



Episode 513: Dr. Tanner Wallace on Childhood Trauma, Attachment Wounds and How to Heal

Child: Welcome to my Mommy's podcast.

This podcast is brought to you by Sunday for Dogs... a new staple in our house that the newest family members could tell you the most about if they could talk. Lollipop and Hemingway, our two family dogs, are loving this food and get so excited when it's time to eat now! When we got them, I knew I didn't want to feed them overly processed kibble and homemade options were a lot of work! And Sunday has been my solution. It's the first (and only) human-grade, air-dried dog food. Combining the nutrition and taste of all-natural, human-grade foods, with the ease of a zero-prep, ready-to-eat formula, Sundays is the best way to feed your best friend. Sundays is easier for dog parents to manage than refrigerated human-grade dog food brands. No fridge, prep, or clean-up. Unlike most human-grade dog foods, Sundays is gently air-dried and ready-to-eat, versus those other brands that are cooked and frozen instead. It's as simple as scoop into their bowl and watch your pup devour it. In a blind taste test, Sundays outperformed leading competitors 40-0. No artificial binders, synthetic additives, or general garbage — seriously, look at the label. All of Sundays' ingredients are easy to pronounce (okay, except quinoa), and healthy for dogs to eat. We've worked out a special deal for our listeners. Receive 35% off your first order. Go to sundaysfordogs.com/WELLNESSMAMA or use code WELLNESSMAMA at checkout.

This podcast is sponsored by Wellnesse, that's wellness with an E on the end. The brand I co-founded when I realized there just weren't truly natural alternatives to some personal care products that performed as well as many conventional brands. We've been sharing our popular toothpaste and haircare for almost two years, but today I'm excited to tell you about a new star in our lineup. The charcoal toothpaste that provides the same mineral-rich benefits as our original whitening formula with a boost of charcoal for extra whitening and mouth-supporting benefits. It's made without glycerin using oral microbiome-friendly ingredients to help your body create stronger, healthier, whiter teeth while you sleep. I love to use charcoal and whitening toothpaste on alternating days to keep my teeth looking and feeling their best. You can check out our toothpaste and all of our products at wellnesse.com.

Katie: Hello, and welcome to the "Wellness Mama Podcast." I'm Katie from wellnessmama.com and wellnesse.com. That's wellness with an E on the end. And this episode is about a tough, but very important topic, which is that of childhood trauma, but not just big T trauma, like we think of with sexual assault or extreme physical abuse. I am here with Tanner Wallace, who is a former university professor of health and human development, turned full-time trauma recovery guide. She hosts her own podcast called, "The Relational Healing Podcast," and you can also find her various places online. But she helps adult survivors of childhood trauma heal their attachment wounds. And we go into a lot of this today, how things like childhood wounds can express in our lives, even if we don't have a really specific extreme trauma. And the way that these wounds show up in adult relationships. The differences between traumatic events, and if that actually becomes traumatizing or not. How what happens after an event is often more important than the event itself. And the reason that emotional neglect can actually be more harmful than physical abuse for children. The first steps in recognizing and starting to unpatterned childhood wounds, and how to deactivate our default survival codes.

We talk about the somatic connection to working through these wounds, how to witness, befriend, and validate, and then eventually release some of these patterns. And so, so much more. There will definitely be follow-ups to this episode. But as a starting point, I can't wait to share today's episode with you. And let's join Tanner. Tanner, welcome, and thanks so much for being here.

Dr. Tanner: I'm happy to be here.

Katie: Well, I am excited to chat with you about a pretty deep topic and one that I have gotten a lot of requests for ever since kind of sharing some of my own story. And that is the topic of trauma in a general sense, and also we're gonna go into some specifics from there today. I know that there are different types of trauma and they can express differently, and even amongst people, different types of traumas express differently. So there's a lot to go into. I also know that, at least from my own experience, a lot of these things started earlier in childhood than I originally thought. And it wasn't until I really started delving into it that I realized just how early they started. And I think when I started on this journey, I didn't realize really that I had any childhood trauma or anything I would've classified as specific trauma early in childhood. So I'd love to start there kind of broad on maybe that overview of how can someone know if they have childhood trauma if they don't maybe have an acute really big T trauma that stands out.

Dr. Tanner: Such a great question to start with. So I guess I just wanna frame this for your audience that I am a childhood trauma survivor. My story is that I kind of survived through life in a very dissociated state, relying on a lot of coping mechanisms. And then, I think this answers the question indirectly, it's kind of when... You know, I'm 44 years old and so for speaking people my age, it's kind of when you hit a point in your life where you just can't explain why things are so hard for you, like any framework or any advice or any therapist you've seen, it just is not helping. And at that point, you start looking for answers and you stumble upon something that introduces you to the idea of childhood trauma and then suddenly you make sense.

So for a lot of people my age, it's kind of this backdoor way that things in your life just cannot seem to come together. And I'll talk very specifically about that. But one of the things that's really fascinating is there's kind of a cohort effect to this. So I'm a former professor that studied human development. And if you think about development, you think about individuals developing over time, but then we're also in clusters of humans that are same-aged peers in a particular context in the history of the world. So even my teen children and early, you know, 20-year-old people that I know are living in a very different context as far as what's available to them informationally from social media. You know, most 17-year olds that have an Instagram account know what gaslighting is, know what a trauma mind is.

