

98. Shame, guilt, and self-compassion when it comes to past mistakes including divorce

Vanessa 00:00

Welcome to the Empowered brain, the only podcast using science, psychology and coaching to help you rewire your brain and create a life you love with your host, Dr. Vanessa Calderon, a Harvard grad physician, master coach, and mother of two.

Hi, sweet friends. So this is episode 98. And I am doing something a little bit different for all of you. So I was interviewed by a colleague on her podcast called The Sun Happens, or sun happens, her name is Marissa Baker. And her information is in the show notes. But she essentially created an entire community to support divorce women. And so she asked me to come on her podcast to talk about the fundamentals of shame of guilt, and how to create self-compassion when it comes to things that we experienced as past mistakes that we hold a lot of shame around. You know, for her podcast, we specifically talked about divorce.

But really, these tools can be used for any area in your life that you are interpreting as a mistake, and you're holding on to shame, shame or guilt. So I really think that this podcast is incredible. It has so many good nuggets in there. We talk about science and history. And we really break down how to think about it, how to process shame, and how to give yourself the self-compassion that you need to actually get past a lot of these things in life. So I just thought it would be awesome if I shared this episode with all of you. So what you will hear is a recording of her interviewing me on this podcast where I talk about all of these things, and I know you will all love it because it is our jam. Okay, so as a reminder, if you are loving what you are hearing on this podcast, please please, please do not be shy. Rate the podcast and drop us a review. It really, really makes a huge difference for us and it helps other people find the podcast. So please rate and review the podcast. I would be forever in your debt if you do that for us. Thank you so much. Enjoy your podcast of yours.

02:33

I love that for me. So Dr. Vanessa is as you can tell a doctor, she's a physician, a master-certified life and leadership coach. And I love this resilience expert with a specialty and compassion, shame, and guilt. And today we're going to talk about how to process difficult feelings around surrounding divorce, like shame and guilt, and anything shame related is my favorite topic, because like I was actually talking about this morning, I think shame was the most useless emotion and that it just, we just get into a shame cycle. And it just keeps us doing things that we're shaming ourselves for. And it's just mind-boggling to me. So I'm so excited. But for the listeners, what is this episode about? It kind of said it, but like in your word? Yeah, I

Vanessa 03:24

think what I would want people to walk away from after listening to this episode is, what a shame what it does to your brain to your body, how it can keep you sort of locked in, and how to process it and move forward. Really, I think the biggest takeaway, is everyone that who's listening right now you're going to leave with an ability to process shame. So you don't have to let that hold you down anymore.

03:48

That's so good. Who would you say this episode is for?

Vanessa 03:52

I mean, every human being if you have a human brain, you're going to process shame. You know, I know your audience specifically deals with divorce. And so I want to talk a lot about divorce. I mean, I've had my own stories around that sort of circumstance of divorce just growing up in a home where my parents were divorced and a lot of the fear that comes along with that. But honestly, if you are a human being whether you've never been divorced, or not, like I imagined myself like 20 years ago, had I found this podcast, I would have been like, wow, I want to learn everything so that I don't get divorced, you know, and it's like, and so it's all of that. So, you know, I don't work primarily with divorced women, though a lot of my students are divorced. But everyone deals with shame, regardless of the circumstances which is why I say it's really for everyone.

04:43

Yeah. And why is this so important? Like why does it matter that we know how to process shame?

Vanessa 04:50

I think of shame as sort of this kind of like an electric fence and makes me so angry sometimes when I think about the emotion. I don't know. Do we use curse words on this podcast? If not, I won't

05:02

say that for you just okay, it may be

Vanessa 05:06

awesome. Because I seriously think of shame as a super fucked up electric fence that won't turn off. And it won't turn off unless you shell it from the rooftops. And the louder that you can make whatever it is that's causing you to feel shame. That's how you turn off that electric fence. Because when it's on, you're locked up behind it, you can't move, you can't process you can't move forward, you can't get into another relationship, for example, if you've been divorced, or at least not in a healthy relationship, because you're holding on to all this baggage that shame is causing me to hold on to. And so I think that's sort of what I think about when I think of shame. And so when you turn it off, then you're able to move forward in life.

05:46

Ah, that's so good. I literally was visualizing an electric fence. And that's part of me, as I hate feeling my feelings, I'm working on it. But in my brain, I was visualizing myself just trying to run through the shock. And it's like, immediately I just like to go down. I'm like, Guess you just can't run through it. You gotta feel it.

Vanessa 06:06

Oh, I love what you just said, It's like the difference between trying to like run through the electric fencing and just getting on the other side, versus processing and processing is literally like getting the key out turning the lock, turning off the electricity and being able to move forward. And it can be as simple as that process. And what I'm going to teach you guys is that simple. But you have to literally do the work. Like you got to get the key out and you got to process.

06:29

Yeah, you can just force your way through it. Just it's not a thing. That's so good. So tell us a little bit more about you. Obviously, I gave a quick introduction. But who are you? And what is your story?

