

The Complexities of Motherhood

Daphne de Marneffe: [00:00:01] it's letting everything in. It's not idealizing, it's not cinema analyzing. It's not denigrating. It's negative capability and cases, terms. It's like you, you are feeling all of it.

that's what Parenthood is. Just like, that's what life is. It's filled with all these differences and contradictions and kind of simultaneously different experiences.

Yael Schonbrun: [00:00:22] You're listening to dr Daphne Marna on psychologists 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: [00:00:48] 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.

Yael Schonbrun: [00:01:11] jill and I are here to introduce an interview with dr Daphne de on her book, maternal desire on children love in the inner life.

we recorded this episode before the coronavirus pandemic hit, a lot of the themes that emerged in this interview are really relevant for what we're all dealing with.

Um, being under quarantine with our children. And Jill, I know that you felt that as you were listening to it.

Jill Stoddard: [00:01:34] I did, you know, initially she's talking a lot about, um, like the gifts of mothering. And I honestly found it a little hard to take in initially, but as I settled into. The episode. Um, I just related to so much of what she said one of the things I liked most yell is when you were talking about a meme that you saw that set, remind me what it said again.

I don't remember the exact words.

Yael Schonbrun: [00:02:00] Here are two of my favorite things, spending time with my children. Number two, not spending time with my children.

Jill Stoddard: [00:02:08] and I thought right now more than ever, people must really be feeling that, that this constant time with family without any break is so incredibly difficult. And also at the same time, there are all these really special moments, at least for me, you know, that I've been having with my kids that I don't typically have when I'm at work and they're at school and busy, busy, busy.

Yael Schonbrun: [00:02:31] Yeah. I found it's really a moment to moment experience where in one moment I'll be thinking to myself, Oh, this is so. Special. I'm here with my three little boys, and I'm so fortunate and privileged and, and

just, you know, feeling that intense emotional closeness. And then in the next moment I'll think, I can not do this anymore.

I'm done.

Jill Stoddard: [00:02:50] Yes, totally. And I had a, someone had said to me early on when I first had kids that parenting is like 80%, um, difficulty in 20% joy, but the 20% makes the 80% worth it. And I've been thinking about that a lot these days and was thinking about it throughout the episode because that feels really true to me.

Maybe even more like 90 10 right now. Um, but where I've found that really being able to show up for those small moments that you just described. Really make it, it's like the only way to be able to keep moving through the tough times.

Yael Schonbrun: [00:03:28] Yeah. And you recently shared an article that was written by a couple of act researchers. Lisa coin, I think was the first author that talks a lot about. What are some of the strategies that we can bring into the parenting sphere while we're under quarantine. And I think that Daphne really brings a lot of those to light.

Maybe some to some extent using different language. But we'll link this article cause it has a lot of really terrific suggestions. And the one that you just alluded to is this sort of hashtag small moments matter and this idea that, you know, we can have rough days but. Show up for these small special moments and, and then they make another very large point of bringing self-compassion along for the ride.

That as we're muddling through the harder parts of our day to just really engage that self-compassion. So willing to that article.

Jill Stoddard: [00:04:18] Yeah, absolutely. And a lot of the pieces in the article, those two especially also reminded me of the episode that you and Diana just did together. And you talked about a number of these strategies too, that I think between that article and today's episode and that the last episode you and Diana did, I think we've got some really nice juicy tidbits for parents who are struggling and it's certainly been incredibly helpful to me.

Yael Schonbrun: [00:04:43] yeah, so while this episode really does start off by exploring why those who identify as women might be driven towards this role of mothering, she really does get into the nitty gritty of. The, the nuances and the paradoxes of the parenting experience.

And again, as we're talking about here today, gel, I think those paradoxes and those nuances and the messier parts have never been more evident than they are now. And so I really found. Um, the, the broader scope of this interview. So validating as they went back to listening to it and so I really do hope that you all out there will find some value in being able to explore some of those complexities of mothering, especially in this time.

Diana Hill: [00:05:32] for therapists, this is a great time to dig into some of your online learning because right now you're being needed, more than ever. And the Praxis has online training and continuing education for therapists. They offer a two types of high quality online training.

One is live online courses and the other is on demand courses, and you can learn more about them from our website, like on the sponsorship shape page, and there's some discount codes there as well.

Yael Schonbrun: [00:06:00] we are so lucky to have clinical psychologist, author, speaker, and couples therapy and parenting expert, dr Daphne back with us to talk about her book, maternal desire on children love and the inner life. This book first came out in 2004 and Daphne released the second edition in may of 2019 . her work has been published in academic journals as well as in the popular press, including in the New York times, and she is a contributing editor to parents magazine and writes a regular, wonderful column on couples relationships.

Welcome, Daphne. Welcome back.

Daphne de Marneffe: [00:06:32] you so much for having me.

Yael Schonbrun: [00:06:35] I'm so excited to have this conversation. so I actually had reached out to you initially about this book some years ago because I had discovered your book during a period of time when I was experiencing a tremendous amount of conflict between my desire to persist as an ambitious academic and professional and my desire to reel back on my professional life, to care for my young children.

And as I often do when I'm faced with challenges, I sought out literature that would help me to gain clarity , and I found that I had a hard time finding books that spoke to what I felt was my core challenge. And I'm wondering if you can talk about how you see this book as filling a gap in the literature

Daphne de Marneffe: [00:07:14] sure. I, I think the conflict of your own that you're articulating is one that I felt as well. And that I think a lot of women who have the privilege and opportunity to pursue careers face and, um, that is that there's a genuine emotional

to be engaged in meaningful work. And there is also a genuine emotional desire to be.

