

You're Not a Horrible Parent with Carla Naumberg

Carla Naumberg: [00:00:00]

So the thing that's cool about self-compassion is it's actually a practice. Like it is a thing you can do and get better at the trick of course, is that you actually have to do it. You can't just think about it, which stinks because I love sitting around thinking about stuff it's so much easier than actually doing it, but, okay.

Yael Schonbrun: That was Carla Berg on psychologists off the clock.

Yael Schonbrun: we are three 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: I'm Dr. Debbie Sorensen, practicing in mile high, Denver, Colorado, and coauthor of ACT Daily Journal.

Yael Schonbrun: I'm Dr. Yael Schonbrun, a Boston based clinical psychologist, assistant professor at Brown University, and author of the upcoming book Work, Parent, Thrive.

Jill Stoddard: And from sunny San Diego, I'm Dr. Jill Stoddard author of be mighty and the big book of act metaphors.

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

Jill Stoddard: you for listening to Psychologists Off the Clock. We're proud to be sponsored by Praxis. The premier provider of continuing education training for mental health professionals.

Debbie Sorensen: Right now Praxis is offering both virtual and in person trainings and for the virtual trainings, they have both live and on demand courses.

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Debbie Sorensen: Check out their current offerings@praxiscet.com or you can link to them through our website offtheclocksite.com and you can get a discount on live training events. If you use the code OFFTHECLOCK. Debbie. And I are here to introduce an episode about self-compassion for parents. We've actually done another episode on self-compassion for parents. It was episode one [00:02:00] 13 with Susan Pollock. , but I was really excited to do this topic again, but from a totally different perspective.

Yael Schonbrun: So I got to meet with author and social worker, Carla Berg. Who's actually been. Podcast before she was on for episode 1 49 on how to stop losing your temper with your kids. And she's back with her latest book. And I wanna preface before I even tell the title, um, by letting you all know that there is a good amount of swearing in this book because Carla likes to swear.

And I think it's really funny. So I'll pause. And if you need to turn this off, because there are sensitive ears in the room, go ahead and do so. The title of the book is you are not a shitty parent, how to practice self-compassion and give yourself a break. And this book comes out on September 27th.

So we're airing this episode before it hits shelves, but you can pre-order through your local, independent bookstores or anywhere else, and yeah. Get ready to laugh a lot. learn how to feel better about yourself as parent [00:03:00] Debbie, what did you think about this episode?

Debbie Sorensen: Well, first of all, I love the dynamic between you and Carla, because you had so much fun together. You were laughing. There were a few little moments of spicy language, but I think to bring some humor to the topic of parenting, which can sometimes be, you know, challenging, difficult, it was just a really fun conversation.

I really enjoyed listening.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah, she's become one of my favorite authors and speakers about parenthood, because she is so funny. And I do think that parenting can feel so heavy. So anytime you can inject some humor and really her books are, are laugh out loud, funny. So I highly recommend them. They're really digestible and you'll have fun reading them while learning about science backed ideas that can help you parent with more sanity and more joy and more.

Debbie Sorensen: So one of the things that I think about a lot, and I think she talks about this quite a bit is this idea of self stories and how we get into some narratives about ourself.

You know, I'm good enough. I'm not good enough. [00:04:00] I'm. , you know, smart, not smart. We get into this around our bodies, all kinds of different areas of life. And I think parenting is no exception. You know, sometimes we feel like I'm a bad parent and sometimes we think, oh, I'm a great parent. And it's like, what is all that, you know, we get into this really evaluative mode when it comes to parenting.

And I just like the idea that maybe we don't have to do that. It's like, you're. A parent, you know, you're gonna have your good days and your bad days, how do you even define what's a good parent and a bad parent

. I read an article recently. We can link to it on our show notes about it was out of the Cleveland clinic and it was about the difference between body positivity and BOSI neutrality. And I think it's very similar here. So, you know, in reaction to a lot of fat shaming, Body image issues.

There was this body positivity movement where it's like, oh, you should feel really good about your body and be grateful for it and have positive thoughts about your [00:05:00] body. But for some people that's not really gonna land because they might sometimes get self critical about their body or there's even a little bit of value judgment within that.

Right. And so this idea of body neutrality is it's like, is your body good or not good? It's like, well, it's just your body. It's. Neutral. It's just doing its thing. You know, you might have a disability, your body might change over the course of time. And I think if you get caught up in those evaluations on either side, you end up getting stuck in self story.

Right. And so it's like, can we just step out of that a bit? And I actually think that's what Carla's kind of getting at here with parenting as well. It's like, can you just, you know, it's. You're just parenting and maybe we don't need to be so focused on like, oh, I'm a terrible parent or, oh, I'm a great parent.

It's like, I'm just doing my best to your people. And that to me is that she talks a lot about curiosity and just being more self-compassionate as a parent.

Yael Schonbrun: This is fairly [00:06:00] off topic, but Debbie, as you're talking, I'm thinking back to an episode that I did, on yoga for all where we

talked a lot about body is object versus body is process, and it's almost like you could apply the same idea to parenting, you know, parenting as a thing that we do and that we should be evaluated for versus a lifelong process.

And so by thinking about it, Process, we don't have to get so hooked on the evaluation piece, but more on the function and how we're feeling and where we wanna be going with it. And interestingly, I love that you're raising this point because I think there, there was this moment in our conversation where Carla had said something to the effect of that she generally feels good about her parenting.

And I, I sort of fed that back and said, you know, I it's so great that you feel good as a parent. And she said, hold on, hold on. Sometimes I feel. Sometimes I feel terrible and all of it's. Okay. And I actually love that. She called me out on, um, sort of getting stuck on her evaluation of herself because I think that is [00:07:00] something that we all need to be working on is it's so natural for our mind to wanna label good and bad

and so often in . So many of the important roles in our life that actually is counterproductive.

Debbie Sorensen: Yeah. And I've seen so many clients over the years, but also friends and family members who can just really be. Hard on themselves about their parenting or who can get perfectionistic about it. And I love that Carla offers some actual practical suggestions and exercises for ways that you can just ease up a bit on that pressure and be a little bit kinder toward yourself as you do this really important and hard, you know, work of parenting.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah. So listen through to the end, cuz she actually shares some of her favorite practices and she does it in such a human authentic, messy, real life kind of way. which kind of gives you some insight into how you in your own messy, real life kind of way can incorporate some of these helpful practices.

So we hope you get a lot outta this episode.

I'm here with Carla [00:08:00] Berg. Carla is a clinical social worker, mom and author of five parenting books, including the best selling, how to stop losing your shit with your kids, which we interviewed Carla for on episode 1 49. And I'd like to mention that when we recorded, it was the front end of the pandemic.

The episode was released in July of 2020. So all of us parents, including myself, were really in need of advice for not losing our minds with our kids. And I have to say that I've really incorporated a lot of the strategies I learned from that book and continue to use them. But I'm delighted that Carla is back to discuss her latest book.

You are not a shitty parent, how to practice self-compassion and give yourself a break. Welcome, Carla.

Carla Naumberg: Hi, I'm so happy to be back and chatting with you.

Yael Schonbrun: I wanted to start with a question about how to stop losing your shit with your kids, because it became a best seller. And I wonder if you have any insights as to why this book struck such a chord with parents.

Carla Naumberg: Oh, um, yeah, I think it's because look, it's something [00:09:00] we all struggle with myself included, right. So it's a really, really common challenge. And I think that. Um, you know, I intentionally used a swear word in the title. It wasn't just like, haha. Um, I mean it was that because I like to crack myself up, but also I was really aware of how I feel when I read parenting books that leave me, judging myself and I've read a lot of parenting books with amazing advice, really wise, compassionate, thoughtful, useful advice.

And I end up coming away from the book feeling like I'm totally screwing up parenting. Right. And I don't, I, I don't think the authors intend that at all. And I actually had a friend who read one of my early non swear books and told me that she felt worse about her parenting after she read it. And I was horrified and I was like, please go burn this book and never read it again.

so, and I think it's true for every parenting author. Um, and I know you have a book [00:10:00] coming out, so we're gonna talk about that, but I know we are all. everybody who writes a parenting book really comes at it. I have to believe from a place of love and compassion and wanting to help other parents and make parenting easier.

And I think an inadvertent, side effect, of it is that because so many of us parents are already judging ourselves, which we'll talk about in a minute. Um, we come away with these, from these books, judging ourselves even worse. Right? And so I think one of the reasons my book resonated is because right of the bat from the title, I'm hoping parents will know that this is not a book that is intended to leave them feeling.

Worse often they already do. Right. That's I just wanted them to feel like, Hey, we're gonna sit down and talk about this thing that we all know we're all doing. Right. I'm just assuming that every parent is losing their shit with their kids, myself included. Let's just talk about it in a real authentic way.

