

# 358. How To Keep House While Drowning with KC Davis

[00:00:00] **KC Davis:** the reason why so many of us struggle ultimately with these care tasks is things like the patriarchy is things like white supremacy. it's things like capitalism and, you know, being reigned by productivity. Like those are ultimately some of the biggest stressors, um, as to why so many of us feel so kind of beaten down by our ability to quote unquote keep up with care tasks.

[00:00:31] **Debbie Sorensen:** That was KC Davis on psychologists off the clock. We are four experts in psychology here to bring you cutting edge and science based ideas from psychology to help you flourish in your relationships, work, and health.

I'm Dr. Debbie Sorensen, a clinical psychologist practicing in Mile High, Denver, Colorado, and author of Act for Burnout, Act Daily Journal, and the Act Daily Card Deck.

[00:01:02] **Emily Edlynn:** From America's Heartland, I'm Dr. Emily Edlynn a clinical psychologist based in Chicago, Illinois, and author of Autonomy Supportive Parenting.

[00:01:10] **Michael Herold:** Calling in from Vienna, Austria. I'm Michael Herold, ACT coach, confidence trainer, and author of an upcoming book on being a better conversationalist and making friends.

[00:01:19] **Jill Stoddard:** And from coastal New England, I'm Dr. Jill Stoddard, author of Be Mighty, The Big Book of Act Metaphors, and Impostor No More.

[00:01:26] **Emily Edlynn:** We hope you take what you learned here to build a rich and meaningful life.

[00:01:29] **Michael Herold:** Thank you for listening to Psychologists Off The Clock.

[00:01:36] **Debbie Sorensen:** Hello listeners, this is Debbie and I'm here today bringing you an episode with KC Davis, who has written a really fabulous book called How to Keep House while Drowning. And you know, I think most of us have this just kind of constant. Backdrop of care tasks that we need to do, house cleaning, personal grooming, that type of thing.

And KC's work really will help you think about all of those kinds of tasks in a completely different way. Her work kind of blows my mind, so I was really thrilled to have her come on the podcast to talk with us and so that we can share her work with our listeners. And Emily, you just listened to the episode this morning, and I'm so curious to know what thoughts you have about this topic.

[00:02:21] **Emily Edlynn:** I was actually really curious based on the title, how this was gonna fit our podcast, and then I was so pleasantly surprised with how deep this conversation goes. So I just want the listeners to know if you're kind of like, what is this about? It's actually about really, life-changing experiences and how we contextualize domestic labor and it even becomes a social justice issue. So I think there's so much in this conversation while also being incredibly relatable. I mean, some of the examples each of you give with your personal experiences, I related to all of it as a woman and mother and wife myself. So I just thought it was so fascinating.

I think. I think people will get so much out of it.

[00:03:10] **Debbie Sorensen:** It's funny you say that 'cause I, I think you're right. The title, we, we actually do talk toward the end about. Some ideas about, for instance, laundry and how to actually do laundry in ways that might be outside the box. But really the book truly is more about our relationship with some of these tasks.

And I have to say, as a therapist, I've recommended this book to a number of people when they are very stuck around some of these things. And in a shame spiral about it, which I have been, I'm sure most people have been. When you just feel like, what's wrong with me? Why am I struggling to stay on top of these things?

It seems like my neighbors have the perfect house and I don't, and I mean, everybody else looks like they have it together, and so I think we often do, there is a huge psychological component to this and cultural, like you said, social justice component as well.

[00:04:02] **Emily Edlynn:** Right, and I think, you know, I've always tried to argue that self-care, and you all touch on self-care, but self-care, real fundamental self-care is changing our mindsets, how we think and how we talk to ourselves. So that extending the kindness, self-compassion about our daily tasks and even re-contextualizing what those tasks mean to us is actually self-care more than a bubble bath here and there.

[00:04:36] **Debbie Sorensen:** Yeah, I mean, I think it's so true and unfortunately there are a lot of people out there who are making this worse. You just go on someplace like Instagram online, and I think there are people who look on the surface like they are, you know, promoting well. Illness, but actually what they're doing is putting even more expectations on it and this sort of false illusion of perfection.

You know, they're standing in the perfect kitchen showing all these self-help ideas that are probably not realistic or sustainable or affordable for most of us. And then we feel worse. You know, it's just so it can get really toxic out there, I think.

[00:05:13] **Emily Edlynn:** And you, you do, you touch on that kind of the flaws in the self-help world in general or self-development. And I see the same in parenting, um, where there's all this pressure and these messages that if it's not quote unquote working for you, there's something wrong with you.

And so there's a lot of internalized feelings of failure and blame, which really gets us nowhere good. And it becomes that cycle into shame. So this is a really refreshing rethinking of how to even contextualize our daily lives of running a household and it's so much bigger than laundry and dishes.

It's really a way of living our daily lives. So I just, I loved this conversation so much.

[00:06:05] **Debbie Sorensen:** Yeah, me too. And I have to say, it even came into practice for me this past weekend because we had some relatives in town visiting and we had them over and I was trying to get the house somewhat clean so it's hospitable, you know, but there was also some, there was like a basket of socks, you know, and underwear sitting there.

And I thought you know, some of the, the people who are visiting had an ever been to my house before. And I was like, they're gonna wanna see my house. And I felt the sense of like maybe I should hide that in the, you know, either try to finish folding or sorting through this basket or hide it in the closet.

And then I was like, actually no, they love me. They don't care. They probably have a basket of socks sitting there too. I wanna have them over. I don't wanna not do that just because I have, you know, some clutter and whatnot. Um, this is the real me. And of course, you know, they don't care. They're thrilled to be part of our lives. And so, and, and I think to just kind of have a little bit more acceptance around some of this, to

[00:07:03] **Emily Edlynn:** Well, and

[00:07:04] **Debbie Sorensen:** really good.

[00:07:05] **Emily Edlynn:** we don't have a perfect house and we have people over, we are being the change we wish to see

[00:07:11] **Debbie Sorensen:** That's right.

[00:07:12] **Emily Edlynn:** the world.

