

EPISODE 229

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:00:02.6] PF: Welcome to episode 229 of Live Happy Now. This is your host, Paula Felps, thanking you for joining us again this week. If you've ever struggled with forgiving someone or forgiving yourself, that makes you pretty much human and it also means you're going to love what this week's guest has to say. Stacy Kaiser is a licensed psychotherapist, relationship expert and author who has some great insight on how forgiveness and self-forgiveness affect our overall wellbeing.

But she doesn't just tell us how much we need it in our lives. She gives us actionable advice for forgiving others, forgiving ourselves and slipcovering greater happiness

[INTERVIEW]

[0:00:37.8] PF: Stacy, thank you for coming back on Live Happy Now and being our guest again.

[0:00:42.6] SK: I always love being a part of anything that has to do with Live Happy.

[0:00:46.1] PF: Well, it's funny how this one came about because I saw that you, on your Instagram TV, you had posted a video about self-forgiveness and forgiveness and it was so compelling that I was like, I think all of our listeners are going to want to hear about this.

[0:01:02.0] SK: Thank you.

[0:01:02.6] PF: Yes, so I wanted to know, first of all, what prompted you to address that topic on Instagram?

[0:01:09.0] SK: Well, this is interesting I think. My daughter who is newly out of college and working in publicity has been telling me that I walk around preaching all kinds of things to people and that a lot of people aren't benefiting from it and that I should start thinking about making some short three to four minute videos about the things that I talk about most.

Interestingly enough, forgiveness has been a big topic of conversation because people really struggle with it, especially if someone has done something that they view as toxic or inappropriate or you know, unforgivable.

[0:01:46.9] PF: Forgiveness is a tough thing because when we feel the other person isn't sorry or we think, well, they don't really deserve forgiveness, it puts us in a difficult position to try to find that forgiveness.

[0:01:59.5] SK: It does. And the reality is, it's basically impossible to make someone apologize or to be able to control other people's behavior. Interestingly enough, people will complain to me often that they did get someone to apologize but it wasn't a good enough apology or was a forced apology and so part of what I try and teach people is because you really can't get the right apology or sometimes people do things that are unforgivable as you said.

That you need to find forgiveness within yourself, for yourself. Because, what ends up happening to us is if we aren't forgiving, we are harboring it inside of us. We physically feel it, we emotionally feel it, we spiritually feel it, it impacts our overall happiness and life and the other person who has done that horrible thing to us or made us upset in some way, they're fine, they're walking around feeling great and so ultimately, we're the ones that are suffering.

[0:02:54.1] PF: Well, even though we know that, it's easy to say yeah, I know I should drop this suitcase of crap that I'm carrying around but that's easy to say and really hard to do.

[0:03:04.6] SK: That is true and it's something that is really important to be conscious of and so I have a couple of tips for that which I'll give you.

[0:03:13.1] PF: I had a feeling you might.

[0:03:14.8] SK: I thought you would. The first thing that you want to do is you want to let your emotions out and it doesn't have to be to that person, as a matter of fact, a lot of times, it's unsatisfying to do it with that person. It could be to a counselor, a religious leader, a friend, it could be in a journal. But you want to go through the gamuts of emotions so I always tell people that you want to express what made you sad about this, what made you mad about this, what

made you scared about this, what made you hurt about this, to make sure that you are covering all of the emotional bases.

And then, after that, you want to start telling yourself that you don't have to forget what they have done but you need to let go of the energy that you're holding on to. So that doesn't mean you have to still be their friend, it doesn't mean that you have to talk to them on a regular basis, it doesn't mean that you have to treat them with the utmost kindness. It's really about sort of relocating them in an emotional way to somebody who you don't care about. That might be just a person you'd walk by on the street that you wouldn't notice or you wouldn't have any energy directed towards them, you want to try and re-categorize that person into someone that doesn't matter, instead of someone that actually matters and is hurting you.

[0:04:29.3] PF: And I think you brought up a really good point because we sometimes tend to think if I forgive this person, that means I have to embrace them and bring them into my life or something. We have to somehow accept them and that's not the case at all?

[0:04:41.4] SK: No, that's not the case at all, as a matter of fact, really toxic people and abusive people shouldn't be in your life at all. Now, a lot of times, what comes up is people telling me, while I have to have this person around, they're a family member, a next door neighbor, a coworker and that is really challenging and so that's where it becomes really important to do a few different things that I recommend. First and foremost, to try and emotionally distance yourself from your frustration of them.

