



EPISODE 67: RE-ENTRY, NAVIGATING LIFE AFTER COVID WITH MICHELLE PEARCE

THE MARRIAGE LIFE COACH PODCAST | SEE SHOWNOTES AT: [MAGGIEREYES.COM/PODCAST/67](https://maggiereyes.com/podcast/67)

Maggie

Hello, everyone, and welcome. I am so delighted to have my favorite Clinical Psychologist back on the show. Dr. Michelle Pearce is here. And she's going to talk about re-entry. How we go back into engaging with life after the effects of the pandemic subside.

And Michelle was my guest on one of our most powerful episodes on the podcast on How to Be Married to Someone with a Mental Illness. And I got so much amazing feedback from that episode. I know it struck a chord with so many of you, we will definitely link to that in the show notes. If you know someone in that situation, definitely send them to that episode. They will find comfort and really practical approaches to navigating mental illness in their marriage.

So for the introduction, I need to call her Dr. Pearce, but we're going to go back to Michelle once we get started. So here's the official bio for Dr. Pearce, our guest for today, so that you know why I love having her on the show and asked her back on.

Dr. Pearce is a Clinical Psychologist and Professor in the Graduate School at the University of Maryland. She's also an adjunct Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences at Duke University Medical Center. She's a Board Certified Health and Wellness Coach, an author, a researcher, and a facilitator on writing for wellness.

Dr. Pearce got her PhD at Yale and then completed two Post Doctoral Fellowships at Duke University Medical Center. But above all of those things, she is an amazing person. And I got to know her really, really well back years ago when I was doing general Life Coaching. We worked together during a season of her life.





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And one of my favorite gifts I have ever received, and I have to share with all of you today, is her acknowledgement in her brilliant book *Night Bloomers*, which we will also link to. It's called *Night Bloomers: 10 Principles for Thriving in Adversity*. You'll find that in the show notes. My highest honor as a Coach is not having my clients become more like me, but helping them become more like their most highest selves, their most magnificent selves.

So reading what Michelle wrote in her book really shook me, and I just want to share it with all of you today. She said, "Maggie Reyes, you are truly a top 1% Coach. Thank you for seeing me and helping me to do the same." So I wanted to publicly thank you for such a beautiful acknowledgement and making the time to be with us today. Welcome, Dr. Pearce, and also my friend Michelle.

Dr. Michelle Pearce

Thank you, Maggie, it is such a delight to be back. And what a beautiful introduction. Thank you.

Maggie

So let's talk a little bit about this idea of re-entry. So I want to just share with everyone: the reason I invited you back (besides the fact that time with you is always well spent) is you wrote this really powerful article for the Baltimore Sun. And it went viral in Maggieland. I was sharing it with all my friends and all my friends shared it with all their friends. And it was about really preparing for post COVID life.

Now that so many of us have either gotten the vaccine or getting the vaccine, we're starting to see some light at the end of the COVID tunnel, so to speak. And it's something we need to start thinking about. And when I read your article, one of the thoughts that really hit me was not just





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thinking about it for myself, but navigating that, is such a personal process.

And when you're in a marriage or in a family where you have multiple family members living in the same house, and everyone has different levels of risk aversion, or comfort with doing different things, everyone's going to navigate that slightly differently.

And our communication and clarity around what's okay and what's not okay is like this is a new place. We've never had to negotiate through this before. And so I want to just just start by asking you a little bit about what inspired you to write the article, like some of the things that are going through your mind about it, and then let's just kind of talk it through.

Dr. Michelle Pearce

Sure. So the idea came after I got my vaccine. And I thought I was going to be just like rearing at the bit to get back to my social life and I had been struggling with loneliness for a year. And suddenly I was turning down social invitations I was getting and I couldn't understand it.

This eagerness to get back out there and then suddenly all this anxiety and ambivalence. So I started talking to friends and colleagues and clients and they were all saying the same thing like, "We're anxious and we're ambivalent, and it's really confusing to be in this state."

