

Addiction in Families: Wisdom from Shelly Goodell

Introduction to Peaceful Life Radio

If you've ever loved someone who was addicted or been addicted yourself, it has tentacles. It tentacles out to your family, to your community, to your work, to your social life, and can create a lot of stress and a lot of anxiety for those around you. It can affect children in the home. It can affect grandparents. Whomever loves the addict is impacted.

And that was Shelley Goodell, a therapy candidate starting her therapy supervision in the second half of life. I'm David Lowry And you're listening to Peaceful Life Radio, where we navigate the second half of life with purpose, wisdom, and grace. And with me today is my good friend, Don Drew. Don, why don't you introduce our guest today?

Today's Topic: Addiction in Families

I would absolutely love to introduce our guest, but let me start off by saying what we're talking about today.

Okay. It's a serious topic. We're going to be talking about addiction. Specifically we're going to be talking about addictions in families. And we want to get around to discussing what a person's role might be in helping this family member or in some cases not. What are our responsibilities?

Meet Shelley Goodell: A Journey to Counseling

In order to do that, we've got with us today, Shelley Goodell. She's got a master's in counseling from Southwestern College in New Mexico, which is a very highly regarded program promoting mind, body, and spirit approach to therapy. And she's also done an internship with the Sky Center in New Mexico, which also provides therapy to families with suicidal youth, addiction concerns, eating disorders, and so on.

But before I say anything else, let me turn over to Shelley and say, Shelley, welcome. And we're glad you're here. And tell us anything else you want us to know about yourself.

Thank you for having me. I'm so glad to be here. Yes. So I ended up in

counseling in the second half of life which I know is a popular theme on this podcast, but I actually started my career in human resources and leadership roles for about 25 years where I led employee relations groups and recruiting groups and organizational development groups, training leaders on conflict resolution, inclusion and diversity and a host of other things. Then COVID hit and I had been thinking about what I wanted to do differently in the second half of life. And counseling has always been attractive to me. And a lot of the reason for that is my own mental health issues.

And so I wanted to do a deep dive exploration. I'd been in therapy for many years and wanted to see if I had anything to offer others that if I could help in any way. So I now work in community health, mental health. And I am a candidate, a therapist candidate, meaning I'm under supervision. So, I haven't been a newbie in anything for a really long time. But I'm a newbie to therapy and I'm really excited about that.

Welcome to the second half of life.

Thank you.

So, Shelley, what do you want to tell us about addictions?

Shelley's Personal Struggle with Addiction

Yeah, so I think I'll start with my own sort of personal story about addiction, and that is I've struggled with two addictions in my life. One is with alcohol and the other is workaholism. And so as I rose the corporate ladder, I worked more and more hours. I was also in an incredibly difficult marriage with an addict and had some of my own trauma and a lot of things invited me to cope with alcohol, and I did that for many years in a functional way and then towards the end in a very dysfunctional way.

And so alcohol worked for me until it didn't. And that is the story of addiction, which is whatever your substances, whether that be drugs or alcohol, it could be a process addiction like gambling or shopping, or pornography, a wide range of things, you have to do more and more of it to get the same effect, right?

And it begins. to cause more and more dysfunction in your life. And the thing that was helping me cope with the trauma that I had experienced in my life stopped working. And I needed to work more hours, I needed to feel successful in that way, to feel normal, to feel like a normal human being.

And that's my story. I got a lot of help, meaning inpatient treatment. I went to therapy, and recovery was not a straight line for me. I had several relapses that were devastating to me. And what I know now is that relapse is often a part of recovery. But at the time, I felt like a failure. And I was also trying to manage

living with another addict. And so while I, on the surface, looked more functional, I was holding our family together, I was also doing things that were really unhelpful and enabling in my relationship.

You make a really great point here.

The Impact of Addiction on Families

And that is that addictions, while we think of them as an individual problem, they become a family problem.

Absolutely. If you've ever loved someone who was addicted or been addicted yourself it has tentacles. It tentacles out to your family, to your community, to your work, to your social life, and can create a lot of stress and a lot of anxiety for those around you. It can affect children in the home. It can affect grandparents. Whomever loves the addict is impacted.