Let's try to be a little funny about it because, oh my gosh. If we can't laugh at [00:11:00] parenting, we're all just screwed. Right. Cuz it's so ridiculous. Um, and I think it, I tried to be as inclusive as possible in the book and I also tried to just be funny and honest and real and give parents advice that hopefully they can actually use because there's a lot of parenting advice out there.

That's awesome. And totally impossible. Just given the logistics of daily life. We just can't freaking do it. So hopefully that's why.

Yael Schonbrun: I think, I, I agree with all of that. I, I love the swearing of the title. I do think that so I could not agree more that so many parenting books out there are so well intended, but leave you feeling well, first of all, overwhelmed, how am I gonna do this? And second of all, like, I, I really am screwing up and yours is just so human and authentic, and you really have such a way of showing the messiness of parenting life and, and sort of making it lovely and approachable and [00:12:00] more.

Acceptable to kind of be, be real. I love it.

Carla Naumberg: Acceptable to be a hot mess, which we all are. Yes. Okay. Let's just say it

Yael Schonbrun: well, I, I also just wanted to ask this question because you addressed this in your introduction of the, of the new book. Um, but the response to how to stop losing your shit with your kids is what led to this new book. And, you know, the re the book came out during the, did it come out during the pandemic right before

Carla Naumberg: came out the fall before the pandemic. I mean, yeah. I think part of the reason it sold well is because, you know, six months later, we're all stuck at home with our kids, trying to manage our jobs and manage their online schooling and manage our own anxiety and everybody's mental health. And is it okay to touch the bananas or do we need to just leave them sitting on the porch for three days?

And like, it was a terrifying time. And even if we weren't all trapped in our houses, unable to reach out to our support network, you know, just having your

kids at home and trying to manage school, it was, it was too much, we're all losing our shit. So yes, the book came out [00:13:00] just before the pandemic hit.

Yael Schonbrun: And you write in the introduction that, you know, right after the pandemic hit, you know, everybody was contacting you to have you come on the podcast and be interviewed for articles about, you know, helping guide parents through this whole, you know, shit storm that was happening, that we couldn't escape.

And what you said is, you know, a lot of the advice that you were giving felt like not quite right. And, and you ended up giving the advice that you really dive into in this new book. So I wonder if you can sort of talk us through how, how this book came to be.

Carla Naumberg: Yeah, absolutely. So part of it is what happened during the pandemic, but part of it was, has to back up to my initial learning about self-compassion. So yeah, you and I are in very similar professions. I'm a social worker, you're a psychologist. I don't know about you, but I went through, let's see, four years of undergrad studying psychology.

I got a master's degree in social work. And then I went back and got a doctorate in social work. And then I was in practice for many years. And not [00:14:00] once during that entire time, did I ever hear the phrase self-compassion and that's not. A dis on my teachers. Right? It's not because they were withholding information or the people I was studying with weren't telling me stuff.

It just wasn't a practice that was really out in the world that we were talking about, at least not in Western traditional society. Um, and. It wasn't until sort of two things happened at once first, uh, a number of different, you know, scholars, researchers, practitioners in the United States, um, started talking about it, researching it, really writing about it.

Um, and also I was losing my shit with my kids to such an extent, and with such great frequency that I, got over my own extremely judgemental attitude towards mindfulness and meditation, and signed up for a mindfulness based stress reduction course, which I read about in that book. But there was, you know, I learned about self-compassion and then the first time I learned about it, I was like, so this is a total crock of shit.

And let's get back to the [00:15:00] good stuff. That's actually gonna help me with parenting. Um, but then I was like, I, I clearly don't know what I'm doing.

So maybe I should listen to these people who have been studying this for a long time. And so I started practicing self-compassion in some of the ways we can talk about in a minute.

And I had this moment. So I think my daughters were five and six years old. I have two daughters and now they're 12 and 13. So this was like six, seven years ago. Um, where we're in the kitchen, it's a Friday afternoon and they were sort of playing with Legos or stickers or something. And I was preparing dinner and my husband was on his way home from work.

And Willie Nelson was playing in the background, which always just puts me in a good mood and all of a sudden, totally unbidden this thought pops into my mind out of the blue. I thought, oh, I'm a pretty good mother. And it was such a shocking thought that I literally dropped the knife and kind of like squeaked, like, nah, what, like what just happened? And then it was like this really weird moment, because not only did I think this thought that I don't think I had [00:16:00] thought once in my entire six years of parenting, how sad is that? But it was so shocking for me that I dropped a freaking knife on the floor, almost hit my toe. And then I had to unpack like, unpack that moment.

Why? Cuz I'm a social worker and we say things like unpack the moment. Um, I had to like really explore how had I gone for so long and never thought of myself as a good mother. And why was it so freaking shocking to me? And where did that thought come from? So I started to realize it came from this place of self compassion and that I had been practicing self-compassion in ways we'll discuss in a moment for several months at that point.

And it led to this moment where all of a sudden I could actually spontaneously think of myself as a good mother. And I will tell you now, I actually think I'm a good mother. Does it mean I'm a perfect mother? No. Does it mean I get everything right all the time? No. Does it mean I never lose with my shit with my kids?[00:17:00]

no, but, and does it mean that I'm any better than any other parent out there? Absolutely not. What it does mean is that I've learned how to stop beating myself up for my imperfections and embrace the ways in which I am showing up for my kids. And, oh my gosh. Yeah. Parenting is so much easier and more fun when you're not shitting all over yourself all the time.

In addition to all the regular life challenges of parenting. Okay. So then we flash forward to this moment in the pandemic when people are reaching out to me

and saying, okay, well, like parents are a mess. How do they stop losing their shit with their kids when they're stuck inside with them all the time.

I remember specifically a journalist reaching out to me, wanting to have a conversation about how to work full time and have an infant and a two year old at home and not lose your shit. And I wrote back to him and said, I literally have no advice for you. I don't know how to do this.

I, I have no suggestions for how a person is supposed to work at home. [00:18:00] I think they had a partner who was also working with two little ones and not lose it. It's it's just not possible. It's like asking me how to defy gravity. I don't know how to do that because nothing about work or child rearing or parenting or being a human being on this earth is.

To manage that. Um, and you know, a lot of advice in the book about getting sleep and reaching out to your support system and getting time away from your kids, which is such an important way to not lose your temper with them. It was like, well, I can say this to you, but you can't actually do much of this.

And so that's when I started thinking about self-compassion and how deeply, deeply important it is to cut ourselves so much slack in these hard moments of parenting, many of which are actually quite impossible. So that's where it came from. That's the long story.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah, well, in our conversation in episode 1 49, we talked a lot about self-compassion and you offered me a lot of compassion. Cause I was sharing that my at the time three year old was it, it was just [00:19:00] an impossible situation, cuz he was home all the time. I never got a break from him. I was trying to work and you know, it, it really is one of these strategies that I don't wanna say it's foolproof, but it's just, it's so much more available than many of the other strategies that we get in the parenting world and being able to , cut yourself, some slack, give yourself some grace, be kind to yourself when things are.

Impossible or you're just not having a good day or showing up as your best self is so useful. So, um, let's, talk a, well, I literally wrote in the margins of your new book, I love you, Carla. And my outpouring of love was prompted.

By fact, that take on mindfulness , is expressed so differently than many of the folks in the mindfulness world. You're like the unlikely Zen superhero. And I'll the quote from your.

Carla Naumberg: That's tagline. I'm an Z superhero, which is hilarious, cuz I'm like the least end person ever. But please on don't I'm loving where this conversation is going.

Yael Schonbrun: But the quote is [00:20:00] just so reflective of how you talk in real life too, which is, and, and the quote goes as fall is the first time I was introduced to self-compassion. I nearly burst out laughing. When the instructor in the mindfulness class, I was taking suggested sending ourselves happy wishes. I mean, who comes up with this crap?

And I just love that. Um, but compassion won you over. And, and so I wanna talk a little bit about what self-compassion is and what it isn't.

Carla Naumberg: Yeah. Okay. So let's talk about this. First of all, I, I do want to send a shout out to specifically Kristen Neff and Christopher Germer. There are an, and actually Susan Pollock too. There are a

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah. And we've had all three of them on the podcast and we'll link to their episodes in our show

Carla Naumberg: you're like a superstar with this podcast. So these are the folks who have really been pioneers in the west, in the research and writing around self-compassion.

And, um, any work I do is, is really because of the work they've done. And so I'm very grateful to all of them and all the other researchers and authors and practitioners of self [00:21:00] compassion, because I did not come up with this stuff myself. I just added a lot more swear words to it. Um, So look, when I first started learning about compassion, I was like, happy wishes.

Like, what is that? I don't how, and, you know, I really had to dive into it. And, and what I started to understand is that hap compassion. Isn't just like thinking happy thoughts. Right. I, I don't really know what that means or how it's useful and it's not being nice to yourself. Like, I feel like being nice is a thing we do.