That's like one of the fascinating things about social media is allowing information to spread more rapidly. So really what I'm gonna talk about, because it's my lived experience and those I work closely with as a recovery coach, is people in their 30s and 40s and 50s that are suddenly like what is going on in my life. And typically the what is going on, to answer your question, is relational. So that in key domains or areas of their life, relationships just keep exploding, having bad endings, not feeling comfortable. So this shows up in intimate

partnership, like through a divorce or affair behavior, or, you know, re-partnering with someone and it's still a struggle. It shows up in parenting. Why can't I be present with my kids? Why do I rage at my kids? Why do I feel like actually I'm not connected with my kids in this way that scares me. Or in work. So why is it so hard for me to get along with colleagues? Why am I always feeling edgy at work? Like, I just can't get comfortable or I'm feeling like there's a scarcity at work, that I'm not getting ahead, that I'm being wronged.

So it's a discomfort. Maintaining and sustaining close productive connections with other humans is often what sends people to get help. And sadly, because the world hasn't quite caught on to the prevalence and impact of trauma, sometimes that seeking help is a decades' long endeavor. And that's really my mission is to not have that be the case anymore, to really make a lot of this trauma-informed perspective way more accessible to adult survivors that may not even recognize they're survivor until very late in life.

Katie: Yeah. That's a great point. And I think one thing I had to realize in this is... Because I would say I had exceptional parents. They were amazing. And overall my childhood was amazing. And so it felt very strange to acknowledge that there were instances in my childhood that had had this really profound psychological impact and having to realize that wasn't a reflection necessarily on my parents. It wasn't that they weren't trying to be good parents. It wasn't that they necessarily did anything wrong per se. It was that as a child, it was a way I had interpreted certain things and then internalized those wounds. And I think it was a big step even just to recognize that. And to your point, I think you're right, with social media, we can talk all about the bad things from it, but the good thing from it is that things like this are now being talked about more and people are starting to recognize these patterns.

And I feel like if we can, as parents, start to recognize them more and more and heal our own lives, that, of course, has ripple over effect into our children and into future generations. So I'd love to hear a little bit more. I know I have a note to ask you about the myths of childhood trauma and I think we've touched on it a little bit that someone may not even realize the roots of some things in their lives, but let's talk a little bit more about that. What do you mean by the myth of childhood trauma?

Dr. Tanner: Yeah. So I mean one really helpful thing, I think, to people just trying to wrap their heads around, does this apply to me? Does this not apply to me? And, you know, just to build on what you said is that there's also a cohort effect with parenting developmentally. So our parents were parented by a particular generation, that generation then parented us, and now we're parenting the younger generation. And so the definition of what is good enough parenting evolves and progresses as we learn more about human functioning. And so a parent that was actually trying their best to parent us as 30-, 40-, 50-year olds wasn't aware as much around how big emotions matter deeply. It's not just, "I'll give you something to cry about," or "Don't cry here. There's no room for your crying." So, you know, just even our collective understanding of the importance of honoring emotions and creating psychological safety has shifted as well. So I just wanna add that to what you said.

And it's also, I wanna add, very taboo to talk negatively about parents in our society. And if you take a cross-cultural perspective, it's even more taboo in certain cultures. And I think that is something to problematize in

some ways. You know, that all of us feel there's something really wrong with saying my parents may be good people, but they really failed me as parents, and really decoupling parenting from someone's character because those things can exist separately. And, you know, in my world, most people had really parents that had their own serious trauma. So it's a little more complicated in my direct world, but just to create a mainstream framework for it. I just also wanna say that there's parts of us that really struggle to say anything negative about our parents because it is so taboo. And I think that's an unfortunate hindrance to a lot of people actually getting the support that they need and desire. And you can both have a connection to parents and not speak publicly about how your parents failed you and still seek help that will be very beneficial to you to unpack the ways in which they did fail you. So I just wanna say that because I think that's really important just in light of sort of what you said related to parenting.

And then I just wanna say that... So if people are kind of sitting with this and like, I don't know, does this apply to me? Does this not apply to me? One of the most helpful ways to think about trauma, and I'm gonna make a visual because we're on video, and I know I'll try to speak it out loud for an audio experience with it. And then you can help me, too, if there needs to be more cues to a listener. But if you think about any event in life, all humans face events that are so stressful that our skills to cope with it cannot keep pace with the stress. So you think here's an event, so I'm raising one hand and I'm making a line with my palm and it's like, okay, here's the event. And then my other palm in my other hand, I'm signaling coping skills and it's below the other palm. So there's a gap between what's happening stress level and what's the coping resources that the human has to deal with it. So in the cases of acute trauma, a single event, you face this gap, right? As a kid, you face this gap.

Kids on a bus, an older kid, you know, maybe not a bad kid, but just being thoughtless, you know, tosses your bookbag out at a bus stop and your stuff scatters and you're in kindergarten. So again, the event is super stressful. You don't have the resources to cope with it. What's really important is that's a traumatic event. But if you think about whether it's going to be traumatizing from a human development perspective, it's all about what happens after that event. Is someone available to process what happens to you, lend you some co-regulation skills so that the gap closes? Either they enhance your coping skills or they decrease your interpretation of the stress of the event, and the gap closes. When that happens to a human, your sense of safety and trust in other humans and the ability to social connection to provide you a sense of safety and security is restored. Fascinating studies of kids in collective events that are traumatic, study what happens afterwards is so fascinating. It shows exactly what I'm talking about. This finding that it really matters what happens after the event in terms of the lasting psychological effects of that event.

Parents, if they don't know that that's their role is to really help close that gap or they're not paying attention enough and kids, I mean, the thing about children is they're still learning how to be in the world. So even a parent that is distracted by work and on their phone a lot, that child may interpret, I don't wanna bother mom or dad or grandma or whoever it is because, you know, they're busy and work is really important to them. And yet I just had this event at school where I wasn't picked to be a part of a group and I'm feeling awful about it, but I don't realize that I can say, hey, I need your time right now because I just had a stressful event. My coping skills aren't... I mean, they don't know to say that. They just know I don't wanna bother mom and dad, so they never get the support afterwards.