Maggie

Yeah, I find the same thing. It's like, there's this desire to reintegrate into the adventures and joys of life and simple things -- like even going to the grocery store and, you know, simple things that you may not have engaged in. I became Insta Cart's best customer during lockdown, right?





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And, and also this idea of like, well, is it safe for other people? Is it safe for me? Are there -- it seems like the guidelines change all the time through nobody's fault, right? This is just something we've never experienced before. But it's like, oh, what is okay, today may not be okay, tomorrow, and did it change?

And so there's also this idea that, usually we make rules and we follow that rule, and then we sort of let our brain, you know, go on autopilot around it. And this is one of those moments or chapters in life where we just can't be on autopilot.

Dr. Michelle Pearce

That's right. And I think the uncertainty, and these ever changing guidelines -- it's very taxing. It's taxing emotionally. And I find a lot of my brain space is taken up by checking the news. And what can I do today? And would that be safe? And weighing the risks. And it's just been a whole different level of thinking for the last year.

Maggie

Yeah. So one of the things you mentioned in the article, and we'll definitely link to the original Baltimore Sun article in the show notes as well, is go at your own pace. Tell me what your thoughts are about that. And I'll tell you what my thoughts are about that.

Dr. Michelle Pearce

Sure. I mean, I think we all need to acknowledge that we're going to go at our own pace with this re-entry. And that's going to look different from your colleagues, your friends, even your family members. I mean, even your spouse. We're going to have to do this at different paces and have a lot of grace for one another.





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A lot of grace and compassion. Your process isn't going to look the same as mine. One of the things I talked about is this pacing is probably easier in our social lives, where we can gradually enter back in, and maybe a little less possible in our work lives.

So you may be like me, I got an email this week, and it said, "Hey, we're going back June 1, you know, at least 50% time," and we don't have a lot of say around that. I do think we'll get to commute some. But some people, they're just, there's a hard deadline and you're back to work. So maybe a little more challenging to pace with work.

Maggie

Yeah. And also, so my husband and I are in similar situations in the sense that I work from home, but he works at home now, but will eventually not work from home. And it's also like, if you are feeling your anxiousness around what your spouse has to do, or what you have to do to go back to work, just allow those feelings, like just invite them, okay?

I'm worried, and we're gonna find the best way to handle it. It's almost like embracing that we are going to have some anxiousness around it. And I'm talking about it today, because I just want everyone to feel like it's normal. It's part of the process.

Before we started recording, Michelle and I were talking about stress cycles, and it's like, wait, we are going to experience some stress around re-entry. And I was thinking about, when you go on vacation, and you come back to work. Even if you're just gone for a week, right? Maybe imagine you've been gone for two weeks, and you have that re-entry back to work. And it just feels a little unsettled, and it feels a little off.





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So imagine, even though you've been working or you've been doing whatever you've been doing for the last year, whatever you're re-entering into, it's almost like the same. That vacation re-entry of getting used to a new routine. And that's always been a little awkward, at least in my experience. What do you think?

Dr. Michelle Pearce

Yeah, I mean, that's a great analogy. One of the things I was thinking about is that change of any kind is tough. Even positive changes. I mean, think of -- classic example is getting married. It's maybe one of the best things you're ever going to do in your life. And probably one of the most stressful things too.

And so now I have this opportunity. We've gone through this acute stressor for the last year. We're getting to get back to normal (whatever the new normal is). And there's suddenly a lot of anxiety and there's been no break, right? We go through all of this stress.

It's not like everyone says, your employer says, "Now go on a nice two week vacation, get yourself just de-stressed, come out of this in a really good place and then come back to work." It's no, you've gone through this really awful year, and now in front of you is a set of whole other changes to transition back in. And I think that's really jarring.

Maggie

Yeah, I love that you mentioned there's no break. There's no sort of soft entry period into any of this. We're thrown into it, right? Now we're getting thrown out of it. And I just think grace for everyone, like gentleness around whatever our reactions are, is going to be just so important to





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keep that in mind. Something you said in the article that really resonated for me was, “Imagine before doing,” so tell us about that. And then I’ll chime in as well.

