

PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

Episode 93:

Creating Healthy Boundaries and Happy Relationships with Laura Froyen

[shownotes at jenriday.com/93](http://jenriday.com/93)

J: You're listening to the Vibrant Happy Women podcast, episode number 93.

Intro: Welcome to the Vibrant Happy Women podcast, stories of vibrant women living happy lives. And now, your host, Jen Riday.

J: Well, hello there, I'm Jen Riday and welcome to Vibrant Happy Women. I want to let you know that Heal Your Heart, a 2018 journey of self-love is open for enrollment and it starts on January 8th. Heal Your Hearts is a small group coaching program for healing your heart an increasing self-love so that you can enjoy greater happiness, increased confidence, and closer relationships. Healing my own heart and taking a journey of taking care of myself and loving myself made all the difference in my relationship with my husband. When I didn't fully love myself, I approached our relationship with need; constantly needing him to prove he loved me or needing him to spend time with me and help me feel better about a situation. But now, I know how to take care of those things myself and I approached the relationship with deep inner self love and confidence, and I come with a place of wholeness and providing a source of love rather than sucking the well dry. So it's made all the difference and I would love to teach you how it's done and walk you through all the tools and strategies that will help you deeply love yourself. When you do that, your spouse will energetically shift; I've seen it, it's been miraculous. And I've said it so many times before, "We women are like the Sun; when we take care of ourselves, when we heal our hearts and let go of resentment and bitterness and shame and guilt and fear and perfectionism, let that all go and we stand in our place and in our truths and in our power, filled with love and positivity and energy, our entire family will shift, our homes will be healed in relation to how much we heal our own hearts," I know this to be true. I would love to have you join us. You can learn more about the program jenriday.com/healyourheart; all one word. Again, that's at jenriday.com/healyourheart. We start on January 8th.

Last week, I spoke with Tonya Dalton about teaching your kids to set goals. I loved that and it helped me a ton because I'd never really done that with my kids. I'd done it a little, but not in a consistent way; and she teaches us how to get that to be more consistent. Today, you're going to love this episode, I'm talking with the amazing Dr. Laura Froyen about boundaries. Boundaries are what help us preserve our energy to have more fulfilling interactions and to stop whenever we feel triggered, to not react internally, but maybe even sometimes we need to establish an external boundary where we remove ourselves from a situation. It's all about clear, loving communication and having the relationships we want to have and feeling the way we want to feel. So if you would like to improve your relationships, then stay tuned,

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we're going to dive right into that interview now.

I'm talking with a fellow Madisonite; that's what we call us here in Madison, Wisconsin. And she is Dr. Laura Froyen and she has her PhD in Human Development and Family Studies, like I do, with a specialization in Couple and Family Therapy. So we're going to be talking about boundaries today. Laura is the perfect person for this because she's a peaceful parenting and respectful relationship coach and the self compassion advocate. And you have to have a lot of self compassion to feel stable in your boundaries; so I love that. She gives parents tools and support so they can stop yelling, ditch the guilt, and rediscover authentic connection with their children, their partners, and friends, and themselves. Welcome to the show, Laura.

L: Hi, thanks for having me, Jen.

J: I'm excited. Laura and I had lunch together at Novanta, a great pizza place here in town, and I love having a fellow, you know, entrepreneur in town with me; so, good to have you on the show, Laura. Well, let's start out with your favorite quote and then we're going to dive into talking about boundaries.

L: Sure. Okay, so my favorite quote is by Theodore Roosevelt and it's, "Comparison is the thief of joy." And as a woman, as a mom, as a wife, and frankly, as an entrepreneur, comparison has been incredibly toxic for me. It takes me out of myself and it stops me from being fully present in my life and being authentic; which is something that I deeply value. And when you're stuck in comparison, it is so hard to do that because comparison is about finding fault in yourself rather than finding satisfaction in yourself and where you are in this moment, even if it's not exactly where you want to stay. So, yeah, "Comparison is the thief of joy," is my favorite to quote.

J: Yeah, I've never heard it said like that, but as soon as you said, "Comparison is..." say that part again? Not, "The thief of joy," but, "Comparison is finding fault with yourself," right?

L: Yeah. Comparison is finding fault with yourself.

J: Wow.

L: Being stuck in a place where you aren't satisfied with where you are.

J: So what's the antidote for that?

L: Self compassion, self-love, and learning to be present, learning to accept where you are.

J: Uh-huh.

L: Letting go of comparison, I ge... you know, the process of letting go.

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J: Yeah.

L: I think also getting really clear on your goals and your values and your priorities is a big piece of it too.

J: Ooh! So a lot of self-discovery and... how do you even move into that place of self-love? I mean, I know how I did it, but do you think there's a formula?

L: I do think it's individual, but I think it can start with intentional practice of self-compassion. You can't love yourself if you don't have compassion for yourself, if you don't understand your humanness; the common humanity, the piece of you that is like everybody else and who suffers like everybody else. And, yeah, so I am starting with self compassion. I am a huge proponent that with... we're trying to improve any of our relationships, whether it's parenting or with our partners or with our friends, that coming and starting from a place of self compassion, developing a practice where we are intentionally treating ourselves gently and with grace, that we can have then approach our relationships with a full cup and being able to be fully present and authentic with them.

J: Yes. And you mentioned self-compassion and shared humanity.

L: Mm-hmm.

J: It's so funny that when I was a younger mom, I thought I was the only one who yelled at my kids.

L: Mmm.

J: I thought I was still only... only one who bad marriage moments or maybe bad marriage years. (Laughs)

L: Mm-hmm.

J: But, you know, I wish more women would understand that everyone is experiencing the same things and that they're not alone. So...

L: Yeah. You know, I really think that we... especially the time, you know, I became a parent 5 years ago, and this time of social media when people are becoming parents, we see so much on Pinterest and on Facebook and on Instagram and on, you know, even on Twitter, and it... we fail to remember that we're seeing the highlight reel of all these people... people's lives.