So it actually takes a really aware parent, a really present parent, a parent that's doing an incredible amount of their own work to recognize how incredibly important this is. In the space that I'm in, I can't tell you how tender and touching and tough moments I have sitting with clients who are processing the ways they failed their children. It's such a big burden as an adult to be like, "Whoa, I'm learning this now. And I got this so wrong." And if someone's listening and they're like, "Oh my gosh, I'm having this huge shame flash right now because that's me. I don't do that." It is never too late. I've had 70-year-old parents make amends, and you can't take back what happened. You know, I mean, some things are too late, but in the scheme of repair of relationships, there's almost always a chance to make things better with that level of self-awareness.

So one of the myths of childhood trauma is that there needs to be this incredibly horrific event that happened again and again and again, like sexual abuse, very extreme physical abuse. Of course, that is childhood abuse and neglect. But that's what gets a lot of, like, if you have that, it's obvious you have it. And even people that have had that experience, your brain and mind do amazing things to help you not remember and to disassociate from it. So even survivors with those histories sometimes struggle, but society accepts that as childhood abuse and neglect. But some research really shows that it's the emotional abuse and neglect that does the most psychological damage because that is like, you know, even in the cases of sexual abuse, if there's a safe adult that validates the emotions with the human processing it, it's going to be horrific. There's going to have to need to be healing. There's going to be consequences for a long time.

But it's really what affects those survivors is the adults around them failed to notice their emotional neglect, failed to notice the red flags, dismissed it, denied it to uphold somebody else's safety and security. So it's really the emotional neglect that is really powerful in terms of those wounded parts you talked about earlier. And there's a huge continuum of that. So what I would say just to wrap up my response is, if you feel those relational struggles that I mentioned earlier, you should really open up your heart and mind to there's some sort of trauma and unresolved relational pain I'm carrying around here. Do I need to wave the flag of childhood trauma survivor to receive the help that I need? Absolutely not. And if we get a chance to talk about it, the view I have of recovery is really a parts perspective. And so there might be parts of you that are like, "I can't claim that. I'm a fraud if I say that." I'm like, "That would be so embarrassing because these other people have experienced things so much worse. Who am I to say I need trauma-informed care?" I just want listeners to recognize that's just a part of you that can be worked with, right? Can be unpacked, can be coached, can be supported so that it doesn't keep you from getting the help that you need.

Katie: I'd love to go deeper. It's amazing. I think you just explained that so well. And some of these core childhood wounds use the words of, you know, kids being worried that they were gonna bother parents or maybe even internalizing that I'm a bother. And it seems like there's maybe like recurring kind of core language that surrounds some of that. I know I've like personally experienced and talked to people who have felt like maybe the core wound is I'm not lovable, or I'm not good enough was a big one for me. And then that expresses throughout our whole life in different ways. Are there kind of commonalities of core ways that kids internalize these things?

Dr. Tanner: Yeah. So the way I think about trauma recovery is in the framework of internal family systems, which is a therapeutic modality that I have training in. And the way that Internal Family Systems thinks about... Founded by Richard Schwartz, one of the most influential books that asked when that question was asked of me is "No Bad Parts." So that's a recent book. It's a really broad framework of this idea that as humans, we don't have a mono mind. That the way our brain develops, especially in response to trauma, is to develop subpersonalities or kind of neural networks that help us function in that gap space, right? So if we recognize we don't have a mono mind, that we have these parts, subpersonalities, neural networks, you know, it's part of our everyday parlance, too. Like, on the one hand, I think this, and on the one hand, I think this. So if you think about the way you process information as not this unified mono mind, how you can think about wounded, younger parts are parts of our personalities, subpersonalities, parts of us that really took on the pain of an attachment wounding.

And those can look very different for very different people, but they're all related to, you know, I'm supposed to be attached securely to often parents. That's where the early wounds come from. And there has been some relational betrayal that I've experienced or interpreted. Often that is kind of an abandonment, like when I needed you, you weren't there. Sometimes it can be more extreme, you know? So the abandonment can be just, you turned away when I needed something. I tried to express help and you didn't help me. Or it could be, you know, the things you said or the way you explained the world to me made me fearful, right? So this is another thing that's not talked about a lot is that when we're little we're sponges, we're taking on our parents' kind of interpretation of the world. So if we grew up with parents that didn't do their own work, even if they weren't, you know, directly abusing us or neglecting us.

So these frameworks that they provide us, sometimes they don't even realize they're providing it to us. Around sickness, money, relationships. It can be really scary for a little kid if it has this energy to it that the world is unsafe. And there are lots of parents that do that and they don't even realize that kids are listening. They don't even realize that energetically kids are picking up on that frequency of how the world is being talked about. You know, gossiping, kind of talking poorly about neighbors, just kind of an energy that the world is scary and you can't trust people. That can fill a little kid with fear, right? I'm afraid, the world seems scarier. I don't know, maybe I can't trust people. And so we take those on, parts of us take those on. Again, it's a continuum. That's like one of the things I wanna emphasize, all of this is a continuum. But it can be unresolved for us.

And so we carry around this wounding, many times unconsciously, but it's implicitly in the way we process information and the brain and the mind and the body are so incredibly adaptive that when we have that thought, emotions rise up, our body, you know, responds with a whole chemical sequence and hormonal sequence that I'm sure other guests have talked about since you have a wellness podcast. And what happens then is our brain continues to be like, "How do I process this? How do I make sense of this? How do I cope with this?" And so there's other parts of our personality that develop that are protective parts. Oh, this now is the emotion of fear. This is the emotion of abandonment, it's been activated, it's been triggered. Now we need something to bring our whole system into like mobilization, survival physiology so we can fight off or fend off whatever's happening. And that can be a freeze or backup response or lean in and fight. So we have these natural evolutionary drives to not feel that way.