Vanessa 06:41

Yeah, so I'm Dr. Vanessa Calderon, I have about 20 years of leadership experience. I work primarily with women, most of them high achievers, all of them professional women that are doing really amazing things in the world, but want to do more and want to feel better and want to do everything without stress and without burnout. And so I give them all the tools they need to be more effective in life without burning out. And to really feel better. You know, a lot of women out there, I'm sure you've experienced this for yourself, you're able to create so many things in life because you're ambitious, or you're motivated or you're excited. But then there are these one areas of your life where something is missing, something's not going right there. You know, and you think if I could just do more if I could just get this one thing done if I just had more motivation if I just stop procrastinating. And the truth is, you know, I teach a lot of my people how to stop procrastinating. But really, the way you stop surprises you, it's like how you manage your mind how you feel better how you're able to create all of that intentionally. So for example, for me, you know, I'm a mom of two young kids, my daughter's eight, my son is five, I'm married, my husband is amazing. And I'm also you know, I was a full-time, ER, Doc, I was the department chief, I was doing all of these things. And I always thought the solution was to work harder to do more, get more done. And then you realize that actually, the solution is to like, slow down, do what matters, focus on your values and do that really well. So I'm still like, incredibly successful and ambitious, and I love my career. But I'm able to do that so effectively, and with so much intention that I'm so much more present for my marriage and for my kids and for my friends. It's just a way I think, really to live a holistic life.

08:24

Yeah. I love that. I was honestly thinking about that this weekend, too. Like, I'm like, I kept myself so busy all weekend, I ended the weekend with so much overwhelming anxiety. And I'm like, like, it got me thinking about my own business. And I'm like, what actually matters to me like, What feels fun? What excites me? And how can I do more of that, just continuing to make my schedule completely packed to feel like I'm doing something makes me want to go to bed at 6 pm and not live on like, not like on a live way, but just like not be present in my life. And so that's really good. And I love that

Vanessa 09:02

girl. 1,000,000% That's like the big deal event in life. How do you be effective and stop being busy?

09:08

Yeah, oh my gosh, it's literally everything. It reminds me of the quiet quitting thing that everyone's doing where it's like, no one's really quitting. They're just trying to set better boundaries and like, have a life outside of work. Do you know? So tell me a little bit about your background with divorce. I know you said that your parents were divorced. And tell us about that. I'm going to let my dog out really quick, too.

Vanessa 09:32

Yeah, go for it. So I was born to immigrants. My mom immigrated from Mexico, my dad from El Salvador, and they're incredible human beings that have done just amazing things, you know, in spite of their circumstances, both are really resilient and but you know, they had a bunch of stuff that came with them through like generations of the trauma of you know, my dad lived through a civil war and my mom dealt with a lot of stuff just from her mom, just a lot of domestic stuff growing up, and they just had internalized and it wasn't even some of it was their trauma. But some of that was just ancestral trauma that they just, you know, that didn't get healed. And it led them to have, you know, a lot of, you know, sort of issues and coping with defenses and other things in their own marriage and eventually led to a divorce. And in my home, when I was a kid, the divorce would manifest as a lot of arguing and fighting and things like that. There was never physical abuse, but there was just a lot of other stuff yelling, arguing, fighting, and, it made me believe that no marriage could ever be successful. I had this limiting belief that I held on to, really until I, my until my husband, who had a totally opposite experience with his family wanted to get married. And we were together for four years, and I just never thought we needed to be married. I didn't think there was a purpose. And I remember he asked me once, why not? And I was like, well, what's the purpose? All marriages end in divorce anyway? Why would you get married? And I held on to that limiting belief, you know, a limiting belief. I'm sure everyone that's listening knows.

But it's a thought that you have, that's not giving you the result you want in life. And for me, I realized I had chosen to not be married because I was afraid of divorce, not because I intentionally didn't want to get married. And I just decided that I never want to do anything based on fear in my life. So if I choose not to be married, it's because I don't want to be married, not because I'm afraid of it. So I went to therapy, and did all the work, and eventually ended up getting married. But I didn't do enough processing as I soon realized on our wedding day. And my husband is amazing. But I had all of these fears coming up on the day of our wedding. And I remember feeling like oh my god, is this the right thing, totally flipping out. And the only thing that felt right in the moment is when he and I were by ourselves, you know, marriage, the wedding day can be bananas, and crazy. And a lot of people and whenever he and I were alone is when I felt inner peace. And so I was like, Okay, well, this is something I should listen to. Anyway, now 10 years later, we're about to celebrate our 10-year wedding anniversary, but um, you know that that story and that fear of divorce showed up in different levels, you know, I often like to tell my students, as you've probably experienced, that shit will come up and it will come up again and again until you've learned all the lessons you need to learn from it. And for me, divorce has been an interesting kind of core limiting belief that I've gotten to work through on very many different levels.

12:32

I find that so interesting, especially because you've never been divorced, even though like you are a product of it, and you saw it and all the things and it just goes to show how easy it is to develop a belief based on a circumstance and imagine like, you're not divorced, imagine someone like me, right? Who has been divorced twice, and is probably thinking all marriages end in divorce because all mine have. And so that's just a good thing to like point out for any woman that's like, going through a divorce. Like, it's actually not, it's not weird that you might be thinking different things or having different beliefs about your divorce because even someone who's never been divorced, has these fears. And honestly, kind of makes us feel a little bit more human. You know, like, if you're feeling that, then of course, you know, it'd be normal. If we were having fears and thoughts surrounding marriage and divorce because of what we've been through.

Vanessa 13:31

It's probably one of the most important things I think is how if you have fear, there's nothing wrong. It's just a human. It's a human experience. So

13:40

good. And you said something? Oh, I know. We're gonna go in and define some of the buzzwords with like shame and guilt. But can you define ancestral trauma? Just because I was curious. You said it. And I'm like, What's that?

Vanessa 13:52

Oh, yeah. So there's been a ton of studies in the world of neuroscience to show that. Okay, can I get really nerdy for a second?