[00:07:13] **Debbie Sorensen:** right. I wish

for a

[00:07:14] **Emily Edlynn:** pick up your house. I'm not gonna pick up my house. Let's all just enjoy time together instead of worrying about how clean our houses are.

[00:07:22] **Debbie Sorensen:** That's so true. I wish for a world where we can all just be a little more genuine about these kinds of things and more open, and

[00:07:28] **Emily Edlynn:** Less pressure. Yeah.

[00:07:31] **Debbie Sorensen:** Well, we hope you all enjoy this conversation with KC Davis.

KC, I'm a huge fan of your work. Thank you so much for coming on. Psychologists off the clock. I'm so excited that you're here.

[00:07:45] **KC Davis:** Thank you. I'm so glad to be here.

[00:07:47] **Debbie Sorensen:** Well, I have to say I had to kind of harass you a little bit to get you on. I kept kind of reaching out through your various channels, so I apologize for that.

And I'm really a little bit of a fan here, so I'm gonna try not to be too much of a fan girl on you. But I'll start by telling our listeners a little bit about you, and I think they will quickly see why I am so excited. KC Davis is a licensed professional counselor, author, speaker, and the person behind the mental health platform Struggle Care also has a terrific podcast called Struggle Care with KC

Davis, her compassionate and practical approach to self and home care for those dealing with mental health, physical illness, and hard seasons of life, drew over a million followers on social media in less than a year.

And her book, which we're gonna talk about today, how to Keep House while drowning a gentle approach to cleaning and organizing. She just told me, has sold over 250,000 copies and was a bestseller on Amazon. Congratulations, KC.

[00:08:49] **KC Davis:** Thank you.

[00:08:51] **Debbie Sorensen:** And professionally, KC has worked most of her career in the field of addiction in roles such as therapist, consultant, and executive director.

And she lives in Houston with her husband and two daughters. Did I get all of that right,

[00:09:04] **KC Davis:** Yeah, that's right.

[00:09:05] **Debbie Sorensen:** Great. Well congratulations to you. Um, your book has made a huge splash and I actually was just wondering before we dive into the content of your book, if you could tell. Us a little bit about what that's been like for you to have your book be so huge.

[00:09:23] **KC Davis:** It's surreal. Um, because my like day-to-day life doesn't seem that different. Like I just, you know, I wake up and I take care of my kids and I do like some various projects. You know, I work on my podcast and I make social media content and I write, um, but it's always funny to like go to, you know, a Starbucks and have someone recognize me. You know, as I'm like driving my minivan, you know what I mean? Like just, it's kind of, it's weird the age of social media to be like a widely recognized person, but not to feel like you have like any kind of life of a famous person, you know what I mean? Um, but it's cool. I mean, I, I really am so proud of the book.

I really wanted to write a book, not only that people would gravitate towards and, read, but also a book that professionals would pick up and hand out to clients.

[00:10:18] **Debbie Sorensen:** I'm a therapist and have given it to many clients, recommended it told them about it because I think it's groundbreaking and I think we'll get to why it's so groundbreaking soon in the interview. But um, I

think that it has such a wide appeal because people need this book and your voice is so novel and also it's short.

It's this tiny book that you can probably read in a couple of hours. I mean, uh, easily read in a couple of hours and even has shortcuts. You say skip to page 17 for people who really just want the kind of the nutshell version of it, could you tell a little bit about why you wrote it that way? Why did you make it so accessible and kind of straightforward and simple to read?

[00:11:07] **KC Davis:** You know, my whole thing was like, this is a book for people who are overwhelmed and people who are overwhelmed are probably like not reading big, thick books. I, I get a lot of books now from, um, other authors that, you know, they're putting out these really great books. I mean, great books about, you know, um. The mental load when it comes to parenting or about burnout and motherhood. I get great books about, you know, how to raise kids around diet, culture, books about, um, grief and books like so many great books and I. Look at them and there are these thick books and I'm like, I just won't ever read this. Like no matter how interesting, no matter how much like it's information, like I would sometimes die to just like be able to upload the information into my brain, like in the matrix, like just z like upload it. Um, but like as someone who has a DHD and has two little kids and. You know, is trying to run a household and take care of a puppy and spend time with my husband and, you know, see family and take care of my parents. Like, I don't ha like the little time I have to read a book, I'm trying to read like fairy smut. Like, I'm not trying to read like more like intense brain sort of, you know what I mean? And so, um, yeah, it's just I wanted PI you, I could have, you could write the best book in the world, but if people don't read it. It's pointless.

[00:12:43] **Debbie Sorensen:** One of my friends said once that she wishes self-help authors would write. A pamphlet, you know, like a four pager with all the main ideas and just, she's like, I'll pay you the same amount, just gimme the information. But I don't really wanna read an entire book on this topic. I think it's that, that same idea that people, you're making it accessible for people who are overwhelmed.

[00:13:07] **KC Davis:** And self-help loves to like tell the same story kind of over and over or like repeat the same point over and over and I understand 'cause there's kind of like an old school, like, I'm gonna tell you what I'm gonna tell you and then I'm gonna tell it to you and then I'm gonna tell you what I just told you.

In summary, here's what we've said. And I'm like, I don't need all of that. I want you to get straight to the point. Um, I want just enough anecdote. For you to explain it to me, but I don't need like superfluous random things about your life. And so, I mean, while there is a lot of my own life in the book and some anecdotes in the book, they're very specific.

So it's like, here's how I approached feeling overwhelmed at the end of the day as opposed to like, I was walking down a river stream as I thought to myself, burnout, what could we do about it? Like it's, I

just. You know, and and I, they're short paragraphs. They are short chapters. Um, and so I just, I wanted a book that people were gonna read.

[00:14:07] **Debbie Sorensen:** Yes. Very direct and practical. And you mentioned that it is really for people who are overwhelmed, right? But what are some of the reasons why people get overwhelmed by these kind of day-to-day care tasks, as you call them?

We'll unpack that in a moment, but what are some of the, the factors that might contribute to that

[00:14:28] **KC Davis:** Sure. Yeah. So, you know, when we talk about self-care, we're often like our minds kind of go to. Bubble baths or massages or vacations or time to yourself. Time to do a hobby. And I think when you're very, very overwhelmed whether or there's like a, a barrier in your life, like when life is hard, right? And that could be because you have a mental illness. It could be because you're neurodivergent. It could be because you have a chronic illness or chronic pain, or you know you're postpartum or that you're in grief.