J: Yeah.

L: You know, we're not seeing that outtakes, we're not seeing the bloopers, unless you're following some very authentic people, which I try to do but, you know, it just... it's not reality based most of the time. And that's one of the other reasons why comparison can be so sticky because we are comparing ourselves or comparing our outtakes, you know, our behind-the-scenes footage, to others highlight reels; and that's just not reality.

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J: I love how you said that.

L: Yeah.

J: I had a previous guest who said, "Comparing our insides with their outsides." But I like highlights.

L: Yeah.

J: That's good.

L: Yeah.

J: Well, so Laura, take us through your journey of becoming a mom and having to learn to have boundaries in marriage and with your kids and other aspects of your life.

L: Yeah. So becoming a parent, for me, has been a constant lesson in the art of letting go. My first birth was not what I had intended it to be; it ended up being very long and painful and... not physically painful, I don't remember that part, but emotionally painful, scary. We ended up with an emergency c-section and my daughter was whisked away to the neonatal intensive care unit; it was very scary. And there was a... you know, when we're scared, there is this natural need to control, right; there's this natural kind of response during times of stress and trauma to kind of ratchet things down and get things under control the things that you can control. And I responded very much in that way. And so coming into myself as a parent after that, I have, again, just been constantly teaching myself the lesson of letting go. And it really is a practice, it's a skill being able to let go of control and that, "You know, I can't control everything that my child eats. I can't control every interaction that my parents or my mother-in-law has with my child," even though I did try to control those things.

J: (Laughs). Right.

L: You know, at a certain point. And I... you know, when I first started doing those things, I thought I was setting boundaries, but really what I was doing was attempting to control their behavior.

J: Ooh! That's a good distinction.

L: Yeah, yeah. And that's... I mean, it's an important distinction. You know, and so having a more clear understanding of what boundaries are, and I really like to think about boundaries from a... that we can have these internal boundaries, these boundaries for like what we let in, you know, what we allow to affect us, and then external boundaries, how we are willing to be treated or how we're willing to allow our environment to be influenced. But I... I like kind of breaking it up into those categories because it helps us get a sense of that, "We are in control of how we feel. We're in control of how we allow circumstances to affect our lives and our viewpoints," and it can free us up a little bit.

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J: So, as a parent, tell us the first moment when you realized you needed to set an external boundary, for example?

L: Oh, needed to or wanted to? (Laughs)

J: Oh, yeah.

L: Yeah, right? (Laughs). Yeah, so, I mean, I think that... you know, again, when I was in my early days of parenting, I was very controlling around interactions with my kids. I only... I wanted them held in a certain way, I wanted them fed a certain thing, you know, and I have eased up significantly on that.

J: Uh-huh.

L: I think now, now I... I would probably be a very different person; I am a different person, 5 years into parenting. But one of the things that I've had to set boundaries around is body image is something that I... you know, I grew up with... with the women in my life commenting on bodies and on appearances, and I am actively attempting to limit my daughter's exposure to those messages. And so I have had to set some boundaries and, not in a controlling way, but in a kind of... "I need to present my values to you, I need to present my goals for my girls to you, and I need to let you know how your behavior is influencing those goals."

J: Wow, yeah.

L: You know, without any real expectation of them necessarily changing, but so that they can have a full information and maybe make a different, more informed decision; if that makes sense.

J: Yeah. And that's powerful, I'm already like loving this because immediately brought to mind times I see my parents or my in-laws interacting with our kids in ways that I think, "Ugh, did you just really say that?"

L: Mm-hmm.

J: "You're like shaming them. Why are you shaming them? They're doing their best." And it's so hard, but I guess I can kindly point it out again and again and hopefully something will sink in eventually. (Laughs)

L: Yeah. You know, I have had to come to the ultimate conclusion that I need to step out of the relationship between my kids and their... the people in their lives; you know, that they will manage those relationships and trust them to manage it. And, you know, so my bodily autonomy is something that's really important to me and raising my kids, and so we don't force hugs or affection or kisses, and we also don't force picture-taking, we allow them to decide whether they want a picture taken of them because their body and they get to choose.

J: Oh, that's good, right.

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L: And so, I mean, I think everybody can make their own decisions on this topic, is something that I feel strongly about. But the... you know, holding that boundary is something I had to do when I... the baby is very young; you know, when they were babies. But now, they're both verbal and they are very good at holding those boundaries.

J: Yeah.

L: And I stay out of it for the most part, you know?

J: Ooh!

L: They say, you know, "No, I don't want to give a hug, it's my body, it's my choice," you know?

J: Ooh.

L: Or, "I don't want to take a picture; don't take a picture of me," they're very clear with it, you know, and...

J: I love that.

L: I'm proud of that; yeah.

J: But... but I think your kids learned the language of boundaries and energy of it through your example, which is...

L: Yes, yeah

J: ... really powerful. These girls aren't going to grow up to be pushed around. (Laughs)

J: I hope not; I hope not. I mean, and the other key piece of this is that, most of the time when I was setting those boundaries, I was interacting with my child. So if, for example, a well-meaning relative asks for a kiss, I... instead of focusing on the relative, I would focus on my child, make eye contact with them and say, "It looks like you don't want to kiss right now, is that right?" and then I would turn to the relative and say, "It looks like they're not ready for a kiss right now."

J: Oh, nice.

L: You know, and just... and kind of mediate that interaction.

J: Yeah.

L: And give them the language and, you know, maybe even help the well-meaning relative to read the situation. And I... honestly, I think most adults, even in my generation, but particularly in an older generation, they don't think about it that way. They don't think about children as whole humans, full humans

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from the moment they're born, deserving them dignity and respect.

J: Yes. And it's more like someone to control and...

L: Yeah.

J: ... order around. I know that energy, yeah, yeah.

L: Right or pet and play with and enjoy or, you know, entertain or serve as an entertainment, you know, those... you know, children are persons, not objects.