Dr. Michelle Pearce

Sure, so this is a technique we use in therapy called Imaginal Exposure. And we use it to treat phobias. If someone is scared of, let’s say snakes, spiders, we don’t put them in the environment with an actual snake or a spider. That would be too overwhelming.

What we first do is expose them to what we call a stimulus -- it’s the fearful thing -- in their minds, their minds first. So it’s a very gradual process. One of the things we know about fear is if we avoid the thing we’re afraid of, we strengthen the fear.

So we’ve had a very strong fear response right now around people. I mean people were the threat to us. So one of the ways that we can lessen the fear response is to approach instead of avoid, and the gradual way to approach is let’s approach it in our minds, and then begin to approach it in real life.

Maggie

I love that so much. So I was trained to do something based on NLP. It’s not actual NLP, but it’s sort of inspired by. And it’s this sort of guided meditation that we call Five Senses Reality that I learned from brilliant Lila Martin. And basically, we do the same thing, but opposite. It’s like Opposite Day! For goals.

For goals that inspire fear in us, we go to this place where we have achieved the goal in our mind. And then we notice the sensations in our bodies, and then we notice where any fear





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comes up. And one of the primary purposes of doing that exercise is to experience the goal achieved and not die. Like just to give your body the message: I can have this amazing, wonderful thing and not die.

I love that we come at it from both angles and it's still, in essence, the same. So when you said that I was like, "Yeah, imagine before doing." So imagine going out for a birthday party. Imagine hugging someone you haven't hugged in a few weeks or months or a year. Imagine how you would navigate going to a bigger event.

So my husband and I just got our second vaccines, and we started talking about what we would do, you know, when we can start going out. And for sure, my husband is that person who ventures out and I'm the person who could like stay in the cocoon forever.

Dr. Michelle Pearce
I relate to that, right.

Maggie

Our whole joke during COVID times was I was born for this. Right? It was hard to get me out of the house before COVID. Like, let's see what it's like after, kind of thing. But we started imagining before doing. And we said we want to do something very simple and very close to home to sort of test the waters of, you know, going away, you know, before we go on a trip.

So we rented, for a weekend coming up, just for two days in a hotel in Miami Beach, because I'm in South Florida and Miami Beach. And during that weekend, it will be the Air and Sea Show where they do -- like the Air Force comes and does like jet formations in the sky and stuff like





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that.

And he's super excited about this. He's like there already, right? He's already imagined before doing. And he's already there and then I imagined before doing and I thought, "It's gonna be loud, there's gonna be a lot of people, it's gonna feel very chaotic." Part of it will feel like a little bit of that frenetic energy.

And I thought, "Oh, I may not enjoy that as much as he does," which also goes back to going at your own pace. We sorta talked about it around, okay, we're gonna stay at a really cute little hotel on the beach. I might stay there and just maybe join him for lunch or one piece of the show and then go back and I might go at a different pace than he goes.

And it's been really helpful to imagine before doing some of that, because I thought, "Oh, that sounds like fun." And then I really imagined it. Then I thought that doesn't sound like fun at all.

Dr. Michelle Pearce

That's a great example. I'll share how I used it in my life. I was very hesitant to get the vaccine. I have a few, as you know, some underlying health issues. And I wondered if I would be in a category that wouldn't do well with the vaccine. So all my friends knew me as someone who was going to be the very last one to get the vaccine so she could have the most data.

And it turned out, I was one of the first. First in my family, first among my friends. I had it very early on in January as a Healthcare Provider, a Clinical Psychologist. And the reason that, that was possible was I started mid-December with this technique. And I started imagining myself 20 minutes every day, through meditation visualization, myself getting the vaccine.