You know those, just those seasons of life, you're a caretaker to a child or a parent with a disability. Maybe you are burnt out from your career. Maybe you are traumatized by the pandemic. I mean, there's just like a whole list of reasons why, you know, maybe you are living in poverty. There's a whole list of reasons why we can find ourselves. Like in a season of life where things feel hard and overwhelming. So when you meet someone in that space and you start to talk about self-care, there's this feeling of like, I feel defeated before the conversation has even started because I don't have enough time and energy to get the things done in my life that just like baseline need to be done. And most self-care is talked about as just like. Extra things for me to add to my, to-do list, go and exercise, you know, make a meal from with greens in it. Like, you know, go see a therapist. And I think at the very core self-care is these tasks, like doing

the dishes, doing the laundry. Cleaning the bathroom, taking a shower, brushing our teeth, making a meal, you know, taking our medications.

That's the first and most basic levels of self-care. But we don't often think of those tasks as self-care. We think of them as just things I have to do and when I can't get them done, I'm failing at life.

[00:16:24] **Debbie Sorensen:** Yes. I love that definition. Just looking at some of these basic things, but that really, they sound basic, but when you're depressed, when you're overwhelmed, when you are struggling in some of these ways, they don't feel so basic. They can feel really, really hard and stressful and overwhelming for people.

You. Do give your own personal example in the book, as you mentioned, and I think the one that really stood out to me, you give several examples from your own life, which I love. Um, the one that really stood out to me is about your postpartum period with your second child during the pandemic. Would you be willing to share a little bit about what you were struggling with in that moment of your life?

[00:17:07] **KC Davis:** Yes. Oh my

[00:17:08] **Debbie Sorensen:** It's so relatable, I have to tell you. It was,

[00:17:11] **KC Davis:** yeah.

I mean, the first thing to know is like, I had a great plan for how I was gonna survive postpartum. My, my first kid had not turned two yet. Um, so I knew I was gonna have two under two. And, um, I was a stay-at-home Mom and I had planned to send my 2-year-old to like a, like a. Part-Time Daycare, and I had just started a nonprofit for moms and we were having meetups and playgroups and they were gonna bring meals by, and I was gonna have some social things to go to and we were gonna get a cleaning, you know, company and maybe we'd get food delivered.

And I mean, I, I just had a whole plan. My, my family was gonna come in for like six weeks and, you know, back to back family. And then when my daughter was about three weeks old. You know, we started having lockdowns in the pandemic. So there was no more daycare, there was no more, you know, at those early days we weren't even getting food delivered, you know, without like wiping it all down. There was no cleaning, there was no, uh, you know, cleaning crew. There was no play dates or meetups or people dropping by your house

anymore. And my husband had just started a new job as a corporate attorney, and so he's working seven days a week. I'm with the kids all day long. And I just got to a place where I went completely numb and I talk all the time about how funny it is that like as a therapist, I didn't recognize my own postpartum depression because I didn't feel sad. It was my friends that sort of started saying like, I think you might be depressed. I was like, well, I'm not sad. I'm not sad. I don't feel hopeless. I don't feel down on myself. I don't feel like I'm, you know, bad or any of that. Um, but I felt so numb and I, I, there was nothing I was looking forward to and I would end each day just like. Oh God. I finally made it to the end of the day, but then thinking about the next day, felt like I was looking down the barrel of a shotgun. It was like, there's nothing to look forward to. I have to do this again tomorrow. There's no respite. And I was so angry. Like everything my kids did, I was on like a hair trigger and I was yelling and screaming and I was so impatient and I was so tired all the time. And. In the midst of that kind of feeling, unmotivated, feeling like I can't get anything done, feeling like everything is just triaging the chaos. You know, the dishes are sky high and the laundry can't get done and there's so much baby toy stuff all over the place, we can barely move. Um, and it was just awful.

Everything was piling up around me and I felt numb and apathetic.

[00:19:49] **Debbie Sorensen:** Yeah. And that, I don't know about you, but that pile of dishes, the shame spiral around that. Just seeing all that kind of adds to that, which is why your book is so great. Um, but you know, when I think about my own life, my kids were. You know, already in school by the time the pandemic started up and the shutdown period and all that.

And if I think about two periods of my life that felt incredibly overwhelming. One was when they were babies and toddlers, and then one was during the pandemic shutdown. I mean, they were just really, really stressful, overwhelming periods. And you had the double whammy. You had them both at once.

Which is, I know a lot of parents were in that situation, and I just think, wow. I mean, that's so intense.

[00:20:37] **KC Davis:** It was deeply traumatizing

in ways that like I, it took me years, like I'm still dealing with the repercussions of how traumatizing that time period was.

[00:20:50] **Debbie Sorensen:** Well, we could have a conversation about, maybe we should do an episode on that. I think that a lot of people. Went through some trauma during that period and we were so anxious to move on from it that maybe we aren't really paying enough attention to that. But yeah, I think that you're not alone with that for sure.

And so your book comes in and the part that really blew my mind that I think changed the way I think about care tasks and that I have shared with many, many people, especially clients, is the idea that care tasks are morally neutral. Please tell us, explain.

[00:21:31] **KC Davis:** Well, I think, the number one thing that comes up for a lot of us when we look around at the laundry and the dishes and the ting and the cleaning, and we feel like we can't get on top of it, is that we immediately go to this place of, I'm a failure. I'm a failure. I'm doing horrible at this. You know, I'm a bad mom, I'm a bad spouse. I'm not a valid adult. You know, and, and it kind of just cuts to the heart of that shame and reminding us that. The way that you approach care tasks is not a reflection of your character. It has nothing to do with responsibility and maturity and, and laziness or productivity like I. You're not a bad person because you're having a hard time. And I think as a clinical professional, and I would ask my other friends that were also therapists, like, you know, when you get in a client that seems like they're lazy, um, 'cause in addiction you get a lot of young adults who's like, parents are like sending 'em to rehab and then they're really frustrated 'cause you have this like failure to launch even in recovery. I was asking some of them, you know, these, these, these guys and these girls that come in and it seems like, oh, they're so lazy, they're so unmotivated. Like when you get down to like brass tacks when you've really like unpacked all the way down to like, what's going on. Have you ever discovered that what that was at the root was laziness? And every single one of them were like, mm, no. Never, there's always something like valid happening underneath, like there's a mental health issue or there's neurodivergence or there's um, maybe just like a difference in values from how they and their parents see things, you know, and, and once they find something they care about, all of a sudden they're super productive.