J: Yeah. I like it!

L: Yeah. (Laughs)

J: You know, some people listening might be like, "Oh, who cares, they're just kids," but the sooner kids can learn the energy of self-respect and confidence and ownership of their life and experience, wow, they will be so much more empowered as adults.

L: Yes, oh my gosh, so much more. And I... I mean, I really think that too that we start grooming... especially our girls, we start grooming them to take a specific place in society very, very early.

J: Ooh.

L: You know, and so maybe forcing a child at 4 to take a picture when they don't want to, that seems innocuous; you know, it seems like not a big deal. But think about it when they're 21.

J: Yeah.

L: Is it okay for a person to take their picture without their consent at 21? I don't think so.

J: Yeah.

L: So, I mean, I also kind of operate under... this is another quote that I like is, "Begin as you mean to go on."

J: Mm-hmm.

L: And so that means kind of, "Start where you are hoping to end with your behavior."

J: Talk more about how we socially end up grooming girls for certain roles or positions in society. I think that's important.

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L: Oh yeah. I mean, the way we socialize our girls is... it's so shocking, you know, the highest of it... I was pregnant with my first daughter and we were in, I think, Walmart and we saw a onesie that said, "Does this diaper make my butt look big?"

J: (Gasps) Oh no!

[Laughter]

L: Like what... and, you know, I... it's not to fault anybody who buys these things that puts them on their children, it's just a evidence of how deeply ingrained it is, you know? And... and I think that these things start small. Like, you know, as a young child, I have a vivid memory of being in kindergarten and having my best friend be forcefully kissed on the playground, you know, in a kind of a boy chasing girl type of situation. And we told the teacher who was a trusted, you know, female teacher, and she told us that, "That's how you know somebody likes you," and we're 5.

J: Ugh!

L: You know, it's a deep message, right?

J: Uh-huh.

L: And we think like, you know, "Teachers don't give that message anymore," but they do; they still do. And, I mean, it's... it's in the dress codes that we see in our high schools that are not equal and very much favored policing young girls bodies, you know, those... I feel like I'm getting onto a soapbox; I don't want to do that.

J: (Laughs)

L: But you can tell that I'm passionate about this issue as a person who, you know, when I was a young child I was told constantly how beautiful I was, how pretty I was. And it was made very clear to me that this was one of my pieces of worth, you know, in society. And I got messages like that while I was growing up. And while they were well-intentioned, I think that they were very damaging to my sense of self-worth.

J: Yeah.

L: Particularly since having become a mom and having my body and my appearance changed drastically and perhaps permanently...

J: Yes.

L: ... that has really made me question... it really... I definitely went through a period of really questioning my value and worth .

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J: Oh, that's huge. Yeah.

L: Yeah.

J: I have 2 friends who were both kind of beautiful in high school; one did beauty pageants but one said she was always complimented on her beauty. And exactly what you said, after she became a mom, she had almost no identity because that was her identity.

L: Mm-hmm.

J: How much better if we just complement, "Oh, wow, you really work hard! You're determined. You have a lot of courage," these internal skills instead of the outside; it would help so much.

L: Yeah! Yeah, you know, I have a story about this. So I was in dance as a child and my mom saved all my costumes. And she recently brought him to my house, I'm at the beginning of the summer, and my kids had so much fun going through them and putting them on, you know? And so one piece, like my one... my older daughter found a headpiece that's huge.

J: (Laughs)

L: Like massive yellow and pink like neon yellow and hot pink feathers.

J: Uh-huh.

L: Like, the size of her head, you know, it's a huge; it's a clip. And she fell in love with it and what, 5-year-old (or I guess she was 4 at the time) wouldn't fall in love with that and so she started wearing it and she started getting lots of attention out on the street because of it.

J: (Laughs)

L: And, you know... and, I mean, who wouldn't love to see her 4-year-old spunky walking around with this massive feather number on her head, right?

J: Yeah.

L: Like a... and so lots of strangers were coming up to her and talking about it, and it was unbelievable to me. I was talking with... and she didn't like it. She is... she is a little bit on the reserved side; she didn't like people she didn't know coming up and talking to her, and she really didn't like them talking to her about her appearance because we don't talk about appearance very much here, you know, in our family. So I was talking about it with her, and almost before I could help myself, the words of, "If you don't want that attention, you need to stop wearing it," came out of my mouth.

J: Ah, okay.

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L: And it's no different than saying to a 20 year old, "If you don't want to get catcalled, stop wearing a short skirt."

J: Ah, right.

L: You know, like I... it just... the piece of clothing and the age of the person's change, but it's the same concept. And it like... and so even for someone who is as kind of maybe radical on this topic as I am, it still is deeply ingrained in me and it came out. And so when it came out, I was like, "Whoa, wait a second. I didn't mean that, Ellie," and then we made a plan for what to do if somebody, you know, talked to them. And so then she asked me to talk to the person for her and for me to say, "You know, she doesn't... we don't focus much on appearance and... but she really likes to talk about XYZ."

J: Oh yeah.

L: You know, and give them something else to talk about. And, you know, she and I agreed on that as the plan so that she wouldn't have to do the talking on the topic. But it was amazing to me how that came out of me, this kind of toxic message that was so deeply ingrained, you know, and how young that starts.

J: Yeah. And it starts with awareness. Like, I've been... my husband is a scientist in the agronomy field and he said there was only one woman scientist at his work.

L: Hmm.

J: There are many technicians but only one female scientist. And we've talked a lot about, "Why is this?" He said it's not because they won't hire them, he said they're trying really hard to hire them, they just don't apply or his own technician has a PhD and could have a science role and he's asked her, "Why don't you want to do that?" and she avoids the question; but he thinks she's qualified but she won't do it. So anyway, we think about this a lot. And so my oldest daughter is 10, her name's Lorelai, and I love it because she wants to be a geneticist like her dad.

L: Mmm.

