

Ep_43_A_Neurodivergent_Conversation_with_Shawna_Meek

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neurodivergent couples, autism spectrum, communication challenges, sensory needs, executive functioning, emotional connection, recovery journey, diagnostic process, masking behavior, camouflaging, neuroplasticity, processing differences, emotional regulation, relationship dynamics, therapeutic approaches

SPEAKERS

Lyschel



00:03

Hi. I'm Pam Blizzard from recovered peace,



Lyschel 00:06

and I'm Michelle Burke, it with hope redefine,



00:08

and I'm Bonnie burns of strong wives, we're so glad you're joining us.



Lyschel 00:17

Well, welcome to another episode of hope for wives. Today we get to have my special friend back, Miss Shawna meek, you may have heard her and I have a conversation earlier this year in one of our podcasts, and I wanted to bring you back in Shauna to talk about something that I know is really near and dear to your heart and your story, and I think it's going to be a real gift for a lot of our a lot of our audience to be able to hear what you've been learning in your own recovery journey and healing in order for them to gain more wisdom and hope in their own story. So today, we're going to talk about neurodivergent couples and the dynamic that comes with being a neuro diverse couple. So Shawna, why don't you just kind of frame this up for us, and then I know that I'm going to have a ton of questions. Neuro



01:14

diversity is really a word that's used to explain the unique way that people's brains work. So while everyone's brain like develops, their similarities, no two brains function alike. So truly, every brain is diverse, if we really break down the definition, but being a neuro diverse individual often means that you have certain criteria that might have been met or you are leaning towards, that creates a different way of learning, a different way of communicating and a different way of perceiving your environment. So those are kind of, you know, the biggest areas. There's obviously lots of different struggles and strengths that come with neuro divergence. So you might hear me say things like neuro diverse or neuro typical. Again, I believe it's all on a spectrum. Everybody has divergence. But for the purposes of today, I'm going to use that language the thing, the characteristics or diagnoses that often come with neuro divergence are most commonly things like autism or being, you know, on the Asperger profile. So having Asperger traits, even though that's not technically a diagnosable criteria anymore. It's not in the DSM five. Autism is a very wide spectrum, so we'll hear the word spectrum ADHD, which also had formerly been called add that's a neuro divergence of the brain. We might hear things like dyslexia or Tourette's, and truly, that term can go pretty broad. There can be, you know, things that are developmentally there or have been there our whole life, like what

I've mentioned. And then there's others, like PTSD. Can even be considered a, you know, a neuro divergence of sorts, too. So the word is pretty broad, yeah. And for today, I'm really, you know, the area of expertise that I'm getting training in and consultation around is really the autism lens of neuro diversity. So I just want to really be specific there that I'm not talking about all neuro divergence, but I am talking about neuro diversity with autism or Asperger traits. So just to clarify, thanks,

 Lyschel 03:47


that's good. I'm glad that you did offer us a definition, because I think it helps us frame up exactly what we're talking about today. And just for our audience to know, this is going to be more of an interview for sure that it will be more than a conversation like some of our other episodes, because I am just super interested in learning about this. And Shauna, I know that you just talked about starting to get a specialty in this area, so we wanted to bring this to our listeners as a resource. So thank you for being here. Just as a quick recap of your qualifications, because if they didn't hear the first podcast with you earlier this year, why don't you tell them your qualifications? Yeah,

 04:31

I'm a certified professional coach, and I'm also very, very entrenched in apps that's organization is a partner coach for betrayed partners. That is most of my work in my clinical practice here in Arizona, living stones and also being a contract coach and being part of Hope redefined, which is the best of both worlds? I say it all the time. I get the best of both worlds. I'm also on the board of directors. With you. And yay, we get to do lots of fun stuff for apps at there, I'm a just a consultation supervisor as of this year, and also I can share a little bit more later, but I am writing our story on uncovering neurodiversity, and so I guess soon I'm told I will be an author, which feels really crazy. So anyhow, that's a little bit about

 05:24


me. Love it.

 Lyschel 05:26

I'm so excited for that book, and I know that it's going to be a gift for so many but I also know that we always have a heart where, like, if it'll make a difference for one, we'll do it. But no doubt that that is going to have a that's going to have a that's going to have an impact for many so thank you for that

 05:45

labor of love. Yeah,

 Lyschel 05:47

so well, why don't we hop in then to our conversation. Thank you for defining the neuro diversity. But what are some common concerns and neuro diverse couples dynamics?