14:00

I love nerdy.

Vanessa 14:02

Okay. Okay. So, so I'll explain one specific research paper that's been really instrumental in this world, which is they had a Mom. So if you have any issues with animals, those are listening, I apologize. I know, there are a lot of issues with animal research, but they did research on rats. And what they showed in the morning and the baby rat, and whenever they would create a lot of trauma to that baby rat, where they will pull them away from the mom, the mom couldn't be there, the mom going to be present. In all of the baby rats, Gen Gen genes of trauma would upregulate. So they would just like to rewrite functional MRI studies, when that baby rat ended up growing up and having another baby so it became a mom, the mom, the baby rat. Now the second generation, with no trauma-exposed to this baby had all of the same epigenetics show up so all of the same genes were turned on in that baby even though they had never experienced the trauma. Why? So this is the effect of ancestral trauma. And so it's the reason why we say that even though you've never experienced the trauma yourself, you might be more prone to it. Or you might be more sensitive to it because of what your ancestors have experienced. Now, the beauty of this research is that if that second generation goes on to heal that trauma, so let's say that second generation is born, and the mom is super present, and but they bond and they love and all of those types of things, that second generation does not pass on the trauma to

the third generation. So when you do your own healing, and you're able to regulate those genes, you can essentially turn the mom and not pass them on.

15:38

That is insane. And like first of all, it's so much of why I talked about what I talked about on here with the healing and why it's so important. But it just reminds me of like the trend on tick tock where it's like breaking general generational curses or generational cycles. And I have this vision in my head I think about a lot because I think there's a lot of things that the women and my you know, line have gone through and, you know, my dad's side, but I always envision this like, like all of my women ancestors standing behind me in the superhero position, just being like, you're doing the work, we all want it. And not to say they didn't. It's like they all did their part when they were here, but and we all have stuff to add. But I think about that often because I'm like, I just feel like I have the support of like every ancestor ever being like, go, yes. Do the damn thing.

Vanessa 16:34

Hell yeah. And I'll just say this, that if you're having that intuitive vision, that it's true, that that's really is true, that energy really is behind you. And that energy really is telling you like, do the damn thing, Marissa? Like, that really? Is

16:47

tries that wicked that makes me want to cry? Because it feels so real at the moment. You know, when I'm just like, ah, and it gives me goosebumps when I think about it.

Vanessa 16:56

Well, yeah, and yeah, and right now, you know, you and I are on video, but I just saw you do the superhero stands with your arms. And I would just say that, like when you feel that energy stand up and feel that like really embodying?

17:07

Yeah. Wow, I love that. Okay, so let's define the three buzzwords that we hear a lot when it comes to healing, shame, guilt, and then compassion, obviously, one by one. So let's start by just defining what is a shame.

Vanessa 17:21

Yeah, so I can give you super brief definitions of all three, and then if you want, we can get into the dirty of each one. Okay, so, shame really is you know, thinking that something is wrong with you. So guilt is like I did something wrong. The shame is I am wrong. It's like really internalizing that for yourself. Yeah. So you can see why it is so difficult to break that like I did something wrong. Okay. No big deal. Just go fix it. I am wrong. I'm fucking wrong. Like, can I do anything? I can't fix that like I must be broken. So you can see why it's so hard. compassion. Compassion is my favorite thing in the world, in all honesty, because I really do feel like compassion is the antidote to shame. Self Compassion is the antidote to shame. Yeah, but self-compassion. So, compassion, those two words, that word comes from the literal translation is to suffer together, see, oh, em calm together, and passion to feel to suffer together. So

compassion is the feeling that you feel when you see somebody suffering and you want to do something about it. That's compassion.

18:26

I love that. That's so good. Yeah, let's definitely go into the dirty of all of those. Because now I'm like, I'm all in, I'm like, let's keep going.

Vanessa 18:38

So we can start with shame. So, shame can almost always be tied back to some experience of feeling judged. feeling judged, feeling criticized, or feeling rejected by someone else. You can almost always tie it back to that. And people often respond to shame by pushing other people away or withdrawing. Because what you're essentially trying to do or what the ego is trying to do is it's trying to preserve yourself, preserve your reputation, by hiding. And so often what ends up happening depends on what part of you you feel ashamed for. So everyone listening right now, everyone has something we're ashamed of, you know, I have worked through a lot of my shame, but I'm sure there's still some stuff there. But, you know, you can see me I'm a five foot 100 pound Latina, and I'm a light-skinned Latina. And a lot of the things I was ashamed of was the fact that you know, I'm not as smart as a white man. That was something I used to hold on to. And internalized racism, of course, and so there's a bunch of that kind of stuff. So whatever you're feeling ashamed about, think about whatever you're feeling ashamed about. And usually what you're trying to do is you're trying to hide it like I would never let anybody know. And I would just try to show up really confident, really arrogant, really, whatever. I thought I needed to be, you know, yeah.

