

Ep_60.1_Keys_to_Coupleship_Recovery

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SPEAKERS

Pam B., Bonny



00:02

Music. Hi. I'm Pam Blizzard from recovered peace, and I'm Lachelle Burkett with hope redefined.



Bonny 00:08

And I'm Bonnie burns of strong wives. We're so glad you're joining us. Welcome to another episode of hope for wives. Today. We want you to know that Lachelle had another obligation, so she won't be with us, and that means that Pam and I are here, and we are going to discuss three keys to couple ship recovery. We'll be covering safety and stability, prioritizing the relationship and radical honesty. So Pam, what would you like couples in recovery to know about safety and stability.



Pam B. 00:46

Safety and stability is also the first phase of recovery from trauma, and this is so important because we have to recognize that, according to statistics, 97% of sexually addicted, porn addicted men and women carry developmental childhood trauma. So we are all you know, and then there's betrayal, trauma from the betrayal. So we are all recovering from trauma, and there has to be safety, which could mean a variety of things. First and foremost, of course, safety from further re injury of betrayal, lying, sexual betrayal. So all the acting out has to stop, and to the extent that it's possible, the betrayed wife needs to have boundaries that keep her a safe distance from any other relational injury that might still be happening. You know, deep, deep seated habits of blaming and and minimizing and justifying and invalidating that can still happen early on, so she needs to have real strong boundaries and be aware that that might happen. Stability means emotional stability, the ability to manage your nervous system when

you're having a trigger, maybe when you're having a grief wave, when there does come some conflict in conversations, the ability to ground yourself breathe, get to a place where You can sort of manage the emotional overwhelm that can happen on this journey.

B Bonny 02:47

Yeah, I think what comes up for me when I think of safety and stability is I totally agree with everything you've said, Pam, especially realizing we each have a certain degree of childhood trauma that we come into marriage with. For me, what was so radically important was predictability. That predictable behavior out of my husband, yes, in recovery, but also predictable behavior with people around me, if I'm walking on eggshells, all I'm going to be focusing on is keeping myself safe, possibly getting dysregulated. So safety and stability for me is having a predictable environment. So how can couples move toward building safety and stability?

P Pam B. 03:50

I think each individual has a lot of power to manage their own internal safety. And my go to my habit was to look to my husband for safety and calming, and, you know, to help calm me. And he couldn't be that person after discovery. He was dysregulated. He was traumatized by being found out. And so I had to learn that kind of like Charity begins at home, emotional safety, stability begins at home in my own body, that that is really where my only true, authentic safety starts, is in my own body. And so my husband needed to do that too, and I needed him to do that. I needed to see him doing that. I needed to see him managing his own emotions, because in the past, he would turn to his addiction to manage those big, overwhelming feelings. And I needed to see. Him facing with them in a healthy way and managing himself in a healthy way.

B Bonny 05:10

So if, if Charity begins at home, you know, you say that that's a great analogy, if the safety and stability is first built within us, and yet that's a really foreign concept to some of our listeners. How can she take a practical first step towards learning how to create safety within herself?

P Pam B. 05:32

Well, I hope that she has a betrayal trauma informed therapist or coach, or a betrayal, trauma informed group where they practice these skills, because they really are grounding skills. And it starts with just stopping whatever you're doing, putting your feet on the ground, and starting to slow down and breathe real slow and deep, and pay attention to what's happening in your with your breath and in your body, and bring the focus back to you. And there's some other tools, like the 54321, where you engage all your senses. You look, you see what you can notice with your eyes and what you're hearing and what you're smelling and what you can feel with your fingers and what you're tasting, and really get into your body senses and a lot of it also is, you

know, self talk, that right now I am safe. The thing that hurt me isn't happening right now. In this moment, I am safe. In this moment, I am in control of what I can do and what I can say those kinds of things.

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Bonny 06:55

Yeah, yeah. And so what we're really talking about, if she's not, if she's not finding stability, that's really dysregulation, correct. That's what we're talking about, dysregulation

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Pam B. 07:09

just, I think dysregulation really kind of refers to what's happening in your nervous system, in your body, and that can affect your perception of your own safety, so the ability to manage your own nervous system like, you know, like with what you do with your body and what you do with your breath, that can have a huge impact on how your your brain is operating and how you're perceiving what you're feeling and what you're thinking and perceiving your environment.