 05:59

I think some of the most common things are when one or both partners don't understand each other and feel like they're speaking different languages. You'll hear this like, are you know, you'll get this very confused. Look like very different languages being spoken. It can feel sometimes like walking on eggshells for one or both partners not feeling safe to say what they want, because they think the other will be angry because they don't see it the same. It can feel like such a different lens. At times, it can feel like the other is stubborn and wants it their way. And obviously we know that we have pride and we know that we have other things in our character, but when it comes to just the rigidity of thought and perspective, that's what I mean by stubborn. Sometimes it can feel like, you know, one or

both are being criticized or asked to change who they are, and I mean in the way that they see the world, not things that maybe we do need to work towards in our recovery and in our growth. Can have vastly different accounts of what happened in an event or conversation. I didn't say that or and that can be a few different things, but sometimes this happens more frequently, and then can feel unequal in partnership. So sometimes the roles can feel like one is following another. Maybe there's over functioning, under functioning. You might hear like, you know, one person just really making a lot of the decisions and the other person kind of being confused. So that can happen. So those are kind of some of the main things for both partners. And then I'm going to share just specifically some things for maybe the autistic or the Asperger traits, neuro diverse partner, they can often feel like others don't understand them. And it's not just in their partnership, but it can be in the world. It can be from friendships from long ago. It doesn't feel like they can share their perspective. Does the world even want to know? I feel odd. It can feel like they've been self absorbed in passions and interests, because that part of the brain really does want to it does have a hyper focus. Maybe they can desire a lot of alone time and have a higher level of avoidance. And again, there's a lot of things that can cross over. So I just want to be cautious that it's not just one thing. They can have unexpected meltdowns and shutdowns and they're like, where, where did that come from? They can show care and concern sporadically, but not consistently. So you'll hear things like empathy. Well, Autistics can't be empathetic. That's actually not true. They can, they can show empathy. It might be more of like a cognitive empathy at times, but it's not consistent all the time. So that's for the you know, more of the neuro diverse partner, and then the neurotypical or the non autistic partner may feel alone and rejected a lot. They may feel like projects and processes are really more important to the other person than the relationship. They may need more interaction and connection, but aren't getting that. They may experience pushback when sharing a concern, because there can be a really intrinsic defense mechanism that can come up for those with autism. So they, as the non autistic, they may feel like they they're getting a lot of pushback for any little concern they may desire to share emotionally, and it's met with a very literal response. So they may be sharing from their heart, and they get ahead response. I hear that one a lot, and the last one, they want to have more vulnerable conversation, but it's met with more surface feedback. So the depth is hard to go to. At times, notes to neuro divorce of. Um, couples are going to be the same, but you might hear some similarities. So those are some concerns, common concerns and dynamic.



10:07

Wow. That is complicated.



Lyschel 10:12

There that comes to me because I'm like, oh goodness. Like, some of that is very addiction related behaviors, avoidance, and the words that we use a lot to describe those different pieces of it, and then you're talking about this neurodiverse which would indicate that this is the way the person was made, versus a choice that they're making.



10:36

Right? Am I right? There's a good there's a good bit of crossover. I'm so glad you brought that up early. Okay, here's a good way to cross over with addiction traits and neurodivergent traits. And so this is why it's really important. And here's what my husband would say, neuro divergence is not an excuse. It's an insight to help in our recovery. It's not, oh, I'm neuro diverse. I can't do these things, and I love that early. I mean, I can share a little bit more. But when he got his diagnosis, which was very late in life and very late in our recovery journey, and through lots and lots and lots of therapy, therapies that would not stick or stay. It was like, what else could this be? And then these characteristics were so familiar in the addiction side and in that self protective place, but he had done a lot of work around that. So really, you know, it's kind of it can be confusing, because they can be layered, and in our story, they certainly were. They certainly were. So, wow, I just wanted to put that out there, because they really can feel like, oh, some of the listener might be feeling what you're feeling right now. Just really taking a breath and going, oh, gosh, have we been seeing this all wrong? It's not we're going to throw everything else out that we know, but do we have a new lens that might be a consideration to look at?



Lyschel 12:10

So okay, so you talk about the concerns, or you've shared some of the common concerns, and nurse neurodiverse couples the dynamic there, what are some of the challenges that a neurodiverse couple would face, I know you've kind of touched on that a little bit, but anything extra you'd put in there, like, Mm, hmm.