Deeply and meaningfully engaged with, uh, one's children. And whereas in previous, uh, periods of history, it was possible maybe to do your work in the company of your children if you're foraging or. So forth in our era, both things take a lot of attention and a lot of focus, and I'm a certain kind of presence and I felt and continue to feel that, uh, the kind of focus and presence and meaningful emotional engagement that's required of motherhood, um, gets, uh, subtly and not so subtly devalued in people's minds.

Partly because it's. Not compensating people economically, it doesn't have a clear hierarchy of advancement. Um, and it's treated in a way that I think is confusing to women themselves in terms of what it is that they're doing, what the project of Parenthood is. And so I was really trying to flush out and voice.

Um, I think the feelings that a lot of people have about how deeply meaningful this is, and that doesn't in any way. Um, detract from the conflict. It makes them in some ways more acute, but at least to give equal place to, um, the, the meaning and significance of the parenting project as a social good. As um, as an important Avenue of fulfillment.

Because I think too often it got sort of misinterpreted as a sort of trivialized, as a kind of self sacrifice or a certain kind of shirking or, or, um, moving away from meaningful work. And I really wanted to critique that.

Yael Schonbrun: [00:09:28] Yeah. For, for me, that was such an important, idea

to have fleshed out because it was something that I kind of felt, but I didn't really have the words for when I first became a mother,

I felt so confused about why I felt so badly being away from my child. And I also felt badly being home with him. So it was sort of a no win situation and part of I think part of what really, um, is, is a struggle for many ambitious women in the modern age is this omnipresent pressure to work with systems to provide more childcare, that that should be like the main objective on the one side. And then I think for other women, there's this pressure to sort of want to be with your child all the time.

And what's missing, I think is that is, is this. Piece that you're really articulating of like the in between space and sort of the, the natural conflict of that. We both want to be with our children and we may want to pursue professional lives and it's, it's normal and natural to be wanting both and to experience that struggle.

Da: [00:10:33] Well, I think, yeah, exactly. I guess very well put, because I think. Think that being in that middle space is hard culturally and often internally. And I think that the more we can articulate what that is, the more helpful it is to people. Cause I don't think people do tend to fall on one pole of the other.

And persistently there's sort of these cultural lenses that just over-simplify. The experience. And I think one thing I, I wrote, I can't remember if it's in the second edition, but I wrote of this moment of, of, of, of being frustrated in my early motherhood with sort of the lack of time I had to pursue my career and sort of being, um.

Almost envious of women that I felt were less conflicted. You know, that, that, that, that sometimes people are either very UN, I, I teach a class to people who are having their first baby. And I, I, I, I noticed, you know, where, where they're at now and where they're, you know, wondering where they'll end up because, you know, sometimes people are just completely unconflicted seemingly about.

The career piece and it's sort of, they'll find a way to get the kids taken care of, but that's sort of not a point of conflict. Other people feel extremely, um, unconflicted about being with children. Right. And, um, and I feel like that middle space of kind of, um, trying to do both, um, doesn't get enough sort of, you know, complex thinking attached to it.

And I think that what ends up happening is that people.

Thinks that they're supposed to be one way or the other. And um, and I, I remember wishing I could sort of lop off part of myself and make myself more simple. And I think the book is partly a attempt to, to, to fight that, that, that impulse because I don't think it usually works.

Yael Schonbrun: [00:12:26] I'm, I'm so glad that you articulated that here because that's definitely a part of what speaks to me.

I think there's a lot of value to learning, to appreciate the desire to do both and that, and that's really, um, I think what your book does a nice job of is speaking to how beautiful the desire is to parent. And I think, um, not just for the benefit of our children, but for us. As adults. And that for me was really a refreshing take.

So I wonder if we could even just start with the title of the book and you talk about that in the introduction. It's an interesting and deliberate choice to join mothering with the word desire and when that might be really surprising in our

cultural context.

Daphne de Marneffe: [00:13:08] Right? So I did, um, feel that, that those two things rarely are juxtaposed, that at least maybe it's changing now, but at least in the feminism that I absorbed as a young woman and in some of the models of psychology that I studied, I felt that, um, motherhood. Was often discussed almost exclusively from the vantage point of what the baby gets from the mother. You know what the baby needs from the mother to have to develop in a healthy way. The mother's a bit of a cipher. She's a bit of a vague construct and that in, in a lot of the developmental literature, and then in feminism, there was this sort of bias where desire was really on the side of sexuality, desires on the side of ambition.

But desire is, is not in the sphere of motherhood. Motherhood is an area where you're self sacrificing. Maybe you're masochistic, maybe your, um, it's sort of a, you're an, an entity of a certain kind. And you know, there's a socio cultural context to this. I mean, I think the feminism of the second wave from the sixties and seventies was written by enlarged by women whose mothers were, um. Highly constrained in their ability to be ambitious. And so for that generation that, that, and the issue was, and at a crucial issue was to sort of, in a way, downplay the, the, the maternal side of desire and help with sexual autonomy and liberation and help with, um, you know, economic and work. Ambition and, uh, success. But I think, you know, culture keeps shifting. And so I think the, the, the positionality of, of my generation is more, okay, so how do we reclaim the side of this that kinda got lost, which is that there are a lot of genuine personal and individual rewards and avenues and fulfillment in relationships. And, um, and, and in nurturing the growth of children.

