Cultivating Peace and Stronger Relationships with Julie Kellogg

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Guest: Julie Kellogg

Resources: https://www.juliekellogglmft.com/home

David Lowry: 0:29

Hello and welcome to Peaceful Life Radio. I'm David Lowry and with me is my friend and co host, Dr. Don Drew. Don, tell us how you're doing and about our guest today.

Don Drew: 0:40

Everything's going great. We've got a really special program today. We've got Julie Kellogg, a graduate of Oklahoma State University and holds a marriage and family and therapy license in Oklahoma since 2004. She first worked in a community mental health before moving into private practice. And over the last several years, she served as a family science professor at the University of Central Oklahoma. And now she's at Oklahoma Christian University where she has helped prepare and graduate the first class of marriage and family therapists.

David Lowry: 1:12

This is actually part two of our interview. Last week we talked about the importance of therapy and how it can help people improve their relationships, manage stress, and overcome some difficult emotions. Today, we're going to delve deeper and explore some practical techniques for fostering stronger and more fulfilling relationships. But before we do that, we want to encourage listeners to like, subscribe, download, and recommend our podcast to your friends, family, and those who may need to hear about how to bring some peace in their lives. Julie, let's begin this second part of our interview with some questions related to peace and cultivating peace. You've been doing therapy for what twenty something years, you said so. So, you've seen heard it all at one time or another. Tell me about typical types of drama or conflict that people bring into their life.

Julie Kellogg: 2:06

Most of the drama that we see has to do with interpersonal relationships. Of course, some of that is related to internal things, and I'll talk about that in a second. But interpersonal relationships often are challenged because of patterns that have existed earlier in life that we're now trying to make work with this person in front of us. So, a lot of drama comes that way. Another way we see drama is if a person has a history that includes anything difficult, which is pretty much everyone on the planet, right? So, a trauma history, our brains learn to interact with the world based on the way that we have already interacted with the world. And if that means that the world has not been the safest place to us, that means that we can become hypervigilant.

David Lowry: 2:45

In one of our shows, we talked about the amygdalas and how they fire up and cause us to go into fight or flight mode. What are some things we can begin to do to break down

hypervigilance and overreactions and conflicting behavior that we bring into relationships.

Julie Kellogg: 3:02

I'm going to speak in very general terms, but we have something called a window of tolerance. And I don't know if you talked about that in your earlier episode. Okay. The window of tolerance is where we are in our most balanced state, where we can take in things from the environment and react to them in a way that is responsive instead of reactive. A person who has a difficult background, often their window tolerance is smaller than someone who's been well resourced earlier in life. That means then that they would either be hyper vigilant or hypo. We see hyper responses with people let's say cognitively, their brain is going a million miles an hour. Emotionally, they might have a very angry response to someone. We see their bodies getting ramped up with an increased heart rate and all of those kinds of things. That would be the, on the hyper side. The hypo side is when your body is kind of turning into itself and shutting down a little bit. So that would be a person who's withdrawing relationally. Their thoughts might slow down, they might perseverate, emotionally, they might begin feeling a little bit numb. So, on either side of this window of tolerance, you have these reactions that make it hard for you to interact with the world in a healthy way or in a way that doesn't cause other problems like what you were talking about earlier.

David Lowry: 4:11

We're trying to bring peace into our life. This window of tolerance seems like a very good start. We can notice when we're Hyped up, our body is tense, feeling anxious, and we can notice when we're shutting down, it's like we're overwhelmed. I don't want to hear anymore. You want to walk away and get out of it. What's a great sign that we're where we ought to be?

Julie Kellogg: 4:34

The word that we talk about a lot is reactive. And that word really comes from, we are "re-acting" earlier things in life that didn't go well. When we find ourselves in reactive spaces, it's because we have unresolved issues to deal with. Where we are responsive, where we can take in the person across the table from us, even if they're not in their best at the moment, and we can respond to them thoughtfully, patiently, slowly. What is it, quick to listen and slow to speak? Those would be the signs that we are in a good space.