12:26

I know I just mentioned that my husband was diagnosed late, so 2009 so 14 years ago was when I had my discovery and my, you know, DIY disclosure at the time, and my husband chose recovery pretty quickly, but he was ready to be done with his love addiction, sex addiction and compulsive sexual behavior at that moment, I say that in his mind, he was like, I've been running from this. I've been running from this. So that was kind of a moment, and that's not everybody's always from that perspective, because, let me say, it was a tumultuous next many years, decade plus. Because there was still lying, there was still, you know, lack of empathy, there was still a ton of defensiveness. There was lots of avoidance, there was lots of narcissistic activity, all of that was still there, which I said, that was the torture, even when there was quote, sobriety, there was not recovery. So we spent years doing intensives and individual work and couples work and lots of different couples, modalities of therapy and things like that. And in the book, I'll talk obviously more about the depth of all of this, because it's 25 plus years and hard to sum up, which is why God has called me to that. But I also say that we were almost we were at 13 and a half years and my husband had a very extreme meltdown last fall. And when he had that meltdown, God revealed to us for the very first time that there could be something like this, like autism, that was in the picture, and he had a neuropsychological evaluation. He is a nurse by trade, and he's like, I want to do this clinically. It doesn't mean we always have to have a neuropsychological evaluation. But for him, that was his choice, and he was diagnosed at age 50. And so all of that new lens and new perspective is where I'm coming from when I share this and share these little nuggets. So I don't want it to feel like I'm right in the middle of the betrayal story, because I know a lot of listeners are in the thick of that too. And I just want to give a lot of understanding of how many things I thought it was. Is it this? Is it? You know. Yes, there was spiritual warfare and battle happening for him for many years, and it was this too. So I just lots and lots of layers. But we thought it was narcissistic personality disorder. We thought it was OCD. We thought it was, I mean, intimacy, anorexia and all of those still could be like little parts, because nothing is super clear cut and in a box. So I just, I guess I get passionate about that as I, as I start to answer your I'm glad



Lyschel 15:31

you say that. Yeah, no, I I'm glad you say that, because that, that is probably part of where I think any partner's brain is going to go to is go, Well, how do I know? How do I know what I'm dealing with here? And, you know, how do I test for this? What do we do with that? Like, how do we figure out, Is this a because, you know, I think the benefit of what you're talking about is like, Hey, you guys did a long journey of not knowing. Yes, I know that. Even in my own story, I did a long journey of not knowing what betrayal trauma was, and then knowing and feeling like someone had just handed me an oxygen mask, and suddenly I was able to to respond and and heal differently. So can I ask that question like you talked a little bit about your husband's decision to have testing done. What? What is that look like? How would a woman even go or how would a couple even go about doing that?



16:27

In our research, we learned that there's a lot of funding and clinical research in children on the spectrum. They're calling this, you know, my husband's 51 now, but they're calling this the lost generation in some of this neuro divergence, even ADHD and people later in life getting these diagnoses, which is very, also very common with addiction too, because these are all processing things, you know betray you know sex addiction is a processing disorder, and there's processing struggles in diversity. So anyways, I say that because it's a little bit hard to find. I could even share a resource list that we've put together. Yeah, we'd love to put that you guys could put in the show notes. Okay, yeah, totally would be great. I'm happy to share that because someone that understands, if this feels like it's something that might be part of your your journey, and he's choosing recovery, and you've you know he's in recovery and has sobriety, that is the time to really, I think, look at it. I'm not saying we can't look at it if there's not recovery yet. It's not like a hard and fast rule, but we want to make sure we've got the full picture and someone you know that really can specialize in in looking at it from a clinical perspective. So there's a lot of assessments through a neuro clinical psychologist. So that's who we went to. We are in the state of Arizona, and we have a great organization called Sark, which is like a Southwest autism research community, something like that. I don't know the exact name, but they helped us find a neuro clinical psychologist that actually was covered under our shirt insurance. There's some self assessments that I'll put in the resource list as well. There's one that's maybe \$8 and the rest are free to just if he's willing and he's listening to this even, or maybe his wife has given him this episode and said, Will you listen to this? Does this sound like something you'd be willing to consider. My husband was ready to say, what else is blocking this? Why can't I understand this? I want to be there for you. I want I want to recover with you. But I have some blind spots and some things that I that just weren't sticking in our couples, work in some

diagnosing and things tentatively that we couldn't really say that's it, until this for us. So that's why, and that's how you can find it is look at your state, maybe research, you know, autism clinics or that sort of thing. But I'll, I'll share a few in the show notes too, to find a neuro clinical psychologist, because they seem to be the best versed in the most current assessments with the DSM five, and it's a pretty extensive it was an exhausting four hours for my husband to go and do that evaluation. But it wasn't just on paper. It was me providing some answers to, you know, some survey questions or assessment questions, and then it was also some some interview with him. How is he communicating? What are some things? Is he monologuing with the, you know, the psychologist, or is he dialoguing some things that she pointed. Out that I would have never known until now. Now I know, but I didn't know. Oh, that's what that meant. Oh, that's why he did that. Oh, that wasn't because he was being rude. That's because his brain is so literal.