I'm sort of making this up right now, yell, but I've been trying to struggle with like, what is the difference between being nice and being kind? And I think being nice is a thing you do when you wanna make people feel good. Right. It's like, I just wanna make this situation. Okay. So I'm gonna say something nice and I'm all about feeling good.

Right. And if I can do something that helps someone else feel better, that's like a good thing. Right. But the problem with being nice, I'm using air quotes, which I realize our listeners can't see, because they're listening. So I'm using my air quotes the problem with being nice to yourself in an attempt to make yourself [00:22:00] feel good is that it's kind of like saying to yourself it's not okay to feel bad.

Right. And parenting feels so bad so often that if we're saying to ourself, Hey, self, it's not okay to feel bad. Then we're kind of saying, Hey, self you're screwing this up somehow because you shouldn't be feeling bad. And the truth is parenting feels bad, whether or not we're doing it right. Cause that's life.

Right. I mean, it's also, parenting also feels joyous and amazing. And I, I love being a parent, but it's also really hard. It's. Okay. So then I was like, okay. So if compassion, isn't about being nice to yourself and it's not about happy wishes, what is it? And I think it's, it's two parts again, based on work of ne and Germer and all the awesome people it's noticing when you're suffering.

So like acknowledging it, oh, I'm having a really hard, awful moment, um, for whatever reason. And then it's choosing how you're going to respond to your suffering. Um, and so are you gonna respond by telling yourself [00:23:00] that you suck and, um, you know, a better parent wouldn't be in this situation in the first place, or are you gonna respond to your suffering by remembering that parenting is really hard for everyone?

And that just because something is hard, that doesn't mean you're doing it wrong. And even if you are doing it wrong, it's okay. Because that's part of being a human being on this planet. And are you gonna try to find ways to kind of comfort and take care of yourself? And again, comforting isn't about saying. You have to feel better. It's just about saying that you're feeling bad and maybe you could treat yourself nicely. So the short version is, I think self-compassion is about noticing when you're feeling like crap and being kind to yourself in response.

Yael Schonbrun: Self-compassion is kind of the opposite or is, is the treatment for something that you have diagnostically labeled shitty parent syndrome? which I love it's

it's in the DSM yet.

Carla Naumberg: Um, oddly, the DSM, which for people who don't know, [00:24:00] the DSM is the diagnostic and statistical manual. That kinda lists all

the psychiatric disorders and mental illnesses. Oddly. They haven't called me to discuss this yet. The committee that writes that book.

I don't know why. So yeah, if you know the committee, I think we should get it in there.

Yael Schonbrun: The next edition. All right. So, so help all of us, uh, who, are waiting for the DSM to now include shitty parent syndrome to understand what is shitty parent syndrome. How, how do we know if we should be diagnosed with it?

Carla Naumberg: Um, my kid is knocking on the door as I'm doing this. And you know why yell? She's knocking on the door.

A podcast, dude. Yeah. Do you wanna come and say hi to yell? Okay. Sorry. I love you.

You just saw her. Okay. Yell. I'm

Yael Schonbrun: My kid.

Carla Naumberg: middle of the podcast. Can you go away now? Did you approve it? Yes. Okay. Don't knock again. Find daddy. I'm so sorry. You should totally leave part of that into the podcast, because I think it would be very real. If people were like, this is the part where Carla's daughter appears in the middle of the podcast, ask her to prove an app.

Oh my gosh, [00:25:00] what? Okay. Sorry. What were we talking about? Oh, you talking shitty parent syndrome. Okay.

Yael Schonbrun: Yes. So how, how should I know if I meet criteria for shitty parent syndrome?

Carla Naumberg: Okay. So my guess is that if you are a parent raising children, in this world today, uh, and you spend any amount of time on social media or reading parenting articles that say things like top four ways, you know, you're raising a narcissistic psychopath or top four things. Parents who raise amazing kids do, and you're probably not doing right.

We've all seen these headlines. So if you're parent in this world getting flooded with information like this, you probably have experienced shitty parent syndrome at some point, whether or not you have the full blown disorder, you

know, that remains to be seen. Also, this is not a real disorder, but a thing I made up let's remember that.

But the, I just, you know, wanted to like. Give a name to this thing that so many of us are struggling with. And if you want me to sound a little more official about this thing, I've totally made up. Um, I would say it's the thought [00:26:00] belief or perception that you are a shitty parent? How's that for deep thoughts?

Um, look, I think the thing that really stinks about shitty parent syndrome is first of all, it feels like crap because it feels really bad to think awful thoughts about yourself all day. But secondly, I think it leaves us feeling really confused and insecure about how to parent, because if you think you're really bad at doing something and then there's this voice in your head constantly reinforcing that.

And then you're getting advice and people that you are not connected to. Right. So. I can tell you how French parents are better than us. And I can tell you how like Asian parents are better than I am. And I can tell you how parents who live in a completely different community with completely different resources and challenges and situations are so much better than I am.

But how does all, all that tells me is that I'm doing everything wrong. It doesn't tell me how to do anything better. And [00:27:00] so I, the point of all this is that I think if you're a parent in today's world, you probably know what I'm talking about. And if you don't, can you please write a book about how you did that?

Cause that's a book I wanna read, right?

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah. And it's, I mean, what, what always strikes me as interesting and you write about this in your book is how often will say to somebody else, like, ah, I'm such a crappy parent or, my, my kid is screwed because I did X, Y, or Z. And I think it's intended as a connecting tool, but we say it so often that we start to kind of buy into it.

Carla Naumberg: Oh a hundred percent, right? This is a way, one of the most powerful ways that parents connect. And I'm gonna go ahead and say mothers here because a, I am a mother and I hang out with a lot of mothers. Um, and I do think there's. A gender divide in how people connect with other people. Having said that to all the dads out there, if I'm wrong, if you think that this is also a dad thing as well, shoot me a note.

Let me know. Like, I, I really wanna hear your voices, cuz I think dad's [00:28:00] voices aren't in this conversation as much as we need them to be having said that for sure. A thing moms and I think many parents do as we throw ourselves under the bus as a way to connect with other parents. Like, you know, it's a way of letting other parents know.

I don't think I'm better than you. I'm not judging you. Um, it, and it is kind of this powerful point of connection. It's also a really problematic one because again, it's, it's setting the stage for, well again, yeah, the more we say something like you just noted, the more we repeat something to ourselves, the more we listen to it, the more we kind of come to believe it, whether or.

It's true or accurate. And the other thing is that when we are not, when we are showing up for our fellow parents, by throwing ourselves under the bus, we're not really creating a space for any of us to feel okay about parenting. Like if I show up and tell you a bunch of stories about what a crap parent, I am, you, there's no space for you to show up and say, you know what?

I actually kind of nailed parenting today [00:29:00] because that's gonna make you look like a jerk. Right? And so I have friends who have started posting on Facebook. Like I had a total parenting win. I did this thing, it was creative. I connected with my kids. It felt really good. And I will tell you, five years ago when I was in a worst place about parenting, I would've been like F that person.

I don't even wanna hear that because that's about my own insecurities. Right. And now that I'm in a more subtle place with my parenting, I'm like, how many times can I hit that love button on your post? Because I wanna hear more parents talking about those moments when we nailed parenting or. I want more space for parents to say, I totally screwed this up.

And that's okay. I'm still a good parent. Right? So both.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah, well, and that's why I like how you started our interview is saying, you know, that, you know, you're a good parent. You're not a perfect parent. You still screw up plenty of the time, but that you feel solid in, in sort of a more zoomed out way about, about your parenting and, and a huge part of that is self-compassion that you can [00:30:00] sort of make space for the oops moments and the moments where you didn't show up is your best parenting self.

Carla Naumberg: Absolutely. And I, so my, my daughters are both, uh, in two weeks, they're gonna both be starting seventh and eighth grade. So we're like

neck deep in puberty and middle school and all the things. And I've got one more year till my big one goes off to high school. And so there are definitely moments where I don't feel grounded at all.

Not zoomed up close, not zoomed out. I I'm like doubting every decision I've made. And those are the moments when. I can turn to self-compassion because that's my solid ground, right? When I'm questioning, oh my God, should I already have this kid signed up for some kind of college advisor? I hear eighth graders are doing that and do they need to be in more sports?

And did I say the wrong thing and blah that's when I come back and remind myself, Hey, this stuff is legitimately confusing. It's not just me. It's not that there's something wrong with my judgment or my parenting style or whatever it is like, this is legitimately hard stuff with really [00:31:00] challenging choices and no clear outcome.

Yael Schonbrun: Hmm.

Carla Naumberg: Um, and so again, self-compassion comes back, brings me back to this place where I can kind of calm down and not freak out, which is amazing, cuz I'm so good at freaking out yell. It's like this I'm, it's, it's really one of my hidden talents, but it's not so hidden as my family would tell you. Um, I'm that when I wanna freak out about something that's actually happening in the moment or something that may or may not ever happen, uh self-compassion is the practice that kind of calms me down and brings me back to solid ground.