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And as I was imagining, I was saying to myself, "The vaccine is a friend to my body. It does so well. I receive the vaccine and I could see myself just prospering and doing so well with it." After a month of daily practice, there I was rolling up my sleeves getting the vaccine.

Maggie

That is such a powerful example. I love that so much. That's so good. Okay, so everyone think about -- whether it's something you were afraid of, or even something you're excited about -- imagine before doing, and then see where that leads you, and then determine what pace you want to go at when you do that.

And there's something that wasn't in the original article in this way. But as we talked about this -- imagine before doing -- it came up for me, and I think it's important and I would love to get your thoughts on it, is: when I got married, because you used that example, I felt grief for my single life.

Even though I was beside myself with joy and glee and delight, like I married the love of my life, I have a crush on my own husband, like I am that person, right? As everyone who listens to the podcast already knows. But I definitely remember feeling grief around a chapter of my life that was ending, even as something good was happening.

And I think there will be a lot of us who will have some grief around some of the things. You know, COVID has been in so many ways, a terrible tragedy, and has, you know, so many things that are tragic around it. But it has also brought sort of people together in new ways.





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There are things that are kind of like that flower that blooms in the middle of the concrete, right? Like in the middle of all the concrete of COVID, there have been those little blooming moments. And I suspect that we will, whether we can anticipate it or not right now, there will be moments that will feel like grief, and I'd love to hear your thoughts on that.

Dr. Michelle Pearce

I think you're right on. I think there's all kinds of grief that we're experiencing, and will, and different kinds of losses. Obviously the ones that we would think of, you know, loss of life, loss of health. A quarter of people lost their jobs in one study I read, and so there's a lot of those sorts of losses, but the losses you're referring to are: parents had more time with their kids.

I have a friend who had a baby during this time. And this has been so precious, and she's been home when her baby was born for longer than she thought or, you know, some of us didn't have a commute. I have loved the extra time in my day.

I have a lot of people, clients, that are experiencing a sense of dread, where they realized, "You know what? I could say I was bored during COVID. But the truth is, I liked being less busy. I liked not driving my kids to six different things every night of the week to all these activities. I like the slower pace." So there are things that in ways that we did benefit, that life is going to change. And that change can feel like a loss. So you're right, there will be grief around that.

Maggie

And then my thought around it, especially as you gave us such beautiful and really powerful examples is: we always have an opportunity to choose what's next. I mean, at the core of this podcast always is, "What's next in my marriage?" I get to choose how that's gonna go. Right?





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And so even with this, with the things that we might feel some grief around or some anxiousness around, we can choose what we decide around how busy we want to get, and we don't have to go back to exactly what we were doing before.

It's almost like, I don't know, when you move houses or when you move from where you live, you sort of get rid of a bunch of stuff and say, "What is coming along with me? What's coming along, and what am I getting rid of?" Right? What do you think about that?

Dr. Michelle Pearce

I've been saying the same things to my clients. So when they tell me, "I'm feeling dread," I say: well, you don't have to recreate the same life you had. You've learned some things about yourself during COVID. And growth is not just self knowledge, not just self awareness. Growth is: I learned some things about myself.

And now I'm going to apply them. I'm going to implement them so that my life looks different. So I'm having people -- I mean, one of the concepts, you know, in the book is "mind your mess." Learn the lessons. So ask yourself, like, "What did I learn about myself? What did I learn about others about life in this past year, that I then want to apply going forward?"

Maybe I don't want my kids involved in six different activities every week. Maybe one is enough. And then the family time and the dinners together, maybe that's more meaningful than having them in all these different lessons. So that to me is growth.

Maggie





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I love that so much. I'm all about the application -- as everyone who listens to the podcast knows -- I'm like, "And how do we apply it tomorrow?" So that leads us really well into being selective, right? Tell us all about being selective.

Dr. Michelle Pearce

Yes. I mean, it basically, what we had been talking about is that we're granting ourselves permission to not pick everything back up, even when it's safe to do so. We get to be selective about that.