J: And we pushed that a lot, "Oh, you can totally be a scientist, you would be an amazing scientist," and just having the awareness to give her that thought process. But I have to share that she would like to create unicorns again genetically by breeding horses and narwhals. I thought everyone should know that. (Laughs)

L: Amazing!

J: (Laughs). So, anyway, it's hilarious.

L: Oh, she's a visionary, that sounds so cool; what a cool kid.

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J: And I feel really proud to have a daughter who says, "I want to be a geneticist." I mean, that is cool at 10 years old. (Laughs)

L: Yeah! Yeah, it really is. (Laughs)

J: Yeah. So, well, let's shift into talking about boundaries in our relationships with our kids, not just protecting our kids, and also in our marriages. What would be a process of establishing boundaries? How do we even go about getting to think about it?

L: Yeah. So, I mean, the first step in setting any boundary with any important person is to get really clear on why you feel a boundary needs to be set. Oftentimes in our relationships, we kind of set these boundaries or lay down ultimatums or rules without really thinking them through.

J: Mm-hmm.

L: So getting really clear on our goal for the relationship in question and our goal for ourselves within that relationship is the first place to start. And then you start kind of figuring out, "So where do the boundaries need to be?" and you start asking yourself, "What is my role in this? What do I have control over? What is mine to take care of? Is this problem something that is my job to take care of or is it somebody else's job?" you know, "Is this my issue or is this their issue?" and getting really clear on those things.

J: Mmm, mm-hmm. Yeah, and you mentioned needs and I think a lot of women don't even know what they need. And so where would they start to figure out kind of their likes and their dislikes and to become aware of their energy and all of those important facets of this?

L: Oh. Well, you know, having someone help them figure those things out is a great place to start. Journaling is a great place to start. There are numbers of classes that can help you figure out your priorities and your deep values. I'm personally taking your class right now, which is really helpful.

J: Oh.

L: You know, this is kind of a situation where I help people do this all the time, but you can always do coaching on yourself, you know?

J: Right.

L: And so I needed somebody else to kind of give me the questions and help me think through those things. And so, yeah, getting... you know, asking yourself the hard questions, spending some time with yourself. I think as moms we rarely spend time just with ourselves; you know, we fill it with play dates and with work and with, you know, cooking and cleaning and, you know, playing with our kids or, you know, hanging out with their spouses, you know, those are all things that are important; but we rarely spend time just with ourselves, and I don't know how we can know or love ourselves if we don't have

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time with ourselves, if that makes sense.

J: Yes, a little bit every day. Well...

L: Yeah.

J: ... a big area I hear women complaining about, as far as boundaries, is the fact that they feel like they have to do all the housework.

L: Mm-hmm.

J: They carry more than their share of the load, sometimes the spouse just doesn't care whether it's done and won't participate, other times, there's a spouse in there who is complaining if it's not done to his or her standards.

L: Mm-hmm.

J: So how do you sort of boundary in that situation? What would you recommend?

L: I would recommend making sure you have really good active listening and communication skills, and if you need a refresher or to brush those up, do that first; you know, get to come to a place where you can be soft with them. So if you're making a request for a change, connecting first, softening first, recognizing all that they do, you know, do.

J: Mm-hmm.

L: In therapy, we call... we use the term 'couching'; so you want to couch a request and, you know, you want to put positive at the beginning, then the request, and then another positive. So you want a couch in there.

J: Oh yeah, yeah.

L: You know, and so doing that with your partner is a great way to do it. But to be honest, I find being authentic to be the most important thing. And to be authentic, you have to be really clear on what it is you want. So for most people that I work with who are struggling with the balance, they say something general like, "I want my husband to work... you know, help more around the house." And, yes, I think that they do want them to do more around the house, but doing more around the house is really vague. It's really...

J: (Laughs). Yeah.

L: You know, it's really hard for the partner to hear that and think like... you know, when a partner hears that, they think, "Well, what about this and what about that?" and they start, you know, listing and count-

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ing all the things that they do do, you know, and, "You want me to do more?" you know?

J: (Laughs)

L: And then they start getting into a place of comparison or like, "My buddy doesn't have to do anything," you know, and so there's this place where then you come to these conversations as adversaries. And I think that if you can come to these conversations as a team, you're going to get more out of it. So coming from a place of, "Look, we have a problem, you know, this... I'm not happy, I'm feeling overwhelmed and overworked. And I know you love me and I know you don't want me to feel this way; I know you want me to feel vibrant and full of life and like I have the energy for these things and I don't right now. How can you get me there?" You know, coming from a place of vulnerability and honesty, but not in a blaming way, in a way that is deeply confident that they want the best for you; that they love you and they want the best for you. And kind of coming around and pulling them on to your side, like, "Be my team mate in this in tackling this problem."

J: Yeah.

L: "Help me figure this out," you know what I mean?

J: Okay. So let's do this. Let's do this role play. I'll be the man.

[Laughter]

L: Oh gosh.

J: (Laughs). This is going to scare her. Anyway, okay, so like, "Okay, cool, but, you know, really the problem is that you just expect too much; your standards are ridiculous." Okay, go, Laura. (Laughs)

L: "Okay, so I hear you saying that I expect too much, that my standards are really high, and that when you do something that isn't exactly the way I would do it, then you feel criticized and like it's not worth the effort; is that right?"

J: "Yeah, I never feel good enough for you."

L: "Oh, that feeling of never feeling good enough, that's hard. I would never want you to feel that way. I'm so sorry we've come to this cycle where my actions are leading you to a place of feeling not good enough. That's not what we want, right? That's not what we want for our relationship."

J: "No, what you need to do is just relax." (Laughs). "You know, you're right, but what you need to do is just relax and not do so much."

L: "Not do so much in maybe you are wanting me to not worry about these things so much, right?"

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J: "Yeah, just like, you never sit still; and what would it look like if you just sat down and relaxed once in a while?"

L: "Hmm, mm-hmm. You want me to be able to have some time to sit down and relax because my anxious energy is maybe making you anxious?"