And so protective parts are parts of us that are like hypervigilantly looking for danger, always scanning the environment for cues of danger, cues of safety, cues of danger, cues of safety. And so we move into adulthood with this very well-sequenced, I feel this essence, I call it a whiff in the real world, I feel this whiff of abandonment might be happening, whether it's real or perceived. And these protective parts jump in. Some of them are managers, they're trying to manage the situation, but then some of our protective parts are shut the whole thing down parts, depressive parts, substance-abusing parts, numbing parts, distracting parts. When the work of the kinda hypervigilant managers doesn't make it okay, then we have had this even, you know, more adaptive strategy just to be like, take us all out of this. It's too much for the system. We need to shut this all down in some way. And those create physiological state changes in us. So there's this fascinating way of kind of combining what we know from a physiological standpoint, what we know from neuroscience, what we know from psychology-oriented trauma frameworks, and also what we know about cognition and how the brain holds and stores memory. And you can bring those all together to tell a really important story of your nervous system through this part's perspective.

And so it's how kind of I view it. And so it's really at its core healing those wounded younger parts, but one of the things I'm so passionate about is that many frameworks miss is the well-defended system that you really need to work with first before you can work with the wounded parts because they've been defended for years. And those protective subpersonalities are not gonna wanna let go of their job because it's kept the whole system operating in a way that feels adaptive to a system, even if in the present day, it's misreading the cues around it and it's looping back through old information.

Katie: Yeah. And when you talk about it in terms of protective, it makes sense. And also, that was the thing I had to recognize is these things happened... I learned to be actually grateful for them because those were amazing things that kicked in to keep me safe at a time when they needed to. But realizing that there comes at a time as an adult when you don't need those protections anymore, but I feel like even getting to that first step can be so difficult sometimes. So I'm sure it's a long answer, but what are the kind of first steps to even getting awareness about that to be able to then begin to recognize it and start to work on it?

Dr. Tanner: Yeah. And that's such a good question and it is a long answer. So I'll try to be brief. But, you know, one thing, too, is I think the very first step, especially if people have hit a rock bottom like I'm talking about, like they're really getting honest about their parenting, or their partnership, or the way they're using substances, or the way that work is not going well. There's kind of this rock-bottom moment for most people where you're like, "What I am doing is not working. And the life that I want is so far out of reach and it seems like it's moving further and further away from me." I think the first thing I would just say is that you are not broken. You are not too messed up or too far gone because I think a lot of us start to develop that perspective about us when it just is not working, it's not working, it's not working.

So the first thing I would say is, the beautiful thing about a parts perspective is that you're gonna totally make sense internally and externally once you understand how these subpersonalities have developed to protect

you and keep you safe. And so the first thing is just like, take a deep breath, you're not too broken. With the right help and support, you can heal. And then I think the next step, and this is a hard one, and so it's so hard to talk about because, again, it goes back to that continuum. And if you have coped by kind of taking yourself out of your body, the return to your body to do some of the work that I'm suggesting is really gonna feel so deeply uncomfortable. It literally will feel sometimes like if I do this, like, I wanna crawl out of my own skin. Like people will say, "I wanna crawl out of my own skin, Tanner. I can't do this. I feel like I'm gonna die if I do this." And so I wanna normalize that that actually is an experience that you're having that's real because all those protective parts are like, "Wait, are you kidding me? Wait, what? We've done this for decades. You want us to do what?"

So the very first step I call it deactivating survival codes or the default survival codes, because actually one survival code, it's the most recent survival code, is connecting with other humans. We're safest in connection with other humans. But more primitive survival codes, which is the ones you wanna kind of break those default primitive survival codes, are the ones that have you, you know, freeze up or fight - the freeze or fight, or just the extreme responses to what's happening in front of you so - that you can tap in the productive survival code, which is connecting and intimacy and vulnerability with other safe humans. But it's first kind of deactivating those most primitive survival codes. And how you do that is a very slow practice of really noticing physical sensations in your body because that's part of a lot of mindfulness practice, right? So you can build on a mindfulness practice if you have it. But the key difference is connecting the physical sensations of emotions with the subpersonalities or parts that show up through that physical sensation.

So it's starting to build a narrative and a story around your subpersonalities and how they uniquely show up physically in your body. And people that listen to my podcast will hear me talk about this because I talk about it very openly. I have had, although she's been greatly unburdened, so she doesn't show up as an extreme, a very extreme hypervigilant manager part that I finally call Amelia Bedelia. And for those that might not know "Amelia Bedelia," she's part of a childhood book, but she's this woman who's hired help and she's like running around and she's always messing stuff up and she's always frantic. And for some reason, my manager just appeared to me as like an Amelia Bedelia part. And so I really know closely now Amelia Bedelia's energy. How I feel her energetic imprint in my body is like literally a high-energy vibration. Like you've had too much caffeine, but not in the good way. It's not like, "Ooh, that was good. I feel awake. I'm here." It's like, "I drank three cups of coffee and now like, I'm so jittery. I can't sit still." It's like, you know, not a good feeling of being over-caffeinated and it kind of goes left to right.

So it would just overcome me and I thought this was just me. I'm like, okay, okay. I had no awareness. And now that I've been doing this work, I feel her when she's like on the left side of my body. I'm like, "Oh, okay, Amelia Bedelia, I gotcha. I gotcha. We need to, you know, slow down a little bit. I need to work with you." And this is what's really different about a healing perspective to physiological sensations. Unlike just noticing them or some of the a thought is just a thought, or stop and check the facts, from a healing perspective with parts, it's she shows up and I honor she's shown up because she's been here with me for a really long time to protect these wounded parts I have. So part of my work with her internally is witnessing her experience, really validating that she's shown up to do this important job, and then helping me, Tanner, show up in self-energy

to let her know I'm here and she doesn't have to do this job in this extreme way now because I'm befriending. Like, I know her, I can work with her.