And I think that even when I wrote the book was a bit taboo to say, because the worry is that once we start honoring that we're cutting away or chipping away at women's other. Uh, rights and values, uh, because it's easy for, you know, for it to be manipulated into, Oh, that's all women want, or, you know, women are happy in the home, or that's all, that's what they should be doing.

And all those sorts of ideas. So again, it's holding intention. You know, I say. But in some ways it's, it's less conflicted for women today to own their sexual desire than them or their maternal desire. Um, you know, that's shifted over time, but it's, it's much more, in a sense, a conflicted for kind of the mainstream women in mainstream culture.

To, uh, to really own maternal desire because of all the implications in terms of gender equality with partners and work success and the way the workplace is structured and how you have to perform and act like your work is your top priority and all the things that, that make it almost dangerous to be too valuing of, of, uh, Parenthood.

Yael Schonbrun: [00:16:30] I'm not sure if you're familiar with the kibbutz movement in Israel. Cuba would seem in Israel, traditionally they were developed as these socialist communes where the goal was equalization between sexes and in order to free women from the burden of needing to stay home with their children, they develop these communal child rearing arrangements where kids would be raised with their peers, same age peers and children's houses.

Sleep there, play there. At be educated, there are a couple of hours a day they would go visit with parents, but primarily they were not raised by their parents and they were not raised with siblings. They were raised outside of the home. And that allowed women in that culture to participate really fully in the key boots, like, you know, working and, and sort of supporting the functioning of the, of these communities.

And what's so interesting is a lot has been made about the impact on child development. As a result of the, the style of rearing that they had. But ultimately what caused those, um, children's houses to be dismantled was that women finally became free to express their desire to participate more fully in parenting. And I think. For, for, you know, many decades they felt repressed from expressing those desires. And I think we see a similar thing among modern ambitious women. And as you're saying, it's not like everybody feels the same level of desire to be home with kids and, and there's a huge range, but. It seems important to open up that conversation of saying we can both feel a desire to participate fully and professional spheres or ambitious pursuits and to participate in this parenting role, that that is kind of a beautiful thing and not something to be hidden away

Daphne de Marneffe: [00:18:12] and I do think that the more free people feel to articulate exactly what you're saying. The hope is, and I hope it's not a utopian hope. That then that becomes part of the general conversation about work and workplace policy and maternal and paternal leave and all these things. In other words, I think sometimes this self suppression is because, you know, there's still a lot of bias toward, um, mothers to where pregnant women toward, uh, women who somehow seem to, uh. To value it to, certainly for men, to anybody who, who is making it clear that their family is of preeminent importance in the workplace is, is under certain. Certain risks. So there are real pressures that make people feel that they have to, um, not be as fully full throated as they could about advocating for this.

And I do think as a culture, we've got this weird disconnect on the one hand, everything in psychology and popular writing about psychology and the sort of zeitgeisty in the culture. Is, uh, emotional intelligence. Relationships are important. They're basic to brain development. They're basic to all sorts of things, and yet the people are actually doing the relationships with young children are somehow marginalized or sort of treated as

Problematic or not committed enough to work or whatever. So I just, I do think there's structural reasons why people feel they have to mute this. They have to, make it less of a part of themselves just to survive in the, in the lives that they have. But I guess I'm, what I'm hoping is if the discourse changes that just that shifts as a value.

That's just as something that we're aspiring to.

Yael Schonbrun: [00:19:53] Yeah. Emily Oster, who, um, has written her recent book, his crib sheet and her previous one is expecting better. She has started this movement of, uh, sort of hashtag parenting in the open, and I love it. I love that somebody in her sort of a powerful position is advocating for, um. You know, various things, including, uh, admitting that, you know, our kids are a part of our lives, even if and when we are working hard.

And, and that actually is, is, you know, something to appreciate too. And I agree that, you know, a lot of the workplace structures that are in place are a lot of the, you know, prejudices that, um, are sort of hangovers of, you know, decades ago. Um, really do prevent people from feeling they can, that they can embrace that side of themselves.

But. Yeah. When research looks at the ways that people manage those two sides of themselves, we find that people work better when they're allowed to parent more fully and people parent more happily and

Daphne de Marneffe: [00:20:46] and you yourself are an expert on that very topic right.

Yael Schonbrun: [00:20:51] under construction with Daphne's support, which I've really appreciated over the years.

so I'm going to transition us to talking a little bit more about what we do get out of parenting.

so there are many ways in which motherhood is truly pleasurable.

And of course that's complemented by the many ways that it feels like the hardest thing in the world. And I wanted to mention this meme that just struck me as very funny in part because it felt so true. And the quote goes as follows, the two things I love most in the world. Number one being with my kids.

Number two, not being with my kids.

Daphne de Marneffe: [00:21:29] You know, we can all acknowledge that Parenthood is not a purely pleasurable project for all sorts of reasons, but, but I think the reason that the pleasures can get downplayed is that the frame of thinking about them is, is sort of, um.

Flattened or simplified. Um, in other words, they're, they're sort of treated maybe because they've historically been associated with women and women are generally devalued as sort of somehow trivial, or the fact that they're sort of fleeting means they're not real or important. Um, they're all in the warp and woof of a relationship.