19:56

That's so good. And I'm like instantly thinking and I probably tell the story once So we're on my podcast, but it's fine. You know, about a year ago, a year ago, like, yeah, exactly one year ago, the Daily Mail wrote an article about me about all of the hate that I was getting for being twice divorced by 30. And obviously, I already had a lot of shame about it, because it was my second divorce before 30. And I was so scared, people would judge me for that. And it was such an interesting thing to go through and feel what shame and rejection feel like. And I know we're going to talk about what it feels like in your body. But it was so interesting because I came home that day from work, I was in the fetal position on my floor crying, and I just kept thinking, okay, like, what do I need right now during the whole, like, inner child thing. And then I like, before I got to the part where I was like, resolving my own issue or feeling it. I felt like shivers all over my body. And like, just this, like, whatever. And it was so interesting because I ended up Googling, what a shame how to shame or social rejection, like show up. And that was like, one of the things it was like, you'll feel the shivers, or the goosebumps, or whatever, all over your body. I'm like, That is insane to me that in the moment, I was feeling so terrible. And I was like, it just feels like the whole world hates me. And then I go, look, look what it is. And it's like, that's, that's rejection. That's whatever. And I'm like, so crazy how smart our bodies are anyways, but it just made me want to share that because I'm like, Yeah, of course. It's tied to feeling judged. And I've literally felt that exact thing. And, and it's okay.

Vanessa 21:33

Yeah, I really love what you just said all of that. But just the fact that you were able to tune into that energy. So that is that and we'll talk about how to process the feeling and then a little bit later, but that's exactly it. You know, what's so interesting about what you shared and tying this back to divorce is, there are four main situations in sort of the literature of shame, that can lead to shame. And you're going to be you're not going to be that shocked. But listen to this, because it totally ties back to your story. One is unwanted exposure. Yeah, right. It's like, yeah, the other one is, and this has ties back to divorce, why divorce can feel so shaming to so many people. It's unrequited love. So if you have this love for somebody else, and you feel like it's not there, that's like one of the most basic fundamental human needs is to feel loved. This means one of the most basic human needs to cause shame, is when you have a love for others. And you think about these teenagers that ended up internalizing a lot of shame because they never felt like they were a good enough part of the popular crowd. And, you know, it's like, you hear these stories, or these movies that are made of these people that come back to their high school. And now they're like, the popular kid or whatever. Because of that, because that's one of the most fundamental like, everybody can sort of relate to that. And then the third one is a disappointed expectation. So if you get married and you have this expectation supposed to all work out happily ever after, right? Which is like what society tells you and then it doesn't, you have a feeling of shame? So we talked about other than the last one is exclusion being excluded or not part of that, you know, the in crowd.

23:08

Yeah, yeah, that was like, A, obviously the unwanted exposure, but the exclusion was, was big too, because I just remember kept feeling like, everybody hates me, nobody wants me like this group. You know, like, I'm lovable. I'm funny. Why would these people not want me and so I love that. That's such an interesting, like, take on it. And I'm gonna have to go find all of these articles that you mentioned, by the way, I'm gonna be like, where is it? But let's define let's go a little bit deeper into guilt.

Vanessa 23:38

Guilt feels so much easier. I feel like when you think about shame and guilt, not to lessen anybody's feelings about guilt but guilt almost feels basic. It's almost like you know, but um, but the truth is, so many of us go to guilt as a go-to emotion especially if you're a woman especially if you were raised in a religious house. Guilt is your go-to emotion. Like if you are listening to this and you are a mom for example, and you've experienced divorce, you probably feel so guilty and what your experience what your what you think your kids might be experiencing. Or you know, if you are a mom and you work you might feel super guilty when you are at home with your kids because you don't feel like you do it enough at work. Guilt is the biggest go-to emotion I once had a student who had grown up in the Catholic Church and it was so go-to for her that she would get up and try to get leave the house and the kitchen was a mess and she'd be like, oh I feel so guilty that I didn't clean it I'm like you feel guilty about the kitchen and she felt guilty about the male guilty about and guilty can be such a go-to emotion guilt, guilty again, as I'm doing something bad. So a lot of people were raised in homes where in order to show love, you thought you needed to always be serving, be in service, be in service be in service. And so if you feel like you're ever doing anything for you, you're going to feel incredibly guilty because you're going to feel like you're not loving others enough. So guilt is you It's deeply intertwined with how we were raised and what we experience.

25:04

So interesting to like, as I'm, as you were explaining that, and you're like, guilt feels easy. I'm like, oh, like something clicked in me that like, I think I have felt like fear and shame. For a lot of things, especially from a religious perspective, I grew up Christian, and I just thought was like normal guilt. It's like if I did something outside of marriage that I wasn't supposed to do. I absolutely, like felt wrong, or like I was being punished rather than feeling guilty. But I thought I thought it was the same thing. I just think it's interesting to note, like, I wonder how many people are feeling shame. And they're just like, oh, yeah, I just feel guilty, or vice versa, and not realizing even what it is.

Vanessa 25:47

Yes. If it's easy for you to talk about, it's probably guilt. You know, like, if you can go to a girlfriend and be like, Oh, my gosh, you know, whatever. I just slept with this guy. And we're not married, and I feel guilty for whatever, it's probably guilt. But if it's something you're holding on to, like, if you can't even tell your best friend about it, that's probably shame.

26:06

I can't you just like totally, like, affirmed everything. Like I was saying, there are things when I have felt shameful, or where I, where I felt what I thought was guilt, but most shame was like, I'll never tell anyone this because if they knew this about me, they would know they would just know that something's wrong with me or that I'm not as good as I say I am. And that's so interesting. Like, all this time, I just thought it was like dealing with guilt. And really, it's always been,

Vanessa 26:33

That's so fascinating. Yeah,

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so cool to think about, alright, let's get into the dirty of if it's dirty, but the dirty of compassion.

