

Why We Get Angry and How to Change It: A Somatic Approach to Parenting Stress

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Welcome back, Moms, to the 21 Secrets of Peaceful Moms Summit. We are so blessed to have with us today Dr. Diane Poole Heller to help us process a lot of stuff around trauma and healing and forming new patterns. Dr. Diane, thank you so much for joining us today.

DPH

I'm glad to be here. Thank you for having me.

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Diane is an internationally recognized speaker, author, and expert in the field of attachment theory and trauma resolution. Her signature series on Adult Attachment provides tools for healing from trauma and creating more fulfilling relationships. A senior faculty for SEI, Somatic Experiencing Institute, Diane studied with Dr. Peter Levine and taught Somatic Experiencing trauma work internationally for over 25 years. Dr. Heller is the author of *The Power of Attachment: How to Create Deep and Lasting Intimate Relationships*, *Crash Course*, and *Healing your Attachment Wounds*. Her film, *Surviving Columbine*, supported community healing after the Columbine high school shootings. Diane, with your specific background, if it's all right, I'd love to jump right in. From your perspective, why do we lose our temper? Why do we lose it so much with our children? Why do we react in anger so much in our parenting?

DPH

Well, there's a lot of reasons that we go anger in any situation, whether it's with our kids or with someone else, or just a stranger, even. First of all, if we are experiencing any sense of threat or overwhelm or excess of stress, it pushes us up into our sympathetic nervous system. If it gets beyond just vitality and aliveness energy, the energy of that, we move into defensive responses. One of them, slight response, we might run away from a situation, but it also can trigger our defensive-orienting, like anger. That can be verbal, that can be glaring through your eyes or flaring your nose, it can be, in the worst case, hitting or being violent. All of these things can come from a sympathetic nervous system that needs to be calmed down.

One of the things we want to look at is how we manage stress, how we manage conflict, because kids challenge their testing boundaries, and sometimes that gets really difficult for us when we're parenting. Just establishing those kinds of things can mitigate or lessen our anger responses. Often, anger is actually a secondary emotion. Very often, underneath it, we're feeling something else, but what clicks on is anger. That's something important for us to all explore for ourselves as well.

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Could you speak more about that? So anger, what might be some primary emotions that might be behind the anger?

DPH

So for instance, if you're feeling overwhelmed, or helpless, or out of control, or scared, or kids are challenging you, so you're feeling like you need to dominate somehow. All of this can push anger. But if we can deal with what our feelings are underneath, it's really helpful. I can give you an example. I had a gentleman, it's not a parenting example, but he was in a very serious car accident. Every time he came in for a session to work through the a car accident, he would just, in a very angry way, want to violate the other driver, all these different ways of hurting this other person, very violent kinds of imagery. About the third or fourth time, I'm feeling like, Well, this is different violence, but it's not going anywhere. I asked him, Do you feel like this is integrating the anger? He said, Well, not really. I said, Yeah, because sometimes there's feelings underneath it that are harder to feel. But anger makes us feel a little bit strong and forceful. I said, so there might be something something else that's there. I said, for instance, when you describe your car crash, I said, I would have been terrified because this car rolled in the air, landed upside down.

It was very, very serious. He goes, I don't do fear. He was a Marlborough man, cattleman here in Colorado. He just said, I don't do fear. I'm like, Okay. Then he's mad at me that I would even suggest such a thing. But the next week, he came in for a session, and he was like this, hanging his head a little. He said, Oh, my gosh, I realized there's a lot of fear. And as soon as we could deal with the fear, which was totally understandable, he'd been through a life-threatening situation, then his need to go to anger didn't happen. He went from fighting and triggering brawls with the other cowboys on the weekends to becoming getting married, having kids, being a deacon in his church, being a very respected man in his community. So it's big change.

NG

He felt fear in the anger.

DPH

Just being able to unearth the primary was driving the anger, behind the anger was fear. So when we were able to allow the vulnerability of the fear to be there and normalize that and have him stay in contact with it long enough to feel it, then he didn't need to go to the secondary emotion of anger. I think that's true for most people have some primary emotions hidden under their angry responses. So just even for people to take a moment and think about, What is it that I'm not okay feeling that might be hiding underneath?

