

We Are Designed for Connection by Tami Simon

Tami Simon: You're listening to Insights at the Edge. Today, my guest is Diane Poole Heller. Diane Poole Heller is an established expert in the field of child and adult attachment theory and models trauma resolution and integrative healing techniques. She's developed her own signature training series on adult attachment that she calls DARE, Dynamic Attachment Re-patterning experience. She's the author of a new book called *The Power of Attachment: How to Create Deep and Lasting Intimate Relationships*.

In this conversation with Diane, we talk about different styles of attachment, these unconscious blueprints that are so deep in all of us and have such an incredible impact on the quality of your lives, the quality of how we connect with other people. Diane emphasizes that no matter what kind of patterning we inherited early in our life, we have the opportunity now to move towards greater and greater connection, and Secure Attachment, and she shows us the path. Here's my conversation with Diane Poole Heller.

Welcome, Diane. It's great to have this chance to talk to you about your new book, *The Power of Attachment: How to Create Deep and Lasting Intimate Relationships*. Welcome.

Diane Poole Heller: Thank you. I'm thrilled to be here, Tami.

TS: Interestingly, your new book has a foreword from Peter Levine, and I think many of our Sounds True listeners will recognize Peter as the person who developed Somatic Experiencing, which is an embodied method for healing trauma, and I know that you taught Somatic Experiencing for two decades. To begin our conversation, I'd love to understand how your work grew out of Somatic Experiencing and healing trauma, to then really focus in many ways on what you call Attachment Re-patterning. What's the connection between healing trauma and Attachment Re-patterning?

DPH: Well, Tami, I can't say enough about what Peter Levine has contributed to healing, for all of us, in terms of understanding how the body reacts to trauma, how symptoms form from over-arousal of the nervous system that can't discharge because you just have too much shock or fear or anger trapped in the nervous system in the body. He's definitely a huge mentor for me and I appreciate his work so much, and I did teach it for 25 years. So, a long time we've been together, and we still collaborate, and I just can't say enough good things about Peter Levine.

When I was working with it so deeply, that's a whole story, the journey of diving into deep trauma. We were working a lot with the physiology, which was so helpful: regulating the nervous system, moving from passive to active responses on how to help the body, complete incompletions related to traumatic incidents, or how you would have defended

yourself if you could have defended yourself. There was a very strong physiological focus, and just so much knowledge there. I can take the whole call and just talk about that.

But one of the things that I recognized in my journey through trauma myself, and also with so many clients over 25 years, and still going, so it's been more like 35 years, is that so much of the time there's this untenable reaction when we have trauma. That we disconnect from ourselves, we often feel isolated and disconnected from other people. I think it was [Robert] Jay Lifton who said, "A short definition for trauma would be broken connection." I started to get really interested in how do we heal broken connection, and it became a calling, and I thought, "Well, gosh, you have to go back to the beginning, to the early attachment patterning, to really see what's happening in our original template for relationships."

Then of course, if we have trauma later, that might exacerbate an attachment injury, or we have this patterned way of responding. Maybe there's even support there, but we can't accept it because of early deprivations in childhood. So, I just had that deep interest in studying and helping resolve trauma that was so deeply guided by Peter Levine, and then I really found that the relational piece, really working with what's happening between therapists and client or what's happening between partners, or parents and children? What's happening in the relational field? How can we help people come back into contact with their authentic self, their deep, true self, as well as be capable and interested in deep intimacy?

TS: Did you see, Diane, in your work with people who were suffering from trauma, that their early attachment wounding would surface in the wake of a trauma?

DPH: Very often it does, and you can speak to attachment trauma as well as developmental trauma. They're big topics. But actually when we have had in our early upbringing Secure Attachment, which basically means our holding environment in the family was positive enough, it engendered basic trust, parents were present. They were protective appropriately, right? They were consistent. They were available when needed, but they were also okay with the child moving into their own aloneness, depending on the age, and all of that was working. It actually becomes a way to mitigate against getting PTSD later.

They've even had studies with soldiers returning from similar war experiences, and those that had early attachment that was Secure in their families, they often didn't get PTSD, whereas people that had rougher childhoods or more deficits in their childhood, they often did get PTSD. They had more propensity for that. So, I think you can have early Secure Attachment, but the good news is we can heal our attachment insecurities, our attachment injuries with the right support back towards Secure Attachment. The more that we accomplish that, the more we have a deeper resiliency against sustaining traumatic reactions or symptoms after we've had an overwhelming life event.

There's no escape from overwhelming life events that I can see for anybody. So, it's really helpful to put Secure Attachment healing in the mix when you're trying to help people recover from difficult experiences.

TS: In terms of this original blueprint that we've received, you talk about attachment patterns as an unconscious blueprint that is in our body memory. At what point is that laid down in our body memory? Is that all happening and does it begin even in the womb? Is it the first year or two of life?

DPH: I would suggest that it begins even in the womb. There's not really any way to test that with evidence. But I think how a mother's being held by her husband and maybe other family members, if that's really positive holding, the child's going to feel more secure and safe. I mean, we know that even taste preferences are transmitted from mother to child. So, certainly emotional reactions or emotional situations or difficulties or deprivation would also be possibly transferred to children. So I would say it starts in the womb, in the first couple years of life.

The reason we don't remember it like a story is we don't have an ego structure available when we're that young to record a verbal memory. But we have a pre-verbal memory, that we often call implicit memory, where it is laid down in the body. So very often when we're in a relationship later, or it'll trigger certain automatic responses that we may not even know or question if they're actually serving us in that relationship.