Vanessa 26:40

Okay, confession, again, is my favorite thing. I can talk about it for ages and ages. But um, again, compassion is what you feel when you see somebody else's suffering and you want to do something about it, you're motivated to do something about it. I think if you want to put a face to this, the best person to think about is Mother Teresa. Like she devoted her life to going out and helping others that were literally suffering. So there's, I think, a good way to think about it also is that there are five big aspects of compassion, there's generosity, we're excited. generosity, right? Kindness sounds obvious, generous like I see somebody suffering, I'm going to give them my leftovers for lunch, or I'm going to buy them food, generosity, hospitality, like being kind, how can I be supportive? Do you need a place to whatever, you know, rest your head? This is a big one, which people don't usually put in with compassion, but it's objectivity being objective to what they're feeling. And really like seeing it as like, that's their human experience. That's their pain, we don't often understand what other people are experiencing. But we don't have to understand this is where objectivity comes in. Yeah, we can just see it as their human experience. Yeah, that's good. And then sensitivity, like, you know, I don't think you have a problem being sensitive. And most people, you know, it's really tapping into the fact that like, this goes back to objectivity. It's sensitive and objective. It's like, I don't understand what's happening with

you. I don't understand why that's a problem for you. It's it was never a problem for me. But I don't have to understand I can be sensitive to your emotions and see it as your human experience. And the last one is tolerance, being tolerant.

28:19

I love that. Okay, how do you just memorize those also?

Vanessa 28:27

I mean, I'm excellent. Yes, I guess I've been doing this stuff for a really long time that I and I did kind of refresh on some of these types of things, because and you will, we're going to be talking about them specifically. But I will say, just to add on to that, you know, we often think of self-compassion as different from compassion. And I just want to link those two together, for those that are listening right now. Because self-compassion is the same exact thing as you going out to help others. It's just you doing that for yourself. And it can feel so foreign, but think about generosity, what would it be like for you to treat yourself with generosity? What would it feel like for you to give yourself hospitality? Maybe you light a candle, and maybe you get under a really warm blanket and covers, you know, what would it feel like for you to be objective to yourself, whatever, you're having those emotions are sensitive, or how would it feel for you to be tolerant to the stuff that you're experiencing as opposed to rejecting that?

29:20

Yeah, that's me. That's so interesting. And it's like all of these, you know, divorce is not divorced, but a woman going through a divorce. Like, I always say that there were two things that I needed in order to heal after divorce, and it was grace and truth, and grace and compassion to me are so like, you know, interchangeable but yeah, it's like, there's a quote out there that says, truth without grace is mean and Grace without truth is meaningless.

Vanessa 29:49

Whoa, that's so good, that good and

29:53

so that's all those are always the two anchors, anything when I deal with healing work or those that are going through to was like if you're going to start this healing process, like, it always starts with grace or compassion and, and truth and truth with compassion, right? Like you're being honest with yourself about what you're thinking, what you're feeling, how you ended up where you are, but like, with that, like nice hospitality and it's like, Okay, let me think about these hard things, but I'm gonna sniff lavender while they do it, you know?

Vanessa 30:22

That's really beautiful and love that. Yeah, such

30:25

a good quote. Okay, so let's talk about how each of these feelings, like feel in our body. And, you know, I've talked probably the last few episodes about feelings in general and how they're simply a vibration in the body. And so pretty familiar with that, if you want to touch more on that you absolutely can. But

yeah, what did What does? What do these three things feel like in the body if we were to experience them and allow them?

Vanessa 30:52

Okay, so if you're listening right now, I just want you to know, it's gonna feel different for everyone. So let's, let's try it. So I want you to figure out what it feels like in your body. So if you're in a place where you can sit up nice and tall, do that. And if not just take a deep breath really quick. And just take a second and ground yourself right now back into the podcast? So if you're multitasking, just come back. If you're running or doing dishes, just come back for one quick second. I'm doing this too, by the way. Yeah. Okay, now just take a deep breath in. And the first thing I want you to think about is the last time you felt rejected, like when was the last time you felt rejected, and you were so you felt so much shame around that. When was the last time you felt like you weren't good enough? When was the last time you didn't feel like you were beautiful enough? Now, I want you to like to think about that moment. And I want you to feel that judgment. And I want you to feel that shame. And I want you to just tune into your body, you might have like one tiny little sensation go to that. Or you might have it stronger if you've done this work before. Where's that shame in your body? Is it in your chest? Does it feel like pressure? Is it in your stomach? Is it in your arms? Just feel it in your body. Because in the future, you're not going to have the consciousness that you're feeling shame, but you're going to feel something in your body. And you'll know. And it's the same thing for guilt. So for me, I feel shame in my chest, I feel pressure in my chest when I feel it. And I know I know what shame feels like now because I've been doing this work for a long time. But so the opposite. So let's say guilt. So do that same exercise and just think where do you feel guilt? Where do you feel guilty, right? It's like for a lot of people, they feel it in their stomach usually. So wherever you feel compassion and guilt, you'll know where you feel those feelings.

32:50

That is so good. And even like my own personal experience as you were navigating me through that, like the same thing, I felt this tension in my chest. And I also felt this interesting vibration. As I tried to set my arm down still on my knee, I can almost feel it. It's just like, vibrating from the inside out, though. You know, and it's just so interesting to just once you start paying attention, you see it but like, I would have never felt that little tiny, you know, vibration unless I got quiet took the breath, and was like, Okay, let me tune in right now.