 Lyschel 20:13

So okay, Shauna, so I kind of got you off on a rabbit trail about how to test. Tell me, let's go back to the challenges for Neuro diverse couples. What? What? What would you share with our audience? In there,

 20:26

kind of narrowing it down to just a few categories, because it can be very unique to each individual and to each couple. So again, I just want to really preface that, but some of the big ones are communication styles are different. So often things like mirroring. So mirroring may be tough, and when I say mirroring, when I see someone's face, it's like a motor empathy skill. And if I were to look at you, Michelle and see that you are sad, oh, I might have an expression of sad. That's a mirroring part of the brain that is limited with someone on the spectrum. So that's one thing. Why aren't you making an expression? I'm crying. So that part right there can be, you know, the mirroring can be tough. The micro expressions can be missed. So subtle facial expressions. Maybe it's upset differently, maybe it's really happy, and then he didn't see that expression of, like, a little bit of joy, and you're like, inside going, oh, I want to jump up and down. And the one that has the divergence didn't notice that micro expression, and they've tried to notice the micro expression. That's something that we noticed. My husband is doing some therapy right now, and he's learning micro expressions from children cards, like expression cards. He's not in the adult set of cards yet, on facial expressions, so he and his therapist kind of giggle and like they have fun with it, because he's still on the child set of cards. He's still learning what kids are learning in OT and in speech therapy and in other things about micro expressions at a very young level, because his brain didn't fully develop in that emotional versus literal I mentioned that a little bit so tender words versus robotic words. We might, you know, share something in a very tender place, and we might get met with what feels like robotic words. I would say things like, are you a robot? Like, do you? Do you hear my heart here? So it really is a limitation, and I, you know, now we can be a lot lighter about that, but it feels robotic. And the last thing on communication is its feelings of being misunderstood or unknown. So it's like planes passing one another. The communication is like constant, like, has it been like that? The whole relationship, that's what I looked back and went from day one, our planes were passing, so before even all the betrayal trauma and before the acting out really happened, there was a misunderstanding and a mis known of one another. So communication is one. Sensory needs are different, so touch can be very different one, and this can be preference too. But a lot of people who are on the spectrum or neuro diverse may, you know, they may maybe sensory avoidant. So I never knew why my husband didn't want me to touch his face. I thought, isn't that a tender thing? He would kind of like pull away. For him, he's sensory avoidant. We know that now. And others may want a deep they may be sensory seeking and want a really deep pressure of hugs, right? And this can be different in we don't have to be divergent or on the spectrum to have some of these details, but when it's there a little bit more extreme or sound loud sounds, my husband has these new little loop earplugs now that when there's family gatherings, he puts them in if it's too much, too fast, airports, amusement Parks, loud places that can be characterized in other neuro divergence. ADHD can have a really hard time with noise at times, because the brain is moving very, very fast. At least for my husband, it's moving really fast. So he gets noise overload. He gets smell overload, things that I loved in the house. He would say, why is that candle on? Well, in his dysregulation, not knowing he was diverse and why he didn't like that candle, he would criticize me about the candle. Now we know, oh, smell overloads him. It overloads his brain. So now we have different tools, and then the executive functioning and cognitive differences. Is, again, this can happen in addition to where the processing speeds in neurodivergent couples is not in sync. So sometimes the neurodiverse person brings in a lot of information and is internally processing really, really fast, and they have a hard time verbally expressing it. So we were talking about this because we had heard this term of like someone with ASD Autism Spectrum Disorder on the spectrum is more like a freight train brain. And my husband's like, Yes, this is his description. I'm loaded down with all types of cargo on a track to to a certain destination. Cross Traffic shuts me down, and I'm heading from point A to point B. Don't interrupt me. And that, as a partner, as a wife, I'm going well, my brain, we identified. My brain's a minivan. My brain has many seats to have family and connection, and it has room to carry lots of stuff, and it has various courses. We can go long distance, short distances, and that's the

difference in our processing. That's how, you know, I can talk really fast, but I'm just processing out, whereas he's thinking really, really fast and has a hard time verbalizing it. So, yeah. So those are a couple things. And then yeah. And then one last thing on that is kind of our natural reactions to things. We can have a long histories of like, trying and failing and trying again at the relationship, but our lenses are different. And so that exhausted feeling of like I don't want to change anymore. It feels like too much work. Lot of lost hope can come, and I'm saying that can be part of the challenge when there's neuro diversity, but I just want to extend that hope because we were there going, what else can we try? What else can we try? So that can be a real that's more of a general challenge versus some of the specific ones I shared.