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Bonny 07:42

So then if, if her safety and stability is starting within herself, then what does that mean for the couple ship, each

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Pam B. 07:52

person really is responsible for their own safety within their own body that I need to be responsible for my own safety, that if I don't feel safe, I can't look to external sources to change that for me, that I need to activate my own authority and autonomy and agency, to move my feet to a different location where I can practice some of these skills, like maybe I just need to go to another room, maybe I need to go outside on on the porch, that I need to be able to to retreat to a sanctuary of sorts, and to self care. And maybe that is grounding, or maybe that's reading some scripture or reading some recovery material. Maybe it's even connecting with a trusted recovery friend that I am responsible for my safety, then for the relationship. My husband needs to be a safe person. For me, he needs to be well regulated himself. He needs to manage his own nervous system. And if one or both of us can't do that, at least one of us needs to be self aware enough to say, okay, one or both of us isn't well regulated right now, so maybe we need to take a little pause and say, You know what? I I'm feeling dysregulated. I'm feeling a little overwhelmed. I'm going to go away for a few minutes, half an hour, an hour in self care. Sometimes this is referred to as a tap out or pause, right? And I'm just going to go in the other room and I'm going to self care, I'm going to breathe, I'm going to pray, I'm going to read some scripture, and just really regulate what's going on in my body and try to do as good as I can, to start feeling calmer. I'm. And safe and in control of of my my own body, my own whereabouts, yes,

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Bonny 10:09

Bonny 10:00

yes. And what's come up for me? As you were speaking, I've had several clients with with stories of how her the husband, has been so dysregulated, and yet he he feels that his regulation comes from her agreeing with him, or he has to stay in the same room with her to continue the conversation. And yet it's not beneficial. And of course, it's not beneficial when it's the other way around, either, when she's following him around and wanting that connection, wanting to have that agreement, and it's just not going to happen, at least not in those in that spun up state. Yeah. And so if, if you're taking care of yourself and the other partner continues to do that kind of thing, what would you suggest? Pam,

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Pam B. 11:11

I would use my voice and say, Hey, I'm I could be wrong, but I'm interpreting, or the story I tell myself is you're not feeling real calm right now, and so I can't make you feel calm. And so I'm going to suggest we take a break. And I'm starting to feel dysregulated now, and so I'm going to take a break, I will, I'm going to go in the other room, I'm going to pray, I'm going to walk whatever, but then I'm going to come back in about a half an hour or an hour so that we can continue this conversation. And again, that's called a tap out. And you do that because if you just walk away and say, I'm done, I'm not having this conversation. I have to leave. I can't handle this. That's a form of stonewalling, which can feel like the same emotions that you feel when you think you're being rejected or betrayed, right, so, or abandoned and so just being very open and using your voice, that's a boundary that's actually enforcing a boundary of safety. And it's going to happen because, excuse me, it's going to happen because recovery comes at different rates. You're never at the same rate as your partner. Somebody's always going to be a little bit ahead, somebody's going to always be a little bit behind, and it's healthy for the relationship, for one or both of you to say, okay, US interacting right now is probably not the best idea for myself. Don't make that decision for the other person. Don't, don't say, hey, for your benefit, I'm going to walk in the other room now, because it really, if you really are feeling that you're the one that needs to take a break, and we are only responsible for what's happening in our nervous system.

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Bonny 13:14

Yeah. So let's shift then. So we've talked about stability and safety, and let's just assume that that couples is working towards really good safety. So now, what would you tell them about prioritizing the relationship?

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Pam B. 13:35

The relationship comes first. What's good for the relationship is good for me as an individual and in betrayal, one person did not put the relationship first. If the betrayer had put the relationship first, they wouldn't have gone outside of the relationship sexually. They wouldn't have deceived or held back or hidden, and they didn't put the relationship first, so the person who's betrayed needs to see the betrayer putting the relationship first, consistently over time and going forward once, once the betrayer does that over a period of time. Um, then she can, she can come back in and say, Okay, I'm ready to make the relationship first also. And when that happens, that means, and I know Jeff and I, you know, we put our child first. We put our child ahead of the relationship. And we had to change that dynamic in recovery. We really did