TS: Okay, so I want to make sure that we introduce our listeners to the map of attachment patterning that you offer in your new book, *The Power of Attachment*. You talk about Secure Attachment, and then three different types of Insecure Attachment. I wonder to begin with here if you could give us that overview and describe what might have been happening in a family situation, between a mother, father, and a child that would create each one of these different attachment styles.

DPH: Okay, I'd be happy to go into that. With Secure Attachment, first of all, I agree with John Bowlby who put this idea out quite a few years ago that biologically, all of us are designed for Secure Attachment. We have it. We come in with it when we're born, and we seek it as little infants, and we pull on that from our parents and hopefully our parents can respond. But attachment patterning is very often transmitted generationally. So, how you were parented, very often it just becomes automatic how you might parent your children.

Also, it's not just parenting. I want to say this for everybody, because sometimes it's a medical procedure. Maybe you had birth trauma, or you were premature, and you were separated from your mom or dad, or they had an illness, and that caused a separation. Different things can factor in besides parent-child conditioning, and you only need to get 20 to 30% of it right for Secure Attachment to happen. So it's a very forgiving system. Everybody that's listening, I just wanted to take this burden off your shoulders like, "Oh, I wasn't perfect, or I made this mistake." I mean, you're not required to be perfect for Secure Attachment.

Our attachment system's highly responsive to the relational field we're in at the moment. So you might have one attachment style or reaction to a grandparent or a father or a mother or a sibling, or later on with school teachers or friends or workers, coworkers. So it is a part of us that responds to the current emotional relational environment, and it does... I believe it eventually can shift more towards Secure. We can learn Secure Attachment skills.

But to speak to your point, Secure Attachment would be, like I said a little bit earlier, a positive enough holding environment. That means that people around you are attuned to you. They get a sense of what your needs are. And they say babies have different cries for, "I'm hungry," or, "I want to play," or, "Put me down," or, "Pick me up," or, "I need a diaper change." And really-attuned parents can eventually pick that up, but it's hanging in there long enough with somebody to get to the real need. And often good mothers just naturally do that. They just have a sense about it, or they learn it as

they're having an ongoing relationship with their children. And most important, of course, in all of our life and all of our situations, it's to show up and be present.

So, the more a parent has done their homework and they have the capacity to be truly present with their children, that is a huge part of Secure Attachment. They're naturally protective, but they also don't get in the way as children get older, or they want to do things on their own. Like maybe they want to confront the bully on their own, or the parent is there as backup. So that's a little age-related, how much you take over the protective function, but of course you are there as a protector.

You're consistent, reliable enough. For a Secure Attachment, there is this consistent responsiveness. Shaver and Hazan did a study on the different attachment styles related to responsiveness. So if you think of a Secure Attachment, I would say the keywords are "presence," "attunement." That's a very short definition for Secure Attachment. Then I would say "responsiveness." So that basically just means that you're there. Again, not 100%, but you're there enough of the time that a child feels they can really rely on you.

You as an adult, as a parent, would be regulating the household. You know about how to self-regulate. You'd know how to co-regulate with your kids, but would include things like safe touch. I mean, if you're talking about parent to child, it'd be like holding a baby skin-to-skin, having a loving gaze, what's called an "attachment gaze," so that when they look out into the world, they see love and connection. They connect to you. You can calm or soothe your child as needed. Your communication is predictable. It's not confusing. It's sensitive. You're contactful.

You invest in understanding and aligning with the child's experience or what's going on for them. Then one of the things that's really important, is that we all in our relationships can learn to repair: to initiate, and respond to repair attempts. So, things are going to go off. It's a little bit like saying, "Nobody goes from point A to point B" with parenting, everybody that's listening knows that. There's a lot of ups and downs and going out of attunement and back in. But part of that is us learning how to create relationship resiliency.

So when I fall out of attunement, hopefully, I'm present enough as a parent to recognize that. Or if I'm a partner, I'm present enough to recognize that I'm a little bit off in my relationship, that you can start to look at, "Okay, where'd that go off? Can I repair that misattunement? What can I do to repair that?" If somebody's trying to repair with me, even if they don't do it perfectly, like they send you flowers, and you'd really rather have chocolate, or they don't say it quite right, or they don't do it within the first 24 hours, that you allow yourself to build a receptivity to other people's repair attempts.

When you add repair, that really helps keep us in a Secure Attachment connection. John Gottman did a lot of studies on this when he was doing research on couples, and he said, "Those that would receive and initiate repair attempts well, they had 80% more sustainability of wellbeing in their relationship." So if you don't take anything else away from today, learn how to repair in your relationships, and whoever apologizes first is... That's great. Doesn't matter who it is, but get back to that sense of repair. That really brings us back to Secure Attachment.

Another thing that's fun—being playful, having play time with your partners or your kids or your co-workers or friends. That is really a bonding way to support and enhance

Secure Attachment. So, we all need to play more. I'm putting a little vote in for that for everybody.

TS: All right, playfulness. Okay, so, Secure Attachment. What percentage of the population do you think is alive right now that was raised in a Secure patterning, Secure Attachment patterning? Any guess?

DPH: Yes, there's a lot of different research results on that, and it varies anywhere between 40 and 55%. So, it's apparently going down, unfortunately, as the year goes by, and I wonder... I used to have to ask this question. I was saying, "How much of that is ... " because we're doing so much on social media, not doing as much face-to-face where you can actually touch someone, and hear their voice and their prosody. Their tone of voice is important as a signal for Secure Attachment. We used to, in the '50s, when I was... I was born in 1954. So in the late '50s, early '60s, we usually had a stay-at-home parent.