Vanessa 33:29

Yeah, that's really beautiful Marissa. And you know, again, the most important why it's so important to know where you feel your feelings is because the way your brain and bodywork is there's a subconscious thought that's leading you to feel something. And it's not super conscious. But because our brain and our bodies are so intricately connected, you'll feel it in your body before you've had a chance to process or have the awareness of what's going on. So for me, I know when I feel shame now I don't feel it as much as I used to. But when it does come up for me now, like, I'll just feel a pressure in my chest and I'm like, What the hell? And then I'll have to like, breathe into it and say, Oh, that shame.

34:05

Are you able to pinpoint when you feel it? Exactly what caused the shame?

Vanessa 34:10

Oh, that's so good. So I brought a little exercise about how to process emotion might be you want me to walk you and your listeners through it?

34:18

Yes, let's go, as

Vanessa 34:22

I call it the ABCDEs of the feeling of feeling. And so the very first thing I do so for example, will you shame as an example. So when I feel something, the very first thing you do is you have an awareness, an awareness that you're feeling something so I'll be like, Okay, I'm feeling something in my body. And then B, I just breathe into it. I just put all my breath and my, I'll just put all my attention to where I'm feeling it. So I breathe into it. So for me, it's in my chest. I just take a deep breath. And I breathe it into my chest. And then at that point, sometimes I'll know what it is. So I can skip C and go to D and I can just describe it and I can say okay, this is a shame. I'm sorry, I do see I call it out. I'll say this is a shame. This is a shame. But if I don't know that I do D, and I describe it, and I'll say, Okay, I'm feeling a pressure in my chest, it feels heavy. It's not really moving anywhere. It feels kind of warm. And then I'll keep breathing into it. And then I'll say out, I'll say out loud, I'll say a case to skill and be like, nah, this isn't gal. Okay, what is this is the sadness. Now, what is this feeling? Is that rejection? Is it a shame? Yes, it's a shame. And then I'll say, Okay, this is a shame. And then I'll just say, this is a shame. And I'll breathe into it. And as you've probably experienced for yourself, and you might have walked your listeners through this, but when you do that ABCD exercise and just breathe into the feeling. That feeling dissipates, it takes less than two minutes usually. Yeah, and it goes away. And this is Carl Jung used to say this, you know, super famous psychotherapist from back in the day, that what you resist will persist. That's where that saying comes from what you resist persists. So when you don't resist it, and you breathe into it, and you allow it, then you're able to process and it goes away.

36:03

That is so good. Especially for somebody like me, who genuinely spent 29 years of my life, reflect last

Vanessa 36:10

year for a second to go. Sorry, one second.

36:14

Can you hear me now? There you go. Yes. But for someone like me, I spent 29 years practicing toxic positivity, and only being happy and I was like, No, I'm like, I vividly remember talking to my therapist. And he's like, Okay, what's, you know, one of the top emotions you feel and I was like, joy, and he's like, okay, and he goes, and under all that joy, what do you feel? And I went to it, and he goes, and a few say, joy, I'm going to smack you and I went, What do you mean? He goes, sometimes, when you feel that much joy, it's because there's something else underneath it. And it was such a first time I'd ever heard that, that maybe I was covering something else up. And anyway, I just, I just love what you're saying about it does persist. Like, it wasn't until I started feeling my feelings, that I could start tackling why I was binge eating or why I felt like drinking all the time, or why I was so tired. Like, I had no idea

that all of that was just connected to having a willingness to feel rather than being like, nope, not doing that. Not today say and.

Vanessa 37:23

And is so beautiful. So true. So true. And I'm you know, I've been in this work now doing resiliency, wellness work coaching for about a decade, so I know what it feels like now, but I was also like that because I used to believe that sadness was unproductive. Sadness was so stupid. It's so unproductive. Why would I ever feel sad? I just gotta move fast.

37:46

That's fine. Whatever. Funny. Wow. And so let's go back to divorce. Why do you think we see you talked a little bit about, what causes shame. But what do you think we see so much shame and guilt show up around divorce?

Vanessa 38:04

Yeah, you know, it's so interesting. I think when you think about the divorce itself, it really hits all of those four causes of shame. unrequited love, feeling excluded out of like not part of a group anymore. Unwanted exposure. Now, everybody knows your shit, you know, and a disappointed expectation if your expectation is that your marriage is supposed to work all the time.

38:29

That's so good. Especially because I feel like that's going to validate not only me but a bunch of the listeners for like, not really understanding why divorce feels so big and so heavy and so shameful. Like, I've literally had people be like, really, your whole brand is about divorce. Like you've been divorced. So everyone does it. Why is it such a big deal? Right? And it's like, why? the hardest thing I've ever done, I had to do it twice. It Ah, my row. I'm tired. I am tired. But like, that is so cool that there are four elements to feeling shame. And we hit all four. That's not cool, but it's like, nice to feel like a physical validation of what we have grieved for so long

Vanessa 39:17

Hell yeah. Hell yeah. Divorce is one of those circumstances that can feel like shit for thinking about the other things that cause a ton of shame. Divorce is a huge one and being fired. Another huge one, like all of the same reasons, you feel rejected, you're not feeling loved, you know, you feel all of those things. And so, yes, like, please like, if you have been having these feelings. That's why I think it's so important for human beings to understand that this is all normal. It's part of the human experience, that if you're feeling ashamed, there's nothing wrong with you. This is what this is what's supposed to happen.

