well.

Appreciating face to face time with our friends and the, and the power of human touch and just being able to hug someone again, that we all wish that we could, we could do.

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:28:35] Yeah. It's so interesting that when we lose things, we really do begin to appreciate them more and, and scarcity really does create this opportunity for mindful, intentional awareness, which is, is a gift in and of itself too. I do think too, that there's opportunities to enjoy surprising gifts in the workspace too.

And, and sort of as you're talking to, and I'm thinking, how are people gonna return to their normal work lives after this quarantine is over? Because working from home has really changed our perspective. Um, I think. You know, maybe there will be more opportunities for workplaces to create flexibility, understanding that people maybe don't need to be in the office, and that could be good for work, family balance.

Maybe the opportunity to see our colleagues, kids pop in on those professional meetings will create more opportunity to, to be more authentic in the workspace and to sort of, um, as Emily Oster, one of our previous guests who is a parenting expert, talks about sort of. Hashtag parent in the open.

Now we're all kind of being forced to parent in the open, even in our workspace because now our workspaces are home space. Some other ways. I think that our work can really benefit is, is just from opportunities to get more creative, right? Because we're engaged so much in parenting for people who are working parents our time away from work.

Gives us opportunities to, to think about things differently, to have that perspective shift that can actually feed back into our work in really cool ways. So one thing that we've talked about on this show is the research on our default mode network, which is this interrelated set of structures in our brain that gets active when our minds are wandering.

And sometimes that's where our most creative problem solving comes from. So as we're parenting more and more, we might actually find our brains getting more creative in our work space. So there are all sorts of cool opportunities that can really contribute in positive ways to making our work lives.

Better. And that may be a surprising gift, but one that we can take advantage of. And one other thing actually that you were mentioning before, Diana, that I think goes back to this idea of essentialism. This was one of my favorite interviews that I did with an author, Greg McKeown, a little while back. And it's this idea that we engage in a lot of trivial things that aren't that important, that aren't that core to what we value in sort of the essence of who we want to be in the world and in this time where we're sort of being forced to strip back all the stuff that isn't important because there's just not resources or space and it's not safe that it's really causing us to ask ourselves.

What is most important to us? And one of our co-hosts, Debbie actually emailed me that that's something that she's really been working on. She wrote to me that I keep reminding myself that it's impossible right now to do everything well, to be a rock star at work, and a really engaged homeschooling parent and get lots of housework done, cook a lot, and spend quality time as a family.

So what I'm doing is thinking about what really matters to me and my family. And letting the rest go. And I think taking this time, using this quarantine to clarify what's important at work in our parenting life and as partners can really help us to narrow in and be more of the kinds of selves that we really want to be.

**Diana Hill:** [00:31:50] And I love that as you're sharing that y'all, we can hear the sound of three little boys running over your ceiling

it's, that's an example of where, you know, we pulled it together to podcast, this thing and that may mean that there's a sound of little boys running across our ceiling

where can you place your attention.

yeah, yeah.

Uh, , in relationship to our partners, focusing on what matters to our relationships are, can be feel really stressed right now. And, um, you were using the analogy of, it feels sometimes like how we felt with the newborn kids and we're back to that state of just like going through the motions of , you do this, I do this, we're kind of fast moving ships, getting it all done, and then we may be forgetting to connect, or our connection may be more hostile than usual and perhaps

little more snappy.

But I think that it can also, uh, be the important to remember the human that you love, that, uh, that is your partner in this. and chances are that it's hard for both of you you feel your own pain most acutely. And sometimes it's hard to remember that your partner is feeling pain too, and it may and they're feeling there's the most acute acutely.

And being able to use that perspective, shifting to kind of get again behind their eyes and see from their world what it's like for them. Acknowledged, uh, appreciate them. This is the time to actually up our verbal appreciations of one another. If we go back to Gottman's work around the importance of appreciating within a relationship and focusing on positive interactions with our partners to help strengthen the bond.

