

# Ep\_79\_Revisiting\_Therapeutic\_Separation

Fri, Dec 20, 2024 12:08PM 36:08

## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

therapeutic separation, anger validation, professional guidance, structured project, mental health, emotional regulation, safe space, children's concerns, boundary enforcement, separation benefits, faith community, biblical example, recovery journey, support network, self-care

## SPEAKERS

Pam B., Bonny, Lyschel

---



Pam B. 00:02

Music. Hi. I'm Pam Blizzard from recovered peace, and I'm



Lyschel 00:06

Michelle Burkett with hope redefined.



Bonny 00:07

And I'm Bonnie burns of strong wives. We're so glad you're joining us. Welcome back to another episode of hope for wives. In episode 12, we first explored the concept of therapeutic or healing separations, and since two years have passed since we published that episode, we wanted to revisit this topic and share a little more around a couple of other questions. So the first question has been coming up a lot in my client sessions, and it's usually after she has kicked him out. She's just reached, she's reached her limit, and she's asked him to go. She doesn't care where just go. But then she comes to the point where she's asking, now, what? How can I transform this out of house, out of house, separation into a therapeutic separation. So ladies, what would you say to her as she's trying to transform the separation into something that's more therapeutic?



Pam B. 01:16

This is my story. I did say, get out. I don't care where you go. You can't stay here. Just leave. And he acquiesced, and I was angry, so I would say, if you're angry, if you did this in anger, give yourself some grace. You have a right to have anger, and you have a right to say, I need space from you. I felt a lot of guilt at first, because after I calmed down a little bit, and I didn't know where the heck I was going, I was adrift. I had a little bit of guilt. So I would say, don't feel

guilty for having anger. There is injustice, and this is one of those cases where anger is the absolute appropriate response. I would encourage you to seek guidance from a professional, whether it's an abscess trained therapist or an ABS coach, most absent coaches have a lot of experience talking about therapeutic separation, helping facilitate them, pointing you towards resources. Don't try to do this alone. At the time that I did it in 2010 this industry, this topic was brand new, and so it was me and Google, and I didn't even know what words to search. I knew that I had a repentant, remorseful husband. I knew I had a family. It wasn't just the relationship I wanted to preserve. There were other things I wanted to preserve. I wanted to preserve the family, my assets, my health care, all kinds of things. And so I sat down with Google and I came across these words therapeutic separation. And that was my doorway into learning more about what it is, what it looked like, what the goals were, and a little bit more information. So do some homework, get a professional once I had some more information under my belt, and I call, I calmed down. I asked for an off site meeting with my husband out of our house, out of a triggering environment. My house was triggering for me. It's triggering for him. We met at a park, and I said, here's what I'd like to propose. I'd like to propose. And I think I said this in episode 12, we took D word off the table. We took the divorce word off the table. Here's what I'm proposing, a structured project, because my husband was a project manager, so that's the language I use. We're going to treat this like a project. There's going to be milestones, there's going to be goals, there's going to be checkpoints. We're going to have some structure around this. And he was very, very relieved. Well,

**B** Bonny 04:23

it makes sense that he would be relieved, because now there's, like you said, structure, there's a path. How many of the wives we work with want to know what the path is? What's the path?

**P** Pam B. 04:34

And taking the D word off the table was important for him, because he was really, really, we both were but he was even more triggered over the thought of abandonment and rejection and divorce.

**B** Bonny 04:48

Yeah, I love that you validated the anger and the reason he's out of the house. There is a reason he's out of the house, and it's because. His behaviors have reached such a point that you aren't safe with him. So I just want to validate that if, if that separation came in the heat of the moment, that's okay, and now you're coming back online, because the separation is working, and your brain is able to reconnect to that higher decision making logic part of the brain that's one of the reasons to have a therapeutic separation, is so your brain can heal and you can think more clearly. So after he's been out a while, and you're now starting to think clearer, it's absolutely okay to shift into this is what we're going to do next. That's okay.