Maggie

I love that so much. When I read that, I thought about -- there's an episode of the podcast called Marriage MBA that I did with my husband, around using things he learned in his MBA in life, and in marriage and in everything. And one of the things that I learned when I was in HR was this idea of keeping the main thing, the main thing.

So Stephen Covey, the great Stephen Covey, has this quote, "The main thing is to keep the main thing, the main thing." And the first time I heard that, I had to study it for an HR certification I was doing and I thought, "Why are we talking about this? What is this about?" I was very not open to that message at that time.

And of all the things I studied for that certification, it is the one thing that I still use to this day. And it's really asking ourselves: "What is important now? What is the main thing?" And maybe the main thing now isn't the main thing it was before. Maybe before, with your great example of kids, all we want them to be is well rounded. We want them to have literature and violin and sports. And maybe now the main thing is, oh, we want to be together as a family. So if the main





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thing has changed, that's okay.

Dr. Michelle Pearce

That's right. Yeah. I've been saying like, we get to reimagine, and reach, recreate and renegotiate, what our lives are going to look like going forward. And what a unique opportunity. I mean, many of us, we take New Year's Eve, or the first day of the year as that opportunity. I'm going to set new goals and we go in a different direction.

And we've really just had a year where the pause button was hit. We had to slow down to look at what was working in our lives, also face it was not working, because the pandemic really exacerbated, individually and collectively, what was not working. And I think that one of the real tragedies would be if we went back to exactly what life looked like post COVID. And I'd say we really missed an opportunity.

Maggie

Yeah, I think that's so important. To slow down, like you said, mind the mess. Like notice what changed in a good way, notice what changed in a bad way, and then decide what we want in the face of that. I love that so much. And then you said, "Be patient." And I think it's so important with others, but sometimes the most important person to be patient with is ourselves.

Dr. Michelle Pearce

Yes. Yeah, this is an up and down process. Some days, we're going to feel comfortable out in the world and some days we're not. And some days are going to be both comfortable and uncomfortable, depending on the hour and the situation. And I have already noticed that. Sometimes I am comfortable around a friend and sometimes I'm not.





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I was around someone who was vaccinated. For the first time in a year, I had someone get in the car with me. This person asked for a drive somewhere. And I was so nervous, Maggie. We were both vaccinated, but I insisted we both wear masks. And I was just like, for the first time having someone in the car in a small space, sharing air, it was just really interesting. Like, oh, okay, so I'm not comfortable right now. This is just going to be a process.

Maggie

Yeah, and one of the things I talk about all the time is the idea of making our marriages like a do over culture. Like there's never a bad time to course correct. There's never a bad time to do a do over. And it's something that I agree to.

Like this example that I gave with my husband, right? "Oh, the airshow. Sounds great. Yeah, I'll go." And then, "Oh, maybe not," right? And so I really think it's so important for us to have this in our mind that there's never a bad time to say, "Actually, now that I'm here, this isn't what I thought or how I thought I would react to being here. I think I need to course correct. I need to make a change."

Or, "Now I realize, you know, I gave you this ride. But I may not be giving you, you know, rides until I feel more comfortable again." It's just, the thing we said yes to isn't an automatic umbrella yes. It's a case by case yes.

Dr. Michelle Pearce

Yeah. And I think we're gonna have to have these difficult and curious conversations. So related, but not quite the same example. This week, I had a client who got vaccinated pretty early on.





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She's also in health care, and figured that as soon as her husband was eligible, he'd do the same.

So everyone is eligible in Maryland above I think age 16 now, and so she excitedly came home and said, like, "Okay, let's get you set up for your vaccine this week." And he turned to her and said, "I'm not getting vaccinated." And she just broke down.

She's like, "What? What do you mean you're not getting vaccinated? This whole time I thought we were waiting till we got vaccinated." And so it was just interesting to me like we are going to have to have these conversations with one another, whether it's about vaccines or masks or just comfort levels. It's going to take a lot of courage and a lot of curiosity.