Right? They're super ambitious and, um. Or there's this like really, really low self-concept and self-worth, and they feel like they don't deserve good things. They don't go for. I mean, it's just like so many things and, and what I found is like if you're struggling with these care tasks, these like basic skills for survival, it's a legitimate barrier. Like there's something real happening and it's not just that you're like a shitty person. So when we say care tasks are morally neutral, what we mean is that the way that you do care tasks, whether you're good at

them or bad at them, or you succeed at them, or you fail at them, or you're productive with them, or you procrastinate them, none of that is a reflection of your character. If you're good at them, it doesn't mean you're a good person and if you're bad at them, it doesn't mean you're a bad person. They are morally neutral tasks and the way that you interact with them. Yes, it can give you some good information, but it's never information about your character. It's always information about what you are struggling with.

[00:24:19] **Debbie Sorensen:** I love that so much. It's incredibly important and I'll tell you my personal, um, relationship with this idea. I'm probably somewhere in the middle on the tidiness scale. I am definitely not like a super. Clean person around the house and it's, sometimes it's because I'm overwhelmed, for sure, but sometimes it really is because I'd rather be working.

I'd rather be having fun with my kids. Like it's just not a huge priority. But I have to tell you that I always bought into this idea that that was a terrible thing about me or that, you know, I would compare myself to my friends who have these like perfect houses, at least every time I go over there and feel that.

Self-criticism, right? That shame that I should be more like them. And it's some sort of deficiency, like I'm not managing my time well enough. But the truth is like, I think it's kind of boring and I choose not to spend, I'd rather read a book than fold the laundry a hundred percent of the times. You know what I mean?

But it really freed me up to think of it that way. Like it's not like I'm worse person than them because I'm not doing that. Do you see what I mean?

[00:25:23] **KC Davis:** Well, and that's the thing, like, everyone deserves a functional space. And there's definitely been times in my life, like when I was postpartum, where like the space was not functional and I

needed some tips that worked for me to get things functional. But that's the important message is that like.

Even when I am in a good place and my space is functional, I'm still not a tidy person, like I'm a messy person. On my best day, on my most mature, most responsible. I'm a messy person. I will never not be. I. A messy person and you know, as long as I have the skills to keep my home functional, it doesn't matter if I'm a tidy person or a messy person like I am genuinely just a person that prefers to do like care tasks in in, um, like large blocks of time. I don't wanna spend 30 seconds every five minutes putting something away, thinking about putting something back, thinking about doing a little here, a little there. I wanna

spend 12 hours doing exactly what's in front of me, and then 30 minutes getting the house functional. Or I wanna spend several days not doing dishes and then an hour doing dishes because my brain just works better that way.

[00:26:38] **Debbie Sorensen:** As a fellow therapist. One time I had a client who was in a huge shame spiral around housekeeping type tasks, and it was during the shutdown period of Covid when I was working exclusively remotely from home and I turned my computer around to show her the. Pile of laundry that was in the room while she was talking about that, because I think she had assumed, you know, it's just really easy to look at everyone else and assume that, oh, their laundry must be cleaned and folded and put away, or they probably don't struggle in this S way, but I think probably a lot of people do.

I mean, do you find, it seems like given the popularity of your book that this is not an uncommon thing. Would you agree with that?

[00:27:20] **KC Davis:** Yeah, and I also think that, you know, we don't actually know what most people's homes look like. Like most homes that you go to, somebody has cleaned before you got there. And so I think we have, just like as a society, we have sort of like, I. A really misconstrued idea of what homes are supposed to look like when people live there.

Like in the midst of like what they look like for people to live there. Like what does the average home look like as people are living there? Because again, you know, most of the homes that you see, you see them on television where that's not a home, that's a set. You see them at a friend's house. Where they have cleaned before you got there and, and you're not going into their bedrooms and looking in the bathrooms and all this kind of stuff. You maybe have a best friend who doesn't clean before you go there. Um, but like, yeah, there are people that are maybe naturally everything is spic and span and spotless, but like most people's homes don't look like that on a day-to-day basis.

[00:28:18] **Debbie Sorensen:** You see the Instagram videos and

[00:28:21] **KC Davis:** like we're pushing things out of the way before we film that video or take that picture and, um, and I mean, it's, it's a lot like bodies, right? Like if you think about the kinds of bodies that we grow up seeing, I. On television, on film, on billboards, they're not at all representative of what like the average body looks like. Um, and so when we are looking at our own bodies, we're comparing that to the kinds of bodies we get served on media. We're not comparing that, like, we're not like going to target and looking around

and like really looking at people's bodies and body shapes and comparing to that. And I think we do the same thing with our homes.

Like I think that we compare the way our homes look to what we see on tv, what we see on Instagram, what we see at a friend's house after they've cleaned when we get there. Um, and I think if you add that to like the gender messages that our society has about like the way women. It should be women's kind of job to keep that home looking a certain way. You just get a lot of crushing guilt and shame, um, like you have this second job that you're failing at.

[00:29:33] **Debbie Sorensen:** Yeah. Well first of all, that's why I love, there was an article that went around a few years ago about, I think it was called Scruffy Hospitality. Does that sound right? I don't know if you saw that. It was like, invite people over, even if your house is a mess. 'cause then they get to see you and they don't care.

And then we can normalize not having to spend hours cleaning before a house party, which I love. I'll try to link to that in the show notes 'cause I. Love that concept, right? Like it, it's gonna make you invite people over more because you don't have to spend hours and hours cleaning to have the perfect house before you have people over.

We should all do that.