**L** Lyschel 05:49

When I read your the question Bonnie, part of what I heard Pam really speak to was the fact that she was the one who had to figure out what it meant to have a therapeutic separation. She

that she was the one who had to figure out what it meant to have a therapeutic separation. She did the research. She figured out what the parameters were going to look like, and the goal in the path, which I think a lot of us as partners can do or do. Do we we take, we take matters into our own hands, and we're going to figure this out. But the thing I probably want to add to this process now, because Pam, like Pam and many of us, did not have those resources, is the ability to reach out to train professionals to help with formulating this plan. I did not know what I needed in a separation. I just knew that, and like Pam said it was like in the heat of the moment, I need you to not be in the space with me, because you're not safe, but I didn't know what restoration or even repair was going to look like during the separation and the therapeutic experience. So I want to just say that, you know, encouraging our listeners to seek out that type of support, that getting a personal coach is a great place to do this. And I don't, I don't say that to say hey, because we're all coaches like, Come hang out with us. But these are, this is a very practical space to seek out coaching support in trying to figure out what is it that I need in order for me to feel confident in sharing that with my spouse. And I know that a lot of times I've, I've, I've seen this where maybe they're not the spouse is not as compliant or willing as Pam's husband was, and they can be aggressive in the thought, in the throes of the separation, they can become lots of gaslighting and emotional abuse comes out and things like that. So her having that additional support is also going to help her, when she starts to say, what I'm looking for from you is a weekly check in, and then all of a sudden, after she meets with her coach four times, and the coach says, Is he doing the weekly check in? And she's like, No, but, I mean, I think he wants to, but he just hasn't. And right? Because we start to gaslight ourselves back into peace. I want peace, right? And so being able to have that accountability, even with someone that you're working on this process with is going to be a real gift and help you with assessing what is in front of you. That's another piece of the just the separation, I hear a lot of clients and group members say is like, I don't know how to undo the separation. In other words, what has to happen for him to come home? And we don't, oftentimes, in our triggered and trauma brain, we don't have the ability to think through those types of things, and so we need others around us to support us with that. So, you know, we're always encouraging community and support, and I'm going to keep banging that drum, because that's where we see people succeed the most

P

Pam B. 09:03

Absolutely. When you were talking I was thinking about perception versus perspective. And Perception is everything that you can know from your senses, from what you see and what you hear, and when I'm in that place of such high emotions, because this is important stuff, high value, very important, critical, risky stuff that I only really had my own perception. And what I needed was the larger perspective. I needed to be able to zoom out and take a lot of different things into account, and I couldn't do that on my own. As much as I read and watched videos and listened to podcasts, I needed another person to challenge me tease things. Out of me. Ask me good questions to help me see reality more clearly with a full perspective, not just my perception.

B

Bonny 10:11

So are you talking about having some empathy for the betrayer when you say that the full the full perspective,

P

Pam B. 10:24

yes, yes and no empathy for myself. Even I really believe that compassion and empathy has to start with yourself, that you can't have true empathy or compassion for others until you have it for yourself. And I was beating myself up pretty badly, so I needed somebody to help me give myself grace. And I had bias that I had cognitive distortions about past performance is only an indicator of, you know, the only indicator of the future is past performance, which, in this case, when you're asking someone to change, or you're making changes, that's, you know, maybe that works in the stock market. But when it comes to you're looking for change, you don't want to look at just past performance that I needed to learn, to remember, to live in the moment and hold my boundaries, that I had a right to have boundaries, that having compassion for myself was having boundaries, for having compassion for me first, but I also needed somebody to challenge me to not give my husband too much credit for what He was doing. I had that bias. I was so hopeful that he would change and heal. I really did want him to heal from he had a lot of trauma. I wanted him to address it and heal it. And so I saw any little movement of the needle forward as giving him, I kind of gave him probably more credit than it was good for me in that time. So that's why I needed somebody else's perspective, and not to tell me what to think or what to feel, but to ask me really good questions so that I could make those decisions, make better decisions myself. So

B

Bonny 12:16

I guess the gist of this question too, as we wrap up this one, is that, what are the practical things if you want to evolve into a therapeutic separation? And Pam has touched on those. And we will again put some PDFs in the show notes to help you think through and, of course, find a coach to help you walk through it as well. But there are documents you can read and blog posts. So in episode 12, I think Pam, you're the one who who mentioned that a therapeutic separation is really a form of mental health care. So let's talk more about that.

P

Pam B. 12:57

I needed space to have my feelings. We know that this addiction is being allergic to feelings and emotions, and when I wasn't okay, my husband was not okay. That's just the nature of CO regulation, tuning into each other's nervous systems. I needed to be away from his nervous system so I could call my own nervous system. I needed space to be angry. I walked around the house muttering to myself, I was I think I was talking to him, but I walked around the house alone, just talking about how angry I was and just getting it all out. I couldn't do that around him, that I could not do that around him, and he was watching me like a hawk. He was hyper vigilant on me, and I was hyper vigilant on his behavior, every breath, every eye movement, if he was sad, if he was worried, I was watching him. I needed to be focusing on me and and validating my own feelings, my anger, my sadness, my loss, my confusion. I needed to validate all that. I needed to be me, and I couldn't do that with him in the room. I just couldn't I felt like I had to do image management. I felt like I had to soothe his emotions, give him hope. I and I just that's not where I needed me. I needed me to be there for me, and that's how it helped my mental health.