Secondly, when you have to be around those people, minimize the contact and try and have other people around as buffers and thirdly, be prepared to set boundaries with them, they do things that you don't like, you don't have to be nasty, you can just say, that's not okay with me or I'm not going to participate in this conversation or I don't like what you just said.

[0:02:31.6] PF: When you can do that, how empowering is that? To know that you're going to go into a situation, we have a situation on our family where it makes family gatherings rather uncomfortable.

[0:05:43.4] SK: Yeah, most people do have one of those — or two.

[0:05:46.9] PF: Yeah, when you're doing that, you know, for myself, I always have to know in advance how I'm going to manage what's going to happen and yeah, there's a sense of empowerment that comes with that thought, knowing that you're not walking into it, afraid that you're going to get ambushed.

[0:06:03.2] SK: I'm so glad that you brought up the word empowerment because that to me is what this is all about. You want to empower yourself. There's nothing that feels more helpless than holding on to emotions and feeling and hurting your own daily life or weekly life or holiday life because of the behavior of someone else.

What you want to do instead is really empower yourself and by having strategies for how to deal with them, you take some of your power back. By making a decision that you're not investing negative energy in them, you take some of your power back.

I had a conversation with somebody the other day that had a horrible falling out with a lifelong friend. Someone that she had known since she was like 10 years old. And as time has gone on, that friend has started to behave badly to the point that if I told you stories about that woman, if I told anyone stories about that woman, they would say how could you be her friend? Yet, the person that I was talking to stayed friends with her because she would say well, I knew her since she was a kid, she's a legacy friend.

She's like family but she's terrible, she behaves very badly. Part of what we discussed is her beginning to see that she got the best years already. That when they were young, she had great times with her, they had fun, they had sleep over's, they did all the things that a lot of little kids do together and that time is now past and that the best of times is gone and she just needs to accept and honor the good stuff and let go of this woman so that she's not being inflicted by this new person who only basically exist to make other people feel bad.

[0:07:39.0] PF: That's such a great perspective on it because I think a lot of times we do, especially with family and longtime friends like that, we say yeah, I wouldn't put up with this from anybody else but – and we let that continue.

[0:07:53.0] SK: Yes. The other thing that you can do if it is a family member, maybe the person has some redeeming qualities, you know? Maybe they have a great voice. Maybe they cook

great mashed potatoes at thanksgiving or you know, the holiday times. And so, I suggest that you just focus on that positive stuff so that you don't have to fill yourself with the negativity and ruin the family event.

[0:08:17.9] PF: I know that you see people all the time who are struggling with this, can you talk about what role in wellbeing forgiveness plays?

[0:08:25.2] SK: Yes. Well, forgiveness is ultimately about spiritual, emotional, psychological and physical wellbeing. There's been a lot of research and my experience backs this up as well that overall happiness can be impacted by harboring negative feelings towards someone else. You might not even be – you know, you talked about a family member and thinking about the holidays. In the moment, it's not even holidays, right? It's before then, they're coming up but you are busy thinking to yourself and putting negative energy into your mind and into your emotional self.

That's going to impact your daily life. This is really about seeking overall wellbeing and only investing time and energy in people that actually deserve it.

[0:09:13.3] PF: That's terrific advice and another component of forgiveness that you also had talked about was self-forgiveness. Sometimes I think that's even harder than forgiving people who have done us wrong or who we perceive have done us wrongs. Can you talk a little bit about the need for self-forgiveness and how we can start going about unpacking that?

[0:09:34.0] SK: Yes, I'm glad you brought that up, interestingly enough, people have a lot more compassion and understanding for people in their lives as they do for themselves. So here's how I suggest that people sort that out. One of the first recommendations that I have is that you really have to ask yourself, did I do something wrong? Do I have a reason to be upset with myself? If the answer is yes, then you want to work on making changes so that you don't make that same mistake again or that you begin to work towards overcoming whatever that issue is that you're not happy with.

So that you won't have to feel that way anymore. But the second component is, try and find a way to be encouraging towards yourself, to look at your strengths instead of your weaknesses

because you are the only person who is with you 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. If you're beating yourself with a baseball bat, you have nowhere to go.

[0:10:29.2] PF: Yeah, nobody left

[0:10:30.6] SK: Yeah, you have to put the bat down, the world is hard enough, you don't need to be hard on yourself. And then, the third thing is to realize that you're not perfect and that's okay. That the whole idea of being able to grow and change and do things differently is admirable. To forgive yourself when you make mistakes or to forgive yourself for issues that you have that are causing you to behave in a way that you're not happy with.