J: "For sure, yeah. Sometimes when you're going crazy trying to get the house clean, I just want to leave."

L: "Oh, you want to leave. It makes you not feel like... that our home is a calm peaceful place to be."

J: "Yeah, that's true."

L: "Yeah. I want our home to be calm and peaceful too; I really do, I agree with you. I do want to ease up and relax and let go a bit."

J: "Hmm."

L: "I don't know how to get there, can you help me? Can you help me get there?"

J: "Ooh," well, I have to interject that...

[Laughter]

J: If I were a man, I would be wanting to save the day right now because you validated me.

L: Mm-hmm, yeah. (Laughs)

J: And so...

[Laughter]

J: "Well, I guess I could load the dishwasher because you've been asking me to do that, but that's it." (Laughs)

L: "Okay, I... I think that would be a great start. I would love... I would love that; that would be great. Do you... so you'll load the dishwasher right now and I can go read my book?"

J: "Yeah, go read a book, for sure."

L: "Great."

J: "But please don't come nag me if it's not done right; you have to like it the way I did it, promise?" (Laughs)

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L: "I promise I won't say anything to you if it's done wrong, if you promise that we can snuggle and maybe make out after that."

J: Oh! You are so good!

[Laughter]

J: That's so good, Laura; that's so good. Okay, so this was fun. I didn't... I've never done that on a podcast before.

L: (Laughs)

J: You're amazing! Oh my gosh!

L: That was good. (Laughs)

J: I loved how you validated his feelings and, you know, you knew what he wanted in the end, you're giving him the ultimate reward which is the snuggling; at least for my spouse and many other men I know. So, so good.

L: Yeah. I think a key piece to it too with that, so often times when we are doing this validating piece that... like I was doing, it can feel like we are in this place of either/or; either his feelings are valid or mine are valid. And if you listen to that, how we talked through you carefully, you will see that, as the wife in this scenario or as the... you know, the person I was playing in the scenario, I never had to give up anything for me to give validation and empathy to him. I never had to give up my perspective or give up my position. Do you see...

J: Yeah, yeah.

L: You know what I mean? So we were in a conversation of both/and.

J: Both/and.

J: So I wanted... yeah, both/and. Yeah, so I think 'both and' as a concept is key to balance to relationships. Because when we come from an either/or perspective, we become adversaries, but when we come from a both/and... so I, you know, want more help around the house and he wants me to be more relaxed and connected.

J: Mmm, mm-hmm.

L: You know, so we can have this 'and', you know, peace of it where we can both have our needs and both have our perspectives and both be validated, if that makes sense.

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J: Both/and; we're on the same team. I think...

L: Yeah.

J: ... what happens is, a lot of women approach that conversation with massive resentment.

L: Mm-hmm.

J: Like, years of resentment.

L: A laundry list, yes.

J: Oh yeah.

L: Yeah, scorekeeping; yeah, for sure.

J: For me, I was definitely in that place after, I don't know, a decade of marriage.

L: Mm-hmm.

J: And then I finally just gave up because it wasn't working that energy, and I quit expecting anything. I started to imagine I was a single mom and what would life look like. And from that place, I could start to see, "Oh my gosh, I'm not a single mom, he is doing all of this stuff."

L: Mmm.

J: It's massive contribution to our family. And so I shifted into the energy of no expectation and seeing everything as a gift, and from that place...

L: Yeah.

J: ... it really... it sounds cheesy but it worked. He shifted in... like one day I remember he cooked and he hadn't done much cooking before, and he made this homemade dressing, salad dressing, with garlic, vinegar, oil, and salt; the perfect combination. And I tried it and I said, "Oh, this is amazing!" and then every meal from then on, he had that dressing on the table.

L: Aww.

J: And that validated to me... I know he wanted to be a hero, he just couldn't do that from that energy of nagging and not feeling enough; he wasn't going to do it. And now...

L: Yeah.

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J: Now he does 90% of our cooking, he gets our kids to do their chores, which is un... I would never have believed that was possible 10 years ago.

L: Mmm.

J: He does not do toilets but I don't even really care; he didn't grow up doing that. But...

L: (Laughs)

J: I mean, there's a ton of stuff he's doing. So I am not a single parent, I just had to go to the energy of not expecting so much. So just adding my 2 cents...

L: Yeah.

J: ... to what you were saying.

L: No, I think you're so right. And then, you know, we sometimes in relationships, we get stuck in our positions and we hold these positions really rigidly. It's almost as if we've backed ourselves into a corner and any step we make feels like a betrayal to ourselves, you know?

J: Mm-hmm.

L: And so one person... it usually takes one person being brave and shifting from their position...

J: Yeah.

L: ... in order to create space for the other person to shift, yeah.

J: Hmm, that's true. Well, they say it's a family system and, one person changes, everyone changes in response. That is so true.

L: Yeah, exactly; yeah, mm-hmm.

J: Well, I have to keep speaking to this because you're so inspiring. Apparently you're a good therapist because you make me want to talk, but...

L: Oh, good!

[Laughter]

J: When I made that shift where I decided to look at life like, "Okay, I'm a single parent. I am done nagging; I'm going to do it myself," I also, in that time, decided I'm going to be in charge of my happiness. I stopped expecting him to do things in order to make me happy.

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L: Mm-hmm.

J: And as I shifted that energy, I saw him shift his energy in response, and it's all become better. So everyone listening, take care of your own happiness and yourself and things will shift; just be in the right energy.

L: Yeah. You know, and I also really liked what you said about and, you know, anything extra being a gift.

J: Mm-hmm.

L: My husband and I have had kind of an ongoing disagreements or issue around like me knowing where everything in the home goes (having this like mental map that's somewhat exhausting) and him having the luxury of not knowing where anything goes, you know?

J: (Laughs). That's hilarious. We have that too.

L: You know, yeah. And so it's funny that dynamic, but the... you know, as a, you know, a feminist, it makes me mad sometimes.