L

Lyschel 14:46

I know that with the separations I've navigated in our relationship, we had small children in the house, and there was parts of it for me where I thought, am I just making this harder on myself because now I'm single parenting? Thing, and having to navigate him and the schedule of getting him around the kids, etc. So there was a lot that came with that decision and that choice to do pursue a therapeutic separation, but the support, like Pam was talking about even my kids regulating with me, right? And so me trying to still quote, create normal in quotes, right with them was nearly impossible, because I felt like a fraud, and I would oftentimes feel really dysregulated, but try to show up well for them. And that didn't always happen. So that space certainly gave me the opportunity to just be fully present with them, even though I knew this other thing, this big elephant, is in the room, I needed to be fully present with my little people in an effort to feel like I was creating some sense of, I don't know what I was creating. I think it was the just the settling of my brain. I wasn't trying to straddle so much, like, what's going on with him? Should I be doing this? And then also, how are my kids doing? So for me, it was definitely mental health. The other thing I'll say is getting the plan written out was one of the greatest gifts I ever gave myself, having the separation plan, having it in writing, made it well one. It made it real. It made it feel important. And not just me being dropped dramatic. It felt important. It also gave me something that if we had any individuals that were going to be part of our support system, I would be able to share that with them to say, look, this is what I asked for. These were the expectations. This was what was shared, etc. And it, I don't know, for me, it just felt like I was approaching it from a very mature,

P

Pam B. 17:03

non dramatic space.

B

Bonny 17:08

I appreciate what you both have said, because you both bring such great thoughts to this conversation. What came back up for me was when I was talking about his absence helps our brains find stability and for our logic to come back online. So that is mental wellness, you know, being able to think clearly. And it's a, it's a mental health, it's, it's caring for your mental health also, because you can feel your feelings like you were saying Pam. So being able to process those in any way you want when there's no witnesses helps you heal. And when we have that internal resource, we can think more clearly to write out that document and to ask for things that might be scary to ask for, there might be pushback, but when you have that resilience internally, you can do those hard things. And of course, we have Christ with us too, but being well rested because he's not there, triggering you being able to think clearly, all those things play into your mental health. So yeah, it's self care. Self Care for your mental health, for sure. Now, another question came up, guys that I think is really important, and I'd like to ask it, what do you tell the kids about the separation?

P

Pam B. 18:38

In our case, my husband sat down our then 15 year old son on the autism spectrum, highly functioning, and at a very high level, said, I have a problem. I have hurt your mother. I am going to take some time away out of the house, but I'm still here for you. I'm just a phone call away. I'll be coming and going. This has nothing to do with you. We still love you. We're still

your parents. This is not your mom's fault. If you have any questions about it, I want you to come to me and ask me, and it's temporary, and it's so that we can both get better. Mom needs some time to heal from the things that I've done, that I did to hurt her. I need some time to figure out why I did those things and how to not do them again. And this is something that married people do from time to time. We are not going to get a divorce. And do you have any questions? And he was relieved. He. Was he was relieved, because he he sensed, he sensed that there were things going on. And he and my husband did say, have an addiction. And so my son and I went out to dinner that night, and he started asking me, what kind of addiction does dad have? Is it drinking? I said, you have to ask him. He said, Is it drugs? I said, you have to ask him. That's his story to share with you. And he smiled, and he said, Is it sex? And I said, That's dad's story to tell. Go, go ask your dad. That's not for me to share. And he smiled, and he knew I wasn't going to go there, so, you know, we just changed the subject. But for my son at that age, that seemed to really help him. It seemed to satisfy him, and he knew we were both there for him, and he wasn't worried. He didn't seem worried or scared, and we just took it from there. Now for other people who have asked me this question, other people that I've coached when they have kids of different age, you know, the number one thing I always say is, don't try to pretend like everything's okay, that it's okay to not be okay with your kids. You don't have to give them all the details, but it's, it's always best to say, yeah, there's some stuff going on and it's hard and but we're reaching out to other people to help us. We're not trying to do it on our own. I think modeling truth, validating everybody's emotions, my emotions, kids emotions, but also modeling. We're not going to try to do this on our own. We're going to go out and get expert help that your kids might remember that if they're ever unfortunately in the same position, and just validating their reality and going to an expert who and hopefully, an app sets trained therapist who is real familiar with kids different developmental ages, what they need at each age, because there's going to be different concerns. We learned that in our apps training each age has different concerns and worries, and how to address those and just validate that, hey, if you're if you're scared, that makes sense, that you're scared, but it's you know, and it's okay. We're here with you. We'll be scared with you. And offer them the help that they might need, professional help. Also encourage that you can ask them to go talk to a professional.