have to put the relationship first. That means the relationship comes before kids. It comes before family of origin. So. It comes before hobbies, friends, social life and other things, because anything else outside of the relationship could be a competing priority, and when you put the relationship first, it's healthier for both individuals. It's two people who come together to create this new thing called a dyad. Two people create this new relationship. I used to call it my baby. We came together and created this little baby called called a relationship, and we have to take care of it. We can't abandon it. It needs to be nurtured and fed and and taken care of, right? And when we put the relationship first, then there's more safety, right? That you're continuing to reinforce that the relationship is a safe place to fall. It's my home base, and I have the trust and the safety that I know that my husband will put our relationship first. And so that might look like, I use this example all the time. No, I don't want to go to Florida for Thanksgiving every year. And my husband, from your personal life, is it right? My husband might want to do that, because that's where I say the I politely say the mothership, right? That's where, that's where his family is. And I love his family. I do I love and so I love to see them, but I don't want to use my vacation time all the time to make that big, long trip. Traveling is not as fun as it used to be. But anyway, it's coming to have this difficult conversation about, what are we doing about Thanksgiving? And saying, Hey, I know that we're going to have this conversation, and we may disagree, but I want you to know that our relationship comes first, that I care more about our relationship than where we go for Thanksgiving, that I care more about our relationship than my need to be right that this relationship is more important to me than this thing we're about to talk about. Even though this thing we're about to talk about, it's pretty important. The relationship is even more important. And being very explicit about that, just saying that out loud,

B Bonny 17:19

let's talk about the double bind when there's two good things going on. And what do you choose? You know the double bind. One double bind would be, you're leaving the gym and there's two women with a flat tire on her car, so but, but your partner's waiting at home for you. It's been a long day. You went to the gym right after work and and the partner has dinner ready, whether you're the male or the female. So do you stop and help that couple, those women. I mean, do you stop and help those women when your partners? Yeah, no, you can help them if they don't have a cell phone. Maybe you could make a call real quick while texting your partner at home that, hey, I'm gonna I'm running five minutes late, but I'm going to be there. But you're still choosing, you're still choosing the marriage over helping put on a new tire.

P Pam B. 18:25

Well, and Scripture talks about burden and load.

B Bonny 18:31

That's in Galatians. Yeah.

P Pam B. 18:32

Are you the only person in the world that can help these people with their flat tire? No. Can you wish them well and pray for them? Yeah, absolutely. Do you have to be the person? No, you must choose the right priority. Now, you know, nothing is ever black and white. There's not always and never right. I mean, an option could be giving your your partner, the option or the choice, and calling and saying, Hey, I know dinner's on, you know, on the table. There's some people here that with a flat tire that I might be able to help. What would you like me to do? What would you prefer I do that's putting the relationship first,

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Bonny 19:23

yeah, and then that partner at home needs to tell the truth right. Needs to tell the truth, not what she she or he thinks is the right answer, exactly. Well, as a Christian, of course, you should stop and help put that tire on. But that gets back to that gets back to your burden and load

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Pam B. 19:45

exactly, can? Can they are two, and it's interesting that you use two women. I did, are those two women or those two individuals? Are they capable of getting that tire change themselves? Absolutely. Yeah. Women are capable of changing flat tires or calling a tow truck or calling somebody else to come and help them. We're absolutely capable. You know, we're not talking about somebody laying there bleeding, obviously would right. You have to stop and help somebody and and, you know, old me would have said, Oh, no, you help them. You that's the kind and right thing to do, but inside there would be resentment, building. Dinners getting called. I slaved over this dinner. You know, this reminds me of all those other times that something else came before me? Yeah, so absolutely, be honest. So new Pam would be like, Well, I I really would prefer you come home. I'm sure they'll be fine. You know, ask them, do they do you need to use the cell phone? Let them use the cell phone. If that's the case who doesn't have a cell phone, but maybe their battery is dead or whatever. Yeah? Yeah. Context is, is everything?