Also acknowledging that there's a lot of contextual factors that are influencing both of you. So things like the stress that we're experiencing, but also losses that, that both of you are having, that your partner has lost around their job, around their, uh, social connection, around their regular activities, that they're not engaging in sleep deprivation.

A lot of us are not sleeping as well or waking up early. Uh. Lack of exercise or increased threat system. All of that is influencing our behavior. And so sometimes when we are interacting with their partner, if we see that they are frustrated or they're snappy with us, rather than responding to their snappiness understand there's a context in which that is coming from and that we can step into a more of a compassionate role.

Also, not just with ourselves. But with our partners, we can practice compassion to other which, which will also regulate ourselves.

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:34:23] Yeah. I just wanted to make one point that I think is, um, something that you're getting at, but I just want to make it extra explicit, which is the stories that we tell about our partners. I think that when we're tired and when we're frustrated, and. When we're having a hard time, it's so easy to vilify our partners because they're not our small children who are innocent.

And because we somehow think that they have the ability to alleviate some of the pains that we're experiencing. And so our minds get really clever in creating these stories where our partner is the big, bad villain. And I mean, I'm a couples therapist and I still find myself doing that. But the reality is it's just a story.

And the more that we can recognize that and step away from it, and as you're saying, recognize that our partners probably having really similar experiences of discomfort, of overwhelm, and they're probably engaging in stories about us too. And if we can each step away from that and connect, you know, from an emotional place of, you know, that this is really hard for everybody and that we're all struggling and just try to make it through that.

That can be. Much more helpful than allowing your mind to kind of take you for a ride.

**Diana Hill:** [00:35:29] When we're home with our partners more, they're also being maybe more opportunity to actually communicate, and I know this is a specialization of yours, y'all, to talk about what is healthy communication and how we do it, um, in our relationships.

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:35:43] So one of the most basic tips that couples find the most helpful is separating out the two different kinds of conversations that we have with our partners. No. Two conversations are discussions. The point of a discussion is to share thoughts, feelings, or experiences. It's really just to have somebody know you better know sort of your insights better and a successful discussion leaves you feeling more understood and leaves your partner with a better understanding.

The second kind of conversation is a problem solving conversation. When we problem solve, the goal is to solve a problem. So at the end of a successful conversation. We feel like we've come up with some solutions that we can try. It's really important to distinguish between these two kinds of conversations.

Because what often happens is that one partner defaults to one kind of conversation and the other person defaults to the other. And that can lead to a really invalidating and frustrating experience for both people. So for example, if I've had a hard day, because I've been with the kids all day and I go to my partner and I and I, I want to vent, you know, I'm, I had a hard day.

I just need you to hear how difficult the kids were, how exhausted I am if my partner. Enters into problem solving and says, well, maybe you could just make a better plan for tomorrow. Maybe you could structure it a little bit more. I'm going to end up feeling invalidated. Now. My partner had really good intentions.

His intentions were to help me. Not feel so bad at the end of the next day. And so when I get angry with him, he's going to feel really frustrated and invalidated because he had the best of intentions to be a supportive, loving partner. But I felt was feeling invalidated because I ended up feeling criticized even though that wasn't his intention.

So one of the tips that I often repeatedly tell partners is clarify first for yourself, what kind of a conversation are you looking for? And then try to communicate it as clearly as you can to your partner. You can say something like, Hey, I just want to vent about my day. I don't need you to problem solve.

Just hear me out. Or you can say, Hey, I'm really struggling with this. Can you help me figure out what I can do differently? And in this way, you sort of ally and get on the same page a little bit more effectively. And it can really, um, it's a simple tip, but it's one that can be really, really helpful.

**Diana Hill:** [00:38:01] I think that is one of the most common, uh. Struggles that relationships get into is where one is trying to problem solve. And the other is just trying to be heard. It's like, it's like the garden variety weed that occurs in every single household. So, I, I love that tip. And I also love that tip for the families that have adult children that are home right now.