L

Lyschel 22:44

I had different experiences. We there's been several separations, and the kids have varied in ages at each point in time. And so I think that the best support I can extend to a partner is you know your kids best, so you know what they can take. You can know you also know what they need. I had some kids who needed more information, and I also needed to create space for them to come back to me later to ask questions or give them permission to ask dad questions. I had other kids who were fine with the one and done meeting, and they moved on. So I think it's, you know, I just want to empower us as mothers that we know our kids and we know what they need, they need, and it doesn't always look the same for everybody. The one thing I will say, though, is watching my own children is, if you don't tell them the story, they will make it up. And oftentimes what they make up is way off guilter. So I always, I always lean towards that of giving them some sense of understanding, otherwise they are going to make up a story and and those could be really hard stories to undo, because their imagination has pulled them together so but I do think that it's important for them to be communicated with.

P

Pam B. 24:11

And so many people have said back to me, Oh, we've shielded them from everything. They

don't know what's going on? We've done our best, you know what? I'm sorry, no, that doesn't happen. Kids are so intuitive. At an extremely young age, they sense something is going on. Jennifer Schneider has done a lot of work on this, disclosing to children lot of research that as young as two years old, they can sense something going on between the parents, and so as much as you think you have shielded them from what's going on, do not make that assumption. It is better to address it head on, otherwise we're gaslighting them and we're teaching. Teaching them to stuff their feelings, or that they can't trust their own feelings and gut that something is going on. We want to validate their feelings that that something is happening, it's okay. Yeah,

B

Bonny 25:17

yeah, you both shared really important things there about telling the children, I just want to echo the kids know. The kids know. They know something's up. And just like Michelle said, If you don't tell them, they're going to make up their own story. And typically, their own story is it's their fault somehow, and they need to be relieved of that burden. So honor them. Honor that they love you so much that they think they're the problem. You know, honor them and relieve them of that with the highest level of information. You don't have to give them a lot just what's age appropriate. And like Michelle said, you know, your kids just want to affirm. You don't

P

Pam B. 26:01

have to go into the details. You can just say, yeah, you can go on the spectrum of debt, and I are having a disagreement, and we're working through it. And, yeah, I'm having a lot. Mom's having a lot of big feelings. What you're if you see Mom looking sad or, you know, a little bit different, yes, you're seeing something. Just want to validate that. And if they say, Hey, you know what? Give me more detail. You can say, You know what? That's private between dad and I. And when we have more to share with you, we will. But you know, if you have any other questions, let me know. But you don't have to give them all the details. You don't have to,

B

Bonny 26:40

yeah, yeah. And sometimes dads won't step up and do it. That's just kind of reality, if they're not good recovery yet. But the kids need to know something, so it's okay if, if dad won't, if you've requested that dad say something and dad won't,

P

Pam B. 27:01

please, go ahead and do that. Yeah, absolutely, you can do it.

L

Lyschel 27:07

And so the other things I would add to this, when you're thinking about what your example, or Yeah, situation, Bonnie, that you were sharing about, one of the things that was really challenging for me was thinking that I was holding my own emotions. I have no idea how if I

challenging for me was thinking I'm barely holding my own emotions. I have no idea now if I give this information to my kids, I'm going to have to also hold their emotions like I just don't know that I have anything left in me, because navigating the separation and the new discoveries the new traumas was big enough, but what I ended up doing was I asked each of my kids if they could tell me a safe adult in their life. And so I told them that what I'd like to do is communicate with that safe adult what's going on, so that they could also talk to that safe adult anytime they wanted to. And and for for my older kids, that was a big help. I had one child who was like, I could care. She was kind of the one who didn't need any information either, so she was just like, whatever. But several of the younger ones really, I think they appreciated not feeling like we were keeping it a secret, because this was, this is a big deal for them, right? Their their unit is rocked, even if it is that we're not headed towards divorce, even if it is a separation, it is a it is a significant change for them. And so for me, having those other safe adults was also support from me. And it wasn't necessarily that these were adults that were in super close relationship with me. Two of the kids picked teachers at school, and I wouldn't have, you know, I don't have that level of relationship with teachers at school, but for them, they felt like they were known, and that somebody in their everyday world knew what was going on in their home. And so I think it that's another thing, when thinking about that whole self care, but also care for our kids, that could also be something else to consider. Is asking them who safe people are to help you with holding their emotional

P

Pam B. 29:14

their emotions too.