[0:10:57.1] PF: Sometimes it seems like people feel if they forgive themselves and they're kind of letting themselves off the hook and are downplaying that what they feel so badly about. How can you convince people that that thinking is not correct, that it is okay to let go of – you can dislike what you did but you don't have to hang on to the pain of what it caused.

[0:11:16.7] SK: Yeah, well, what's wrong with letting yourself off the hook anyway? I mean, honestly, that to me is one of the biggest gifts you can give yourself. I don't think there's anything wrong with letting yourself off of the hook. I think there's actually a power of positivity in that in saying I'm not a perfect person. However, that goes back to what I brought up earlier which is, if you're going to let yourself off the hook, what you should do, then you want to implement change for the future.

So to say look, I'm going to do this differently, it's almost like if your child or an employee did something wrong and you would say okay, you did this wrong, I'm going to teach you how to do it better the next time and then you let them off the hook. One of the things that we know about self-esteem is that it's impacted by what happens in our environment and what people say and do around us but it is also very much impacted by the thoughts that were thinking in our own head. So if you are busy walking around thinking, "I am terrible, I can't do anything right, I am so angry with myself" that is going to impact your self-esteem and when your self-esteem is impacted then that is going to impact your ability to talk to people.

To have friendships, to enjoy work, to just have fun going to the beach and ultimately as everything seems to do in these conversations, they will impact your overall happiness.

[0:12:41.8] PF: But it is really hard when there is something that is just haunting you. I've known people who have done things that have haunted them for years and it's like that bad thing though. It is there when they wake up first thing in the morning. That is the first thing they think about and it just hovers over them like a presence. So what does that process for repeatedly addressing it until it goes away?

[0:13:04.1] SK: There is two techniques that I find to be really effective. The first is to immediately dismiss those thoughts and to try and replace them with a positive thought. So for example, let's say I treated somebody I cared about very badly. So I'd wake up on the morning and think, "Oh I treated them so badly. I am such a bad person," and then I would say to myself, "Okay no. I did something that I didn't like and today, I am going to do something that is kind to people."

I am going to work hard to be a better person because I care about people and I am a compassionate and empathic human being. So it is about shifting the language to making progress for the future instead of rehashing the past and then the second thing is that a lot of times it is just physically moving will get something out of your head. So if you are really ruminating and obsessing, I tell people go take a walk around the block and listen to music.

Go hit a pillow. Empty the dishwasher rapidly, you know physical movement that is causing you to engage in the activity that you are doing instead of what is going on in your mind.

[0:14:12.4] PF: Well that is really good and that you can really walk it out when you are trying to deal with something that is upsetting you.

[0:14:19.1] SK: Yeah, I love that. You can walk it out or talk it out.

[0:14:21.6] PF: Yeah, don't just shut up and it is not – please do, please do there is no copyright on that and it is a process. It is not like you decide, "Okay I am going to forgive myself," and then poof it is all good.

[0:14:38.8] SK: No, it does take time anything that you have been doing or the longer you have been doing it the more of a habit it is and they say it takes about four to six weeks to even begin

to break a habit. So you have to be pretty conscious and diligent. It might need to be a daily activity where you wake up in the morning and say, "I am going to forgive myself because I am a good person. I am going to forgive myself because nobody is perfect. I am going to forgive myself because I do a lot of great things in the world and I deserve a break."

[0:15:06.9] PF: And is there any kind of writing exercise that they can do that would help with self-forgiveness?

[0:15:12.7] SK: Yes, I always recommend that you switch to the power of positivity in that case and I tell people to either write a list or they can even write a whole long paper about all of the things that are good about them. All of the good things that they have done. All of the good things that you deserve recognition for. You know it is so interesting, this is more common with women than in men but everybody does it is this whole thing about looking at the good in you.

And patting yourself in the back and when you are in the process of not forgiving yourself, you are not patting yourself on the back very much and so it is about making a list or writing in a way so that you are patting yourself in the back and building yourself up and showing to yourself that you are a good person even though you have done something that you are not happy about.

[0:16:04.3] PF: Oh I really like that and it speaks to Kristin Neff has a new – well it is not totally new but *Self-Compassion Workbook* and it seems like a lot of the things that you are talking about speak to the same things with self-forgiveness and self-compassion kind of go hand and hand.

[0:16:19.9] SK: I think you're right. I think that would be a really good component for a person to look at and working on their forgiveness because the truth is we are not compassionate for ourselves in the same way that we are for others and that is why we are saying often times we cut people a lot more slack than we cut ourselves and you deserve to get it from you, right? And there is also that sort of domino effect thing where if you are not liking yourself, you put out energy into the world.