NG

That is so, personally, that's so relevant to me right now. I was assuming a lot of my anger and temper losing was coming from childhood traumas. But when I get stressed, I get a specific pain beneath my left shoulder blade. Just this week, I was having my husband push on it, and I was breathing into it and breathing it out. Then afterwards, what came up was a car accident right before my marriage, and exactly the fear. I had never realized I thought I could die. I felt like I could die. I started feeling that fear and just crying, and my husband, What's wrong? I'm like, Oh, it was 12 years ago. Then I think I might be overreacting to my children out of this fear, exactly. Sometimes, especially when I'm stressed.

DPH

Absolutely.

NG

In general, the overwhelming.

DPH

It's very normal and common to do that.

NG

Fascinating. Okay. So all these stressors, fear can be behind our anger. Just spending some time either in the moment or later, right? Kind of exploring what might be there.

DPH

And you can take a look at the last time, maybe. Because anger sometimes is a slow seeping in feeling, but other times it's explosive, and we think it just comes out of nowhere. But if you can take a moment and even journal about this, write down what was the sequence that led up to what might have felt explosive? Were you going to yell or had a tantrum of some sort with whatever was going on. If you take a moment to backtrack and go, Okay, what was I feeling? Was I feeling threatened? Was I feeling challenged? Was I feeling out of control? Was I feeling really overwhelmed? Was I feeling stressed? Was I feeling sick and tired? What was going on? What emotions might have been connected to that? What self-talk, what we're saying to ourselves? This is going to last forever or I'm never going to get control over these kids, or they're always acting out, or they're always pushing my buttons, or whatever your self-talk is. We want to move that to something more positive and more constructive. Then just seeing if we can go from explosive anger to some healthy assertion that starts down the line before everything becomes explosive.

I had a client who was bulimic. She had a very traumatic childhood because some of our anger comes left over from childhood trauma, for sure. She had a very traumatic history. She would just push it down and push it down and push it down and push it down. Then it would explode through throwing up, but also this feeling of anger with that. We just had her backtrack. I asked her if there was any image that went along with this explosive anger, and she was like in a volcano erupting. I had her draw a volcano, and you know how sometimes the lava comes down the side slowly, it doesn't explode all the time. I said, We need to catch it when the lava's slowly seeping and just see if you can at that moment, when you start to feel something bubbling up that you don't push down, that's a big change in behavior, but you actually go, What is it I need right now? Is there someone I can go to in my support system? Is there a way I can articulate my need in a way that's not a demand or not an angry complaint, but I can actually say, Hey, guys, I need some personal time.

I need a little time out here. Mom needs a chance to just regroup and say that, versus just trying to power through, where then the anger builds and builds. Just to identify what is it I need when I start to feel this, what leads into anger, the arousal, the activation. You can check your body, too. Maybe your face flushes, like you get the pain in your shoulder. That's really important information. When you had somebody palpate that or come into loving contact with that, then it unpacked it. If we know our body, it's like, Where do we put it? So some of us put it in a rapid heart rate. Some of us put it in a migraine. Some of us put it in a tense, constricted part of the body somewhere. If we can identify those things and then interview them, be curious, not judgmental, but just open a space where it's okay, what's going on there? It's true for all human beings walking around, not just you or anybody in particular. Then just see if you can bring some understanding and kindness and compassion to those states that might have gotten

trapped. Because over-arousal, like I was talking about, sympathetic nervous system over-arousal, it literally can get encapsulated in the body.

We need to learn how to discharge it gently. It can get stuck in the jaw, it can get stuck in our shins, it can get stuck in our stomach or our diaphragm. There's lots of places overarousal can get constricted and stuck.

NG

How can we discharge that gently? If we notice that we're stressed, overaroused?

DPH

Well, you have the help of your husband's contact helped you discharge it. Sometimes when people start, I had this happen just yesterday. I was showing a demo in a class I was doing. As she became in touch with difficult feelings, her jaw started to tremble. And a lot of people, when that happens, they start to feel really vulnerable, and they'll just clench their jaw to stop it. If you can allow it to just let that gentle, trembling happen, or people will start to wear their shoulders for earrings. If you can slide down your back. Everybody could do that right now. Just bring them up. We know that feeling, right? The turtle, the turtle. And just letting your shoulder slide back down. You're trying to work with this physiological patterns that might be reinforcing anger. As you do this a few times, it might bring some real relaxation into your shoulders. Then you might find it radiating out your skin. It might be going down your arm and out your fingertips. It might be going out at the top your head. But to really pay attention where there could be a way that the body could let that energy out instead of holding it in.