39:56

Yeah, and that's the other thing too I get a lot of people that are like how do you ask for the divorce? How did you get through it? And I'm like, I suffered. But, but I willingly chose the short-term suffering for the long-term peace. And yeah, so

Vanessa 40:16

one brave girl,

40:19

you know, sometimes mas, thank you, you know, I take a lot of heat for taking the easy road and leaving when I could have stayed. And I always talked about this, I'm like, row each, every scenario is hard if I decide to stay in a marriage that I wasn't happy, and that's hard. And if I decide to leave the marriage, and I'm not happy, and that's also hard. It's like, I'm just choosing my heart. At the end of the day, and both your right require courage on some level. So, okay, do you think that there is a stigma just around divorce based on what we've learned in culture and whatnot?

Vanessa 40:58

Absolutely not. No stigma, with getting no good? Like, no, this is like, okay, so So now, you know, the four main causes of shame now add on top of that, socialization, like all of the bullshit, right? It's like, if you are like, just assume you're like a perfectionist, which a lot of women are, now you have failed. Now you think like, Oh, my God, I failed, you know, like, that feels like shit. And now think about cultural or familial expectations. What happens in your culture and your family? Are you religious Did you grow up in a house? Where till death do us part no matter? What, did you grow up in a house where one of the family members stayed married, even though it was toxic to their brains to their bodies to their minds? Right? Yeah. Okay. Yeah. So like, if you think about all of these things, did you have childhood trauma like me when you were growing up around divorce? And so now now, do you have kids? What do you think is going to happen to your kids with all this shit? All the stories that you have in your head? What about finances, we know with women, very few of them ever keep their finances because there's a cultural socialization, the story that women aren't financially independent, that they're responsible, all of these other things. So when you layer all of that, on top of the complexity of divorce already, there is so much, there's so much, I almost want to just say trash like there's so much story wrapped up around it all the stigma.

42:24

Yeah, that is so good. I love that you said that. Because it's not just our own shame that we're kind of navigating. But it's also just what we think, how we think life is supposed to be based on what culture told us. I think about that all the time. I'm like, I did what I was supposed to do. I went to college, I found the man I married the man, and then got divorced. And then I believed in what society told me so much that I tried it again. And then I failed, quote, unquote, failed at that, too. And that is really what has kind of made me question so many things like, and what does Marissa want not what cultures told me? Now what society has said like what feels good to me. And that has been so freeing, but I see a lot of thought errors or people with heavy, heavy beliefs about marriage and death to his part on tick tock because of what society or religion or other things have told us. So that's just so interesting to me. I wouldn't

Vanessa 43:24

even make an argument Mercer that your courage is like 10 times stronger because you pushed against those boundaries, the societal boundaries. You tried what society said, Guess what, it didn't work, because it doesn't work for a lot of people. And you were like, fuck, let me try it again. You try it again, thinking that something's wrong with you. And you're like, it just this one didn't work. And so you

pushing up against those boundaries and fucking owning your truth. Like that is courage. That's courage.

43:50

You're making me feel like such a queen? I'm like my ancestors.

Vanessa 43:52

Well, you are.

43:55

I appreciate that. How so you've kind of talked about how how to process feelings and why people should process versus like resisting. But what are some practical tips that you can give someone today to help them through the shame and guilt of divorce?

Vanessa 44:12

Yeah, that's a really good question. So I'll say number one really practices those, again, a B, C, D is a feeling or feeling so awareness, breathing, calling it out, if you know what it is, if you know what the feeling is indeed describing if you're not sure, take your time and sit with that. And I promise it takes like two minutes to do that experience and just do that for yourself. It's really healing.

The other is self-compassion. I think the big and I'm going to move away from this conversation of self-care which happens I think a lot on social media right now towards real self-compassion. Real Self Compassion is treating yourself like your best friend, like really loving yourself, holding yourself high, and talking to yourself like you are your best friend. And the reason why that matter is you know what you practice will always grow stronger. If you wake up every morning with so much shame and guilt about your divorce, what you're going to do is you're going to strengthen those neural pathways in your brain that are wired toward shame and guilt. And you're going to make that stronger, it's going to be easier for you to feel shame, to feel it to hide, to feel like you're not worthy to feel like you're not good enough to be in another relationship, another marriage. And what I will say is, fuck that, like that is just some bullshit. That's not true. And so I'll give you a super simple and really, really effective self-compassion practice. For those of you that might be feeling shame.

Every day when you wake up. You don't wake up alone, you wake up alongside your inner critic, and your inner critic is some bullshit, let me tell you, and they will never sleep in, they will always be there with you all of the time. Yeah. What you want to do when you wake up is literally start the day with kindness towards yourself. Start the day like you had a sleepover with your best friend and you guys snuggled in bed, you know, and you're waking up in the morning with your best friend. And what would that person say to you, they would probably say good morning. Good morning. That's so sweet. And so what I would do, and this is something I practice a lot for myself just as a general self-compassion practice, but it's just so beautiful is open your eyes in the morning. And before you get out of bed, put

your right hand over your heart, just that that experience of putting your hand over your heart that releases oxytocin, which is one of our feel-good hormones in our body. Release that oxytocin. And then you say to yourself, good morning, Vanessa. They love you.

46:26

Ah, I love it. I already feel like, that's so good. That actually too reminds me of like, when you say treat yourself like your best friend. I and my girlfriends have this thing that we do, which is so corny, but I love it if say my roommate comes in. And she's like, God, I look so stupid today, right? Or I feel so gross and will literally look at them or be like, Don't talk about my friend like that. And then then then we'll meet up like, Oh, dang, I didn't even realize how mean I was being to myself. And it's just such a cool way to like, call it out immediately. Because sometimes you don't see it like they're automatic. But someone else is like, why are you talking about my friend like that? You're like, oh,

Vanessa 47:05

oh, hell yeah. interrupt that. Yes. It's so funny. You just reminded me I had these like, girlfriends in high school, there were six of us. And we used to do something called compliment corner. When somebody had like a shitty day or during a sleepover, we'd be like, go to the compliment corner. Get around her. We were just like, you look so beautiful. You know, we just like to tell her all the things that are amazing about her.