Yael Schonbrun: Okay. So can, can I have you walk through this, Buddhist metaphor of pain versus suffering the first arrow versus the second arrow.

Carla Naumberg: Yeah. So I think Buddhist psychology is some of the most contain some of the most brilliant insights I've ever heard into the way sort of the human mind and heart and soul and behavior work. And I am not in any, by any stretch of the imagination and expert in it, but I, I have taken bits of wisdom for my studies over the years.

So here. [00:32:00] How I think about, um, the first and second arrow story from the Buddha. And again, my apologies to folks from the Buddhist community who, uh, will listen to this story and think I have butcher it. I hope I am honoring it as well as I can. Uh, so I think of the first arrow is just the, the stuff that happens to us in life, the unavoidable stuff, right?

Uh, your kid gets a broken arm. You get a flat tire on the highway, in the middle of West Virginia, and you have no idea how to, you know, get roadside assistance, um, uh, ingrown toenails, rent bills. You can't pay terrible diagnoses, uh, storms that flood your town, whatever it is. First arrows are the stuff that comes at in life.

And there's no way around it. It's just a global pandemic. That's a hell of an arrow. Right. And we can't control it. It's gonna happen. It's part of life. Okay. So I feel like a lot of parenting advice is really focused on how to avoid those first arrows [00:33:00] babies that don't sleep at night. That's a hell of a sharp first arrow, right.

That one hurts. Um, and yeah, sometimes there are strategies that can get babies to sleep through the night. But a lot of times there's not right. So it's a, it's a pretty often unavoidable first arrow. And to all the sleep coaches out there, the work you do is important and it matters. And if you are having a hard time getting a baby sleep through the night, go talk to a sleep coach.

They might help you. But you know, sometimes babies just don't sleep. Okay. So we have these first arrows of life. We've got this arrow on our side, right? We've been shot by an arrow. It really hurts. Cuz getting shot by an arrow. I mean, I've never been shot by one, but I have to assume that getting a sharp arrow stuck in your side is really painful.

So then in that moment we have a choice for how we're gonna respond and the response can be okay, I got shot by an arrow. This is really, really painful. What am I gonna do about it? Or it can be some version of, oh my God, I suck. And this is horrible. And this is the worst situation ever. And I brought it upon myself because [00:34:00] X, Y, and Z, because I forgot to send in the mail for the thing.

And I didn't answer the letter. And I'm the one who wanted to drive through West Virginia in the middle of the night and everything is terrible and a better parent wouldn't have an ingrown toenail. Right. And so those you's laughing at me. Now, if you can hear this folks, she's just laughing at me.

And that's the other thing about first arrows, the older you get, the more you realize random things like your nails will grow back under your skin. It's really freaking painful.

Okay. So the second arrow is about the blame and shame we put on ourselves when the first arrows happen. Right. And so instead of noticing that we've got

this arrow on our side, it's really painful. And either trying to take it out or asking for help or putting on a bandage or doing something kind to take care of ourselves, what we do is we beat ourselves up for it, right?

We blame ourselves. We feel ashamed. We think about all the ways that we're the only person who's ever gotten shot by this arrow. And it's our own damn. And if we were, you know, if we had actually started training for that damn marathon, or if we had lost the weight or if we had, you know, been a [00:35:00] better parent, or if we hadn't lost our shit, or if we had a better career, whatever it is, we wouldn't have gotten this arrow.

And that's basically the equivalent of shoving a second arrow right into that wound. Right. It doesn't help anything. It doesn't make the pain go away. It doesn't help us heal any faster. It gives us zero insight about how to avoid the first arrow in the future, if it's possible, which it often isn't, because first arrows are again like gravity.

They're just a part of life. All it does is make us feel worse. Right? So in parenting, Parenting is full of first arrows. That's just the deal. That's just life. And whether it's the normal day to day stuff of a kid who gets a fever and has to come home from school on a day when you've got important work presentation and your partner, if you have one is out of town or whether it's, you know, getting a diagnosis, an ADHD diagnosis for your child, and then you have to figure out what it is or it's just like having to make freaking dinner every freaking night.

Like what a it's like these stupid AR it's like death by a thousand teeny tiny dinner [00:36:00] arrows. I say this as the person who doesn't make dinner in my house, my poor husband makes dinner, Anyways, the point is parenting is full of first arrows, but instead of being taught like is normal parenting is really legitimately hard.

Anyway, you slice it. What we are told is. There shouldn't be arrows in your parenting. And if there are it's because you haven't worked hard enough, you haven't read the right parenting books, you haven't listened to the right parenting podcast. You haven't consulted the right expert. You haven't set up the right strategies, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.

And of course, we're left with the second arrow of being like, oh, that person wrote that book about how I can get my kids to eat vegetables and their kids are eating vegetables. So if my kid, you know, hasn't touched anything green in six

months, it's clearly my fault that, that it's my fault is the second arrow of parenting of life.

And it's horrible. So what this book is all about, like, I make no claims to first arrows. I can't help you with that stuff. I wish [00:37:00] I could. I wish I could tell you had to parent a three year old during a pandemic. That's like just a, the biggest, most awful arrow ever. I got nothing for that, but what I can do, what I hope to do with this book is. Help parents not shoot themselves with a second arrow. Let's not make it any worse and self-compassion not only, you know, is instead of that second arrow, but it also is a way to start healing from the first arrow and moving on in a clear, calmer, more confident and creative way

Yael Schonbrun: Absolutely. Okay. So before we get to some of the strategies of self-compassion, I wanted to actually spend a little time on the, the freak out responses. You, you sort of have added to some of these, , commonly understood freak out responses of fight, flight freeze. You've added, flip out, fix or FAW.

Carla Naumberg: Yeah. So let's talk about these and why they matter for self compassion.

Yael Schonbrun: I, I wanna talk about all of them, but I have to say I'm [00:38:00] especially interested in hearing you discuss the fawning response, because I think this one is really under discussed, but so common and again, especially among women and moms.

Carla Naumberg: Yeah. Okay. So let's just take a really quick step back and remember what fight or flight is and where it comes from. So this is a very, um, old, old, old response among living beings, not just humans, right? When, when we sense a threat, our nervous system kicks us into fight or flight response. And so it, increases power and energy and blood blood supply, and all the things you need to the parts of your body and your brain that you need to either run away or fight.

And so we all know that our muscles tense up and our heart rate starts, goes up and our breathing gets faster and our pupils dilate. So we can like see the enemy. Um, what we often don't talk about is that the blood supply or the, I dunno if it's blood supply, cuz I'm actually not a neuroscientist. The part of our brain. The prefrontal cortex that [00:39:00] is responsible for kind of higher level thinking like how to make box Mac and cheese and how to do calculus and all that stuff. That part of our brain actually kind of shuts off. And it's our

limbic system, which is the very old kind of, lizard, like part of our brain in the very back above our brain stem.

That's the part that starts running the show, right? Because we don't need to remember, um, every Harry Potter book in order, when we're being attacked by a bear, what we need to do is have this very quick instinctual response to either run away or, uh, fight or freeze as, you know,

Okay. So what this is is this is a physical reaction. To a physical threat. That's how it developed. So then we jump forward thousands of years and all of a sudden we're in a place where most of us, most of the time are not facing a physical threat.

Yes. Sometimes, maybe there's a car that comes racing at us when we're crossing the street. Or if you're my kids saw a bear at summer camp, like there was like legit. Yeah, it was awesome. They ran away. But for most of us, the threats we [00:40:00] face in life are not physical. Right? They're financial, social, emotional, like, oh, that parent is clearly talking shit about me across the playground.

And I thought we were friends and what are they saying? And that on some level still triggers this fight flight or freeze response. Right. And so we still have this very physical response, but I think, I think it's actually coming out in more ways than just like, you know, when I see parents talking shit about me on the playground, I don't usually either run away or just freeze in place or go up and punch them in the face.

I've actually never done any of those things. Um, I have been known to run away from my kids and hide in the bathroom with chocolate, but that's different. That is different. Okay. So I think we also do, um, What I refer to as flip out fix or fond. So flipping out is just kind of losing our shit. And it's, I guess you could say it's a subset of fighting, but I don't actually think about it as fighting.

I think about it as sort of like becoming emotionally unhinged. Um, and then fixing is like leaping into this mode of like, what is the problem and [00:41:00] how am I gonna fix it and becomes this very kind of knee jerk, obsessive instinctual, almost like you can't think clearly you're just, you know, my husband's back went out and I was like, I need to find the physical therapist.

That's gonna fix this for him. And it was this very instinctual, like I need to fix this problem. Right. And there is for sure, this higher level thinking of like, how

am I gonna find a physical therapist for him and whatever, but it's still kind of not a really thoughtful thing. It's definitely a reactive thing.