J: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

L: But we have recently come to a place of, you know, he used to not put things away if he didn't know where they went; he would just leave them in the dish rack, you know?

J: Mm-hmm.

L: And it used to be making me mad like, "Why can't you just remember where it goes and put it there?" you know?

J: Mm-hmm.

L: But then I had this like massive perspective change on, "He's not putting it away because he knows he doesn't know where it goes and he knows it's important to me that it goes in the right place."

J: Ah.

L: So him not putting it away is this beautiful act of love.

J: Oh yeah.

L: Of valuing my values and valuing my... you know, respecting my perspective and...

J: Right.

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L: You know, and then I mentioned it to him and he's like, "Yeah, that's exactly why you don't want to put it away. I know that I put it in the wrong drawer and you open the drawer, it's going to frustrate you."

J: (Laughs). Uh-huh, uh-huh.

L: "And I don't want you to be frustrated."

J: Aww.

L: "You know, I want you to feel calm when you open your drawers." And I was like...
[Laughter]

L: It's such a funny...

J: "When you open your drawers." (Laughs)

L: Yeah, right? Si it's a funny thing, but yeah, I mean, and... so now like our... the behaviors in our home, so if we were to videotape our home 6 months ago and videotape our home today, the behaviors looking exactly the same, but the emotional energy around it is completely different, if that makes sense.

J: Yeah, yeah. And it's funny, you reframed your thinking to give him the benefit of the doubt.

L: Yeah.

J: And why not do that in all relationships? And it's hard because we expect all these things to be happening, and when they don't meet the expectation, the stress occurs.

L: Mm-hmm.

J: If you just drop expectation, give the benefit of the doubt, so much better.

L: Yeah, yeah.

J: I don't know why it's so hard for us.

[Laughter]

L: Because we're human. (Laughs)

J: Well, let's take a quick break for our sponsor and then we'll come back and talk about the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse.

(Advertisement) [35:21]

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(Interview resumes) [36:44]

J: Well, let's speak a little bit about John Gottman and emotional abuse, criticism, contempt, and those things, and how... you know, how we can identify that and establish a boundary there.

L: Yeah. So the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse are four things that in... so John Gottman is a marriage researcher and he has done extensive research and it's mostly observational. So he videotapes couples having a disagreement and then analyzes their disagreement, the content of their disagreement or I guess really the processes that are present, and he tracks them over time and he can predict divorce really accurately based on the presence of 4 things; criticism, contempt, stonewalling, and defensiveness. And so those 4 things, if they're present in your interactions, that's a clue that you need to start working either with a relationship coach or with a therapist and start addressing those feelings and what's underlying them and kind of why those are popping up in your interactions. And the... some, a little bit is, you know, like maybe one arguments with some contempt over the course of a year is okay, but even just a little bit of contempt is incredibly toxic. So, I don't know, does that help? (Laughs)

J: Yes, yes.

L: Yeah.

J: That's good. And so a lot of people think that name-calling and yelling is just a part of a good fight in a relationship.

L: Oh. (Laughs)

J: But if you're...

[Laughter]

J: Well, yeah, I mean because... right, I know you... you don't because you were trained right.

L: Right.

J: But a lot of people do.

L: Yes, yeah.

J: So how do you get... help a couple shift from that thinking and start to do it more healthfully?

L: Yeah.

J: Knowing what...

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L: Yeah. So the first thing that you do if you're working with someone who's 'Gottman informed', who follows Gottman's kind of approach to working with couples, is you outline the typical pattern of communication. And so everybody has a conflict routine that we do where it doesn't really matter what the topic is, we can just agree about anything, but in general, we're going to disagree the same way. I might bring up the disagreement and then typically my partner gets defensive and then I get defensive back and then he starts stonewalling and then I start pursuing, so I start, you know, needling and trying to get a reaction out of them and then he explodes and then I act like the victim and then he finally apologizes and, you know, so we have a cycle. You know, I just made that one up, but that's a pretty classic one.

J: You're describing our cycle, that's my cycle; although it's much better now, but that was our past cycle.

L: Yeah. That cycle it's actually, like research-wise, I think for couples who are having frequent disagreements, I think that's the most common; like, it's like 75%.

J: So it went... how did it go again? Problem...

L: You see the problem.

J: Defensiveness.

L: Defensiveness, more defensive, then stonewalling, and then pursuing. So there's usually like a pattern of pursuing and withdrawing; and usually one person is the pursuer in all of the arguments, and the other person is the person who withdraws or tries to stop the argument from happening. And then the needling and the kind of consistent pursuing until an explosion happens.

J: Mm-hmm.

L: And then victimhood and apology and then, hopefully, reconnection and repair and then maybe the cycle starts again.

J: Ooh.

L: Yeah, it's really... I know, it paints a stark picture. And so like the way that Gottman works is you start at the very beginning. You focus on changing the way the conversation starts; it's called a soft start up.

J: Mm-hmm.

L: And you really soften... you approach it from a vulnerable and open-hearted place that allows your partner to be less defensive; to let go of defensiveness.

J: Ooh.

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L: And then the second defensiveness flares up, the second you get flooded with emotions, the moment you start feeling your fight, flight or freeze response being activated where you are maybe you feel hot, blood starts rushing to your head, your heart starts pounding, the second you notice those things, you take a break with the intention of coming back to it.

J: Okay.

L: But you take a break. Because when you're in fight, flight or freeze, your rational parts of your brain are not accessible and you are not going to make good decisions; decisions that are based on your true goals. You're going to be making decisions and saying things that are hardwired into your brain, probably from when you were a child. I mean, you are going to start behaving in very defensive way. So you take a break and you come back to it when you're calm and clear-headed, but you always come back to it.

J: Hmm, wow, you're ending the whole cycle really, just at the beginning...

L: Yes, yes.

J: ...with that soft start up.