Now, economically, it's just become necessary, pretty much globally, that both parents are involved in working more and more. So there's not as much contact or time to be with kids, and everybody does their best and, fortunately, we still have some folks that can stay at home. But you're having to really work to make those times you have to get that are high quality, and sometimes you're coming home from work and you're pretty tired. So, kind of, "I gave at the office." It's just important that we understand, even more today, that we understand what attachment requires, and that even if we have more limited time, we can make the most of it, and we can learn to repair.

We can learn how to make sure we're looking and sending what I call a "beam gleam"—I think that term came from Patti Elledge—across the room to my child or my partner or a friend or even my dog. Try it with your animals at home. It works with them too, where you're just sending this loving gaze to somebody. Doesn't cost anything. Takes 10 seconds. There's all these things we can do. That's really what the book is hoping to accomplish, is to give you very easy steps to go back to Secure Attachment.

It doesn't mean it'll happen immediately. It doesn't mean there won't be some pain to process. Because usually, as we discover Secure Attachment antidotes, we're also feeling what we didn't have as kids, or what we didn't have when in a partnership or a relationship that was painful. So, it's a journey. It's part of the human journey. But I think having some guideposts really makes it much easier for all of us to find that, to at least know what we're looking for and how to get there.

TS: Before we move on to the Insecure Attachment, I have a couple questions about this. So an environment only needs to be 20 to 30% attuned to a child, for that child to feel the parents and the environment, the caregivers, 20 to 30%. But I know the-

DPH: That's according to Ed Tronick. I would think that would be also including the ability to repair, to come back into attunement. That's a really important part of keeping Secure Attachment alive along with that 20 to 30%.

TS: Okay, but I want to ask a question about this because I know a lot of people, Diane, who would say, "I have this type of Insecure Attachment." But the parents said they weren't really that bad. They were probably, there, 20 to 30% attuned. I wonder, do

you think it's possible for people who are super sensitive, that perhaps they needed something special that they didn't get in their environment?

DPH: That could be part of it. The other thing is very often these things are not one-time events. They're kind of patterned. So every time you express a need you get shunned, or every time you express a need, it's misattuned. So you don't really get what you were hoping to get from it. So, usually, these are things that recur over and over again that build that original blueprint situation for what relationships will be or what you expect or how you trust or you don't trust.

The other thing is, is that if you've had a childhood that's been marked by severe traumas or ongoing stresses, like a parent with an addiction, or an abusive parent, or something on the more severe side. It's like that burns such a memory into you, that sometimes that really deep dark memory pulls in any other positive memory with it. Sometimes when we heal trauma, we actually start to regain some of our more positive memory moments that were actually there, but were overshadowed by all of the difficulties. So there's a lot that goes into this.

I think this is a tool that, thrown in the mix with a lot of other tools, can be very, very helpful for people to sort that out. Also, the other thing I want to mention before I forget, Tami, is it's how we internalize our original environment. So, as we go through and we start to investigate a little bit more, we may start to broaden our experience of what actually happened when we were younger.

TS: Why would somebody internalize it perhaps in a more negative way, or someone internalize it in a more positive way? I mean, what creates that filter?

DPH: Partly memory gets laid down. Well, there's many types of memory, but what I'm talking about is implicit memory. Memory gets laid down by duration and intensity. So when things are repeated, that creates a longer duration of a particular behavior or a particular response. Then if it's highly intense, we might remember that... Say everything's okay seven days out of the week, but something really tragic happens on Tuesday, we might tend to remember that unfortunate experience with our parents, or in life, more than we remember those other six days.

So, intensity and duration, and it also helps you understand why three different siblings, even twins, might have a very different experience of their childhood even though they're born into the same family.

TS: Let's move on, Diane, and hear about the Insecure Attachment patterns.

DPH: Well, typically, the two Insecure Attachment patterns are called Ambivalent and Avoidant in childhood patterns. As for adults, those same pattern for Avoidant would be called Dismissive, and for Ambivalent would be called Preoccupied. There's a third attachment style that's called Disorganized, that in a way is more severe than Insecure. It's when we have threat mixed in with the attachment system. There's more trauma involved in the Disorganized Attachment, and because it doesn't have a predictable pattern, because so many different things can manifest on that one it's more complicated, so I'll talk about that last.

But let's start with Avoidant. What typically happens from a parental situation for Avoidant... And again, this could be medical procedures, or there's different things that could influence, such as child's temperament, generational patterning. But if

we just focus for right now on what could go wrong in parenting, some of these things could happen. It may not be everything I'm going to describe, but enough of it that a child starts to isolate. They start to keep their sense of self separate from the family or from the mom or the dad. Usually what that means is they're in an environment which is highly neglectful.

When they look to their parent, they're sort of, "Nobody's home." So they're reaching out for connection and nobody responds. So from a responsiveness point of view, it would be consistent non-responsiveness. When their needs come up, they're either met with the wrong thing, or their needs aren't recognized at all. When they look in for eye gaze, they see hatred, or they see vacancy, and that's very traumatizing to a kid. Vacancy is traumatizing to a kid because they need the presence of their parent. They experience a lack of attunement. Often they aren't held much or played with their toys or engaged with playfulness very much, so, here they are reaching out into the world, so their Secure Attachment's working, but they have to adapt to a parent that can't respond very well. Usually that parent hasn't healed from their own relational and attachment injury, so they're bringing it forward into the next generation. But what'll happen then is a kid will isolate, and they'll start to feel like they manage their needs better. They try to self-regulate. But instead of really self-regulating, they're regulating through disconnection and dissociation most of the time.