David Lowry: 5:03

Let's think about a conflict situation many people find themselves in. A very difficult person talks loud, accusatory, seems threatening. How do we keep from matching that kind of energy? What do we need to have inside of us to keep from escalating the conflict?

Julie Kellogg: 5:20

If you have the luxury of knowing that you're going to be interacting with a person like that, you can prepare yourself ahead of time and then you're choosing to interact with them when you are in a place where you are most likely to be able to respond to them

well. You wouldn't be interacting with them when you're hangry or tired. We would be avoiding those times when we ourselves might be tempted to be amped up. We would set ourselves up to succeed, but we would also be having a conversation internally saying. Okay. This is who they are. That's about them. That isn't about me. What is it about me that I want to communicate in this exchange? What is true about me? And you would be going through those things. And maybe that would be that I am attentive and kind, that I want to be loving to this person. I want to think about maybe they're acting that way because they're insecure. And is there some way I can meet their actual need instead of the one they're presenting? So, if you can go in a regulated state, knowing that they are likely dysregulated, then that gives you a chance of being more responsive instead of reactive.

David Lowry: 6:19

The only person we can change is ourself, right? But we're in relationships. And even though we know we can't change another person, it is pretty painful when we deal with people who can be accusatory, belittling, or acting as though we're not good enough. It takes resilience to be with people like that. Any ideas on how we can maintain our peaceful demeanor and taking a path that's helpful to us?

Julie Kellogg: 6:42

I like to think of this as kids on the playground. And if we're playing chase, it takes at least two, two parties to play chase, right? One to chase and one to run. And so if you are in an interaction with someone, it takes two people to have that interaction. And that means if you stop running, Then they have no one to chase. Or if you stop chasing, then they have no reason to run. And so even though we know we can only change ourselves, the way that we act in situations can affect the system that we're in. And all we can do is maintain to think about the boundaries that we wanna set. The expectations that we have for the behavior that we will accept. And if a person crosses those lines, then we get to choose what we do with ourselves. We can't impose consequences on other adults in the world.

David Lowry: 7:25

Except in our dreams.

Julie Kellogg: 7:27

Yes. But we can choose how we share space with those people. And so if they are not going to be respectful, then we do not have to share space with them.

Don Drew: 7:35

One of the other things that I've heard from you in the past that I think is really important to understand is how we tell stories about ourselves and stories about others. And I think that also impacts our feelings of peacefulness and our stories become our reality, but stories can be rewritten.

Julie Kellogg: 7:49

Yes, absolutely. And that's actually one of the models that we talk about is a narrative therapy and it's helping us understand that we are not just people who the world

happens to us that we have agency in the world and we can write our story. We can take the pen and we can write our story instead of having our stories written for us, absolutely

Don Drew: 8:08

I want to be clear that I have not been in therapy with Julie, but we had what I would call a therapeutic discussion one time. And you asked me what animal, you probably remember my answer. It was a bull in a China closet because that's what my father always said to me. And I had absorbed that and made that my story of somebody asked me what animal I am. I'm a bull, right? And you asked me, but what do you think? And I stopped and thought about that. And I believe my answer was an owl, and it fit more of my self concept of myself, but I'd never really told that story. So I just found that extremely useful. Even a simple conversation.

David Lowry: 8:45

It's amazing how little moments of insight can be so valuable to us. Just happens in a flash sometimes.

Don Drew: 8:52

You have to hang out with good friends, David.

David Lowry: 8:53

You do. Julie, one of the things that we've talked about on this program before is either or thinking. And there is a way of looking at polarities where we tried to say, okay what's the benefit of one side of the polarity or one pole and what's the benefit of the other and making sure we don't exclude ourselves from the benefits of either. Does this play into couples where you might have one person who's more outgoing and another one who's a little more of a homebody and doesn't want to do anything? How do you work with polarities in couples?