If you're in the second half of life and you've come out of an intense work situation, family situation with kids, husband, wife, or the stress of life, maybe caring for an aging parent. What do you do? You're still carrying around this dysfunctional behavior? Is there a way out?

Self-Compassion and Understanding Addiction

Yeah I think it starts with some self compassion. I think there is a lot of shame around those, what we call addiction type behaviors or unhelpful behaviors. And so there's a lot of time spent hiding. And in reality, many, many people suffer and struggle with unhelpful behaviors that repeat and repeat and repeat. They're in a pattern that is unhelpful.

And so starting with some self compassion, understanding that you're not alone, that many people experience these types of things. And then what I say is become an expert on yourself. Try to get curious about why those patterns exist. And can be helpful to find some help from those who've experienced those same things.

People in recovery, whether that be a support group or a therapist or a trusted mentor for many people that looks like a pastor or that looks like some other type of mentor that you can talk to and express those feelings of perhaps shame.

So, Shelley I'm going to go back to families and how they respond to another family member who has an addiction. What kind of response is a reasonable response and a helpful one?

Yeah.

Supporting a Loved One with Addiction

So I think you're asking about what can you do if you love someone that you suspect has an addiction or you know has an addiction. What can often happen is let's just say you're married and your wife comes home and she's been drinking excessively. As a spouse or a partner, you can feel really angry. You can feel abandoned, rejected. And so you have this sort of transactional reactive response to what's happening. And that's pretty normal. It's pretty typical to feel some anger or frustration about what's happening. But again, if you can pull back away from that situation and say, *okay, I'm not alone. Can I find self compassion? And can I also understand that I didn't cause this, that I'm not the reason. The person has an addiction?* This is hotly debated, right? Is it nature or is it nurture? Is it a disease or is it not a disease? Is it based on trauma? We could have those conversations and be here for weeks.

But I think it's realizing that you're not alone, and also understanding that the shame and guilt that you might feel, they also feel shame and guilt. Right? They know that their behaviors aren't helpful and are affecting their family in, maybe in really negative ways. And the one piece of advice, and I never give advice, is just to know that you're not in control, that you cannot control another person.

And, you can get into this real war or battle with a spouse or a kid, and it just creates more animosity and more problems in the family.

Setting Boundaries and Seeking Help

I would always encourage treatment, and what does treatment look like? For an addict of a substance, like alcohol or drugs, it can look like inpatient treatment.

They may need detox. And it can also look like therapy for the person who is addicted. For yourself, as someone who loves an addict, then I might encourage you to seek self-help groups to support you through how you navigate this situation. So again, for a substance, it might be Al Anon or another support group like that.

And learning all you can about what you can do to protect yourself. Self care is really an overused term. I like to say self protected. What can you do to protect your own sense of self? Because what can happen is that the person who loves an addict becomes addicted to the addict, right?

They're constantly swirling the addict, and they can be consumed with the behaviors of the person that they love. And it can be really damaging to not only their relationship, but their self worth. And so asking a question like, *what would my life be like if I weren't so consumed with this person's behaviors?* Just getting

curious about that and then educating yourself and setting boundaries.

And there are a lot of great resources, and I'm sure we'll talk about a few of the ones that I like, but support groups can really help you learn *hey, what, how did you set those boundaries in a loving and kind way that protected you?*

I'm imagining that some people in the second half of life are saying, *I dealt with all of this for many, many years. Do I want to keep on doing this? I'm at a place in my life where I've got to decide how much do I want to spend in this situation. I love the person, but I'm not sure what I should do. Should I cut my losses and move forward?* I know there's no hard and fast guidelines, but anything you might offer would be welcome.

Yeah, it's a great, great question. And I'm glad you said that, David. It's a very personal decision. But I think there is help out there for people who are struggling with that. So for instance, if you're in a relationship that is violent in some way, whether physically violent or verbally violent, I would say seek help immediately to help you safely make those decisions.

And if you're in a situation, for instance, you love someone who has a gambling addiction and you've gone into massive amounts of debt, then understanding, *how do I protect myself while I'm making the decision about is this a relationship that I want to continue?* And it's not an easy decision to make because if you've been in a relationship for decades, and let's say an addiction has gotten worse and or debilitating, that you're probably grieving some of what your relationship was. And how it has changed over the years, and you're also debating and circling around, *Can it be the way it was? Can it be better with some help? Can, with some treatment, can we have a more fulfilling loving relationship than we've ever had before?*

So I think getting some help to navigate those things, because when you're in the middle of acute addiction if we're talking about a severe addiction, nobody's clear, right? Everybody is just reacting and to what's happening in the moment. And it can feel overwhelming. And so during those moments, maybe it's not the best time to make a snap decision about the health or the longevity of your relationship.