So it may look like they're totally autonomous, but if you were to check their pulse and all of that, they would show a lot of signs of stress, even though they may not show it facially or in behavior. They're actually experiencing a lot of physiological stress. If you think about it, they're having to put their brakes on an attachment system, that's a very strong system. We are really designed for connection. So to put the brakes on inside ourselves to block or turn off our attachment system, that's very, very stressful. If you grow up more isolated, you don't have the support of a tribe, the support of connection, and connection is one of the main ways we regulate ourselves, one of the main ways we heal.

I mean, often we're injured in isolation, but we heal in connection. So it's a very big injury for Avoidant, and what I really like people to try to understand and have compassion for, if they have a child or a partner or a client that's struggling with this to whatever degree, is that when they start to surface—maybe you're being really kind to them, or they're in treatment, or they're starting to feel their original need to connect—it's very important that you show up in a nourishing, present kind of way. Because it is an excruciating vulnerability for someone with Avoidant to open themselves up to that level of intimacy or that level of desire for connection again.

They need to be met with something as yummy as possible coming back at them to start to learn and experience in their body, their emotional self, their heart, that good connection can happen. That they can let down. They can express their needs. They can join into a more intimate connection. So important for the Avoidant, and it's possible. But usually, in the beginning, like if you're trying to work with someone with that, they'll often resist it or say they don't need it or, "I do things better on my own," or, "I meet my needs better myself." It takes a while to get buy-in for that.

But if you can start to help them understand and interview a little bit about their history, very often you start to see that that was an adaptation, away from attachment, that they had to make to survive. And they start to feel that in themselves, and then they start to take a few more risks. I always try to provide these corrective experiences that help

people come out. So one of them I know I have on YouTube, and it's called "Kind Eyes" Exercise, and it's like imagining that you're looking out into the world, and there's kind, loving eyes looking back at you, and that can be completely imaginary, or maybe you've seen a picture of the Dalai Lama looking beautifully compassionate, or even a picture from your history, one of your family members or your dog or a friend or even a stranger, but that has that "beam gleam" in their eyes that says, "I accept you. I care about you."

Kind of like in the olden days, I think, when you used to surprise people at their homes. You know, drop something off, like a... I don't know... banana nut bread or something. The person would open the door and go, "Oh my gosh. Tami, it's you. Wow, I'm so glad you're here," and you just see them light up when they unexpectedly see you at their door. That would be a beam gleam. That would be, you're totally welcome. You feel completely loved by that person. You feel like they're happy to see you, and that's what we're hoping to stimulate, just in eye contact, for someone in this case dealing with Avoidant, and then you track ... Maybe they immediately feel the relief of that and the nourishment, or maybe what comes up is the wound of remembering that with their parents, they looked into blank eyes or angry eyes or rejecting eyes, and then you help them process up that pain. But then they eventually can see that you're looking at them with caring and kindness.

So, these are some of the things that experientially we have to excavate the old pattern, if it's Insecure, and meet it with the resource, or the need is met in a way in that exercise that helped heal what the original disappointment or devastation was. Did that make sense?

TS: Totally. It's very clear, and I do have some more questions, but let's first... I want to just make sure that our listeners have the full map here. So let's move on to the Ambivalent patterning.

DPH: Okay. Ambivalent is a different pattern, and it's more that there is ... In the parental relationship, there's on-again, off-again parenting, so it's a little bit like Las Vegas. You don't know. You start to relax into the love of a parent and then all of a sudden, they get distracted and they drop you, and then you try again. Because of this consistent inconsistency, this inconsistent responsiveness, it creates a dynamic for children where they're always looking out to see if they can change, or get the parent to settle, or get the person to be there reliably in terms of meeting their needs, and it creates a lot of anxiety because sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't.

So they never know when they're going to get the win of contact and connection. Then also this type of parenting often involves a certain intrusiveness and not an awareness of boundaries. So very often there's a feeling of being a little bit invaded sometimes when somebody has an Ambivalent pattern. They respond to this on-again, off-again by increasing anxiety and having this accentuated fear of abandonment. So they tend to be a little bit clingy sometimes, and our culture's so autonomy oriented that clinginess is like... if it could be, it would be a four-letter word.

So they often demand a lot from their partners later on, and sometimes if they've had a lot of disappointment in childhood with this kind of pattern, they often end up complaining. They have this feeling and pressure to speak. If I keep talking, I'm going to force connection. Somehow that connection will happen. Sometimes, with the

incessantness in that, this pressure to speak, they actually push away the people they want to be close to, either through constantly trying to engage them, or complaining a lot, or nothing ever being good enough, is the way a partner might feel.

That's not an intentional thing for the Ambivalent. I want to explain why that happens in a compassionate way. Because when they were young, the only way they could get attention was either sometimes through illness or sometimes through crying. But usually at an infant level, they often had the experience of getting more contact through crying or being ill. So their pattern that if they stop crying—it's like a survival issue—they'll lose their attachment figure. So they don't understand this even themselves, but there's this fear of being abandoned if I stop my trying to engage the other person.

This is interesting because even when they start to get what they want from their partner, they'll tend to dismiss the caring behavior. They'll tend to not see it. Because they're in this physiological loop, they'll keep pressuring for something. Even though they might actually be getting good responses, they don't acknowledge them. They often negate them and keep complaining. It's like, "Okay, I want to go out to dinner," and your partner says, "Great, that's wonderful. Let's go." Then you end up at the Italian restaurant, and they start complaining because they really wanted to go to the Greek restaurant, but they didn't tell you that. So there's always this sort of it's not good enough, and partners later on can feel exasperated by that.