Maggie

I think it's so important to remember even in a marriage, where we might have different values, we might have different fears. We might have different beliefs, different political views. I have, for some fascinating reason, many of my clients are progressive women, and married to more conservative men.

And so I coach on things like that on a regular basis. And it's like, how do we navigate what's okay and what's not okay, with regard to whatever we have decided is right for ourselves, for our bodies, right?

And even in that, it's like, we need to be patient with ourselves, with our own reactions. And we need to then look for -- I always say, "Find the place in your heart where it's true. Find the place in your heart where you love and support your partner, even when you don't maybe love their





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decision, you can still love and support your partner.”

Dr. Michelle Pearce

Yes. And also I encouraged her, we got to: what’s the root fear here? It really wasn’t that he’s not deciding to get the vaccine, it was, I am so desperately afraid that my husband is going to die. And I don’t know if that I would be okay if my husband died. And she’s newly married, and I get it. I think we all go through that phase when we’re newly married of like how could I go through life without this person?

And that led to a really productive conversation about her understanding that, although her husband is part of her world, he can never be her whole world because then it would indeed shatter if she lost him to COVID or to anything else. And so for us, like the work with her was really examining this belief that I would not be okay if I didn’t have my husband. And that was separate from the vaccine, and it actually freed her up to be able to allow him to decide whatever he wants to decide about the vaccine.

Maggie

I love that you mentioned that. We’re going to link in the show notes to an episode called The Five Layers of Why, which is just something for all of us to get to the root cause. We just want to ask: why are you concerned about that? And what’s going on there? And why is that? Until we get to that root cause, which I love that you said that.

And I’ll tell you something that’s kind of a mirror of that experience. Again, the same place from an opposite angle. Recently, my Business Coach challenged me to really face a lot of my fears. And in the process of facing those fears, I journaled, and I went to that worst case scenario in





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my journaling.

And I thought, “Okay, what is the worst thing that can happen?” And amongst my worst things, which isn’t THE worst thing, it was just my worst thing was: what if all of my friends shunned me, and I had no friends left on planet Earth? This was the thing that was underneath everything else, right? I finally got there.

And it was like, what if they shun me? And instead of going to the very useful place where you went, which is your husband can’t be your whole life. (Which I totally agree. I’m always talking about don’t put all your emotional eggs in one basket. It’s not healthy for a marriage, for your partner to be everything to you. The healthiest thing is to have different outlets and all of those things.)

But where I took myself was: okay, I’d be devastated. It would be awful. I would cry for weeks. It would be the worst, you know, emotional experience of my life if that actually did occur. And I would make new friends.

Dr. Michelle Pearce

Yes. Good.

Maggie

Oh, it was only once I took myself to the absolute devastation and how awful the devastation would feel, that I had the ability to see: okay, if that did happen, I would also find my way through that.





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Dr. Michelle Pearce

Yes. I think that's the ultimate belief that we all need to get to is: "and I would be okay." And I would find a way through that. And when we get to that point, that's when fear loses its grip.

Maggie

Yes. Yes. I can tell you, I have repeatedly, endlessly Coached a variety of names and faces and situations to: "and I would be okay." Like, at the end of it all, all the things we were doing was to figure out that I would be okay. And so now I can go and do whatever the thing was in front of me to do. Yeah. And love that. Okay, the last one is: be open. Tell me about being open.

Dr. Michelle Pearce

Yeah, we touched on this a little bit. But although we've been dreaming about what post pandemic life is going to be like, it's not going to be just positive emotions. You know, we're going to have -- we talked about grief, the anxiety, the losses, the regrets, and a host of other emotions -- and they may come up all in one day or all in a week or it's going to be a myriad of things.

And I think sometimes when you go through a trauma, you're so focused on surviving that trauma, that it's not until the worst of it has passed, that your body almost has a chance to be like, "Oh my goodness, like, what? What just happened to my life?" And then you start to feel all these things.