A lot of people are having their college students come home and it's the same deal where the college, she just wants to complain about how their life feels like it's over right now. And then the mother or father comes in and starts. Trying to tell them why don't you go out and exercise some or take this online class?

And it just, it just spirals into a conflict they're trying to help by giving suggestions and advice. So noticing the difference between when you're actually need some problem solving and when you just want to have a discussion and being able to communicate that.

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:38:51] Yeah. Yeah. And I think you're pointing to another

valuable tip, which is it's always safer to start with a discussion when it's something I'm discussing. And if a problem solving conversation is going to be useful, it's much easier to, to head in that direction after. Um, but if you start with problem solving that isn't what the other person wanted, then you often end up with a lot of friction between two individuals.

**Diana Hill:** [00:39:12] I think as therapists, we know this firsthand because we've done it so many times. I'm trying to go into problem solve and you can see your client getting resistant, right and

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:39:21] Yeah. Yeah. But one other thing that we just wanted to acknowledge is that many people who are having their roles crashed together, don't actually have a partner to collaborate with.

And that's an, an additional challenge. Individuals who are parenting alone. It isn't so much an issue of finding a partner or figuring out how to communicate more effectively with a partner, but finding other ways to get the kind of support that we all need during this time.

**Diana Hill:** [00:39:48] Yeah. I think single parents right now are under such an incredible amount of duress, and this is also where I think that we need to be thinking about the people in our lives and in our community that are single parenting and how we may be able to support them.

the people that are, that are trying to parent and work and are doing it alone. Have to, um, be facing just the most incredible amount of stress right now. We've been talking to a colleague of ours. An intern, uh, for our show that's said it was fine for us to share this who single parenting with two toddlers and how she's been super creative and how she's managing and getting through this time.

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:40:26] She told a story that I thought was just wonderful that one of the things that she really uses to center herself as her daily cup of tea, and so she put her kids in the car and went for a drive and put on a CD that she hated, but that they loved.

But just. Savored her tea, even though, she had to be really flexible to get those minutes of, of enjoying her moment. Um, and I'm just sort of thinking too, that it isn't just single parents. It could be if your partner is ill or, or if you have a nontraditional family set up in, in other ways.

**Diana Hill:** [00:40:57] Are your partners working? Is an essential worker and now outside of the home working right now? Yeah.

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:41:03] So we're all gonna just have to be as creative as we can and as flexible as we can. And again, keeping gauging that self-compassion because it isn't easy. And, and you know, there are some circumstances that are particularly challenging, this is a tough time.

So I just want to come back to summarize that, that what we're trying to get at here is, is the importance of finding the balance between managing what's hard and still looking for the positive even moment to moment.

Because this is. A really hard, tragic, traumatic time, but it's also a time that offers lots of opportunities for play, connection for wearing yoga pants if we're not washing our hair and, and so to make space for both sides of, of the emotional experience.

**Diana Hill:** [00:41:52] Thinking big picture, you know, seeing the forest in terms of what are the qualities that you want to grow within yourself, within your family?



What are some maybe some shifts you want to make as you are moving through this time, but then also looking up close at the trees and what, what do you need just in this moment to get through this moment, survive the moment.

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:42:14] yeah. Yeah. So we want to send our best wishes out to all of you listeners and, let you know that we're, we're going to try to continue to provide supportive, , content. Please be in touch with us if there's something that you think would be particularly helpful. Um, and we are just wishing you also well.

**Diana Hill:** [00:42:34] Yes. Take care

Thank you for listening to Psychologists Off The Clock.

**Yael Schonbrun:** [00:42:41] You can find us on iTunes, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Please help us out by writing a review on iTunes.

**Jill Stoddard:** [00:42:47] We'd like to thank our interns, Dr. Katharine Foley-Saldea and Dr Kati Lear.

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