It's not... the Ambivalent doesn't really even understand why they're pushed to do that. It's not because they mean anything to frustrate people. But like what I did with one client, I had her imagine having everything she could possibly want relationally on a big smorgasbord, like a banquet table full of her favorite foods, and her favorite emotional treats, and anything she would want in her relationship. I said, "I want you to imagine just taking that into your body," just to take that in, and she was so shocked because she said, "Oh, my stomach. My whole body is constricting. It's like saying no. So, why would I say no?"

I said, "I think... Let's just try something else, but now I want you just imagine taking one percent of what's available to you." She goes, "Oh, I can do that." Her stomach relaxed. She could take it in. She started to feel satisfied. But often Ambivalents don't know how to feel satisfied because of this early patterning, so she was feeling satisfied and then she goes, "Oh, I think I want to try two percent." I'm like, "Great. Let's try two percent." So she goes and takes in two percent. She's still able to manage it. She gets up to five percent, she's able to manage it.

She's feeling fulfillment and satisfaction for almost the first time in her life, and she did not realize that she had trouble receiving, and that she was blaming her partners through life about that, and really it was her inability to receive. So as we helped her heal and make a practice of staying present when somebody does something nice for her, to notice it, stay present for it, try to take it in, or take in five percent of it. Then she started to build a capacity to receive. But she didn't even know that that was the issue. She thought all of her partners weren't doing the right thing.

So what I love about this work is it cuts through blame, and we start to be able to feel our own pattern, and not only feel the pain of it but feel the possibility of how do we move out of that? How do we help ourselves heal? What tools can we practice that will bring us more towards Secure Attachment? That's really what I'm hoping to really

expand on in the book.

TS: I think you do a very good job of that. Just, finally, introducing Disorganized Attachment, that pattern.

DPH: Yes, that's a tough one. That's a tough one. Disorganized happens when a parent has been scary enough over childhood, in the early on. Where a child's threat response is on. They're hyper-vigilant. They're scared. They're feeling a lot of fear or anger in response to the way the parent's treating them. And that's interesting because it could be the parent actually doing something like yelling, being physically, sexually, or emotionally abusive, anything like that. Hitting, of course. You know, not having good boundaries. Maybe having an ongoing addiction where there's a lot of chaos in the family.

So those are some things that would be actively coming from the parents that would set up this dynamic, where the threat response is shutting down the attachment system, and the attachment system and the threat response are in a ... Because when we're in threat, we very often are not in the part of the brain that's interested in connecting, which is the medial prefrontal cortex. We're in our reptilian brain, which is about the threat response, and we're activating our sympathetic nervous system reactions of fight or flight, or we're shutting down completely into a freeze with over parasympathetic, and that creates a lot of turmoil.

Another way that Disorganized can get set up is if the parents themselves have a trauma history, which many of us do, that's unresolved, and maybe their behavior is kind and consistent and reasonable and everything most the time. But they're emanating a feeling of fear or terror from their own unresolved trauma. A baby can't attach to fear and anger. It will disattach or disconnect, or it'll disorganize the attachment system, is where that word comes from.

So what we're trying to do, and like when I'm trying to work with people, is to help them separate out people that they feel relatively safe with, sort of their ally oasis, so they can give their attachment system a safe place to land. So, I might have them talk about all the people they feel they can trust, or they feel that soothe them or that being around them feels safe, and that might be you as a therapist, or you as a partner, or wherever you can start with that. Sometimes, it's with people's pets.

Then to start to feel what an attachment would feel like when it's not interrupted by the threat response. Then we have to work with the threat response, and I would say, "Okay, what behavior of your mother or father was disturbing to you?" I take one parent at a time. Let's say it was yelling, and say the father happened to yell a lot. I would have them put the father as far away from them as they need them to be, and maybe mute the father or put him in a soundproof booth or something, so that they have distance. Because very often when people experience stress, they feel like it's right in their face. So, they're overcome by it. So giving distance is the first part of that.

Then silencing and making the threatening behavior of the father, you immobilize that. Basically, you can say things like, "He can't do or say anything that's disturbing right now. He's this far away, and he's immobilized." Then you can ask them, "Now that the threatening behavior is immobilized, what do you want to do or say about that?" Because you're trying to move them from passive reactions like collapse or dissociation, into active responses like finding their voice, saying, "I hate it when you do that," or, "Stop being so loud," or, "Go to an anger management class."

Or maybe they want to push him away, like making a boundary, or they want to glare at him when he's in that behavior. I always separate the behavior from the parent, because I don't like to demonize parents. Usually we have love for our parents, so I said, "The love isn't the problem. Let's look at the behaviors that really were hurtful to you. And let's see if we can calm and complete that threat response." So this movement from passive responses, like collapse or dissociation, to active response is very empowering. It really helps people feel like they have strength and they can do something about it, and they're doing it in the safety of your relationship, whether you're a therapist or a partner or a friend.

Then they can move through the threat sequence and complete the threat response, and this may need to happen over and over again, depending on how many triggers there are. But the attachment system and the threat response are in a counter. They're at cross purposes. So, I'm trying to untangle those two systems and have the person feel the positive part of both of those survival systems in a way that they can complete both.

And of course, because Disorganized has so much threat in it, they very often are highly dysregulated. So they might have sudden shifts of emotional states. They might be easily triggered into hypervigilance. They might dissociate easily. But depending on how you unpack that, that's why it's so complicated. It could show itself in so many different variations. But if you understand trauma work and you understand attachment work, I think they're a marriage made in heaven. Then you can address both those parts of things for people and help them learn how to better self-regulate, how to collect co-regulate or interactively regulate with their partner.

If you get two Disorganized people together in a relationship, you just need to make sure they aren't both triggered at the same time. They need to take turns on dealing with the difficulties, because when you get two Disorganized together, both triggered, that's a recipe for suffering.