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Lyschel 27:07

So, so helpful and such a great word picture. I mean, there was a part of me that I was slightly being silly in my brain, and I was like, So what she's doing is describing all men, and then she's describing all women, but I know that that is not true. Been around enough difference. But I also think that what I heard you say earlier about it being the missed generation, and that also just leads me back into like i Two of our children are dyslexic, and we have the the tools and the resources and our education system now to look for that, right? They're they're noticing that, and when they got that diagnosis, the therapist was saying, you know, this is this is genetic. This can be genetic. And immediately I'm starting to rack my brain and being like, well, where would it come from? And I'm sure it came from my husband's family. No, I'm kidding. I'm totally kidding, but actually, where I think it came from was my grandfather. But my grandfather grew up in rural Kentucky. He dropped out of school in fifth grade because his parents were tobacco farmers, and he needed to be on the farm, but it didn't matter, because he hated school anyway, so he he was all too happy to get out of there. And I know that when he died, he could only sign his name, he could not read and he could not write. And so there was a part of it for me where I'm thinking about what you said about that missed generation, yeah? Is the advancements that have been made for us to be able to say that and then to go Yeah, like grew up in a generation where it was all men were freight trains and women were minivans, right? And we would stereotype everybody. And then you see how that has impacted us so much as a culture, as all these stereotypes and that, you know, it's like, no, like, I have my one, my son that's dyslexic, is super gifted in music, and that's very different than things that I've seen other men in our families, you know. And so I can see how this can just, I don't know. My point, I think, is just being like, it's connecting on how it can be missed, yeah, and the importance of knowing. Because what I don't hear, and I love, I would love to say, I want to hear you talk about this, like, because I do you have this belief system that the more you know, the better you do? Mm, hmm, right. And so the dynamic in your guys's relationship now is not your husband says, I don't do emotions, remember, I'm neuro diverse. What does that look like now, now that he has this diagnosis like, what the. Right? Like, that's definitely not



30:02

helpful. No, no, and that won't work for me. Let me just say that what I think. And I want to come back to what you said about your grandfather in just a minute. Um, he we all have. There is still neuroplasticity in our brains. We still can grow and learn things like I mentioned with the kitty cards, learning micro expressions, and so I still have needs in the relationship, and he has needs in the relationship. And I will say this is still like we are still learning through this, because there are still things that I'm learning to accept may not be consistent, because as a partner, I was looking for consistency over time in all areas, and not just in sobriety, but I was saying, can he share emotions with me? Can he share his feelings? These are, you know, some people can call them deficits. Sometimes I will use that word because I think we all have some deficits. I think we all have strengths and deficits. So I'm going to use it a little bit not to say there's something wrong, but the way that we look at the deficit of reading. I actually have dyslexia myself and did not get did not self diagnose until my daughter was diagnosed in second grade. So in our family, it is, you know, it is genetic, and that doesn't mean that I can choose not to read. I still or learn new words. Mind, phonemic awareness, dyslexia, it's mild to moderate, but if I have a word that doesn't mean I don't public speak, because I might get stumped on a word, okay? I might get stumped on a word. And that right there, I still will choose to say yes, I will read aloud. I know that limitation, and I've worked through maybe some embarrassment or shame around that to be able to say, Can someone help me with this word I might be in a Bible study, is where it happens most often. Read out loud. I'm like, I think we all can stumble over some words, like, there's a lot of names in there, but it might be a really common word that someone that didn't have dyslexia would go, I know that word phonetically sounded out, and I I have a limitation there, so that doesn't mean that I don't participate in that. And I would say the same goes for here. If my husband is trying non defensively, right? And I'm not saying defenses, we can't have we have defenses sometimes, but not using it as that excuse around well, I just can't feel that emotion. He might need to say something like, I need a few minutes. I can't tap into that emotional place right now, but I'm going to go take some time to do that, and I will reconnect with you. Okay, and please when I say that, I hope listeners don't hear that. This took us a few months. This took us years to figure out what that break looked like. Me

being okay, him actually coming back, because his avoidance is still he still has some intimacy, anorexia and so that is even higher at times too. But it's never going to be the well, I just, I just can't, especially when it's connecting things, maybe he can't have that candle on, and that's okay. He can't have that candle on, and I can adjust to that. Be kind about, can you blow out the candle that's overwhelming me? Yes. Okay. It doesn't overwhelm me. I like all sorts of candles, all sense all the time, but I want to be sensitive to that the same as I want him to be sensitive to my needs for emotional connection. And we've got to find a new language with our hardware that's a little bit



33:55

different. Well, let's



Lyschel 33:57

go into this question about what can be you kind of already speaking to this, but maybe there's more. What can be supportive for a neuro diverse couple?



