

**Episode 23: Emotions, Boundaries & Relationships**

Liz Higgins (00:02):

Hey, y'all! Liz Higgins here, and welcome to the Millennial Life Podcast, where my main goal is to share conversations that will inspire you and drive you toward the life and relationship you desire. I'm here to share what I've learned as a licensed therapist and relationship coach specializing in millennial relationships and wellness, as well as transformative conversations with other professionals. Thanks for listening and enjoy today's episode!

Liz Higgins (00:34):

Hello, welcome to the episode today! I am back again for a solo episode... I have been doing a few of these solo episodes and hope that you have received some takeaways from these shorter segments that I'm putting out. I'm finding it really enjoyable to just be here in my cozy office, kind of mindfully putting intention on what will be helpful conversations and topics to put out there around our generation and relationships. And as you can probably tell (if you've been following along and keeping up with me), most of what ends up coming out of my mouth is very relationally focused. And it feels validating internally that that's kind of what's happening, because I really truly believe my purpose on this earth is to make a mark in the realm of relationships and how they function in the modern world and what really allows commitment, long-term commitment to succeed for our generation.

Liz Higgins (01:31):

And not just our generation, but as we continue to grow and expand and evolve and develop as humans, we have to continue nurturing that process for relationships, for marriage. So you can probably tell that's where my heart is. That's where my brain is, and it's just what I want to put out there and bring to you. So I hope these things have been helpful. And, with that being said, I'm really excited because coming up in future episodes, I'm going to be doing some really great interviews. I have a few lined up! Those will be coming back in. So please stay tuned, because I think there's going to be some really great stuff on relationships, becoming your best self, reducing relational anxiety... So that you can really level up your relationship, your marriage, your dating experience, wherever you are in the phase of life - this stuff is for you.

Liz Higgins (02:32):

And it will help you at any phase of life and relationship that you're in. If you listen for the stuff, you can receive what really applies to where you're at at this point in time. So stay tuned! Today, I want to talk with you about emotions and relationships. And so I grew up a very emotionally-attuned person. I would say I've been told directly that I have a pretty high E.I., or emotional intelligence, and that I have an empathic, compassionate way about me. And honestly, all this is probably why music has always been an essential part of my life. It's always been something I could do, a place I could go to feel my feelings even more. So I don't think it really surprised anybody when I became a therapist, wanting to kind of dive into the realm of emotions and that part of, of human nature and how it impacts who we are and how we show up. What we do, what we don't do, and who we choose.

Liz Higgins (03:41):

Um, I'm proud of my ability to tune into emotions easily, but I'll be honest. It's also gotten me into plenty of trouble throughout my life. The strange part is, back then, I barely even knew it. As aware as I seem to be about everybody else, I kind of lacked in the self-awareness department. Some of you probably know exactly what I'm talking about here, right? Like before I became a therapist, I was more like a sponge. I would often take on the emotions of others because I kind of felt like it was my, my duty to feel what others were feeling. Like... I was actually really good at that, especially when it was something painful. Like, as a means of carrying some of that burden or helping them. And this happened for me, with friends, with, I mean, whoever. Some, somebody, you know, having a hard day in class, like I, I seriously, I would feel that stuff in my body. This especially ranked true in my family of origin, with the people I most loved.

Liz Higgins (04:43):

I came from a very close, nurturing, loving, maybe overly close family. And I don't regret any of that. I love my family, but I definitely learned in that environment, I think to be very emotionally attuned to my siblings, to my parents and as kiddos, that something that should do, we just kind of go through that process and our families of origin of gravitating towards more that experience of real emotional closeness, or sometimes it's the opposite, like kind of withdrawing pulling away or not, not experiencing that much love or nurturing from family or caregivers. But, so my experience was that I think long, long ago, I, I learned to be more spongy in nature, emotionally speaking. What I realized eventually, (and as I reflect on this, I feel like it's kinda... The clarity comes maybe in high school years, but I've always done this) um, the taking on feelings, the kind of over-awareness, hyper awareness of what others were experiencing emotionally.

Liz Higgins (05:54):

Um, what I realized is that this often left me feeling drained, anxious, stressed, and sometimes even worse, even resentful of others. And I found myself not wanting to be around certain people. Um, and I know some of y'all know what I'm talking about. Like, there's just those people in your life where you think about going to hang with them or be with them or whatever, and you're just like, 'ah, the dread, I don't have the energy today'. Or like, you know, their name pops up on your phone and you're like, 'Ooh, I'm just gonna not answer that.' Um, that's what I've learned now is like, that's a major signal. That's a major indicator that, you know, something's going on here. There's a little bit of an emotional imbalance that could be occurring, because what I realized is half the time, these people didn't even know that I felt this way within our relationship. But it was me, having learned this process of being so spongy with others, that it was hard to feel sturdy in myself when I was with those people or around those people.