And for some listeners, they're gonna be like, this woman is crazy on your podcast. Like, "What is she talking about?" And totally, I'm a former university professor. Like, the first time I heard this, I was like, "This is some crazy stuff that this person is saying to me." But....So I've seen it work for myself and many people I work with. So I'm kinda at the point now where like, "I don't care what it sounds like, it works. So I'm good." But for those that have some skeptical parts that need something to connect it to something that they can understand, the way I make meaning of it is, and the challenge is, and I know you've had guests on here that talked about this, is science hasn't really caught up. Like, what we know about the brain is very limited. Like, we are limited by technology and technological advancements to really understand the brain. But my theory is that why this works so efficiently at healing has to do with why retrieval, like memory retrieval and storytelling, is so impactful for cognitive development.

So, many researchers who study cognition and cognitive development, you know, the power of storytelling and the power of retrieval, like memory retrieval... That's why actually quizzes in classrooms really do work, but homework isn't as effective. Like, there's a whole set of research around cognition and cognitive development and learning that I think this really taps into because you're telling stories with yourself about your physiological sensation and it's activating the parts of the brain that have those implicit memories, have the stored lived experience of past like survival mode activation that's looping back through that you're really able to do that work yourself internally. It's incredible, like work as your own recovery coach. So that's how you work with a part. So you witness, you befriend it, you validate it, and you help it know that you are here. So right now when this part shows up for me, I've done so much work, but the burden that she carried was me, Tanner, going offline and like parenting or trying to manage things from a very compromised perspective.

And so part of my work with her was to develop more coping skills, to be like, "Okay, I'm here." Like, "You're right. We need to manage this better." She helped me realize I need to stop drinking alcohol because that just didn't work for my system. So it's this incredible intuitive wisdom you have inside when you tap into really internally being your own coach and not just noticing the physical sensation, not just recognizing it, but really beginning to befriend it through storytelling and tapping into the intuitive wisdom it has for you and your whole internal system. And this isn't my... So I'm building on the Internal Family Systems framework interpreted through like my own trauma survivor lens, but there's a big body of work on IFS.

Katie: I know you have resources about this. I'll make sure we have lots of links in the show notes. But I'm glad you brought up the body awareness and the somatic connection. I think that was a piece that was missing for me for a long time that I didn't even realize to know was missing. And the idea of that what we resist resists. So as long as we're like fighting this thing, especially this thing that's a part of us, it's going to keep resisting because that's in its nature. And so I love your process of witness, befriend, and then validate because I feel like, for me at least, I've seen that start to play out in my life where when you recognize it and bring your awareness to it and befriend it rather than battle it, it changes the way that you could interact with that.

Dr. Tanner: Absolutely. Because what happens is like that resistance is another part. So I'm feeling anxious and there might be another part of me that doesn't like this part that makes me anxious all the time, right? So it's like, I hate this part. So I'm going to, you know, give you this other sensation or this other experience, and then it's not very integrated. So if you think about mental health as an integrated holistic experience of your life, you can imagine how a resistance part, an anxious part, a part that just wants you to check out, a part that wants you to work harder, it becomes very chaotic internally.

Katie: You've also mentioned the term attachment wounds a couple of times. And I think we've talked about them a little bit, but I'd love to have a clear definition and some examples of attachment wounds and how to recognize them in our lives.

Dr. Tanner: Yeah. So, an attachment wound is a relational violation or betrayal that happens in an attachment context. So an attachment context is early in our life, our parents, our primary caregivers, but often it is parents. So in the case of, you know, an adoption, often there is an attachment wounding from the biological parents that relinquish the child to be cared for by, you know, other carers. So parents are always involved, whether they're present or not, in the experience of the attachment context. And then the caregivers that, you know, raise the child. But they also are replicated in our adolescent and adult life in intimate partnerships and sometimes friendships. So you see, we have the primary attachment context and then we replicate, and this is why you'll hear some people say, you know, I was fine when I was single. I was fine when we were dating, but then we moved in with each other or then we got married and everything got so tough.

And the reason that people have that experience is when you're just dating, you know, you're not like recreating a family unit. You're not in an attachment context. You might be becoming, you know, fond of that person, developing affection for them, a dependency upon them in some ways, but you still have this totally separate life. And it's when those lives really integrate or blend in some significant way, and now you're relying on them to be trustworthy, to provide you safety, to have your back, to not betray you. That's often when you replicate an attachment context and attachment woundings can be activated pretty significantly. That's why I said if you struggle with relationships, pay attention because that's the clue that there's some relational trauma. So that's an attachment wound, just a relational betrayal.

And I wanna mention that, you know, there's a thing called complex trauma, which is kind of the world that I sit in. And that is defined as a relational betrayal or violation in the attachment context that happens repeatedly over time where the person experiencing them feels like they have no way out. So that is the continuum, right? So if someone feels like they had pretty good parents but there was some wounding that wasn't really handled as well as it could be. The gap between resources and coping skills maybe wasn't handled well, or something was off about that. So, you know, there are some core wounds carried with you to adulthood. That's different than this happened again and again and again and no one paid attention, and, in fact, my parents were making it worse. That's where you see adults with complex trauma, and that is a longer, more in-depth recovery process. But I would also just really encourage your readers... Readers. Sorry, I was

thinking of a book. That's why I said readers. Your listeners who are like, "I don't know. Maybe that is me." Pete Walker's book on Surviving to Thriving is a great book to pick up, skim, and just see if you connect with what he's saying.