L

Lyschel 29:16

What's the old entity? It takes an army, right? And it does.

B

Bonny 29:22

Yeah, excellent point.

P

Pam B. 29:24

Yeah. I love how that helps you, yeah, through the process too, take some of the weight and the burden off.

B

Bonny 29:34

Well, ladies, as we transition out of this conversation, what hope do you want to leave? Our listeners,

P

Pam B. 29:42


I want to leave the hope that separation is a good healthy thing, that it can absolutely help you



I want to leave the hope that separation is a good healthy thing, that it can absolutely help you heal, gain clarity your partner as well, and it can be really healing and bring another debt. To your relationship and that you don't have to do it alone. Other people have gone on before you gone on before us, and we can rely on those resources and guidelines and structure that you don't have to write this from scratch. I

**L** Lyschel 30:22

don't know if it's hope, but I kind of want to debunk a myth, and I've heard this shared with me and also with multiple clients, is is that separation will automatically lead to divorce. I've had lots of partners say that they've had some of their faith communities say that, that if you separate, it's leading to divorce? There's also been myths or lies around that it's not within God's will that we should never separate from one another unless it's mutually agreed upon. And so if he doesn't agree to the separation, then it's not mutually agreed upon. I have to say that those really are very damaging and detrimental statements that are being handed off to people who are potentially in a really unsafe space, emotionally, sexually. There's just lots of other pieces to this story that are not always apparent on the surface.

 31:20  
So

**L** Lyschel 31:23

you know, as challenging as it can feel sometimes in our roles and positions as coaches and people who walk with women who are hurting to say, don't listen to your faith community, they don't know what they're talking about. That's not really the heart behind it. But there is a part of this, of saying I don't know that that's the full story, right? So jumping to the statement of separation will immediately lead to divorce. Just feels unfair. And so I guess the hope I want to give is you have a spirit that lives inside of you. You do have you do have a guide. You have a teacher, the Lord is committed to be all those things for us that He will lead us. But sometimes we just struggle with trusting ourselves and so that, again, going back into then, if you can't trust yourself, get people around you that you can trust and ask them to support you through this process.

**B** Bonny 32:21

And I actually look something up this morning that went along with what you're saying. There lashell, there is biblical example of separation from a conflict. Now, they weren't married, but Paul and Barnabas had a big enough disagreement that they parted ways. And then there is scripture that implies that down the road, they reconciled. So that is a scriptural, biblical example that separation is not a sin and it doesn't lead to divorce necessarily, necessarily. And like, like Michelle says the heart behind separation really is reconciliation, if at all possible. So, but I just wanted to arm you with the biblical scripture there that always helps. I'm sure there's others in the Old Testament too. I just didn't dig em up, but any last minute thoughts, ladies,

P

Pam B. 33:25

separation is boundary enforcement. It's a boundary and boundaries, yeah, boundaries are designed to boundaries done well. Give everybody a road map on how to access each other safely, how to access the most vulnerable parts of other people. If they're communicated clearly and adhered to, they are connecting. And so a separation is just a type of a boundary.

B

Bonny 34:02

Excellent well, listen for us in the upcoming weeks, because we're going to talk about restoration and how that might happen. But for now, if you find us helpful, a five star rating or a positive review on Apple would be fantastic. We actually have a recent review was left, and I'm going to read it. These words help us to carry on and to persevere. And so we thank each and everyone who's left us a review. And this one says, I am in the early stages of my recovery journey. I've had difficulty finding faith based faith based resources for partner, betrayal, trauma. At times, I feel so alone and isolated with what I'm going through. It's hard for people to understand unless they've been through it. And when I am seeking wisdom, counsel or loving advice, I automatically turn on this podcast. These women are vulnerable, honest and tell. And most importantly, they show the love of Christ. Thank you for making this podcast, because it helps women like me go through an enormous storm.

P

Pam B. 35:10

Wow. Thank you whoever left that that does encourage us to keep going. Yeah. Did you hear she called me smart?

B

Bonny 35:21

Did she say funny too? Let me look she should.

L

Lyschel 35:27

She meant to if she didn't.

B

Bonny 35:29

You know, trauma, brain, we forget stuff. So thank you. Thank you so much for leaving that and yeah, we'll Be back soon. We'll talk to you later. Bye. You