L: And for... yeah, and lots of couples, you know, they work really hard on the soft startup. You know, there's lots of education around what is a soft startup, and not just education from like the coach or the therapist to the partners, you know, but also education like... and feedback from the partner. You know, so, "If I were to say this, how would that feel?" and then you'd validate and, you know, and empathize and say, "Okay, so what about this?" and, you know, there's trial and error, you know, and you find a new way. You... another approach to couples work that I really like is called emotion focused couples therapy.

J: Mm-hmm.

L: And they view couples as dancers as like a ballroom dancing couple and that the therapist is the coach teaching them new steps, and that it takes time to find a new rhythm, you know, to find new steps that work for the couple. But the therapist is the choreographer giving them the new steps to try out and helping them practice that we're not stepping on toes and all of those things. I really like the imagery of ballroom dancing lesson.

J: Oh, you're going to make everyone want to work with you.

L: (Laughs)

J: Because... are you a Gottman trained coach, I mean, therapist?

L: I don't have anything official... like I haven't been into any of the official Gottman trainings, but I've read

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almost everything that he puts out. And, you know, have...

J: Mmm, nice.

L: I mean, have had extensive training in my PhD program, yeah.

J: So do you offer therapy if anyone wanted to work with you like online therapy or anything like that?

L: I offer relationship coaching. And so definitely, I help couples come to understanding. I help them learn new communication skills. I help them delineate they're kind of their cycle. I offer them psycho-education, but I don't do therapy. So I don't have a license to practice therapy either in Wisconsin or online; it's just something I chose not to pursue licensure. I prefer the coaching relationship which is more goal oriented and solution focused rather than digging into some of the deeper issues. So if... you know what I mean?

J: Yeah, rehashing the past.

L: Yes, yeah.

J: Yeah.

L: And so...

J: Oh, that makes sense.

L: ... since this is a conversation around boundaries, that's just a personal boundary that I had to set. Because as a highly empathetic person, when I was a couples therapist, (so I was a practicing couple and family therapist for 6 years) I brought everything home with me. It really influenced... I didn't have firm internal boundaries so I let a lot in. I brought my couples home with me, I would have dreams and nightmares and lose sleep over it. And so in...

J: Wow.

L: ... kind of restructuring my life and pursuing a new career, I made the conscious decision not to do therapy anymore; to stay in the realm of coaching.

J: Oh.

L: If that makes sense.

J: Awesome. Well, and if people wanted to work with you or learn more about what you're doing, where would they go?

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L: Yeah. So I have a website; it's www.laurafroyen.com. So on my website, I do some blog posts, I also have an option where you can opt in to do a free 15 minutes 'get to know you' call, a mini session with me, and I also have a fun game that you can download on my website called 'random acts of connection', which is just a really kind of fun game that there's a copy for you and you can download copy for your partner. And they're just fun tasks to up connection on that speak to love languages, and it's a task that I usually give my couples right at the very beginning of working with me because one of the key pieces of working with a couple is getting their sense of connection and nurturing their marital friendship going; getting that like the positive regard within the relationship up, so we want to up that right away.

J: Up.

L: Yeah.

[Laughter]

J: Yeah.

L: Yeah.

J: Oh, that's so smart.

L: Yeah.

J: That's so good.

L: And then, I have a Facebook page where I do a weekly live talk on Wednesday is at noon, and I talk about... I cover 3 topic areas; parenting, relationships, and self-care. So those are the 3 pillars of balanced parenting or my approach to balanced parenting. And so each week, I rotate through the topics and you can catch those on my Facebook page, which is facebook.com/laurafroyen.

J: Perfect. And I want to hear about your morning routine. What does that look like?

L: I usually get up early and either read or journal with a cup of tea, and I recently started going to... well, I also often do yoga during that time. I usually get up about an hour before my family gets up; so usually around 5, and my kids get up at 6. And I've also started just recently going to a body-positive boot camp style workout which is so amazing because it's filled with... I don't know, people who look like me and who are working out in order to be strong and well and have a positive body image, rather than for any specific goals around weight loss.

J: Oh, nice.

L: Yeah, and it's really... like, it's really devoid of all the unhealthy messages about, you know, "I'm really

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working hard to have a healthy relationship with food," you know, and so lots of the food stuff is not in there. And like I'm able to have goals around like being able to move well and with ease or having lots of energy or getting better sleep, and those can be my goals without any reference to weight loss or, you know, changes in my body.

J: Yeah.

L: It's really cool.

J: I like that. And... and those kind of feel they're more visceral than just the scale number.

L: Yeah, yeah. And, I mean, focusing on this scale number, I mean, it really... it's a really... it's just a number. You know, number can't give us happiness, you know?

J: Yeah. And what if you're gaining muscle?

L: Right, yeah.

J: I mean, it might go up, but you feel great. Yeah.

L: Yeah.

J: Yeah. What is your favorite easy meal?

L: Easy meal, oh gosh, I really like rotisserie chicken. (Laughs). Those...

J: Mmm! Yummy.

L: Yeah. So one of my favorite things that I make for my kids though, they like pasta with butter and cheese on them.

J: Uh-huh.

L: And so I recently started using lentil or chickpea pasta, which is really high in protein. And so like the my favorite easy meal is with those... like with lentil or chickpea pasta and I always put like frozen veggies in with it at the last few... like the last minute or 2 of cooking the pasta. Then the frozen veggies cook with it and then you drain it and then put it right back into the pot and melt butter and cheese into it. And then you only have one...

J: Yum!

L: ... pot on the clean, which is really nice. And it's... yeah, and that's really fast. (Laughs)

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J: Smart.

L: So, yeah, I guess that's it.

J: I don't even know they made lentil and chickpea pasta.

L: Oh yeah, you...

J: Good to know.

L: You can even get it at Costco. (Laughs)

J: What!

L: Yeah!

J: Oh my gosh, I have to go.

L: Yeah.

J: (Laughs). What is your favorite way to connect with loved ones?