It's a really good litmus test because if you read that and you're like, "Oh my goodness, this is me," then you'll really clearly have your answer of whether you are, in fact, an adult survivor of childhood abuse and neglect and you have complex trauma. It's a really great resource for people. And I think the other part of that question is how do you know you have one? So that I think goes back to the relationship piece I was talking about earlier. So that there's just this discomfort you have in being closely connected to other humans. There's kind of some... I describe it as like a push/pull. Like, you're really close and then you feel like you're chasing someone and then you're moving away from somebody and then you're chasing someone, or you love someone and you don't know if you like them. It's just push/pull, in/out, warm/cold. It's kinda like Katy Perry's song, it's hot and it's cold. I love that song because that's like attachment issues and how they show up in adult life. It's just this inconsistency where you never really can settle into a relationship for the duration. And you always kind of feel lonely even if you're around people or connected to people.

There's always a part of you that worries you can't trust people. And your first instinct isn't to seek comfort and support from a human. You often try to handle it on your own, either through numbing or work or distraction. You're not fully convinced that other humans can provide you comfort and support. So those are a really good set of things that that's you, that there's probably some unresolved pain from childhood that is showing up that's really inhibiting your ability to really be closely connected to other humans. And one thing I'll just mention is that, you know, from a developmental standpoint, it is so clear across so many different data sets that the number one predictor of health and well-being across all different aspects of mind, body, spirit, soul is the presence of stable long-term relationships that are positive over a lifetime. So this really is an investment worth making. I think some people listen to something like this and they're like, oh, well, I'll do that when, you know, I'm not as busy at work, or I'll do that when the kids are older. I'll do that... And they just deprioritize their relational connections or their relational health. And it's just such a sad misunderstanding of what's most important in life. It is the single most wise investment you can possibly make upfront before you reach like 60, 70, 80, and then it actually is too late at that point.

Katie: Yeah. Thought that for a long time. It's like when we look at blue zones, everybody tries to point out, oh, it's the food, or it's they drink red wine, or it's they only eat fish, or whatever. And I'm like, actually the commonality they have is like very good bonded time with stable relationships and that's every single day for them.

This podcast is brought to you by Sunday for Dogs... a new staple in our house that the newest family members could tell you the most about if they could talk. Lollipop and Hemingway, our two family dogs, are loving this food and get so excited when it's time to eat now! When we got them, I knew I didn't want to feed them overly processed kibble and homemade options were a lot of work! And Sunday has been my solution. It's the first (and only) human-grade, air-dried dog food. Combining the nutrition and taste of all-natural, human-grade foods, with the ease of a zero-prep, ready-to-eat formula, Sundays is the best way to feed your

best friend. Sundays is easier for dog parents to manage than refrigerated human-grade dog food brands. No fridge, prep, or clean-up. Unlike most human-grade dog foods, Sundays is gently air-dried and ready-to-eat, versus those other brands that are cooked and frozen instead. It's as simple as scoop into their bowl and watch your pup devour it. In a blind taste test, Sundays outperformed leading competitors 40-0. No artificial binders, synthetic additives, or general garbage — seriously, look at the label. All of Sundays' ingredients are easy to pronounce (okay, except quinoa), and healthy for dogs to eat. We've worked out a special deal for our listeners. Receive 35% off your first order. Go to sundaysfordogs.com/WELLNESSMAMA or use code WELLNESSMAMA at checkout.

This podcast is sponsored by Wellnesse, that's wellness with an E on the end. The brand I co-founded when I realized there just weren't truly natural alternatives to some personal care products that performed as well as many conventional brands. We've been sharing our popular toothpaste and haircare for almost two years, but today I'm excited to tell you about a new star in our lineup. The charcoal toothpaste that provides the same mineral-rich benefits as our original whitening formula with a boost of charcoal for extra whitening and mouth-supporting benefits. It's made without glycerin using oral microbiome-friendly ingredients to help your body create stronger, healthier, whiter teeth while you sleep. I love to use charcoal and whitening toothpaste on alternating days to keep my teeth looking and feeling their best. You can check out our toothpaste and all of our products at wellnesse.com.

And I feel like this also is gonna dovetail. I have a note in my show notes that if you were gonna give a TED Talk, it would be about the one thing to know before you get divorced. And I have a feeling it might connect to here. And it seems like a lot of couples are struggling in different ways after the last couple of years and some increased stress that's happening all around us. So I'd love to hear your answer to that.

Dr. Tanner: Yeah. So this is based on my own personal experience of leaving a first marriage that, you know, maybe we wouldn't have worked out, you know, who's to say, but both of us were traumatized humans. And even though we sought couple's counseling for two years, had two young children depending on us to work it out, and stayed together, no one ever mentioned trauma to either one of us. And that is just such a shortcoming of our mental health system, especially with my history. It is like astounding that no one said, "Hey, you know, I think there might be trauma going on here." But I think even for my ex-husband's story, that's the myth of childhood trauma. And I was even hit occasionally. I don't know if I brought that up in session or not, but it's this myth that it has to be sexual abuse to classify as childhood abuse and neglect, or very severe physical abuse and neglect.

So with our presenting stories, and even mine that has some extreme elements to it, no one mentioned trauma to us. So I would say before anyone walks away from a marriage, especially if there are children involved, like the bar to me is so much higher because of the consequences for your children's development, that you really need to find out if there is some unresolved childhood trauma that is causing you to loop back through and project upon your partner what is not theirs. So what happens, you know, the way trauma is stored in implicit memories, I could be talking to you right now, you trigger my trauma. I'm acting as if I'm Tanner in real-time on this, you know, the day we're recording this episode, December 6th, 2021, but my brain

is looping back through 1995, but I'm talking to you as if we're here. It's like I'm in my adult body and yet it is such old information. And so what happens in partnerships is their protective parts, their wounded younger parts, are blending with them. They're in a trauma distortion, but they're acting as if it's real-world right now.