Yael Schonbrun: , and I think that's like where like looking for all the experts and reading all the books and finding the podcast that has the answer. And we can just sort of find ourselves in this treadmill of like, I'm looking for the answer and there needs to be an answer. And we just feel like we're not getting anywhere, but we can't find a way to get off the treadmill and do something that feels more productive.

Carla Naumberg: That is 100% accurate, 100%. And I think every once in a while, there is a parenting problem we can actually fix. But the majority of these problems that really trigger the crap out of us on this deep level, they're [00:42:00] not really fixable. They're kind of, you kind of, kind of just muddle through them as best you can.

Right. So, but let's also talk about fawning. So I think fawning is like, you know, the bear's coming at you and if you really feel like he's gonna outrun you and you don't feel comfortable, you can beat up a bear then. You start fawning over him. Like you try to make him feel better. You try to develop a relationship with him and tell him all the ways he's great and calm him down and make everybody else happy, make the bear happy.

And I think that's a thing that we parents often do a lot. Um, maybe sometimes with our parenting friends, but really with our children, because so often our children are the source of this threat. And again, I'm using the word air quotes because in the vast majority of cases, our kids don't actually threaten us.

Um, but there is something about really difficult parenting moments that for some of us. Feel threatening and trigger this response, [00:43:00] even if we don't actively realize it. And whether it's because it feels like a threat to our identity is a good parent or it's triggering some really deep, old memories from our childhood.

And even though the last time you were in this moment, you were the child. It doesn't matter. It's still a, a painful, tricky, maybe even traumatic moment between a parent and a child. And now you're in it again. And so on a deep level, there's something really triggering and rough about that moment. And some part of our old, old brain and our nervous system response to it is for a threat.

And I have seen parents and I myself have said some version of how can I make you happy? What do you need? How do I make this better? How do I fix the problem? And again, there's a, there's a little bit of a blending with fixing here too. Of course it's not super straightforward, but there is this sense of if I can just make you happy, everything else will be better.

And of. Show me a parent on the planet who hasn't felt this way we all [00:44:00] have. And the problem with it is that when we think we have to be happy to be a good parent, that's a set up for failure because nobody's happy all the time. It's just not possible. And no matter how many self-help books you read on happiness, um, it's just not human nature.

It's, it's not the way we're wired. It's not the way the world works. And so thinking that you have to be happy to be a successful parent or that your child has to be happy to be a successful parent is a total set for failure.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah, I love that you explicitly write in your book that our job as parents is not to get our kids to feel better. That is not the job.

Carla Naumberg: Is not possible. I mean, think about it. Like, yeah. If I said to you, I have \$500,000 and if, if you can just be happy and a hundred percent happy, nothing but happy for the next five minutes, I will give you \$500,000. And I know I've got all sorts of sensors. I know what's going on in your brain. I know what's going on in your body.

And I [00:45:00] would know that for a millisecond, you were worried and you don't get the money. We cannot control our feelings. We cannot force ourselves to feel a certain way. And the same is true for our children and everyone else in our lives. It's just not how feelings work.

Yael Schonbrun: Right. And so that means that if your kid isn't feeling good, that doesn't, that's no indication that you're a good or bad parent. It's just, it's just an indication that they're human and alive.

Carla Naumberg: Like, yeah, yeah. A hundred percent. Yes. That is true.

Yael Schonbrun: all right. So now let's talk a little bit about what self-compassion is. So you break it down into four unique practices. maybe, it would just be helpful to kind of list the practices and then we can dive in a little more deeply to a few of them.

Carla Naumberg: Absolutely. So the thing that's cool about self-compassion is it's actually a practice. Like it is a thing you can do and get better at the trick of course, is that you actually have to do it. You can't just think about it, which stinks because I love sitting around thinking about stuff it's so much easier than actually doing it, but, okay.

So the four practices are, are noticing. We just have to notice our own [00:46:00] suffering notice when we're having a hard time, uh, connection, which I see as the antidote to shame and shame is something so much of us walk around with, about parenting, about life. All the time connection is the antidote. We'll talk about what you can connect to and how curiosity.

This is one that we think about like, oh, isn't it nice when our kids are curious about, you know, the flower, as long as they're not curious for too long, cuz then I get bored. But curiosity, I think is this thing that we've somehow relegated to like the world of children and scientists or something. And the rest of us don't have time for this crap.

But what I will tell you is curiosity is the antidote to judgment. So many of his parents jump straight to judgment about ourselves, about other parents, about strangers that we know nothing about, but we feel totally comfortable like commenting on their parenting on social media. And curiosity is the antidote to that.

And then the last one is kindness, which is the antidote to contempt. And I see so many parents treating themselves with contempt. Um, and so what we have is noticing connection, curiosity and kindness.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah. [00:47:00] And they, so on the face of it, they all seem so simple. But the, the reality, and I love how you dive into your book. Is that on the ground? It's hard to do. So let's just start with noticing why is it so dang important, and why is it so hard to do.

Carla Naumberg: Oh, my gosh, noticing, um, look, all of these practices are incredibly simple and they're so not easy. Right? Important distinction. If I could write an entire book about noticing that a publisher would actually wanna buy and publish, I would do that. So if you're a publisher who wants to buy my book about noticing, let's talk, um, look, it is the key to everything I feel like because it is that moment when we go from being completely lost in the shit storm and like feeling awful about how bad everything is and wondering how the hell we're gonna fix it.

And like feeling frustrated, our partner for leaving their dishes in the sink and our kid, why won't they just put their damn shoes on the first time we act? And life's like, I, and where's the book that's gonna fix it all. And then we switched to this place of being like, oh, [00:48:00] here I am. And this is what's going on.

Like. Everything's a little chaotic right now and, and that's okay. It's like taking a step back and actually taking in the scene rather than being stuck in the middle of it and look noticing, I think most people think that noticing is this amazing thing when it actually happens. Right. Oh, I noticed that I left my phone on the airplane at the very last minute and I ran back on to get it and thank God I noticed, or I noticed my kid was, my toddler was about to step down off the top of the stairs and thank God I noticed.

And I, I grabbed them, but I, I think we think of it as this thing that it's like unpredictable. And we never know if we're gonna notice at the right moment or not. We never know if we're gonna snap out of our own little brain ramblings and come back to reality with awareness. We just don't know. And the truth is that noticing, here we go again, it's a practice that you can get better at.

And so this is the part where I start talking about the stuff that people don't wanna hear about like mindfulness and meditation, [00:49:00] but meditation look, meditation is many, many things, and it's, it's an amazing practice on many levels, but on, on a most really basic fundamental level, it is a practice of noticing and you sit there and you decide you're gonna count your breaths.

And then you get like maybe one and a half breaths in if you're lucky. And then you're like, whatever happened to that, ex-boyfriend who was such a sleeves and, you know, should I start planning a vacation for next year is COVID still gonna be around and do I really need to splint my kids' broken finger?

Is that like a thing you just leave alone? Can you tape it or do you have to go to the doctor and how am I supposed to get a doctor's appointment in the American medical system? So freaking broken, whatever your brain goes off, wherever it goes. And then all of a sudden you notice it and you go, oh, I'm lost in my thinking.

And I was actually trying to count my breath. So I'm gonna come back to my breaths. And a lot of people think common misconception about meditation is that, um, when your brain [00:50:00] wanders, you failed and Nope, like when your brain wanders, you're just doing what you're supposed to do. It's the moment you notice that that's the practice, right?

The noticing and making the choice to do something differently is the practice. And so the analogy I use is like, okay, let's say you go to the gym and you lift up the weight. Okay. Cuz you're, you're lifting weights and you lift up the weight and then you go, oh, this is like heavy. I'm gonna put it down for a second.

So at that point you say, oh, I failed at the gym because I put the weight down. No, you pick it up again. Right. And you do like five reps. And so noticing is just the reps, right? That's the thing you're doing. But the point is the better we get at noticing the better we, the more likely we will be to noticing when we are shitting all over ourselves.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah.

Carla Naumberg: It is a thing that for so many parents has become like the air. We breathe that we don't even notice when we're doing it, but it's still there. It still impacts how we think of ourselves as parents. It still impacts how we treat ourselves, how we engage with our children. [00:51:00] And so when you can start to notice, oh, I just called myself a shitty parent.

Again, that's the moment where you can choose to do something differently. But if you don't ever notice you're doing it, you can't choose to change.

Yael Schonbrun: What's your favorite practice for noticing what's the one that you use in your life?

Carla Naumberg: Um, gosh, that's such a good question. So for sure meditation, meditate. Yeah. Yeah. So this is a great I, I meditate out on walks because. Sitting down or laying. Okay. If I try to sit down, I don't know. I just feel very twitchy. And I guess if I was like more hardcore, I would work through the twitchiness, but I'm not that hardcore.