Liz Higgins (06:57):

So, when I looked at myself, I saw that I really only had me to blame for allowing that kind of pattern to continue. So fast forward, I met my husband who is an incredible person and kind of had this incredible blend of the masculine energy. Also with this softer way of acknowledging my feelings, I would say he's pro-empath. So like he does empathy. He really tries to. He goes there with me and we could be very emotional with each other. And I'm telling you, like I was smitten. He was like the full package for me when we met. And I was like, you know, this is not like every guy that I've come across or met. And so a lot of that felt great. Um, what's an interesting thing to think about, something that I've learned through grad school and being a Family Systems student, um, and, and just studying relationships as systems, is that we often attract a partner that has a similar level of emotional maturity as we do.

Liz Higgins (08:06):

And I do feel like that's very accurate for, for me and my husband. Um, I think that we're similar in a lot of ways, even though we're very different people and we'd certainly express and process and feel things differently as far as, like, the level of emotional maturity. I think there's a connection there. What is also amazing, is how in a relationship, your partner really truly becomes this mirror for you to go deeper into yourself. If you allow that to happen, if you take that opportunity and that can actively come through the process of your partner openly observing things about you, to you, um... Just in the way that they maybe emotionally respond to you and what that brings up in you, these are all opportunities to go inward and to turn back into yourself and explore what's going on with me. And what does that mean?

Liz Higgins (09:00):

And what do I need? So what I came to realize through his open observations to me (which lucky for him, I was open to hearing how greatly, and sometimes how negatively, my ability to take on other's emotions was affecting me) I mean, he would often bring awareness to the fact that I'd be, like, complaining about people frequently, uh, complaining about him and just frequently like stressed, anxious, or freaking out about stuff. Um, as with many couple relationships today, your partner kind of becomes your go-to outlet for venting about life and wow... How lucky I am that he picked up on some patterns and he was brave enough to tell me, you know, 'Hey, I'm noticing you really whine about this person, like a lot. You're, you're putting a lot of headspace into this relationship or this situation at work.'

Liz Higgins (10:06):

So fast forward to it, our lives today. I mean, our marriage is like many other marriages out there in many ways. And sure we argue, we love, we talk about the future. We sharing anxieties, but you know, I had to do some major renovations inside of myself to get me to a place where I could really partner up and have this kind of relationship where I could differentiate myself from those tendencies to be spongy and just over-read all the things that he did that could quickly become blockers for me to be connected to him and to grow in the relationship. So with this, with this whole setup objective like emotions and relationships, here are some specific things that I've learned about myself. I think the greatest thing is that I've learned my emotions are incredibly important. They're precious, they're valid. You can never question what somebody is feeling.

Liz Higgins (11:03):

You just really can't. But my emotions in and of themselves cannot steer the ship. My intellect, my values, the guiding principles that I've defined through my own personal development, are the things that guide me through life's challenges and make me a better partner and a better person. That doesn't mean I'm not feeling my feelings. When I can feel my feelings, or when I, when I can, I do, I do feel my feelings. I bring an awareness to them, but I choose how I want to respond in my relationship. I can be in control of myself when we're having really huge emotional experiences. We often feel out of control. We feel overwhelmed. We feel overflowed. We aren't sure, you know, what to do in the midst of big emotions. And that's really important to be mindful of because I'm not saying don't feel that way and don't have big feelings.

Liz Higgins (12:06):

I do have big feelings, but I've learned that I can go through the process of feeling that. Not necessarily, uh, reacting in that moment based on those things, but allowing time breathing. And just deeper, intuitive work to kind of take me through that experience. And then think about my response as responding versus reacting, thinking versus feeling. When I am in the presence of another person who's experiencing big, big feelings, big emotions... And you know, there's been nothing quite like parenting. Parenting little toddlers that, that describes this very kind of moment. You know, you're like literally sitting with a child that's just screaming, crying, overwhelmed, overflowed with emotion.) I've learned that I can simply be me. I don't have to take those feelings on. I'm not responsible for that emotional experience over there. I can practice a healthy boundary. I can practice putting a force field around me that protects me from needing to, like, soak all that in on a visceral level. And doing that practice actively helps me to be a better listener, a better friend, a better family member, a better lover.