L: Oh, I think I really like to speak to each of their love languages. You know, so from my partner, it's time spent. So I can give him the gift of watching football with him while I hold his hand, you know, that's really a way that fills his need for connection, and mine too.

J: Uh-huh.

L: With one child, one of my kids, it's reading; yeah, snuggling up together and reading. And for the other one, being fully present while she plays; so putting my phone away. I mean, for both of... all of these situations, so putting my phone away as the number one first thing I do to up connection in my house. If we are having a grumpy week, that's the first thing that my husband and I agreed to do is to put our phone in a drawer the second we walk in and not take it out again until the kids are in bed. Yeah.

J: Wow. How did you figure out these exact... you know, love languages are kind of more general, how did you figure out the exact things? Did you just ask your kids and spouse?

L: I asked my spouse, yeah. I mean, we took, you know, the love languages quiz. You know, so there's a quiz online that you can take that's super easy.

J: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

L: So we both took that and had fun like a date night discussing it, much earlier in our marriage; I think

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before we even had kids. But with my kids, it's been through observation. And, I mean, I think one of the things that I've noticed is that, when I'm doing those things, their behavior is better. They are more patient, they're more kind to each other, you know, and so I think it's been a little bit of trial and error, but I really like... I mean, I think that we all benefit from being really seen and heard and I know that my kids respond really well to that; to me putting my phone away and really being fully present with them.

J: Uh-huh, so you're kind of watching their behavior to know what's working.

L: Oh, absolutely.

J: Oh.

L: Yes, yeah. I... you know, they can't always tell you. I mean, sometimes like with an older one you can ask, "So when do you feel most loved?" you know, "What is your favorite thing, you know, to do with me?" And those are really great questions to ask but, yeah, the behavior too. And, I mean, with lots of my clients, I have them keep behavioral logs, you know, with those tracking positives and negatives; what time they happen, what they happened right what were you were doing right before a meltdown and what you did right after, you know, it's kind of tracking those things so you can just become more aware. Because oftentimes, we just kind of go through the rhythm and go through the motions of life without being present.

J: Hmm, wow, that's good. I'm going to have to do better with 6 kids.

L: Oh, I can't even imagine. (Laughs). Yeah.

J: I'm going to do better. I'm committing on this show.

[Laughter]

J: What's your favorite book, Laura?

L: Well, gosh, my favorite like personal book that I like to read or the book I'd most recommend people read?

J: Anything; both, both

L: Okay. So... well I hope probably have 2 separate ones. So my first like my personal like favorite novel books are the 'Dragonriders of Pern' series, which is a really like...oh gosh.

J: Oh! I love those!

L: Good, I'm glad you even have heard of them; I feel like most people in haven't. And so, yeah, I love the books, I think that they're so interesting. And if you can get past...

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J: Mm-hmm.

L: I think if you're not a fantasy person, I think that there's still a really accessible book to enjoy. And then from a like more kind of self-educational standpoint, I am currently reading 'Parent Effectiveness Training' by Thomas Gordon. And Thomas Gordon is the original source of listening techniques and these... like active listening is used in almost every relationship intervention out there right now. And so kind of the... it's really fun to read this like source material. It's really practical and can help you in almost all of your relationships, even if you don't have kids. So you got a 'Parent Effectiveness Training' by Thomas Gordon is like my number one book.

J: Hmm, PET.

L: Yeah, PET, yeah.

J: Mm-hmm.

L: Yeah. (Laughs)

J: Okay. Ooh, that's good. I haven't read that one. Okay, let me remind our listeners they can find links to all these books and everything else we've been talking about on our show notes page at jenriday.com/93. And, Laura, the big question, what does it mean for you to be a vibrant happy woman?

L: Okay, yes. So deeply knowing and trusting myself, being brave and vulnerable, and slowing down and savoring life.

J: Ooh, ooh! How do you slow down and savor your life more? Your busy...

L: I'm intentional about it. So I create little rituals where it's part of our routine. So in the mornings, we get up quite early, oftentimes my daughters and I will gather in our sunroom and watch the sun rise, you know, and that's a really...

J: Ooh!

L: You know, I know not everybody gets up that early, but at the same point, there are moments in your routine where you can slow down. My family also fills out a gratitude journal most days at dinner. So one of our things is we go around the table and write down what we were grateful for that day. And it's just a simple journal and we... you can write the date in; and so we actually have like 3 years worth of gratitude in there. And then sometimes, we flip back through and read kind of like, "So what were we grateful year ago and what were we grateful for 2 years ago?" and... and that helps too.

J: Is it a special kind of journal or just any old journal?

L: This one happens to be a gratitude journal, but it's... I think any notebook would work. I don't think

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that you would have to get...

J: Ooh.

L: You know, I think you could use this do any notebook because it's all the... this one, it just has, you know, like lines where you can write like it says 'date' and you fill in the date. You know, and we just write it for each person, you know, and it helps. I don't know, it's really fun to see like what a 3-year-old is grateful for and now what they're grateful for at 5. And, you know, when my youngest was starting to talk and she would say she was grateful for water, you know, like in its... I mean, and she's, you know, 8 months old. Like it's really fun to go back and look at those things.

J: Aww!

L: You know, and... and see how they change and grow.

J: I'm feeling this, Laura, that you need to write a book about this.

L: (Laughs)

J: Let's have a challenge from you to our listeners and then we'll say goodbye.

L: Okay. So this week, I want to challenge everyone listening to get very crystal clear on their goals and values and priorities because it will really help guide their actions in their relationships and in their work and in their lives in general.

J: Awesome. Thank you, this was fantastic. Everyone find Laura on her website [drlaurafroyen...](http://drlaurafroyen.com)

L: I am Dr. Laura Froyen, but it's just laurafroyen.com.

J: Okay. Everyone, find Laura online at laurafroyen.com.

L: Yeah.

J: She is amazing.

L: Aww!

J: Alright, take care, Laura.

L: Thanks for having me. Bye.

J: Bye-bye.

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