TS: Now, I want to ask you a personal question, and I'm going to be vulnerable myself in asking the question, setting it up. Which is, I myself discovered in my adult relational life that, unfortunately, I resonate quite a lot with the Avoidant patterning, and it's been a huge journey to be in a relationship that's characterized by Secure Attachment. It's a journey that really has been a big part of the last two decades of my life. So my personal question for you, is what's your relationship blueprint pattern, and how have you worked with it, whatever you have discovered that it is?

DPH: Well, you can have a mix of attachment styles, and I think that I was dealing a bit with, a lot actually, with Disorganized/Avoidant, because Disorganized involves both the Insecure Attachment styles. So you can lean towards an oscillation between ... Disorganizing might flip back and forth between Avoidant and Ambivalent, or you can have a Disorganized pattern that's mostly Ambivalent or a Disorganized pattern that's mostly Avoidant. So I would say my journey involves Disorganized with mostly Avoidant, because when I get really stressed, I tend to isolate, and I forget who my friends are, or the people that are close to me. It's like they don't exist all of a sudden. I have to make a list on my refrigerator or put pictures around or something to remind myself that I have resources, because I just go into this isolation reaction first.

So I have Disorganized largely because there was a lot of stress with one of my parents originally, that was quite frightening ongoingly in my upbringing. So, I was alternately

loved by this person but also afraid of them, and that took me a while to sort out. And especially doing the "Kind Eyes" exercise, the reason I love that one so much is I really had to work with that to be able to even see people's eyes and detect how they were looking at me, because I would always first see this angry, hateful look. That took me a while to peel that back.

So I had some traumatic experiences that were pretty severe when I was a child, and that were relationally-based, even outside the family. So I had a lot of terror to work through. I was working very hard, and thanks to Peter Levine and his work, actually helped me a lot re-regulate my nervous system and become very relationally oriented and really interested in connections. In the beginning, I think I was really healing from relationships that were very dangerous, actually. So, that was a long journey. I've been working on it really hard my entire incarnation, and I'm 65 next month.

TS: Yes, I think that's part of what I wanted to bring forward because you mentioned how your book, *The Power of Attachment*, what you really want to help people with, is learning these skills of Secure Attachment and moving in that direction in their life. And of course, I desperately want that as well, to give that gift to other people in the world, and I want to make sure people have a sense, though, of what the journey's like, what's required, the depth of inner work that's required, and I wonder if you can speak to that both the promise but also what this actually asks of us.

DPH: Well, I think it starts with a curiosity, almost like a candle being lit, like seeking and curiosity of what happened to us, being able to have support and our own intention to heal from it. I do a lot of spiritual work as well as psychotherapy kinds of things. And eventually, learning how to disidentify from a lot of what those patterns were, and to open to the healthier version, to find more capacity for connection. I don't want to say it's an easy journey, but it's incredibly fulfilling, and it's so worth it once we get ... I think we get so much back when we allow ourselves to go through this process.

And really disidentifying from the idea that something's wrong with me or you, like something's wrong with us personally, or that there's something wrong with the world. That we start to transcend and understand this amazing capacity for healing that we have, and how to have an intelligent relationship to suffering. I think this is a really important point. Because there is suffering. There's no way around the fact that on this human journey we're going to bump into some pretty tough stuff. I think this is a very tough planet to be on. It's tough to be human. I don't know what the other choices were, but we all made the choice to do this one.

It's hard. Life is challenging. Maybe sometimes it's really great, but there's also lots of challenges. So I don't want to sound Pollyanna about this, because I don't feel that way at all. How do we find these helpers along the way? And then how do we also build the inner strength to confront things in ourselves that we could potentially disidentify from, and find this reservoir of resiliency and capacity and expansiveness and openness? And then sometimes we lose it, and then how do we start again?

It's constantly, I think, falling down and picking oneself up. I think relationships, our deep relationships, whether they're partners or as a parent or deep friendship. I think that's really like being in the trenches. Because I think relationships challenge this part of ourselves in a really direct way for most of us, if we didn't have the jackpot of starting out with Secure Attachment and feeling basic trust and seeing

relationships and expecting relationships to be nourishing and yummy and delicious, and knowing how to respond to our partners in a way that just deepens love.

A lot of us didn't start out from that point of experience, so we make a lot of mistakes, and then how do we come back? And how do we excavate what might work better, or find that part of ourselves that's not wounded? I mean, we have the wounded part, but we have the unwounded part, that we access more and more as we do this deep exploration.

TS: How do we disidentify, Diane, but make sure that we're not avoiding the journey we actually need to make through the old pattern?

DPH: Well, in my process, and seriously, I just dumped into a vat of pain for a while, and I'm just trying to figure out, "Well, okay, what is this about?" I'm trying to stay with the experience and not disconnect from it, and that means I'm not avoiding it. Because to be open to the whole experience of life: the pain, the joy, the sadness, the anguish, the expansion, the constriction, and to get guidance when we need it. I'm a big believer in having a lot of mentors and therapists and spiritual teachers in my life. I think that's hugely beneficial to me.

Then also having a commitment to ourselves to try to be—it's mindfulness. I guess I'm talking about mindfulness—to really be with our experience as it unpacks. The pain sometimes is as valuable as the breakthrough because you're metabolizing something. You're metabolizing your history, digesting it, assimilating what you can use, eliminating what you don't need anymore. And I think that, in a way, is a very digestive metaphor for disidentification. But I have to go in and down and in the muck, and then eventually surface or get a hand up to see things more clearly, by the addition of someone else's more pure presence.