[00:30:08] **KC Davis:** And it does genuinely get in the way. Like I know as a mom of young kids, like I felt really isolated and I wanted new friends, but like the idea of like, oh, come over to our house and we'll do a play date. Like I felt like I had to do all this work before somebody got there, which made me like not likely to set up play dates.

And then, you know, it's like genuinely getting in the way of like social connections. And I felt like I had to be at a certain point in a relationship with someone before I could invite them over and not clean. And yeah, I'm with

you. Yeah, . So your work, as you mentioned, is really deeply rooted in social justice and to me it's actually kind of ultimately a social justice book. I mean, I feel like, I mean, and I would just love to hear about what you think about that. Is that intentionally your stance?

Yeah, I mean people online are often, um. Sort of taken aback when I post about social justice issues. And I'll even get people that say like, I liked you better when you posted about cleaning. Or, you know, you never used to post about

social justice. And I always respond to those by saying like, if you think that my stance on social justice issues is like some big departure from my stance on cleaning, like you haven't been listening because I've been very clear that the reason why so many of us struggle ultimately with these care tasks is things like the patriarchy is things like white supremacy. it's things like capitalism and, you know, being reigned by productivity. Like those are ultimately some of the biggest stressors, um, as to why so many of us feel so kind of beaten down by our ability to quote unquote keep up with care tasks.

[00:31:51] **Debbie Sorensen:** Yeah, well, I'll give you a little personal example and I would love to hear. Uh, your thoughts on this so I've been in a relationship with my husband for about 20 years since we first met each other. And earlier in our relationship, he would make a comment about, oh, this kitchen is a mess, or something like that.

And I, I think this was so internalized to me that I would take that as like a personal insult.

[00:32:18] **KC Davis:** Like it was a criticism.

[00:32:19] **Debbie Sorensen:** was a criticism of me as a person and I would get really defensive about it and I would, I think. Honestly, he was an equal contributor to you know, the pile of dishes that are sitting there waiting to be cleaned or the clutter that's around.

Um, but I took it as a personal insult and it took us a long time to get to the point where he was like, I'm not saying that you should have cleaned that or that it's your fault, but I'm just pointing out that the house, like you don't need to be so sensitive to it and I realized, no, it's because I think that that message that as a woman, the ability to do care tasks is kind of considered your worth.

[00:33:00] **KC Davis:** yeah, I mean, and I'll take it one step further. There was a time where like when my husband would start to do a care tasks I interpreted it as a condemnation that I hadn't done it already. Like if he were to walk up and start doing the dishes, I would experience that as if it was a, even just, that was a criticism of me.

Like, oh, I should have done it. Like I, and I would feel like I'd have to apologize for it not being done already, which is just bananas. And he'd be like, what are you talking about? I'm just doing the dishes. 'cause I could see they need to be done. Um, but those, but that's how deep those messages go.

[00:33:37] **Debbie Sorensen:** Yeah. And to add to that, I sometimes would feel this enormous guilt if he was working on household domestic tasks and I was just sitting there, and so then I would get up and do something else, like I'd start sweeping the floor or something, but I would notice if I'm doing the dishes, he's just sitting there like he doesn't have that guilt.

He can just sit there on his phone while I'm cleaning the dishes and it doesn't bother him at all. Do

[00:34:02] **KC Davis:** It doesn't bother me. Like I don't feel like, oh, you should get up or whatever. Like,

but Yeah.

I'm, I'm the same way.

[00:34:09] **Debbie Sorensen:** So something for our listeners to be aware of too, right? Some of these things are deeply embedded. Okay. So you offer a gentler way of thinking about care tasks that's less about moralizing and more about function in your life.

Can you tell us about that?

[00:34:24] **KC Davis:** Yeah, I think a lot of mainstream self-help. Um. Does something that it doesn't intend to do, which is like, I just know so many people who will reach out for self-help. Material or content, and they feel motivated at first and energized at first, but then within a couple of days or weeks, whatever, this kind of like sweeping new system they've decided to implement from this book that's gonna change everything, like doesn't seem to work for them and they don't stick to it, or it's just not practical for their life, and then they end up feeling like they're the one that failed and you know. So in, in a lot of ways, mainstream self-help content causes a lot of shame, and it's also very prescriptive. So it's often someone saying, you know, here's how I did it and here's how you should do it. And if you do it the way that I did it, you're gonna get these same results. And while there is a lot of self-help written by mental health professionals, there's a lot of self-help written by just a rando.

And that Rando might have a very inspiring story. They might have discovered lots of wisdom along the way, but the problem comes when people present their personal experience as a universal prescription. And it's also like, like I call it like the, like the school teacher fallacy where like you, when you got to that age where you had a different teacher for each subject. And it felt like every teacher

prescribed homework as if they were the only class you had. So it's like it's no big deal to do an hour of math at night unless you also have an hour of English, an hour of social studies, an hour of science, an outright. And so a lot of times, you know, you'll have someone who is, is an expert in something writing self-help, and, but it'll be like this whole life. Change, right? Whether it's, you know, how you're gonna tidy your house, how are you gonna get on an exercise thing? How are you gonna address this mental health thing or this mental health thing? And it's like, okay, great. If this was your only job, you could implement this 94 point system, right? Which may or may not take into account your. Like personal limitations or your personal support network or your personal health or your personal, you know, the way your brain works. Um, so I think when we run into these one size fits all systems that are highly moralizing, some people use a lot of very shaming language to get you motivated, right?

And so you read a book called Girl Wash Your Face, and the whole thing is just shame. Just, you know, snap out of it. Do better believe in yourself. Manifest it. And that feels motivating in the moment until you can't pull off all of this weird, ambiguous coffee cup slogans, don't do anything. And this big system you've taken on falls through. Um, and then you just feel like I'm the one that has failed again. Um, and that's what the majority of self-help is in my opinion.

[00:37:32] **Debbie Sorensen:** Yeah, and it, it's always interesting when people share their, you know, their morning routine and you can tell they've been. Reading all these books and listening to podcasts and so on, and it's like, oh, and you're supposed to meditate for 15 minutes and you're supposed to take a sh cold shower, and then you're, and you can almost picture over the course of time, you've added more until it's at the point where it's like, is this really sustainable?

Are you really gonna do these 20 things before breakfast? I don't know.