Where other people pick up on it and you impact your family and you impact the people that you work with and so it isn't just doing it for you but you are doing everyone else a favor if you are feeling better about yourself.

[0:16:56.9] PF: Yeah so if you won't forgive yourself for yourself, do it for those who have to live with you, right?

[0:17:00.8] SK: Yes. Exactly.

[0:17:04.4] PF: Do it for the kids. Yeah it is. It really does eat you up and change who you are and how you approach people and pretty soon it is going to become self-fulfilling prophecy like nobody wants to be around me. It's like well, you're right.

[0:17:19.9] SK: Right and if somebody finds themselves incredibly stuck and they are saying I have tried all of these things that you guys are talking about right here or they're not working, then sometimes it is being pulled from the baggage in your past and that would be the time that you really want to take a good hard look at how were you raised or were you in a toxic relationship that has not put you in a place where you can't even find positive attributes about yourself.

You struggle with forgiveness and that is when I recommend that people take another step and consider counselling or pulling a lot of workbooks to heal you know pain from their past.

[0:17:55.5] PF: Because it doesn't seem like self-forgiveness really comes naturally. It's something that probably you were taught or you were taught to berate yourself, is that correct?

[0:18:05.0] SK: Yes, and the truth is, it's not even, I don't even think, a lot of times, it's not even discussed, there is so much of a focus on what we're supposed to do for other people and the achievements we're supposed to master that I don't think we're really told how to comfort ourselves and have compassion for ourselves and that's something that's really necessary for not only survival but for day to day life.

[0:18:31.7] PF: Yeah, we kind of need those skills. And you mentioned too that we're a lot more forgiving of others than we are of ourselves, does it ever help to kind of step away, step outside of yourself and say okay, if someone else had done this, if I'm not looking at myself, someone else would have done this, how would I forgive them?

[0:18:50.5] SK: Yes, if I had a dollar for every time I said to somebody. What would you say if this was a friend of yours that did this and then they say, well I would forgive them in a second or I would understand, I would have a lot of dollars. A lot of times it is good to step out and ask yourself that question. Would I give forgiveness or compassion to another person and if the answer is yes, then I think you want to take a good, hard look at why you aren't giving yourself the same perks. Because you certainly would deserve what you would give to anyone else.

[0:19:22.8] PF: Absolutely. So, if someone's feeling really stuck with this, because I do – I talk to a lot of people who have trouble with this, forgiveness is big, self-forgiveness is big and it's a tough thing to pull yourself out of sometimes. If someone is feeling stuck, where can they go, what can they do to really kick start this and make it effective?

[0:19:43.4] SK: I would say that it's to write down goals for each day of things you are going to do to combat it. So, I would tell people okay, in the morning, when you wake up and you're still lying in bed and at night when you get into bed, so the first and last thing you do, you need to take a moment of forgiveness for yourself. You need to take some time to not only forgive whatever it is that you're upset about within yourself but also take some time to give yourself some compliments and pats on the back and talk about what is good about you.

And then the second thing that I would recommend is, to schedule time where you can talk to somebody that you trust or care about and vent about whatever it is that's bothering you because sometimes, it's the holding it in that we sort of fester in our own heads and so when we're talking it out with somebody that we trust, we'll begin to hear ourselves and say, you know what? I'm not being very reasonable or I really need to let this go or maybe, they're going to even give us some information that's going to help us think about things differently. So don't isolate yourself.

[0:20:49.6] PF: Yeah, because I've had things where I'm like really beating myself up over it and if I sit down and write it out and then wow, I'm embarrassed to even share that with somebody else because it's very trivial.

[0:21:00.4] SK: Yes, yes. That happens.

[0:21:03.0] PF: Well, Stacy, this is really good advice. I love the fact that you're dealing with this topic, we're going to give people information on where they can find you online so they can start following your Instagram videos and you cover some great topics. You cover some really great things. I think people can benefit from jumping on there and seeing what you have to say.

[0:21:23.5] SK: Thank you so much.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[0:21:29.6] PF: That was Stacy Kaiser, talking to us about forgiveness and self-forgiveness. If you'd like to learn more about Stacy and where to find her online, please visit us at livehappynow.com and we'll give you links and more information.

We hope you're already a subscriber to live happy now but if you're not, you can find us on the Pandora Podcast Network, Spotify, Sound Cloud, Stitcher, iTunes and Google Play. Just look for us on your favorite platform and then hit subscribe so you'll never miss an episode.

That is all we have time for this week, we'll meet you back here again next week for an all new episode and until then, this is Paula Felps, reminding you to make everyday a happy one.

[END]