34:07

How do they get care? Yeah,



34:10

I think really having professionals in your life that understand the autism approaches in differences for those in neuro diverse relationships, so even if you suspect that could be the case, getting some understanding for yourself, there are some great podcasts and things out there. There'll be on that resource list too that you can start listening to and gaining some tools and perspectives, but also not going at it from a neurotypical lens we I mean, I'm Gottman trained level two. Not all Gottman approaches work for Neuro diverse couples. Trust me, we tried them. Not all EFT, Emotionally Focused Therapy or Imago approaches as they are brought to the couple, work for Neuro diverse couples. Bowls, we need different approaches a lot of times, and we've learned that now. But that was a lot of like, okay, he'd go and try it. So, different approaches, different professionals. He'd go and try something and be like, I got it as long as the therapist was in the room. But then comes home, and Where'd it go? Yeah, it couldn't sustain So considering a formal diagnosis, not everybody's a fan of that, but I would definitely say that, because it breaks up the characteristics that are within that so like I said, on my husband's subset of his diagnosis avoidance was high narcissism was high, sensory avoidant, or, you know, that sort of side of avoidance was high too. There were a few other things that really paralleled what I had heard in addiction recovery. And so it was like, oh, okay, these can overlap a little bit. So that's where the subset was really helpful. Take it slow. I know I'm sharing a lot of information, but I just want to remind especially the non autistic partner, please don't flood someone that you think might be autistic with information, podcast books. I just want to remind you to take it slow. If you're hearing this first and saying, This is my husband, or this is, you know, this is my wife, even I have a, you know, betrayed partners. This isn't there is a higher propensity of autism in men than than women, but women get misdiagnosed and missed a lot in society because the characteristics are a little bit different. Don't immerse yourself. I know we're really good at that as partners, to really immerse ourselves in the everything, and to throw everything so and then set a simple goal together, maybe one at a time. The overload is really high. That is really important for me to know how quickly my husband can get overloaded. He is a very high achiever and does really well in work, and can literally, and I'm not lying about this, he can manage two zoom meetings at the same time. I will walk in his office and see two zoom meetings and go, are you kidding? Like I can't do that? No way. When it comes to the emotional side, there's where his intellect is like he can listen. His processing is so fast internally that he can process two zooms, which, to me, feels like, what? How do you do that? I want to set simple goals together. So what's one tool we can have together and be open and showing compassion for new insight for one another. There are tools and resources that are a little bit tweaked sometimes and sometimes they're completely different for neurodiverse couples that can really help.



Lyschel 37:56

Wow, this has been a really good conversation. Shawna, I'm thankful that you were willing to give this time to us and and just the vulnerability of you still in the trenches of this right? And I don't know if it trenches the right word, but you're still walking it out like you're still learning, and I think our mental health arena is still learning, and our brain

people are still learning, and so for sure, there can be further development. But I just really appreciate just bringing this up and letting us kind of just learn from you. And super helpful, Shauna, you had mentioned that you wanted to circle back around something on my grandfather, and I'd love to pull you back in there and see what you have to say. Yeah.



38:45

So really, what I was thinking about there is the the culture that your grandfather probably lived in, even with his dyslexia, and how stupid he may have felt. I mean, I'm not trying to put words share it, but no, absolutely, so many things that shame could have brought up because of that difference, because of that neuro difference for him, that really, we have to do something with that as humans. We have to figure out how we're going to cope in a world that needs us to be a certain way. And so what I was thinking about with regard to those with Asperger traits or on the spectrum or any neurodivergent for that matter, is this high need to camouflage or mask. And my husband's masking score, or camouflaging score, was really high on his assessment, and meaning that he was trying to fit into the world, into this box, even into our coupleship, even into our therapy. That was what he was, quote, supposed to be doing. But he kept hitting these walls, and that created a bit of the shame too. Why am I? So different. Why can't I get this? And so, because that was so high, that was also why I think a lot of this was missed, even in other psychologists that, you know, therapists that were psychologists that understood a little bit about this. Is because he was wearing a bit of a mask around that. And so that part, I think that's where some hope comes in, of like, letting that down and being like, I am a little different, and different isn't bad. Different isn't stupid, different isn't shameful around that. And so let me have some different resources, and so I can de mask some of the way my processing is working. We talk about take your mask off, you know, in recovery. And, you know, we hear that a lot, but I think, take your mask off and admitting what's going on. My friend's daughter had a dyslexia diagnosis and could not accept it. She felt so different in middle school, getting that late in her learning years, and did not want to accept it until she was surrounded with people that were family friends, saying, hey, you've got some great strengths over here. Yeah, you've got some things that are a little bit of a deficit. So what resources can we help you with? I feel that that is really I just wanted to share that and thinking about your grandfather, and thinking about my husband, and when he was like, Oh my gosh, I can take that off. And I'm like, please. That creates intimacy. Please, let me see it. Take that. I welcome the de masking of, you know, that diversity. So, yeah, I just wanted to add that piece. Yeah,