Recognizing and Addressing Enabling Behaviors

Shelley, a lot of times when I hear anybody talking about addictions, the term enabler comes up. What does that look like?

Yeah, so it's the whole, when am I helping versus when am I enabling? And what I would say if you are helping under the guise that continues to further the addiction then that's not helping, that's enabling. For instance, if you're a

grandparent raising a child with an addiction, and you are giving them money, and they are using that money to further their addiction that is enabling behaviors. If you are taking them to the spots where they have access to their addiction, that is enabling behavior.

If you are taking a spouse to treatment, to me, that is helpful behaviors, right? Because what you're saying is, I'm willing to help you get the help you need, and I'm not enabling the behaviors that further the addiction.

And so a boundary is what will you do, not what will the other person do, right? So it's what will you do if this happens? How will you respond if this happens? And so that might mean that your partner, you have a discussion and say, *I no longer feel comfortable with us sharing money because you're using money from the family account to further your addiction.* It might mean limiting another's access in the family to your credit cards or to your car. If there's someone who is addicted to drugs and alcohol and they're driving your car, then you might set a boundary that I'm no longer willing to allow you to use my car.

And of course, boundaries get challenged.

Yeah, an addict does not the worst word they can hear is no. That is not a fun word for an addict to hear. And you're likely to get met with lots of resistance and perhaps manipulation. And even big, big emotions and perhaps big behaviors. So just understanding that and having a response ready that keeps you safe and also holds your boundaries and keeps your boundaries intact. And that's why I think having people who have done this before, who are in recovery, or who love people in recovery, having them help you navigate this can make all the difference in the world.

Finding Hope and Community Support

I think that there's probably a lot of shame in identifying oneself as having a problem, maybe being an addict. You go to these meetings, you think, *I'm not as bad as those guys*, when obviously you are. There's always someone who's taken it further than maybe you have. What are some things we might do to put a perspective on something that's holding us back?

So, I love that. And I'll just share a personal story. The very first time I went to a self help group for myself, and then I later went because I love someone who is an addict. The very first time I went, I thought, *I'm nothing like any of these people.* I am a person who has built a really successful career. I know how to navigate this situation. And I just kept going back. I kept going back. Something would invite me to return.

And what I ended up feeling is that I was exactly like those people because we're

all just humans trying to figure it out. And we all have problems. And when we have those problems, we think we are alone.

And addiction grows in the dark. And if you can shine a little light towards another person and say, *Hey, I haven't been exactly where you've been, but I felt those same feelings. I felt alone and I felt shame. And I felt like, why do I keep doing this behavior that is so destructive? I felt that exact same feeling. And you know what? I'm better.* It gives the other person hope. And hope is the thing that can really change behavior.

Yeah, sometimes I think when we look at people in our families or people that we love or care about, we watch them enact behaviors that on the surface actually getting them some good stuff. For instance, as a workaholic. Being a workaholic quite often, you get a lot of good stuff. You get promotions, you get money and all that sort of thing. The cost comes in many other ways. Not necessarily, at least not in the short term, in the workplace. It's hard, I think, to always be able to tell when an addiction is an addiction, when it's hurting them. So, I can see an older family member looking at a child or grandchild and questioning whether or not they actually are an addict.

Certainly there's a textbook DSM 5 TR definition of what addiction is. That's a clinical definition. What I might suggest or encourage is as a layperson, is what problems are surfacing because of this perceived addiction? So I'll give you an example of that.

If you have a young person in your life, again, if let's just use the example of a grandparent raising a teenager but let's say they're using technology, they're on their phone for many, many hours a day. They're not going to school. They're skipping classes so they can be on their phone. They're not having social relationships. They're not in their family. They're a part of their family, but they're not in it because they're constantly on their phone. We know it's not helpful. And we know it's hurting the individual. And we know that it's a pattern that they cannot stop on their own. And if you cannot stop on your own, and it's causing problems, I think that's a marker to seek help.