Right? All the things we get. We have pleasure and in relationships, joy, laughter, humor, um, you know, warmth. Uh, you know, all these things are, um, are kind of the stuff of life, and yet they're not treated as, as sort of serious in a certain kind of way. Um, I remember you may remember this book, the cultural contradictions of motherhood by Sharon Hayes.

Is it. Now an eminent sociologist, and it was all about how, you know, we have this ideology of intensive mothering and how it oppresses women and so forth. And then in her acknowledgements, she has this kind of bubbly, effervescent, adoring, acknowledgement term mother about, you know, hugs and kisses. And. You know, a lifetime supply of frozen yogurt. And I sort of thought about this juxtaposition, you know, that some of the, some of these sort of more gushing, joyful pleasures of, of Parenthood are sort of treated as kind of a side note or under the radar, or not sort of put centrally in what it means to feel alive and what it means to hold pleasure and being alive.

And I think most people would say some of their peak experiences in life. Then shared with their children, and not to say it's all of that, but, but, but let's acknowledge it as partly that. And I use that as a guidepost to thinking about, okay, how do relationships feel satisfying? How do they feel meaningful?

How do they deepen, you know, I have a quote at the end of the book. At the end of the new prologue to the second edition from Audrey Lord, who talks about joy as this critical element of bridging differences between people of understanding other people of getting inside their experience. And so it's that kind of idea. It's like, where do we put pleasure and joy in our sense of what's, you know, important in life? And I think a lot of us locate that most deeply in these, these fleeting moments with our kids.

Yael Schonbrun: [00:24:03] I think that's absolutely right. And what's so interesting, I mean, there's Sharon Hayes book, but there's also books like Jennifer senior's all joy, no fun, and overwhelmed by Bridget Schulty. And I think there's just a lot of emphasis on the challenges of parenting and they are real. But I think what your book points out is, it's so much broader than that. And I think most parents can. I mean, I suppose depending on the developmental stage that your kid is at, but we can mostly kind of take a step back and see these moments of deep connection, of hilarity, of just intrigued. I mean, kids are just such interesting little creatures and, and they help us to learn about ourselves and see the world in new ways.

And there's such, there's such fun that can be had with it, but we do, we, we do tend to focus more on how difficult parenting is. And I think it's because it is true and that is certainly a prominent experience for most parents. But if we can sort of take a step back and see the pleasures more clearly and savor them more effectively, I think it does make the experience of parenting that much more pleasant and rewarding.

And, and I think it is inherently anyway, but, but it's not that piece of, it isn't so much a part of our cultural conversation.

Daphne de Marneffe: [00:25:18] So I think an important point to make here is that we're, we're all our own worst critics. And I think that part of what I'm trying to talk about from a psychological angle, and this is something that we encounter with people we talk to in therapy. You know, the people, um, a lot of the difficulty feeling the pleasures.

That are available is to do with feelings of anxiety, feelings of self criticism, feelings of worry. That one isn't doing as good a job as one could as a parent. Um, you know, when your kids have challenges, it's extraordinarily painful and feeling like it's, it's very hard to necessarily know the right thing to do or the right approach to have.

And people can feel really alone in that. And we all know. They'd be anxious or being self-critical are huge parts of not being able to feel more relaxed, right? Or more joyful or more take more pleasure in what is in front of us. And so the book is really a cultural critique, but it's also a psychological sort of analysis of what makes the pleasures hard to access and what it is that we can, what the kind of internal work we can do.

Um, to help ourselves with that as, as a goal, right? As an aspiration that there's, there's, there's, there's pleasure and meaning to be had in this, uh, parenting project. And what, in what ways are we, in a sense standing in our own way?

Um, you know, and that stuff's very deep. I mean, it often comes. Through from how we were parented ourselves, the kind of family culture we grew up in, the state of our marriages.

You know, all sorts of things impact that. But I'm trying to also sort of help people, um, with their own internal life, right? Their inner life in terms of how they, they take more pleasure in, in Parenthood, uh, where they can.

Yael Schonbrun: [00:27:15] Yeah. You give this wonderful anecdote that I think most parents can relate to of being in the, you had like a stay at home parent day and you were really frustrated with your kids and you were in the shower and this sort of like rage monster came out and sort of like the, the least proud moment that most parents have a screaming at our kids while we're, you know, drenching wet.

You ultimately say the problem is not that we ha, I'm quoting from your book. The problem is not that we have a momentary burst of hatred. Welcome to the club. The problem is finding a way to manage the guilt and anxiety that these episodes bring about. So I think that that just sort of dovetails on what you were saying, that it is complicated and there are a lot of difficult emotions that come about as we parent in part because.

You know, among the most important things we do in our lives because we care so deeply about this project. Um, but managing the less comfortable emotions is a part of what makes it easier to access. The more joyful ones.

Daphne de Marneffe: [00:28:12] Yeah. And I want to say something about that, that, that spans across all intimate relationships, whether it's with partners, you know, parents, friends, children, um, and, and all the research bears this out. You know, we're. We're all human and we all make mistakes, and we're all imperfect by definition, right?

But th th the key is always the ability to repair whatever that means, right? So people get lost and stuck in their own guilt at having not been the person they want to be. But I, when I say welcome to the club, I really mean it. No one, no one is their ideal self all the time. And many of us are not our ideal selves most of the time.