The more we hold it in, it builds. And then if it builds and builds and builds, eventually, it's going to lead to something, probably that you're not happy that you did. So it's learning how to catch it early instead of waiting or pushing it down until it becomes explosive or damaging.

NG

I'm hearing you saying we can use both the sensations in the body to be aware of the emotions that are coming up and also to let them discharge or pass.

DPH

Yes. Sometimes if it's a strong emotion, because sometimes it can be from unresolved trauma in childhood, it can be strong stuff like your car accident, you need support. It's important to resource yourself, like have someone like your partner with you or a friend or a support system.

It helps to have the presence of someone who can be with you in different states and contain whatever arises. I like to call it the empathetic other, to someone that can be there in a kind, containing, compassionate way that you can express some of these things and not feel shame and not feel like you're going to be judged or criticized or something like that. That's really helpful is to do this with someone. I mean, if it's possible, do it with a therapist that knows how to work with someone somatically and emotionally, that's the ideal scenario. But even if you have a partner like your husband did, could meet you in places and then help that release. It's possible. We're designed for our nervous systems to regulate, but when they get dysregulated, meaning there's just too much arousal from an event that was probably overwhelming or shocking or traumatic, Then we often need some help to move that energy through, and so it doesn't just get frozen and stuck and constricted.

Then that takes us into areas that are difficult. I think what I really want people to hear is that we need to understand our biology. Our biology and physiology is designed to discharge these extra stressors, whether it's childhood trauma or whether it's a reaction in the moment. If you learn how to self-regulate and also co-regulate with other people in your life that are supportive, that can really, really help. It's not your fault that these things are happening. It's really just a sign that your nervous system is really dysregulated or there's unresolved trauma, and you need some help with it. That's all. Need some support and need somebody that knows how to help that move through. Then what you might consider as damaging or destructive doesn't have to come into play anymore.

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Wonderful. That sounds hope-filled.

DPH

Yes, it's very hopeful message.

NG

You alluded briefly with the volcano, lady example, not getting our needs met. I know one of the underlying causes of anger can be a sense of injustice, perceived or actual. Sometimes it's maybe my needs that I feel angry aren't being met, and I didn't realize it until I'm exploding. Or sometimes it's one of my children I feel is being unfair or even dangerous to another child. Sometimes it's the trigger of injustice there. But can you speak to being aware of our needs or the needs of those around us?

DPH

It's challenging, especially with motherhood, because there's this idea that That moms are supposed to be all giving, all sacrificing, always available, never upset.

It's an impossible standard. But if we can build into our lives, times for our needs to get met, that's really important. If you're needing time with other adults, for instance, to have an adult play date where you get together with other moms and the kids are taken care of by the spouse or by a babysitter or whatever, but you have some adult time to have some support or just maybe play bridge or go for a hike or go to the mountains, have a girls weekend, something like that. We need to be with other adults. We need to be with other people, understand our circumstances. To just take a look at what needs are not on the radar? What do I need? Do I need quiet time? Do I need time to read a book? Do I need time with a friend? Do I need just time to be in nature or walk the dog? Do I need special date night with my spouse? Do I need my favorite foods, my favorite restaurant once in a while? I joke about it like need is a four-letter word, but it's a good four-letter word.

Needs are like our body and our soul telling us what we really need to be fulfilled. A happy mom, or like they say, happy wife, happy life, it's happy mom, happy life as well. I think not putting everything on the back burner. There are times in everyone's life where something critical happens when you got to put yourself on the back burner, but that shouldn't be an everyday mandate.

NG

Thank you so much. When we spoke before and we were planning our interview, you mentioned negativity, and you mentioned it as something separate from the pattern of maybe anger, irritability. Can you speak, how are they connected and how are they different?