Julie Kellogg: 9:25

I think the first thing that we can do is to realize that difference is not defective. Often we do see any difference that a person has as a defect of some kind. So if we can accept that there's value in the person for who they are or that particular characteristic, of course, excluding I don't even know how to describe those things. I don't want to say sinful, but I don't know of a better word. But excluding those things that we can accept that a difference is okay. It's just neutral. And then we can look and see, is there any value? In fact, we often end up in relationships with people who are different from us because we were attracted to that in the beginning. And a person who found themselves attracted to, let's say a girl who's looking at her boyfriend in college and is thinking, Oh wow, he's a really stable guy. I just appreciate that he's solid and all of that. Well, down the road in there, let's say they get married. She might look at that same person and say, what a stick in the mud? He's so boring and predictable. If we can remind ourselves of the high side or the positive side of those differences, that can go a long way. But there is a lot to be said for meeting somewhere in the middle. And people like poles because they think that they're easier because they're more contained and it is harder to hold both-and that's more weight to carry. But it does give you more latitude.

David Lowry: 10:40

Don and I've had this conversation. I'm married to a get 'er done person and I'm more spontaneous and I don't necessarily want to jump right in and do stuff sometimes. Over the years, though, we've come to appreciate how each of us have these special gifts. I rely upon her ability to get things done. And she relies on my broad ability to see things from a greater height or distance or to see where things might be going.

Don Drew: 11:07

You described yourself as a 20, 000

David Lowry: 11:09

A 20,000 foot guy, yeah! But those are some polarities that took time to appreciate with one another. But the moment we learned to appreciate those differences, magic happens, I think.

Julie Kellogg: 11:20

It's huge. That's one of the things that we see in successful couples is that they have positive attributions for each other instead of believing that the other person is out to get them or wants to prove their point, right? They're like, Oh, we're on a team. We're in this together. You're giving them the benefit of the doubt. And that is a huge step that couples can take towards health.

David Lowry: 11:38

In your 20 years of work with couples and people in all kinds of situations, what are some things all of us could be doing to cultivate a more peaceful and happy life?

Julie Kellogg: 11:50

A drum that I beat often is that there are two types of people in the world and one of those says, when something goes wrong, what did I do wrong? And the other type says, what did you do wrong? And we just come in the world that way. We just are for whatever reason. And that's okay. Those are neutral positions. But both of those people have to learn to ask the other question. Because if you're always asking, what did I do wrong?, then you are likely a doormat in the relationship. You are not healthy. You do not have high value or worth of your own space in the world. But if you're a person who is asking, what did you do wrong? We can see how those don't go well together. But ironically, they do often end up in relationship with one another. The beauty though, is that we can learn to ask the other question and there's great value in that.

David Lowry: 12:36

I've never thought about those two questions before.

Don Drew: 12:38

Yeah.

David Lowry: 12:39

What did I do wrong? What did Don do wrong? Hahaha. Just learning to ask the other question. How do you recognize an emotionally intelligent person?

Julie Kellogg: 12:49

Self-awareness is a huge piece of that. They are open to exploring themselves and being wrong and receiving input from other people. Like Don was saying an ability to re imagine themselves in some way and to make a change and know that change is good and not to be avoided. Another thing is people who can ask, and rightly follow the answer of what is mine to do? Because we get in a lot of trouble when we are trying to do what is meant for other people. So, emotionally intelligent people can ask that question and then sit with that answer.

David Lowry: 13:22

I have always wanted to talk about the shadow. Quite honestly, I've heard about my shadow self and I don't even think I know what people are talking about on that. Not really. Would you tell us what shadow is and what we should think about that?

Julie Kellogg: 13:38

Kelly Roberts is a colleague of mine and she talks about how there's the two sides of the coin, right? If we look at the positive side of a particular attribute, then there's probably also a shadow side of that as well. So, we might have a person who is a servant hearted person and is very loving and attentive to other people. And the shadow side of that might be that they are not attending to their own needs, or maybe that they're meeting the needs of people that they want to gain the favor of, but not necessarily the people who need them the most, those right in their circle. That's just an example of 2 sides of that coin. A way that I've heard about it recently that I've really been enjoying thinking about is related to the Enneagram. It's talking about the number that we move to in strength, in rest. That when when we're not really cognizant, we might move to the low side of that number and the places where we are most at ease. So where we're at home we might fall into the lower functioning side of those numbers. And so for me, my type, I moved to a number that on the low side can be a bit dismissive. It can be a bit bossy. It can be a bit pessimistic. The shadow side of that would be that my family would be more likely to receive those bits of me because that's where I've let my guard down. And so I would say if a person is looking maybe to figure out the shadow side of themselves, they would think about how they behave when their guard is down.