Lyschel 41:47

that's powerful. But I also think about the fear that comes with that unmasking of, you know. And I think one of the things that has always been so important in my own journey was, and I'm still in the process of is settling into my identity in Christ Yes. And one of the things that I recognized in my early 30s was that I had spent the first, whatever, 10 years of my adult life being who I felt like people had said I was Yes, right? And I so I can see exactly what you're saying about like, if, if you know your our husbands, our men, are given a certain description, dialog, way they're supposed to show up. I was doing the same thing. I was supposed to be a high achiever, good grades, kick butt, do all the things, super controlling, you know, always planning everything. And all of a sudden it was like, I started this, just this journey with God, about what is my identity, and I came to a point where I was like, I don't really like being the cruise director, right? I just, I don't want to live a life like that that doesn't bring me joy. But it was something that I felt like was spoken over me, and I really owned that. It was a mask I was putting on being like, this is what's expected of me, and this is how I fit into the world. It's so funny because I said to my daughter this morning, she is just now joining marching band. Sorry, another tangent of mine. She is now joining marching band for the first time, and so she's, you know, at band camp this week. She's gloriously exhausted, but I can see this light on her face that I'm so excited to notice. And this morning, I asked her, I said, so I'm curious, do you fit in or do you belong?



43:34

And she was like,



Lyschel 43:35

I mean, I guess both, right? And I was like, well, there is a difference. And she was like, What do you mean? And I said, Well, fitting in means you will adjust yourself to fit into the space that you're in. And I said, But belonging is you being able to be there just as you are, and you know you belong there? And so she was like, I definitely belong like

and she was able to really validate that for herself. And I just thought that was so sweet. But I think about that is what you're saying is like that camouflaging, and it is the result of fitting in versus belonging.



44:09

I love that you said that I am going to take that with me, because I think that is 100% you know, tied to our identity in Christ, and tied to our authenticity and knowing who we are, and we are not separate from our identity. We are not separate from our neurology, we are not separate from our personality. God has brought it all together for us, and I love that idea that you can instill in her. And hopefully this just ripples, ripples out into waves of others, of these belonging sense, I belong, here I belong. And as I am now, we're always going to be growing and learning, but hopefully we're always growing. And learning, but we belong as we learn, learn and grow.



Lyschel 45:05

I would love to just hear what kind of hope you'd like to share with our audience today.



45:11

I think I'd like to just mostly share that if this feels like it's something that is part of your story or a missing piece. Now I understand the autism logo and graphic with the puzzle pieces so much more. I really, really understand it. Just really lean into the Lord with it. Lean into the timing of conversations. Lean into the pace of it. If it's been there, it's not going anywhere, and it can be insightful, of like maybe something we can try and see if it works, instead of saying, What are your feelings right now, if someone struggles, and that is an area of feeling, put it on a scale, make it a little more literal, if you need to ask someone to be settling down with something, instead of using a lot of words, try and say something maybe like that feels like a five intensity to me, and I need a three, or I need a two right now, so maybe a one to scale, one to five Scale, or something like that, or just adjusting something small and just try it, try something simple, rather than we need a diagnosis, and we, you know that might be true, but maybe just try really small and more simple, maybe not easy. So just to just a consideration and just a little, a little nugget, because I really do, I really do feel the weight of the longevity of trying to find answers in our relationships. And this may open your eyes to something else. It may not be autism, it may not be the spectrum, but maybe this conversation is giving you insight being the husband or the wife, listening to this around something else, and that's really the heart of why I think the Lord has positioned us to, like you said, be in the trenches. I say I'm, we're still walking this out, and we will be, we're still going to be learning, we're still going to be grieving some things. We're putting our story. We're called. It's definitely a calling to put that in the world through the book. Right now, my husband's going to be speaking a little bit in that too, and then being on podcasts and just increasing this awareness. This didn't just come out of the blue. Kids have it. They get a lot of resource. We deserve that as middle age, older age, generations too. So just want to so good, not hope.