[00:37:59] **KC Davis:** Not to mention like I like, I mean, God love you all. I, I, I'm married to a man and I love men, but like, I would never read a self-help book by a man because it like. They have a completely different life than I do. Like someone talking about waking up at four and doing cold plunges and you know, habit stacking and it's like, that's great.

I have two children and a house and animals, and a completely different brain and a completely different societal expectation for how I show up in the world, and a completely different demand on my nervous system.

[00:38:37] **Debbie Sorensen:** Right.

[00:38:38] **KC Davis:** And that doesn't apply to me. This, like, this idea that, oh, I just need to optimize my productivity by doing X, Y, Z, and it's like, man, I'm, I don't have that kind of nervous system

[00:38:48] **Debbie Sorensen:** yeah, yeah. And probably that much space without a demand on you to be able to.

[00:38:55] **KC Davis:** every time. every time. I hear a man on a podcast give advice on how to be productive, the only question I want asked in that interview is, who is doing your laundry?

[00:39:06] **Debbie Sorensen:** Yeah. Yes.

[00:39:08] **KC Davis:** Who drops your kids off at school?

[00:39:10] **Debbie Sorensen:** Mm-Hmm.

I've

[00:39:12] **KC Davis:** who's getting birthday cards and birthday presents for all of you, the birthday parties your kid has to go to?

Like, lemme talk to her. I want productivity advice from her.

[00:39:23] **Debbie Sorensen:** Exactly.

[00:39:24] **KC Davis:** Anyways, all all that to be said, what I wrote the book, I, I knew what I didn't want it to be. I didn't want it to be moralizing. I didn't want it to be heavily prescriptive and yet I wanted to give. Hard concrete tools. For people to, I don't, I didn't want 'em to just feel inspired.

I wanted them to walk away with, wow, there are concrete tools, concrete directions, but they're not prescriptive. They're given in a way where I talk, I tell you how those tools can be used flexibly. I tell you how those tools might or might not fit into your life. Um, and I give you basically like a buffet of concrete things that you could take and use in your life.

And I tell you that if you can't find the right. Way to use these. You're not the one failing. Just come back, pick some different ones.

[00:40:13] **Debbie Sorensen:** And I love, so part of your gentler approach that I love is. It's, it doesn't have to be perfect, right? It can be imperfect. You have to do what works for you to function and looking at it more as a favor to your future self. Like a way of being kind toward your future self instead of having this harsh kind of berating tone to it.

It's like, oh me, tomorrow morning will be so happy if I wake up and. I cleaned my coffee mug, or I loaded the dishwasher, right?

[00:40:45] **KC Davis:** Yeah. 'cause we, we often will do care tasks from a motivation of like berating our past selves for having been messy or having created a mess or whatever. Even when I, when you go to shower, it's like, Ugh, I'm gross. I need to shower.

And my suggestion is to be a little more like forward thinking in that.

Like wouldn't it be such a kindness to myself if I were to do these dishes tonight and I woke up tomorrow and it was easy to get my coffee cup and it was easy to pack that lunch and I didn't have to deal with this tomorrow. Right? Like, wouldn't it be such a kindness to myself if I were to shower right now?

Because then when I, you know. When my husband gets home, I'll feel X or when I need to get ready for a podcast tomorrow, I won't feel rushed. You know what I mean? Like turn those things to forward facing. Um, wouldn't it be such a kindness to myself if I cleaned this now and I could enjoy it later?

[00:41:36] **Debbie Sorensen:** I mean, the quality of that, it just feels so different in such a lovely way, right? It's just, it's compassionate towards yourself and it feels more like a. You know, they say like a carrot instead of a stick that you're beating yourself up with.

[00:41:52] **KC Davis:** And it builds other psychological tools that are going to help you in other areas of your life. I mean, learning how to speak to yourself with self-compassion and to accept things being just good enough and to let go of perfectionism and to learn how to be gentle with yourself and speak these kinds of things about like, you know, I'm gonna do this as a kindness to my future self. It brings you really up. And close and personal with some of those beliefs about, well, I don't deserve a functioning space, or I don't deserve, I don't deserve to shower 'cause I didn't get everything done today. And you kind of have to face that. And the book addresses that too. This idea that you know, you don't really need to care about yourself to start caring for yourself. I think a lot of times we feel like we have to work on our self-esteem to get to a place where

we're making different decisions and it's actually backwards. Like you, it is by caring for yourself that you can learn to care about yourself. Um, and I think that it's just a lot more actionable and gentle and realistic for people who are genuinely struggling.

[00:42:56] **Debbie Sorensen:** Yeah, and everyone deserves to care for themselves and to, Talk to themselves in that kinder way. 'cause again, back to this idea of, you know, people might be struggling with depression or they might be neurodiverse or have something going on in their lives where they, they don't feel like they deserve it, or they're, they're so focused on, I'm lazy, or whatever the narrative happens to be.

[00:43:22] **KC Davis:** And I think there's also just enough, um, like psychological truth and knowledge in the book to help you get to a place where like, I'm not just saying do it this way 'cause it's nice and warm and fuzzy. I'm also explaining to do it this way 'cause it is the only way that works.

Whether or not you think you deserve to be berated, I'm telling you, no one has ever berated themselves into better mental health. Nobody has ever shamed themselves into better psychological functioning. Like it just literally won't work that way.

Um, and so it's not just like a nice thing to do for yourself, it's the only way that it will effectively work.

[00:44:00] **Debbie Sorensen:** I think that's so true. The deeper yard on the shame spiral the harder it's Right. So I wanna use the example of laundry because that's my personal struggle, and maybe give people a little flavor for how you think about some of these chores. Because in the book you really do get into specific strategies for managing care tasks.

And I love that it's like concrete, it's practical. There's probably something in there for everyone who struggles with this. Um, and one of the things, again, I had a lot of moments when I read your book. I originally found it a couple months ago, and that just, I was like, what? I never thought about this way.

Okay, so you're outside the box thinking about laundry, like who said we have to. Wash it, dry it, fold it, put it neatly away in a drawer. I mean, some of the conventions that we have all just gone along with are socially constructed. Yeah.