B

Bonny 21:03

Yeah, and that's just one small example of prioritizing a relationship. Also, I think you have to look at your whole week's schedule. If there is a lot of work going on and there's a lot of children being carded around, and the two of you have not had time to yourself, that golf outing or that girl's wine and Art Night may not need to happen. That's prioritizing the relationship? Yeah, I go back to in that very, very early days we we actually facilitated a marriage class, Dave and I, this is years and years ago, but one thing that stuck with me is that this, this marriage class promoted you spend your goal is to spend 15 hours a week with each other. Now I realize that's a lot our our limited goal between the two of us became that we would have at least 15 minutes a day. And this is when the kids were really little, 15 minutes a day, just the two of us talking, and then we would have a special date. On Friday, we'd go to lunch together. But you know, if we hadn't had any of that, there were no extracurricular activities on the weekend, because the marriage comes first. Yeah.

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Pam B. 22:25

And I just want to punctuate again before we end talking about this, because people may be in different places in their recovery because they're listening to this, if the betraying partner has not demonstrated this consistently over time, and in my mind, I just throw a number out there, three months minimum, putting the relationship first. The betrayed partner is not required to put the relationship first until she sees him or her being consistent with that, because it's not safe.

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Bonny 23:05

It's not safe, right? No, if he's Yes, I agree. Can continue. Yes, so Okay, um, but you know what, what we mentioned about being honest with your feelings. What do you need when they call? Can I can I help with this tire, or do I need to come home being honest? There leads us to our next key, our third key, which is radical honesty. And we have had a couple of previous episodes around honesty, but we're going to just tackle this again, because it is so very important for recovery. Pam, what's your definition of radical honesty? We

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Pam B. 23:52

tell each other everything. No secrets. I don't find out you got the promotion on social media. I don't find out the test was negative from your mom, that I am the first place you come to with vitally important information about each other, and that we don't hold anything back, because, again, that caused a huge rupture with dishonesty. Now I'm not talking about just disclosure of things that happened in the past, talking about day to day radical honesty. We can't say 100% honesty, because nothing is all or never right. There's no such thing. But if it's important to the relationship, if it's important to my life and your life, there should be nothing held back. This also applies to this is this is something that I see, I've experienced in my own relationship, and I've heard people. Mother couples is that the betrayer tries to protect the betrayed feelings by holding information back. But if you found out, I knew it would hurt your feelings, and maybe it's got nothing to do with him, maybe it's got something to do with somebody else, right? Well, I didn't tell you because I knew you'd be upset. We we need to go ahead and let everybody manage their own feelings. Trust me with the truth. Trust me with it, even though I may get upset. Trust me that I will handle it in a healthy way. I'm learning to handle it in a healthy way. Don't protect me from the truth, whether it's about you or something else, and we so we tell each other everything, and like you said, we we're honest about our feelings and our preferences.

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Bonny 25:55

Yeah, when a person wants to protect the other, that's actually treating the other as if they're disempowered. It's kind of treating them as a child like I know better than you know. And that is not mutuality in a relationship, and that's the goal. That's the goal. I'm not saying that early couples recovery is going to have mutuality. There's going to be a bit of a power differential, as the one who betrayed proves themselves over time. But But mutuality being the goal, you have

to treat each other as equals and as adults. No one gets to decide for the other so radical honesty is very, very important. Another, another facet though, Pam I'd like to talk about is privacy versus secrets versus radical honesty, right,

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Pam B. 26:59

right. Well, and it kind of comes back to the relationship comes first. And again, nothing is in absolutes. I can't say to my husband when he's in the middle of an appendicitis attack, no, don't go to the hospital, because I'm feeling kind of lonely and I want, I want you to stay here with me. We have to use just discernment, right? And we all deserve privacy in different areas, especially recovery. Work. For me to do my recovery, for my husband to do his recovery, he needs to be able to go to an unbiased, compassionate individual and dump whatever is going on in his head. And I don't need to necessarily know every last little thought and cognitive distortion. And you know limiting belief that



27:56

he has,

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Pam B. 28:00

there may be some safety seeking that says, No, I've got to know everything that he's thinking, because his thoughts could lead to actions that could harm me. And that is a cognitive distortion that somebody else's thoughts can directly hurt you. And so, but what's good for the relationship is for my husband to have privacy in his recovery work to a certain extent, right? I I do need to know that he's doing recovery, that he's making progress, that he's showing the fruits, but I don't need to dig into the details of the deep, dark rabbit holes of childhood, things or things that happen or the did not how he was in denial himself, the lies he told himself. I don't I don't need to know all of that stuff that's really personal, even if I did, I'm not qualified. I'm not qualified to even understand what it means. I made the mistake.