DPH

Well, anger, if you just think of it as an energy for a moment, it's got a lot of energy, usually, right? And it's got a liveness in it. It's got juice in it. It's sometimes even passion in it. If we can not get stuck on the negativity or the critical words that want to come out of our mouth or the yelling that wants to happen. If we can calm the negativity part or we can separate that out, anger, when it's drained of its activity, what's left is vitality, juiciness, vibrancy, feeling alive and passionate and strong. It has an element of strength in it. I think that one of the reasons that anger becomes a secondary emotion over helplessness or being overwhelmed or too vulnerable is that there's a certain strength in anger. You feel more powerful, you feel more dominant, you feel more on top, maybe not in a positive way, because we want to move

aggressive anger to assertiveness, which is much more positive state using the same energy. So part of that's a practice. When we find ourselves getting super frustrated, take a time out.

Just go, Wait a minute. Wait a minute, kids. I'm hitting my limit here. I need a mom moment. And take it and just see what you can do to self-regulate yourself or call a friend and say, Hey, Jennifer, I'm having a hard day. Talk me down. It's something that you do that interrupts the pattern so that it doesn't just get acted out. And then you have to go through the shame of doing something that you feel like wasn't really good.

Of course, repairing and apologizing is also an important skill to develop. Repairing a misattunement or repairing when you've been abrupt or hurtful to a child or anyone else, learning how to do that is really helpful. When I have in-person trainings and I ask even professional therapists how many of them had role modeling around apology and repair from their parents, it's usually about 2%. Usually, we didn't learn it home. at I mean, all of you can be thinking, Mom and dad, my parents, caregivers? Did they model when they made it? Because we're going to make mistakes. Did they model apology and repair? Even getting the kids off to the school bus in the morning if they're going on a bus and they're slow and you have to send them to school in their pajamas because they didn't get dressed.

Whatever happens. Just to visit that later and go, I know I was pushing you out the door and I was abrupt with you. You didn't get to finish your breakfast. Let's just come up with a solution together. Do you think if we agreed, you and me together, that we get up 15 minutes early, we have a little more relaxed time for us to talk in the morning, have a nice breakfast, have time to get ready, get the ribbons in your hair or get your clothes on right, pick out your favorite outfit? Is there something we could do differently so this isn't something that's stressful for you or stressful for me? I'm sorry that I yelled at you about it this morning. Just to make those repairs and to teach your children how to repair with each other. Like if one sibling breaks the toy of another sibling, teach them how to repair. John Gottman does studies on adult relationships. He's famous for that. But he says that if you learn how to initiate and receive repair in your relationships, you have 85% more chance of sustainable well-being in the relationship. If you think about an 85% return on anything, that's gigantic.

If you don't take anything else from today, take that. Because if you were going to put your money in the bank and get an 85% return, you wouldn't even bother buying a \$5 Starbucks. You'd put everything in the bank because you get so much back. Learning how to repair is another way that you don't let past hurts keep happening. You don't just apologize. You look for what is the solution for what was upsetting. We all find ourselves complaining sometimes. That happens. But if we can start start to make a practice, instead of complaining, like catching those words before they come out your mouth, and go, What is a solution I can offer instead of

complaining? You never are on time, or you never do this. Instead of saying, Oh, like if your spouse is late for dinner a lot, just say, Honey, I love making you food I know you're really going to enjoy, and I love having it warm and on the table, and I love it when you're here to enjoy the time with the kids and me in our special dinner time. I just really... It's so wonderful when you can be here or let me know what time it'll be so I can make sure that special time is sacred in our family.

That's very different than saying, You're never on time. You don't respect me. You don't have enough time with kids. What's wrong with you? It's a very different feeling. But a lot of us weren't trained how to be assertively direct about what we want and also do it in a positive solution-oriented way. Some people suggest you give three solutions, but you pick one that you want to promote, one that you think is the most useful. Here's three things that I think could work around this situation. The one I like is this one. Which one do you think works for you? And then that creates some creativity in the family about, well, what could we do differently that takes the stress out of this particular part of our life together?

NG

Awesome. You pointed out explicitly, but what I noticed is not only an apology, but a strategy for solution. Strategy for improvement, so that it's different next time.

DPH

Yeah. Now, what do we do next time so this doesn't hurt either one of us?

NG

Then when you gave that really potent example, the contrast of you're never on time for dinner versus all the positivity that you poured into that relationship before you made a request. The request was so gentle then, especially couched in all that positivity. Could you let me know what time so we could keep this time sacred? Which also connects back to separating the bigness, the bubblyness of the anger emotion from the negativity piece of it. We can keep a lot of that strength and energy, but not necessarily... We could maybe in some ways it could be easier to channel that into a positive big emotion, some bubblyness or enthusiasm.