[00:44:57] **KC Davis:** Yeah, and, and so my approach is I want you to for like, take the task laundry. Think about what is the function of laundry. It's just to

have clean clothes to wear. That's the ultimate function. And then there are layers to that functioning. Like that's what, you know, we need, we need the clothes to be like safe and sanitary and all that.

So we need them clean. Uh, but also there's a comfort level. Like I want to be able to find what I'm looking for easily. Um, there's like an enjoyment level of maybe I prefer them folded or hung or whatever, but for me, you just start with that function, which is to get clean clothes on your body every day. Um, and then, you know, we wanna ask ourselves like what are some sensory barriers that we might have that might be kind of bottlenecking this process for us? So if there's a part of that that you find yourself avoiding or procrastinating from a sensory perspective. So for example, for me it was, um, like when I put laundry away, I find myself having to like bend a lot. Bend down to put it on this shelf, bent up to put it on this shelf, bend down to put it on on shelf. And I don't have like chronic pain. I don't have a bad back. I just still think that that process sucks from like a sensation per like a comfort perspective. Um, and so we think about like what things could we bring in or change that would make that easier.

And so I got a rolling stool. So that I can put some on this shelf and I can roll over here and bend down and get this and I can roll over here and get, and now I don't procrastinate as much because they're, that little pain point has been taken care of. This could be the same with, you know, people that brush their teeth and they find themselves, they don't like the mint or they, they find themselves avoiding avoiding the shower 'cause they don't like to stand or they wish they were sitting or they don't like to be cold.

We're like, let's get a space heater. We, let's get a grabber. Let's get a non mint toothpaste. Let's get some, um, a stool to sit at the counter to do the dishes. We wanna look for those pain points when it comes to comfort and sensory barriers. And then I want you to think about the steps that it takes and really identify like, what are the steps I don't like the most.

So for me, it was a, it was, uh, folding. I really hate to fold and I would, I would avoid the entire process of laundry because of how much I hated folding. Or I would do it up to the point of folding and then do nothing else. So not even putting them away. 'cause they're not folded yet. Right. And we wanna ask like, can we just take those steps out? Can we make those steps easier? And so the two steps that I identified that would make it easier was the folding and the putting away in multiple places, because I have two little kids. So I was putting clothes away in three different closets, which meant that I had to go to three different closets, and then I had to take my children to three different closets, even though I was the one dressing everyone. And so what I did was I started

doing a family closet. So now all of our clothes, all four of us have the, our clothes in the same closet so that when the laundry is done, I can go to one place and put all that laundry away, sitting on one rolling stool. It also means that when my kids go to get dressed, the dirty laundry is in one place because they've taken it all off in the same place. Um, and I also just stopped folding clothes. I just went with baskets. We don't, we don't own dressers in my house. Literal, not a, not a one. Uh, we have open shelves with baskets and then we will hang a few clothes and everything else just kind of gets tossed lightly into baskets and shelves. And when I did that, when I addressed that, I.

Then I added like a layer, a layer of enjoyment. So, um, you know, I got some like Bluetooth headphones. So now whenever I do care tasks, I make sure I have a podcast or an audio book or a playlist I really like. Um, or I set my Netflix up, you know, on my phone on the counter while I'm doing something. And so if I think about the function and I address the sensory barriers, and I, and I make it as few steps as possible, and I make it easier and less time consuming as much as possible, and you have to.

Think outside the box to do that, and I add in those layers of enjoyment. All of a sudden I will be left with a care task that I procrastinate less frequently. I am willing to do more frequently and is taking less time and energy and executive functioning for me to like make myself rally and do all the time.

[00:49:12] **Debbie Sorensen:** Hmm. I love that you're making it more reinforcing by. Taking out some of the pain and adding, you know, the audio book or something enjoyable to make it more fun. Katie Milkman came on our podcast, she's a behavior change expert and talked about that idea of like, how do you make these things more reinforcing, you know, watching your favorite show or something.

Um, but also it's like that kind of creativity. I mean, I think you're a genius for that. It's like, why not have a family closet?

[00:49:41] **KC Davis:** Yeah.

[00:49:42] **Debbie Sorensen:** My version of that. So in my house, I do my own laundry. My husband does his own laundry and the kids are, my kids are old enough, they're starting to do their own, but my youngest doesn't always, and sometimes they're, you know, it's like bedtime and so I just kind of help move it around or whatever.

But I hated having to sort when my kids were little. A giant heap of laundry into like all these different people's clothing. And so I just do one person's at a time. If it's, you know, if it's mine, I just do it. If it's my kids, maybe they do it with me or sometimes they do it on their own or sometimes I do it and, but it's like that, you know, to have like 20 piles, like one person's T-shirts, another per, I'm just like, I can't deal with that anymore.

It takes me like hours

[00:50:26] **KC Davis:** I don't sort by color or any of that. I only

sort by person.

[00:50:29] **Debbie Sorensen:** Yeah. Yes. I just wash it all on like warm and it's like, doesn't matter if it's dark or light. I mean that some of that stuff is like, who said Why

[00:50:40] **KC Davis:** That's, by the way, You don't have to do that.

anymore. Like unless you have like a bright red dress that has to be washed the first time by itself. All of that was based on older detergents and older machines that

like, you don't actually have to do that anymore.

[00:50:54] **Debbie Sorensen:** And fabrics that would bleed or so, I don't know. It's like just, yeah, you can get out of some of those old habits and make it less painful for yourself, which I love. I mean, I just wanna tie it back to your overall premise of your book, right, which is that we don't have to be perfectionistic about this

[00:51:09] **KC Davis:** Yeah,

[00:51:10] **Debbie Sorensen:** it or this is not an exercise in self torture.

It's like making it just functional for

[00:51:16] **KC Davis:** and it, and it's okay to make it easier, like you're not morally obligated to do it the

hard way.

[00:51:21] **Debbie Sorensen:** Yeah. Just 'cause your grandmother did or something like that.

[00:51:24] **KC Davis:** Like, who cares if it only, you know, saves two seconds. I want those two seconds back.

[00:51:29] **Debbie Sorensen:** So I'll share one more little hack that you offer. This is the kind of life hack I can get behind. So often life hacks make me, you know, cringe up. I'm just like, Ugh, we don't need that. But you just put baskets everywhere in the places where the piles end up. Just put a basket there and then shove everything in that basket.