And until you can learn how to un-blend or mindfully separate from a potential trauma distortion that's looping you back through old neural networks, you don't have enough self-energy in the present moment to really understand what your partner's capable of, what you are capable of. So I would just say before you get divorced, learn how... First of all, identify your childhood trauma. If you feel like you might, at some level, you need to work with someone who can help you un-blend or differentiate from a trauma distortion so you can find true self to see what is possible in your partnership before you leave. And I will say, based on my experience in my second marriage, working with a lot of survivor couples, relational healing in the context of like a committed partnership is some of the most sacred soul-stirring work I have ever seen. Like, you see humanity, like it just almost makes me cry right now to see people work through attachment wounds in an attachment context with a partner that's committed, caring.

It changes your life because you actually become a more evolved human by doing that work in witness with somebody else. And the intimacy that you can create when all your protective parts have stepped back and you literally are standing in front of someone and you're like, this is me. Like, nothing's in between you and me. I've trusted you enough. You've become safe enough because we have to learn how to be safe. You know, most of us, it's not intuitive to us because of all that happens to us. You've learned how to be safe. And that's incredible work that you can do with someone. You know, or you find out that this person isn't self-aware enough, not able to do the healing work they need to do, you know, and people are like that. People sometimes are not aligned with you.

And maybe one day, they'll gain some self-awareness or be open to healing, but it may not be within the timespan that you can give them to not be triggered all the time in your relationship, and no human... Like, I kind of think about it as like if you're a recovering alcoholic, you don't go to the bar every night. That would be a nightmare for you, right? Because then you're always having to... You might do it, you might stay sober in that context, but every night you have to, "Oh, okay, I'm gonna do it tonight. I'm gonna do it tonight. Like, I'm gonna stay sober. It's all around me." You know, so if you're in a relationship with someone that's just constantly triggering your trauma, constantly triggering your trauma and they're not willing to work on... I'm assuming you're willing to work on, like both people are willing to be like we don't wanna trigger each other all the time, then you really need to make some hard choices about what's best for you, what's best for your children, and what timespan you can give.

But you really have to work with someone that's deeply trauma-informed, not just any couple's counselor because actually with someone that has trauma, couple's counseling mainstream makes it worse because they're gonna tell you skills that make sense. And one partner would be like, "Just do it. Why can't you just do that?" But protective parts and trauma distortions, you're looped back. You're not in the real world. So then it becomes really frustrating. It gets worse. People get more angry, more resentful, and it kind of cycles downwards in a lot of cases. So yeah, that would be my TED Talk.

Katie: I love it. I feel that could and probably should be a whole episode by itself at some point. But that was gonna be my next question actually is how can someone find the type of person to help them work through this? Because it seems like having experience somewhat with both, this is a big deviation from a lot of the mainstream therapy model. And so if someone's maybe recognizing themselves in some of the things you've said, where do they start to find resources?

Dr. Tanner: Oh my gosh, this is... So I actually just did a podcast episode where I was like crying on my own podcast about this because I have turned this over and turned this over before I make this statement. And so I'm taking a deep breath and I'm gonna speak my truth that it does not exist except in the Relational Healing Lab, which I'm building from the ground up. It's not out there. And like when I had, you know, an audience of like 100, including 50 people I knew, and my podcast only had 10 downloads a week, it was easy for me to say that. And my audience has grown, as my connection to other pretty big, important trauma recovery experts has grown, to say that statement now feels like it has so much weight for me to say that. And there's parts of me that get really nervous about claiming that is my truth, but until proven otherwise that is my truth because really what I brought to you on this episode is a connection between my personal lived experience of all the things, my study of 20 years of human development and understanding how critical human development is to thinking about trauma, my training in Internal Family Systems, and then just this gift that I've always had as a kid that was, I can connect dots. You know, just this intellectual capacity to be like, I love building theories and I love connecting the dots. And doing so much deep work on my own to show up in such an openhearted curiosity around people and humans.

So, there's no space, but the Relational Healing Lab is being built very slowly from the ground up. So, you know, the best place, if this resonated with you is... I mean, I mentioned Pete Walker's book, right? So skim that, be like if this is you, and "No Bad Parts," if you're interested in the non-mono mind perspective, and then show up in the Relational Healing Lab. We have a free Facebook group, super active. I have a podcast, the "Relational Healing" podcast and, you know, just literally we're building it. So it's like one step at a time, but if this really connects and you really wanna do this work, those are the places you can show up. And I think the reason why I have to take a deep breath is it sounds so self-promoting, and it's not. I just want listeners to know this is not about me and promoting me as a human and a person, it's about promoting the space where I'm sharing and offering up frameworks to do this work with other humans in safe containers.

Katie: And I know for sure this can be its own podcast, probably several, and I hope you'll commit to at least one. But as a kind of parting point, I would love you to leave for all the parents listening maybe just some small steps of awareness that we can start to pay attention to, both in ourselves, but also especially in our kids and in our relationship with our kids.

Dr. Tanner: Yeah. Oh, this is such a touching, touching question for me because actually, my first rock bottom, when I really realized I needed to do something differently, was when my second oldest woke up with a bruise on her neck, which is so humbling. And at the time, I was for many years after a professor of human

development. And so I offer that as a starting point for my answer, just to really ground how deeply trauma imprints on you and you really do lose control of your present day thought processing pattern. So I just feel an obligation to start my response with that because I know that there are listeners that that is true for them and the disconnect between listening to a podcast on wellness and actually how they're parenting is huge. So I wanna release the shame because this is the first thing with actually getting honest about parenting.