Lyschel 47:52

Yeah, and I think the thing, just as you're talking about that these are thoughts that are going through my mind as a betrayed partner is one. I think that's why I wanted to ask the question is like not allowing it to become an excuse, right? I don't have to do the hard things because I have something, a deficiency. The other thing I think I want to just this is not hope. Is probably more caution is for if this is a if this situation is happening where the husband is neuro divergent and wife is also has her own divergences, but you said neurotypical, I think one of the things that I see that can be a slippery slope is then all of a Sudden the pain of her story and her betrayal goes out the window because he needs care, yes, and we see that even just in the very beginnings of betrayal in and of themselves. And I could see how this would add to that of another layer of well, then I don't get to heal because he needs, he needs, he needs, right? And I do think that as women, we have that natural bent in our own companionship, the way that God's designed us to do life with another person. And so I just, I think the hope that I wanted to tie into that whole observation is, is that the Lord is already bringing up



49:18


betrayed women like yourself to be able to walk with other

 Lyschel 49:23

women as they're starting to navigate this, because I can only imagine the amount of grief and just the processing that you've had to do in your own experience, are still actively doing and saying, Hey, was that this, or was that this? And you needing that space to be able to sort that out, and then also come to a place of grief and and loss of other things, whether it's

 49:49

Gosh that would that

 Lyschel 49:52

that season of separation could have been so different had I known that there was this neuro divergence there, or it could have been like you. Wow, we could have gotten a different level of treatment. And that's, that's just part of us healing, right? But so anyway, I just that would probably be, my hope is just like, like, I don't want this to end on a heavy note and understanding that the Lord is already moving Absolutely. He's already doing it and so, and I imagine that, you know, he has picked you for such a time as this, and I suspect that there are others out there who are, you know, starting to connect with this, this piece, too. And I'm just really hopeful that our listeners can seek out people to help them walk this journey out.

 50:37

Absolutely well done. Thank you for saying that. I mean, if I can just say one last thing, saying that about not taking away that process, I've had couples now that I'm working with now that are going is this a part of the story too, and we don't adjust what needs to be healed from the betrayal first, in fact, we will postpone even the conversation for them, or help them postpone even the neuro clinical evaluation with the psychologist, because it can disrupt now, I might bring in other tools or other ways that they can, you know, if it could be a possibility, and he's got some Asperger traits that at least are I kind of identified, but I do want to say it is so important to still have that grieving process together. Have the full therapeutic disclosures. We don't need to derail what the bleeding is right now. That makes sense. Like, yeah, our our information came so much later. But I want to be really clear with those that are hearing this in the front end or in, you know, in a very raw midpoint, in a grueling discovery of something sexually betraying like this is a discovery of sorts, if we get a diagnosis of something, but a limb is hanging off. It's not the intimate deception and necessarily that finding out a divergent, you know, diagnosis is so I just think we're not going into the ER with a limb hanging off and saying, Will you check my blood sugar right now, like we're going in saying my limb is hanging off. Can you please help me here first? Yeah, and then let's check my blood sugar.

 Lyschel 52:28

So yeah,

 52:29

thank you for saying that. I think it's really, really important, as we have this conversation, to be thinking about the order of things and giving everybody space so we don't derail what might be needed first, and let your professionals help you guide that and hear that too. Yeah, is definitely hope in that, and hope for healing, hope for so much more of what the Lord has, no matter, no matter where we are in our journey and whatever layers we have to uncover.

 Lyschel 53:02

So, yeah, yeah. And I think that, just as the closer, I'll say, when you start to understand your partner more, it's in different level of intimacy, yeah. And it's a different level of connection, and that that does bring hope. So



53:20

absolutely, well. Thank you so much.



Lyschel 53:24

Yeah, so let me just listeners. Thank you so much for joining us today. We hope that we've been a bright spot in your journey of healing. If you'd like to leave us a question or comment, please contact us through the contact button on our website



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at [Hope for wives.com](https://www.hopeforwives.com)



Lyschel 53:44

and also just so you know that we are a listener supported podcast. So if you have any interest in financially supporting us, please check out our website. Feel free to make a donation, and all of that will go to the work that happens behind the scenes to make this happen. Shauna, thank you so much for being here, glad to be here today. Bye, guys, bye.