And Parenthood, you know, you're exhausted. It's taxing physically. It's taxing emotionally. And there are these moments like what I called my drenched, which episode where you open the shower curtain and scream at your baby's sitting on the floor and they're terrorized by you and you feel horrible. But the point is that if you can circle back, whether it's with your spouse or with your child and Sam, sorry, I didn't mean that.

I love you. That is the stuff. Of healthy relationships. It's not that you are perfect all the time, it's that you can apologize and circle back and repair and self-reflect when you weren't perfect. And I think that is so hard sometimes for people because they worry that if they're not their best self, they're terrible.

Right. That's that gray area we're talking about. Where do you find that middle ground. I'm human, I'm fallible, but I'm basically a loving and good person who's trying their best. That's the posture that I'm really trying to help people adopt. And it holds true in, in marriages too, right? I mean, people need to find a way to say, I wasn't my best self, I'm sorry.

And that goes so far with a child or with an intimate partner and in, in repairing, which is really kind of the, the, the stuff of good relationships.

Yael Schonbrun: [00:30:00] one thing too, to take away from that message is

that it's important to be forgiving of ourselves when we're not our ideal selves, which is much of the time and to be forgiving of others because, um, to have healthy, intimate relationships. We need to both expect that we will make mistakes and that people we love will make mistakes.

And so from a parenting perspective, it's actually a very useful lesson to be teaching our children both that nobody can be perfect all the time, and that it's an opportunity for learning and for growing and for, you know, rebuilding maybe even stronger relationships that matter to us. I think that's a really important take home message.

You also discuss how our desire to mother is so intertwined with the social value of time. And because I write a lot about this work, family conflict. Um, this is an issue that I find really fascinating, but I wonder if you can start us off by just talking about why is time so important in our relationships with our children? How do we understand the role of time.

Daphne de Marneffe: [00:31:02] Right. So, I mean, I think we all know that as children, we don't have the same sense of time as we do. When we grow up. Right. And once you're indoctrinated in a society, we're all tethered to our watches and our schedules. Uh, but children. And need another kind of time from us, right? So that is one of those points of friction, right?

We have a schedule, we have to get out the door. And yet, you know, all of us have been at the receiving end of the child going, don't leave. Don't leave. Right? So, I mean, I do believe there is a value to quantity time and part of the book is about, you know, how do you just hang out? How do you be present?

How do you not put a lot of, sort of standards and, um, values on accomplishing when you're with your children. I mean, I think the whole society, I talk about this a lot at the end of the book, you know, even someone who has the, the, the ability to be a stay at home parent can often feel a huge sense of pressure that they need to make sure that they are accomplishing something.

You know, getting their kids. Building skills and doing things that are going to help them get into college or whatever. And so there's a real sense of, you know, I talk about this contrast of having versus being that we often measure our value in our culture by what we have, whether it's, um, characteristics of ourselves or things we have in our house or accomplishments of our children.

And so it's this, this sense of time where, yes, we all have to. Put one foot in front of the front of the other and accomplish things and make a living in the rest of it. But there's also a quality of time that his presence, and that is a sort of shared being together that is really kind of the, I believe, this sort of stuff of emotional. A fulfillment and growth, right? We need that kind of togetherness, um, to feel satisfied in relationships. And we all know, you know, in couple relationships, you mean have our time together, you grow less close. I mean, there's just all sorts of reasons why it's important to spend time in each other's presence and be together.

Um, and I don't think the culture is all that helpful with that. I think, um. You know, one thing that changed drastically between when I first wrote the book and now is, is smartphones, you know, and the fact that there's always technology to be, to be absorbed by. And so that's an example of an area where like, you have to exert conscious control over turning away from those things and being present.

And then it's not always easy.

Yael Schonbrun: [00:33:28] Yeah. We just released an episode with NIR Eyal who wrote a book called indestructable, which is a great book to read on this topic because it is so easy to just get lost in our phones as opposed to spend time just . Being with the people that we care about. And I think that that is really easy to do when we're with our kids, right?

Daphne de Marneffe: [00:33:48] Yeah. I mean, I, I think that, you know, one thing I, I write about in my own experience, and I'm sure you've had this too, is there's a real value in just kind of being around, but not being necessarily involved. In other words, every minute with your kids isn't doing something with them.

It's, you know, you're cooking or you're just. There and, and phones can be that too. You know, you can be buying something online while your kids are at the playground and that's not a crime, right? But, but then it's phones have a way of just sort of absorbing you, right? I mean, before you know it, you're sort of in it and you're then irritated by your child, distracting you from your phone, and you sort of gotta be always monitoring that line.

You know, what, what, when are you really. There and when are you not. Right. And to try to try to, um, you know, phones have a very addictive, you know, nature. And, uh, and so it is a huge challenge that I have to say. I'm glad I didn't have to confront when I had little kids.

Yael Schonbrun: [00:34:47] Can I actually ask you to talk a little bit about your view of some of the mundane household tasks? Because I loved, I thought it was such an interesting take on the role of making dinner and doing the laundry in terms of that it's not just drudgery and it's not just. Us as women being subservient. Not that only women should do it.

I don't think you're advocating that at all, but that you can see kind of a role for it in the way that we can. Mother. Well.