And I, I, I just, I don't know. I get too bored. I can't handle it. Um, and if I lay down, I fall asleep, so I go for walks and I count my steps. Um, and so I like literally one to eight, cuz that's about as high as I can count without losing track at any given time. And I still mostly lose track then. And that's a noticing practice for me.

Um, I also will tell you that [00:52:00] when I am neck deep in the chaos, right, I'm exhausted and I'm overwhelmed and I have too much going on. And unlikely to notice what I do is narrate what I'm doing. So if I'm making dinner

or cookie cleaning up the kitchen or whatever it is, and I'm totally exhausted and overwhelmed, I will just say to myself, Okay.

Now I'm picking up the broom and now I'm sweeping the floor or, you know, now I'm washing the dishes or whatever, and it sounds kind of ridiculous, but it keeps my brain and my body to the best extent that I'm able on the same page, because where we get really off track, I think often is when our body's doing one thing and our brain is doing another thing.

And somehow that just makes it really hard to notice. So narrating either out loud or to myself is a powerful noticing practice for me because all of a sudden, if the narration stops, I know my brain has gone somewhere unhelpful

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah.

Carla Naumberg: and that's when I need to kind of get it back on track. Um, yeah. So those are kind of my two noticing practices.[00:53:00]

Yael Schonbrun: Well, I love that because it's not like you have to fit in an hour of meditation. It's just, if you're on a walk, count your steps. If you are mopping, the floor described to yourself that you're mopping the floor,

Carla Naumberg: And it, it really keeps you noticing what you're doing. Yeah, absolutely.

Yael Schonbrun: And I'll give an example of myself.

I had a really exhausting week last week. It was one of those weeks where it was not enough childcare. And I had a ton of work demands and my partner had a ton of work demands. And so I was, you know, on my own with the kids after my long work day. And by Friday, Friday is my long clinical day. I was just wiped and I was, I was not in a good space and I was just feeling angry and put out by everybody.

I got home. My partner said something to me. I don't even remember what, but I was angry. I went upstairs and I slammed the door. And I, I, I took a moment because I've been practicing this for a while now. And I just felt my feet on the floor. I was like, okay, just feel your feet. Feel your feet.

The only thing I could come to is I'm not good. I'm not good right now. And [00:54:00] so what I did was I, that noticing was really important. I'm not even

sure it was the quote unquote right decision, but I took myself to a movie. I like couldn't be around the people I needed to be away. I needed to just decompress.

And I, I was able to do that because my partner was home with the kids, but it really required me just feeling my feet for a moment and recognizing like, I'm not, I'm not good. I'm not good to be around anybody right now. And, and to sort of, um, make my escape. And I think sometimes that brief pause of just recognizing, like, where am I at can be really hard to do, because we're sort of all up in the flurry of the feelings and the thoughts that are just spinning out of control.

And it's the practice that gives you the power.

Carla Naumberg: Oh, my gosh. First of all, you just said so many things. I feel like I wanna write it's the practice that gives you the power and like tattoo that backwards on my forehead. So I see it in the mirror every single day. That is freaking brilliant. Um, also I think taking yourself to every, every, I, I have goosebumps.

Because I'm such a nerd about this stuff that like, I [00:55:00] literally get tingly flesh. That sounded really inappropriate. I'm sorry,

But look, everything about that was so beautiful. Like you said to yourself, I'm not good right now. And you didn't mean I'm bad. You just meant I'm in a bad space in this moment.

And I don't have anything to offer anybody. And that can be such a painful thing to acknowledge because really what most of us think is the minute we get home from work, we should be super mom and connecting with our kids. We haven't seen all day and making dinner and playing games and doing all these things that we have zero, zero energy to do.

Right. And so you just said like you just acknowledged reality. And sometimes reality really, really sucks. And we don't wanna acknowledge it, but it's a game changer when we do. So you acknowledged reality. And then you had this moment where you said, I don't know if it was conscious or not. What do I need. Oh, my gosh, what could be more compassionate than asking yourself what you need? This is the curiosity [00:56:00] piece, right. And taking it seriously.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah.

Carla Naumberg: So you had this moment, excuse me, while I friends explain to you exactly what just happened for yourself. Okay. I'm actually like friends explaining to our listeners, but bear with me where you, you, you asked yourself what you needed.

You found an answer, you listened to it, and then thanks to the support of your partner. and movie

Yael Schonbrun: Who, who didn't,

Carla Naumberg: you gave yourself this thing you needed. I just think it's brilliant. And I wish we had the ability to provide childcare and a free movie ticket to every parent on the planet who needs it.

I just think it's amazing.

Yael Schonbrun: yeah, yeah. And I will say too, that. A couple years ago, I wouldn't have known to do any of that. And I'll just repeat that the, the power is really in the practice because it was knowing that I really needed to take myself seriously that if I didn't, things were gonna get worse, not better. And having communicated that in other conversations with my partner, that there are times [00:57:00] that I need to sort of recalibrate in order to be in a place where I am comfortable and, and appropriate to be around other people.

So, you know, it really has taken me a while to develop that kind of practice. And it's not easy even now, but I will say that the kinds of practices that are involved in self-compassion practice are exactly what helped me to do that. And I did, um, realize the next day was Saturday. And every time I sat down, I would fall asleep.

Like I was really tired.

And it wasn't until that night that it hit me how tired it was, because it was just such a go, go, go week. And I think parenting is like that. There's so many demands that we often don't give ourselves a moment to kind of check in with where we're at until it can feel almost too late.

Carla Naumberg: But I, I just love that the, the example we're starting out with about self-compassion is a mom taking yourselves to the movies cause, and it doesn't always have to be that. And sometimes it can't be that. Um, but if that's what you needed in that moment, [00:58:00] that is such a deep act of self-compassion. I love it.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah. All right. So let's talk a little bit about connection, cause that's another important element to the practice of self compassion. And I'm curious more generally what your. Connection your favorite connection practices are, but I also wanted to ask this specific question, which is what do we do when we are dying to connect, but we're terrified of the judgment that might come.

If we out ourselves about what's really going on with us. Like, I, I wouldn't have wanted to tell a friend. I was about to hit my wall on a Friday with my beautiful three kids and spouse who are waiting at home for me. Like that's embarrassing. I just added myself to the entire podcast audience, but you know, it, it can feel scary.

Carla Naumberg: oh my gosh. So scary. So, so scary. So let's, let's back up and talk about what I mean when I'm saying connection. So I think of three different sort of, um, ways to connect in these really hard moments. One is connecting back to the present [00:59:00] moment, which is a thing you did so beautifully when you went in your room and felt your feet on the floor, right?

Because in those moments of blame and shame, and, and just when we're throwing ourselves under the bus and judging the shit out of ourselves, for everything we're doing, coming back to the present moment, is this really powerful way to kind of get out of that, that horrible tornado in our brains. Right. And so, um, I love the feet on the floor.

I also tend to put my hands on the counter. There's something about kind of feeling that firm hard, smooth surface under my hands. That kind of brings me back to the present moment. I often take a few deep breaths and say, what is actually happening right now, right? Not what might happen or what happened in the past, but what is actually happening right now.

And sometimes when I look around, I'm like, okay, what is actually happening is like, my girls are on the crowd couch and they're cranky. And my husband is doing whatever. And I'm sitting here in a swirl of like fear and worrying anxiety and self contempt, and that's what's happening. It's just what's happening.

And there is something about [01:00:00] taking yourself again, out of the chaos of crappy memories and anxieties about the future and coming back to like, okay, what is happening right now in this present moment? So one of the most powerful connection practices is finding a way to come back and say, like, just be in the present and focus your attention. On the things that are actually happening right now in your space that you can see and feel, and hear and taste

and touch. Right. Um, another powerful connection practice is connecting with what Kristen Neff calls, common humanity. And this is it's so, so simple. And it's so powerful just reminding yourself that you are not alone, right.

That, you know, one of the most powerful things I say to myself, when things get really hard is like, I remind myself, parenting is hard for everyone and, oh my gosh, it's so easy to forget that. Right. I've watched a reality show about, um, parents who have like, I don't know, 13, 18 kids. I don't how many kids, so many kids, and I'm like obsessed with [01:01:00] this reality show.

And not once in the show, do they lose their temper with their children? Not once.

Yael Schonbrun: Oh,

Carla Naumberg: And we're led to believe that somehow that's normal or even possible. And yet when we watch this stuff and even people like me who can list off 87 reasons why I shouldn't watch it, I totally watch it. Right. I know it's not true.

I know it's not an accurate depiction of this family. And yet there is some part of my brain that gets sucked into believing that parenting is easy for some people that there is some people who never lose their temper with their kids, that there are some families where their kids eat everything on their plate at every meal.

Right. That like I let somehow my brain like believes that. And so I need to remind myself on a regular basis that parenting is hard for everyone. It is hard for everyone, right? So that is this connecting with common humanity. I am not alone in my suffering and my struggling. Um, but then the third one is connecting with what I like to call a [01:02:00] trusted adult.