I need all of you listening to just open your heart because we are all doing the best that we can with the tools we were given. And for some of us, those tools were not at all, at all, at all, at all, what we needed. So that's the first thing is just take a deep breath because parenting can be really hard to talk about in an honest way. And so I really want this response to be grounded in honesty about what's really happening between closed doors. And that's very hard to get honest about because there's so many pressures to be a good... Especially like this is where social media has like, you know, there's so many, oh, you have to do this, you have to do this, you have to do this, you have to do this. I mean, so there's a lot of pressure on parents, more so than there ever has been in the entire history of humanity to show up and do well.

With all that said, the framing of this question, I would just say that your own inner work is the best thing you can do for your kiddos. Like serious, deep introspection about what is coming up for you in parenting and how is it showing up consistently? And that's doing the work that we've been talking about in this episode, getting your relationship right with yourself. And if there's a partner involved, making sure that's as healthy as possible. That is the best thing you could do for your kids long-term, but that's like a long-term investment. But that would be my number one thing. And I would just say in the short term is really, really like... So I have actually, I know we don't have video, but like I'm gonna show an emotion wheel. And if you just Google emotion wheel on Google, you will find hundreds of images. So this is my quick tip.

An emotion wheel has the big six emotions in the middle, like happiness, fear, sadness. And then there's an outer band that differentiates them a little bit more like anxiety, respect, disrespected, joyous. And then there's an outer band that even gets more distinct, so I'm gonna just look at one real quickly. So if you feel sad, you could feel lonely, and then a form of loneliness could either be abandoned or isolated. Or you could be sad and feel guilty, which is remorseful or ashamed. So just download an emotion wheel and start trying to equip your kids with a better, deeper emotional vocabulary because most kids are just like, I don't feel good, or they're freaking out, they're crying, they're screaming. Same thing I said with you internally with your parts, witness their emotion, I really feel you're really feeling sad right now. Like, I'm really getting that sense that you're so sad right now. So sad.

And you know, you feel that you should have been able to get that toy, and given you felt like you should've gotten that toy, it makes sense to me why you're feeling despair right now. Or the kid might say, "No, I'm not sad. I'm angry." Oh, okay. You're angry. So I'm really getting you're angry right now. Can you tell me more about the anger? "Well, because you got that for, you know, brother, sister, fill in the blanks, and I feel like it's not fair." Oh, given you feel like it's not fair, it makes sense you're so angry. So notice I didn't validate that they should have gotten the toy. In both cases, I just have given you feel this, given you interpret it this way, you make sense to me. So emotions are not, they make sense, they don't make sense. This is the biggest thing I

always tell parents. Emotions are natural responses to a thought processing pattern. It is not any other person's but the human that's experiencing it right to say, that's justified, that's not justified, that's right, or that's wrong. So the very first thing you can do for your kids is give them a deeper emotional vocabulary and witness, based on their interpretation, that they make sense. Like, you make sense to me.

Then the second thing I would say is you teach them how to appropriately express emotions without harming or hurting themselves or others. And that's the co-regulation they're looking to you for. That's a gap, right? The stress I'm experiencing, the coping skills I have through co-regulation. Okay. So you're really sad. You know, you can Google how to help a sad kid, there are so many free resources out here. Like, bring their coping skills up a little bit more. But as a parent, you also control the external environment. So you really need to be honest with yourself around, am I making my kid's environment too stressful for them given who they are as a kid? And this is a really sweet spot, right? Because you don't wanna kind of... You want your kids to have optimal stress. That is good because you want them to have those experiences if their skill is not being able to keep pace with the stress so that you can teach, right? If everything's taken care of them all the time, they're actually not gonna have the developmental experiences they need with you. On the other hand, I see parents having their kids operating at a stress level that far exceeds what the kid can handle and each of your children are different.

You might have one child that can go from 6:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. and is like, gimme, gimme, gimme. I love it, more and more and more. And you might have a child that can literally do one activity a week for 45 minutes. And the other hours of the day, they need to be cuddling with you. They need to be softly reading. They need music. They can't handle that. And that's really hard as a parent if there's only one of you or, you know, even if there's two of you and you've multiple kids. But you really have to get honest about how am I giving the zone of proximal development for my kid where they're in optimal stress? And how do we as adults need to not make it about us so much? Our life needs to be about our kids. And when we need adult time to do our own adult things, that needs to be separate. And that is hugely important to relational health. So I'm not saying your whole life needs about your kids, but if you have kids, your life should be built around what's optimally stressful for your kids. And if you and your partner need something different from your kids, you schedule that outside of your kids where they're tended to well. Oh, my gosh, I could go on and on about this. But is that a good enough answer? There's like 18 other things I'm thinking about that I could have said, but hopefully that will answer some people.

Katie: I think that's perfect. And like I said, I would actually love to do a whole podcast just on that topic at some point. And as well as probably a follow-up to this one as I'm sure we'll get lots of questions and people are gonna have a lot of their own experiences and stories probably come up from hearing some of the things you've talked about. In honor of respecting your time today and our listeners' time today, I think we'll wrap up here for now.

Dr. Tanner: Yeah. Listeners' time.

Katie: But I'm so grateful. I know this is a big topic we tried to tackle in an hour and I'm so grateful for how wonderfully you did that. Thank you so much for being here.

Dr. Tanner: Absolutely. It was a pleasure. Thank you so much for having me.

Katie: And thanks as always to all of you for listening and sharing your most valuable resources, your time, your energy, and your attention with us today. We're both so grateful that you did. And I hope that you will join me again on the next episode of the "Wellness Mama Podcast."

If you're enjoying these interviews, would you please take two minutes to leave a rating or review on iTunes for me? Doing this helps more people to find the podcast, which means even more moms and families could benefit from the information. I really appreciate your time, and thanks as always for listening.