DPH

The great thing about practicing this, and it's best to practice, all of us have our three by five card file of what gets us crazy. I mean, what we feel judged about or feel like we're not this enough, we're not that enough. I mean, everybody has that. If you can write down what the

triggers are for what makes you angry, maybe when you feel abandoned or you feel unsupported or you feel like there's no time for you. I mean, you have to hide in the bathroom just to get a minute to yourself. Whatever those things are, if you can maybe just write them in a journal or on a three-by-five card and then look at what could we do around that that would work for the family, work for me, especially work for you, because you need to have a significant number of your needs met to be a happy camper. They're valid, usually. If you have them met, at least most of the time, then when a situation comes up where you can't meet them, it's not going to be so devastating. It's not going to be so triggering. Or you can delay it like, Okay, I can't have this today, but I'm going to make sure I have it tomorrow or over the weekend or something.

You make agreements with yourself that hopefully you can keep around getting your needs met, and maybe agreements with your spouse and agreements with your support system that are reciprocal. I know my sister's marriage, she watches all the sporting events with her husband as long as he'll take her dancing. It's instead of like, Oh, I have to watch football and I hate sports, or, Oh, I don't like to dance. They worked it out. Like, Okay, we both get to do something a little out of our comfort zone, but that fulfills something for both of us that works to support our relationship.

NG

Beautiful. You're describing really being so intentional and strategic strategic about awareness of our triggers and needs and then solutions.

DPH

Yes. And see, the thing is, it takes a lot of work in the beginning to come up with the solutions. Maybe it feels like work. It's just creativity, really. But as you practice them and as they get to be patterns and habits, your life just gets easier and easier and easier. It's like a gift that keeps on giving. The more you learn how to self-soothe, the more you learn how to self-regulate, the more you learn how to use your relationship in a way where you're co-regulating each other as and as partners, you learn these skills. I call them secure attachment skills, because if we don't have secure attachment as the little ones, and some of us didn't come from that situation, then it's harder for us to have impulse control. It's harder for us to manage those arousal spikes that come up that might take us to anger or tantrums as a kid. As parents, they're the master regulators of the household, and they model regulating themselves and regulating regulating each other, that's something the kids pick up, and they also are regulating the kids. For instance, if one of you is dealing with an altercation with the kid, something that is not going

well, they're not going to do their homework no matter what or whatever it is, or they're not going to go to bed or whatever the normal stuff that comes up.

One parent is trying to deal with it. Another parent may not have to come in and take over if it's not going well. They might just put their hand between the shoulder blades. Let's say it's the mom, the dad comes in or whatever, another mom comes in and puts a hand between the shoulder blades and this is basically physically saying, I'm here, I've got your back. And then they keep working out something with the kid. Or if they want to hand it off to the other parent, they can. But it's a way that children and the whole family starts to learn how to co-regulate. We regulate a lot through connection. So even if you give your kid a time out, you don't want to necessarily isolate them. They might need a time out to be in their safe space, whatever that is in the house. And then you go in and check on them. How are you doing, honey? How's it going? You don't abandon them there. You check in on them because connection is really important. They say with dogs, a lot of us love dogs, dogs are really social. And if they make a mess in the kitchen or something and you throw them in the backyard, you shouldn't do it for more than 20 minutes because then it really, really hurts them.

They get the point in 10 or 15 minutes. But that's just for a dog. I mean, imagine how much more sensitive a child might be.

NG

Thank you. Thank you for those examples. Co-regulation is, I feel like it's starting to become a little bit more of a popular word, a word that we've heard. Could you describe a little bit more what co-regulation is and how it works?

DPH

Well, for instance, if you're stressed a little bit, even with each other, there's a little bit of a conflict surfacing. If both of you have an agreement that you're going to try to keep the other person safe inside the relationship and outside the relationship, you're not going to say anything. If you have that agreement, you really know what that means. You're not going to, because somebody forgot to get milk at the grocery store, you're not going to threaten divorce. You're not going to go to something that's really hurtful to the other person. If you're mindful, how can I communicate that this isn't working for me? I really needed the milk for dinner. I was making mac and cheese or whatever. You learn how to communicate in a way that preserves dignity and preserves the other person's sense of is supportive to them, even when you're saying, Hey, Kate, we got to work this out. This isn't really working for us. Let's find another

solution. That's co-regulating. But just even having somebody come up and put their hands on your shoulders is co-regulating.