Shelley, what is the hardest part of getting rid of an addiction in your opinion?

Oh, that is a tough question. The hardest part. I think I'll just tell you my own personal experience. And that is I did not understand for a long time how the symptom of drinking and workaholicism was serving a purpose. And that was to numb me out from having to really look at myself and my trauma.

In my life, trauma hasn't gone away. Like, I didn't have this miraculous cure that made my trauma just disappear. I didn't have that perfect therapy session but I have a different relationship with my trauma at 52 than I had at 47, at 40, at 35.

The hardest part, for me, was De layering why I used alcohol and de layering why I coped by working myself to death all the time and how it related to how I sought worth, right? How I hustled, as Brene Brown would say, for my self worth.

For people in the second half of life who may have come from that hustle culture and somewhat miss it. What could we replace that with?

Yeah, I think my second part of life was trying to understand what I enjoyed, what was interesting to me. I am a people pleaser and a perfectionist. That was part of my workaholicism and also hustling for my worth. And what that meant was that I could be directed, right? *Hey, Shelley, look here, do this.* And if I got praise for that, if people were thinking about promoting me, if I got to a different level, if I got a seat at the table, man, that was just super motivating for me. I could only do that for so long before I needed to cope with alcohol because you burn out. It's a vicious, vicious cycle.

In the second half of life, I think it's important to really look at what gives me personal fulfillment? Is it being out in nature? Is it doing yoga? Is it going fishing? Is it mentoring others?

Shelley, in families, as we've mentioned, there's always a lot of trauma that comes with addicted family members and so on. We've talked about some of the feelings we have, guilt, fear, shame. People who are listening to this podcast are seeking more peace in their lives. What are some suggestions you might have that could be really helpful to them at this point if they have a family member that has an addiction?

Yeah, I am a believer that we heal in community. So, having community support can be a game changer for a person who is suffering because they personally have a pattern of unhelpful behaviors, or they love a person who is struggling. So, being in community, meaning seeking out help, whether that be self help group, therapy, or other people in your life that you love and respect and opening up to them about what you are experiencing. Shame can keep us in the dark.

Resources and Recommendations

Are there any books or resources you would specifically like to suggest?

Yeah, I'll just tell you a few of the books that I have found really helpful. One, when you're talking about enabling behaviors, rescuing behaviors it's an old book, but it's a goodie. And that is *Codependent No More* by Melody Beatty. That is an excellent book for trying to understand the origins of why you might enable or rescue and really practical advice on how you get out of those patterns.

The other is *The Power of TED*, which is by David. Emerald, and it is also about

relationships. It's a very simple book to read. You can read it in an afternoon, but it talks a lot about the drama triangle. So, the victim, the rescuer, the persecutor, and how those play out in relationships.

I'm a big fan of Gabor Maté, who, if you've read anything from him, he would say that a lot of addiction comes from trauma, if not all addiction. And he has a book called *In the Realm of Hungry Ghosts*, which was a powerful book in my life. And then there is a book called *A Beautiful Boy: A Father's Journey Through His Son's Addiction* by David Sheff, which is also a powerful book about how do you love a kiddo who is going through addiction. I think *The Book of Alcoholics Anonymous* is a classic book that can help you understand the mind of someone suffering from alcohol addiction or drug addiction. It's obviously, focused on alcohol, but you can apply it to any other addiction.

There is a book called *Addict in the Family* by Beverly Conyers, which is also a really good book. There's *The Laundry List* by Tony A with Dan F. It really provides insight and meaning to the adult child of an addict.

And all the books that I've shared have various beliefs. They're on the spectrum of belief systems about addiction. But I have found pieces in every one that have been really helpful to me.

Conclusion and Final Thoughts

Well, these all sound very helpful and we're so grateful for all of the time you've given us today and for all these fine recommendations for books. We hope our listeners found this program helpful.

We've been talking to Sherry Goodell, who's a therapy candidate starting her therapy supervision in the second half of life. Congratulations to you on making the big change. Congratulations to you for facing those problems you mentioned earlier. And congratulations for helping so many people. I know the future is so very bright. We look forward to seeing you again sometime.

Thank you so much. I've really enjoyed it.