29:07

Confession, confession, confession. Time

P

Pam B. 29:10

I made the mistake of looking up peeking into my husband's workbook, and I saw one of the lies he told himself, and I didn't understand the context of what he was writing or why he was writing it, and it hurt me terribly. It was, well, Pam never loved me anyway. That cut, can you imagine that cut me to the quick, and so I confessed to him that I read it. I'm laughing now, of course, but I shouldn't have done it. I mean, he was saying, Oh no, no. Those are the lies I told myself to avoid feeling remorse and guilt. Those are the limiting beliefs I have to uncover what these lies are so I can stop. Myself these lies. I know you loved me. So, you see, I was lucky that he was able to provide that context,

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Bonny 30:08

old pain you, because you did the right thing. You confessed

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Pam B. 30:11

I did and I was

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Bonny 30:13

honest, yes, radically Yeah. I was radically

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Pam B. 30:17

honest, yeah. So I, you know, in a perfect world, he would have had that privacy, and I would not have gone through that stress and trauma of not even really understanding what it was all about. And he needs to have that space to vent all that garbage out, right? It's like, do I need to go picking through his garbage? No, that sticky, smelly garbage, no, and I don't want to. I would not want him to read my journals of all my anger and my name calling and my cognitive distortions and judgments and you know that I've given myself grace. I had a right to, I had a right to vent all that stuff out, but I wouldn't want him to read it without the context of the nature, of where it came from, why I was doing it, and whether or not those things were true for me or not, or are still true for me. They're not still true for me, so I need that privacy too. Yeah,

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Bonny 31:21

yeah. As we think about these three keys, creating safety within outside ourselves, so that we can create safety within the coupleship and regulation, prioritizing the relationship, the relationship always comes first. Well, wait, I use the wrong term, the relationship comes first, always and never, cognitive distortions and then radical honesty. So how would you wrap all of those up in a bow and offer some hope to our listeners?

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Pam B. 32:02

God designed us perfectly. He gave us the gift of neuroplasticity, that even though our brains have been physiologically changed by trauma, that he designed us so that our brains can heal and we can grow and we can learn new skills for better brain care, better self care, better regulatory care. He designed us to be in relationship. He said, It's not good that man be alone. And he said, Thou shalt not lie.

B

Bonny 32:44

If you are in Christ, the new creation has come. You are a new creation. And I say you're a new

If you are in Christ, the new creation has come. You are a new creation. And I say you're a new creation daily. It's not just a one and done. It's a daily thing. And I know for myself, in early recovery. I couldn't and it wasn't because I was depressed, but I could not wait to go to sleep at night, because I knew that in the morning it was like my brain was reset, and I always felt a little bit better in the morning. So I do believe that we are, you know, new, new each morning, but it goes on along with our biology and neuroplasticity. I love that word, and I love, I loved when I learned that concept that our brains heal. That's what neuroplasticity basically means our brains can change and heal recovery from betrayal, trauma. Betrayal, trauma does physically change us, biologically, emotionally, spiritually, but we are made to heal. And that new creation, it happens overnight. You know, I think a lot of things are healed as we sleep. That's why it is so important to get sleep in the early days. So anyways, I just want to, yeah, leave you the hope that you're in your coupleship can be a new creation each day as well.

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Pam B. 34:13

Absolutely. Amen. It must be. It must be. It's not a remodel, it's a tear down and and rebuild from scratch, newer, better, bionic, right? This is \$6 million marriage.

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Bonny 34:30

Absolutely. I can hear that from the we're telling you how old we are people,

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Pam B. 34:41

although people will be Googling, although \$6 million check,

B

Bonny 34:44

what is that? Well, thanks, Pam, this has been a great conversation. And listeners, we thank you as well. If, if we have helped you in any way, shape or form, please share us with. Your groups, with your communities, with other friends who may be very new to this journey. The best, the absolutely best way to tell us we're doing a good job is word of mouth. Word of Mouth promotion, and also, if you would like to contribute to the cost of publication, we have a donation button, both in our show notes and on our website, and our website is hope for F O, R wives.com so that's it for today, and we will be back in a couple weeks. Bye, you.