Daphne de Marneffe: [00:35:20] Yeah. So I, I, the, my, my, my second chapter is called feminism and it's, it's sort of a discussion of what I see as some of the, um, sort of misunderstandings of motherhood. That kind of came through, um, feminism of the second wave, sort of sixties to eighties, feminism. And, um, you know, I think that. One of the problems was that taking and Betty Friedan's feminine mystique sort of fell into this category.

Although it's a brilliant book and in obviously many ways, but you know, the idea that childcare and laundry and cooking, they're all drudgery. They're all sort of fallen into the same basket of kind of poorly remunerated, you know, unsatisfying kind of survival work. And I just sort of flip it on its head.

I say, well, if your value, if you want to be actually around your kids. And doing some of these household tasks as sort of the, the background labor of that. When your kids let you, and you know, they're not sort of tugging on your leg and having to do something else or crying or whatever, is actually a pretty compatible set of activities, you know, that you're kind of, have a hovering attention. You're sort of not like in their face. You're not like sort of completely interacting, but you're also getting stuff done and they can find you if they need you. You know, it's, uh, if you look at. Studies of attachment, separation, you know, healthy development as a kid. A baby is first right with you. And then as they become

able to walk and so forth, they go away.

But when they need to refuel or get some comfort, they come back and then they go away again. And then, you know, sort of that model of you're there, you're with doing something, but they can come back. It's not, it's not the worst combination in the world. And I sort of feel like, uh, when all these things are treated as, as kind of, um.

You know, drudgery or housework, something gets lost in that.

Yael Schonbrun: [00:37:11] Yeah. And after reading your book, it has really changed the way that I think about some of the housework. So like I'll be making dinner and my three year old when I'm not engaged in another task, just wants my attention all the time. But if he knows that I'm making dinner, it's actually the time that he's most likely to go and engage in independent play.

And as long as he, if he, if he notices that I'm not doing something, he'll ask for my attention again. But it's actually a great opportunity for both of us to be doing our own thing. And I think it really fits. Sort of presses him to do that because he knows that I'm otherwise, you know, mostly engaged.

I'm nearby. But, um, and it's, I think as a result, it's really changed my attitude towards some of those kinds of tasks

Daphne de Marneffe: [00:37:52] yeah. And I think it can make it, as you're saying, those things feel less, um, less like drudgery. Cause you're sort of doing two things at once in a way you're sort of available, but you're also taking care of something that needs taken care of.

Yael Schonbrun: [00:38:06] Yeah. One of the other areas that was particularly impactful for me that you, that you take on in your book is child care, and I think. So often in our culture, we're just talking about how working women can get more of it and high quality childcare, and I'm 100% behind the social reforms that would support more of that.

But what I think rarely gets discussed, and I just really love your discussion about this in the book, is the emotional complexity of childcare. And again. Some moms don't feel this. I really did. I had a really hard time with letting my child go to somebody that wasn't family, and I don't have family nearby, and I just never saw it discussed anywhere.

And so I think for me, that element of your book really resonated so deeply. So I wonder if you can talk a little bit about this idea of, of the emotional complexity of childcare for some mothers.

Daphne de Marneffe: [00:39:02] Yeah, I, I actually, that chapter and the chapter on abortion, which we may or may not discuss, are probably the . Cause I'm proud of stuff because I feel that they, they get at certain aspects of these issues in a way that I hadn't seen before, but I personally feel is a value, um, in the chunk care chapter.

Um, I, I talked in a way that I think is, is, is probably a little, um.

What's the word? Not politically correct in terms of, um, what I believe are the genuine conflicts on the part of some women and you're describing them in yourself. I certainly felt them. Um, you know, I think the whole sort of. A general discourse around childcare is, is like most discourses penned by people with privilege.

And if you look at someone who has a lot of education and a lot of opportunity, and they can easily, um, make a living that is going to. Both allow them to do their interesting work and Paige for childcare and still have money left over. You know, their incentives are in a direction where, um, having, you know, a model for society of a.

Very well trained, highly paid, a dedicated workforce. Doing childcare makes a lot of sense because they get a lot of gratification from their own career. It's not going to be a huge financial hit to pay for that and it's worthwhile to them. But as you move down the pay pay scale and you move down the education scale, it's going to become less and less.

Um, the incentives are going to be less and less strong. For a woman with, um, who doesn't make a lot of money or doesn't have a ton of education, that allows her to have a fascinating job, to really want a well-paid childcare person instead of herself. Because if we're talking about meaning in life, taking care of your own kids is pretty meaningful.

So, you know, I feel like in a way, um, yes. I mean, if we could snap our fingers and suddenly have a really excellent. National daycare system with people who are paid fairly and have appropriate benefits and are treated as professionals. What's not to like about that? And yet if you look at the economics of it, it seems like.

It, it, it, it seems, um, there's a certain amount of social ambivalence for that because it's gonna mean a huge outlay of money for doing something on a national scale that I think many people would prefer to do themselves if they could. And so I just think there's a lot of conflicts and contradictions in that whole public policy question that are sort of papered over.

I mean, yes. Of course it's important for women to have good childcare in order to go to work, and yet paying for that is a big problem on a national scale.

And you know, I think what you're describing on an emotional level, I think that people. You know, there are these moments where you sort of feel like, I can't bear to leave my kids. Maybe I should leave my job for some people. Right? And I do think that, um, those are some of the most painful moments of, of Parenthood where all the feels like the system really isn't holding and something's gotta give.