NG

That's that example, right?

DPH

Yeah. Massage is co-regulating. Talking, just talking something out is co-regulating. Being present is the most important thing, being present with someone. Stan Tatkin talks about the welcome home hug, and this is really a very obvious thing, but most of us don't do it. I'm going to tell you what that is. There's It's a YouTube on it on YouTube, if you want to look at it, Welcome Home Hug. But basically, our attachment system is very sensitive to comings and going. If one partner is coming home from work and the other one's maybe trying to do homework with the kids, if you just tell the kids, Hey, hang on, your dad or your mom is here, and they get up and they actually hug the other person. They don't do a pyramid hug that sometimes people do. They do a body-to-body hug, and they stay in the hug long enough that you can feel one body regulating the other body. And bodies love to be with other experiences that are regulating. Very, very, very powerful. This will help keep the attachment bond really strong in your relationships. That's true for kids, too. When the kid comes in from school, you get up from or you say, somebody you're on the phone says, Hey, hang on a minute, and you go and hug the kid.

That's the most important thing is to have that greeting and have it be a regulating experience when somebody comes in the house. Because a lot of times, our partner comes in and the first thing was, You didn't take the garbage out, and I need you to... You forgot the milk, and you start tasking the person. That's not particularly fun or regulating, but it's calming. If you can just drop that behavior, you can do it later if you need to, but make sure you have time for that regulating hug. Ideally, let's say one partner has a headache, the other partner would put their hand on their head to soothe their headache, and the other person has low back pain, then the other person would put their hand on their back so that they're getting the feeling of nurturing from the other person. That's very, very co-regulating. That's just an example.

NG

That piece of it is very physiological.

DPH

Yes. Physiology plays a really big part in anger management and in stress and regulating the nervous system. Very big part.

NG

I mean, we're bodies as much as we are soul, right? We don't just exist. Theoretically, we actually exist. Our attachment, this is just my reflection as you're listening, our attachment struggles often have those physiological pieces missing or misaligned, right?

DPH

Well, sometimes we have touch hunger. Sometimes we don't have enough positive nurturing touch. We want to make sure that we reinforce that in our relationships with the family as much as that feels appropriate. That's an easy pattern to build in, a welcome home, a welcome home. I love it. That you interrupt what you're doing if you can. I mean, if you're putting a fire out, you can't do that. But generally speaking, you can take a minute and make sure you have that welcoming. The same thing when somebody's going away, making sure, Hey, text me when you get there. I want to make sure you're at the hotel safe or whatever. There's just ways you stay tethered, stay connected throughout the day, and that's very co-regulating. We need each other. We need each other, not just our devices, our iPads and our iPhones and all that. Those are nice, but we need that physical and 3D presence along with things like now Zoom gives us the opportunity to have this conversation, so they're helpful. But it's really being in the physical presence of someone can be extremely regulating in addition.

NG

Yes. Thank you.

DPH

The other thing that I think is really important, because when we act out anger, we can be really hard on ourselves about that because it's not what we want to be doing. It's not our ideal scenario for ourselves. But a lot of times we had parents that role modeled anger that wasn't used in a constructive way that wasn't helpful, wasn't assertive, was more aggressive or violent. You're learning that as a child if you're around it. It's another reason that as a parent, we want to make sure we get it handled because we're actually teaching children through our behavior, and then that's going to be an issue for them down the road. My mother, for instance, just as a personal example, she was a lovely person, very gregarious, very generous, all of that, but she had a quick trigger for anger I mean, you'd leave your jacket on a door knob and she'd go nuts,

and she could go all the way to violence. We all observe that, and pretty much the only person who was allowed to be angry in our household was her. But she did it in a very threatening way.

NG

It's a scary way.