47:26

Yeah, that's a compliment corner. I'm gonna try that one day and be like, You know what? We're done. Go. No one's it's maybe in a corner where you're going into the corner. We're doing this. That is so funny. Before we move on to the closing questions. Did you have any other tips that you wanted to give? Or?

Vanessa 47:44

Yeah, I really think um, so that one self-compassion practice who talked about the ABCD the self-compassion practice in the morning of just putting your hand over your heart. If you're not at a place where you can talk to yourself? Yeah, just start by putting your hand over your heart. If you can, I would recommend saying good morning. State your name. Good morning, Vanessa. And then really taking it a step further. Good morning, Vanessa, I love you. And then the last thing I would say is, every time shame is trying to show up, I would just say this aloud to myself, or just acknowledge that this is just human. This is just a human experience. Of course, I'm going to feel shame. Every time you're able to call that out. You can even say I noticed that I'm feeling shame. Because it's not what comes out the other way. I'm ashamed. I'm ashamed. I'm ashamed. But I noticed that I'm feeling shame. It's just a feeling. It's not part of my identity. It's just my feeling my thinking brain offering me that.

48:36

That is so good. Like I'm honestly thinking about like, I need to do this every single morning. Like stop hitting the snooze button and just be like Good morning. I love you. Yes, I'm so good. Like, look like this is so genuine.

Vanessa 48:51

So beautiful.

48:52

Oh my god, I love that. So what is the one thing you want people to take away from this episode?

Vanessa 49:03

Okay, here's I'll say three quick things, which if you listening right now, you are not broken. Divorce does not define you. And you are lovable. And you can love again if you want. If you want to love someone else, again, you can do it again. Because there's nothing wrong with you.

49:22

That is so good. Especially because I think so many of us struggle. I still struggle with trying to love again because I'm like I was the common denominator. Like, how am I supposed to love like all of the things are is it's fine it'll be good for five years and then it will be over and so just having that reminder is like wow, I can love and it doesn't mean anything about me if it doesn't work out or if it does. It's just I get to

Vanessa 49:55

choose to love. Yes, so true.

49:59

That's good. Edie, do you have any books, podcasts or any other media recommendations for those who may be learning? Just about shame, guilt, compassion, or any of that? Discuss really?

Vanessa 50:11

Yeah. Well, you know, I have two podcast episodes, specifically around this topic, and one on self-compassion. So I host a podcast called The empowered brain, on Empowered Brain podcast number 25. It walks you through how to feel your feelings. So I walk you through this, I talk about science, because I'm a big science nerd, and I love science. And then podcast 28, I talk all about self-compassion. And I give you a ton of super simple, highly effective tools that you can use. Specifically around self-compassion. I also recommend the work of Dr. Kristin Neff. She's really I think, the forefront researcher of all self-compassion, you spell her last name and E F S. common spelling of Kristin, and her website, I think, is actually I don't know what a website is. I think it's self-compassion or something like that. But if you just Google her name, you'll see all the self-compassion stuff she's created. It's really beautiful.

51:09

Wow, that's amazing. And then if people want to find you, because all the things you've said are gold, where can they find you?

Vanessa 51:17

Yeah, you can find me on my podcast, the Empower Brain anywhere you listen to podcasts. I have. I'm on Instagram @vanessacalderonmd. anywhere else? Yeah, you can find my website vanessacalderonmd.com.

51:38

I love that. And then the last question which I have to ask everyone because you know, the podcast is called Son Happens and it's a play on Shit Happens. But that good things happen to and you can create your own sunshine if you're willing to do the work. So when you can't find the sunshine? How do you create it?

Vanessa 51:56

You know, it's funny, you had sent me this question ahead of time. And on that day, when to go pick up my kids from school. And that I just wasn't really thinking about that question. But I looked up in the sky. And I was like, isn't it so fascinating that the sun is always there, the sun is always there. So when you can't find your sunshine, what do you do? You can look up, you can remember the sun's always there. And you know, if you were to look at it the other way, it's like you can always remember you can come back to Joy, or you can come back to peace. And I don't actually really believe in always coming back to Joy. I am also recovering like a general optimist. You know, like positive regard. Yeah. And I would just say like, you can always come back to peace, which I think is where the money is. And I just breathe. So how can I find my sunshine? I do it by breathing and tapping into the fact that I already have it inside me.

52:45

Oh my god, that's so good. The sun is always there. Right? It's like no matter how you define it, even when you don't feel it, it's still inside you. Yeah, just kind of like tune-in. You're just there shining. That's so good. I love everything that you have to say and everything that you're teaching. And I'm so excited. I think the listeners are going to just get so much chef's kiss value out of it so much for being a part of this.

Vanessa 53:15

Oh, you're welcome. This was so much fun. I'm so glad I got to chat with you today. Thank you and I hope all your listeners really enjoyed this

Hey, sweet friends, if you love what you're learning, then you've got to join us on the journey. It's my all-inclusive program and the best community out there giving you the education you never knew you needed to help you create a life you love. Join us at vanessacalderonmd.com/join. I'll see you there.