Um, and I talk about that also in the chapter. Just those moments. In my own life, I have to say, as a woman who's now my kids are grown and I do a lot of therapy with younger women who are in cotton, these sorts of conflicts. I do believe that trying to find a way to keep it all afloat and work through those moments where you feel like something's got to give.

I've got to, you know, give up my job, or I've got to, you know, um. Stop being when you know, I've got to take a bigger job or whatever. I feel like it's really useful to help women find a way to keep all the balls in the air, even if it's at a lesser level than they would like it a given moment because I think longterm there are big rewards for.

Getting to the point in life where you have some mastery, you have some authority in your career. And, and I do believe that the society is built such that if you completely leave the workforce for a decade or two, it is harder to get back. So I really do try to help women with their specific situations.

How do you keep it all going in some form? You know, not, not at full throttle and every in every department, but how do you keep your finger in things so that it's easier to keep. Doing both, I think is a value that I hold.

Yael Schonbrun: [00:43:50] Yeah, and I think that even if you pull back, even if you delegate some of the childcare out, even if you have understanding and colleagues or bosses, it can be so overwhelming to try to keep it all going.

I think at the same time, as you're saying, there's, there's real value to trying to do that and to creating social structures that support that

Daphne de Marneffe: [00:44:13] Well, the, the, the, um, hashtag you mentioned parenting in the open.

just thought about that, that, you know, that sort of seeing it as a, some kind of position of strength to be able to do all these things, even if not. Perfectly. It seems like a good social model for us.

Yael Schonbrun: [00:44:30] I think so. And one of the things that has become clearer and clearer to me as I've been working on this book on working Parenthood, is how much working Parenthood really does help us to be more skillful in both roles. It's kind of, you know, the ability to juggle a lot of things into have. You know, that side of yourself that is, you know, really able to connect with people in a caring way as well as the side of yourself that's able to be ambitious and forward moving.

And to be able to hone both of those sides and move between them is a real asset. To workplaces, and it's an asset in the parenting sphere. Um, those are not easy skills to building, and it can be pretty painful in the process, especially when you have young children at the same time as you're trying to build a career. Um, but there is, as you're saying, real value to trying to do that in some way, even if it's not the ideal vision that you had.

I mean, last in last, I wanted to sort of talk about just this idea of the paradox of mothering requirements, you know, can feel liberating even as it feels shackling. You talk about this example from the author, Toni Morrison.

Um. Who wrote the children's demands on me are things that nobody had ever asked me to do. And I think that's certainly true, that it feels shackling, even though it's also this opportunity to fulfill a part of ourselves, you know, to raise children who we love more than anything. Um, you write about a number of other paradoxes.

It can be the most important and special we have ever felt like when we're pregnant and at the same time, so mundane and tedious. And I can think about that like when I'm driving my kids around, it's so special and it's. So Monday, and when I'm making them food or putting them to bed, it's that,

that paradox of experience of like, Oh again, and how special that I get to be here and connect with these creatures that are so important to me.

Um, so I wonder if you can talk about sort of how, why it's so important to recognize the paradox that's inherent in mothering.

Daphne de Marneffe: [00:46:32] You know, I think what you're talking about is, is this really a deep question? Isn't it? About living

as fully as possible? Right. And as aware as with as much awareness as possible. I mean, those moments where you're feeling both. This is unbelievably precious and unbelievably boring, or mundane or repetitive. I think that is

accurate, right? I mean, it's, it's, it's letting everything in. It's not idealizing, it's not cinema analyzing. It's not denigrating. It's saying it's, you know, negative capability and cases, terms. It's like you, you are feeling all of it. And, uh, with in present all of it. Um, and I think that's the mindset.

That the book is trying to help people have, right. And in the book tries to create an atmosphere where that's, um, possible. Um, so it's that I'm hoping that the reading experience is one that actually gives the mother reading at the experience of that as well as the sort of, um, philosophical validation that you know, of that, um.

Because I think that's what Parenthood is. Just like, that's what life is. It's filled with all these differences and contradictions and kind of simultaneously different experiences. I think on the, on the bigger cultural level in terms of contradictions, I mean, I mentioned before, but I think part of what I'm trying to pinpoint is, you know, that relationships really are the thing that determines if our lives feel happy and fulfilling or not.

And. Um, the, the, the, um, spending your time cultivating those relationships and being. A loving, present, curious, interested, self-reflective parent is possibly the most valuable thing you could be doing with your time. Uh, and is also strangely kind of devalued, misunderstood. So, um, I'm trying to sort of talk about, even in.

You know, like in the workplace, we value and honor the difficulties and challenges of work is like, if you can take those on and you know, confront them and work with them, you're a successful worker. Well, it's the same in Parenthood, but we don't talk about it that way. Maybe, you know, we talk about it as just some kind of, you know, under stimulating, unpaid work.

And I'm trying to, I'm trying to question that.

Yael Schonbrun: [00:49:09] Yeah. Flip that understanding of, of what it means to experience, you know, the, the sort of less enjoyable side of it. And, and to see that as part of the entire experience and that, and how much that entire experience creates fulfillment for us. It's not just for our kids, it's, it's fulfillment for us. And I think that point of deep relationships create, helping us to create. More satisfaction and that those deep relationships are what leads people to have happy lives is a really important point. There's really interesting longitudinal research out of Harvard university, this sort of decades long study that. Has unequivocally proven that meaningful relationships are the biggest predictor of life satisfaction.