And it's confusing because you're thinking, "Well, it's not happening anymore. Why am I feeling all those emotions?" And it's because you literally had to survive to survive. You couldn't feel those things. When you get to a place of more relative safety, we start to be able to feel those





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things. So I think we just need to expect that.

Maggie

Yeah, I love that. Just expect that you could feel anything at any time. And that if you feel something that isn't the fun feelings, right? If it's not one of the fun feelings, that it's okay. And that it doesn't have to have a direct correlation with something that happened today.

Dr. Michelle Pearce

That's right.

Maggie

I was going through something for the last year and then I'm feeling it now. And when you were explaining that so well, the thought I had was like: when we have a family event, like Thanksgiving or something, right? And everybody's coming to the house and you're getting everything ready, and you're doing all the things.

You're like running on adrenaline for those couple of days. And then everyone goes home and then you collapse and you need a nap for a whole day or something. It's -- for a year we've been on heightened response. Even when we've been resting or even when we've been, you know, obviously, we've ate and slept and rested.

But there's a part of our nervous system that was just on an extra level of heightened awareness. And as that recalibrates to: I don't have to be in this heightened awareness all the time. All of these things are not, "Oh now I'm calm." It's, "Oh, now I can feel angry and upset and scared and all the things that I couldn't feel when I had to be dealing with my day to day life."





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Dr. Michelle Pearce

That's right. Yeah. I like that you said that about the nervous system. It's been turned on, it's still turned on. And now that we're going through different transitions, we've got in different levels and different things that are keeping that turned on.

Maggie

Yeah. And so one of the things that I'd like to talk about whenever I talk about the nervous system is just completing stress cycles, right? Like, how can we bring ourselves back to safety. And it's something as simple as taking a deep breath, calling a friend, looking at a tree, petting a pet. Any self soothing activity that helps you come back to center can be really useful to help your nervous system to calm down. What are your thoughts around that?

Dr. Michelle Pearce

I agree. Naming and normalizing are other tools to do just that. So I remember just when the spring was starting, I was talking to a colleague and we both confided in each other that we were not being as productive as we thought we were, and we couldn't figure it out.

We had both had at least our first shot. It was spring, the weather was warming up, there was finally hope of things going back to a little bit more like normal. And we were like, why are we at one of our lowest points? Where we just couldn't really get ourselves moving at work and felt down. And it was really helpful just to name and normalize to each other.

Because for like, at that point, like, I don't know, 10 or 11 months, we've been running on adrenaline and stress and fear. And why would we think that suddenly, just because the weather





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is nice, that we're gonna have all this energy and have, you know, be able to be so productive at work. And so to normalize that for each other was very helpful.

Maggie

And I think for me, that was one of the reasons I wanted to do a podcast episode just on this, to open that conversation. Like, these are some of the things where we think about our nervous systems and how we're thinking and feeling all the time and we still have to process this.

So I know for all of our listeners that you aren't thinking about this stuff all the time. A) It's okay if you have to process this. It's okay if you need to go at your own pace. It's okay if you feel like, "Oh, I'm not totally ready to reintegrate now. I don't want to do other things." Every reaction is okay.

Dr. Michelle Pearce

Yeah, I'm glad you brought that up. That is something I struggled with during the pandemic. I'm a Clinical Psychologist, I'm a Coach, I've written books on this subject. And I was struggling. I mean, this year with one of the worst years of my life, and I read my own book three times.

You know, like, I had to rely on all my tools and all my social network. And at first, there was a lot of shame. Like, "Michelle, you should be the expert in this." And then I'm like, "Yes and I'm also a human being having the same experience everyone else is having." And so there was just that moment of like, yeah, it doesn't matter who you are. We all have to be using these tools to be able to get through this time.

Maggie





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Yeah. And I think there was something that went around social media around: “take this time to do the biggest project you’ve never done.” And I’m very much on the side of: “Take this time to survive a freaking pandemic.” If you happen to get something done that you wanted to get done, and it’s delightful to you, and it feels nourishing to you, great. That’s also fine if you don’t, right?