I'm like. So simple and yet so effective.

[00:51:52] **KC Davis:** Yeah, if you, you know, if you are looking for like a place to start, I believe, especially just from who I am and, and having a family and all this, like I have, um, like three baskets in every room. I have a trash can, a large trash can. I have a laundry basket, and then I have like a basket for things that go in a room other than the room it's in. And that way when I'm walking through kind of like day to day, it takes me two seconds flat to kind of tidy that space up because if it's trash, it goes in the trash. If it's laundry, it goes in the laundry. If it goes somewhere in that room, you just put it away. And if it goes somewhere else, you put it in the basket and then you can walk out with the dishes. Um, and that way, you know, you can have like a once a week, like Sunday afternoon, like go through and, and empty out those baskets.

[00:52:41] **Debbie Sorensen:** Yeah, it's so. simple and yet so profound, the effect of that before we wrap up, I wanna talk a little bit about division of labor, right?

Like how to manage this. If you have. Whether it's a spouse or a partner or even a roommate or other family member or something like that, when maybe people have different roles, different amounts of, of domestic work that they're doing, or when they have different, I think, standards for tidiness. How, how do you recommend that people navigate that?

[00:53:17] **KC Davis:** Yeah, so I always say that you should focus for like families. I don't want people to focus so much on making the work equal as much as making the rest fair. So, because I am, um, and I do work, right, like I have a podcast, I have a social media account that's monetized. I do write books, but I also consider myself a stay at home mom at the same time because I. I can do that work whenever I want to, if I want to. And like right now my book is at

the editor, like my new book's at the editor. I don't have anything to do during the day. I literally just drank. I've been reading fantasy books sitting out by my pool, right? So like I have a very, the work that I do, I do because I'm passionate about it, because I really like it and it's flexible. Um, my husband is a corporate attorney. He does not have the same kind of work that I do, and so naturally our sort of labor division has sort of been split by traditional gender role because of the kind of job we do and because of our own interests. I wanted to be super involved family-wise. I wanted to be the one at the class parties and do all that. So, you know, when it comes to, you know, who should be doing what we, what we didn't want was one person who got to clock in and clock out and got to rest all the rest of the time. And one person who is just constantly on the clock. Doing all the childcare, all the care tasks, all the whatever. But we focus not on who's working harder, who has the harder job, who has the whatever, but on making sure that we both have fair amount of time to rest, to recreate, to have time, autonomy, so. There are times in my day now when my kids are at school, where I'm in between projects, where I have full time autonomy. I can do what I want, when I want, how I want, I can, whatever. And I'm good about protecting that time. I don't spend that time doing laundry. I spend that time reading a book or, or getting in the pool or you know, hanging out, going to lunch with a friend and like my husband only gets those times, you know, like on a Saturday. I might be cleaning the house on a Saturday, running after the kids while he decides to, you know, read a book. And if you only beamed in on a Saturday and you saw me doing things and him laying on the couch reading a book or watching a game, you would think, oh my gosh, how unfair. Uh, but the reality is that, you know, he's also the one who is going to take one of these kids to school in the morning so that I don't have to leave the house.

He's the one who's probably gonna be working until nine or 10 at night when I get to put my kids to bed at seven and then read a book and eat dinner and DoorDash, whatever I want, right? Like, so we think more about are we both getting time to rest, to sleep? To go out with a friend, to socialize, to um, lay around and relax and, and we do, I think a pretty good job of making sure we both get those times in our life, even if they don't always add up at the same times or follow some sort of traditional pattern about e evenings and weekends.

[00:56:26] **Debbie Sorensen:** Yeah, I've seen so many times when that it, it's just unfair, right? It feels like one person's time is treated as more valuable and one person, you know, doesn't get the luxury of ever. Resting and recharging. And so in the, what you're talking about is that everybody's time is valuable and everybody's downtime is valuable.

This reminds me a lot of Eve Rodsky, who's been on the podcast before in her book Fair Play will link to out in the show notes just this idea of like, it's Val Domestic work is work, it's valuable, and it, you know, people need a break no matter what kind of work they're doing. They need time to rest and recharge.

[00:57:09] **KC Davis:** Yeah, and that looked, by the way, totally different when my kids were not in school, right

when I was all day at home, at school, that it looked completely different.

[00:57:20] **Debbie Sorensen:** yeah, yeah. Well, KC, what can you tell us a little bit about what projects you have ahead? You're coming out with another book soon.

[00:57:30] **KC Davis:** Yeah. So, um, my new book is on relationships and how to think about relationships and make decisions about the relationships that you're in. Um, both romantic and platonic and familial and, and boundaries and things like that that'll hopefully come out spring of 2025. and besides that, you know, I work on my podcast Struggle Care.

I work on my social media channels. I'm domestic blisters on TikTok. I am struggle care on Instagram and Facebook. And I have a website, struggle care.com that you can go to and kind of get to all those various places and some downloads and some online courses and things like that.

[00:58:06] **Debbie Sorensen:** Well, wonderful. We will be on the lookout for your new book if you wanna come back on and talk about it. We would love to have you come back next year. Um, and so yeah, we'll link to all of these resources on our show notes today and definitely check out. I. If you haven't already, how to keep house while drowning.

It will really revolutionize how you think about care tasks. Thank you, KC. I really appreciate you coming on the show.

[00:58:30] **KC Davis:** Thank you. thank you for listening to Psychologists Off the Clock. If you enjoy our podcast, you can help us out by leaving a review or contributing on Patreon.

[00:58:47] **Emily Edlynn:** You can get more psychology tips by subscribing to our newsletter and connecting with us on social media.

[00:58:53] **Michael Herold:** We'd like to thank our podcast production manager, Jaidine Stoutt Williams.

[00:58:57] **Debbie Sorensen:** This podcast is for informational and entertainment purposes only and is not meant to be a substitute for mental health treatment. If you're looking for mental health treatment, please visit the resources page of our website, [offtheclockpsych.](http://offtheclockpsych.com)

[com.](http://offtheclockpsych.com)