And certainly meaningful relationships are inherent in the relationships that we have with our children. So I, I think, you know, it sounded a little bit like a broken record, but for me. One of the huge take-homes of your book is that we don't parent just for our children, we parent for ourselves. This is something that creates growth, resilience, and fun and happiness on sort of this broad life level. And I think that is important and not sort of, Yeah. Acknowledged enough in our

public conversation about parenting.

Daphne de Marneffe: [00:50:28] just one of the things that reminds me of is, you know, a lot of, um, like the Harvard study you're alluding to, but you know, that, that really, um, life satisfaction is going to relate to, you know, the relationships you have and,

you know, being a loving parent

and, and having, um, a relationship with your child where they feel. That you care about their feelings. You're trying to understand their feelings, you're trying to respond to their feelings is the basic building block

for any kind of healthy relationship. Right? So, so it's, it's necessarily going to take working on yourself to be the best parent you can be. But you know, in creating that with your kid, you're giving them this amazing.

Headstart on actually having good relationships and adulthood, which we all know is going to be the critical thing. Um, so it's really, in that sense, pretty foundational.

Yael Schonbrun: [00:51:29] Yeah. What's so fun, and I mentioned this in the intro, and you're sort of alluding to it throughout the interview, is that, you know, your main work is on. Is is writing on parenting and writing on our primary romantic relationships. And it's so fascinating how many similarities that are in terms of what creates healthy parent child relationships and healthy partner relationships and how those relationships, those primary relationships, feedback on our own happiness and health.

And, and I think it's no coincidence that those are your two main areas of expertise because they do really relate to each other.

Daphne de Marneffe: [00:52:05] Right? I mean, they're all about attachments, right? That are, that are. Um, you know, the attachment that we form with an adult partner is really directly in line with the attachments we had as children. And that's, um, that's news to a lot of people. You know, that, that, that, you know, you'll often see in couple therapy, we will say, all my relationships are good except my relationship with you.

I'll say this to their spouse and it makes sense because all the other relationships we have aren't. Drawing and exactly the same way on that very early primal attachment relationship that, that there are ways that that gets reenacted and expressed in adult intimate relationships. That's, that's direct.

And so they do really, um, are deeply connected. Those two things.

Yael Schonbrun: [00:52:56] Yeah. And what's so cool for anybody who's concerned about the impact of a painful child-parent relationship in their own history and their adult relationship. And your book talks, your book, the rough patch talks a lot about this, is that we can heal old attachment wounds, but we first need to sort of recognize them and do the healing work.

And, um, Daphne's other book really talks a lot about how that can be done. So I'll just end with a quote from your book and maybe ask you to talk a little bit about, you know, different ways that mothers are, or anybody reading this book can, um. Put this put, put your writing to good use, but you write psychological

conflict and the need for compromise are inevitable.

The challenge is to meet them with awareness, emotional flexibility, and a reflective experience. This idea of the power of noticing without judgment, being reflective, being willing to learn, being willing to sort of recognize what isn't working without shame, but rather with curiosity.

And then, you know, figuring out how to sort of reconnect in both to yourself, yourself, and to people that you love. I dunno if I'm, if there are other things that you would suggest in terms of take homes and what people can do with some of this, these ideas that you write about. Obviously there's a lot more complexity than we were able to get to in here, but if there are any sort of larger take homes that you see as being primary.

Daphne de Marneffe: [00:54:26] I think you've hit on it and, and, and I think, you know, it is the fundamental challenge for all of us. And it's not always easy. You know, if you, if you grow up in a family where you were. You know, shamed for your emotions or treated as good if you did this bad. If you did that or not loved unconditionally or you know, treated as a disappointment or any, any of these things, you know, it just, it, it's very, very hard.

Emotional work to, to heal often. Um, but I do think Parenthood with the proper support, you know, does give you another chance to, and I think a lot of people feel that way. You know? I mean, I think we all, when we become parents, we think about the things we want to repeat from our childhoods and the things we don't want to repeat from our childhoods.

And I guess I want to just support people in that enterprise. It really is a, a truly. Potentially transformative relationship. Um, the relationship with one's child and it's an amazing opportunity to do things differently and learn about yourself. And I think it does start with that what you said, that self acceptance and that attention, that effort to be aware.

Without, um, shame or without getting down in yourself that you're not perfect. You don't have to be perfect. That's the whole point, right? and that's what you're trying to also apply to yourself. You know, treat yourself as you would your child with that understanding and gentleness and realize you're a beginner at this too. When you become a mother, you're learning as you go, and that's okay.

Yael Schonbrun: [00:56:07] Lovely. Well, thank you so much for taking the time and for talking to us about, you know, so many of these really, I think, paradigm shifting ideas that you describe in your book, maternal desire on children love and the inner life. And we'll link to the books and to your website. And, um, I definitely encourage folks who, um, have enjoyed hearing Daphne's. Guest appearances on our podcast to also check out her column in parents magazine. It's, it's awesome. And as well as her, her books. Um, so thank you so much for joining us today.

Daphne de Marneffe: [00:56:41] Thank you. I really appreciate it. Take care.

Diana Hill: [00:56:44] Thank you for listening to Psychologists Off The Clock.

Yael Schonbrun: [00:56:47] You can find us on iTunes, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. Please help us out by writing a review on iTunes.

Jill Stoddard: [00:56:53] We'd like to thank our interns, Dr. Katharine Foley-Saldea and Dr Kati Lear.

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