Fortunately, I mean, your whole orientation in the world and mission is to expose people to all these different possibilities, spiritually and in healing. I feel like we live in a time, that's relatively recent, where there's been so much available in terms of being able to communicate spiritual work and healing possibilities and even what I'm offering in the attachment work. We can get that information out there, and we can partake of it. We can use it. But I think having somebody, a person, whoever that is, whether it's a partner or a professional person or a personal relationship, just really helps a lot.

I think it helps us move through pain more quickly and more efficiently, in a way, to find ourselves in a more spacious possibility. I mean, it has been a really rich journey. There's a hidden gift in trauma, because as you process it and you metabolize it, then it opens up into tremendous creativity and vision and different spiritual dimensions. So it's worth it, except that ... I don't like to say that to people in the very beginning because it almost feels like you're not honoring how hard it is, because it is hard. There are times it's devastating.

TS: Do you have a sense when it comes to re-patterning an attachment blueprint, how long that takes in general? Once again, just trying to give people a framework.

DPH: I think the more you take to heart the particular Secure Attachment skills, like some of them I offer in the book. You can make each one of those a practice. For me, I've made it a real practice that if somebody reaches out to me whether it's email, voicemail, whatever, that I respond as much as I can within 24 hours, and I have a lot of

people in my life. So that's a pretty major commitment. I also have a staff that helps with some of the things that aren't specific to me, of course. But I really practice my responsiveness, and it's funny because sometimes I'll write an email, and then I go back to the beginning and I say more about connection. Then I try to emphasize connection.

And I really have made a practice about repair. When I feel like something's off, I try to drum up the courage to address it, and maybe not always immediately. Maybe I have to grind on it for a while, but those types of things help. Even how I look at someone, like I've been greeting someone. I make sure I'm not looking in their file, or I'm not tied up on my cell phone. I look at them. I greet them. I shake their hand or hug them, whatever the relationship allows, and I look at them directly, and I drum up as much presence as I can.

These are things I've learned from the attachment study. But also, like who do we want to be in the world? And how do we want to connect? And how do we want to honor every individual, because we're all interconnected? In a way, we're all seeing ourselves. We're all the same thing from some perspective. But how do we not get into this us-versus-them polarization, that it's so easy to trigger if you're coming from fear or hatred or anger, and how do we get into an all-of-us, interconnected perspective? I think Secure Attachment really helps that. It helps brain integration. It helps us access love and compassion. It helps us move into that global citizen kind of space, like a more cooperative versus competitive or collaborative. We become collaborators with people in our lives, and you're not going to do this perfectly every day. I mean, we're going to do the best we can. But as you make it practices, it gets easier.

TS: One of the sections of the book *The Power of Attachment* that I really liked, towards the beginning you were talking about ways that we can increase Secure Attachment, and about how whatever Insecure Attachment we might have, might have been transmitted generationally through our parents' own history. You offer an exercise, a visualization practice we could do to help heal our parents, to help heal our mom and heal our dad in whatever their attachment trauma might be. Can you share a little bit about how we could do that for our parents, at whatever age they are, or even if they've passed on?

DPH: Yes, I love this exercise. It's one of my favorites too. I usually call it "Reversing Role Reversal" because one of the things that happens in childhood that creates Insecure Attachment is that often children are relied on to fulfill parents' needs, or they become surrogate spouses in some cases, and that ideally our parents are parents, and it's an asymmetrical relationship that our parents are mostly there for us. Then of course, as we get older, we're there for our parents.

But in this exercise, first, what I usually do with somebody, if I was doing therapy with them is I would have them go into their own attachment wound and then see what they didn't get, and then try to create a corrective experience where they're actually getting that need met, like maybe they didn't feel listened to, or they never felt seen. Then I'd say, "Well, okay, is there somebody in your life that you feel really gets you now? Or if you could imagine someone being like that, what qualities would they have? How would they be acting with you?" Because they're creating the antidote, or maybe they're feeling it coming from me, because I certainly would be trying to hear and see them.

But then as they feel that need met, then I'll sometimes... because then they have a base in themselves. They're not operating from wound. I'll often invite them to go, "I wonder ... I mean, you're sort of an expert on your mom at this point. You spent many, many years with her and saw her in many different circumstances. Let me just start with Mom. I wonder if you can just see your mother and just imagine what does she need? What is missing for her? What unmet need is there, that she might be behaving from or experiencing her life from that vantage point?"

And very often, people see it very quickly. They go, "Oh my gosh. My mom needed support for autonomy. My father and their marriage had completely controlled her. She never had any time to herself, and she had six kids. My mom really needed... I mean, if she was born today, she'd be a CEO of a company. She was so competent, but she was trapped in this older-era lifestyle, and it didn't really fit for her." I say, "Okay, so just imagine what that would be like." I had one client say, "Oh, I'd love her to have a book club with Mary Tyler Moore." Remember My Girl? I'm dating myself now.

TS: Yes.

DPH: It's this autonomous young woman. Then I think the other one was Mary Tyler Moore when she was in that show where she worked for the news station, and she was an independent woman. She wasn't in a relationship. So she was just, "I just wish she could have those opportunities." So, she's imagining her mother in this book club with all these women from media that would represent having autonomy and choice, not necessarily that she wouldn't have chosen also to be married and be a mother. Nothing wrong with that. But that she would have had this wish fulfilled.

As she felt that with her mother, she started just feeling like, "Oh my gosh. I can just see my mother happy. And as she's happy, I can see her being more caring towards me." Because you're moving, in the imagination at least, the mother toward Secure Attachment having her own needs met, and then she's of course much more fulfilled, and can be a much more loving and available and present parent. So it's healing the generation. In this particular case, the person was a parent themselves, and we started to work with her as a mother and her daughter and repairing that Insecure attachment that had come Generationally. So, we're doing three generations at once.