Dr. Michelle Pearce

I totally agree. I had a friend who said, “You know, I got rid of my Netflix subscription. And I started reading and I started writing and like doing all these things,” and I was like, “Wow, I actually subscribed to Netflix for the first time.”

Maggie

And I think it’s just so important to make all of it -- it’s not that we’re making all of it okay -- it’s that I want us to be examples of: it is all okay. It’s okay to cry. It’s okay to be angry. It’s okay to be happy. It’s okay to be like, “Yay I get a break. Let me go watch Bridgerton.” Like, whatever it may be.

Dr. Michelle Pearce

Oh I agree with that one.

Maggie

Okay, so I love romance novels. We’re going to have a Bridgerton moment now in the middle of all this. So I read those books when they first came out. And I was beside myself with delight to know that they had been picked up and I -- Julia Quinn is the author of those books, and I follow her on Facebook. So the whole time that was leading up to the production coming out, I was just





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like, you know, so excited for her, and you know, all of these things.

And then it comes out. And it's such this, the whole world now knows how awesome -- you know, romance novels are not the thing that gives you credit as an intellectual person. And it's like, but they're super fun, and really great, and we can enjoy them.

Dr. Michelle Pearce

So true. That was a good one.

Maggie

So, when we got started, Michelle reminded me (and I'm so grateful) that at the end, whenever I have a guest on, I ask a question from the Questions for Couples Journal, and I will do that now. Before we start wrapping up, though, is there anything else that you think is important that we didn't touch upon that you want to add? I always want to give space for that.

Dr. Michelle Pearce

I think maybe the last thing that, since it's my thing about Night Bloomers. I wrote the book Night Bloomers. It's actually 12 principles for thriving in adversity. And I just want to offer to people that there's another perspective here.

Because when we go through crisis, I think one of the main things we need is hope. And when we have a different perspective, we can have that hope. And so this perspective comes from the idea of post traumatic growth.

And that says that we don't just have to be destroyed by negative things and by crises, and we





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don't just have to bounce back to where we were before the pandemic came, that would be resilience. There is a third option, and that's post traumatic growth, or what I call blooming in the dark.

And that's where we can actually become more than -- not in spite of, but because of that adversity that we went through. So I just want to offer that possibility to people. You may not have experienced that positive growth yet, but that is still a possibility for you. And I just want to leave you with so much hope to know that.

Maggie

Oh, that's a beautiful. See, see everyone. This is why Michelle had to be on the podcast today. That was so beautiful, so eloquent. Thank you. Okay, now, a little fun question, which was: who was your favorite fictional character growing up? And of course, why did you love them?

Dr. Michelle Pearce

So I have two. The first is Anne of Green Gables. And that was a TV series when I was growing up, and I must have watched it every year, for 10 years in a row. That was just my family thing that I did with my mom. So Anne of Green Gables.

And then Alice in Wonderland. And my dad said that I would make him rent that movie like almost every time we went to the video store. I think he tried to hide it at some point because we had to rent Alice in Wonderland so many times.

And so as I'm contemplating why -- why these two characters. I think because they were strong females. They were passionate, they were creative. They were curious, and they had a sense of





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awe in the world that I loved.

Maggie

I love it so much. So how can people find you? If people want to get the book, we'll link to the Amazon link on the book, but if people want to hear more about you and what you're up to, what you're doing -- what's the best way for people to do that?

Dr. Michelle Pearce

Sure. So I have a website, drmichellePearce.com. And on Instagram, I'm @bloomwithdrmichelle.

Maggie

Bloom. Like a flower. Like a beautiful flower blooming. Bloom with Dr. Michelle. Awesome. Thank you so much for coming on the show, for talking so beautifully and so powerfully about re-entry. I think this is so important. And thank you everyone for joining us. We'll be back next week with more ways to make your marriage better.

Dr. Michelle Pearce

Thank you, Maggie.

Maggie

Bye.