Right? These are, that's a phrase we clinicians like to use with kids. Go find a trusted adult. Okay. Let's use it with adults too. Like we need other trusted adults and whether it's a therapist, which by the way, just to reiterate, not only I have been on both sides of the couch, right. I have been a therapist and I have gotten so much support and wisdom, advice and connection from my own therapy that I have been in as a client.

So, um, but also is it your rabbi or priest or minister or Imam? Is it, um, your children's teachers, uh, pediatricians, therapists, whatever. Or is it your friends and, yeah, look, you raised such an important point in your question.

How do we be vulnerable with people when we don't know what we're gonna get back from them when we don't know if we can trust them, not to judge us.

So, first of all, this is one of the most important reasons for self-compassion because how can we be vulnerable for ourselves with ourselves? How can we be [01:03:00] honest with ourselves about our situations, if we don't trust. What we're gonna get back from ourselves. If we think that the minute we're vulnerable, all we're gonna hear from ourselves is what a crap human being we are.

We're not gonna be honest about what we're struggling with, and if we're not honest about what we're struggling with, we can't start to change or accept or fix it or whatever we need to do with it. So that's one piece, but the second piece is how do we be vulnerable with someone else if we don't know if we can trust them?

Well, my wish for every parent on the planet is that they have at least one friend that they can invite over and not have to clean up their house. And I mean that both literally and metaphorically, like who is the friend that when they ring the doorbell and you know that there's like your kids dirty underwear hanging over the back of the couch, because God knows why.

But like, for some reason they left their freaking dirty underwear in the back of the couch and you've got dirty dishes and, and plates all over the place. And the house is a freaking wreck who is that friend that you can invite over and not have to tidy the house and not have to tidy your house. Right.

So I wish that, and by your house, that's when I'm speaking metaphorically, like our internal house, right. [01:04:00] so. I wish that every parent had at least one friend like that, but I know that we don't all have that. Right. And so what I would say to parents is you don't have to invite everybody into your house every time.

Like, if you're looking for ways to make these connections, can you dip your toe in the water of vulnerability a little bit and see what happens? So you don't have to like, show up at the playground and be like, my family is a mess and I'm a shit show. And I don't know anybody, and this is falling apart, but like, that's a lot for people to take in, but can you say like, yeah, we're having a rough parenting day and see how people respond and if they respond with curiosity and connection and compassion, oh, maybe you can hang out near that pond a little longer.

But if they respond with like changing the subject or walking away or some obnoxious comment, or like, oh my kid's so amazing. They learned to walk when they were eight months old. That's not your pond. Go find someplace else to swim. You know what I'm saying? And the other thing I would say is when I actually write about this a lot in the, in [01:05:00] how to stop losing your shit, notice how you feel when you are hanging out with people.

So if you hang out with other parents and you come away from that play date or lunch date or softball game or whatever it is judging yourself and feeling worse and feeling stuck and feeling like you're screwing up parenting, like notice those feelings and believe them. And maybe that's not the place where you're gonna be vulnerable, but if you come away from hanging out with these folks and you feel calm and happy and connected, and maybe a little bit lighter, maybe a little more empowered, just like better.

That's your crew. Go hang out with them some more, but trust your feelings, notice how you feel.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah. And there's the noticing and, and the curiosity, So, so I wanna talk a little bit about curiosity next, because I think, you know, really just. Being curious about what your internal experience is like, you know, when you're trying to connect, I did wanna ask though, you know, there's such a temptation when we're being [01:06:00] curious and the sort of response to our curiosities that we're not feeling well, we're not doing well to drop into fix it mode, which of course is not where we necessarily wanna go with self-compassion.

So how do you sort of separate out being curious from the impulse to fix it?

Carla Naumberg: Yeah. Oh, cause look, I'm a fixer. This is like my go-to thing. I love it. Love it. And there are times, you know, for example, when I finally got a little curious about why I was losing my shit with my kids all the time, and I got curious about how I could fix this, that brought me to the mindfulness courses that changed my life.

So sometimes fixing is super useful. And so it is a fine line. It's not always easy to tell, but I think when we drop into fix it mode, that's a good sign that. We've immediately judged ourself for whatever we've found. We have found ourselves to be wanting or broken and in need of fixing. And that's not what I'm going forward with the curiosity piece.

I'm more interested in. Let's imagine. I [01:07:00] want you to think about you being the listener to think about a trusted adult in your life, anyone, and maybe it's a friend, maybe it's someone who's still in your life that you see on a regular basis, or maybe it's someone you haven't seen in many years or they've passed away.

Maybe it was a grandparent or an aunt and uncle or a childhood friend. Imagine someone that you could sit on a couch with and tell them all the horrible things that are happening in your life. And they ask them questions and they sit and listen and they don't judge you. And they don't make weird little eyebrow faces at you and they don't diss at you.

And maybe they ask some questions. And then they just keep sitting with you and they don't offer suggestions. They just, maybe they say, yeah, it's really awful. And or they say that was hard for me too. Maybe they even share a story that was hard for them in a way that's connecting and not, not luxury or judgey or grandparent Blay or whatever.

Um, that's the kind of curiosity I'm going for, right? The like making space to be interested in. And [01:08:00] when you are with a person who is truly curious about your experience, know, they're okay with whatever the answer is. Right. And it's really scary to share this stuff sometimes because the fear is what if, what if I'm actually saying something to this therapist that they've never heard before?

PS, we have heard it before, but what if I'm saying something to this therapist that they've never heard before and it's gonna freak them out and they're gonna think I'm a crazy psychopath. And they're like gonna tell me that there's no solution for my problems. Right? So that anxiety is very real for many of us when we share and maybe on a lesser level, what if I share this with another parent, they're gonna think I'm a horrible parent, right?

So that anxiety is very real. And when we find a person, the, the, the goal in life is, you know, if you've ever had that experience of sitting with that person where, you know, you could say anything and they weren't gonna judge you, it's a game changer. It's life changing. It's incredible. But if you haven't had [01:09:00] it, or even if you had, can you be that person for yourself?

Can you ask yourself, what am I struggling with? What am I scared of? What feels so hard for me? And then listen to the answer and not judge yourself. Really right. You, you know, you yell in that moment when you came home and

you were like, what do I need? And somehow the answer was, I need to get away. I need to be alone in a dark room with an entertaining movie.

I am hoping. And I, this is what I was listening for in the story that I was so glad not to hear it doesn't sound like you said to yourself. Oh my God. Yeah. You're such a shit parent. Like you've been at work all day and now you just wanna get away from your kids even more. You didn't say that. And I'm so glad you didn't because being curious and then listening to our response and taking it seriously.

And sometimes the serious listening does lead to fixing behaviors, right? It does. Like if you listen to yourself and thought I can't do this, I cannot be at work all day long [01:10:00] and then come home and be attended for my kids. And, you know, you mentioned that you had not great childcare last week. Maybe the answer is, you know, maybe you do come up with some fixes that it's like, I need more childcare.

I need less work or whatever it may be. But there has to be that I think the important part is that space of acknowledgement of hearing this is what is real and true for me. And it's okay. As opposed to, oh shit, I'm broken. How do I fix it?

Those are two really different perspectives.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah, it kind of reminds me. So I do a lot of couples therapy and I'm often giving communication skills, training to people and we separate out communication into discussion versus problem solving. And I always tell people to spend a lot of time in discussion and if there needs to be problem solving, that's totally fine.

But you first need to. Get through a lot of discussion and really deeply understand and feel understood before you get to problem solving. And it's in part because then you can solve the problem more effectively cuz you know what the problem is. If you don't spend [01:11:00] enough time being curious and, and really understanding what's at the root of it all, then how can you be effective in your problem solving the other part of it?

There's just something so healing about being seen by yourself or somebody else. And sometimes that is all we need. I know for me, when I call a really good friend and I just vent, that's just what I need often. You know, I don't need to be fixed. I just need to be heard and seen and loved

Carla Naumberg: Uh,

Yael Schonbrun: am.

Carla Naumberg: uh, I just wanna reach through the computer and hug you in a moment.

It's it's all so true. And what I, what I say to people all the time is that feelings need to be, felt not fixed, right? There may be problems out in the world that need to be fixed or not, but our feelings need to be felt. And when we can give ourselves that moment, To actually get curious about we're feeling and feel them often that's the fix right there.

Like that's what we needed to feel better. And sometimes it's not, sometimes it's like, oh, I'm really sad or [01:12:00] upset or frustrated or angry or confused or overwhelmed by this problem. But now that I've gotten curious and understood, what's beneath the feelings, now I can figure out how to respond to it. And I think, you know, an example from parenting is that I think I write about in the book, but I was out with.

My daughter once when she was like three or four and we were at some, you know, community fair and she was being all sweet and cute. And we were paying like 10 bucks for the arrow to throw out the balloon to win the 30, 30 set present or whatever, great day. And then all of a sudden she starts losing her shit and she's like melting down and going boneless on the sidewalk and screaming about everything.

