

Episode 3: *Challenging Destructive Defenses* Transcript

Context: Jess and Liza decided to experiment over the summer with different activities they can do together to bring energy back into their relationship. Sharing music with each other was their most recent idea and this session started with them discussing that.

Jess: Liza was leaving early to go back to our house in SF. I made her a playlist before she left. I put 8 songs on the playlist; some songs she knew and some she didn't. I love making playlists. It felt like a good morning mix with some older stuff and slower. I was trying to make a story through the song titles: Under Pressure, Tear Drop, Lovely Day, Cosmic Love, Fresh Water, Jump In the Pool, Beginning, It Takes Two. (*Here's the story interpreted: (We're) Under Pressure, Tear Drop (sad), (but also a) Lovely Day, (could be) Cosmic Love, Fresh Water (ahead), Jump in the Pool, (could be a new) Beginning, (but) It Takes Two.*)

Liza: I love that there was a story. I definitely appreciated it. I feel badly that I didn't give it more attention in the moment. Honestly, I've been in a distracted and terrible mood since the Roe decision. I've felt just kind numb and pissed and having difficulty snapping out of it.

Noelle: Can you give it more attention now? Tell Jess what you wish you would've said then.

Liza (turns to Jess with a big smile): Thank you for making me that mixed tape. I really appreciated it and I ... (Jess jumps in abruptly)

Jess: Do you really? I don't believe you. (*This is a fairly common reaction from Jess that can get things stuck: she doesn't believe what Liza tells her when it's something positive.*)

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Liza: (Annoyed) Yes, I did appreciate it. But it kinda pisses me off that you say that. I wouldn't say it if it wasn't true. I bothers me how you're always assuming those things about me. And it just makes me not want to say anything. Like it's not even worth it if you don't believe me. (*This is often a stuck spot: They move from a positive interaction to something negative really quickly.*)

Noelle: Okay, let's slow this down. What happened here is you both got hurt. Jess, you were worried that what she was saying wasn't true - that maybe she was just saying things because I told her to say it.

Jess: Yeah, like she's only saying it because you put her on the spot.

Noelle: Yes, and that would be hurtful if she was just saying it to please me and didn't mean it. And Liza, you got hurt when Jess jumped in and cut you off and was doubting the honesty of your appreciation.

Liza: (Nodding) She does that a lot and it's deflating.

Noelle: Okay, so I want you guys to turn to each other and have that exchange one more time. Liza, I want you to start and say what you said but take the edge out of it – soften it. Do you know what I'm talking about?

Liza: Yes. But I think Jess should start.

Jess: Yes, I should start because I was the one who said something first.

Noelle: You're right. Jess you start and say what you said with vulnerability – talk about your feelings. Do you know what it would sounds like to do that?

Jess: Kinda but can you give me an example?

Noelle: Yes, of course. I'm glad that you took a risk and asked. So part of you liked what she was saying and wanted to take it in. (She nods.) But another part of you was worried that she was just saying it because I told her to - that it wasn't genuine, right?^{TTT}_{SEP SEP}

Jess: Yes.

Noelle: So I want you to speak both sides of that - they are both important - so something like: "Liza, I really love that you liked my mixed tape - thank you for telling me. But there's also a part of me that worries that you are only saying it because Noelle told you too. Can you reassure me that you really did like the tape, if that's true?" I want you to ask something of her at the end - take a risk to ask for something that will help. It might not be reassurance - it might be asking her to say it again, to slow down what she

is saying, to hold your hand while she says it. I want you to think about what would be helpful.

Jess: Yes, okay. I'll try. I liked your appreciation but I worry that it's not true. Is it true? Because I want it to be true. Can you reassure me?

Noelle: That was really good, Jess.

Jess: Thank you.

Liza: (Looking Jess in the eyes.) Yes, it's true. I wouldn't say it if it wasn't true - I was really appreciative of your playlist and all the thought you put into it. It makes me sad that I didn't put as much thought into the playlist that I gave you.

Noelle: That was good, Liza, How did it feel different to say it without the edge?

Liza: I'm not as activated about it. I'm not letting my frustration show through.

Noelle: Yes, I could feel that, too - it made a difference for me hearing it. How did it feel Jess for you to say what you did with more vulnerability?

Jess: Good. (Turning to Liza) But If I said it that way, you would be so mad.

Liza: I wouldn't be mad if you said that. You are assuming you are mad a lot of the time when I'm not. I wish you would just ask me instead of assuming because you don't know what is going on with me. (She's getting irritated and more sharp.) Like when I asked if you gave Sam his supplements and you said no and then I sighed and you said, "Don't get mad at me!" But I wasn't mad. Maybe I was just overwhelmed by all these vitamins that he has to take. It's always automatically about me being sensitive. (Again, something positive turns negative pretty quickly. And she starts to bring up a larger complaint: she always assumes she's mad. I'm not always sure how to contain this.)

Noelle: Okay, let's slow down. You both did a good job the second time. Jess, what was it like for you hearing what Liza said?

Jess: I feel proud of her for doing it a second time. Asking versus assuming was a real insight for me. There are often times and I'll say she's mad at me but I don't know - it's just a feeling. But I should ask her.

Noelle: Yes, that would be a good thing to do. Can you imagine yourself being able to do that?

Jess: Yes.

Noelle: Okay, I want to go back and ask you each something about the first exchange about the play list. Jess, do you know what you were reacting to when you thought she wasn't telling the truth?

Jess: Yes, her tone and how short she is with her words. (This is a common stuck spot: she reacts personally to Liza's non-verbals. But I will also say that Liza can be hard to read and her facial expressions can be intimidating.)

Noelle: So, a part of you - a part of you that long ago learned to pay hyper-focused attention to non-verbals - got scared when you interpreted her tone as not being genuine.

Jess: Yep.

Noelle: And what decision did you make in that moment?

Jess: To pull away.

Noelle: Good, that's really good self-awareness. When you got scared, you pulled away. Is that something that is familiar to you? Is that something you do when you get scared, pull away to protect yourself?

Jess: Ummm ... yes.

Noelle: So, you're learning something about yourself right now - that's really good. One way that you respond - that's not helpful for connection you want with Liza - is that when you get scared you pull way.

What about you Liza? When Jess' scared part jumped in and pulled away what decision did you make in that moment?

Liza: To shut down and get mad.

Noelle: So, one of the ways you protect yourself when you get hurt is to shut down and get mad.

Liza: (Thinks about it.) Yeah, I guess.

Noelle: And that is something you also learned how to do as a young child since being mad was one of the only ways you got seen.

Liza: Yes, there was a lot of negativity.

... And I talked about their adaptive child and how each were responding from that place and what it'd be like to have their nurturing adult show up instead.