But I really do believe what you said, that even if your parent's not alive anymore, I feel like you can heal ancestrally and start to break that generational transmission, which many of us have more capacity to do these days, because we have so many resources that simply didn't exist if you go back 80 to 90 years.

TS: Diane, I want to call our conversation, "We are designed for connection," and-

DPH: I agree.

TS: ... that's a quote from what you said earlier in this hour together. As we end, you've mentioned a few things that might help that person who's feeling somewhat disconnected in some way. One of the things you mentioned in The Power of Attachment book that I thought was great was, "Is there anybody that's reaching out to you that you could respond to? Maybe someone who's reached out for a repair and you haven't been there for that, or reached out for connection?" What are your other suggestions for the person who's listening right now who's thinking, "God, I wish I felt more connected to the people in my world"?

DPH: Well, there's some simple things actually, like even how you greet a friend, or let's say a partner when you're first meeting up after you haven't seen each other. Like can you give a full-body hug? Belly-to-belly, not the triangle hug, but a lot of times people do, and they just tap each other on the shoulder, but they're looking like a tent instead of really connected. If it's your partner, then it would be even a closer hug, and can you stay in that hug until you can actually feel each other regulate each other? Can you stay in that connection and then support the other person?

Stan Tatkin has a lovely YouTube on that. It's called "The Welcome Home Hug" on the internet, and having rituals for connection like, how do you greet people? If you're living with someone, how do you get up in the morning? How do you connect in the morning? How do you do rituals where you have connection at night? I have friends that they have this pattern of each of them finding these really special truffles. Every night they'll put this very special truffle, that they hunt down during the day, on each of their partner's pillow, and they don't always go to bed at the same time, but they have this appreciation.

They always try to have a little debriefing pillow talk before they go to sleep. Just little things that you know that you can rely on, traditions that you set up in everyday living, and of course, holidays. But really, everyday living. When you see friends, do you light up? Are you welcoming? Are you a welcoming person? I mean, are you a friendly person? Are you somebody that people can feel they can feel with, they can be present with? If you're not in a space where you have time for somebody, then you can just be direct about that and go, "Oh gosh. I'm really busy. I'd love to talk to you on the phone, but I'm going to have to do it tomorrow, or next month or whenever."

Can you be responsive but also have boundaries when you need them, because sometimes we aren't available. We need to be clear about when we're going to show up again. If you have a difficulty or conflict with somebody, it's good not to argue too much to more than 15 minutes because it starts to lay all that anger and resentment or whatever emotions are going on into long-term memory. So, we need to learn to argue or have conflict in shorter periods of time, like not more than 20 minutes. So, "Okay, let's table this. We're going to come back to it in an hour. We're going to come back to it after you go take a walk and enjoy the sunset, or we're going to go to a movie, and then we're going to come back to it, but we need to take a break."

So, we don't, from a memory perspective, actually facilitate our beloved turning into our enemy, because if you have too much negative long-term memory, your body is going to start reacting with that person as if they're not a friend, that they're a foe. So just understanding some of our physiology and some of our design, we can have more intention to build more positive memory, deepen our intimacy, help ourselves, learn how to connect.

I think I'd like to say to people, "We just think that connection happens automatically," but I think it's actually a pretty big life lesson. Dan Siegel said at a conference one time that we've done so much about learning how to track our bodies, learning to understand our emotions, learning how to understand our cognition, even learning our spiritual states, like awareness, know of awareness. But connection is really the frontier. The leading edge for most of us is learning how to truly connect: to ourselves and to other people in our lives.

TS: Just as a note to end on, it's my conviction that as we learn how to be more securely attached, in our lives, to our loved ones and within our relationships with the people we work with, our partnerships, with authors, Diane Poole Heller, people, everybody in our life, that this is one of the biggest levers to create a kinder and compassionate world and a beautiful world, and I wonder what you think about that? I think this might be the biggest lever personally.

DPH: Well, actually, I think if we want to change the world, we could do it in a couple generations. If we really supported new families to understand Secure Attachment and help parents do that, and help relationships go move into that space ... I mean, think about it. The world leaders, really focused on Secure Attachment. Can you even imagine what the outcome of that would be? I have a big vision. I'd like us to have a relationship revolution where people really understand this, and it's one of the reasons I took the time to write the book because I just feel it's so powerful.

It changed so many things in my life, and you said that's been true for you, and I feel like there is so much potential, and it takes some work. It takes some commitment. It takes an orientation, but we have to know what we're going for. We have to have specifics to help ourselves, and that's what I'm trying to bring out during the training, the online trainings, the books. I'm trying to help, and I'm totally open to other people's suggestions and ideas because I think anything we can do to move the needle more towards Secure, and really having people in our lives in a deep and powerful way just enriches everyone. It's such a win-win-win.

I'm just happy to be part of it, and to talk about it, and to practice it myself. I certainly don't do it perfectly, but I'm working on it. I think it's just a really rich place, that hopefully people will enjoy discovering, even as they go through healing and some of the pain that might be in the way.

TS: I've been talking with Diane Poole Heller. She's the author of a very beautiful and helpful and practical new book. It's called *The Power of Attachment: How to Create Deep and Lasting Intimate Relationships*. Diane has a gift for taking a lot of complex research, science, study, her own many, many years as a practitioner, and writing quite an accessible book, and one that I think will be very useful for readers, *The Power of Attachment*. Thanks everyone for being with us. Thank you, Diane, especially.

DPH: It's been a pleasure, Tami. As always, thank you.