Liz Higgins (13:33):

When I stopped doing that whole thing of blaming my husband for making me feel certain things and actually taking ownership of those feelings that are happening in me and listening to the underlying needs I had, I could meet my husband on a whole different level. And you can see how I'm kind of shifting around with different relational, um, examples like relationships with kids, relationships with friends, relationships with spouse, partner, whatever. Like, this stuff works across the board with relationships. And that's why the core of what I am here to do and to share and talk with you about is healthy, relational practice. There's so many things that we just didn't learn in school, growing up, whatever, about how to effectively do this stuff on a very empowering and internal level. And I'm telling you guys - like, it's so possible. So when you get to that place, it's really amazing because there's no longer any, any control that one can have over the other.

Liz Higgins (14:40):

I mean, Terry Real talks about it all the time. You know, intimacy and real, relational practice does not involve (in any circumstance) being in power over another or being disempowered beneath another. It's same as. We're meeting each other, fully aware of the vastness of our templates and who we are. We don't need to be, you know, going one up, or going one down, or taking on too much than is ours to take on. So when I really started this kind of practice and internal understanding of, like, where I start, where I end and where others began and that I don't have to be that sponge with everything. And I quit referring back to maybe things that happened to me, or family dynamics, or the way things turned out in different aspects of my life as excuses and ways of justifying this tendency that I had, I was really able to take ownership of who I wanted to become.

Liz Higgins (15:46):

I can empower myself to become the kind of partner and person that I wanted to be - somebody that I'd want to be with. So the truth here is, again, that I've learned, my feelings are precious. They are valid, but they don't have to be in control of my actions. Had I continued on living based out of my feelings, chasing feelings, I don't even know where I would be right now. There'd probably be plenty of times I would have left my relationship. This relationship I've been in now for over a decade! Feelings can't always necessarily be trusted to make our final calls on stuff. In fact, they shouldn't be. I don't hold out for feelings of love, for example, to prove that my relationship is healthy. I believe that my relationship is healthy because my husband and I actively do things to keep it that way.

Liz Higgins (16:41):

I'm not chasing a vibe here. I'm looking at, wow, we are, we are nurturing this thing. We are putting deposits into that bucket of relationship health, prioritizing each other. And on the flip side, we definitely know and talk about when we're not doing that. So that's huge, too. It's like, we're, we're in the throws of parenting toddlers. We're still in pandemic life - a year in, you know. We just went on a date yesterday, actually, to get vaccines together. That was strange and sweet and crazy and weird... All the same. But anyways, I digress. The feelings that come from the actions and affirmations of what we're working so hard to do, those are wonderful feelings. But again, hear that those feelings come from the, the... They're like the, the nice results of the active, intentional things we are doing to work on our relationship and maintain it together.

Liz Higgins (17:47):

I've tried the whole "follow your feelings". Trust me here. It works sometimes, but it often leads to more emotions of regret, guilt, uncertainty, or again, like, being overly responsible in areas that maybe you don't need to be. So I now empower that other part of myself - my, my thinking self, my functional adult self to make the right decisions based on my values and needs. Based on the values of my relationship and what we've defined. And your life changes when you identify those values. And when you become curious about your partner, this also leads to more space for intimacy. And it's just so weird that the loop, that it is the feedback loop, that it is. Because it's like... You work on this differentiation of yourself. Truly, deeply knowing who you are. Truly, deeply knowing the boundaries that you need to define who you are. And holding on to that.

Liz Higgins (18:44):

So you can show up for others and experience them fully for who they are without that being a threat to you. That's when even more intimacy, even greater emotional experience, even deeper emotional experiences will happen in your relationship. So don't get me wrong. It's definitely work to bring these differing parts of ourselves together. But when you learn to manage your emotions, I'm telling you the possibilities are endless. So I hope this bring some things up for you. And if it does definitely, um, send me a DM, make some comments, write a review on this podcast. The greatest thing you can do here with this conversation, if it reaches you and touches you in any capacity, is to write a review and help push this message forward for others to hear. Cause I... I'm sure you agree. This is really needed. You know, we've got to get into ourselves to be able to thrive relationally. And somewhere along the way, (and you know, the rise of technology and the fast pace of our world today, just hasn't helped with this) we've started to get addicted to looking outside of ourselves for the things that are going to complete us and make us feel happy, make us feel better. And it's just backwards. Y'all, it's totally, completely backwards. So anyways, write a review, stay tuned. We got some great stuff coming soon. I hope this was helpful.

Liz Higgins (20:21):

I will talk to you soon!

Thanks again for listening to the podcast. If you like the show, leave us five stars or write a review. If you're interested in learning more, sign up for my free ebook “The One Barrier to Commitment All Millennials Face” at [millennialrelationships.com.](http://millennialrelationships.com/)

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