David Lowry: 15:03

When we talk about the about shadow sides, it seems to me there's another two types of people. One of them is the person who sees the shadow in everything. You can say, I really admire that person. You just don't know that they can get mad or something. It's like, everybody's got to be saintly or something. The shadow person always sees the shadow in the other person. And then there are those who see the light in everything. And that can be annoying too, because it's like, Oh, but this is really a blessing that we're out here on the highway with a flat, in the middle of

Julie Kellogg: 15:34

Silver lining. Yes.

David Lowry: 15:35

The silver lining person.

Julie Kellogg: 15:37

It reminds me of conversation that I had with my dad when I was in high school because I happen to be more of a second type of person that you were describing. I was talking to him about a particular teacher and opportunity that I had and how much I loved her and how fun she was and, bringing out this other side of me. And he said, well, what about blah, blah, blah, her shadow side. And, I said, I'm just not interested in that. And we finally got to the point where I asked him why he was always pointing out the shadow side. And he said that he was afraid that I couldn't see it. And that if I didn't see it, I would be hurt by it. His intention was good in trying to help me see the whole person. But we were just kind of missing each other there and the way that we were talking about this. I appreciate that.

David Lowry: 16:19

A story I have is my grandma was a person who saw a lot of good in people. But it got to be a bit much one time because we were driving down the road and we had a flat. It was on Christmas Eve. We're in the middle of West Texas on a two lane road and we had no idea if we were going to get help or not. It's cold. And she's saying, we just need to count our blessings. And.

Don Drew: 16:44

Yeah.

David Lowry: 16:44

I was

Don Drew: 16:44

was

David Lowry: 16:44

wanting to choke her, even as a very young person, I didn't like that. But I have come to believe that it's really important that we not be the person that just sees the bad in everything. It is a choice I believe.

Julie Kellogg: 16:58

We come programmed a little bit, right? And so we do, we can grow in one way or the other. Absolutely. I'm going to tell a story and you guys can cut it if you think that it makes me sound too naive. But to the point that I'm the second type of person. When the second plane hit the world trade center, I looked at the person next to me and said, what a coincidence. Even with that happening, I had no idea that someone would intentionally inflict pain or hurt like that on someone else, it did not even enter my mind as a possibility. And so I will say that it's a happier life to live when you are seeing the good in people. And so, yeah I try to stay in that lane, but I do recognize the value in looking at the whole person. My husband often tells me that I'm dependent on the good of other people, that I just trust the kindness of others. And that's because so far I've not really had a lot of reasons not to. I understand that's not everyone's story and I've been

very privileged in that way. It makes sense that people in other contexts would have a more skeptical view of the world.

David Lowry: 18:03

People who listen to our program are going through things and some of them really hard things. How can we encourage people to have hope, develop resilience, to keep going forward, not give up? Any ideas?

Julie Kellogg: 18:18

There's a lot of great research that's coming out right now about positive and compensatory experiences. They start in childhood as positive childhood experiences, and they're not things like going to the best school and having a European vacation as a junior. There are things like having a regular meal around the table. They're having community, belonging in your community, having maybe even just one teacher who you felt like was in your corner. Those are the kinds of stabilizing events that we see then even into adulthood, the compensatory things like serving someone like having a community where you feel that you have belonging. Those are ways that we build resilience from childhood on through adulthood. And so, if you're looking for ways to grow in hope and grow in resilience, they are not the big things. They are not the next book. They are looking at the community in which you live and trying to be a part of that community.

Don Drew: 19:14

Julie Kellogg, marriage and family therapist. Thank you so much. This has been a wonderful session. We've been able to cover so much and I know that we could keep going forever. So thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Julie Kellogg: 19:24

It's been a great pleasure.