DPH

You might find yourself having that impulse later when you get triggered by something that you replicate the same behavior. Something that I think is important for compassion is to look at, where did I learn this behavior. The last thing I wanted to do was act out my mother's violence. I didn't ever act it out violently, but I would throw a pillow or something, but with a lot of force. But that was a replication, and I got over that as I resolved my issues with my early childhood and everything. But I had that impulse to break. I wouldn't actually break things. She would actually throw things against the wall and break them. I calmed it down to pillows, but still that impulse, I learned it. As I recognize that, I realize, Okay, I can unlearn this. I have to back up and look at what gets me to that point and see if I can intervene with myself, a need that's unmet or something that I need to say or a boundary I need to set, a healthy boundary about something. A lot of times we have a lot of anger when our boundaries feel overridden or we don't have them or we don't set them, and then we feel intruded upon or we feel taken advantage of or we feel ignored or we feel like we don't matter.

All of those things can get easier if we learn how to set a boundary. Say, No, I can't lend you money, or No, I don't have the time for that. I have time for this. I can do it on Tuesday. I can't do it on Wednesday. Or I give myself time. If you think about it. Somebody makes a request that I'm not sure, Can I do that? Just make a habit of saying, You know what? I need to look at my calendar. I need to think about it. I'll get back to you tomorrow or a couple of days or whatever. So give yourself time to go, Can I actually do that? Do I want to do this? Do I have to do this? Do I need some space for myself? Because people's demands, especially with lots of kids and also with school wanting things and church and all sorts of different organizations sometimes. Friends. There can be a lot of requests coming in. If you feel like you can't say no to anything, you're going to be in trouble pretty quick. You can't really say a real yes unless you can say also a real no.

Learning to say no, for some of us, was really challenging, whatever our original language was, right? How to say no. It's okay to say no. No is a good word. Sometimes it's just not possible or it's not convenient or it just doesn't fit. It's okay to say no.

NG

Thank you. I think that's big for a lot of us.

DPH

Yes, I think so, too. The other thing that when secure attachment has been threatened, we have the attachment quiz on our website. That can give you an idea what attachment injury or unresolved trauma might be hiding in the background that might need some attention to help you move into healthy aggression or healthy assertiveness, to be clear about your needs, to be able to ask instead of demand or ask instead of complain. All of those things sometimes come from early developmental patterns. The attachment quiz is free. You can take it as often as you want, but you want to make sure you only take it one relationship at a time so that you're focused on your partner, you're focused on your mom, you're focused on your dad, you're focused on your brother, you're focused on your friend, your coworker, whatever. You can take as many times as you want. It's free. It doesn't matter. Then it'll give you some feedback. Because our attachment system shifts depending on what's happening with the other person, how they're responding to us or not responding to us.

Then the other thing that if you're going to take the attachment quiz, which I really recommend because I think it gives a lot of useful information.

NG

You took it. Yeah, that's linked below for everyone.

DPH

Oh, good. Okay. But you can take it not on your best day when you're maybe a little tired or a little bit run down or something, because that'll show you more accurately what your default attachment reactions are. Then they give you specific behaviors that you can work on that help. For instance, if you have more of a void and attachment, you might need some practice Practice on reaching out. Reaching out is a little bit more challenging or actually making consistent eye contact or allowing yourself to know what your needs are and actually to ask for somebody else to fill them and not to feel like you have to do it yourself all the time. There's certain issues that are related to each attachment injury. We usually have a mix of attachment styles. I have a lot, some of all of them, so I can relate to all of them myself, but just to see where it fits. When you take the quiz, we give you some information about it so you get a little bit more sense of what that might be for yourself.

NG

Thank you. That's super helpful. I'm curious to go back and take it, like you said, not on my best day when my higher mind is regulating, but when my subconscious defaults are acting right. I'm also curious to take it with a couple of different people. Diane, do you have any final thoughts before we wrap up?

DPH

Just to be compassionate with yourself, get support when you need support, however that is, with friends or partners or a therapist that knows how to I would say, emotionally and somatically, that's attachment and trauma-informed if you have unresolved trauma. A lot of us came from challenging childhood, so to get some help with that, it can be really liberating, and you can reap the benefits of it the rest of your life, and it will impact parenting. Detachment is very easily passed down through the generation. A lot of times we parent deeply influenced by how our parents parented us. Some of that might be great, and some of that may not be so useful. To disengage from those ingrained, learned patterns, it takes a little work, but the benefits are huge, and you get to enjoy the benefits the rest of your life. I think it's worth taking a look at it. I'm glad you're doing this summit. I think that's really great that you're offering this. Thank you so much, Lucy.

NG

Thank you, Diane.