And all I'm thinking is this ungrateful little jerk. We spent all day at this fair and wasted all our money and all she's doing crying. I was judging her. I was judging her. I was judging myself. Like I am spoiling this child and she doesn't appreciate me. So clearly I'm being a shit parent. And then I was like, okay, I'm gonna be curious.

And I was like, what is happening here? And in that moment of curiosity, I realized we forgot to give her lunch. We were having so much fun at this fair that we totally forgot to feed her and kids that little get so caught up and [01:13:00] distracted. I mean, we all do that. They forget to tell you they're hungry.

If they even notice. And my kid like me, we come from a long tradition of people who get hungry and she lost it because she was hungry. It wasn't because she was ungrateful. It wasn't because she's a jerk of a kid or gonna grow up to be a narcissist or whatever it is. She was hungry. And when we went and got our food, she was fine.

And we had a great day, but I had to switch from a mindset of judgment to curiosity before I could figure out what was going on. And so it's the same for us, right? When we're having a horrible moment, when we've made a mistake, instead of judging ourselves, oh, you're such a terrible person, a terrible parent, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.

Can we switch it to, Hey, what's what's going on right now and what do you need? Right. That's like this curious place. the answer is I don't freaking know, like, I think for a lot of parents who are struggling during the pandemic and we still are, we try to get at the root of like, what do I need? I don't know what I need.

I have no [01:14:00] idea what will make this better. I don't know, but I know at least I'm having a hard time and even just acknowledging that is, is very calming and empowering in a weird way.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah, I think it is. And, and then we sort of get to, to the kindness component and one thing that you and I haven't talked too much about, but hopefully is implicit in, in all the different. Components of self-compassion that we're talking about is that we're modeling these things for our kids. You know, when we get curious, when we connect, when we notice those are things that our kids are witnessing and kindness is that too, you know, when we make a mistake and are beating ourselves up, we're teaching our kids that that's how we respond to mistakes.

And we're also kind of teaching them that making mistakes is not, is not okay in our minds. And so when we instead respond with kindness, it really helps our kids to respond differently. And, and I know that this is, so this was an element that was consistent throughout your book, [01:15:00] that, that, that showing our kids, these practices of self compassion, it's not just good for us to be better.

Parents. It's good for them.

Carla Naumberg: Oh, totally. And I, I will look, I can't talk to my kids about self-compassion because if I try to talk to them about it, you know, they roll their eyes and like, oh, this is so boring. And they don't wanna hear about it from me because I'm their parent and they don't wanna hear anything from me, which is fine, whatever.

So my best bet is to model it. Right. All I can do at this point, because I have a 12 and a 13 year old is, is, is do my best to live this for them. And that doesn't mean I get it perfect at every moment, but I keep trying. Right. And so, yeah,

like, and, and there was a moment when I was having a really hard day and I made a mistake and my daughter looked at me and she just goes, mom, it's okay.

Everybody makes mistakes. And I was like, nailed it. What? That I had a moment and I felt much better. Um, but here's how I think about kindness, cuz it's so important. Right? I think about kindness as treating [01:16:00] ourselves the way a really good friend who loves us so much would treat us. So, um, let's say you a friend calls you, right. They're having a horrible time. Maybe their, their dishwasher's broken. And, um, it's the middle of a heat wave and they're exhausted, overwhelmed at work. And they, they just got this diagnosis about their kid, that their kid has a learning disability and they they're totally overwhelmed with how to handle this.

So you go over to cheer, 'em up. Would you like immediately sit down and be like, yeah. And, oh my God, your house is a mess. That really sucks. And oh, the system for dealing with learning disabilities really sucks. It's so hard. And if you screw this up, your kid is gonna suffer for life. Like it's gonna impact their ability to get into college.

And they probably never have a great career. Like, would you say all that to your friend? That is a rhetorical question. No, you would. and if you would, then we have other issues to talk about. The point is you would sit down and you would say to them, yeah, this is really hard, but like, you'll get through it and how can I help?

And can I make you a cup of coffee? And can we sit down [01:17:00] together for a moment? And you know, a lot of parents dealing with learning disabilities, and this is a thing you can handle. And like you would just be with them, right? You wouldn't trot out a laundry list of things they need to do, and you wouldn't judge them.

And you wouldn't tell 'em, they're a shit parent for not catching it earlier. So when I think about the kindness of self-compassion, I'm thinking about treating ourselves the way that we would treat a really, really good friend or that our really good friends treat us. And a lot of this has to do with self talk, right?

The way we talk to ourselves. And I think about this as speaking of modeling things for our children, self kind self-talk is a language that most of us never grew up speak. And so the first time we try to speak it, it's weird. Like, if any, if any, if any of the listeners out there have ever, um, tried to learn a new

language, not, not, you know, when you're a kid and you grow up bilingual, but I'm talking about later in life in high school, college beyond it's hard.

Like you struggle to remember the word and then when it comes, like it feels weird in your mouth and [01:18:00] then you're not quite sure if you're saying them right. That is literally how I felt when I first started trying to practice kind self talk, I was. What am I supposed to say to myself?

Like, you're a good person that feels weird. Like what the hell? Who says that? And so what I have learned is that the, and look, we ne most of us just never learned this language from our parents. And let's not blame our parents. They never learned it from their parents and they never learned it from their parents.

And people just never talked about it. It wasn't a, it wasn't a language we spoke for lots of evolutionary reasons that we don't need to go into now, but are in the book. Right. Um, but we can learn to speak this language. So how do we learn to speak it the same way you learn to speak any language you hang out with native speakers, right?

These are the people who are gonna talk to you and treat you with compassion. You repeat words over and over again, even if they feel weird, right? And so there's all sorts of loving kindness, meditations. You can make up your own phrases. I offer a bunch of them in the book, um, and you keep practicing until eventually you're standing at your kitchen counter and all of a [01:19:00] sudden you think, oh, I'm a pretty good mom.

And then you drop a knife, don't drop the knife. That's not, that's not part of the practice. Um, but. Sharon Saltsburg, who's one of my favorite mindfulness meditation teachers. And she is a, a wizard, a wise wise wizard about self-compassion, um, talks about loving kindness, meditations, and treating yourself with loving kindness is absolutely an active me, uh, compassion and, and these meditations, you're literally just repeating these phrases to yourself and, and mine are, may I be happy?

May I be healthy? May I be safe? May I live with ease and Sharon Salberg talks about just walking down the street, sort of saying to yourself, happy, healthy, safe, live with ease. And, oh my gosh. On the one hand, cheesy as hell, right on the other hand. So much better than being like I suck. I suck. I suck. I suck.

I suck. Which is like the drum beat that so many of us walk to.

Yael Schonbrun: Yeah.

Carla Naumberg: So again, self-compassion and kind self talk is just a language we're learning. That's all. And eventually you will become fluent in this language.

Yael Schonbrun: [01:20:00] Yeah. If you practice,

Carla Naumberg: If you

Yael Schonbrun: where the power is.

Carla Naumberg: look, here's my little note pad. I'm showing it up to you. I wrote down practice gives you power because I'm like, oh my God, this is, this is the mantra. People listen to you, El she's very wise.

Yael Schonbrun: I think you are wise, Carla, you are an absolute treasure. I'm so glad that you and your books are in this world. Bringing your unique combination of snark and ity to

Carla Naumberg: So what if ity mean? That's such a good word? What does that mean?

Yael Schonbrun: I know it's in it's it's alliteration too. I

Carla Naumberg: I love alliterations way. I need another S word besides shit. What does ity mean?

Yael Schonbrun: it's wisdom. It's you know, Sage ity.

Carla Naumberg: I, by the way, I have a terrible vocabulary. So this I, oh my God. That's my new favorite word.

Yael Schonbrun: I love that you used, bunker balls. Do you listen to, um, wow. In the world?

Carla Naumberg: Yes. I

love

wow. in the world.

wait, you have to leave this part in the podcast. Yeah, it's important. If you are a parent, who's looking for a podcast for your children and yourself that you can all enjoy. Wow. In the world is

Yael Schonbrun: Oh, it's so [01:21:00] good.

Funny. Okay. Your advice, your books are evidence backed, but that, so dang funny that readers won't even realize it. So I highly recommend anything written by Carla.

And then where else should people go to get more from you?

Carla Naumberg: They can go to my website, Carla.norberg.com.

Yael Schonbrun: All right. And we'll link to it in our show notes. Thank you so much for taking the time. Carla.

Carla Naumberg: Thank you, Y and thank you for everything you and your podcast are putting out into the world. It's so wise and important, and Sacious see what I did there.

Yael Schonbrun: Hey psychologist off the clock listeners. I'm going to guess that if you are listening to this episode, that you love to geek out about books in psychology.

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